

bædan


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The Modern English word 'bad' came into common usage about four centuries ago, before which 'evil' was the predominant term. The successor was derived from the Old English derogatory term *bæddel*, and its diminutive form *bædling*, meaning effeminate man, hermaphrodite, pederast. This in turn was derived from *bædan*, meaning to defile.



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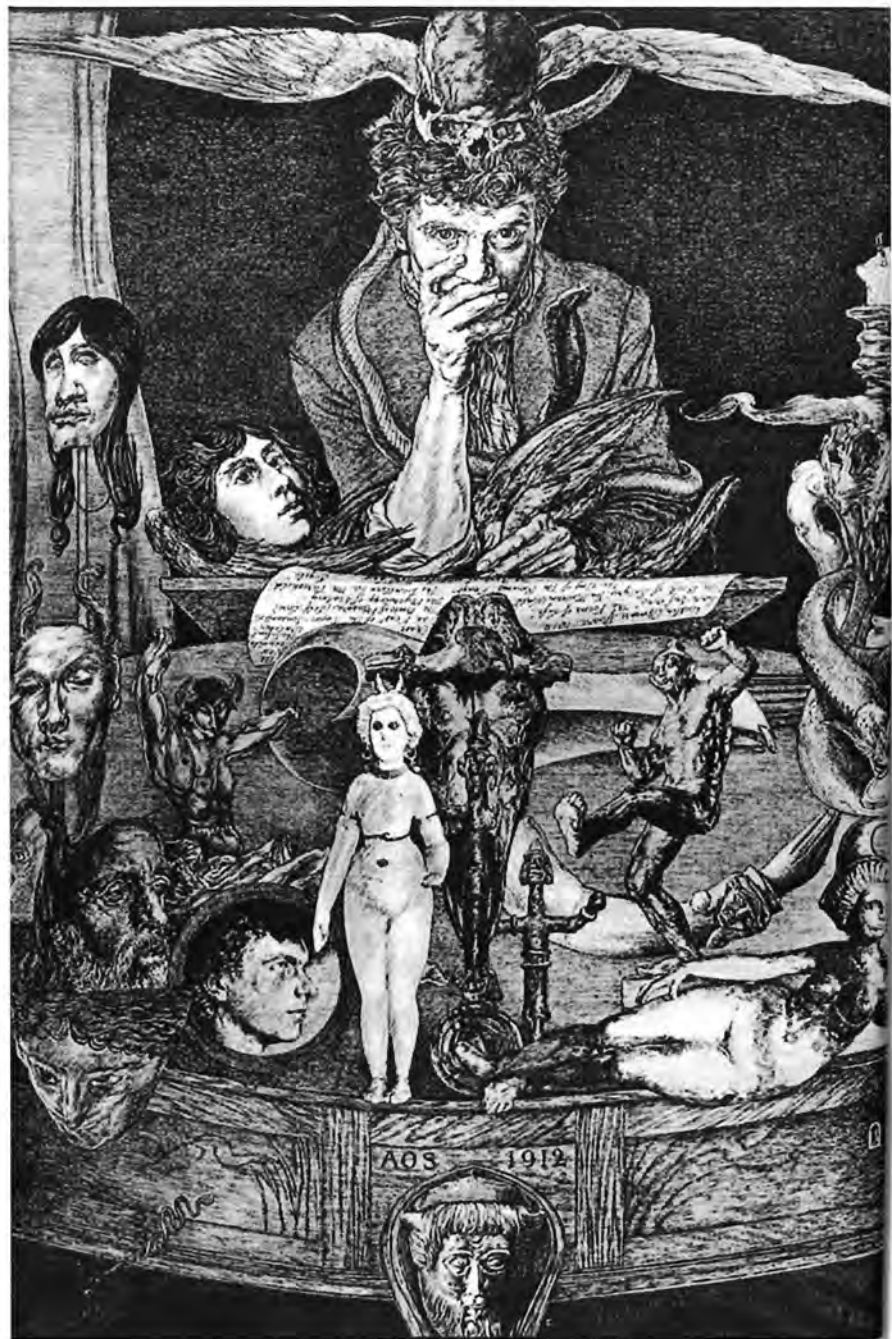
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*W*e thread our way like
earthworms toward some kind
of love, into remorseless granite,
inexplicable burrows.

~ D. di Prima



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Editorial Statement

BEDAN: JOURNAL OF QUEER TIME TRAVEL[†] HAPPENED ALMOST by accident. Very little of what we had intended for a third[‡] issue is included within these pages;

† To be honest, we debated whether “Queer” would reappear in the subtitle of this issue. Even in the scope of the last handful of years, we can see the way Queer has been further institutionalized, rendered as a synonym for an accepted ideology or a particular aesthetic. The malaise of queer as in-this-scene or has-these-politics or this-type-of-sex was almost enough for us to leave the word behind. We almost parted ways because of its dumb reified identities. We didn’t, because we think that something remains in it—something of its original weirdness, strangeness, alterity. Queerness has always been this remainder for us, something as corporeal as a heartbeat yet paradoxically evasive, and fantastical. It’s what first drew us into the word: a danger, a power, a magic. Queer spirals outwards, goes in disparate directions, poses an unending series of corrosive questions—encrypts and decrypts—creates, destroys worlds. We kept the word, because of the holes it pokes in any attempted orthodoxy. We decided it was worth a fight over it; to find the holes, stretch them out, plot an escape.

‡ In conventional numerology, the number three, and by extension the third thing of any set, bears a significance beyond the sum of the first and second. Pythagoras considered three to be the first real number. The first two being mere essences, three was the first to constitute itself in spacetime. He determined this by reasoning that one is just a single point, and two points form a line; but only with three points and three lines is the first shape born—the triangle. • Arguably a circle is a shape prior to the triangle, but being composed of no fixed points and an unending line, it is hard to put in sequence with other shapes. Being the paradoxical embodiment of the void and the infinite, it is a rather odd quantity.

Traditional interpretation tells that the first

instead, these texts are the remainder of a series of distractions, detours and wanderings away from where we thought we were going. In the last year and a half we fell into ruts, and we fought our way out. We found unexpected friends,

card (the Magician) represents will and action; the second (the High Priestess) representing passivity and reflective inquiry into deeper mysteries—the reception of spirit into body. The third, then, is the Great Mother, who births the spirit back onto the world, the sign of all things creative and fertile. Three combines the elements of one and two in order to establish a new whole; breaking binaries and uniting contradictory contents into something new. This peculiar quality of the number three is ossified and reflected in those unfortunate trinities—spirit/body/mind, Father/Son/Holy Ghost, past/present/future—which we might desire to annihilate, to break and reconfigure into something indistinguishable from the strangeness which is life.

To approach from another angle: what if, instead of such an uncomfortably heteronormative interpretation, we chose to read the cards otherwise? After all, the tarot was a tool to encrypt and share secrets, so perhaps the third card is telling us something else. The Leviathanic view of history rewrites the infinite flux of the world outside gender into a binary logic. What if the third arcane thing is not the product of heterosexual union—not something that reproduces gender, or anything else—but rather an interruption? Perhaps it indicates what is figured anthropologically as a “third gender.” But, contrary to the colonialist folly of anthropology, there is no reified “third gender,” only a polymorphous space, a placeholder, an asterisk, a-/un-/anti- prefixed to gender, an opening onto all that is outside the set. We could perhaps represent these first three cards—will, inquiry, and opening onto the world—as a spiral: beginning with a point, circling itself, and then gesturing outwards. The spiral stretches out as it moves, opens up reaching new heights and depths before inevitably trailing off. In distinction to the dialectical image of the triangle,

we might pose the spiral as a queer image. Draw a spiral. Notice the way the tail drifts off, thins out and disintegrates at the extremities until it becomes nothing where the pen lifts off the paper. We locate a certain queerness toward this opening outwards, this spiraling out.

The triangle, of course, is a queer shape in its own right and with its own history. But where does a perfectly straight line—let alone three—occur in the world?

and we lost others. We encountered old enemies, neither leaving unscathed. We pirated, burned, and searched. Again and again, we returned to certain questions. How did we get here? By means of what traps and misfortunes did we get ourselves into this mess? Is there a way out? We laughed at the questions, cried at the answers, and let the rest drift off into silence. We allowed our minds to stray, to err here and there, and one thing led to another. Our little obsessions and parentheticals took on a frenzied energy, and, when we paused a moment, we realized that out of our inquiries, correspondences, and translations another issue had quietly materialized—clandestinely smuggled itself into the world.†

Our methodology in this issue could, at best, be described as wandering or errant. We began with a sort of intuitive reading; we softened our gaze so as to let certain figures, some old friends and some strangers, make themselves known to us. In this we searched for clues—synchronic coincidences, liminal events, weirdnesses—and let ourselves fixate on them. From there we went in spirals and lines of flight, exploring boundaries and other sides. By means of obsessive daydreaming and the perfect alchemy of stimulants and delirium, our project burst outwards in leaps and bounds. When we stepped back, we realized that between these disparate inquiries we had triangulated something unexpected: a gaping hole in spacetime. Wherever we poked and pressed, we found ourselves returning to the strange phenomena and transformations happening at the beginning of the 1970s (more on that later) and realized our historical research

† We can now better appreciate Lorraine Perlman's anecdote in *Having Little, Being Much* about Fredy Perlman's work on *The Strait* being interrupted in order to write what was essentially a footnote explaining the origins of the beast which arrived on this continent and began its genocidal expansion. Days turned to years and that footnote turned into *Against His-story, Against Leviathan!*

was leading us somewhere unknown. Time, suddenly, felt open, indeterminate, up for grabs. We were experiencing a sort of *chronotaraxis*: a distortion of time. This felt different than the *chronophobia* with which we usually look upon the “storm blowing from paradise”. We came to realize that we were playing with—to borrow a term—“queer time” and were in a sense, time traveling. And so, our *chrononautic* project, this *journal of queer time travel*, was born.



Put another way: with this journal we’re attempting to elaborate a queer critique of civilization. Queer not only in the sense of coming from those outside and disruptive of the Family, but also in the sense of a critique weirder than its more orthodox cousins. In the space of anti-civilization thought, nearly all critique is reliant on a notably biblical meta-narrative with a set of predictable tropes: a prelapsarian past, agriculture as the root of all evil, some recourse to anthropology or ecology, etc. The emergence in recent years of certain grotesqueries—authoritarian anti-civ cults and a return to traditionalism—should be placed at the doorstep of this unimaginative moral orthodoxy. We suspect that this orthodoxy (like all orthodoxies) cuts something out. Without dismissing it outright, we insist that something remains missing from the green anarchist approach. While certain nodes in this milieu entrench their dogma, we want to hear the words of those unmoored ranters outside it.

We imagine the *Bædan* project as an effort to pose the critique of civilization otherwise, to begin from another place. In this issue (and beyond...) we have conjured a strange bestiary of thinking emerging outside the space of the anarchist milieu. We’ve tried to unearth and trace the tradition of anti-civilization thought in the literature

of queerness and in queerness as immanent critique. In this issue we visit a handful of queer writers—Delany, Copi, Genet, Preciado, Chitty, Baldwin—and through them assess a variety of incendiary attacks upon civil society staged by the contemporary investigations grouped under the headings of queer theory, Afro-pessimism and anti-humanism.

From these last, we borrow the concept of the “third term mediator”—the common reference point by which two parties mediate the free play between them. Such mediation structures or recuperates our conflict with another. These are the binding and foundational fantasies that perpetuate the social order. In each previous issue of *Bædan*, we’ve named and attacked these fantastic figures. In *a journal of queer nihilism* we took aim at the Child, that singular space within the Symbolic which is the fixation and justification of all politics. In *a queer journal of heresy* we attacked gender—the binary, the pair—the system that separates, dominates and produces us as gendered subjects. In this issue, we expand our attack upon the Child and the gendered pair onto the whole of their unity: the Family. This trifecta—child, couple, family—is the set of mediations that, in our view, enchant and underlie the totality of this civilization.

We are also intrigued by some of the more idiosyncratic critiques of civilization coming from unexpected corners of the occult[†] and art worlds. One noteworthy example is the journal *Dark Mountain*, whose contributors pose the thesis that civilization is a metamyth that presents itself as the last sacred thing. They imagine an iconoclastic task of “uncivilized writing” that poses new stories against the old, ones that sort through and make sense of the crises of civilization. They say:

† See, for example, the recent “Rewilding Witchcraft” by Peter Grey or “The Witch and the Wild” by Sarah Anne Lawless.

We believe that the roots of these crises lie in the stories we have been telling ourselves. We intend to challenge the stories which underpin our civilization: the myth of progress, the myth of human centrality, and the myth of our separation from ‘nature’. These myths are more dangerous for the fact that we have forgotten they are myths.[†]

This provocation is seductive and warrants a queer approach. We might render these three interlocking stories—progress, humanism, nature—as three of our own: child, gender, family. To name all these as myth, and to determine that myth composes the world, is also to wager that the world could be likewise undone.

Diane di Prima put it this way in “Revolutionary Letter #45”:



And it seems to me the struggle has to be waged
on a number of different levels:

[...]

to take hold of the magic any way we can
and use it in total faith

to seek help in the realms we have been taught to think of
as ‘mythological’

to contact ALL LEVELS of one’s own being
& loose the forces therein

To fight on many levels and to seek help in the mythological is to begin imagining a method of attacking certain stories and proposing others. We might benefit from subjecting this matter of stories to a useful nihilist psychic self-defense tactic known as “deploying the triplicity”[‡] (universalism—pluralism—nihilism). Universalism tells

† See “Uncivilised: The Dark Mountain Manifesto”.

VI { ‡ See Alejandro de Acosta’s presentation of this ethical-critical mode in “Its Core is the Negation”, included in *The Impossible, Patience*.

us that there is one true story; one usually beginning and ending with a paradise temporally disrupted by a fall from grace, but restored by either progressive or dialectical means. Pluralism, in its standard postmodern maneuver, pulls the ground out from under the one story in order to say that there have only ever been stories, that there are many, that they are all valid and welcomed. One could float forever in this airy space of relativism, but the nihilist approach insists that one story and the many are all groundless, devoid of meaning. The tactic has a corrosive effect, undermining and denying the essential truth posited of any story or set of stories. This denial is effective as a form of self-defense, but also cold, cerebral. We'll add that after the ground is clear, after the great myths have fallen and all the little lies have been dissolved, the truth or untruth of any given story depends entirely upon the extent to which we *feel* it. And here other tactics take over. What is sometimes called magic is the application of force of will to a chosen story and its reverberations in the world around us. Let us not forget di Prima's "Revolutionary Letter #46", corollary to the preceding:



And as you learn the magic, learn to believe it
Don't be 'surprised' when it works, you undercut
your power.

The stories that become real, for us, are those that enchant us or through which we access enchantment; those that occur within and implicate our bodies; the ones that call us to presence and to sensual reciprocity with what's around us; the words we feel in our marrow and traced along goose-bumped skin; the visceral stories, of and about the flesh. This issue is a fleshing-out of our mythological enemies, but also of a countermyth. To flesh these out is to give them bodies, or rather to embody them; to elaborate them with the flesh. The flesh here is a physio-conceptual tool

that has the potential to overcome the dumb split between mind and body. After all, what is the mind other than the fleshy tissue wherein our dreams and nightmares play out? The flesh dispenses with the conceptions of the mind as transcendental ideal and of the body as its receptive mechanistic vehicle. Instead it's the very ether of sensual, corporeal, thoughtful experience. The enemy anchors its mythology into and scars the flesh, but we do the same. So it is also the terrain in which to pose our countermyth, our own system of reality; a joyous play. In "Musings on Nothingness", we played with the skin as perforated with a thousand orifices; we can elaborate upon this to imagine the flesh as a holey terrain reaching out, oriented toward the Other.



Bædan: a journal of queer time travel is an investigation of occurrences and transformations spanning three or so years at the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 70s: assassinations, riots, Stonewall, the decline of one movement and the emergence of another, the "coming out" of an identity and its politics, "sexual liberation," the formation of revolutionary groupings, etc. We approach these years by means of a collection of stories playing out in those times. "A Holey Curiosity" seeks the help of Samuel Delany, Michel Foucault and Copi in order to explore the coming-out of the early gay liberation movement after the Stonewall riots in 1969, interrogating its relationship to identity and time. "Between Strangers and Friends" is a close reading of texts written by Jean Genet and James Baldwin in the years 1970–1971, specifically teasing out the implications of their thinking through the questions of racial and sexual conflict, then and now. This issue includes an original translation of a text by Paul B./Beatriz Preciado, "Anal Terror", their presentation

of the Spanish translation of Guy Hocquenghem's first book. The presentation takes the form of a playful, provocative exploration of the emergence of the Front homosexuel d'action révolutionnaire (FHAR) in 1971. We are also publishing excerpts of a paper by our dearly departed Chris Chitty, "The Antinomies of Sexual Discourse", a beautiful and nuanced critique of the historical legacy of "sexual liberation". Finally, this journal spirals out in several directions, following a diverging set of correspondences around themes from the preceding two issues. All together: we offer up a cacophony of voices singing a hymn against linear time, *our* stories against THE STORY (which we are done with). We don't present these stories in order to lock them up in History or confine them to the scheme of things. We read them with the intent of a wandering palaver; to put them in conversation with one another and to let them speak to us in turn; to find a hole in time and to open them up in the present. ✨



A Holey Curiosity

*no shape
for space & time now but the shapes we will*

– Diane di Prima

A QUEER HOLE TOPOLOGY MAKES TRACES TOWARD THE unspeakable.

A queer hole topology intrudes into will as holeyness, protrudes into spacetime as curiosity.

Diatrusive, the method emerges from a reading of Zach Blas’ “Queerness, Openness”, which proposes an opening of queer theory as one possible outcome of Reza Negarestani’s genrefuck[†] *Cyclonopedia*. Resisting the standard queer-theoretical impulse, Blas does not read queerness into *Cyclonopedia*; instead he *exhumes* the text’s subterranean queerness in order to read queer theory out of itself, opening it to the Outside (or, less willfully, recognizing “a queerness that is in the process of being opened by the outside”), stretching it so wide that “the word queer does not hold, cannot hold.” For Blas, queer theory is a way of reading that is still “stuck between identity politics and neo-materialisms.” Happily, *Cyclonopedia*’s “hole complex” models a way of reading our way out of this bind, a way bound away from the subject:

a model for queerness that departs from the subject and heteronormativity; or more abstractly, a model for

† No typo, we’re talking about a work of theologico-philosophical-genopolitical-architectural-speculative-fiction.*.

reading inconsistencies and instabilities that acknowledges and confronts the fact that these holes will have a logic that consists, at least in part, on something that has no correlate in the subject...

Blas' method is ripe for appropriation. While in *Cyclonopedia* the hole complex is "a model for grasping the earth as a 'destituted Whole' and a 'holey-mess'," the complex immediately suggests its application to other surfaces, its repurposing as the finding and stretching of holes in the supposed continuum of spacetime, in our allegedly stable selves, ways of speaking and listening, and bodies. A curious disposition toward what may happen, what strangeness might seep out or might we seep into. My suspicion is that in digging holes and witnessing the odd outcomes there is a chance to grasp, or be grasped by, spacetime's queerness. Let us deploy such a speculative-archæological method, first to exhume and probe an artifact in the immediate proximity of our project.

The proximate artifact in question is a curious note that appears in the editorial statement of the sixth and final issue of *Pink and Black Attack*, a queer anarchist magazine published in the Pacific Northwest in the late 00s. The editors point to a split over questions of identity addressed in five out of the six of the issue's expository pieces. Coded within the editors' enumeration of the five texts and their formulation of the split appear a number of clues:

(One) They mention that the problematic at hand—that of identity—has not appeared in the periodical before in any major way. Indeed, before this final issue, the positions published in the magazine were the sort most or all of its readership could agree on. Arguments on the undesirability of certain political goals of the LGBT movement (gay marriage, acceptance into military service, and harsher punishment for hate crimes)—points of major

cleavage between queer anarchists and other politically-minded non-straight—filled most of its pages. The magazine even published five points of unity in each issue. Among these were opposition to the state and capital, anti-assimilationism, and a belief in collective liberation for all people. There was, of course, no point of unity concerning identity. (As this final editorial statement implies, not only did no point of unity exist, its existence may be impossible.†) Our first clue corresponds to the location of a first hole, one that worms into the supposed solidity of the magazine’s readership, its milieu.

(Two) According to the editors, each of the five listed texts takes a position for or against identity (the count, for those concerned: two in favor,‡ three opposed§). But while the favorable positions are unqualified, the editors

† Another reading would trace the magazine’s structure, in particular the point of unity concerning collective liberation for all people—echoing, as it does, the call for self-determined subjectivity taken up in national liberation and in its homonationalist copies—as excluding the anti-identity position by encoding a supposition of commonality. This might explain why it took so many issues for some critique of identity to appear, even while a text widely circulated in the same milieu, and certainly known to the editors, had declared not long before that “Queer is not merely another identity that can be tacked onto a list of neat social categories, nor the quantitative sum of our identities. Rather, it is the qualitative position of opposition to presentations of stability—an identity that problematizes the manageable limits of identity.” See “Toward the Queerest Insurrection”, Mary Nardini Gang.

‡ “Ditching the Boys’ Club”, a rather confused call for breaking down heteronormative behaviors within radical spaces, and “The L Word”, a critical address of the (all too obvious) shortcomings of then-popular television show.

§ “Let the Trans Women Speak”, an indignant report-back from Camp Trans (a now defunct annual protest of the trans-exclusionary policies of the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival); “Reflections on the Demise of Bash Back!”, whose title is fully descriptive; and “Preliminary Notes on Modes of Reproduction”.

qualify the negatives: these “have at least some critique of identity.” Here I want to underline this *at least*, and this *some*, to ponder their appearance. They are odd at least, and to our method oddness lures, it draws. The split in question may differ from those leveling, balancing splits staged in courts, legislatures, and formal debates (and which we often unwittingly adopt in our [anti-]political debates, accountability processes, and lovers’ quarrels). A plausible explanation for the editorial qualification would be that the three who oppose identity oppose it only in part. This possibility introduces intriguing outcomes: what might have been a binary of positions for and against identity now splinters into an ambivalence field of varying degree. And then, when it comes time to divide this field, the editorial “at least some” draws the line closer, tighter around the positive pole. By this time, that pole’s normativity is coming into focus. The line, the law, bounds the normative, marking the rest as deviant. So the split separates a node-position, or pole-position, from a possibility-array or constellation. One implication: identity’s defenders are relatively pure and alike; its naysayers are perverse and disparate, relating without coherence. Another: in the matter of identity, even a small deviation from the norm counts.

Consider the following diagrams, which figure the possible shapes of a split. As a basis for these, a preliminary diagram, that of pure identity (in logical terms, a thing’s sameness as itself: A is A).

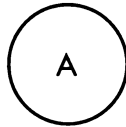


Figure 1.0 – Identity

4) Now introduce a split. A standard model involves two parties cleanly delineated by a dispute. If no overlap

exists between them (and if we ignore the arbitrating bodies: the conventions and rules, terms, discourse, questions, silences, and officials of the dispute's mediation), we arrive at the following figure.

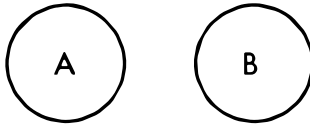


Figure 1.1 – Opposition

A simple enough image: it calls to mind the parties, their distinction, their self-containment. Having already overlooked the medium, one feels no itch to consider the lines (have they thickness?), the party's internal consistency (how sticky is it? Through what practices does it cohere?), the spaces, the sheet. It all stays put. Time does not enter into it.

The dialectical image is slightly less simple.

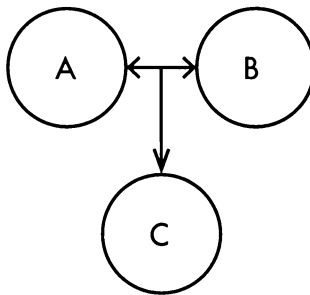


Figure 1.2 – Dialectics

Had the magazine editors presented the split dialectically, the identity position (A) would have been set against the critique of identity (B). The critique, or negation of the too-pure identity position would in time generate a new identity-position (C) at a higher level of desirability (for instance, an identity position of greater

flexibility and dynamism). With recourse to the passage of time, the dialectic resolves that negativity will always be a hole in the process of closure, a *reproductive* hole. This is in contrast to the negativity entailed in our poking and stretching of holes, detached as it is from any need for closure. (In passing, it is the image's time-shape, its hole's self-suture, which permits it to bring to mind—all at once—Catechism, “how babies are made”-style reproductive propaganda, and desiccant Marxist tracts.) Time progresses on the vertical axis as a line—straight. Now, here's a picture of the editors' “at least some”:

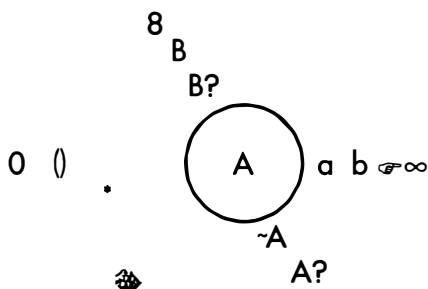


Figure 1.3 – “At least some critique”

Here only (A) is delineated. Its delineation allows everything beyond the line to take the form of a constellation: not-A, possibly-A, lesser-A, B and friends, zero, the empty set, infinitude, some free radicals. And spaces, and forms of relation. Before, the bounds of (A) and (B) begged to be overlooked; now the line, solitary and strange, invites—demands—question. Indistinct, it dithers, now suggesting a membrane, now a wave, now a force field. What is underneath it becomes muddy: the border

distorts. One might say it conceals, but that would suppose something underlies it, a certainty no longer certain.

Given that 1.3 still diagrams a disagreement, a political-polemical split, its beauty lies in its opening precisely what the other forms of political splitting tend to close: outside ways of relating. More about these later.

Consider that figure 1.3 could be repurposed as a figure of queerness. We are already speaking of a queer magazine with a queer audience, and have noted the queer shape of its splitting. Is it such a great stretch, then, to turn the diagram back from the parties of the debate to the space in which the debate happens, and to the terms of the debate? (Not the queerness of spacetime but queer as space and as term.) The strangeness of this shift will correspond to the strangeness of one's conception of queerness. That is, the more one was conceiving queerness as a container for a soup of once-excluded, yet-included letters (queerness-as-can, pop-top queerness) or as the latest, hippest noodle on the label (queerness-as-fashion, canned queerness), the stranger our proposition of diagrammatic repurposing. (There are better diagrams for these: see figures 1.4 and 1.5.)

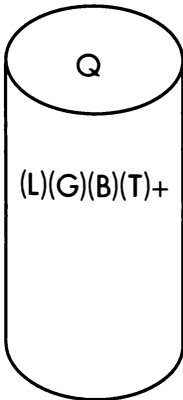


Figure 1.4 – Queerness
as Can

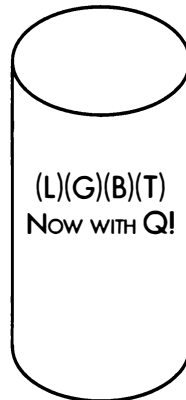


Figure 1.5 – Canned
Queerness

But insofar as one was already thinking queerness strangely—as the permeability of identity (opener queerness), identity’s remnant (-as-crumbs), or as its instability (-as-noodle), drift (-as-stock), or negation (-as-mouth), or some of these, or none or all—the strangeness of the diagram preexisted the transformation; it was already inviting its repurposing and perversion. It has a kind of sense: in (A) we see heterosexuality, its boundedness, its self-containment, exclusivity and myopia. Beyond, some counter-norms, some not-straight; between those, relation; beyond them, openness, queerness.

Still more curious, that 1.3 might figure a social field (the social group and every possible ungroup beyond), and just as readily might figure a subjective one (that in me which cleaves to identity, and then so many personae-out-of-place).

Finally, that we might read what is queer in the figure as consisting not of any of its points of stability, its lines, any of the traditional subjects of Euclidean geometry, but rather in all the aspects of a diagram that a proper geometric gaze would gloss over: its points as holes, its negative space and warp, its messiness and indisposition to map to reality. A second hole location: everywhere in geometric space; diagram space as a mess of holes. Our gazes have been trained, and untraining them is also a way of finding ourselves riddled with holes—with eyes as holes the world seeps into.

Let us return to the editors, tease out another clue from their *at least*: the debate does not take place on a level field. The positive position can be taken for granted, while the negative side might easily not have been. “At least some” also reads as “At least here, against the odds, *some* critique of identity appears.” What odds? How is the field unleveled? *Like this*.

“Syntax,” as Luce Irigaray wrote,

is governed by
- *identity with*, expressed through property and quantity,
- the reducible *non-contradiction* of ambiguity, ambivalence, polyvalence,
- the *binary oppositions* nature/reason, subject/object, matter/energy, inertia/movement.†

One last reading of the figure (1.3) then, as a syntactic diagram which also figures a perverse way of reading. One hand grasps the identity, non-contradiction and binary oppositions at work in the syntax (the textual structure, the force of structure on the text); the other brushes a textured surface, punctuated by suspension and breath.‡ A standard queer theory method has been to read queerness into texts presumed to be straight. Holey reading starts from queerness (its texts, spaces, identities, politics) and reads outward, poking holes in its normativity and straightness, finding queerness to be full of holes, trying to open canned queerness to its outside.§

(Three) If there is a position where anti-identity negativity reaches maximal intensity, the translation of this position into critique renders it partial. To use an electrical metaphor, the language of critique, or the language at a higher level of generality, is not a good conductor of negativity. The discourse insulates positivity; positivity insulates the discourse. Alternately, return to the diagrams: critique tends to correspond to the dialectical

† “Is the Subject of Science Sexed?” Tr. Carol Mastrangelo Bové. *Hypatia* 2–3, fall 1987. Translation modified for clarity.

‡ Punctuation reminds us to breathe, reminds us that reading is, like writing, a bodily practice.

§ By the outside of queer we do not mean straightness. Beyond the oppositional/contradictory sense of the outside figured in 1.1 and 1.2, beyond the exclusionary sense in figure 1.3, here the outside must be sensed as not another side, as unsided.

form (1.2), wherein the negative position is enlisted to reproduce and improve the positive. If the negative intensity could pierce the insulation, what would be heard? Denial of the points of unity, any set of points of unity, and any attempt at unification or its desirability, undoing of positionality until only non-positional (constellational) relations remain, unbinding of the magazine's base identifying terminology—queer, anarchist—stripping them of any meaning other than as words of unbinding.[†]

We can already make out several points in favor of taking up the question of identity: that the question's drift, far from erecting a straightforward division between queer anarchists and others, instead sinks into the essence of queerness and anarchism, unbounding rather than solidifying the boundaries of the readership; that the contours of the split do not repeat the politics/debate model with its parties, its sanctimonious presumptions to equality, its laws, but instead suggest an outside, an anti-political constellation comprised of other relational forms, some present, others potential or reminiscent; that, in pointing away from politics, it also points toward holey ways of life.

A critical voice can be heard intervening in disagreement. What is it saying? Its tone is reasonable, its concerns seem genuine, based in practicality—my feet are on the ground, it seems to say—well, let's listen.

☞ “Homophobia puts us in the closet, reads us as straight or cis. Identifying as queer and coming out are resistance. Do you want to be on the same side as the homophobes?”

10 | [†] A third kind of hole, sensible in words and stretchable through reading as unbinding, as undoing knots of meaning.

- ☞ “Look, I also hate Gay, Inc. with its assimilation, but your aims are misdirected. They want to destroy identity too—by making queers normal! Do you really want to be complicit with assimilationism?”
- ☞ “Is it even *possible* to not identify? You’re just identifying as non-identitarian.”
- ☞ “Queer youth suicide is the new AIDS, and by talking about self-negation you’re basically telling queer kids to kill themselves.”

Well, common sense has spoken. It reminds us to tie the question of identity to these concerns: homophobia, survival, assimilation.

- ☞ Regarding the accusation of complicity with homophobia: while it can take the form of a compulsion to silence, homophobia is, after all, a terror, and the source of its terror is the unknown. The will to know, then, is its greatest will, the compulsion to speak its major force. This is as much the case or more when we consider transphobia, that lurking terror of any uncertainty, any transgression of sexual propriety, so often expressed in a demand to know another’s “true” sex. (Not to mention its medical form, the requirement of detailed confessions which are supposed to dispel any uncertainty around the patient’s confessed “psychological gender identity”; there is an obsessive concern with the danger of fakes, pretenders, gaining inappropriate access to the hormones, which one would be amiss not to recognize as an expression of transphobia.)
- ☞ As for the complaint concerning assimilation: to place the practices of gay identification (pride, coming out) against the politics of gay assimilation (Pride™; Gay, { 11

Inc.) is a great folly. The public declaration, i.e. aimed at institutions, of some non-straight identity must be understood as a political act—foundational and atomic. Political because its impetus and effect is the transformation of a person into a operational part of a political machine.[†] Glance again at that issue of *Pink and Black Attack*, and among the communiqués and anti-assimilationist statements, one finds a great many communiqués and reports on the disruption of Pride events as well as attacks on mainstream gay organizations. The will to attack not only typical homophobes but also the institutions of gay assimilation has become fully understandable from a radical queer standpoint. One notices, however, that while critiques of the Pride events abound, they are couched with a requisite disclaimer: “We don’t want Pride™,” they say, “—but we are also proud!” It has gone unsaid, so we will say it thusly: If that Pride we can all agree to hate has a heart, the sound of its beating is ten thousand queer voices speaking, over and over, pumping out, sucking in. Listen, you can hear them: “We don’t want Pride™—but we are also proud.”[‡]

† A scene in the 2008 film *Milk* provides an immensely straightforward, albeit theatrical, version of the link. Shortly before voting day and behind in the polls, openly gay political candidate Harvey Milk and his campaign team strike upon an effective political strategy: compulsory coming out. The insight and the resultant strategy are both starkly statistical: with the vote of San Francisco’s closeted homos alone, they only have a minority and lose at the polls, but if each homo comes out to all of their straight family members, friends, and coworkers, then these straights—now realizing they have a gay friend or family member—will become the votes Milk needs. Every gay person who comes out multiplies Milk’s count. The campaign team hits the phones, spreading the word to the gays they’ve crunched into numbers: Come out, now!

12 { ‡ Pride’s heartbeat can be found tucked into that final *Pink and Black* issue in the form of a flyer distributed at Seattle’s 2010 Queers

☞ No.

☞ In the intake, in the dash that ties in to out and keeps the machine running smoothly, abides the silent promise—it gets better. Lubricant in the manner of all propaganda, diligently applied by the responsible parties to keep the Pride machine, coming-out machine, in working order. Because what is so unsettling about queer suicide is not how senseless it is, how strange or difficult to understand, but precisely its sensibility, its dark resonance. The illusions tidily wrapped in “it gets better,” as political campaign and conformism-lube, are the same illusions we have bludgeoned for years now: faith in the system, teleological progress, postponement, safety in conformism. Those seeking a way to think through survival without these illusions may be interested to read Kate Bornstein’s *Hello, Cruel World*, a collection of alternatives to suicide published some years before It Gets Better™ got its legs. Although diluted at times by a certain feel-good self-helpism, Bornstein’s story is based on some pleasantly acidic premises: (1) The world, or at least society, is cruel, and this cruelty, especially in its moral forms, is a likely culprit of your desire to kill yourself. The suicidal desire is something to be understood, not shamed, and overcoming the shame attached to this desire may be a useful exercise in protection against all those other cruelties. (2) To live, you don’t have to do any particular thing instead of killing yourself, especially not what is expected of you (and so may be part of the cruelty). If the goal is to live, any of the book’s hundred and one alternatives—and others, or

Fucking Queers dance-party-cum-smash. First the lunge: “Over time, Pride parades have come to represent the opposite of [Pride’s] origins: they are permitted, sponsored, and devoid of struggle.” Then the riposte: “See, we have pride too.”

not doing anything—will work. The selection can be one of pleasure. (3) It may be only a part of yourself that you can't live with (and which may be a product of the cruelty). It may even be possible to kill this part and still live. Notice, however, that this last premise relies on a sense of self that is not solid and singular—a holey read on the self.

The anti-social turn in queer theory names the academic study of negative queer affects, from anti-identity and anti-sex grumblings to suicidal urges. One work in this field, Jack/Judith Halberstam's *In a Queer Time and Place*,[†] intersects our present task in its attempt at a cartography of anti-social queer spacetime. (*Queer Time* also shares two of our points of engagement, namely Samuel R. Delany and Michel Foucault.) An early clue about Halberstam's book is that it begins with the assertion that "there is such a thing as 'queer time' and 'queer space'," which is quite different from the proposal that we locate, open, and stretch out the holes in time and space in order to be consumed by their queerness. (Halberstam's mode begins with defining and identifying: he writes down explicit definitions for "queer time" and "queer space" in the first chapter. He draws a line rather than poking a hole.) But does his *Queer Time* have anything to say about our question of identity? It does. Pushing back against the desire to theorize the trans* body as "a kind of heroic fulfillment of postmodern promises of gender flexibility," Halberstam levels an apt criticism. Flexibility (both bodily and identitarian) is not only prized in hip queer subcultural communities, it is also a powerful force of commodification in contemporary markets. Halberstam does not flesh out this critique (To what extent does the sharing of terminology actually correspond to complicity? Are there two or more

14 } [†] *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. New York: New York University Press, 2005.

forms of flexibility at play here? Might one be more evasive, more caustic than complacent? Has flexibility been recuperated?); he allows it to retain the dialectical form.[‡] Still, it does pose a crucial question for rethinking queer complicities with and against the postmodern reshaping of work. Halberstam's stake in this critique, however, is something other than complicity with or against the system, as he soon makes clear:

[I]t has become commonplace and even clichéd for young urban (white) gays and lesbians to claim that they do not like “labels” and do not want to be “pigeon holed” by identity categories, even as those same identity categories represent the activist labors of previous generations that brought us to the brink of “liberation” in the first place.

At first Halberstam seems to be launching an investigation or accusation of racial differentials at work in the anti-identity fashion, but it is not so. He only wishes to declare fealty to the “activist labors” of generations past, with all the sense of tradition and duty this implies. Consider Halberstam's apparently sincere belief that the social movements of the recent past led us nearly to freedom. Even if this were so, there is no particular reason to see identity categories as the vehicles of this almost-achieved freedom. We might as easily say that these categories have acted as tanks rolling in to spell the death of whatever sense of life and liberation an insurgent force had grasped. But let us go farther and pretend that identity categories, rather than a technique of counter-insurgent containment, are *goods* won in the course of struggle (akin to higher wages and

‡ See figure 1.2. It is not such a gross generalization to say that the dialectic form, which critiques in order to improve and which lacks fleshiness, is nearly coterminous with academic theory.

For fleshier engagements with questions of flexibility, see “Preliminary Notes on Modes of Reproduction” (*Pink and Black Attack* 6, 26–32) and “Musings on Nothingness” (*Bædan* 1, 151–55).

shorter hours for workers). Even then, what a misplaced sense of obligation it would be to reduce one's efforts to maintaining them! Halberstam's sense of history would have the dead generations be nothing but accomplices of the present shape of domination, ghosts who demand our conformity; this sense refuses to be grasped by the dead as rebels, as potential accomplices in revolt. It is precisely the conformist view of history we've railed against in our engagement with Walter Benjamin's theses on history. Perhaps there is room to read Halberstam more sympathetically: What are the quotation marks doing around liberation? Might they mark the gap between the illusory kind of liberation one might believe such categories to bring, and something much more queer? But no, Halberstam makes no bones of his politics at various points in *Queer Time* and his other writings—to wit: get back to work. Perhaps this was the subterranean aspect of Halberstam's beef with Lee Edelman and the latter's attack on reproductive futurism in *No Future*.[†] Halberstam might allow for ending the familial succession of generations that reproduces the straight social order, but only so long as he can erect in its place the succession of generations through the "activist labors" that bring us to the brink—always to the brink—of liberation.

No Future got at least one thing right in appropriating the words of little orphan Annie: tomorrow is *always* a day away. So long as, out of duty to the labors of past generations, we project our urges onto the future, it remains the repository for all desire, hope, dreaming, and liberation, and so long do social orders—the straight, conservative

† See Halberstam's "The Anti-Social Turn in Queer Studies" in *The Graduate Journal of Social Science* 5-2, 2008. We dealt in passing with the Edelman-Halberstam pair (and our exteriority to it) in *Bædan* 1. It may be worth noting that Halberstam's *Queer Time* was published one year after Edelman's *No Future*.

order *and* Halberstam's queer activist one—extend across time.

The question Halberstam raises concerning a queerness of place and temporality pertains to our curiosity even if his method and answers do not. We will consider the possibility of a ligature between our question of identity and this question of queer spacetime—a ligature which, far from clinging to identity categories as a duty, far from moralizing us into a sad little countercultural corner of capitalist society with more lube and more abjection, has the character of a lifeline, a rope of knotted bed-sheets dangling out of a prison window. Not spacetime in its normative sense of continuity, punctuated here and there by the odd rupture. Rather like Negarestani's earth, or a queer sense of flesh and text: spacetime as a holey mess, punctuated with escape routes and openings for us to widen. With this in mind, let us approach a figure who *Queer Time* also draws upon: the science fiction writer Samuel R. Delany.



I wrote the words 'science fiction writer Samuel R. Delany' by rote, but two more are supposed to come before them: black and gay. What this lapse in definition opens is Delany's description of that 'supposed to'. What follows does not concern itself with the question of whether it is more correct, politically speaking, to write 'black, gay' or '. Instead, we want to consider it a maneuver that produces feelings within its object. That is to say, we want to listen to what Delany writes about the act of someone writing 'black, gay' before his name, and about the supposition—the position underlying that writing-act. (From the perspective of the supposition, he is their incidental object; in the following, he is necessary, vital.) Our approach points away from questions of

political correctness, with their abstraction of the object of speech, and toward ethical (relational) questions. I also wrote ‘science fiction writer’, this time in line with what is conventionally written about Delany, but slips into reduction and closure. My engagement is mainly with his nonfiction, especially a short essay he wrote years after the popular science fiction novels that made him known. To misgenre an author does not count as a transgression of political correctness in the way that misgendering him does. But the slip opens a question onto the application of genre to writing, which may usefully parallel the application of gender to persons. In a third slip, I wrote ‘writer’ where we† would have preferred to write ‘scribe’. Synonymous but with an archaic texture that acts as a roughening agent against the slick, machinic circulation of language. To write it, as Delany sometimes likes to do, is to return to inscription as a bodily practice.

In reading Delany, our desire is to slip through each of these passages: from marking an identity to the lack of such a marker, from genre to misgenre or genrefuck, and from writing to inscription. If they lead anywhere, slipping through them may be another way to come out.

The year is 1996 and the title is “Coming/Out”. The slash Delany places between the words is his intervention—it manifests the interruption of a routinized circuit. Our topological approach allows us to read his slash as a type of textual crack, opening between two words we tend to run together, that have a tendency to join seamlessly. The crack imperfects their union. The intervention is first of all to slow, to stop, the too-fast speaking of the words, their automation and closure. Delany’s slash invites us to venture through his opening mark, to “consider what each meant separately,” to remember “all the possible meanings—historical, new, and revolutionary—that the two

18 | † In a fourth slip, we wrote ‘I’.

could be packed with, either apart or joined.” Let’s allow him to stop us, intrude on our attention, disassemble and reimagine our too-familiar phrase. Reading closely, then, into this close passage, seeing what meanings it leads to. Delany offers the triplicity *historical, new, revolutionary*: this is the path we will take.


Historical: Our political-identitarian sense of “coming out” is precisely and only as old as the gay liberation movement, which appropriated and redirected the term from the preexisting gay argot. When Delany first heard the words “coming out”, ten years before Stonewall, they had a very different sense than ours. They were the product of an earlier gay appropriation of a keystone of straight society: the debutante cotillion ball. These balls—still practiced formally in some circles although marked by anachronism, and informally converted into sweet sixteen parties—ritualize a woman’s emergence from the private sphere of her birth family into public society (a woman attending the ball is a *debutante* because the event is her first appearance in public, her *social debut*). Formally escorted by male relations, women are quite literally put into circulation, passing in circular revolutions from one dancing partner (one potential husband) to the next.‡

The gay riff on the term was also a coming-of-age, a passage from private to public life, and sex. To “come out”, then, meant to come first of all. This historical sense of coming out was less about telling a story and more “a matter of bodily practice,” Delany says. It also, even requisitely, meant to come out *into* the public social spaces where gay sexual encounters were coordinated (cruising spots)—for the young Delany, the porn theaters of Times Square, Manhattan. Cultural appropriation is one sense

‡ “Coming out” was the linguistic component of the gay cultural appropriation of the cotillion ball, Harlem’s queer ball culture dating to the 1920s and famously chronicled in the film *Paris Is Burning*.

and lesson of the historical term: it may be necessary for an underground to appropriate, to mess with the dominant culture, taking and turning its terms. Adrienne Rich's

 *this is the oppressor's language*

 *yet I need it to talk to you*

Often as parody: the queer term for it (Delany learned it the same day as “coming out”) is “camping”—dressing up in drag. The noun form (the descriptive noun, not the abstract “camp”) was a near synonym of riot, as in “what a riot.” A companion exercise in queer alchemy (mixing the meanings of camp and riot) would be an appropriation caustic enough to resist straight reappropriation.

So, coming out: where from? Not the closet, certainly. Coming out in the historical sense had little to do with knowledge at all, and still less with one's friends or family knowing about one's sexuality. Have a major homosexual experience, and you've come out; telling straights, even close family, could happen decades later, or not at all. Moreover, the terms were conceptually separate. Delany says that, although he first heard the words “closet” and “coming out” on the same day, they were never put together until gay liberation. In his youth, the closet did not signal a denial of the self and a betrayal of one's identity group, but a kind of perversity, a fetish category right alongside feet and leather. Just as there were size queens and toe queens, there were closet queens. Until gay liberation, he points out, “no one would have thought of asking the closet queen to give up his closet any more than of asking the toe queen to give up his toes—save in the smug, peremptory tone in which all perversion was decried.” The closet in its moral hue—as a shameful space of betrayal—is then an invention of gay militancy. (No wonder the gay militant is, as Hocquenghem observed,

blocked from his desire.) If not the closet, then what one came out of was *straight society*.

What the words did not mean before sixty-nine: speaking (except incidentally, as pillow talk, as conversation with friends afterward), or anything to do with straights (except appropriating their terms), or registering with institutions, or identity. What they did mean: bodily practice, participation in counterpublic space, appropriation, and relation.

New: At his most pessimistic, Delany says of coming out—the post-Stonewall kind—that it operates within a mode of straight surveillance. Possible nostalgia notwithstanding, his pessimistic view coincides with our own sense of loss, our disbelief in progressive narratives, our feeling as outsiders of queer scenes. For Delany, coming out is constrained by the same normative discourse it opposes. First there is the heteronormative supposition: Everyone is straight unless otherwise stated. (Even queer spaces tend to fall back on this straight supposition—and its genderstraight partner—as a grounding norm. Especially when it comes to gender-segregated spaces, coming-out acts are required of those who look a certain way in order to justify inclusion.) Then too, the heteronormative discourse denies a queer person’s having their own unique field of events, reducing them to a copy of a generic narrative (about which more soon). This same straight discourse also compels and constrains coming out. Delany shows this, not to cross it out, but to underline the need, the *why* of it, and to tell how it doesn’t fit him (he didn’t come out once, in the post-Stonewall sense, but many times, in odd ways, incompletely), and to ask us to stop and dwell here.

The new sense of coming out is also (and not distinct from its relation to surveillance) its media-technification. Delany writes that as the years passed after Stonewall, and the new political meaning of “coming out” gained

traction, it became more ubiquitous (taken over by the straight media, reappropriated) and automatic. “It became almost a single word.” This temporal shift in which language takes place without pause, without thought, is both familiar and curious: could speeding-up be an integral aspect of the recuperation, normalization of subversive words, queer words? Removing space, stripping out pause, running together. (Machinic heartbeat of the Pride apparatus.) And if automation and speeding-up are entailed in the technification of speech acts, what about other bodily practices? Reading, eating, shitting, sex. More broadly still, isn’t this speeding-up also the sense many of us have of the way the world is going? Speeding up, running together, losing spaces. “I found myself wanting to stop people,” Delany writes, “every time they began to say the phrase—to slow them down, startle them with a slash struck down between the words.”

Delany’s slash recalls these lines from Walter Benjamin’s omitted notes to his theses on history:

Marx says that revolutions are the locomotive of world history. But perhaps it is quite otherwise. Perhaps revolutions are an attempt by the passengers on this train—namely the human race—to activate the emergency brake.

Revolutionary, then, in the sense of stopping, slowing down, and startling.

Understood within the gay movement’s own linear narrative, Stonewall is a revolution in Marx’s sense, moving world history forward. It marks a starting point, the beginning of a progressive increase of (state, straight) recognition of gays and the codification of legal rights. Looking back, the movement sees the 1969 event as a collective “coming out” moment, in the slick, political sense of the phrase. Meanwhile, an individual’s act of coming

out is framed, in the style of a marxist or feminist model of political consciousness, as a coming of political awareness, a micro-Stonewall that can provide a little more fuel to the gay movement-machine. The timelines are all structured around the wholeness of movement and individual, around sameness (identity). Here dwells the vitriol in that accusation of complicity with homophobia levelled against the not-out-enough, here lurks the motive for that renovation of the closet, its conversion from a place of perverse pleasure into a shameful betrayal: Militants in search of recruits. The lines run both ways: individual made whole in the collective, the collective made manifest in the individual. Delany shows how the crunching of queers into numbers is at work in the reductiveness of the coming out discourse: “For what is wrong with all these seemingly innocent questions—which include, alas, ‘When did you come out?’—is that each tends to assume that the individual’s subjective field is one with the field of social statistics.” Revolution only appears here as it does in the cotillion ball: the cyclical movement operating as the turning-point between before and after, mechanized to propel the train forward.

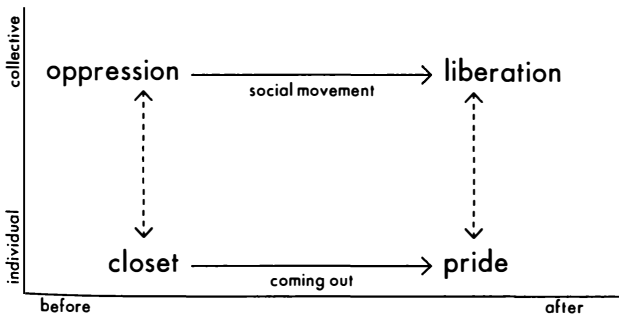


Figure 2.1 – Coming Out (new)

Revolutionary: Delany interrupts all the easy lines with his single slash. On one level, against the progressive } 23

narrative of gay liberation, he reminds us of the subversive aspects of the gay underground, the oppressive character of the political movement. He asks “hadn’t we perhaps lost something” in displacing the historical meaning of the term for the new. He points away from easy systems toward paradoxes:

Differences are what create individuals. Identities are what create groups and categories. Identities are thus conditions of comparative similarity that complex individuals might move toward, but (fortunately) never achieve—until society, tired of the complexity of so much individual difference, finally, one way or the other, imposes an identity on us.

And he entirely unsettles the easiness of the before and after distinction. He begins the essay with a related paradox, commenting on the strange relationship between the coming out narrative in the post-Stonewall years and his own written endeavors:

I found myself faced with a paradox: Much of my critical enterprise over that same period had been devoted to showing that such “defining” or “identifying” events (when, as a reader, you first became aware of science fiction; when, as a child, you realized you were black, gay, or an artist) simply did not “define” anything.

Against clean, normative narratives of self-definition, Delany poses a “gradual, continual, and constantly modulating process of becoming who we are,” in which events’ meanings are derived from their “surrounding event field”—that is, events are not definitive, atomic things arranged in a teleological chain, but areas of compression in relational suspension with their surroundings. Or event is monadic, folded over: the “endlessly iterated, thus always changing, situation.”

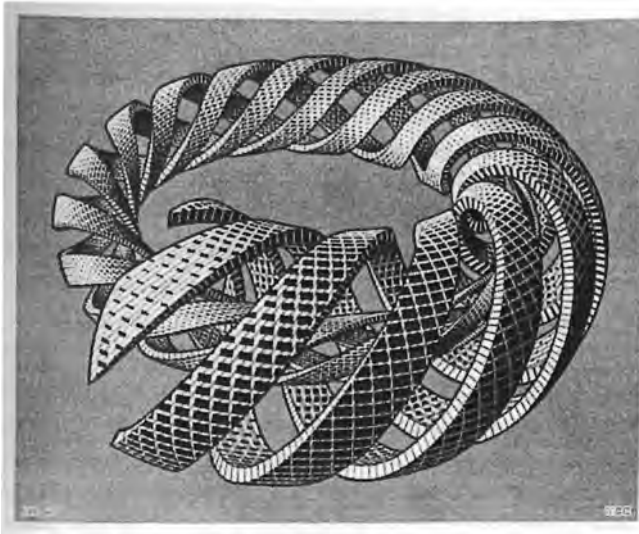


Figure 2.2 – The Endlessly Iterated Situation

To trace the situation's folds across his life, Delany recounts a constellation of moments, all of them transformative, but none of them defining or identifying. "None of them," he writes, "marked a before or after point, distinguishing absence from presence." When he comes out in the historical sense, it happens awkwardly, anticlimactically. The other guy is extremely anxious; the sex is bad. Delany describes it as a teaching moment about anxiety and desire. His earlier experiences of sexual experimentation, as he finds out from gay coworkers, were only proto- or quasi- versions, not the real deal ("fooling around with your bunk-mates after lights out, I was informed, was *not* major"). As for the several moments of coming out in the new sense, it's much the same: rather than a dramatic confession that marks a clean passage out of the closet, it's messy, and even while he is incessantly, even exhaustingly, tagged as gay by journalists, he never performs the

paradigmatic act of coming out to his mother. “The truth is, though, it’s not a major regret.”

Delany remarks in “Coming/Out” on two stories he wrote in the late sixties (one and two years before Stonewall) that expressed gay themes. In order to explore the third term of Delany’s triad of possible “coming out” meanings (historical, new, and revolutionary), I will consider one of them: “Time Considered as a Helix of Semi-Precious Stones.” Its world is one in which law enforcement is constituted in two distinct departments. The Regular Service is that old familiar sort: crude, bumbling, heavy-handed, reactive. The new Special Services are technological, efficient, proactive, and *wholistic* or “hologrammic”. Hologrammic meaning that the organization is modeled after its use of hologrammic data storage, in which each data point encodes an aspect of the whole picture. Imagine a compact disk on which any given nanometer encodes a impression of the entire album—its blueness, the bitterness or sweetness of its tone, or the nature of the interplays of bitter and sweet. Any given piece of the disk would provide, rather than a perfect recording of a fragment of the album, a fuzzy impression of the whole thing. Applied to criminals, the technology enables SS agents to deal in trends rather than cases. The agents are not tasked with stopping crime per se but rather with preventing major disturbances in the distribution of power. In other words, the agency is not interested in petty criminals doing petty crime nor high-level rackets (the latter are the top cops’ social peers!). Both, as SS Chief Maud Hinkle tellingly informs the narrator, “don’t really upset the social boat.” Their sights are set on criminals who are about to make it big, jump status—“that’s,” Maud says, “when you get problems with socially unpleasant repercussions.” Their task entails analyzing massive amounts of data on a temporal vector with an eye to steep slopes
26 | (i.e. upsetting trends). Computerized, trend-analyzing

surveillance aimed at spotting deviations from the norm. Sound familiar? (Doubly so: it should remind not only of the ever-escalating government and corporate surveillance programs of the digital age, but also of Delany's insight that coming out is beholden to straight surveillance.) The SS's methods seem to be largely (if not entirely) panoptic: the chief cop's first action is to inform H.C.E. of the existence and efficiency of her organization, its interest in him, its remarkably effective methods, her knowledge of his secret past and her prediction that she will be arresting him red-handed very soon. Predictably enough, he plunges into a sea of paranoia. She admits that the surveillance works better if they inform their targets of it. One imagines this practice suffices for most of her suspects.

(Aside) H.C.E.'s initials (what they stand for is always changing with his identity) are almost certainly a reference to the H.C.E. of James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, also a name-changeling. *Finnegans Wake*, by the way, is a cyclic novel (its opening fragmentary line is a continuation of its last), and while "Helix" does not have an explicitly cyclical narrative shape, Delany wrote many texts of a recursive form. One, the short story "Aye, and Gomorrah...", which he describes in "Coming/Out" as an allegory for the place of homos in pre-Stonewall society, uses a similar last-first line device as *Finnegans Wake* to produce a recursive narrative. "On the Unspeakable", a queer essay, has an even more enigmatic form, about which more later.

Several science fiction authors have described dystopian societies of total surveillance, even predictive policing: what's useful about Delany's? Aside from the queer narrative with its dappled silences, and the meditation on time (consider neo-policing in temporal terms: time-cops trying to sever chance and happenstance from the future,

to exclude the unknown from the passage of time), the world he imagines is not dystopian, and its surveillance is not, cannot be, quite complete. Later, H.C.E. is invited to a ritzy party (held in honor of a fascist presidential candidate), and while there he overhears this fragment of a political argument:

You must remember when you make predictions like that [...] that if everything, *everything* were known, statistical estimates would be unnecessary. The science of probability gives mathematical expression to our ignorance, not to our wisdom.

This affirmation strikes the narrator as an interesting follow-up to Maud's lecture, and may even help him keep the paranoia at bay. In any case, in "Helix" as in our world, it is true: predictive sciences—neo-policing apparatuses included—are imperfect, escapable. Some time remains holey and open. H.C.E. is a master of quick-change disguises, social engineering, and distraction. Ever since leaving home, he is constantly changing identities, wandering through places—tricks honed over years of evading old-style policing. But exactly how he escapes the neo-cops is never said, just as it's never revealed what stolen goods are in his briefcase, and just as the nature of his S&M relationship is undervocalized. In fact, when he offers to trade some precious things-that-are-not-his to a top-tier criminal named Arty the Hawk in exchange for information on how to not get caught by the time-cops, Arty declines. "It would be pretty stupid of me to tell you, even if I could." When H.C.E. asks again:

"I wouldn't tell you a thing." He smiled. "I wouldn't tell you the time of day."

Two early lessons: part of evading hologrammic surveillance is knowing what not to say, and the lessons may not

even be speakable information. Some other clues: *Arty is smiling, and saying something about time.*

Encrypted messages and telling the time (of year, not of day) are in fact two of the story's themes; its enigmatic title is inlaid with both. Time and encryption are the devices of two social institutions that work in tandem with H.C.E.'s criminal maneuvers: the Singers and the Word. Both linguistic institutions, firmly non-technological, and with some connection—even vital importance—to the criminal world. The Singers are a highly-regarded sect of storytellers who only sing unrecorded (one isn't even permitted to write down their lyrics) and, at least in the story, only unannounced, unstaged, in public spaces and social gatherings. Their relations cut sharply across class lines.

(Aside) “They sang... to an individual laborer coming home from the city's docks, on slum street corners, in club cars of commuter trains, in the elegant gardens atop Twelve Towers to Alex Spinnel's select soirée.” One may hear an echo of the Singers' class promiscuity in Delany's *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (another genrefuck, the book juxtaposes two long-form essays, one utilizing the vernacular and the other written as theory), which makes the case that class war in modern America (in the decay of the classic conception of class war to which many of our anarchist and communist contemporaries still cling) takes place as a conflict between, on the one hand, those who create and vitalize spaces of cross-class contact, and, on the other, those who try to police, close down, and destroy these places. He is thinking and writing of those porn theaters in Times Square where he met, and talked with, and sucked off, men from extremely varied class and ethnic backgrounds, a cruising culture destroyed in Times Square's redevelopment into the commercial megaproject that is the only Times Square some of us ever have known, and already well

underway by the time Delany wrote the two essays. There are many fruitful directions this provocation, this conception of class war, could go in, but for the moment we will limit ourselves to mentioning that interested readers might apply this analysis as an antidote to the prevailing discourse in struggles against gentrification, which so often sides with traditionalism, segregation, and family values, to shift to a position away from purity and toward perversion, from segregation toward transgression.

First clue about the Singers: “Some have speculated that [the institution of Singers] was a spontaneous reaction to the mass media which blanket our lives.” In addition to spreading information, these media “also spread a sense of alienation from firsthand experience.” (Today we might add that the media also assist in hologrammic surveillance.) Second clue: What the unwitting founder of the Singers initiated, when he was moved to tears and song by seeing the collapse of a block of tenements, was a moment that some will easily recognize as that old-fashioned kind of lower-case anarchism:

Three hours later, hundreds from among them had arrived at the scene with blankets, food, money, shovels and, more incredibly, the willingness and ability to organize themselves and work within that organization.

Resistance to mass media, and spontaneous, solidaristic social organization are the backdrop; in the story’s own time there are also two Songs: the first as a living answer to what (if not predictions and statistics) can validly oppose political abuses, and the second as a bold diversion to give H.C.E. and Arty cover to escape the time-cops’ clutches. On the one hand, then, we have some rather family-friendly (and here no offense is intended) interventions into miserable poverty and political abuse, and
30 | on the other, at least one Singer acting as an accomplice

in slipping the cops. This, and not the cutting-edge of commodity creation, must be the sort of art Delany had in mind when he wrote, in *Empire Star*,

The only important elements in any society are the artistic and the criminal, because they alone, by questioning the society's values, can force it to change.

Speaking of criminal complicity, the above clues are enough to hint at the motivation for the second counter-institution. The Word is an oral time-telling device and a bit of modern thieves' cant, rotated monthly, and always in the name of a semi-precious stone (jasper, opal, tiger's eye, and so on). The Singers pass it by mouth to the criminal class, for whom it is pass/code/warning. The device is imperfect—its transmission is delayed, one's source cannot always be trusted, and its use allows the cops to eventually become informed of it—but the same imperfections in the method of transmission often allow the criminals to stay ahead of the cops, force the fuzz to keep at their fuzzy prediction and statistics, to never fully know. (Remember Delany's slash, interrupting where the words become automatic, mechanical, predictable.) Moreover, relations of trust and mutual aid between criminals are embedded in the Word—it relies on them, but it also strengthens them, (rein)forces them as a way of life. Anyway, a cop or other enemy knowing the Word doesn't mean they will be able to trick you, if you pay attention to how they use it. H.C.E.:

Fine point of usage: Never trust anyone who uses it improperly.

The story is sprinkled with these sorts of tactical considerations. Most operate at the social level as ways to navigate public space, slip the time-cops, form complicities and speak in code. But the paranoia that threatens to sever H.C.E. from the ability to trust anyone, which operates

at a different layer of consciousness, is the emotional core of “Helix”. The story is a meditation on time, and also a reflection on language, and then again a trial of trust. In this last, artist and thief are brought tentatively together. Relations between artist and criminal are hardly academic for Delany: while there is no reason to believe he was a criminal in the style of Genet, artist-criminal relations were the stuff of the Times Square wanderings that hold such a seminal (by which we mean charged, sensual, and perverse, not original) place in his writings.[†] The crux of “Helix”, in which the S&M relationship between H.C.E. and Hawk is opaquely voiced, arises when the holo-cops’ paranoia has led H.C.E. to suspect the boy of having lured him into a police trap. Hawk tries to put his mind at ease—“No Singer’s going to— Look, do you really think I would—” Though he knows it will hurt his friend, H.C.E. says yes. Hawk insists: “You did something for me once, and I—” What H.C.E. did for the masochistic boy was to hurt him, scar him (the flesh as a holey mess, full of holes, in which more can be opened, cruelly and/or lovingly), as his words of mistrust are hurting him now. Hawk’s meaning seems to be: when you hurt me, you opened a trust between us. The message is encrypted in what is left unsaid. (Maybe Singers and Word can only form trust when it’s the bumbling cops you’ve got to think about; maybe Maud’s paranoid policing makes spoken trust suspect, so that only wordless communication remains: scarring the friend’s flesh, being scarred.) This is what we call the love story, the moment when the alienation instilled by the mass media and the paranoia planted by the fuzz are all supposed to be undone. Whether or not one reads alienation and paranoia undone in the scene is, let’s say, a mea-

† In addition to such nonfiction texts as “On the Unspeakable” and *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, the perverse reader may see *Hogg* (completed, as it happens, days before the Stonewall Riots and unpublished until the 90s) and *The Mad Man*.

sure of one's attunement to the holes. Delany described this story as one of his coming out moments—it was safe to assume anyone who read it would know he was gay (and kinky). But the disclosure is appropriately subterranean, passed in code, spoken through the silences. Does Delany come out, in this story, to the straight reader? A gaze normal enough, trained aright, could gloss over the gay S&M stuff. So it's not coming out in the new sense; and—unless his act of writing it was a sexual first for him—not in the historical sense either. The revolutionary sense, then—the unspoken, the coded, coming out through the holes.

(Aside) A kind of encryption plays out in Delany's essay "On the Unspeakable", which we mentioned earlier as a more intricate version of the *Finnegans Wake*—"Aye, and Gomorrah..." cyclical narrative. Its text runs in two streams, and these do not follow from left to right in the typical fashion of columns, but instead run parallel and twist together at the ends. The words on the other side of the Möbius strip from the reader's place are not related to the present words linearly—that is, they do not come next—rather, they are always on the flip side of the strip, exactly half way across the length of the text. Printed the way it is, the text is initially confusing—it appears to be incomplete, starting midsentence, not continuing from the left column to the right. Yet it strikes me as more complete than the page-bound text because it has no beginning or end to sever the time of the text from the time beyond it, or its content from what it leaves unspoken. So watch as the Möbius-text attains its true form: using a strip of paper some hundred feet in length and under an inch in width, write or type all of the text from the left column text onto one side of the strip. (Yes, the paragraph breaks will have to be elided or symbolized.) Repeat with the right column text on the strip's flip side. Now use a bit of clear tape to join the strip to itself,

end to end, with a half twist so that what was the back runs together with the front, so the two sides become one side: a textual monad, without beginning or end, on the unspeakable.



Delany's helix, as a meditation on a non-straight time-shape formed through criminal-artistic relations of complicity and perversity, points to the possibility of friendship as a way to open ourselves to other shapes for space and time. (To Diane di Prima's "shapes we will", not constrained to progressive narratives, to identifying moments, to the succession of generations—either in the traditional familial-racial sense or the activist sense Halberstam offers.) So the helix also points to friendship as a form of life, to the question of what is, or might be, political in friendship. This question crops up repeatedly in radical milieus, where it has been variously grasped since it was adopted from Foucault and Agamben[†] and most famously proposed in *Call[‡]*. For some, friendship-as-politics indicates a programmatic approach, a much-desired answer to nagging questions of organization. And for some the politics of friendship retroactively justifies a gregariousness otherwise suspect (with good reason—not only does it make friendship too easy [friendship as a click], it also operationalizes friendship as recruitment [friendship as a clique]). Both approaches flatly fail to grasp friendship outside of its all-too-modern, all-too-common meaning. There are also those most sober attempts to take up friendship as a way of life, as a project rather than a fact or program. It seems that in the latter, what is too easy

† See "Friendship" in *Contretemps* 5. For his part, Foucault was familiar with Nietzsche and Aristotle

to forget is that the proposition of friendship as a way of life becomes sensible only through a certain concept of homosexuality (today we might better say queerness). This concept of homosexuality is not the one attached to the coming out narrative, and it is not even about sex per se. Moreover, its relation to friendship is not necessarily friendly: Foucault makes note, in the *Gai Pied* interview “Friendship as a Way of Life”, that the category of homosexuality appears (as a medical diagnosis and social problem) when friendship is disappearing as important social relation. The potential for meaning unsanctioned loves and complicities is why we might think of homosexuality as a kind of radical possibility, rather than a mere sexual-identitarian fact—the possibility of forging friendships beyond the normative social relations. In order to figure an *outside* way of life, relation cannot start from or aim toward any predefined forms. Friendship in this register is “outside of institutional relations, family, profession, and obligatory camaraderie.” One corrective to the gregarious misreading of friendship-as-political: obligatory camaraderie is not exempt from the set of institutional relations to get outside of.

Remember that the coming out narrative in the new sense is always directed toward straight society, toward institutions: the family, workplace, political formations, and so on—including their homo-forms. Who demands that we identify ourselves, as queer or otherwise? In his introduction to *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault addresses an interview or interrogation to himself (a favorite form of his):

“Aren’t you sure of what you’re saying? Are you going to change yet again, shift your position according to the questions that are put to you, and say that the objections are not really directed at the place from which you are speaking? Are you going to declare yet again that you

have never been what you have been reproached with being? Are you already preparing the way out that will enable you in your next book to spring up somewhere else and declare as you're now doing: no, no, I'm not where you are lying in wait for me, but over here, laughing at you?"

"What, do you imagine that I would take so much trouble and so much pleasure in writing, do you think that I would keep so persistently to my task, if I were not preparing—with a rather shaky hand—a labyrinth into which I can venture, in which I can move my discourse, opening up underground passages, forcing it to go far from itself, finding overhangs that reduce and deform its itinerary, in which I can lose myself and appear at last to eyes that I will never have to meet again. I am no doubt not the only one who writes in order to have no face. Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same: leave it to our bureaucrats and our police to see that our papers are in order. At least spare us their morality when we write."

This bit of self-interview has several interesting aspects (aside from the form itself!): the demand for identification is associated with morality, police, and bureaucracy; this demand can surface in less disciplinary forms such as the voice of the critic; our speculative-archæological method finds an echo in this method of opening passages; the writing's movement by a desire for anonymous encounters. To read Foucault's desire to appear "to eyes that I will never have to meet again" in this passage calls to mind cruising as the sexual version of this textual one. But cruising can also evoke prefabricated encounters where pleasure is mechanized and neat, what Foucault called "the pure sexual encounter" in the "Friendship" interview. For Foucault, this is one of "the two readymade formulas"

of sexuality. The other is “the lovers’ fusion of identities”, and neither generates the kind of unease, neither threatens the formation of new complicities feared by our society, as can “affection, tenderness, friendship, fidelity, camaraderie, and companionship.” Instead of merely giving each other pleasure, Foucault speaks of “mak[ing] ourselves infinitely more susceptible to pleasure” (more holey!). The approach to these formulas is in fact a departure: “We must escape and help others to escape” them.

So the point is not that homosexual relations are inherently or already outside of the everyday. Instead, homosexuality acts as a code word to imply an always unrealized potential. (This potential and its gap were the reason the word queer was first deployed.) The point is to expand this kernel of possibility: “we have to work at becoming homosexuals and not be obstinate in recognizing that we are.” The misstep, then, in the first misprision of ‘friendship is political’: taking as a statement of fact what should instead signal a challenge to approach relating as a creative process aimed toward becoming free of oneself. Not altogether unlike Foucault’s sense of writing as a task, of preparing a labyrinth to lose himself within.

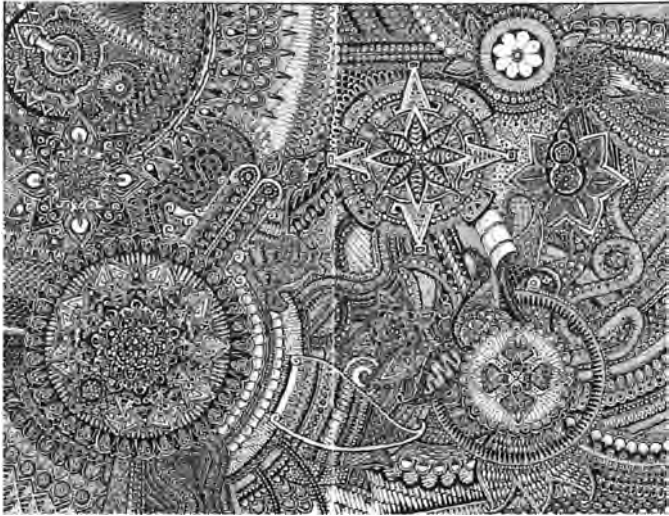


Figure 3.1 – Labyrinth

In his introduction to *The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault names his motivation for writing *curiosity*: “the only kind of curiosity, in any case, that is worth acting upon with any degree of obstinacy: not the curiosity that seeks to assimilate what is proper for one to know, but that which enables one to get free of oneself.” He speaks again of this faculty in a 1980 interview with Christian Delacampagne:

Curiosity is a vice that has been stigmatized in turn by Christianity, by philosophy, and even by a certain conception of science. Curiosity is seen as futility. However, I like the word; it suggests something quite different to me. It evokes “care”; it evokes the care one takes of what exists and what might exist; a sharpened sense of reality, but one that is never immobilized before it; a readiness to find what surrounds us strange and odd; a certain determination to throw off familiar ways

of thought and to look at the same things in a different way; a passion for seizing what is happening now and what is disappearing; a lack of respect for the traditional hierarchies of what is important and fundamental.

When “strange” and “odd” (queer synonyms) appear here, they are not identities, are not directed at our selves but toward our surroundings—away from an introversion and toward a way to live. Here Foucault speaks of study, observation, and reading in a way reminiscent of our speculative, holey reading. Earlier he spoke of writing, friendship and homosexuality earlier still, and openness, curiosity, in all of these. And all of these as ways of living. To return to the “Friendship” interview and homosexuality: “There ought to be an inventiveness special to situation like ours and to these feelings, this need that Americans call ‘coming out,’ that is, showing oneself. The program must be wide open.” Another way to critique the coming out narrative: it functions as a closed program; another way to rethink the situation: coming out as a desire to escape and abandon the readymade formulas.†

Far from conceiving of homosexual culture as a goal or program, Foucault would reduce it to a set of tools: “the instruments for polymorphic, varied, and individually modulated relationships.” Identity may be grasped as one such tool. When asked about the formation of S&M identity in a 1982 interview with B. Gallagher and A. Wilson, Foucault responded:

If identity is only a game, if it is only a procedure to have relations, social and sexual-pleasure relationships that create new friendships, it is useful. But if identity becomes the problem of sexual existence, and if people think that they have to “uncover” their “own identity,”

† Recall Delany’s idea of “coming out” coming out of its overuse, banality, and cliché.

and that their own identity has to become the law, the principle, the code of their existence; if the perennial question they ask is “Does this thing conform to my identity?” then, I think, they will turn back to a kind of ethics very close to the old heterosexual virility. If we are asked to relate to the question of identity, it must be an identity to our unique selves. But the relationships we have to have with ourselves are not ones of identity, rather, they must be relationships of differentiation, of creation, of innovation.



Foucault’s “Friendship” interview was conducted for the French gay magazine *Gai Pied*, which Foucault contributed to in the later years of his life (the magazine launched in 1979; Foucault died in 1984). The first questions of the interview address Foucault as a reader of the magazine, and as someone who, being in his fifties, was older than most of its readership. Guy Hocquenghem, who has appeared in earlier issues of our journal, also contributed to *Gai Pied*, but Guy will appear here only to introduce his friend Copi. Now Copi, who also contributed to the magazine in the form of humorous cartoons, is not as well known to us as Hocquenghem and Foucault are. So we will allow Guy introduce his friend, from his brief postmortem “So Be Copi”:

[W]hat breathes in [Copi’s] plays, the great demented giggling that lifts up the actors, the intrigue, and brings its madness all the way to the stage decor, is Wit [*l’Esprit*].

There are, Gilles Deleuze explains, ironists and humorists. Ironists are cold, nasty, Voltairean. Their mockery comes from misanthropy, aiming to straighten out social mores. Humorists are Anglo-Saxons, Jews, or

Argentines. The first group, called absurdist, excludes; the second, with a wink, make you participate. Copi is obviously a humorist.[†]

Humor, because in the end, this is what is most lacking in that serious and obligatory narrative of coming out. At a time when some on the radical edge of LGBT+ identity politics have gotten into their heads that drag is transphobic and tried to ban it from Glasgow Free Pride,[‡] Copi's hysterical genderfuck plays, his playful drilling and exploding out of gender, are a much needed antidote. Rather than respond to indignity with indignation, as was the mass reaction to the drag ban in the Glasgow debate, what we most need is Copi's kind of identity-shattering laughter.

Copi's 1971 play *The Homosexual* bears the paratitle (not sub-, not under the first but next to it) *The Difficulty of Sexpressing Oneself*.[§] A play, then, on self-expression floundering in difficulty. From opening to finale,

† Anonymous translation from unpublished manuscript.

‡ See "Drag Queens Banned From Pride Event for Offending Trans People", *The Daily Beast*, 23 July 2015. The organizers of 2015 Free Pride Glasgow initially banned all drag performances, citing drag queens' mockery of femininity (the discourse tended to absent drag kings) as transmisogynistic. For the most ridiculous defense of the ban, see Lisa Wade's blog post "Are Drag Queens Doing Girlface?" (*The Society Pages*, 28 July 2015) which oh-so-casually conflates drag with blackface, and seems to drop the trans* question altogether.

§ César Aira:

The title includes two words that Copi never used before or afterwards (with good reason): 'homosexual' and 'expressing oneself'. The homosexual is the being of the past, of upbringing, of the Bildungsroman: nothing could be farther from Copi's system. The same can be said of 'personal' expression.

Copi introduces these words-that-are-not-his here to murder them, to make them fail. Parenthetically, Aira notes: "I understand it was his favorite."

Sexpressing is a self-expressional nightmare consisting mainly of a circulating round of interrogations (“almost police interrogations,” César Aira points out). Madre interrogates Irina about who she’s fucking, whether she is pregnant, who impregnated her. Garbo interrogates Irina about her past, her sex change, and her relations to Madre and Uncle Peter. But no one ever gets a clearer sense of what’s going on—the truth of who they are or their histories, how to map them onto familiar cartographies of sex and gender and sexuality. Speech is anything but clear, and it is stymied by every thing from confusion of identity:

CARBO: Are Mrs. Simpson and Uncle Peter the same person, Irina?

To surveillance:

CARBENKO: You could have told me that at home.

CARBO: At home everywhere’s bugged.

To speaking for others:

MADRE: I made her get out of bed so that you could hear it from her own lips. Go on, tell her. Tell her, Irina!

CARBO: Good evening, Irina.

IRINA: Good evening.

CARBO: Are you feeling better, my dearest?

IRINA: Yes.

MADRE: She lost the child, Madame Garbo!

To saying what one shouldn’t:

IRINA: If we don’t go this evening, we’ll never go! Everyone will know by tomorrow that we wanted to run away and they’ll lock us up.

GARBO: Noone will know that you wanted to run away.
How will they know?

IRINA: Because I'll tell them.

MADRE: You see what she's like!

GARBO: Irina, you have just said a very wicked thing.

To changing the story:

IRINA: I've been fucking around a lot these last few days.
I strip off in the bog at the station and all the cossacks
come and ball me.

MADRE: There you are, you see! And you [Garbo] were
claiming the child was yours.

IRINA: The child was hers.

GARBO: What was that, Irina?

IRINA: The child, it was yours.

MADRE: Irina, you said it was mine.

IRINA: That's impossible. I was three months gone.

MADRE: You said four months.

IRINA: Yes, but it was no bigger than that. It was
three months old. It was either hers, or her husband's
[Garbenko's]. He was fucking me not too badly around
that time.

GARBO: Irina, what are you saying?

IRINA: It was either yours, or your husband's. Or perhaps
it was one of the cossacks. But it wasn't hers.

GARBO: Don't you even know who was the father of the
child?

IRINA: I'm not quite sure.

GARBO: I can't bear it. Goodbye, Irina. I'd rather be
devoured by the wolves!

And what to make of this confession of extramarital love that, in a straightforward confessional mode, should be met by indignation, jealousy, rage?

CARBO: I love her, Garbenko.

CARBENKO: Why didn't you tell me before?

CARBO: Why should I tell you?

CARBENKO: Agreed.

Or of this strange sequence?

IRINA: ... Do you want me to talk or would you rather be quiet?

CARBO: Talk to me, Irina.

IRINA: I don't know what to say. Shall I tell you the story of a movie?

CARBO: I hate you, Irina. You are the most unspeakable and loathsome person I have ever met.

IRINA: Would you like me to tell you how I changed my sex?

CARBO: No.

IRINA: Captain Garbenko has a great big cock. I'm better off with yours than with his. His is wicked.

CARBO: Do you realize I could be driven to kill you one day?

IRINA: Are you taking me to China to kill me?

CARBO: Yes.

It goes on, it gets better, I don't know where to stop. The odd sequence above—Irina offers to talk, but has nothing to say, then only says things that Garbo can't stand to hear—results in Garbo repeatedly telling Irina to stop speaking, to shut up, while Irina hammers her with humiliating questions:

IRINA: Does Garbenko screw you from in front or from behind.

GARBO: From behind.

IRINA: You like it that way, do you?

GARBO: Stop it, Irina.

IRINA: Are you coming in your pants over there?

GARBO: Stop it, Please.

Yet almost immediately after the humiliation sequence, the script flips, with Garbo beginning a lengthy interrogation of Irina, compelling her to speak. It's okay to be confused. The story is riddled with holes, it's a holey mess.

Irina's replies to Garbo's inquisition, and Madre's earlier one, alternate between monosyllabic deflections, lies, insults ("at least he's got a cock"), mockery, and self-contradiction. While off stage, she miscarries (or aborts), shits herself, deliberately injures her leg, and in these crises she alternates between demanding and refusing assistance. César Aira points out that Irina, as a transsexual victim, is atypical in Copi's system, where transsexuals are cast outside of the victim role. But:

in reality she becomes a victim on purpose [...] to become a better murderer of Garbo and Mrs. Simpson, also transsexuals and thus very efficient, difficult to attack.

Irina's weapons are passive: delay, the opposite of action.

In a final mad gesture, Irina cuts off her own tongue, sending Madre and Garbenko into a frenzy over this decisive sabotage of the communication they've been failing at throughout. The finale is nothing but a gaping hole: mute Irina is opening her mouth as if to speak, but—

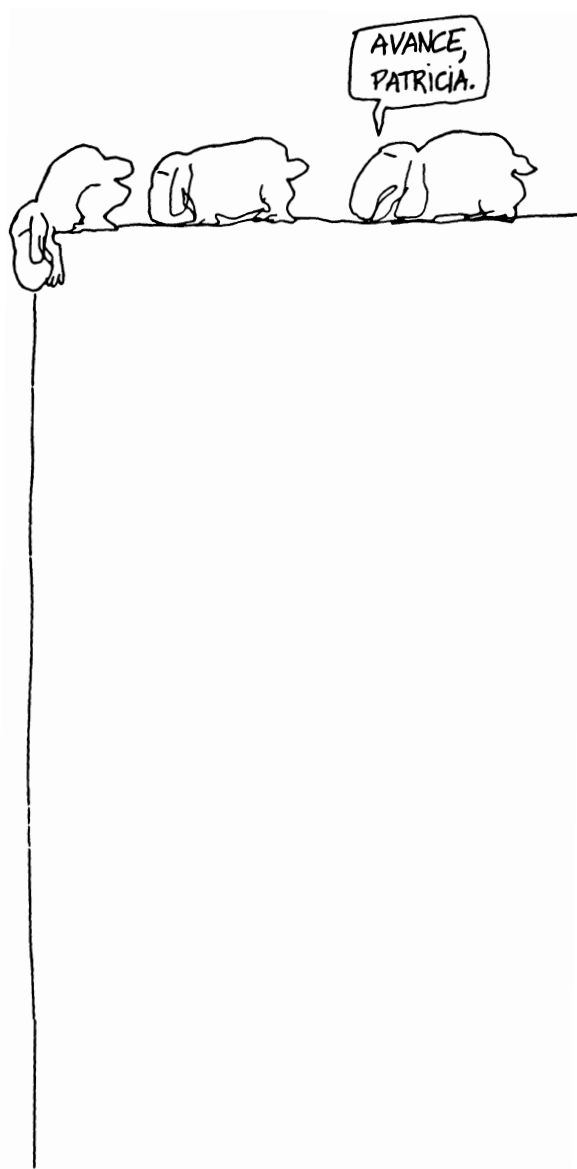


Figure 4.1 – Avance, Patricia

Coming out is impossibilized, messed up, crazed with holes. (Two more holes for the litany: the mouth as mute, bloody hole; the plot hole.) Copi's plot holes disrupt the continuum, as well as the defining discontinuity of before and after, that the coming-out narrative tries to plot. The truths the characters fail to tell are typical coming-out material: trans status, sexuality, surgical and sexual history. It doesn't even become clear which character the title's "homosexual" is meant to refer to. At first glance, the main sexual relationships in the play could be categorized as a more or less even mix of lesbian and straight. These categories quickly fall apart, however, when we start to learn that all of the major characters could be put under the umbrella of trans* identity, but never in any straightforward way. Madre and Irina have both had "the operation", but Irina says she didn't want to have her sex changed (at least, not until she did want it changed, which was after she had already grown breasts, although she won't say why she wanted breasts and no sex change). As for Madre, she only changed *her* sex, Irina says, so as to be deported along with her daughter. So much for that truth-of-self narrative where one changes sex to conform with what one always felt oneself to be. Of course, Madre's story flatly contradicts Irina's: "My daughter and I changed our sex of our own free will, Madame. Now good evening to you." Madame Garbo is an even more extreme case. Biologically female-to-male—"I now have a man's penis," she says—she lives, nevertheless, as a woman. "I had the operation... against my will." The surgeries are fantastical (or science fictional); at the very least they far exceed the capabilities of modern medicine. No scientific incredulity is voiced when Madre learns that her trans daughter Irina has gotten herself pregnant, nor when Madame Garbo, with her unwanted penis, identifies herself as the baby's... father?! Speaking of family relations,

these are just as artificial: Madre and Irina are presented as mother and daughter, but they aren't related by blood:

CARBO: ... Did she just decide, like that, to be your mother and you just followed her?

IRINA: Yes.

We can only imagine the horror of the sensitive Free Pride Glasgow organizers if Copi's *Homosexual* arrived on stage. Is this transphobia? The play denies the question its ground, drills mad holes, rips up, unearths gender as travesty. What is truly horrifying to those who love finding the truth (of sex, of sexuality, of whether or not something is politically correct), is the perverse pleasure the characters get in hiding it! Madre's line to Irina says it all: "You love hidin' the truth". Remember the other two versions of this? The closet queen who derives pleasure from keeping his affairs a secret; the masked philosopher who writes, hands trembling with desire, texts of labyrinthine intricacy, not to uncover the truth but to get lost in. Copi's players perform, excessively, hysterically, all the artifices of gender, sex, sexuality, love. They ripple beneath the coming-out compulsion in every possible way (*they come out all over the place*—and why not, it's all lies anyway), but always humorously, always in shuddering disbelief in the social game, returning us, finally, to Guy's farewell/introduction:

Copi's great laughter teaches us that ultimately every illness, every taboo, is imaginary. ~~MC~~

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Between Strangers and Friends

Reading Baldwin and Genet

IT HAPPENS FROM TIME TO TIME THAT A TEXT OR constellation of texts, by means of synchronicity or mere happenstance, demands one's attention. The present investigation opens a set of texts which performed this exact feat: demanded attention through its co-occurrence with the conflicts unfolding in recent days. What follows examines the interweaving lives and thought of two autodidactic queer figures born a world apart: Jean Genet and James Baldwin. Both contributed, in word and deed, invaluable weapons to struggles against the sexual and racial orders of their time. Both are seen, by virtue of the searing beauty of their early writing, as early prophets of the gay liberation movement, and yet each remained lifelong outsiders to that world. Each committed the later parts of their lives to the movement (armed and otherwise) for the destruction of white supremacy in the United States. Neither found in queerness the preconditions for inclusion or the basis of community, but instead a means of connection with other rebellious and excluded figures. In a time when the dead end of a politics around gay identity is all too apparent and when a nascent wave of struggle has begun again to crash against the hardened edifice of white supremacy, it feels necessary to examine the traces and impressions left by these iconoclastic writers. Such a reading offers a tremendous amount to careful listeners. In them we find a cautionary tale of their situation, but also our own. Within this cold assessment remain brilliant and battle-worn, scathing and queer visions of a lived

revolt against the social order, against a world which creates and annihilates us as sexual and racial subjects.

We'll closely read their works written in the period between 1970 and 1971, as well as interviews with each writer.[†] Reading them now, after four decades of the defeat—through repression and recuperation—of the movements in which they participated, means approaching them as friends lost at sea. We find them swimming amidst the same questions confronting us today: questions of the family, “the people,” exile and revolt, the racial and sexual divisions that separate us and how those divisions might be broken. We recognize Genet and Baldwin as friends—in their friendship with one another and in ours with them—because of their status as outsiders; their familiar queerness at odds with their time.

Genet, in interviews, explicitly revealed a certain queerness as integral to his being. In a gesture of naked honesty, he described his narcissistic drive—one concerned with his own happiness, his own way of being, without relation to the prescribed roles or categories to which it corresponds for others. He offers no theory of his homosexuality or of desire:

I'm homosexual. Okay. There's not much to it. Trying to find out why or even how I became homosexual is a pointless diversion.

† The texts: Baldwin, *No Name in the Street*, 1972. Genet's “Introduction to *Soledad Brother*”, “For George Jackson”, “The Red and the Black”, “After the Assassination”, and “America is Afraid”, all compiled in *The Declared Enemy* ed. Albert Dichy and trans. Jeff Fort, 1991. The interviews: Genet interviewed by Hubert Fichte, appearing in *Gay Sunshine Interviews* 1 and also *The Declared Enemy*; Baldwin interviewed by Studs Terkel, Richard Goldstein, and Quincy Troupe, published as “An Interview with James Baldwin”, “Go the Way Your Blood Beats”, and The Last Interview”, compiled in *James Baldwin: The Last Interview*, 2014.

His queerness and his life plays out within a singular and interior space. Genet's homosexuality demonstrates a matter of separation, of becoming-singular, an abjection. For him, homosexuality and crime (inseparable) establish a non-relation to the world around him. He could only acknowledge the perception of himself as a leading voice in contemporary gay life with a great deal of distance, if not dismissal. Such a publicity—as in *Saint Genet*, for example—elicited only “a kind of disgust.”

He said, regarding Sartre's reading: “I saw myself naked and stripped by someone other than myself. In all my books I strip myself, but at the same time I disguise myself with words, choices, attitudes, magic. Sartre stripped me without mercy. He wrote about me in the present tense.” Rather than a confessional mode of coming-out, Genet deployed self-creation and opacity. His words and choices reveal a homosexuality integrally tied up in betrayal, loneliness and departure: a mechanism by which he distanced himself from hetero-sociality. He wrote to affirm his solitude, to explore an entropic and centrifugal force within the social. This vantage point of the outsider produced in him a sense of affinity with the excluded and otherized, leading to his later engagements with various underground movements.

Baldwin's interviews likewise reveal that he considered himself a stranger in gay America, and America at large. He didn't understand the word “gay”, and was disinterested in the roleplaying he perceived in the word. Even “homosexual” didn't seem to fit right. He saw gay life as a tribal culture from which he experienced a marked distance. As a maverick, he claimed membership in no group or party. Matters of his sexuality and love were absolutely personal; matters between him and the divine, unmediated by any church. He wrote about them in order to clarify something for himself, something about his place in the world. He said: “there's nothing in me that is not in

everybody else, and nothing in everybody else that is not in me. We're trapped in language, of course, but 'homosexual' is not a noun. At least not in my book... perhaps a verb. You see, I can only talk about my own life. I loved a few people and they loved me. It had nothing to do with these labels. Of course, the world has all kinds of words for us. But that's the world's problem."

These singular matters were only made public by the interference of institutions (the church, the state, etc.) and so Baldwin had no interest in seeking acceptance from those very institutions. Being black, and being sexually deviant, he found himself alienated from the politics of representation and inclusion. His relationship to his own perceived importance to the gay phenomenon, like Genet's, remained complicated. If anything he saw himself as a witness to it, without any interest in being its leader or spokesperson. If he refused leadership of the gay movement, he was precluded from such a role in the civil rights movement. Many referred to him as "Martin Luther Queen."[†] A *Time* magazine article from 1963 described him as a "nervous, slight, almost fragile figure, filled with frets and fears. He is effeminate in manner, drinks considerably, smokes cigarettes in chains, and he often loses his audiences with overblown statements," and emphasized that he could not be claimed "by any stretch of the imagination as a Negro leader." On the one hand, he

† In "The Color of Discipline", Thaddeus Russell argues that "The construction of [Martin Luther] King himself as the masculine symbol of the movement was a deliberate attempt to remove the image of black deviancy and show that African Americans could be good citizens. The public King [was] nearly always clad in a conservative business suit and frequently photographed in affectionate poses with his wife and children...." Russell situates this symbolism within a broader political strategy of the Civil Rights Movement to exclude queerness from a newly forged heteronormative image of the black community. Within this politics of the Family and masculinity, a queen like Baldwin could only figure as an outlier.

felt himself alien to a politics of white homosexuality concerned with achieving the benefits promised to whiteness. On the other, he was acutely aware of his exclusion from a politics based on a strong family and masculine virility. He responded to Eldridge Cleaver's invective against him by writing:

He seemed to feel that I was a dangerously odd, badly twisted, and fragile reed... I was confused in his mind with the unutterable debasement of the male—with all those faggots, punks, and sissies, the sight and sound of whom, in prison, must have made him vomit more than once. Well, I certainly hope I know more about myself, and the intention of my work than that, but I am an odd quantity. So is Eldridge; so are we all. It is a pity that we won't, probably, ever have the time to attempt to define once more the relationship of the odd and disreputable artist to the odd and disreputable revolutionary.... These two seem doomed to stand forever at an odd and rather uncomfortable angle to each other, and they both stand at a sharp and not always comfortable angle to the people they both, in their different fashions, hope to serve. But I think that it is just as well to remember that the people are one mystery and that the person is another. Though I know what a very bitter and delicate and dangerous conundrum this is, it yet seems to me that a failure to respect the person so dangerously limits one's perception of the people that one risks betraying them and oneself....

This uncomfortable and dangerous angle towards the "mystery of the people" and toward the revolutionaries who'd serve them, revealed to him the problem always posed in the invocation of a people. Peoples are forged through the exclusion of certain persons and the forcing of others into familial relationships of violence and constraint. It is no mystery, then, that struggles for nationhood—the governmental and political elevation of kinship

bonds through the fantasy of “blood”—or for assimilation and citizenship consistently employ a significant degree of internal sexual and gendered control. Baldwin, being a stranger among peoples (gay, black, American, otherwise) could only laugh at a politics that proposes the necessary strength or vitality of any given people.

In their distances, we clearly recognize Genet and Baldwin as friends. The otherness expressed by both figures provides a certain paradoxical comfort, if only because we too feel an estrangement from the so-called “communities” of our time (the assimilationist ones, obviously, but also the supposedly “radical queer” and the revolutionary milieus). As we think through the questions of struggle and revolt, it serves us to invoke their sense of humility, otherness, dissonance, and interiority. From a space of distance—a queer space—we’ll hazard the trap of language in order to perhaps clarify some things about ourselves and our world.

Ending the Family Name

In 1972 James Baldwin published *No Name in the Street*, a memoir of his travels through the US and contributions to the black liberation movement of the preceding years. The book gives testimony to a decade of assassinations, repression, and terror. With this document of pessimism he attempted to sift through the defeat of the civil rights movement. The assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X bookend the text and figure prominently in Baldwin’s pessimism. In his words, with King’s death, “something altered in me, something went away.” He buried his last hope for a country he had all but forsaken with King. In the aftermath he set about an aimless wandering

that lead him away from the United States for good, writing the book in that time of wandering.

Baldwin laced his narrative throughout with an apocalyptic sense of time. He frequently referenced “these last and evil days,” and his “bleak, pale, cold wonder about the future.” He described that over America “hangs a miasma of fury and frustration, a perceptible darkening, as of storm clouds of rage and despair,” and he imagined a day “when this country’s absolutely inescapable disaster levels it.” The American people themselves are figured as “the disasters they’d become.” For Baldwin, the world was ending, but rather than fire and brimstone, he saw the black struggle “facing an army, facing a citizenry, facing white fathers, facing white mothers, facing the progeny of these co-citizens, facing the white past, to say nothing of the white present.” If he esteemed the American people to be part and parcel of the apocalypse, he had no confidence regarding the good intentions of liberal white America or their “nagging sense that they must do something” or their desire to pledge some financial contributions in order to be “off the hook.” This distrust cohered into a skeptical view of the social movement of the time:

We could petition and petition, march and march, and raise money and give money until we wore ourselves out and the stars began to moan: none of this endeavor would or could reach the core of the matter, it would change nobody’s fate. The thirty thousand dollars raised tonight would be gone in bail bonds in the morning, and so it would continue until we dropped. Nothing would ever reach the conscience of the people of this nation—it was a dream to suppose that the people of any nation had a conscience. Some individuals within the nation might, and the nation always saw to it that these people came to a bad, if not a bloody end. Nothing we could do would prevent, at last, and open confrontation.

Despite his belief in an inevitable “open confrontation,” Baldwin viewed Martin Luther King Jr. as one of the few figures who might possibly avert it. King’s death crushed Baldwin because Martin had made him hope in spite of his better sense. Baldwin recounted watching the march on Washington with a sense of impossible optimism that “the beloved community would not forever remain that dream one dreamed in agony.” He located a naïve belief, if only momentarily, that the peaceful petitioning of grievances might amount to their meaningful redress. This hope died in Birmingham when a bomb blew four little girls into oblivion and amounted to, in Baldwin’s words, “the first answer we received to our petition.”

He reflected years later, after Martin and Malcolm were both dead, that it was hard to believe a frontal assault against the Capitol that day could possibly have produced more bloodshed or despair. The emergence and repression of the Black Panther Party in the coming years only served to confirm his suspicions that any movement among black people in the US for dignity and for life would be met with “the ferocity of the repression, the storm of fire and blood which the Panthers have been forced to undergo merely for declaring themselves as men—men who want ‘land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice, peace’.”

If we pause here to assess the situations unfolding in the past year, Baldwin’s analysis proves haunting and brutal. After all, didn’t we too hear friends’ tales and watch the fires of Ferguson and Baltimore and dare to believe in the emergence of something we’d long abandoned hope for? In the following months a movement we hadn’t imagined (small in comparison to past generations, surely, but remarkable for ours) emerged and began to approach things that daydreams scarcely would. This movement proclaimed that *black lives matter* and in doing so opened up a series of questions as to how exactly to go about

destroying those institutions and apparatuses that deny that simple assertion.

Tragically it seems the arc has shortened; or perhaps time has intensified. History perhaps moves in neither a line nor a circle, but rather a spiral. Already an escalation of murder and terror at the hands of white supremacists (whether in police uniforms or not) has answered the petitions. If we had wagered that the threat of rioting might make an officer hesitate before pulling the trigger, police nationwide have disabused us of such a notion. If anything, since Ferguson, police departments have intensified their campaign of racial terror. Already over seven hundred[†] people have been killed by police in the US and the year is only halfway through, all while spree shootings and arsons of black churches have become a norm. Viewed in the course of a larger scope of time, the situation appears all the bleaker. Today, we couldn't disagree with Baldwin's assessment in his final interview (shortly before his death in 1987) that since King's death "everything is worse." It's no secret that the end and supposed success of that movement corresponded to the beginning of a massive expansion of the prison system in the US. The United States currently keeps as many people in cages (a larger prison population than any nation in the world) as were enslaved in 1840. Baldwin's apocalyptic narrative reads as if it were written yesterday, but the state's repressive apparatus has grown in ways almost beyond comprehension. It appears that we've reached an impasse in our understanding of social movements. Innumerable commentators have spent countless words on the events of the past year, but we remain without a way to talk about the apparent futility of these attempts to dislodge white supremacy, or even slow

[†] This statistic needed to be updated with each subsequent draft of this paper, illustrating a disturbing escalation in the past weeks alone. In the year since Michael Brown's death on August 9, 2014, police in the US killed at least 1083 people.

the rate of police murder. We hear so much about “riots as protest” or about the necessity of “strong communities” to “make police obsolete,” but next to nothing about how exactly we might go about dismantling the apparatus of policing itself. We are at a loss and to say otherwise requires a tremendous dishonesty.

Politics fails us, language fails us, but Baldwin exposed this decades ago. He criticized the failures of language and understanding, and in his doing so we can see his influence on contemporary theorists such as Frank Wilderson III and Saidiya Hartman[†]. In his critique of language, we read him as a sort of proto-Afro-pessimist. He said:

you see, whites want black writers to mostly deliver something as if it were an official version of the black experience. But the vocabulary won't hold it; simply. No true account, really, of black life can be held, can be contained in the American vocabulary. As it is, the only way that you can deal with it is by doing a great violence to the assumptions on which the vocabulary is based.

A call for such a violence against the preconditions of language coincides with Frank Wilderson's commentary on recent anti-police rioting in the US. In a radio interview shortly after the first wave of rioting in Ferguson, he spoke to the near-impossibility of language to convey the experience of black people, in the US, in their confrontation with the police[‡]. He described the burden put on himself and others to come out against

† For an introduction to both, of significance to the present conversation, see Saidiya Hartman interviewed by Frank Wilderson III in “The Position of the Unthought”.

‡ Originally aired on the “I Mix What I Like” radio show, a transcript of the interview is available in the zine “We’re Trying to Destroy the World”, published by Ill Will Editions. (ill-will-editions.tumblr.com)

police brutality or *police violence*, whereas he positions himself against *police in their entirety*. He argues that this sentiment appears nearly unsayable in the American vocabulary. For Wilderson, and we'll follow him here, no conceivable demand can be posed (or met) by which policing in this country could be disinherited of its lineage of slave-catching and the suppression of revolt; there are no reforms to be made. By his account, black people have nothing to ask for. (Current events confirmed his argument shortly after the interview when Barack Obama and some progressives began—in the name of “transparency” and “accountability”—calling for a proliferation of surveillance by means of body cameras on police officers. This parody became farce almost immediately when a New York grand jury found no crime in the police murder of Eric Garner, despite the entire incident being caught on camera.) For Wilderson, the irreducible enmity of black people toward the police—their non-demand—registers as incomprehensible in the white imaginary. Recognizing an aversion to the demand-form reveals something interesting about the post-facto naming of the movement emerging out of Ferguson as Black Lives Matter. Rather than coalescing around a set of piecemeal reforms to policing or this or that party or demand, participants in the riots and blockages simply affirm their lives. While one could read this as a lowest common denominator humanism which everybody should at least be able to support, there exists a way of reading wherein this simple assertion opens an unmediated hostility with all the institutions and apparatuses which impede those lives. This hostility could open onto a confrontation with the linguistic, libidinal, and psychic structures that determine “mattering” as such.

Wilderson bases his arguments (around the futility of demand) on his efforts elsewhere to illustrate the failure of metaphor in the struggle for black liberation. In

“The Black Liberation Army and the Paradox of Political Engagement”,[†] Wilderson argues that the combatants of the Black Liberation Army, unlike their counterparts in the Red Army Faction or the Irish Republican Army, have no recourse to what he calls “third term mediators.” In his reading of the communiqués of these groups, he identifies the ways in which the RAF and IRA combatants justify confrontation with their enemy by means of symbolically fighting on behalf of a people or a nation. In their texts, concepts such as “the people,” “the nation,” “the land,” or “the working class” function as a sort of spatial grounding-wire between the fighters and their enemy, which absorbs the shock of violent action. These interlocutors function temporally also—as in a crisis or period of repression—and likewise justify armed action. Wilderson argues that black people in the US cannot claim these spatial or temporal grounding wires: they have no native land on which to stake a claim, and their situation is inextricable from hundreds of years of incarceration, slavery and domination which passes for normality. As evidenced by his reading of Assata Shakur’s communiqués (written following her arrest, a year after the publication of *No Name in the Street*), he argues that black combatants cannot successfully invoke a common interlocutor with their enemy. He figures them as barred from understanding as familial agents fighting over a shared metanarrative of nation, class or people. As such, their violence takes on an unmediated quality; their words speak directly within the registers of sensation, emotion, pain, and desire for love.

The reaction of various white nationalists to the “Black Lives Matter” riots and actions partially reveals the exile of black people from the fantasy of familial common ground in the United States. One example is the neo-Nazi skinheads who took to patrolling downtown

Olympia, Washington after a handful of anti-police demonstrations. These skinheads declared that their presence was necessary to “secure a future for white children” against the threat of “black insurrection.” Another example is the Ku Klux Klan organized “confederate flag” rally in Columbia, South Carolina which called on whites to “defend their heritage” from the threat posed to it by recent Black Lives Matter mobilizations. Taken together the “pro-police” and “pro-heritage” sentiments pay homage to the history of policing as the delineating apparatus of humanness in the United States (both in the sense of the systematic domination of black people by police, but also of membership in police departments as a mechanism for the assimilation of various ethnic groups into whiteness [i.e. Italians, Irish and Polish communities in the last century]). In both cases, the partisans of the white nation aspire to secure the temporal continuity of their imagined family—in terms of their historical inheritance and also their children’s future—from the threat of blackness.‡ While obviously extreme examples, the same impulse to defend the symbolic coherence of the “third term mediator”—whiteness, the Family, the Children, etc.—from an incommensurate blackness reveals itself everywhere in the discourse around racialized struggles. For all their radical airs, the managers of revolt are no less afraid of the specter of blackness. We hear their condemnation in thinly coded appeals to respectability, in shaming of “unreasonable” looters and rioters, in the attempted mobilization of benevolent “white allies” to organize as a white block supporting the self-supposed “leadership” of politicians and non-profits, in the discursive shift from “Black Lives Matter” toward “All Lives Matter,” or in the way the media

‡ We take a great amount of joy in being able to report that in both situations, the white nationalists were dealt with in a visceral and unmediated way.

describes white spree-shooters as “deviants” or “mysterious drifters” while simultaneously elevating individual “crimes” on the part of black people to synecdoches of an entire race.[†]

An ontological abjection emerges here: a disjunction in being and language, which Baldwin (like Wilderson) attributes to the experience of blackness in the United States. We almost hear Frank when James described his experiences in the US differing from those of Algerians in France.

They thus, held something within them which they would never surrender to France. But on my side of the Ocean... we had surrendered everything, or had had everything taken away, and there was no place for us to go: we were home. The Arabs were together in Paris, but the American blacks were alone.

He viewed the situation of colonial subjects as being “more coherent” than his own and described how, “as I began to discern what their history had made of them, I began to suspect, somewhat painfully, what my history had made of me.” Baldwin illustrates here the failure of the analogy upon which the nation thesis and the last century’s fantasy of a possible coalition between nationalisms (of various coherent peoples struggling together as nations for their respective liberations) rests. For him the black subject in

† This tendency toward synecdoche—the elevation of a part to a representation of the whole—appears in the way that acts of violence carried out by Arabs and Muslims are portrayed in the west as “terrorism” compared to those same acts being “mental illness” among white actors. And yet, not all synecdoches are the same; whereas the specter of Muslim terrorism is conceived of by politicians and talking heads as a “clash of civilizations,” the specter of black uprising is never thought in those terms. This is worth bearing in mind while reading the arguments in the following paragraphs.

America cannot compose the same imagined nation. In his reading, the analogy doesn't hold.

In *No Name in the Street*, Baldwin elucidates the same paradox labored over by contemporary theorists; the paradox by which the black subject is included in the West by the very nature of its exclusion as such. This inclusion underlies the singular condition of his abjection, and from this condition he spent his life attempting an escape. At various points in the text he says:

It is easy for an African to hate the invade and drive him out of Africa, but it is every difficult for an American Negro to do this. He obviously can't do this to white people; there's no place to drive them....

and,

We have created—no other nation has—a black man who belongs, who is a part of the West. In distinction to Belgium or any other European power, we had our slaves on the mainland. No matter how we deny it, we couldn't avoid a human involvement with them, which we have almost perished in denying, but which is nevertheless there....

and,

[F]our hundred years in the West has certainly turned me into a Westerner, there was no way around that. But four hundred years in the West had also failed to bleach me—there was no way around that either—and my history in the West had, for its daily effect, placed me in such mortal danger that I had fled.

These lines, together and separately, point toward the singularity and irreducibility of the black condition in the United States. This irreducibility provides substance to Wilderson's argumentation on this point. He exposes the untenable falsity of the dreams of inclusionary reforms, of

building a “black nation” in the South, or of some imagined return; an ontological paradox. Baldwin articulated this paradox years earlier in his 1965 debate with William F. Buckley. He argued, then that in spite of his ancestors being buried in American soil for hundreds of years, this civilization’s “system of reality” still couldn’t make space for him.

Baldwin’s writing as a whole, but especially in *No Name in the Street*, shares a great deal with contemporary queer and Afro-pessimist thinking because of his contributions to an understanding of the role of fantasy and libidinal structures—“systems of reality”—in the experience of domination. For this elaboration, all of us are particularly indebted to him. He theorized the domination of black people in the United States as inextricably tied up in the symbolic space of “blackness” within the white, Christian, imaginary. He put it this way:

This problem, which [white Americans] invented in order to safeguard their purity, has made of them criminals and monsters, and it is destroying them; and this not from anything blacks may or may not be doing but because of the role a guilty and constricted white imagination has assigned to the blacks. That the scapegoat pays for the sins of others is well known, but this is only legend, and a revealing one at that. In fact, however the scapegoat may be made to suffer, his suffering cannot purify the sinner; it merely incriminates him the more, and it seals his damnation. The scapegoat, eventually, is released, to death: his murderer continues to live. The suffering of the scapegoat has resulted in seas of blood, and yet not one sinner has been saved, or changed, by this despairing ritual. Sin has merely been added to sin, and guilt piled upon guilt. In the private chambers of the soul, the guilty party is identified, and the accusing finger, there, is not legend, but consequence, not fantasy,

but the truth. People pay for what they do, and, still more, for what they have allowed themselves to become. And they pay for it very simply: by the lives they lead.

In *No Name in the Street* Baldwin described being sexually assaulted, groped by a powerful white man, and in doing so sketched the fundamental libidinal economy ensuring that the slave knows his master's commercial and sexual license over him. He describes what Hortense Spillers has elsewhere talked about as the ungendering of the black body in its absolute availability for the enactment of white desire.[†] He invokes a contradictory (e)masculation in the act of this white man grabbing his cock—that organ of the black body which the white imaginary has invested with such a powerful cathexis. He bemoans the position of the black body as both threat and fantasy in this system of erotics. Throughout many of his novels and essays, he articulates the role of black people as tools in the hands of another, instruments of another's will and pleasure. For him, the entirety of the white social order rests upon

† In her text "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe", Hortense Spillers explores the ways in which, throughout the nightmare of chattel slavery, black subjects are excluded from the heteronormative familial structures which define white America, and are instead subject to the violent rupturing of their kinship relations (what Frederick Douglass would describe as a relation without fathers, or as "the order of civilization reversed") and to universal and "ungendering" sexual violence at the hands of masters and overseers. Spillers illustrates the libidinal economy at play within the master/slave relation, but also the ways in which that economy is structured differently than the gender relations of white America. For her, the apparatuses which render black subjects as flesh always available for the pleasure of the masters also leave "hieroglyphics of the flesh" which mark all descendent black subjects as similarly available. Her argumentation helps us in considering the way that a variety of apparatuses, (slavery, police violence, sexual violence, CPS, etc.) render the black subject as outside the fantastic structure of the white heterosexual family. In a sense, she also then illustrates the precise futility of nationalist attempts to fight for the strength of this type of family.

this. “Behind the facade, of course, lives the city, furtive, paranoid, puritanical, obsessed and in love with what it imagines to be sin—and also with what it imagines to be joy, it being difficult in Western culture to distinguish the two.” He said that black men are imagined as posing as much of a threat to the economy as to the “morals of white cheerleaders.” To the police occupying the ghettos, black men represent a “pale, compelling nightmare—an overwhelming collection of private nightmares.” Of them he says:

What they do see when they do look at you is what they have invested you with. What they have invested you with is all the agony, and pain, and the danger, and the passion, and the torment—you know, sin, death and hell—of which everyone in this country is terrified. As a Negro, you represent a level of experience which Americans deny... all the taboos placed on the flesh, and have at the same time in this country such a vivid example of a decent pagan imagination and the sexual liberty with which white people invest Negroes—and then penalize them for... it’s a guilt about flesh. In this country the Negro pays for the guilt which white people have about the flesh.

Baldwin’s narrative revelation of the libidinal underpinnings of police and judicial violence continues in *Tell Me How Long the Train’s Been Gone*, where he describes sexual violence (and the threat thereof) inflicted upon black inmates by white guards. In his telling, such violence weaponizes and upholds both the sexual and racial orders of the time. If, as Wilderson and others have argued, the contemporary policing and prison system form a continuum with chattel slavery, then the reduction of black bodies to objects available for another—the foundation of that libidinal economy—continues into the present through those apparatuses. In the contemporary

fantasy structures of the US, sexualized and criminalized black bodies figure as available for consumption by another. This is evidenced by the institutionalization of prison rape and by the pornotroping of that violence; by rampant sexual assault of black men by prison guards and police officers; by inmates in San Francisco's county jail made to fight "gladiator style" for the entertainment of the guards; by the fetishistic portrayals in the porn industry of chattel slavery, policing, and imprisonment. Particularly grotesque is a recent performance by the Museum of Modern Art's first poet laureate, Kenneth Goldsmith. Goldsmith, who in recent months was invited to read at the White House, cut up and read Michael Brown's autopsy report as a poem entitled, "The Body of Michael Brown." In the performance, he surveils and spectacularizes the dead body of Michael Brown. In dispassionately reading the details of the coroner's report and dwelling upon a description of Brown's penis, he invokes and exploits all the pornotropic stuff of the libidinal fantasy inextricable from the order that mandated Brown's death. Goldsmith inadvertently illustrates the complicity of the avant-garde with social order's psychic center.

In the interview, "Go the Way Your Blood Beats", Baldwin clarified that the libidinal nightmare space that black people occupy also constitutes the conditions of heteronormative domination in the US. He called this domination a "terror of the flesh, a doctrine which has led to untold horrors." He saw the sexual and racial questions as intertwined in the white imaginary. He argued that society reveals its will through police officers and other masculine figures who need faggots as a receptacle upon which to enact their own sexual fantasies, to displace what they cannot acknowledge in themselves onto the body of another.

I think it's very important for the male homosexual to recognize that he is a sexual target for other men, and that is why he is despised, and why he is called a faggot. He is called a faggot because other men need him.

We can read Baldwin as indicting homophobic violence as co-constitutive of the racialized sexual violence of the white social order. The “terror of the flesh” is, for Baldwin, tied up in the terror inflicted upon the flesh by slave-masters, police officers, and prison guards. This emasculation and inscription of black bodies into a hierarchical sexual ordering relies on the same psychic violence constitutive of homophobia. And yet, unfortunately for Baldwin, this psychic violence often remains intact or unchallenged in the resistant struggles to reclaim a “castrated” masculinity. Baldwin elsewhere described the ways he saw black men “battle for humanity according to those brutal criteria bequeathed to [them] at birth.” The maintenance of the psycho-sexual order in the struggle for family, masculinity, and nation—which so alienated Baldwin—can still be seen today in the rhetoric of resistance to the police and the courts they serve.[†] Baldwin illustrated in “Freaks and the American Ideal of Manhood” that the structure of heterosexual masculinity is not necessarily a black thing, but an *American* thing. We might expand this and say that it is a *national* thing—a thing related to the fantasy of any nation composed of blood ties and elevated fam-

† For an example from contemporary anthems of street fighting, we could look at the line in “G-Code” by Geto Boys about not testifying because “I ain’t gay,” which codes collaboration as queer and resistance as predicated on an innate masculinity. Or the NWA line—“I don’t know if they’re fags or what?”—about sexual violence against black men on the part of police officers. Here, this type of routine violation, euphemized as “frisking”, is figured as a queer act which implicates the police, but also those who do not resist. In both we see the struggle against the State’s racialized sexual violence abiding by those same “brutal criteria” that reproduce it.

ily structures. Thaddeus Russell argues persuasively that “the price of admission to American society for African Americans would be a surrender to heterosexual norms,” and that the movements for middle-class inclusion, civil rights or nationalism often went hand-in-hand with a tightening of gendered and sexual control, as well as a paranoia against sexual deviance.[‡]

‡ An example given by Russell in “The Color of Discipline”, which illustrates the shift from the New York City Baldwin left toward the one he returned to:

In the late 1920s, as the drag balls gained popularity among the African American working class, black queers came under attack from the leaders of the early civil rights movement. It was probably no coincidence that the campaign to purge queerness from black life began immediately after the white moral reform society called the Committee of Fourteen released its first report on Harlem and declared it to be the most vice-ridden neighborhood in New York City. The campaign was initiated by Adam Clayton Powell Sr., pastor of the powerful Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem, a leader of both the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Urban League, the standard-bearer for the black middle-class, and perhaps the most famous African American clergyman and civil rights leader at the time. In... a series of sermons [Powell] claimed [‘sexual perversion’] was ‘steadily increasing’ in large American cities.... According to Powell, the individual pursuit of pleasure over the obligations of community was both the cause and consequence of homosexuality. The indulgence in the sensual pleasures that were newly available to the great numbers of recent black arrivals in the cities was “causing men to leave their wives for other men, wives to leave their husbands for other women, and girls to mate with girls instead of marrying.” Homosexuality, one of “the powers which tend to debase the race,” was a rejection of the familial responsibility that held the black community together and made it a viable political entity. From this perspective, homosexuals were the products and purveyors of a broader urban culture that clashed with the ethic of self-sacrifice and communal responsibility at the core of citizenship. The fact that Powell’s attack immediately followed the

If Baldwin saw this “terror of the flesh” and the horrors of the American libidinal economy as underwriting the militancy of certain tendencies within the black liberation movement, he likewise recognized it in the motivations of the white liberals of his time. He noted in *No Name in the Street* that their desire was no less structured by the psychic relation of black men’s availability for consumption. In staying consistent with his pessimism, he insisted that they too needed a particular fantasy of black militancy to play out the “familiar rage confirming the reality of white power and sensuously inflaming a bizarre species of guilty eroticism without which, I am beginning to believe, most white Americans of the more or less liberal persuasion cannot draw a single breath.” In other words, it was important for black people to suffer so white people could feel guilty and maybe even do something to assuage their guilt.

This underlying psychic relation marks the point where he imagined that a struggle against the white social order might begin. Baldwin ultimately claimed that the possibility of liberation could only really exist in the desire

to be liberated from the stigma of blackness by embracing it... to cease, forever, one’s interior agreement and collaboration with the authors of one’s degradation... when the black man’s mind is no longer controlled by the white man’s fantasies.

This may be the suicidal endeavor of the fanatic or the revolutionary, but as he said, “perhaps the moral of the story (and the hope of the world) lies in what one demands, not of others but of oneself.” One makes these demands of

first exposure of Harlem’s libertinism by white authorities indicates that he intended to shape his constituency into the normative structure of the dominant culture.

the self because liberation cannot stem from any demand made upon the enemy. As Baldwin put it:

They cannot afford to change it. They would not know how to go about changing it, even if their imaginations were capable of encompassing the concept of black freedom. But this concept lives in their imaginations, and in the popular imagination, only as a nightmare. Blacks have never been free in this country, never was it intended that they should be free, and the specter of so dreadful a freedom—the idea of a license so bloody and abandoned—conjures up another, unimaginable country, a country in which no decent, God-fearing white man or woman can live. A civilized country is, by definition, a country dominated by whites, in which the blacks clearly know their place.

We'll pause here to tease out a bit of what Baldwin meant by "civilized", as the concept returns at many points throughout the book. We know this enemy well, but Baldwin approaches from a queer angle—one outside the metanarrative and without the baggage of anarchist orthodoxy. Years earlier, in *Notes of a Native Son* he described the "glittering, mechanical, inescapable civilization which has put to death our freedom." The specter of "civilization" and "the civilized" appears over a dozen times in *No Name in the Street*. He deployed the concept of "the civilized" as a status reserved for the included and as always predicated on the exclusion of another (Arabs in France, black people in the US). He used it to criticize leftists for their hesitancy to act, and their willingness to limit themselves to discourse and debate, "so choked and cloaked with formulas that they no longer seem to have any connection" to life. He bemoaned the civilized "impersonality of our time" and his unwillingness to make peace with the world of "Cadillacs, Frigidaires and IBM machines." He spoke of "civilized" as an award given to those educated

in order to defend the system, as opposed to those “uncivilized black possessions” that must constantly be excluded, policed, enslaved or killed. Finally, for him it was a justification of the slaughter of indigenous people and the enslavement of blacks; the altar upon which they’re sacrificed. In naming civilization as enemy, he significantly located society[†] in its entirety (economically and historically yes, but also psychically, sexually, spiritually) as the beast that enslaves and destroys.

Baldwin unveiled civilization as the corporeality—the physical manifestation, the excrescence—of the white fantasy world. Describing the experience of being in the American South, he wrote:

There is the great, vast, brooding, welcoming and blood-stained land, beautiful enough to astonish and break the heart. The land seems nearly to weep beneath the burden of this civilization’s unnameable excrescences. The people and the children wander blindly through their forest of billboards, antennae, Coca-Cola bottles, gas stations, drive-ins, motels, beer cans, music of a strident and invincible melancholy, stilted wooden porches, snapping fans, aggressively blue-jeaned buttocks, strutting crotches, pint bottles, condoms, in the weeds, rotting automobile corpses, brown as beetles, earrings flashing in the gloom of bus stops: over all there seems to hang a miasma of lust and longing and rage. Every Southern city seemed to me to have been but lately rescued from the swamps, which were patiently waiting to reclaim it. The people all seemed to remember their time under water, and to be both dreading and anticipating their return to that freedom from responsibility.

76 | † As he clarified in “Stranger in the Village”, “the present civilization, which is the only one that matters.”

This anticipation—a sense of waiting, patience—recurs several times throughout the book, and warrants our attention. For now, we'll say that this patience stems from a recognition of the decline and decomposition which is always already happening within civilization, and which its defenders must constantly mobilize against. It recalls Walter Benjamin's attempt to "recognize the monuments of the bourgeoisie as ruins even before they crumbled." For Baldwin, this return to a freedom—a terrifying freedom outside of or after civilization—was at stake in the conflict unfolding in the US, but was also something incomprehensible to white America. He said that the US couldn't dare to assess or imagine the price paid by its victims, because to understanding their revolt would reveal them to be "revolting against all established civilized value." The truth of this, for him, followed from his assessment that they were revolting against the preconditions of the Western existence. He quoted Bobby Seale in asserting that in the fantasy life of white Americans, the conflict was unfolding between the white god and the dark gods which they'd prefer to repress; a conflict that challenged their very sense of honor, safety, certainty and self. Baldwin added, "for a people caught in a civilization in crisis, history fails to give any very sanguine answers." For him, the very identities and histories from which civilized Americans draw meaning rely upon an inextricable subjugation. This history of subjection, he feared, couldn't be redeemed without further bloodshed.

One may see that the history, which is now indivisible from oneself, has been full of errors and excesses; but this is not the same thing as seeing that, for millions of people, this history—oneself—has been nothing but an intolerable yoke, a stinking prison, a shrieking grave. It is not so easy to see that, for millions of people, life itself depends on the speediest possible demolition of this

history, even if this means the leveling, or the destruction of its heirs.

To pose this history as indivisible from “its heirs” is to call into question each of our complicities in the illusion of civilized order; in the civilized fantasy and its corporeal excrescence. This question of complicity and revolt is teased out in the final paragraphs of *No Name in the Street*:

Questions louder than drums begin beating in the mind, and one realizes that what is called civilization lives first of all in the mind, has the mind above all as its province, and that the civilization, or its rudiments, can continue to live long after its externals have vanished—they can never entirely vanish from the mind. These questions—they are too vague for questions, this excitement, this discomfort—concern the true nature of any inheritance and the means by which that inheritance is handed down. There is a reason, after all, that some people wish to colonize the moon, and others dance before it as before an ancient friend. And the extent to which these apprehensions, instincts, relations, are modified by the passage of time, or the accumulation of inventions, is a question that no one seems able to answer. All men, clearly, are primitive, but it can be doubted that all men are primitive in the same way; and if they are not, it can only be because, in that absolutely unassailable privacy of the soul, they do not worship the same gods. Both continents, Africa and America, be it remembered, were “discovered”—what a wealth of arrogance that little word contains!—with devastating results for the indigenous populations, whose only human use thereafter was as the source of capital for white people. On both continents the white and the dark gods met in combat, and it is on the outcome of this combat that the future of both continents depends.

To be an Afro-American, or an American black, is to be in the situation, intolerably exaggerated, of all those who have ever found themselves part of a civilization which they could in no wise honorably defend—which they were compelled, indeed, endlessly to attack and condemn—and who yet spoke out of the most passionate love, hoping to make the kingdom new, to make it honorable and worthy of life. Whoever is part of whatever civilization helplessly loves some aspects of it, and some of the people in it. A person does not lightly elect to oppose his society. One would much rather be at home among one's compatriots than be mocked and detested by them. And there is a level on which the mockery of the people, even their hatred, is moving because it is so blind: it is terrible to watch people cling to their captivity and insist on their own destruction. I think black people have always felt this about America, and Americans, and have always seen, spinning above the thoughtless American head, the shape of the wrath to come.

In his final interview, he repeated that the only hope of the world demanded that the notion of western hegemony and the psychic structure of civilization be stopped once and for all. But how does one destroy a psychic structure? What is this terrible "inheritance" and what are "the means by which that inheritance is handed down"? The task might be conceived of as what he imagined when he wrote: "when the pagan and the slave spit on the cross and pick up the gun, it means that the halls of history are about to be invaded once again, destroying and dispersing the present occupants."

If Baldwin held out hope of this type of destruction and dispersal, it was to be found in those who had made a mysterious vow to "never be so wretched or so wicked" as was demanded of them by this civilization. He said that to make such a vow meant, "turning away, then,

from what I have called the welcome table.” He explored this further, later in the book, with different but related metaphors of “the Family”[†] and “the Great House.”[‡]

He described traveling to San Francisco, where he observed young black militants and countercultural white youth. He described the existential crisis experienced by the white kids who realized the meaninglessness of the roles they were expected to play, who realized that being accomplices of the black militants meant choosing

† The play between these two metaphoric figures “Family” and “Great House” is worth noting. Whereas in vernacular English, “house” almost exclusively refers to a residence or dwelling, historically the term has meant a family, especially one that can trace its lineage. It also has referred to a temple and a seat of government. And so, we have invested in one spatial figure: god, state, family. It is further worth noting, relating to investigations in the previous two issues of *Bædan*, that the term “domestication” is derived from the Latin *domesticatus*, literally “dwells in a home”—and by extension under the laws of god, state, family. Domestication then names the violent process of capture and subsumption within this home. Finally, we’ll point out that the modern term “economy” is derived from the Greek *oikonomia*, or “management of the house.” And so when we speak of economy, we are always already talking about those economies concerned with the ordering and reproduction of the Great House and its order: libidinal economies, racial economies, spiritual economies. Many will argue that the Family is the sphere of “reproduction” in service to the means of production, but don’t get it twisted: economy is at the service of the Family.

‡ Baldwin was surely also thinking of Martin Luther King’s final book, *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?*, wherein King deploys the metaphor of “The World House” into which black people in the US were struggling for inclusion. Thaddeus Russell argues that entrance into that house, in King’s assessment, would be predicated on self-discipline, masculinization and moral reform. Or as he put it: “Historians have yet to acknowledge what King well understood, that sexual freedom was included in the price of admission to that house.” It would appear that King’s death signaled Baldwin’s ultimate repudiation, not only of America, but of “the World House” too.

between irrelevance or treason to their inheritance. Acting upon their desired allegiance to their darker siblings would “place them in conflict with all that they had loved and all that had given them an identity, rendering their present uncertain and their futures still more so....” Baldwin described the lostness which stemmed from having not

expected to be forced to judge their parents, their elders, and their antecedents, so harshly.... Coming to the defense of the rejected and destitute, they were confronted with the extent of their own alienation....

In his mind, those who made the choice to join the revolt had opted out of the familial future promised to them. He saw the streets of San Francisco as an unprecedented, howling, orphanage, filled with children who had abandoned their families. He reframed the unfolding conflict as being less about a “racial problem”—in doing so curiously de-centering racial essentialism—and more a problem of how the great Family treated its children (both the blacks, “despised and slaughtered bastards,” and also the alienated and rebellious white children). Baldwin recognized the white “flower children” as patiently waiting for their black siblings to recognize that they had disavowed the Great House in their struggle to become “organic, autonomous, loving and joyful creatures” out of “their desire to connect to love, joy, and eroticism.” They had taken the first step. The heirs of the great house had repudiated their parents, and the continuation of the house was endangered.

In San Francisco, the eyes that watched seemed to feel that the children were deliberately giving away family secrets in the hope of egging on the blacks to destroy the family. And that is precisely what they were doing—helplessly, unconsciously, out of a profound desire to be

saved, to live. But the blacks already knew the family secrets and had no interest in them. Nor did they have much confidence in these troubled white boys and girls. The black trouble was of a different order, and blacks had to be concerned with much more than their own private happiness or unhappiness. They had to be aware that this troubled white person might suddenly decide not to be in trouble and go home—and when he went home, he would be the enemy. Therefore, it was best not to speak too freely to anyone who spoke too freely to you, especially not on the streets of a nation which probably has more hired informers working for it, here and all over the world, than any nation in history. True rebels, after all, are as rare as true lovers, and, in both cases, to mistake a fever for a passion can destroy one's life.

With the benefit of hindsight, we know that a great many of those children did go home; they returned to the great human Family as professors and politicians, as fathers and mothers, as cybernetic architects of our present misery. But the Family has been exposed. The secret is out. Baldwin's metaphor reveals a powerful complicity between the best of queer thought, Afro-pessimism, and the growing body of theory in the anarchist milieu which rejects the foundational status of the human. Our enemy is the Family—that great, expansive, and archaic libidinal structure. It is this human Family from which queer and black subjects are excluded. Moreover, this Family constitutes itself through these exclusions, its *sine qua non*. When we speak of severing an inheritance, or of a civilization we are trying to leave, we refer to this exact libidinal structure trapped within us and ensnaring us in turn.

One gets the sense that Baldwin's recognition and rejection of a complicity with this Family produced a profound and surreal effect on his sense of time[†]:

In this place, and more particularly, in this time, generations appear to flower, flourish, and wither with the speed of light. I don't think that this is merely the inevitable reflection of middle age: I suspect that there really has been some radical alteration in the structure, the nature, of time. One may say that there are no clear images; everything seems superimposed on, and at war with something else. There are no clear vistas: the road that seems to pull one forward into the future is also pulling one backward into the past. I felt, anyway, kaleidoscopic, fragmented, walking through the streets of San Francisco, trying to decipher whatever it was that my own consciousness made of all the elements in which I was entangled, and which were all tangled up in me.

Elsewhere in *No Name in the Street* he describes a similar temporal nonlinearity:

Time passes and passes. It passes backward and it passes forward and it carries you along, and no one in the whole wide world knows more about time than this: it is

† Something interesting emerges when we compare Baldwin's dysphoria around time with the accounts of participants in the uprising in Ferguson, such as this one from the interview "Cars, Guns, Autonomy", published in the journal *Avalanche*: "Time didn't make sense there. Somehow you'd be there and all of a sudden eight hours would have disappeared. I remember one night, we were all hanging out, there had been a lot of looting, the liquor store was on fire and we were all just sitting around watching it burn and this man said 'fuck, what time is it!? I have to go to work tomorrow.' Our friend laughed because she also had to go to work in the morning and she asked, 'do you really want to know?' and he replied 'no, fuck that; time doesn't matter. Fuck work, that doesn't matter.' and he just went back to partying. So yeah, things changed, the ability to talk to people really changed."

carrying you through an element you do not understand into an element you will not remember. Yet, something remembers—it can even be said that something avenges: the trap of our century, and the subject now before us.

In the break from the family and its time, there emerges an intimate need, a desire to remember, to perhaps redeem the dead. Time, for Baldwin, was open, chaotic, splintered through with fragments of experiences and sensations. His narrative moves quickly through years, leaping forward and then reaching back. It also pauses, slows down and laboriously pours over specific moments. These instances of extreme presence read as significant, because in surveying each and every detail of his world, Baldwin exposed the points wherein it could be undone. In several sections of *No Name in the Street*, we find instances where some slight shift would allow the black subjects of his book to enact a vengeance on those who maintain their situation: a black barber who could slit his white client's throat any day; a segregated cafeteria where the black people remain close enough to attack the white employees or patrons; he himself being "close enough to kill them all." For Baldwin the possibility of redemptive violence is everywhere. This potential imbues him with a sort of radical patience: "black people know why they're in prison, and not all of them can be kept in solitary. These blacks have unforgiving relatives, to say nothing of unforgiving children, at every level of American life. The government cannot afford to trust a single black man in this country, nor can they penetrate any black's disguise, or apprehend how devious and tenacious black patience can be." This omnipresent redemptive possibility of attack, coupled with a devious black patience, fills the white imaginary with dread. This carefully repressed terror dwells amidst the stuff of the white fantasy life. Baldwin saw it as unnecessary to advocate violence, as it was already there, waiting.

This radical patience appears in conflict with his assertion in earlier interviews that, “there is never time in the future in which we will work out our salvation. The challenge is in the moment, the time is always now.... The time is always now. Everybody who has ever thought about his own life knows this.” But, the point isn’t to delay this sense of salvation to some future moment, some revolution or culmination of progressive movements after which we will be saved. We can, in a way, resolve this apparent contradiction by invoking that “weak messianic power” alluded to by Walter Benjamin which reveals that the Messiah might enter through the narrow window in every moment.† Forgoing the hope that some movement will come and wash away this wretched mess, Baldwin’s book sounds a call to presence, to patience, to a studying and taking account of the world around us in order to locate those fractures and weak points where we might strike a killing blow‡.

† The final words of Benjamin’s “Theses on the Philosophy of History”:

The soothsayers who found out from time what it had in store certainly did not experience time as either homogenous or empty. Anyone who keeps this in mind will perhaps get an idea of how past times were experienced in remembrance—namely, in just the same way. We know that the Jews were prohibited from investigating the future. The Torah and the prayers instruct them in remembrance, however. This stripped the future of its magic, to which all those succumb who turn to the soothsayers for enlightenment. This does not imply, however, that for the Jews the future turned into homogenous, empty time. For every second of time was the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter.

‡ In talking of this type of patience, we’re reminded here of a two passages, one written in the previous century and the other written in subsequent one. First from Edward Carpenter in 1883: “We are a menace to you, O civilization! We have seen you—we allow you—we bear with you for a time, but beware! For in a moment and, when the hour comes, inevitably, we shall arise and sweep you away!” And

Toward the end of his life, in the introduction to the 1984 edition of *Notes of a Native Son*, Baldwin gestured again toward the potential in this taking account. He said, “not once have the Civilized been able to honor, recognize or describe the Savage.... Once they had decided he was savage there was nothing to honor, recognize, or describe.” But on the other hand, “the unadmitted panic of which I spoke above is created by the terror that the Savage can, now, describe the Civilized.” For Baldwin, the possibility of insurrection followed from a desire to understand the enemy while remaining incomprehensible to him. In imagining this type of study and patience, he held a special place for silence. Rather than protest and petition—in attempt to make the self coherent and recognizable—silence bolsters a more clandestine potential. In silence, we evade answering the omnipresent call to identify. Silence allows for a revolt to seemingly spring from anywhere and from nowhere. Silence accompanies the ellipses before and after certainty, a presence attuned to the unknown. Silence, then, marks the space of an (im)possibility outside civilization.

It is true that our weapons do not appear to be formidable, but, then, they never have. Then, as now, our greatest weapon is silence.

Ecstatic Weapons

As the 60s drew to a close, Jean Genet travelled to the United States on two occasions with the intention of

86 | secondly, from the dearly departed Christopher Chitty in 2013: “be attentive to the voices of the oppressed, the slaves who possess the key knowledge, and be patient for the most opportune moment for slitting the tyrants’ throats.”

contributing to the struggle there for black liberation. In addition to months spent traveling alongside and speaking on behalf of the Black Panthers, he agreed to write an introduction to a compiled volume of the writings of imprisoned black revolutionary George Jackson, awaiting trial in California for the murder of a prison guard. Genet put a tremendous volume of words to page in support of many imprisoned black liberation fighters, but his writing in support of George Jackson stands out with a singular beauty and ferocity, specifically the introduction to *Soladad Brother* and also “For George Jackson”, distributed in the last days of Jackson’s life. These works, spanning the better course of a year, also serve as the strongest example of certain aspects of Genet’s thought upon which we’d like to elaborate.

Firstly, we should say that Genet viewed writing, specifically in Jackson’s case, as a potential weapon in a war upon society. He referred in various instances to Jackson’s letters as a “gripping poem of love and combat”, as “a weapon in a struggle for liberation, and a love poem”, as a “combat weapon”. He doesn’t give this praise lightly. Far from ascribing this quality to any or all writing, Genet clarified that this is something very special about the writing of a prisoner, a black prisoner, a revolutionary black prisoner under threat of execution. He said that “to understand the importance of this book as a weapon in struggle, the reader must not forget that Jackson is in danger of death.”

Genet believed that the book-as-weapon could be especially dangerous when written and deployed in the context of a struggle for black liberation. The book is inseparable from this context. Much of Genet’s writings focused on the fantastic underpinnings of prison life and his writing about Jackson continued this:

Jackson's book makes it brutally clear that in prison, in the cell, the white skin of the prisoners is taken as a sign of the complicity with the white skin of the guards; so that while the white guards stand watch over a hell in which white prisoners are confined, the white prisoners stand watch over another hell inside that one in which black prisoners are confined. Now the security of the guards, their independence—since the time they spend on duty is divided by trips into town or by their family life—allows for a certain respite with regard to the white prisoners. But because these prisoners must remain constantly in prison and are never distracted by the outside, all their all their time and imagination are spent maintaining the hell in which they hold the black prisoners captive....

This complicity with the guards is based in no small part on the white inmates' nostalgia for the social world and the social order from which they'd been removed, an order to which the guards functioned as their only link. By analyzing this, Genet took aim at whiteness itself: "the complicity of the white prisoners with the guards intensifies, and maintains at its highest pitch, that which forms the basis of relations between whites and blacks: racism." As in his own prison writing, he articulated the way that sexual, racial, and libidinal ritual upholds and justifies the perpetuation of the prison order.

For Genet, there existed a complicity between all works written in a prison or an asylum. He spoke to the struggle of the imprisoned to find within themselves a burning light in spite of the walls, moats, jailers, and judges that constrain them. They dwell and search for themselves in the worst degradation of social repression. This leads to a tremendous distancing from the world, but gives life to a genius proportionate to this distance. If read

by another, these words must attempt a sort of impossible communication with the outside world:

The forbidden and accursed words, the bloody words, the words spit out in a lather, discharged with sperm, the slandered, reprobate words, the unwritten words,—like the ultimate name of god—the dangerous, padlocked words, the words that don't belong in the dictionary, because if they were written there, complete and not maimed by ellipses, they would say too quickly the suffocating misery of a solitude that is not accepted and that is whipped and prodded only by what it is deprived of: sex and freedom. It is therefore prudent that any writing that reaches us from this infernal place should reach us as though mutilated, pruned of its overly tumultuous adornments. It is thus behind bars, accepted only by them, that its readers, if they dare, will guess at the infamy of a situation that a forthright vocabulary could never reconstruct: but behind the permitted words, learn to hear the others.

Baldwin articulated something incommensurable between the black experience and writing, and Genet recognized this in Jackson. In his esteem, Jackson's words posed the utmost danger to white society. Against all odds, Jackson performed a paradoxical labor of fitting his hatred of the white social order into the language of that order. This tempered it, surely, but “in a revolutionary work written by a black man in prison, some traces must remain, then, of the orgiastic and hate-filled trajectory pursued in an impossible solitude.” Though he doesn't say as much, it's clear that Genet recognized in Jackson's writing something of his own prison writings as a rite of passage in his life; something of the searing need for connection that those scribbled and smuggled works reached toward. In a sense, only by some measure of solitary self-discovery can one achieve a real connection beyond the prison walls. } 89

Genet saw it as no mystery that Jackson and the Panthers would have found one another and achieved communication through writing as a form of presence. "For myself, having lived with the Black Panthers, I see Jackson there, in his place, fighting alongside them with the same conviction and the same talent as his two brothers accused of murder: Huey Newton and Bobby Seale." In no uncertain terms, Genet believed that it was only by means of Jackson's poetic weapon that he found his place among the revolutionaries on the outside. In introducing these words he warns:

If we accept the idea that the revolutionary enterprise of a man or a people has its source in their poetic genius, or more precisely, that this enterprise is the inevitable conclusion of poetic genius, we must reject nothing that makes poetic exaltation possible. Certain details in this work will seem immoral to you; this is because the entire work rejects your morality.... Finally, every young black American who writes is searching for himself and testing himself, and sometimes he recognizes, at the very center in his own heart, a white man he must annihilate.

Jackson's book cannot be separated from this intent to annihilate. Genet called the book a "murderous act against white America" and described this attempted "murder by book" as a difficult undertaking that required a tremendous binding of body and spirit, demanding "a time that could be called infinite." In carrying out this murderous deed, Jackson made himself "more legendary than real, representing the sudden omnipotence of the black world so feared and dreamed of." He became, in the libidinal imaginary, "an image that goes beyond his physical person and his ordinary life." This exemplifies those powerful "words, choices, attitudes, magic" with which Genet imbued prison writing.

He imagined this magic, violence, intelligence, poetry, as useful to black people in America in their struggle for life. “All they have accumulated for centuries while observing their former masters in silence and almost in secret,” Genet assures us, could be mobilized in the project of liberation. These words, written concurrently with Baldwin’s “devious black patience,” could just as well have been found in his own book. Genet viewed Jackson’s writing as a first measure in an attempt to think through the possibility of insurrection. Jackson was killed before such an insurrection could occur, but of the dead revolutionary, Genet said:

If the quake his death set off in us has not ceased, we ought also to know that every day young anonymous blacks are struck down in the streets by the police or by whites, while others are tortured in American prisons. Dead, they will survive among us—which isn’t much—but they live among the peoples who have been crushed by the white world, thanks to the resounding voice of George Jackson.

And so despite, or perhaps because of, the lack of God in Jackson’s writing (which Genet was pleased to point out), an element of the same messianic potential found in Baldwin is revealed. Jackson’s writing, and Genet’s writings about him in turn, struggle to awaken the dead so as to fight alongside the living.

As Jackson awaited trial, Genet made every effort to keep his situation firmly within the context of centuries of struggle against slavery and white supremacy in the US. He claimed that this particular trial had lasted for three hundred years. After Jackson died, he said that his name would now find its obvious place among all the slave rebels who preceded him. For Genet, Jackson’s life and death remained inseparable from the carceral continuum in which whiteness corresponds to “master” and blackness

to “slave”. He claimed: “we can be sure that Jackson and the Soledad Brothers will not be judged as Men by Men; the distance that separates them from each other is still unbridgeable.” So he posed the question:

What, then, is the nature of this vertiginous space that—in America and throughout the Christian West—separates Man (the basis of Humanism!) and the black? It is obvious that, as a whole, all the laws of which Man is so proud are not set up for the black. They are set up against him.... I will ask the question again: what is the nature of this space, vertiginous for one side and reassuring for the other, that—in America and throughout the Christian West—both separates and binds together Man and the black?

Genet’s question strikes with an almost stunning lucidity. This question of the dizzying and seemingly impassable distance between blackness and Man continues to challenge today’s combatants. Genet kept asking it in conversations and interviews years later. This question underlies the writings of Afro-pessimists like Wilderson and black feminists like Alexander Weheliye or Sylvia Wynter[†]. Can

† In his recent book *Habeas Viscus*, Alexander Weheliye takes up the theories of black feminists like Hortense Spillers and Sylvia Wynter and uses them to interrogate the construction of race and also the category of the Human itself. Throughout his text, he argues for a conception of “race, racialization, and racial identities as ongoing sets of political relations that require, through constant perpetuation via institutions, discourses, practices, desires, infrastructures, languages, technologies, sciences, economies, dreams, and cultural artifacts, the barring of nonwhite subjects from the category of the human as it is performed in the modern West.” He refuses race as a biological or cultural descriptor, but instead describes it as a changing system which defines the borders of “Man”. By his account, Wynter and Spillers disrupt the category of “Human as Man” by analyzing and attacking the “deeply gendered and sexualized provenances of racializing assemblages.” He argues that the category of Human itself has to be interrogated and disarticulated from “racial

the paradox of blackness be reconciled within a civilization built on its enslavement and perpetuated through its exclusion? Is there hope of some inclusion and some remediation of this divide? And if not, is the category of Humanity itself our enemy?

A white man kills three black men: he remains innocent.

A white man falls from a wall: three black men will be sentenced.

Without meaning to, I just formulated a sort of equation for black-white relationships, in America and throughout the Christian West.

Like Baldwin, Genet held out no hope that white Americans would do anything for those combatants ensnared in their enemy's webs of repression. Not because they were cowards (which they were), but because they are entirely unable to lessen the "vertiginous space that separates Man from the black." The only possible outcome he could imagine was bloodshed. "It's simple: the blacks are going to kill you.... I have come to that part of my speech where, to help save the blacks, I am calling for crime, for the assassination of whites. Other meetings like this one will be held to raise money and to acquire arms...."

While he developed a conception of the use of a poetic weapon in revolution, he clarified that a revolution itself entailed a specific thing, inextricable from destruction. As shown in his interview with Fichte, he had a rather complex relationship to the idea of revolution. He was deeply suspicious of the possibility for revolution to function as a normative event: "one gets the impression in the end that

assemblages" which constitute it if "Man" is ever to be abolished. He wages that doing so begins with the experiences of the excluded from the domain of Man. Far from a politics of representation, he describes an "insurrection" or an "exit strategy" against the categories which construct the "world of man".

revolutions are carried out by family men.”† When asked why he never travelled to the Soviet Union, he quipped that he was afraid of being bored to death! When asked why he’d never accepted an invitation to Cuba he said he would only go if the Revolution had abolished flags, for “a flag, as a sign of recognition, as an emblem around which a group is formed, has become a castrating and deadly piece of theatricality.” Had the revolution in Cuba abolished all flags? If not, he surely wouldn’t go there. When asked if he considered the events of May 1968 to be a revolution, he said that they might have been if they’d been seizing and

† Genet’s joke about revolution as the activity of “family men” is particularly funny because of the way it complements an argument made by Frank Wilderson III in his piece “The Black Liberation Army and the Paradox of Political Engagement”, wherein he analyzes and contrasts the communiqués of combatants in the Black Liberation Army and Germany’s Red Army Faction. For him, there is a fundamental difference between these texts, because whatever the violence they employ, the RAF combatants will always have a familial place in the German imaginary as the wayward children of the country. By contrast, he argues, BLA fighters like Assata Shakur have no recourse to the fantasy structure of the Family, and thus cannot ever be figured as America’s wayward children. In this sense, revolution is truly a family matter: a reordering and contestation of the family’s business, but never a challenge to the structure itself. Wilderson’s argument is interestingly supported in reading Genet’s small amount of writing about the RAF. For example in “Violence and Brutality”, his defense of the RAF, there is a noticeable lack of the beauty and brilliance with which he writes about the Panthers or George Jackson. Instead, we get a surprisingly boring piece in which Genet bewilderingly invokes concepts—*honesty, humanity, reason*—almost entirely absent (thankfully) from the rest of his corpus. In it, he lays out justifications of RAF violence which line up closely with Wilderson’s reading of the revolt of Germany’s children. Genet actually begins the piece with a metaphor comparing the RAF’s activity to the same violence intrinsic to impregnation and childbirth; a normative metaphor grossly at odds with his way of describing the poetic, beautiful violence Jackson or the Panthers. Unwittingly, Genet elaborated the distance between these violences.

destroying courthouses instead of performing in theaters. When asked what his revolution would look like:

I'm not exactly sure I want a revolution. If I'm being sincere, I have to say that I don't particularly want it. The current situation, the current regimes allow me to revolt, but a revolution would probably not allow me to revolt, that is, to revolt individually. But this regime allows me to revolt. I can be against it. But if it were a real revolution, I might not be able to be against it. There would be adherence, and I am not that kind of man: I am not a man of adherence, but a man of revolt. My point of view is very egotistic. I would like for the world—and pay close attention to the way I say this—I would like for the world not to change so that I can be against the world.

Genet did not find beauty in revolutionary violence. The beauty of revolt might coincide with such violence, but the violence was not beautiful in and of itself. For example, he didn't see the Terror of the French revolution as beautiful: "I don't know whether one can speak of beauty, because they already had power". Revolt is beautiful, danger too, but when that revolt becomes ritualized, it risks losing its magic. He imagined revolution as the possible breaking of ritual, "but only when a revolution is under way, because when it's over, it becomes ritualized almost automatically." This element that evades or strains against ritual fascinated Genet. To understand it:

We'd have to talk about potlatch and destructive intoxication. Destructive intoxication even among the most conscious and intelligent men. Think of Lenin offering the Soviet people public urinals made of gold. In every revolution there is an intoxicated panic, more or less contained, but also more or less unleashed. This intoxication showed itself in France, for example, in all Europe, by the peasant uprisings before the French Revolution, and

also in other ways; in a ritual or ritualized form in the Carnival. At certain moments, the entire people wants to be liberated, wants to indulge in the phenomenon of potlatch, of complete destruction and total expenditure, it needs violence.

For Genet, entrance into such a carnivalesque energy proved and expanded one's freedom. The decision to take up revolutionary activity constituted a murderous act against the social roles of the racial order; like Jackson's, a refusal to enslave or be enslaved. Rather than describing this act as "a struggle", he imagined it as a betrayal:

The word "betrayal" causes the mind to recoil; this is because feudal morality condemned it, and this condemnation still weighs on us because we have not yet rid ourselves of this mentality. In order to be what is called chivalrous—still a prestigious word—we end up remaining faithful to people or to institutions who demand from us the worst kind of abjection.

At a time when adherents of struggle demand "faith, loyalty, honor", this serves as a welcome provocation.

Genet imagined a sort of destructive intoxication, a betrayal of the institutions which demand our loyalty. He applauded all those who refuse subservience to these institutions, in whatever way. To be clear, the grandest institution in question is that Great House, the Welcome Table, the Family. Genet's queerness, tied intimately as it was to the concept of betrayal, betrayed first of all this family. For him, poetic revolution, alongside the Panthers and others, realized his desire for the antifamilial betrayal he imagined.

Having no home, and no family, Genet felt more at home among the Panthers than at any other point in his life. He described being welcomed immediately among them, as if he himself was "a black whose color is pink."

Like Baldwin, Genet insisted on the need for a new language—a new type of communication—and he believed the Panthers to be discovering one:

there are at least two types of communication, then, a mode that is recognizable, controllable and one that is uncontrollable. The Panther's action had more to do with the uncontrollable kind of communication.

He saw in them a revolution of an affective and emotional order:

The Panthers put into play an entire affectivity that we lack, and this affectivity did not come from the fact that they were of African descent, that they're black; it's simply that they're banished, they've been banished and outlawed for four centuries, and they found each other again in the expression 'brothers'. This fraternity is not possible if you're thinking of a global revolution, or so it seems to me. You can't talk about that if you don't have a very long stretch of time out ahead of you.

This connection, this relationality in banishment, this uncontrollable communication, possessed an intense erotic charge for Genet. It was this connection, which he'd elsewhere call love, that he felt among the Panthers. His affinities and solidarities were always tied up in desire. As we're attempting to sketch a critique of the libidinal underpinnings of civilization, Genet offers a mode of revolt in the libidinal field. After all, wasn't desire at the root of his own enmity toward society? He described a dimension of playing a game: being banned from the US and having to enter and travel clandestinely created a tremendous sense of enjoyment for him. Eroticism, enjoyment, insolence, exile, destruction: these were the markers of Genet's poetic insurgency.

Strangers in Exile

In March 1944, Jean Genet is freed from prison and never reenters. In 1948, James Baldwin flees the US for France, vowing to never return. In the following years, the two writers frequent the Reine Blanche, a gay bar along the Seine in Paris; they become friends and are said to dine together frequently. In 1955, Genet begins writing The Blacks (his mockery of racial and judicial order) and finishes in 1958; he spends the subsequent year traveling through nearly a dozen countries. Meanwhile, Baldwin writes Giovanni's Room (that novel of betrayal and murder) and publishes it in 1956, and in 1957 returns to America saying that it was time to "pay his dues." In 1961, The Blacks is put on by the St. Marks Playhouse in New York City, starring Maya Angelou; Baldwin, a friend of Angelou's and Genet's, can't help but attend and advise the rehearsals. The play runs for four years. At the close of that fourth year, 1965, Genet attempts to enter the United States, but is turned away at the border as a sexual deviant. He spends the next several years traveling the world while Baldwin travels the US, embroiling himself in the black struggle. In the spring of 1968, MLK is assassinated, and with him dies Baldwin's last hope for America—he sets about a sort of aimless wandering that lasts for years, leaving the US for the last time. A few weeks later, rumors of an outbreak of student revolt lures Genet back to France. A few months later, unsatisfied, he succeeds in sneaking into the US, by way of

Canada, just in time for the riots against the Democratic National Convention in Chicago where he meets Ginsberg, Burroughs and others. By 1970, Baldwin settles for good in France and Genet, at the request of the Panthers, sneaks once more into the US. He travels with them for two months, speaking on their behalf. In April, while in San Francisco, he is solicited by George Jackson's lawyer to write the introduction to Soledad Brother, and on the first of May he speaks to a crowd of twenty-five thousand people demanding the release of the Panthers from prison. He travels to Brazil in July, where he completes the introduction he'd promised, and by October is back in Paris to join Baldwin at the American Center for a rally in solidarity with Jackson. Genet travels to Jordan, lured by rumors of a brewing intifada, and there writes "For George Jackson". He intended to present the text himself at a rally for Jackson organized by Baldwin in London, but events in Jordan kept him and they were circulated in his absence. In August of 1971, Jackson is killed. By the end of that year, Genet will have written fifteen pieces in his defense and mourning his death. A few months later, delayed by assassinations and mourning, Baldwin finally publishes No Name in the Street, with an epilogue dedicated to Jackson. In the spring of 1986, Genet dies in his hotel while editing Prisoner of Love, a memoir of his time with the Panthers. He is buried on a hill in Morocco. In December of the following year Baldwin, in turn, dies in exile.

Throughout their lives, Genet and Baldwin were each constantly leaving.

Baldwin established himself as a stranger early in his writing. In “Stranger in the Village” included at the end of *Notes of a Native Son*, published in 1955, he described being the first black person to ever travel through a particularly remote Swiss village. In it he said that by assuming the role of a stranger he was able to recognize the history of black people in the US as “a nightmare from which no one *can* awaken.” By his account, he was a stranger there, whereas in America he could never be. In America he was known, and his presence there couldn’t be removed from centuries of domination and struggle. He said the white villagers were likewise not strangers, because anywhere in the world, they’d remain the inheritors of the legendary greatness with which their ancestors built the modern world; inheritors of the language by which their ancestors sought to control the universe by describing it. He argued then, more than a decade before *No Name in the Street*:

the idea of white supremacy rests simply on the fact that white men are the creators of civilization (the present civilization, which is the only one that matters; all previous civilizations are simply “contributions” to our own) and are therefore civilization’s guardians and defenders. Thus it was impossible for Americans to accept the black man as one of themselves, for to do so was to jeopardize their status as white men.

He realized this while looking on the grand old churches of Europe as a stranger. Whereas white Europeans are able to look upon them with a sense of the grand nature of their inheritance, he looked upon them and saw

the slippery bottomless well to be found in the crypt, down which heretics were hurled to death, and [...] the obscene, inescapable gargoyles jutting out of the stone

and seeming to say that God and the devil can never be divorced. I doubt that the villagers think of the devil when they face the cathedral because they have never been identified with the devil. But I must accept the status which myth, if nothing else, gives me in the West before I can hope to change the myth.†

For him, the possibility of escape and freedom was embodied in the wandering of the figure of the stranger.

Genet asked: “what is prison?” and answered: “It is immobility.” He appreciated that he lived a life that allowed for a certain irresponsibility. Having no responsibilities to speak of allowed him a sort of immediate engagement. When asked about deciding to travel to the US to join the Panthers:

When Bobby Seale was arrested two of the Panthers came to see me and asked me what I could do for Bobby. It was morning and I answered that the simplest thing would be for me to go to the US and see the situation. They asked “When?”—“How about tomorrow?”—“So

† There is something intriguing and promising in this act of looking upon the edifices of civilization by one of the devils (queer, black, witch or otherwise) upon whose exclusion it has been built. This is related, in a way to Alexander Weheliye’s reading of Sylvia Wynter. To quote:

Wynter’s commitment lies with disfiguring their real object, Man, through the incorporation of the colonial and racist histories of the modern incantations of the human. This spot should be understood neither as an identitarian land claim concerned with particular borders of exclusion nor a universal *terra nullius*, but instead as a ceaselessly shifting relational assemblage that voyages in and out of the human. The cluster I am tracing here brings forth a “demonic ground” to versions of humanity unburdened by shackles of Man. Demonic ground is Sylvia Wynter’s term for perspectives that reside in the liminal precincts of the current governing configurations of the human as Man in order to abolish this figuration and create other forms of life.

soon?" I saw that the Panthers were thrown off by this. They were used to moving quickly, but I was moving more quickly than they. All because I was living in a hotel. I had one small suitcase. If I had an apartment, would I have been able to do that? If I had friendships, would I be able to move around with the same speed?

Baldwin conceived of his wandering as the "deliberate repudiation of everything and everyone that had given me an identity up until that moment." He said:

I was a maverick, a maverick in the sense that I depended on neither the white world nor the black world. That was the only way I could've played it. I would've been broken otherwise. I had to say "a curse on both your houses," the fact that I went to Europe so early is probably what saved me. It gave me another touchstone—myself.

By his account, only by leaving was he able to see the world for what it was. When he returned to New York, he returned as an "aging, lonely, sexually dubious, politically outrageous, unspeakably erratic freak"—certainly no longer the person his friends and family had known—a stranger. Returning home, he was forced to face the life from which he'd spent so many years in flight. Through his writing he revealed his inability to achieve the normative conclusion often figured as the counterpoint to leaving. Life offered him no redemption in return. Even when he wanted to rest, it wasn't really an option for him:

My desire to be seduced, charmed, was a hope poisoned by despair: for better or for worse, it simply was not in me to make a separate peace. It was a symptom of how bitterly weary I was of wandering, how I hoped to find a resting place, reconciliation, in the land where I was born. But everything that might have charmed me merely reminded me of how many were excluded, how many were suffering and groaning and dying, not far

from a paradise which was itself but another circle of hell. Everything that charmed me reminded me of someplace else, someplace where I could walk and talk, someplace where I was freer than I was at home, someplace where I could live without the stifling mask—made me homesick for a liberty I had never tasted here, and without which I could never live or work. In America, I was free only in battle, never free to rest—and he who finds no way to rest cannot long survive the battle.

Driven by their conditions, and more so by their own indomitable refusal of them, these two were in a sort of perpetual exile. Their undying need to travel flowed directly from each one's sense of their own alienness in an enemy society. Baldwin:

For it is a very different matter, and results in a very different intelligence, to grow up under the necessity of questioning everything—everything, from the question of one's identity to the literal, brutal question of how to save one's life in order to begin to live it.

Genet:

Excluded by my birth and tastes from the social order, I was not aware of its diversity. Nothing in the world was irrelevant; the stars on a general's sleeve, the stock-market quotations, the olive harvest, the style of the judiciary, the wheat exchange, flower-beds. Nothing. This order, fearful and feared, whose details were all inter-related, had a meaning: my exile.[†]

In a sense, this permanent exile is an aspect of the same self-creating magic that Genet situated in the writing of a prisoner; it is another way of being in limbo, of determining oneself and one's life. Baldwin puts it this way:

† In *The Thief's Journal*.

in order to survive this, you have to really dig down into yourself and re-create yourself, really, according to no image which yet exists in America. You have to impose, in fact—this may sound strange—you have to decide who you are, and force the world to deal with you.

This image of individuation through departure is ever-present in our collective imaginary in traveller archetypes. In its normative conception, this archetype plays a crucial aspect of youth: to leave, in order to return and take one's place at the welcome table. But the lives of Genet and Baldwin exceed the limits of the archetype in its domesticated form; in reading them, we find records of two who left, never to return. Their lives and works were the efforts of outsiders to describe and decry the society around them, but never to mediate a place for themselves within it. We want to explore this unwillingness to return. What's at stake for us—in queerness and in revolt—is to permanently have done with the great human Family. A return to this family, this great terrible psychic structure, poses the danger in that trap of inclusion. For that reason, a Justice of the Supreme Court, in reference to the newly legal institution of gay marriage, says: "their hope, is not to be condemned to live in loneliness, excluded from one of civilization's oldest institutions." While only one tiny example of a vast issue, it nonetheless begs the question: what of we who stake no claim to a place in that institution? (And we're speaking here of something different than those pseudo-critics of "assimilation" who want *different* reforms, or *more inclusive* ones.) Far from a resignation to a life of loneliness, we wager that only in disappearing and vowing to not return might we achieve the alchemy necessary to find others doing the same.

The permanent exile and wandering of both Baldwin and Genet was also the precondition for their friendship and later collaborations. In the case of Genet, his

exile from the familial structure of the West compelled him to travel amidst those peoples excluded from that structure. His affinity was tied up in his exile. Baldwin experienced a double exclusion—from white America, but also from the attempts at forging a new black nation or family—and for that reason fled to Paris and met Genet at a dive along the banks of the Seine. Little has been written about the content of their early friendship, but one can only imagine what they discussed at those early meetings and frequent dinners together. One can perhaps get a sense of their influence on one another in reading *The Blacks* and *Giovanni's Room* alongside each other, or likewise in their later respective commitments to the use of poetic weaponry. This type of alien affinity underscores what we find so dangerous in both writers. I will always remember when I first discovered Genet's writing. Those first few pages of *The Thief's Journal* resonated on a frequency deeper than I had known the written word could. Stealing that book in that moment had an immeasurably affirmative quality in my life; a quality only confirmed later upon learning of Genet's early arrests for shoplifting Proust and others. As Baldwin put it:

If you can examine and face your life, you can discover the terms with which you are connected to other lives, and they can discover, too, the terms with which they are connected to other people. You read something which you thought happened only to you, and you discovered it happened on hundred years ago to Dostoyevsky. This is a very great liberation for the suffering, struggling person, who always thinks that he is alone.

Genet takes this impulse toward connection further when describing in *Prisoner of Love*—his final writing—a sort of mystical immanence of sensuality which allows for connection beyond the veil of death:

A little while ago, I wrote that though I shall die, nothing else will. And I must make my meaning clear. Wonder at the sight of a cornflower, at a rock, at the touch of a rough hand—all the millions of emotions of which I'm made—they won't disappear even though I shall. Other men will experience them, and they'll still be there because of them. More and more I believe I exist in order to be the terrain and proof which show other men that life consists in the uninterrupted emotions flowing through all creation. The happiness my hand knows in a boy's hair will be known by another hand, is already known. And although I shall die, this happiness will live on. 'I' may die, but what made that 'I' possible, what made possible the joy of being, will make the joy of being live on without me.

This imagined continuity of sensation and experience after the withering away of the "I", of "Jean Genet" gave Genet a surety of purpose toward the end of his life. This connection, unmediated by identity and language, feels intimately related to what he recognized as the "uncontrollable communication" among the various rebels of his time. Communication here is imagined as inseparable from connection to life, to eros. The above passage reads as contiguous with Baldwin's narrative in his last novel, *Just Above My Head*, where he wrote:

Memory is a strange vehicle. Or perhaps, we are the vehicle which carries the increasingly burdensome and mercurial passenger called memory.... [T]he event, the moment, engraved in me, which is me more surely than my given name is me: escapes my memory. Memory is mercurial and selective, but passion welds life and death together, riding outside and making no judgement. You are, yourself, the judgement.

Like Genet, he imagined an excess—of passion, of joy, of emotion—which continues after death. His inversion of the metaphor, between memory as vehicle and us as vehicle, likewise inverted the boundary between outside and inside. Are we contained within memory, or is it within us? Do the memories and violences of the libidinal nightmare contain us or do we contain them? In this sense, we—and all the subjections which compose us—figure as the enfleshment of all the operations of order, morality, and fantasy of civilization. And so the point is an overcoming of this containment, a stepping outside of ourselves, *ek-stasis*. Baldwin points to the potential of this overcoming, later in the book, in a sex scene between two characters, where he writes:

It was incredible that it hurt so much, and yet, hurt so little, that so profound an anguish, thrusting so hard, so deep, accomplished such a transformation, I looked at my hands and they looked new, I looked at my feet and they did too! But that is how they sang, really, something like fifteen minutes later, out of the joy of their surrender and deliverance, out of their secret knowledge that each contained the other.

This paradox by which two people might contain one another ruptures both the coherence of the forces that structure them as individuals, but also boldly defies the sexual order that Baldwin decried. It is an exploding of the binaries of in and out, top and bottom, self and other, which caused him to gesture toward an overcoming of what history has made us through a connection to those it has rendered our others. Baldwin staked his belief in a fleeting ecstatic possibility on this impulse and openness toward connection with another.†

† Lee Edelman, who we'll steal from again in his reading of *Just Above My Head*, wrote:

At close, in Genet and in Baldwin we find an impulse toward connection and revolt not based upon a morality or on a programmatic politic, but upon the ineffable lived reality that exceeds these discourses. For both of them, the work of art was an attempt at an uncontrollable communication that overflows the limits and points toward the outside of civilized language[†]. We could call this discursive space, following Wilderson, the “third term mediator.” But this interlocutor is more than just the specificities of

The novel, and Baldwin, remain committed nonetheless to the hope of dismantling the armored identities that keep self and other, inside and outside, resolutely, if arbitrarily distinct. *Just Above My Head* insists on the necessary permeability of such identities, even in the face of its candid acknowledgment of the risks such permeability can entail; and it offers, near the end, a paradigm for that receptive openness to what is ‘foreign’.

† In his meditation on music and language, *In the Break*, Fred Moten critically augmented Edelman’s reading (cited in the preceding footnote) by emphasizing the significance of the characters singing together after the scene above. Moten insists that “the primal scene must be heard; one must be attuned to its sound and perhaps, then, even to a real reformulation of, rather than dismissal of, spirit.” He criticizes Edelman’s “valorization of language [...] as pure form,” arguing instead for an “attunement to sound [...] revealed as the literary experience of a psychic imprint.” A focus on the sound obscured by language opens us to Baldwin’s “libidinal drive toward ever greater unities of the sensual,” or the “erotic drive that now can be theorized in its most intense relation to the drive for, and knowledge of, freedom.” Moten finds in Baldwin something unheard in language, “something transferred to him from the way back and way before wounded kinship, forced and stolen labor, forced and stolen sexuality.” He wants to “*open up*” this substance because,

as Baldwin knows, as Edelman knows both because and in spite of the analytic he deploys and to which he is given, to receive the blessing of this substance—to see and hear and touch and smell and taste it; to receive the gift that does not cohere but exists in its abounding of its own internal space; to receive and in so doing to acknowledge the fact of the whole as a kind of distance: this is what it is to linger in the music.

time and space upon which certain politics justify themselves; it is the imagined future community that all politics presuppose. We'll name civilization itself as the libidinal container of all such fantastic ground. Baldwin and Genet's revolts, but also our own, play in a space outside the limits of civilization—outside the psychic structures of language, identity, *the Family, the Child, the Great House* and its *Welcome Table*. If we wish to destroy the conditions of our—and so many others'—exclusion, it is out of a desire to abolish all that separates and alienates us from this sensual world and from each other. After all, the Fool's journey is completed—by way of the madness of the Moon, the vitality of the Sun, and the cosmological mysteries of the Star—with entrance onto the World. Those who wander truly have no name in the street. Continuing outside that house—beyond domestication—means forging surname, ending the line, defying its *nomos*. We seek this in that great betrayal of the human family: to create ourselves on our own terms, to connect and co-conspire, to forge a new ecstatic communication, to discover and grow worlds from which to attack—to flip *the Welcome Table*, to burn *the Great House*.

Epilogue

We'll end with the words that the two writers penned almost simultaneously, to eulogize George Jackson.

Baldwin's:

This book has been much delayed by trials, assassinations, funerals, and despair. Nor is the American crisis, which is part of a global, historical crisis, likely to resolve itself soon. An old world is dying, and a new one, kicking in the belly of its mother, time, announces that it is ready to be born. This birth will not be easy, and many of us are doomed to discover that we are exceedingly clumsy midwives. No matter, so long as we accept that our responsibility is to the newborn: the acceptance of responsibility contains the key to the necessarily evolving skill.... There will be bloody holding actions all over the world, for years to come: but the Western party is over, and the white man's sun has set. Period....

Angela Davis is still in danger. George Jackson has joined his beloved baby brother, Jon, in the royal fellowship of death. And one may say that Mrs. Georgia Jackson and the alleged mother of God have, at last, found something in common. Now, it is the Virgin, the alabaster Mary, who must embrace the despised black mother whose children are also the issue of the Holy Ghost.

And Genet's:

A few hours after Jackson's death, I had this half-waking dream: nine months apart, or thereabouts, Jonathan and George violently came out of the prison, a stony womb, on waves of blood. This expulsion was like the delivery of twins confounded in their identical age. It was not their mother who gave birth to them that night, for she was there, upright, impassive but alert, looking on. If it was a new birth, at once into life and into death, who but History was delivering the two black men covered, as with every birth, in blood....

George and Jonathan, two black Gemini, are not the modern version of the mythology that rose from the abyss or descended from Heaven. They simply remind us that we must carry out a human labor directed against the dense and sparkling mythology of the white world. We must look closely... at all imprisoned blacks—whether in jail or the ghetto—who are in danger at every moment of being assassinated like George and Jonathan Jackson, or of being wasted away by the white world. In fact, we must learn to betray the whites that we are.

These passages hauntingly resonate together because of what they each, in turn, say about our fight in the present. In both we find the image of a sort of inhuman birth, a birth necessitated by history and time, a corporeal rupture born not out of procreation but out of death. In them the mother has been displaced, and she instead takes on the role of witness to the bloody happening. From each we hear an invocation of a celestial force—whether of a holy ghost or of a constellation above—which in one way or another announces the immanent destruction of whiteness and its world. ❧

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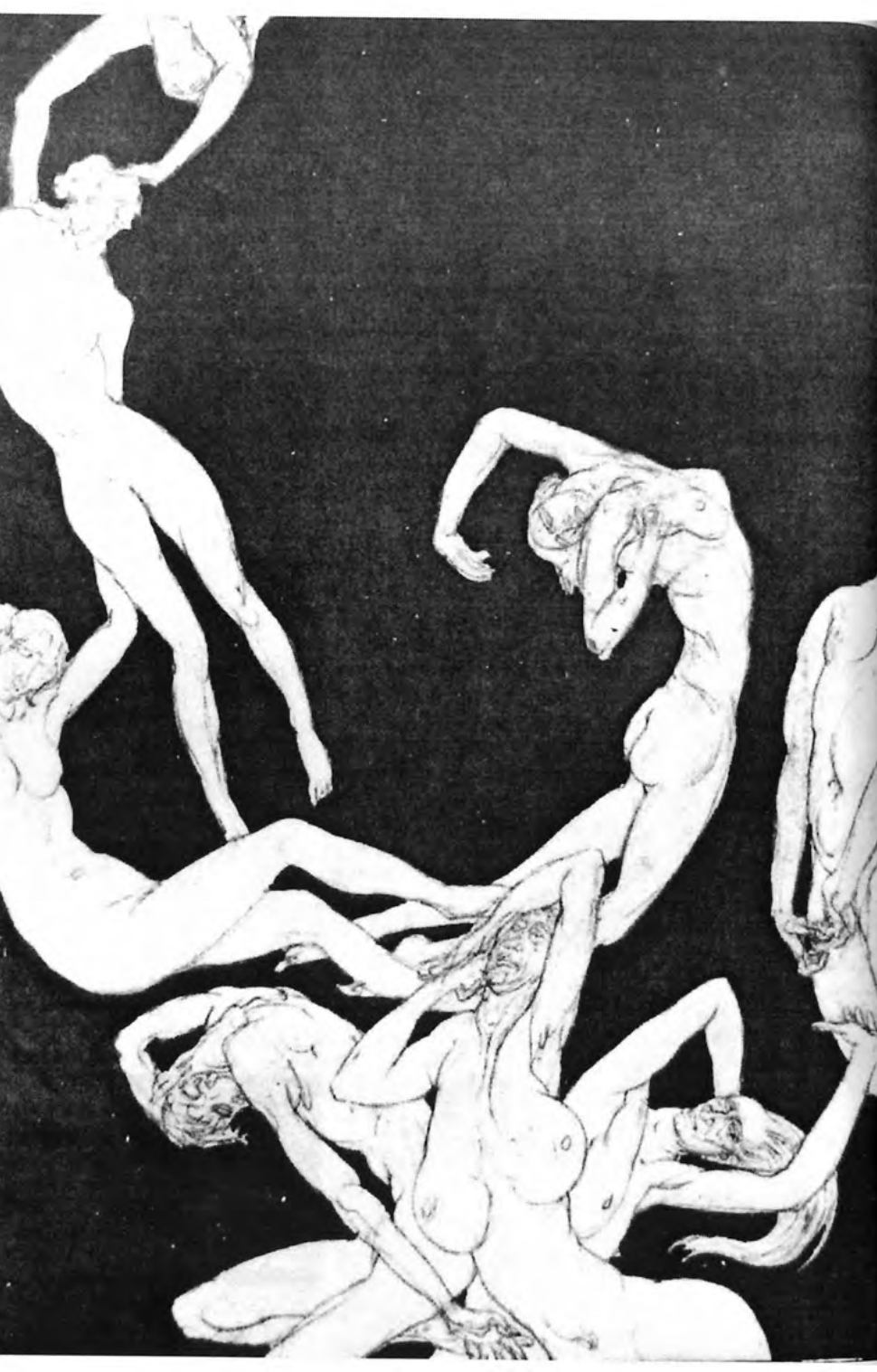
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Introduction to “Anal Terror”

“Anal Terror” is Beatriz Preciado’s epilogue to Geoffroy Huard de la Marre’s Spanish translation of Guy Hocquenghem’s *Homosexual Desire*, published by Melusina in 2009. Sometime in the next few years it was liberated into the ethereal spaces of the Great Web. Around 2013 we found it and began reading it out loud to each other. Not long after that, a complete draft was in circulation and under discussion. It occurred to us, and would certainly have had its own charm, to publish a pocket book called *Anal Terror*, with size and cover design planned so that it could be provocatively revealed from a pocket, purse, or pouch. Openly carrying the booklet about opening the anus could have been an opening to opening the anus (distribute literal and metaphoric understandings as needed). For various reasons, the manuscript instead incubated until we realized was time to publish it, as it belonged in *Baedan* 3. The crash course it provides in the theory and practice of (mostly French) queer politics (*avant la lettre*) contributes to this issue’s thematic of time travel as queer historical investigation (carried out against history, against homonormativity). But, as fond as we are of this text, we have also had occasion to eye it critically. The three most prominent among those critiques might be summed up in the triad: *opacity, knowledge, blood*.

Opacity. It is indeed remarkable that Guy Hocquenghem was able to speak and write as a fag. Preciado is not wrong about that. But we have our reservations about the way this point is made, viz. by contrasting him with the putatively closeted figures of Barthes and Foucault. It is not so much that we think they are better, or alternative, queer heroes (let alone Saints, despite the hagiographic attempt, however excellent, of David Halperin). It’s that there are more alternatives than being publically queer as Guy was, or being in the closet in the contemporary

(and therefore anachronistically applied) sense. We follow Nicholas de Villiers in his appraisal of Barthes and Foucault as queer writers who played, in their written work as well as in their rest of their lives, with a certain strategic opacity as regards the public and mediatic gaze. That they were caught up in what was basically an academic celebrity culture does not diminish the fascination of this insight: they were not in the closet; their queerness *preferred not to* be said to the many. We therefore need a different understanding of Guy's publicity and queer militancy, one that does not rest on this kind of facile contrast.[†]

Knowledge. Though the penultimate sections of "Anal Terror" briefly channel some of René Schérer's provocations about childhood and education, the category of "production of knowledge" emerges from "Anal Terror" relatively unscathed. We wish it had not. We are extremely skeptical of the focus on knowledge production (on production of any sort; on knowledge as production; on thoughts, intuitions, or feelings as knowledge). Our skepticism insists on a different understanding of popular "knowledge" than one that says, as Preciado does, that before 1969 "the 'abnormals' existed, but they had yet to construct a collective knowledge about themselves." We think such self-understandings *did* exist, and go on existing, though perhaps not in the form of "knowledge" that is "produced." For us the critique of this focus divides into two subtopics, to wit:

a) *the need for a different kind of critical self-affection.* Following on the critical point about opacity, it's at once clear that something remarkable, beautiful, and truly new happened when Guy and the FHAR spoke and wrote as the fags, dykes, queens, and queers they all

† For more on de Villiers and Foucault, see "A Holey Curiosity" in this issue; on Barthes specifically, see de Villiers' *Opacity and the Closet*.

felt themselves to be, *and* that the new statements, new manners of feeling and communicating, thereby brought into the world had and continue to have the most delicate status. For, on the one hand, the tentative self-expressions they essayed often enough became the most calcified and stultifying of political identity categories to the following generations; and, on the other, to whatever degree these self-expressions traveled and challenged or inspired others, they did so in spaces of clandestinity and secrecy far from the KULTURAL centers Preciado seems to dream of influencing. Which brings us to the second subtopic,

b) *the need for a devastating critique of the academy*. It is true, and worth repeating, that the provocative French philosophy of the seventies that theorized bodies, sex, desire, power, and so on, rewriting, deconstructing, and harshly critiquing Marx and Freud, took its inspiration and many watchwords from what we quaintly and metonymically, though not inaccurately, still call *the streets*. The same may also be said for the insertion of the term *queer* where before only *gay and lesbian studies* went in the US context. But to show the street pedigree of academic theory, historically or genealogically, does not do nearly enough to disrupt the endless stimulation and absorption of the production of new practices and statements as "knowledge" that characterizes the academy because it characterizes pretty much everything about a society like ours.[‡] *Of course street knowledge ends up in the classroom*. That fact neither vindicates the academy for its good graces, nor does it mean popular knowledge (which we say is the collective, shared mode of experimental self-expression) ceases to mutate and grow in those same (or other) streets. It does not make us any less partisan to resistant movements against the academy. It makes us no less convinced that universities, like most schools,

‡ See our critical engagement with Lee Edelman in *Baedan* 1.

are traversed in every direction by so many apparatuses to be dismantled as rapidly as possible.

Blood. There is a remarkable elision of violence, perhaps even of force, in Preciado's text. We are in agreement that the homo revolution, to whatever degree something like this happened, had a different form than revolutions of the past. And, yes, queer militancy has a very different relation to the military than any militancy premised on class or nation. It is almost impossible for us to see a thanatopolitical underside to queer biopolitics (mainstream or radical). And yet we know that blood was, is, and will be a part of queer life. Let us consider some of the many ways in which we feel it is inappropriate, if not dangerously misleading, to call the homo revolutions "non-bloody." This can be confusing, both because sometimes things simply do get bloody (points *a* and *d*) and because sometimes what is initially understood as non-bloody turns out to inhabit the blood after all, in a different way (points *b* and *c*).

a) The most basic resistance, to defend ourselves, to *bash back*, can get very bloody.

b) At another level, *AIDS*, a virus borne in the blood, claimed nearly an entire generation of queers in the US and is a continuing crisis for communities of color here and globally; the violence of the medical establishment and of numerous governments, from the eighties to today, was indeed bloody in one sense, but can we afford not to claim that our resistance had to be, in its own way, bloody as well? *As in: of the blood?*

c) Whereas many forms of racism and nationalism, as sources of explicit and implicit revolutionary solidarity, figure blood in their imaginary as the binding agent of family and nation, this clearly does not apply to queer kinship bonds. But does this mean that queer kinship is "non-bloody", or does it instead suggest the possibility of

perverse, *deviant bloodlines* that don't flow through the Family or the Nation?

d) Lastly, we will add the most advanced techniques of *queer time travel* can, in their own more esoteric ways, have bloody modes of orientation.

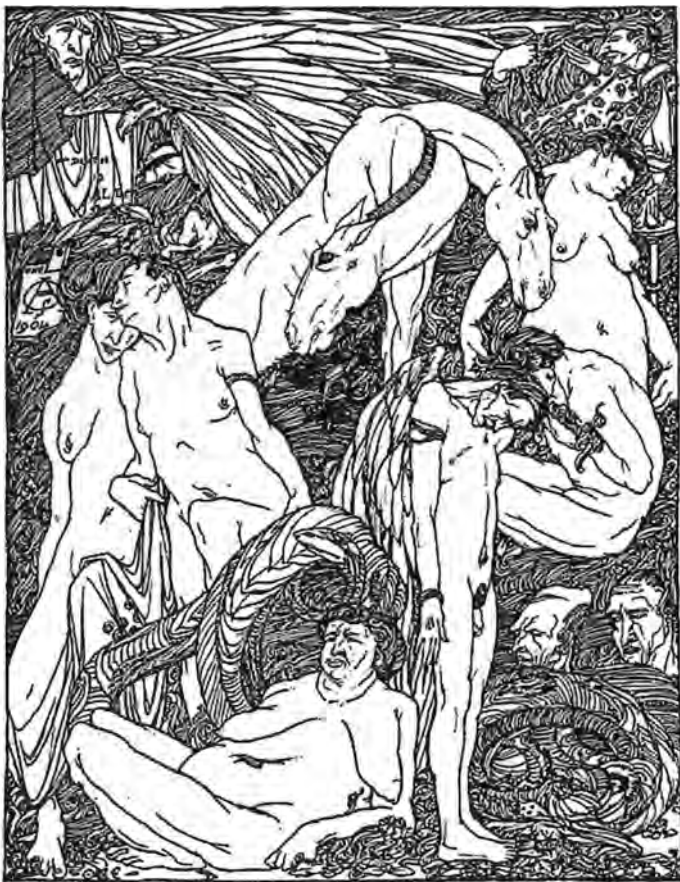
To sum up, then: we accept the critique of the marriage of the militant and the military, but we also know our own project is born of, among other things, events of violence and counter-violence—sometimes *Queer Ultra-violence*. So let's not moralize.†

To all of this, we might add the question (appropriate to our third issue) as to whether this critical triad composes a kind of *triangle* that allows us to delimit the ways in which our perspective differs from Preciado's. A unilaterally positive encouragement of speaking as what one is, an affirmative relation to the production of statements, discourses and knowledges, and an overly rosy portrayal of past and future insurrections as "non-bloody" seem to us to add up to a kind of historical positivism or optimism that we are not inclined to share. There is plenty to cautiously affirm in this triangle of Orders/Goods, but we need to see what in it responds still too much to the production and reproduction into which every citizen-subject in a society like ours is interminably seduced or coerced. We need the other triangle, the Chaotic/Evil one, with its yawning gaps: not speaking one's truth, but deploying a maze of protective opacities; not new statements, but new

† We might also add here that as much as we delight in replacing the category of *homophobia* (which practically all liberal institutions are now nominally against) with *anal terror* (which they continue to embody), Preciado's use of *terrorist* and *terrorism* with respect to activist practices can't help but sound glib in the contemporary US context. It would be nice to live again in a time when one can joke about terrorist actions, or provocatively refer to books that don't explode as terrorist. But a certain humorlessness can't help but exist around this term when it names the laws that put our friends in prison.

disruptive silences; not the ordered peaceful protest but... well, you can either guess what goes here, or you can't.

This triangular or triadic critique is important to us, but in no way does it invalidate this lesson in reading Hocquenghem, with its wonderful, bizarre combination of queer theory and history. There is a lot to learn from here, many angles to contemplate, plenty of references to follow up on. And we can't beat the slogan *communize your anus...*



Anal Terror

Notes on the First Days of the Sexual Revolution

Beatriz Preciado

Oedipus and Anal Castration

SINCE WE HAVE TO START SOMEWHERE, LET'S START AT THE beginning. Let's tell the story of the anus. Let's swallow the tapestry of civilization and, with the threads that peek out between our legs, let's weave the tent for a new circus. That's what Guy did: to anal-ize himself instead of psychoanalyzing himself. Actually, Guy had read Freud while he sucked cocks at the meetings of the French Communist Party, and—one thing leads to another—one day ended up asking himself if Oedipus had an anus.

“Once upon a time there was an anus,” he said, and invented a myth to explain how we became hetero-humans and homo-humans. I know the myth by heart. It goes like this: we aren't born men or women; we aren't even born boys or girls. When we're born we are a patchwork of liquids, solids, and gels covered by a strange organ whose extension and weight is greater than that of any other: the skin. This tegument ensures that all of it remains contained, presenting that appearance of isolated unity we call body. Wrapped around the digestive tube, the skin opens up at its ends, leaving two muscular orifices visible: the mouth and the anus. So there are no differences, then:

we're each a flesh ribbon that, due to of the law of gravity, begins in the mouth and ends in the anus. But there was too much symmetry between those two orifices, and bodies, simple dermal tubes, frightened of their indefinite capacity to enjoy everything (earth, stones, water, animals, other dermal tubes) sought ways to control themselves and others. The fear that the whole skin could be a genderless sexual organ brought them to redraw the body, designing outsides and insides, marking zones of privilege and abject zones. It was necessary to close up the anus to sublimate pansexual desire, transforming it into the social bond, just as it was necessary to enclose the commons to mark out private property. To close up the anus so that the sexual energy that could flow through it would become honorable and healthy male camaraderie, linguistic exchange, communication, media[†], advertising, and capital.

The Holy Fathers, fearful that the born body would come to know the pleasure of not-being-man, of not-being-human, of romping among the wild boars and the flowers, took everything they had on hand (fire, the wheel, language, nuclear physics, biotechnology...) and they set into motion a technique to extirpate from the anus all capacities save the excremental one. After many attempts, they found a nice clean method to castrate the anus: sticking a dollar in the boy's ass, they exclaimed: "Close up the anus and you'll be an owner, you'll have a woman, children, objects, you'll have a nation. From now on you'll be the master of your identity!" The castrated anus became a mere site for the expulsion of waste: the orifice at the end of the digestive tract, through which excrement is expelled. Placed at the disposal of public powers, the anus was sewn

† [Preciado has *prensa*, "press" or even "newspapers" here; we think the point is more powerfully made by suggesting that all media as we know it is premised on the closing up of the anus. —T.N.]

up, closed up, sealed up. Thus was the private body born. And the modern city, with its clean cobblestones and its polluting chimneys: cement anuses through which what is collectively repressed is desublimated. That is how, at the end of the 19th century, heterosexual men were born: they are bodies with castrated anuses. Although they present themselves as bosses and victors, they are actually wounded, mistreated bodies.

In the heterosexual man, the anus, understood only as an excretory orifice, is not an organ. It is the scar left on the body by castration. The closed-up anus is the price that the body pays to the heterosexual regime for the privilege of masculinity. The damage had to be replaced with an ideology of superiority so that they only remembered their anus when they defecated: like bigmouths, they think they are better, more important, stronger.... They've forgotten that their hegemony rests on their anal castration. The castrated anus is the heterosexual closet. Along with the castration of the anus, when the dollar sank into the moist guts of the child, the penis arose as despotic signifier. The phallus appeared as affordable mega- $\$$ -porno-fetish of the new Disney-heterosexual-land.

The kids-with-castrated-anuses built a community they called City, State, Nation. They excluded all the bodies whose anuses remained open from its organs of power and administration: women doubly perforated by their anuses and their vaginas, their entire body capable of transformation into a uterine cavity capable of hosting future citizens, but also fag bodies that Power couldn't castrate, bodies that deny what the others consider to be anatomical evidence, and that make of mutation an aesthetics of life. The community of closed anuses is shored up with dumb columns made up of families, with their anally-castrated-father and their hollow-viscera-mother available for bringing new dermic tubes to the world; they will promptly have their anal orifices torn from them....

Until the day of the wrath of the lamb[†] arrives, and the non-castrated-bodies rebel.

Terrorist Texts

If all of this sounds too linear and counter-biblical to you; if you've already swapped your analyst's couch for archeology, if your thing is more the archive of micro-revolutions than the War of the Titans, I can also tell it to you in another way.

In 1971, Roland Barthes, who had a harder time speaking publically of his own homosexuality than doing hermeneutics, invented a category, not knowing that it would be the most appropriate to describe the book Guy Hocquenghem would write the following year: textual terrorism. Texts that can “intervene socially” are terrorist, said Barthes in *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, not because of their popularity or success, but due to the “violence that enables the text to *exceed* the laws that a society, an ideology, or a philosophy establish for themselves in order to agree among themselves in a fine surge of historical intelligibility.”[‡] Hocquenghem's *Homosexual Desire* is not just another book on homosexuality. It was the first terrorist text that directly confronted hegemonic heterosexual language. It was the first critical diagnostic about the relationship between capitalism and heterosexuality made by a fag who didn't hide his status as “social scum” and “abnormal” to begin to speak.

There are no apologies, excuses, or justifications in Hocquenghem's text. They're lacking because he no longer wants to be the good boy, request juridical favors, beg

† [Cf. Revelations 6:16. —T.N.]

126 } ‡ Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, 10.

the “hetero-cops” for crumbs. That’s what Guy Hocquenghem teaches us: when you give up on favors and crumbs is when the revolution begins. Always at the local scale and in lower case. And possibly the fiesta too, though, paradoxically, that implies a certain austerity, since opulence is always on the side of hegemony.

And it must not have been easy to open up a hole in hegemonic language: thus Hocquenghem’s need to slowly drill into medical, psychiatric, psychoanalytic, media discourses... incessantly, as if it were the start of a task that will take us centuries to complete. Because, let’s not forget, there was a time (whose trace, more rabid than moribund, still extends out to us) when there was not yet any language outside the heterosexual narrative, when there was no outside to the dominant discourses on homosexuality.

These were the times of Krafft-Ebing and his classificatory tables of sexual deviations; the time of juridical persecution of sodomites; the time in which the fathers of a wealthy family entrusted their lesbian daughter to Freud with the intention that he make a good wife of her; the time of electroshocks and lobotomies; of the “causes of the biological degeneration of the species”; of “mental hermaphroditism” and “congenital inversion”; of the “effeminate brain of the homosexual” and the “virile body of the lesbian”; the time of the “dilated anus” of the pervert and the “hypertrophied clitoris of the tribade”; the time of concentration camps for the “purples” and of separate jails for those accused of the crime of vice.

1869–1969: The West perfects its best technologies of death (which it calls “improvement of the species”) as it exalts the values of the white heterosexual family. The members of the family have no anus. Dad has no anus. Mom has no anus. The son has no anus. The daughter—well, it doesn’t even matter if she has one or not.

Between 1869, the moment in which central European medico-juridical language first defined the opposition between heterosexuality and homosexuality as a moral and biological struggle between normalcy and pathology, and 1969, the moment of the founding of the first movements for the defense of homosexual rights in the US and Europe, heterosexual discourse was the sole biopolitical language about the body and the species.

The “abnormals” existed, but they had yet to construct a collective knowledge about themselves; they had no history; they had yet to transform oppression into a critical perspective on power. There was no language of the anus. Yet.

It was a time of apologies, justifications and shame: a time in which, out of fear of persecution or public scorn, it was preferable to hide behind baroque apologies of “love among Greek men” written in the third person[†]; the time of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs and the “magnetism” that explains that a “woman’s soul trapped in a man’s body” feels a natural attraction towards another man; the time of Proust and his fag-hiding words; the time when Gide based his defense of masculine homosexuality on misogynistic arguments according to which we would have been better off if we had gone on making history as men.[‡]

Heterosexuality appears to be a wall built by nature, but it’s only a language: a mass of signs, systems of communication, coercive techniques, social orthopedics and bodily styles.

But who knows how one pierces a dominant language? With what body? With what weapons?

† See, for example, the German literature of the end of the 19th century in defense of Greek homosexuality as an innate tendency: Heinrich Hössli, *Die Männerliebe der Griechen*.

128 { ‡ See the translation of some texts by Ulrichs in *Pioneros de lo homosexual*, 35–90; and André Gide, *Et nunc manet in te* and *Corydon*.

Or, to put it differently: how did the anal revolution begin?

As might have been expected, it all began as a children's story—one might even say, a girls' story, if feminine and masculine were not, in infancy, simple educational utopias. "Homosexual desire is above all a question of infancy," said Guy Hocquenghem. Don't freak out, we're not talking about men of the Church or fathers of families who hunt for kids in confession booths or school exits; this is about the child's body and its desire to enjoy everything, to become a flower and a wild boar. During the fifties, while "Spain" was festering under the Franquist regime and Algeria boiling over, our French neighbors discovered the culture of mass consumption. Willy-nilly they invented a new market subject; US economists were already calling it the *teenager* and feeding it chocolate bars and Coca-Colas; they bought it a *look*[§] and a polluting way of getting around; they gave it, for the first time, access to higher education before beckoning it to integrate itself into the labor market. They didn't know that they were creating a new hedonistic political subject, affluent but dissatisfied, full of energy and eager for new experiences.

In the mid-sixties, on the other side of the Atlantic but on the same premises (consumption + culture + bodily experimentation), a multitude of *hippies* assembled a strange world made of psychedelic drugs, *rock'n'roll*, glasses with tinted lenses, and sex, and as they danced, they composed an anti-war bloc of opposition to the Vietnam War. Some of them suddenly discovered that they had an anus. 1968–1988: twenty years during which the *teenagers* decided to make their own institutions, founding myths, and techniques of production of subjectivity as an object of critique and a possible space of

§ ["Teenager" and "look" in English in the original, as with "hippie" and "rock'n'roll" below. —T.N.]

transformation. Music changes and drugs change, but the frenzy for experimentation remained. In these years, a set of micro-revolutions appeared, one after the other, that compared with traditional uprisings were visibly poetic, ludic, bodily, and which rejected the space of traditional politics as the main site of struggle.

In 1968, the adolescents who had been gifted with university knowledge occupied the streets of the Latin Quarter in Paris. Classrooms went from being places of indoctrination to centers of political debate. Marx and cinema had gone to their heads: they demanded the impossible, saw beaches beneath the paving stones of the metropolis, and planned to replace the Civil Code with a single slogan: it's forbidden to forbid. Their street revolts were followed by the largest workers' strikes in French history. The revolt had brought together factory workers, journalists, and well-read children.[†]

But the revolution they announced, based on the end of class struggle, was a manly thing, not fag stuff. The left defined its limits: no fags, no queens[‡], no drugs—only alcohol, their masculinity, and their chicks. Hocquenghem alerts us: “It is possible that revolutionary politics are in themselves repressive processes.”[§] Provisional lesson: revolutions are not what they seem. Causes capable of becoming logics of power are not really the most revolutionary ones. Revolutions are not always made by the best, nor are they always made for the best reasons. On top of

† See Kristin Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives*.

‡ [Here and elsewhere, *queen* renders *travesti*, imperfectly but, we hope, imaginatively and provocatively. Most dictionaries will suggest *travesti* means something like ‘cross-dresser’. Hocquenghem and Preciado consistently use the term in an expansive, non-literal sense, to gesture at something unnamable or not-yet-named. —T.N.]

§ [*Homosexual Desire*, 134. All further references in parentheses in body of text. —T.N.]

that, every revolutionary movement has its chief officer of marketing: the ones who label a revolutionary bloc and say who does and who doesn't belong to it. Conclusion: revolutions also construct their own margins. Corollary: the revolution had not yet arrived at its anal stage.

Soon enough, the girls, the fags, the lesbians, the queens, and the transsexuals began an anal rupture with the virile left movement. In France, on August 26, 1970, a small group of women (among whom were Christine Delphy and Monique Wittig) performed a street parody, inspired by guerilla theater actions, in which they paid homage to the wife of the unknown soldier: "There is someone even more unknown than the unknown soldier: his wife", read the sign. It was a critique of the historical invisibility of women and of masculine domination, as much in the institutions that structure everyday life, such as family or work, as in the institutions that archive, monumentalize, and produce history. That relatively modest action was the first to receive media attention, leading to the constitution of the MLF (Women's Liberation Movement).

A few months later, the movement was recuperated by a white, heterosexual, liberal feminism that concentrated (through figures such as Antoinette Fouque or Gisèle Halimi) on the struggle for reproductive rights for women (abortion, birth control), excluding the lesbians, the street queens, sex workers, or immigrant women from the dominant feminist discourse. Provisional lesson: revolutions are not what they seem, blah, blah, blah. Corollary: I don't know why we keep falling for the version of the story that says that the homosexual revolution was made by gay men. Let's correct it: the homosexual revolution was started by lesbians, effeminate fags, and queens—the only ones who needed revolution to survive. The temporal implication of these political zigzags: the anal revolution will be slow.

US, 1969: various women's groups emergent from the anti-war struggle and the black civil rights movements occupied Atlanta streets, mocking the Miss America pageant to demand "emancipation of women from the category of unpaid sex workers". In a few months, there were women's assemblies in every university in California and pickets at all the main museums and civic centers of the country. The feminists defined a specific form of oppression that they called "sexism", called the kinship system that legitimates it "patriarchy", and outlined the strategies for a struggle for women's emancipation in public space: overcoming of the traditional roles of mother and wife in domestic and family institutions; access to contraception and abortion; economic independence; and intervention into the space of political decision-making.

This revolt was absorbed by NOW (National Organization for Women), a group created in 1966 by Betty Friedan, channeling its energies towards legal equality between men and women. The struggle to establish equilibrium between both poles seems to have concealed the internal differences in women's collectives, projecting a feminist subject that excluded its own sexual and political minorities. Provisional conclusion: heterosexual feminism is scared of the anal revolution.

In May 1970, Rita Mae Brown and a group called Lavender Menace rose up against the exclusion of lesbians and the marginalization of their demands in NOW. This was the first rupture between feminism and what is called "radical lesbianism". Provisional conclusion: feminism has also castrated its anus.

In France, March 5, 1971, as Professor Lejeune lectured against abortion in the Mutualité de Paris Theater, the writer, left activist and member of the MLF, Françoise d'Eaubonne, along with a group of lesbians, attacked him, armed with sausages. That is how the "Commando Sausisson" (Sausage Commando) arose. Later, the FHAR

(Homosexual Revolutionary Action Front) congealed around it. The Saucisson Commando invented anal terrorism. Simultaneously ridiculing billy clubs and penises as instruments of traditional politics, the sausage refers to anality: made from the intestinal tissue of lambs and pigs, its shape always reminds us of human or animal excrement. Not much later, the Commando Saucisson raided the radio station where M^énie Grégoire's program dedicated to the topic "Homosexuality, that painful problem" was on the air. If the public anus is to be opened up, it will have to be through the cultural route. The mass media are extensive and diffuse networks for the construction and normalization of identity. ANAL TERRORISM = CULTURAL TERRORISM.

While lesbians were displaced by the construction of hegemonic feminism, fags and queens were also excluded in the practices and discourses of the ultra-left, which considered "homosexuality" and "drugs" to be symptoms of bourgeois decadence. The appearance of the FHAR in France in 1971, around writers and activists such as Daniel Guérin, Jean-Louis Bory, Françoise d'Eaubonne, Guy Hocquenghem, René Schérer and Michel Cressole was a response to the exclusion of fags, lesbians, transsexuals, and queens from feminist and left groups. The FHAR rose from the homo- and lesbophobic ashes of May '68 and the feminist movement. Its goal was to render visible sexual dissidence in the heart of the ultra-left; but also to politicize sexuality, distancing itself from the Arcadie movement[†], which defined masculine homosexuality as a natural tendency (often secret, private, and shameful) before which the homosexual subject has no choice and only demands to be socially respected.

† French movement founded in 1964 by André Baudry around the publication of a magazine on "homophilia"—the establishment of emotional, not sexual, relations between two men. [D'Eaubonne and Guérin participated in Arcadie, but defected into FHAR. —T.N.]

Guy Hocquenghem wrote *Homosexual Desire* in the FHAR, in that context of the breakdown of the dominant Eurocentric discourses, but also of rupture with the “good homosexuals” of Arcadie and the “good girls” of liberal feminism.

In the FHAR, Hocquenghem learned that it is possible to pierce through the dominant language. The FHAR invented the grammar of the anal revolution and of the queer[†] feminism to come: gynocide, phallocracy, ecofeminism.... The FHAR denounced the political oppression of homosexuality by a regime that Françoise d’Eaubonne, for the first time, called “phallocratic” and “heteronormative”, criticizing all of the institutions of “heteropatriarchal” normalization (family, school, hospital, prison) and the centrality of the apparatuses of identity construction to capitalism. The amphitheater of the School of Fine Arts in Paris (the same place where the assemblies of the ACT UP collective took place in the nineties), where the FHAR met every Thursday during the seventies, became a space for the construction of new political imaginaries. Questions of race, class, and public sex were for the first time at the center of those debates; their topics (“fags and institutions”, “making love with Arabs”, “adolescent sex”, “clitoral pleasure”, “proletariat and sodomy”, “long live the erotic school”...) explicitly rebelled against the anal castration that dominated the language of the left.

The FHAR was joined by Gazolines (made up of, fags, cross-dressers, and queens, among whom were Marie France, Héléne Hazera and Maud Molyneux). Influenced by glam rock culture, they were the first to use techniques of parodic theater in public space, practices that would later be reconceptualized by queer theory as performative or camp politics. It’s about playing some music for

134 { † [This and all other uses of *queer* are found in English in the original. —T.N.]

the austere and anally castrated left, tossing it some pink feather boas, some lines of coke, and some milligrams of estrogen. In 1971, the FHAR organized its first demonstration in the streets of Paris: "Our bodies are political", "Family = pollution", "Proletarians of all countries, sodomize each other"... Hegemonic language and its physical transcript, public space, had been pierced.

That same year, during the Franquist dictatorship, the clandestine group MELH (Spanish Movement for Homosexual Liberation) formed in response to the increase in homosexual repression due to the Law Concerning Dangerousness and Social Rehabilitation. However, its activities were limited by the harshness of police persecution. This group would later become the FAGC (Catalunya Gay Liberation Front), but would not take on a public form until the 1977 transition to democracy. In the Ramblas of Barcelona, among officers and priests, Ocaña paraded dressed as the Andalusian virgin, followed by Nazario and the forty fags.‡

Meanwhile, in 1972, the Gouines Rouges (Red Dykes) appeared, among them Monique Wittig, Christine Delphy and Marie-Jo Bonnet, as a reaction to the "phallogocratic" and "lesbophobic" character of left movements, including the FHAR. Lesbian leftist groups were not at the intersection of feminist and homosexual movements, said the red activists, but were precisely in the space occupied by neither. Lesbians are, as Teresa de Lauretis says, in the blind spot of political representation.§ In the same way that homophobia defines homosexual desire, lesbian existence, they said, is in the non-place outlined by the

‡ In 1979, Alberto Cardín published a translation of Guy Hocquenghem and René Schérer's *Systematic Album of Childhood*. [This book has not yet been translated into English. —T.N.]

§ Teresa de Lauretis takes this image from Patricia White's analysis of Ulrike Ottinger's film *Madame X: An Absolute Ruler*. See "Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representation", 155-177.

lesbophobia of the feminist movement and the misogyny of the homosexual movement.

There are lesbians on this stage and also in this room. We are on this stage because we are not ashamed of what we are. We are enclosed in silence, insulted because we refuse to submit to the law of the phalocrats and the hetero-cops. We are fundamentally subversive. We are lesbians because we choose our own *jouissance*. Our *jouissance* is neither mutual masturbation, nor psychosexual infantilism, nor a caricature of male-female relations. We are creatures of *jouissance* outside of every norm. We are lesbians and proud of it.†

This is how a process of fragmentation and displacement began to put into question the positing of a single feminist subject and a single homosexual subject... a process quite similar to the one that unfolded in the eighties in the US feminist and homosexual movements, resulting in the queer movements. We can already see the two paths for political action that emerge, for the rest of the century, from left movements: revolution or normalization, communizing the anus or closing it up.

Anal Politics

If all of this sounds too linear and counter-biblical to you; if you have already swapped the hagiography of our heroines for the anal assembly, if your thing is more the video

† “Les Gouines Rouges”, *Gulliver*, no. 1, Paris, November 1972. [Translation modified with respect to French original. It is worth noting that the first two uses of *lesbian* here correspond to *homosexuelles* in French. Guattari, in the introduction to the FHAR issue of *Recherches* cited elsewhere, uses *homosexuel/les* as an inclusive form, which it’s safe to say must have been in wider circulation.]

game of theory than the theater of civilizations, I can also tell it to you in another way.

Get ready to play: *Homosexual Desire* is a weapon. But it is not a sword, or a bullet, or a missile, nor is it a bomb. Even though its power of transformation (not to say destruction) is many times that of all of them. Guy Hocquenghem's text is a critical weapon invented by one of the few non-bloody revolutions in the history of the twentieth century: feminism and the emancipatory movements of sexual minorities carried out the first revolution made with language, drugs, music, and sex. Separating itself from the thanatopolitical weapons that characterize the historical struggles of the twentieth century (from the machine gun, through the gas in the Auschwitz chambers, to the H bomb), the gay, lesbian, and trans movement places the body's vulnerability and survival at the center of political discourse. It makes of culture, as the forum for the creation and exchange of ideas, where the limits of what is socially possible are defined, the center of the struggle.

Keeping the libidinal theory drawn up in *Homosexual Desire* in mind, such peaceful revolutions could be called: anal politics. I mean forms of action and critique that reacted against the biopolitical strategies of the end of the 19th and 20th century, that had used medico-juridical methods to invent sexual deviation and its pathologies. They also reacted to the thanatopolitical excesses of the mid-twentieth century: Auschwitz, Hiroshima, and also the decolonization wars in Algeria and Vietnam. Between 1968 and 1988, anal politics were invented as collective assemblages against the (bio/thanato-)politics of war that, until then, had been the traditional forms of the governance of the social: exercises of power in which mutilation and death are converted into ways to defend the life of populations. These micropolitics of fags, dykes, queens, and trans people are opposed to the traditional model of

politics as *war* (both biopolitics and thanatopolitics find their point of reference in war as the ultimate model of control) and propose a new model of politics as relation, fiesta, communication, self-experimentation and pleasure.

We could say that anal politics are counter-biopolitics. As such, they are body politics, redefinitions of the human species and its modes of (re-) production. But the body, here, is no longer to be thought of as the natural container of qualities or defects that must be preserved or eliminated through education, discipline, sterilization, or death. It is no longer about the human body, nor the feminine or masculine body, nor the racially superior or inferior body, but the body as relational, vulnerable platform, socially and historically constructed, whose limits are constantly redefined.

Homosexual Desire is an instruction manual to render functional an anti-systemic orifice installed in each and every body: the ANUS. Specific, offensive, and vital—it is a highly maneuverable revolutionary machine, conceived with a collective use in mind.

How do you know if you still have an anus? Supposing you still have one, how do you write with an anus,? What can we learn from the anus? How do we bring the anal revolution? Search.

Do you really know what an anus is? Then tell me: is the anus a sex organ? And if it is, of what sex? To what sexuality do the practices that use it belong? Then don't answer. First throw out all of your anatomical certainty and stop trusting visual and linguistic evidence.

First look at the dictionary of the Spanish language published by the Royal Academy. Anus: "Orifice at the end of the digestive tube, through which excrement is expelled." Compare that definition with those of other organs situated in a nearby area. Penis: "Human male organ, also of some animals, that is used for urinating and copulating." Vagina: "Membranous conduit that in

mammalian females extends from the vulva to the womb.” Vulva: “Parts that surround and constitute the external part of the vagina”. Womb: “Hollow, round viscera, situated in the interior of the pelvis of women and mammalian females, where the menstrual hemorrhage begins and where the fetus develops until the moment of birth”. First provisional conclusion: some organs enjoy a privileged biopolitical status. Only the penis appears as a sexual organ, the anus and the vagina being relegated to the roles of excretory and gestational organs respectively. But then how to define erotic anal practices? Can a penis that does not copulate, according to this definition, still be considered a penis? Should an anus that copulates be considered a penis, a membrane, or hollow viscera? Let’s leave these questions in suspense for now. Derivative suspicion: the Royal Academy of Language is in bed with the Anal Castration Regime.[†] The task of the activists of the FHAR was to invent an anal language.

† [The Oxford English Dictionary, the Anglophone dictionary with an authority similar to the Royal Academy’s, would apparently seem to be in bed with the ACR as well. Compare: Anus: “The posterior opening of the alimentary canal in animals, through which the excrements are ejected”. Penis: “The male genital organ used (usually) for copulation and for the emission or dispersal of sperm, in mammals containing erectile tissue and serving also for the elimination of urine”. Vagina: “The membranous canal leading from the vulva to the uterus in women and female mammals”. Vulva: “The external organ of generation in the female; esp. the opening or orifice of that organ”. Uterus: “The organ in which the young are conceived, developed, and protected till birth; the female organ of gestation; the womb”. —T.N.]

Anal Knowledge

Homosexual Desire is, both in terms of anticipation and project, the first example of a form of knowledge known today as *queer theory*. Elaborated in the US by a group of fag and dykes, theorists and activists, at the end of the eighties, queer theory could be defined, following Hocquenghem, as a critique of the sexist and heterocentric foundations that pervade the discourse of modernity. Two elements seem particular to this critical task: first, and unlike other practices of knowledge, queer theory comes directly from activism; it is a “situated knowledge” (Donna Haraway) that emerges from the strategies of struggle against normalization invented during the last century by sexual-political minorities. The inaugural texts of queer theory[†] have innumerable points in common with the texts of Guy Hocquenghem and the FHAR: use of the insult (queer, homosexual, fag, dyke) as axis of enunciation and production of knowledge, displacement of the traditional man/woman, hetero/homosexual oppositions, elaboration of a complex theory of oppression that takes into account the axes of race, class, age, disability.... In this sense, queer theory is not only a science of sexual oppression, but also a radical questioning of the modes of the production of subjectivity in capitalist modernity.

Secondly, what defines queer theory from a critical perspective, and what makes Hocquenghem’s writing its most obvious precedent is (as Michael Moon has indicated) the reappropriation of concepts elaborated by post-structuralist philosophy. This takes place in a theory/practice feedback loop in which it would be difficult to sort out cause from effect. We find in Hocquenghem, for example,

† In particular Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* (1989), Teresa de Lauretis’ article “Queer Theory” in *Differences* and Eve K. Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the Closet*.

readings that we would today call queer: of the critique of the reduction of libidinal economy to psycho-familial mechanisms in *Anti-Oedipus*, but also of the concept of “interpellation” as Althusser elaborates it in “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses”, or of Marcuse’s theory of “repressive desublimation”. But this is not a one-way relationship; post-structuralist philosophy is, in its way, the inflection produced in traditional disciplines (philosophy, anthropology, sociology, history) by the rhetorics of difference, the analysis of oppression, and the resistance to the norm introduced by the micropolitical movements that emerged at the end of the sixties. Both elements appear for the first time in the texts of the FHAR, Guy Hocquenghem, René Schérer, Françoise d’Eaubonne and Monique Wittig, as well as the special issue of the journal *Recherches* edited by the FHAR, *Three Million Perverts*.

In France, during the years after World War II, we see the beginning of a knowledge that emerges from the impact of the politics of decolonization, as well as worker’s, student, feminist, and homosexual movements in the discourses produced by marxism, existentialism, psychoanalysis and structuralist philosophy. But it is not as if there was first a post-structuralist philosophy that later got queered when it was reconsidered by fag, dyke, and trans writers; post-structuralist theory was already the result of an intense process of sexual-political questioning of the anthropological, psychological, and philosophical categories that dominated the conceptual ecology of the fifties. Derrida, Deleuze, Guattari, and Foucault were just as much the inheritors of feminism and homosexual movements as these movements are inheritors of the so-called post-structuralist philosophy.

At the same time that a revolt erupted in the streets of Paris, there was also a profound shaking-up of the educational system and its forms of production and transmission of knowledge. At the end of 1968, Foucault, who had

just returned from Tunisia, where the students had already revolted in March, took over the philosophy department of the University of Paris VIII-Vincennes. Although the idea of Minister Edgar Faure, of General de Gaulle's government, was to distance student revolt from the center of Paris, moving them towards the peripheral neighborhoods, the result was the construction, at Vincennes, of a center of production of dissident knowledge inserted precisely into the networks of the French university system. Around Foucault gathered Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, a part of the Maoist left, but also a good deal of the younger members of the Althusserian left, among whom were Jean-François Lyotard, Jacques Rancière, and Alain Badiou.†

What was being outlined in this way was a different form of political action than that proposed, in his time, by Sartre. While Sartre appeared as a three-in-one intellectual ready to defend all causes (the worker's movement, Judaism, Genet's eccentricity), Foucault sketched the figure of a specific intellectual, at once modest and involved in the causes he defended. According to Foucault, however, involvement should be impersonal rather than adopting a public face. Although it was Foucault who, in the seventies, elaborated the most radical hypotheses about the historical and political construction of sexuality, he never presented himself as a protagonist of the dissident sexual-political scene. He never (except in a brief interview given in one of his trips to the US) spoke of his "homosexuality" in the first person, but rather acted as the background intensifier of a field of forces with which he claimed he could not completely identify. Maybe,

† [Preciado is mistaken here. Lyotard was never an Althusserian. His political background was with the council communism of *Socialisme ou barbarie*, though he had broken with them by the time he was at Vincennes. Also, Guattari was never a university teacher.

beside the techniques to incite the confession of the truth of sex Foucault claimed to resist, there is also another set of techniques of production of silence that make it impossible to articulate the position of a homosexual subject of enunciation, productive of critical knowledge about himself and society, within French university institutions. What would it have meant if, in the middle of the seventies, the man in charge of the philosophy department at Vincennes had publically claimed his “homosexuality” or his participation in sadomasochist practices?‡ How would it such a pronouncement have affected the reception and reading of *The History of Sexuality* or *Abnormal*?

In 1973, Deleuze and Guattari published *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, opening up a new mode of philosophical practice and cultural criticism. The message was clear: the operative myths of psychoanalysis must be treated as political metaphors. The desiring machine of the unconscious functions as a social machine, that is to say, as an economic-political system of production. Of all the machines of control and repression, the family (the triangle mother-father-child) is the base of the despotic pyramid, into which the enchained flows of all the other capitalist machines are plugged. The watchword is revolutionary. The feeling: joyful and collective. Deleuze and Guattari explained it in this way:

We're not writing for people who think psychoanalysis is doing fine and sees the unconscious for what it is. We're writing for people who think it's pretty dull and sad as it bumbles on about Oedipus, castration, the death instinct, and so on. We're writing for unconsciousnesses that protest. We're looking for allies. We need allies. And we think these allies are already out there, that they've gone ahead without us, that there are lots of people who've

‡ [Slightly anachronistic, as Foucault was only at Vincennes for the year of 1969, when he was elected to the Collège de France. —T.N.]

had enough and are thinking, feeling, and working in similar directions: it's not a question of fashion but of a deeper atmosphere informing converging projects in a wide range of fields.†

And there will be allies: the Hocquenghem of *Homosexual Desire* is a reader of *Anti-Oedipus*, in the same way that D & G are readers of Foucault and inspired by the student and sexual revolts all over France. *Anti-Oedipus* in fact emerges from those exchanges, from the search for a new language that can redefine the relations between power, desire, and subjectivity within what Guattari had begun to call "Integrated World Capitalism." In the same way, *Homosexual Desire* is not merely an application of the theories of desiring-production in *Anti-Oedipus* but rather their extension and implication in a critique of capitalism that takes sexuality into consideration as a central motor of production. The influence here is as much that of Deleuze and Guattari as that of Foucault, Schérer, and Françoise d'Eaubonne.

In the seventies, Vincennes became a laboratory of proposals for resistant action against institutional normalization. In February 1971, Foucault, together with Jean-Marie Domenach (editor of the magazine *Esprit*) and historian Pierre Vidal-Naquet, formed the GIP (Information Group on Prisons). The GIP's goal was to cause leaks in the French prison system, opening up means of communication with the "outside" that could reveal how the apparatuses of power and subjectivation hidden by the prison function. To open up the prison is to open up the anus of the social body. One of the first actions was to carry out a public inquiry with the prisoners in different French penal institutions that allowed them to produce a knowledge about prison and its techniques of

144 } † Interview with Catherine Backes-Clément in *L'Arc*, 1972, translated in Deleuze, *Negotiations*. 22. [Translation modified.]

subjectivation—a knowledge that would pierce through and question the power of the walls.

The same period saw the organization of the CERFI, a network of over seventy-five independent researchers (among whom were Deleuze, Guattari, Anne Querrien, and Foucault) connected with different left groups. The CERFI sought to take up methods of collectivization of knowledge that emerged in May '68 to rethink urban transformation, artistic production, the psychiatric cure, education, and economics: “During meetings, the current research was discussed in an environment that also took into account each researcher’s subjective involvement, libido, and desires.”[‡] Escaping academic style and professional monographs, they created the journal *Recherches* with the goal of “putting into practice collective assemblages of enunciation.”

Deleuze and Guattari’s biographer tells of the impact made at the CERFI by the appearance of Guy Hocquenghem, accompanied by some members of the FHAR (René Schérer and a group of fags, queens, and dykes), exclaiming, *Anti-Oedipus* in hand, that he’d found the theory he needed to undertake a critique of the heterosexual regime.[§] Hocquenghem, who had just finished *Homosexual Desire*, proposed to the CERFI the publication of a special issue of *Recherches* dedicated to homosexuality. The result was *Three Million Perverts: Great Encyclopedia of Homosexualities*. This issue (dedicated, among other things, to the critique of the heterosexual education system, sexual relations with “the Arabs”, and pedophilia) was the most famous and provocative in the magazine’s history. It triggered a judicial persecution against its editor (officially Félix Guattari, whose office at the La Borde clinic and home were both searched), leading to confisca-

‡ François Dosse, *Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari*, 268.

§ *Ibid.*, 273.

tion of the journal for “affront to public decency.” The verdict ordered the destruction of the entire print run, because it was a “detailed description of sexual turpitude and perversion” and was the “libidinous venting of a small group of perverts.”

It is in this context that the figure and discourse of Guy Hocquenghem came to produce a radical displacement of the subject of scientific and political enunciation. For the first time, the homosexual anus speaks and produces a knowledge about itself. This knowledge does not come from guilt or shame; it does not try to excuse or legitimate itself; it is not a description of pathology or deficiency; rather, it presents itself as a form of political critique and social transformation. Between Sartre-the-Universal who speaks about every political cause as though it were his own and Foucault-the-Impersonal who denies the possibility of articulating his position in the struggles he stimulates, there appeared a new kind of revolutionary, local and anal, precursor of what will later be queer politics. Hocquenghem was the first, the paradigmatic one.

Guy Hocquenghem had joined communist youth groups (the *Jeunesse communiste révolutionnaire*, a Trotskyist group) at only fifteen years old; he soon understood that his “homosexual orientation” was an obstacle to being accepted among the party militants. He left in 1965, but for the rest of his life he forced the militants to admit their “heterocentric mythology”. He was part of the first student uprisings in May ’68 on Rue Lussac in the Latin Quarter. In 1971, together with other fags and lesbians, he took over the 12th issue of the PCF newspaper *Tout* and published it with a cover demanding the political liberation of women and sexual minorities. “We demand our femininity, just as women reject theirs, at the same time as we affirm that these roles mean nothing.” The 12th issue of the newspaper was denounced as “obscene and

an attack on morality”, confiscated by police and recalled from bookstores.

Educated as a philosopher in the prestigious, white and heterocentric Ecole Normale, Guy later worked as a journalist for *Libération*, which during the seventies was still a space for militant left debate. On January 10, 1972, in an interview with the magazine *Le Nouvel Observateur*, he stated openly that he was a fag. Even his mother responded to the interview with an open letter. Thus he became the first French intellectual who was able to publically articulate a political identity as a “fag”. Guy Hocquenghem was one of the first sexual activists who grasped communications media as possible spaces of “cultural squatting”, production of visibility and social transformation. The struggle begins with a subversive use of communications media understood as polemical (not informative) flows and as vectors for the production of public space.[†] There are two kinds of writers: those who lie to say the truth and those who tell the truth to expose a collective lie. Guy is of the latter sort. To call oneself a homosexual in 1972 was not a pose, a fashion, or even a courageous gesture. It was at once a declaration of war and a way of exposing himself, vulnerable, before the dominant language and gaze. It was to say: here I am, I’m just an anus.

† In 1973 he outed the editor of the magazine *Actuel*, for which he worked, which led to his friends calling him “the exterminating angel”, referencing the Buñuel film.

The Anal Method

Guy Hocquenghem, Françoise d'Eaubonne, René Schérer, Monique Wittig, the FHAR activists and the Gouines Rouges invented a form of anal knowledge (fag-dyke-trans) that displaces traditional scientific enunciation, producing an authentic epistemological rupture. Félix Guattari aptly describes this scientific earthquake in the introduction to *Three Million Perverts*:

The object of this dossier—homosexualities, today, in France—cannot be approached without questioning again the standard methods of research in the social sciences where, under a pretext of objectivity, all care is taken to maximize the distance between the researcher and the object of study. Institutional analysis [here he is referring to the schizopolitical method he had built up in the La Borde clinic] on the contrary, implies a radical decentering of scientific enunciation. To arrive at such a radical decentering of scientific enunciation, it is not enough to ‘give voice’ to the subjects concerned. [...] Rather, it is necessary to create the conditions for a total, indeed a paroxysmic, exercise of that enunciation. [...] We have to overcome three types of epistemological censorship: a) that of the pseudo-objectivity of *social surveys*; [...] b) that of *psychoanalytic prejudices* which pre-organize a psychological, topical and economic ‘*comprehension*’ of homosexuality (‘fixation’ at the pre-genital, pre-oedipal, pre-symbolic stages, in continuity with the pathological psychology of the 19th century) [...] c) but also displacing the models of *traditional militant homosexuality*.[†]

148 { † “Three Billion Perverts on the Stand”, 185–186 [Translation modified].

It is no longer about the defense of the demands of innocent and oppressed minorities, of victim-homosexuality, of Oedipal, guilty, shameful and miserable homosexuality.

Homosexuals speak for us all—in the name of the silent majority—and put into question all forms, whatever they may be, of desiring-production.

This is the outline of another form of knowledge, another subject of scientific enunciation, but there is also the clearing of another epistemological field, the reconfiguration of the territory of what was invisible before then. Guattari:

May '68 taught us to read the writing on the walls, and, since then, we have begun to decipher the graffiti in prisons, asylums, and now in public bathrooms. There is a 'new scientific spirit' to recapture!

The goal is no longer “save the prisoners” or “give a voice to the people in the ghettos”, speaking for them, but “create the conditions of enunciation” through which “prisoners”, “neighborhood associations”, or “homosexuals” can produce a knowledge about themselves, reappropriating the technologies of power that construct them as abject.

The activists of the FHAR sought a form of knowledge production about homosexuality that escaped the traps of scientific knowledge and psychoanalytic interpretation, but also confessional and victim discourse, stories of guilt and begging for respect. On one hand, they questioned the criteria of objectivity of the human sciences as part of the control apparatus that had created the categories homosexual/heterosexual. But they also displaced psychoanalytic method and the myths that made up its hermeneutic base, exposing the racial and sexual metaphors that underlaid it.

The analyst's couch had been replaced by the factory, the dialogical assembly by the backroom, the epidemiological study by the deconstruction of scientific

metaphors, the individual cure by collective experimentation, and lobotomy by political genealogy. Thus, for the first time, an anal science was elaborated, arising from the rupture with so-called “scientific objectivity” that characterized the central European and colonial tradition of the social sciences and that led to the production of the “homosexual” as the political figure of degeneration, strategically situated in a cartography of abnormals next to other liminal figures such as the violent woman, the prostitute, the criminal, the madman, or the disabled. The expression “Fuck it all. I hope you get fucked in the ass!” could well sum up this methodological strategy.

Necessarily collective and political, this knowledge cannot but be articulated in the first person. And this is not because it is court testimony or autobiography, but because up until now, homosexuality has not been able to present itself as knowledge on itself, or as reflexive synthesis. “Speak from your anus” is to say, tell me what are the flows of power (libidinal, economic, linguistic...) that make you up. Speak from where you never thought that a word could be enunciated as a proper name. You have to play at the parody of tracing an I that affirms itself as fag, dyke, or queen to make manifest the constitutive fault lines of the traditional subject of democratic representation. Scientific enunciation shifts here suddenly from the third person singular (the scientist who speaks about the “homosexual”) to two local articulations: an enunciation in the first person (“me, the homosexual”) and the second person plural (“you the heterosexuals”, “you are the ones who are afraid”).

Here coming out of the closet does not take the form of a confession, but rather, to put it in Judith Butler’s term, of “performative inversion”: the affirmation “I am a homosexual” is not a sovereign statement, but a “decontextualized citation” of the insult. The word “homosexual”, far
150 | from having an ontological value, operates as a political

boomerang. The statement “I am homosexual” bears no truth of any sort about the one who so speaks, but rather says: the subject that up until now has been constructed as abject (anal-yzed, reduced to a social anus) exceeds the insult, does not let itself be contained by the violence of the terms that constitute it and speaks, creating a new context of enunciation and opening up the possibility of future forms of legitimation.[†]

Homosexual Desire and FHAR’s *Rapport contre la normalité* [Report Against Normality] set out from the expropriation of the concept of homosexuality from the medical-juridical discourses that invented it to redefine it as a “psycho-police category”—the effect of a system of control and of the regulation of the social flows of desire (51). There are no heads left in the puppet show of the history of sexuality: Freud, Ferenczi, Kinsey, Martin Hoffman, Adler, Nacht, Stekel all go to his barbershop.... Through a detailed analysis of their texts, Guy Hocquenghem clarifies the hidden politics of the psychological and psychiatric equations that have historically constructed the category of homosexuality. Neither “sexual perversion” (Krafft-Ebing), nor “libidinal orientation” (Freud), not even “sexual practice among persons of the same sex” (Kinsey), homosexuality is the effect of a political regime that Hocquenghem, following Deleuze and Guattari, calls “capitalism” and that Monique Wittig will later call “heterosexuality”. “Capitalist society manufactures homosexuals just as it produces proletarians, constantly defining its own limits: homosexuality is a manufactured product of the normal world” (50). From which a lapidary conclusion follows: no homosexuality without homophobia. In this way *Homosexual Desire* became homosexuality’s first de-psychiatrization exercise, similar to what transsexual,

† On the performative reappropriation of insults, see Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 29–41.

transgender, and intersexed activists are attempting today with the categories of “transsexuality” and “intersexuality.” † “Homosexuality exists and does not exist, at one and the same time: indeed, its very mode of existence questions again and again the certainty of its existence” (53). In this way he came close to identifying, for the first time, the curious metaphysical status of biopolitical entities: homosexuality and heterosexuality (like race or the purity of blood) are neither true nor false; they occupy the space of social machines, they are historical constructs, somatic fictions, political inventions that take the shape of bodies and the consistency of life.

The etiological questions (how do you end up as a homosexual? Was it dad’s fault or mom’s?) are replaced with a political interrogation: what are the causes of heterosexual normalcy? What are the mechanisms of control and repression that guarantee that heterosexuality (with its ritualized corporeal choreography and its rigid institutions of relation and filiation) will continue to appear as the only natural sexuality? It is no longer a matter of explaining what “homosexual desire” is, but of carrying out a detailed analysis that takes up techniques of domestication, punishment, and reward that make possible the strict and calculated regularity of “heterosexual desire”. The problem is not anal sex, but the civilization of the anally-castrated-man.

† While the category of homosexuality disappeared from the DSM in 1973, in part due to pressure from homosexual groups, the category of “transsexuality” first appeared in the DSM in 1980.

Identity Politics and Anal Normalization

Hocquenghem was not only one of the inventors of “anal knowledge” and an invigorating force in its politics, but also indicated, in an extremely lucid way, the possible traps that laid in wait for the homosexual movement with its entry into the public sphere and its integration into hegemonic social institutions (family, school, army, museum, hospital...). Studying the relation between homosexuality and fascism, Hocquenghem warned of the dangers of a possible sexual revolution whose goal would be to “normalize homosexuality”, transforming it into a form of sexual satisfaction parallel to the heterosexual one. Paradoxically, he says, this form of sexual revolution would resolve “the homosexual problem” by making it disappear.

That is why the activists of the FHAR worked out a political concept of “expanded homosexuality”: homosexuality cannot be an identity among others. They said: all forms of desire, relation and pleasure that exist outside of the bourgeois heterosexual norm are homosexual. In short, homosexual desire is the name of a rupture with the norm. They wanted to exit the mode of political specialization that would make of “good gays and lesbians” homosexual bureaucrats in charge of the defense of the individual rights of homosexuals. In *Rapport contre la normalité* they say: “We are not revolutionaries specialized in sexual issues... Our objective aims at the entire sphere of the political”[‡]. In the FHAR’s discourse, sexuality was no longer a peripheral matter in the critique of capitalism; it was the touchstone that allows all of the processes of domestication that produce the diagnosed of the

‡ FHAR, *Rapport contre la normalité*.

docile subject of Fordist society. Here homosexuality is not, as the hetero-left would sometimes like us to think, a revolutionary motor, but rather a model, among others, of resistance and recoding of the flows of power-knowledge.

Already in 1972, Hocquenghem and the FHAR denounced the coming of an anally castrated homosexual movement. From the start they critiqued the appearance of a normalized homosexual movement whose rhetorics of liberation have been recuperated by “individual/family/nation” propaganda, a tame homosexual movement that seeks consensus, respect of tolerable differences, and assimilation. Gay (and to a much smaller extent lesbian) identity politics accepted the liberal logic in which political existence and representation means the right to consumption and media visibility. They had critiqued the way in which the left made the “homosexual problem” a second-tier issue with respect to the worker’s revolution, leaving the “margin” as the narrow political territory of the sexual minorities; now, in the same way, they critiqued the risk of homosexual collaboration in state projects that repress sexuality, separating “perverts” from “good homosexuals”, “junkies” from the “sober”, butches from discrete and cultivated lesbians, transsexuals willing to discover their true sex from hopeless dysphorics.

FHAR’s anti-identitarian paranoia could today be considered a lucid diagnostic of an ongoing political mutation. In the US the eighties was the decade of the expansion of gay politics of identity, but also the period in which neoliberal strategies and the globalization of their capitalist model were understood and legitimated as democratizing forces in the world, first before totalitarian communism, and later before Islamic terrorism. It was also the moment in which AIDS arose as the new cultural disease of the masses, around which homophobic and eugenic rhetorics, already in circulation since the later 19th century, congealed. The AIDS virus, as if it were a late biopolitical

crystallization of some of the eugenic intentions that the West had tried out in the Nazi experiment, changed the environment and the general conditions of immunity in which new survival strategies and other revolutionary micropolitics were invented and carried out. In this context of retreat for revolutionary forces, the queer micropolitics of the end of the eighties and the nineties (ACT UP, Lesbian Avengers, Radical Fury, drag king practices, the emergence of transgender and intersexual politics) were modes of survival for the anal politics that the FHAR, the Gouines Rouges and the Gazolines had shaped.

In 1984 Michel Foucault died of AIDS. Guy Hocquenghem died of it in 1988. Two years before his death, in the bitter pamphlet *Lettre ouverte à ceux qui sont passés du col Mao au Rotary* [Open Letter to those who Traded Maoism for the Rotary Club] Guy denounced the way in which revolutionary movements, in search of visibility, had been absorbed by their own process of spectacularization. It was not enough to have had an open anus. It was about being able to keep making a relational field of it. How to do politics without renouncing the anus? How to demand representation without renouncing the anus? Not to renounce the anus means not giving any more to Power than what it demands of us. Yesteryear's question—how to make the anal revolution?—has metamorphosed today into: how to avoid anal marketing? How to survive the normalizing effects of identity politics? How to survive with an open and collective anus?

There are no directives, no agenda, and no precise program; but there are two recommendations distilled from the first days of the anal revolution:

Distrust your desire, whatever it is. Distrust your identity, whatever it is. Identity only exists as a political mirage. Desire is not a reserve of truth, but an artifact that is culturally constructed, modeled by social violence, incentives and rewards, but also by fear of exclusion. There

is no homosexual or heterosexual desire, just as there is no bisexual desire: desire is always an arbitrary slice of an uninterrupted and polyvocal flow. In this way we understand that the title of Hocquenghem's book, *Homosexual Desire*, just like that of Monique Wittig's *The Lesbian Body*, pointed, with a parodic wink, to mechanisms of political construction and not to entities or substances.

The anal revolution is impure. In *Three Million Perverts* the FHAR activists affirm:

This text is not offered as a manifesto, much less as theory. It drags an entire set of confused elements along with it: purposely and accidentally funny, revolutionary political elements mixed with racist and fascist elements, bits of Oedipal sexuality mixed with a tendency toward something different in sexuality.... We could say that the reactionary or even fascist elements that subsist in a revolutionary are a potential betrayal. But from the moment when we introduce desire, libido, the unconscious into the political field, everything gets complicated: because libidinal inversions, fascist *and* revolutionary, racist *and* antiracist, get mixed up and distributed in the same person, creating new conditions that allow the analysis of the *entanglements* of desire, beyond all reference to appearance, mystification, or betrayal.†

There isn't, there can't be, any pretense of purifying the political subject, except at the risk of normalization, oppression, and reproduction of new exclusions. The FHAR activists affirmed a bad political subject, a subject with faults, who is in no way purely revolutionary. A pure (clean) revolution has ceased to be an anal revolution.

† [Translation worded in consultation with French original. There is good reason to think this was Gilles Deleuze's anonymous contribution to the issue.]

Anal Educastration: Infancy, Masturbation, and Writing

In 1974, two years after the appearance of *Homosexual Desire*, René Schérer, friend and lover of Hocquenghem, published *Emile Perversi* [Emile Perverted; Spanish translation's title translates to *Perverted Pedagogy*], certainly one of the most radical and controversial texts of French post-structuralism. In Schérer's texts, the subject "child" was subjected to the same process of deconstruction to which the political aggregates "woman" and "homosexual" had been subjected (by Simone de Beauvoir and Hocquenghem respectively). The child appears here as a biopolitically constructed artifact that allows the production and normalization of the adult. If de Beauvoir had affirmed that one is not born a woman, we could even more radically say with Schérer: "One is not born a child."[‡] For Schérer, Guy Hocquenghem and the FHAR activists, the educational system is the particular apparatus that produces the child, and it does so through a singular political operation: the de-sexualization of the infantile body and the disqualification of its affects.[§]

Childhood is not a pre-political state, but on the contrary, a moment in which biopolitical apparatuses function in the most despotic and silent way on the body. The first goal of the educational project is the privatization of

‡ [In the Spanish, Preciado adds here that the French *enfant* (like the English *child*) has no gender, unlike Spanish *niño*, *niña*. For the same reason the translation refers to the child as "they" further on. —T.N.]

§ The question of childhood and child sexuality, so central to the texts of Hocquenghem and the FHAR, seem like a new taboo in the social sciences and even in contemporary queer critique. Only a few authors such as Steven Angelides or Lee Edelman work today on the "political chronology" of the body.

the anus (sphincter control), bringing about a biopolitical redesign of the body in which certain zones are radically excluded from libidinal economy. Later comes repression of masturbation, learning reading and writing, and insertion into the “heterosexual machine”. The repression of masturbation that extends from the 17th century until today had as its object to free the child from a danger anterior to any social relation, a danger in which their own body, feelings, and imagination are its worst enemies, so as to insert their libidinal energies into the circuit of production and reproduction of capital.

There is, Schérer reveals, a structural relation between childhood and writing. Historically, the appearance of childhood coincided with that of the printing press and the culture of the book. Access to reading as a technique of subjectivation marks the difference between two kinds of bodies: infants, or bodies-without-text, and adults, who can be accessed in a virtual fashion through reading and writing. Where there was masturbation, there will be learning reading and writing, the rhythmic monitoring of classes, the discipline of the body, enclosure and repetition of tasks: the hand that caressed the body now grasps an instrument with which the body leaves a trace and becomes a subject. Here we are before a paradoxical repressive incitement: it is not so much about eliminating masturbation, as about being able, through control and privatization of the practices of production of auto-erotic pleasure, to construct a new sexual subject, individualized and self-conscious, that perceives itself as the container of a sexual identity and feels itself to be a danger to itself. That is how we learn to be afraid of our bodies, to forget that we have an anus, and to claim an identity.

In educational institutions and the family, this desexualization takes on the specific form of the repression of homosexuality. Examining the norms that govern the French educational system, the FHAR stated: “Pedagogy

is a heteronormative discipline” aimed at transforming the body into a heterosexual subject. But homosexual desire is not completely repressed; it is rather replaced, at once substituted and veiled, by the establishment of a series of homoerotic relations of camaraderie that are, from the point of view of Françoise d’Eaubonne or Delphy’s feminist critique, the basis of the simultaneous rejection of femininity and passivity. To close up the anus is to defeminize the body. This is the genitopolitical regime that d’Eaubonne calls phallocratic. It’s not a matter of men having penises and women not having them; it’s a matter of men presenting themselves as if they had no anus. The problem does not come from an eventual penis envy in the bodies known as “women”, but from the negation of the anus in those bodies thought of as “masculine”. To learn, and to teach (to be heterosexual), therefore, it is necessary to close up the anus, to avoid passivity. The relation of learning must be a transference of virile knowledge.

Girl, Lesbian, Total Anus

But where does this leave the hollow viscera? Where does this leave the girl’s anus?

From the start, in both Schérer’s *Perverted Pedagogy* as in Hocquenghem’s *Homosexual Desire* it’s about the Oedipus principle and the masculine anus, Emile and his relations with his preceptor. We are told that the educator—who is at once part of the panoptic surveillance apparatus and the beneficiary of a surplus of scopic pleasure—places a pencil in the hand of little Emile the masturbator—the same hand that up until now frenetically grasped his penis—and teaches him to write. But we know nothing about the girl, who neither has a penis nor seems to masturbate. So the girl (hollow viscera, lesbian,

butch) seems to fall out of the masturbation-writing-education circuit that masculine pedagogy presides over. What sometimes seems to escape these otherwise precise and provocative analyses is that the educational institution is above all, to say it with Teresa de Lauretis, a “political industry of gendering” bodies. If there is, as Schérer points out, de-sexualization, or heterosexual normalization of the body, as Hocquenghem says, it is above all thanks to and through the production of normative masculinity and femininity. We could say, with Judith Butler and Deborah Britzman, that the school (and by extension the university, the museum, the library, the archive...) is a highly performative space where the student’s body (dermal tube more than boy or girl) learns, practices, and tests discursive, aesthetic, and biopolitical models of gender normality and deviance.

The shift that Butler operates, from an ontology of sex (sex as anatomy and essence) to a performative gender (gender as cultural and historical practice) invites us to think about sexual and gender identities as disciplinary tactics, as effects of a pedagogical process of gendering, a process of incorporation of norms through coercive repetitions that hide their historical and contingent dimension and present themselves as natural. Before the educational space as a medium in which institutionalized heterosexuality constitutes the norm of any possible assemblage, the queer body (neither masculine nor feminine, neither child nor adult, neither human nor animal) is the one that constructs itself as a resistant subject and contests this process of pedagogical normalization, finding escape hatches that allow for deviant assemblages. Here queer means neither a sexual practice nor a sexual identity, but rather the effect of a set of forces of oppression and resistance, on the one hand, and a space of empowerment and revolutionary mobilization on the other.

Thirty years after the publication of *Homosexual Desire* and *Perverted Pedagogy*, intersexual movements dealt the final blow to the traditional sex/gender system, exposing the technopolitical apparatuses through which the normality of sexual difference is constructed in childhood. As Susan Kessler's studies (today corroborated by the critical practices of intersexual activists such as Cheryl Chase and Mauro Cabral) have shown, if the intersexual body is operated on and mutilated in infancy, it is precisely because the institutions of socialization (family, school, local and state administrations...) can't deal with a body that puts into question the binary categories of sex and gender with which they work. In rejecting the normative assignment of masculine or feminine sex, the intersexual body is situated at the limit of the human: from an institutional point of view, it has neither face nor name—it is simply an anus.

Educational institutions operate here as genuine technologies of normalization of sex and gender. Today transgender and transsexual critics, such as Del LaGrace Volcano, Dean Spade and Pat Califia, insist that there is a coercive continuity between control of the cultural apparatuses of sexual reproduction and filiation and the normalization of educational models of cultural reproduction. An anal revolution to come will have to work out an educational model in which it is possible to collectively render explicit the apparatuses that construct deviant minorities (of class, race, religion, gender, sexuality, age...) as well as oppositional history, dissident narratives, and the programs of resistance that make possible the survival of these abject subjects of history.

The history of normalization, of reading, writing, and their pedagogy, is not a history of signs. These are not hermeneutics, but rather the histories of bodies, processes of subjectivating incorporation of knowledge that determine potentials for action. Biopolitically, adulthood

is just this: the age of the book and the closed anus. We could ask, with Hocquenghem, if it is possible to read and write with an open anus, and what an anal writing and reading would be like.

What is clear is that the censorship that, in France, followed the publication of Hocquenghem, Schérer, and the FHAR's texts on "love for boys" was the symptom of a mutation in the medical-juridical categories with which the West has modeled desire and the production of the species. The strategies of knowledge and control that lead to social stigmatization or criminalization were shifting from the nineteenth century figure of the homosexual, absorbed and normalized by "gay culture", towards the figure of the pedophile as the new limit of the human.[†] With Hocquenghem and Schérer, we have to ask ourselves: what does pedophilia mean? What is the political relation between the constructs of age and sexuality? What is the social machine embodied in pedophilia? What does this pedophilic machine produce and consume? What collective pleasure do we get from the sexualization of childhood? What is the sublimated desire behind the paranoid delirium about pedophilia? Could it be fear at recognizing collective pedophilic desires that are codified and territorialized through the family institution, which makes us see and invent the pedophile as the figure of the abject? What is pedophilic in the "desire to have a child"? About the promotion of youthful body and its technological reconstruction?

In the texts published in 1973 in *Recherches*, the FHAR's language opened up a new political direction.[‡] A

† Transgenerational sex (together with necrophilia, for example) is the only category that continues to be the object of legal repression since 1979 in democratic European societies.

‡ The articles on "pedophilia" were one of the reasons for the journal being censored; they are still not available today in the digital reissues of *Three Million Perverts*.

collective of pederastic boys speaks. It is not a movement of adults that seek to “protect” minors from the dangers of sexuality or “initiate” them into pleasure, but rather a movement of minors that seek to redefine the limits of their bodies, to speak of their own sexuality, to make decisions on pleasure and the ways of producing and regulating it.

The FHAR has formed a committee of minors who say: we don’t want guys to hit on us, to force us to make love, as if we were the sexual object of pederasts, of Platonic, pedagogical, reactionary pederasty. The liberation of school depends on freedom from that kind of pederast. This liberation movement is also a movement of minors against adult pederasts.

Anal Utopia

The first days of the revolution were not many, but they taught us some lessons. Here they are; these are some (only some) of the surprises that the collective use of the anus affords. Revolutionary anal virtues, one could say, were it not for the risk of seeing them transformed into Anal Facebook or MyAnuSpace.

1. The anus has neither sex nor gender; like the hand, it escapes the rhetoric of sexual difference. Situated in the rear and inferior part of the body, the anus also erases the personalizing and privatizing differences of the face. The anus challenges the logic of identification of the masculine and the feminine. There is no division of the world into two. The anus is a post-identitarian organ: “Any social use of the anus, apart from its sublimated use, creates the risk of the loss of identity” (101). Rejecting

sexual difference and the anthropomorphic logic of the face and the genital, the anus (and its other extreme, the mouth) establishes the basis for an inalienable sexual equality: every body (human or animal) is first and above all an anus. Neither penis nor vagina, but oral-anal tube. In the horizon of the post-human sexual democracy is the anus, as orgasmic cavity and receptive non-reproductive muscle, shared by all.

2. The anus is a bioport. This is not simply about a symbol or a metaphor; it is an insertion port through which a body is open and exposed to another or others. It is that portal dimension that demands, for the masculine heterosexual body, anal castration: everything that is socially feminine could enter and pollute the masculine body through the anus, leaving uncovered his status as equal to any other body. The presence of the anus (even a castrated one) in a body with a biopenetrator dissolves the opposition between hetero and homosexual, between active and passive, penetrator and penetrated. It displaces sexuality from the penetrating penis to the receptive anus, thus erasing the segregative lines of gender, sex, and sexuality.
3. The anus functions as the zero point from which an operation of deterritorialization of the heterosexual body could begin, or, in other words, of the degenitalization of sexuality reduced to penis-vagina penetration. It's not about making the anus into a new center, but rather setting into motion a process of de-hierarchization and decentralization that would make of any other organ, orifice, or pore, a possible anal bioport. Thus a set of practices unfolds here that are irreducible to masculine/ feminine, homo/ hetero identities: enemas, dilation, lubrication,

penetration with the tongue, fist, or dildo... The anal machine rises up before the heterosexual machine. The non-hierarchical connection of the organs, the public redistribution of pleasure, and the communization of the anus all announce a “sexual communism” (111) to come.

4. Historically the anus has been contained as an abject organ, never clean enough, never quiet enough. It neither is nor can be politically correct. The anus does not produce, or rather it only produces trash, detritus. No production of profits or surplus value may be expected of this organ: neither sperm nor egg nor sexual reproduction. Only shit. It is the exalted place of ecological non-production. Or better, the escape hatch through which capital may escape and return to the earth, turned into humus. Although it is imaginable for the strategies of capital production to eventually reterritorialize anal pleasure, they would have to be ready to be transformed into shit.
5. Non-reappropriable organs (bio as well as techno-protheses) in heterosexual libidinal economy are anal: dildos, nasal and oral orifices, implants, pre-existing cuts or hollows or those produced with the intention of being penetrated. The vagina that does not procreate, that is extracted from the heterosexual machine, ceases to be a “hollow viscera” that tries to get “filled up” to become rather an organ with anal characteristics. Thus Monique Wittig’s expression: “Lesbians do not have vaginas.” In the same way, from a strictly biopolitical point of view, and within the economy of the sexual reproduction of the species, fags do not have penises, because they do not penetrate vaginas (but rather anuses, mouths...)

bædan

All that's left is for me to wish you the best: **Communize your anus.** The weapon is modest, but the possibility of action is close by—and infinite. ~~✿~~

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For a Friend

Sophia and Neve

Chris was unstoppable. He was a queer and a genius. He knew when to hold back and when to pounce—oscillating between hermetic scholar and exuberant, extrovert communitarian. If you told him how to get there, he'd arrive at any "emancipatory celebration" with eyes aglow. Recently that glow went out.

He struggled with demons all too familiar: the mind. The flip side of genius is desire. Chris wanted so much; he longed for things long lost from our collective imaginary. Though he was too shy to share it, in his writing we find a necessary corrective to many of the unfortunate directions in which sexual politics have pointed in the past four decades. Chris' humor cuts through the absurdity and contradictions inherent in the identitarian and cybernetic traps of thinking sexuality in the present; a brilliant and hilarious poetics for the age of Facebook, Tumblr and Grindr. Posed in terms of the two main inquiries of his piece: "First, why have theoretical elaborations of the body—as gendered, racialized, pathologized, sexualized etc.—been so central to philosophical projects which have sought to abandon the critique of capitalism as the objective totality structuring human life? Second, why have these accounts been so crucial for political analyses on the Left seeking to deny the subjective project of transforming the world and creating a new humanity?"

He held a spark of belief in a subversive dimension that remains in queerness—something irreducible to “sexual liberation” or “sexual freedom”—which is the drive for connection with the Other and the Stranger; the drive to imagine all of our relations otherwise; the drive to annihilate those prisons of language and taboo that chain us to the present. Theory, while crucial to Chris’ project, was inseparable from the other means by which he sought to reveal this possibility. Wherever Chris found himself—whether dancing at occupations, in squats or the close quarters of dives, on the front lines of street fights, holding court in conversations spilling into all hours of the night—he was a partisan of the chance for connection. When dreaming or meditating or painting he was grasping at the utopia immanent to these moments.

His perceptive qualities as a friend extended into his relationship with the world around him. What we experience as a noxious drought he felt so deeply, like his own body was dry. The impending ecological disaster was the ground on which his thinking stood. For him, this meant building a multi-generational family that defied the Family and living as a commune. While he found no restorative hope inside capitalism, he wanted all the best for his people. Capitalism for him named a loss of potential, a loss of connection, a severance. The antinomies between nature and culture as they played out in his life were the fixed, chaotic, capitalist world that drove him crazy against the peaceful garden he tended spiritually. And he kept a beautiful garden.

These times are marked by an overwhelming sense of meaninglessness and futility. We don't think that queer people are more subject to it; rather that we maybe have a better vantage point—things are more apparent, clearer. A huge part of our separation from meaning is related to (or maybe is just another way of talking about) our separation from connection, from the world around us and from each other. Our bodies are fleshy vehicles for connecting to and participating in mutual perception of the world around us and of other life. The first violent act of this society is to sever us from this potential, to limit the ways we can be in the world. If the answers we've been given as to where we might find meaning ring empty, if we can't stake any hope in a future, and if we can accept that there is no "reclaiming" or "reconstruction" of what's been lost, then all we really have is a life or death struggle to live joyfully. We wager that the only meaning we may ever really unearth is in the enjoyment we can take from this life. Not the crass enjoyment of consumption and decadence (after all, isn't this just an inversion of the poverty that most of us grew up with?), but instead the enjoyment that comes from experimentation with connection and of our capacities within it.

The days after Chris' suicide left me dwelling in a dark place—a place more nihilistic than where I usually let myself go to. In that place I found a great charge, a certain intensity—an urgency to live a life of enjoyment, to enjoy that life with the people I love, and to destroy the world that would get in our way. Everything buzzed with this urgency. In that spirit of hostility to this world of banality, and out of enduring love for those who

refuse it, we're publishing these excerpts of "The Antinomies of Sexual Discourse." Beyond the overlapping themes in Bædan and "Antinomies," there is also, between us, a shared desire to confront the self-imposed traps of queer theory and the discourses of "sexual liberation." In rereading his words, we find ourselves missing Chris and wishing he was here to debate the tensions in our positions. In his final note he wrote: "in death I'll find the peace I never could in life." So those of us left behind now fight to destroy a life that offers no respite or rest. Despite the inability to make whole what's been lost, there remains a magic in words which allows us to keep him alongside us as we turn to face what lies outside.



The Antinomies of Sexual Discourse

(excerpts)

in memoriam Christopher Chitty

TO THE EXTENT THAT OUR LIVES ARE BOMBARDED, MINUTE by minute, with advertising come-ons, the latest lyrical euphemism for a sexual act and gossip of the affair of some acquaintance or media superstar, and to the extent that the critique of sexuality has become thoroughly and institutionally routinized, one is tempted to state an obvious fact: *sex has become excruciatingly banal*. Sexual practices once considered socially marginal or extreme have become the topic of a sort of bored, vapid cultural chatter and empty boxes on the growing political checklist of diverse persons in need of “tolerance”. The obsessional compulsion to speak or listen to a constant stream of sexual discourse might be a defining feature of our cultural moment in the wake of the 1960s social movements which contested the established sexual order and social conformism of post-war culture in American and European societies, suggesting that the simple wisdom of world-weary cosmopolitans—that “so little is new under the sun”—misses something essential about this cultural form and the historical conditions for its emergence. In spite of its banality, why does sex persist as an object for collective cultural enthrallment?

Perhaps contemporary sexual discourse has assumed the dimensions of what Peter Sloterdijk has called “cynical reason”, an enlightened form of false consciousness which eludes traditional modes of ideological critique. At first blush, this concept seems to cast some light on many

experiences that one may encounter in everyday life. How many of us have found ourselves trapped in an amorous relationship, rehearsing a collection of clichéd lines about fidelity or romantic interest, which we know all too well maintain a dubious correspondence to reality, as if we were the first ones to have such experiences? How many of us have then experienced the heartache when such lofty aspirations come to grief upon the harsh reality of desire, as if it were a profound or singular disappointment? It strikes me that there are, however, many features of the contemporary cultural experience of sexual desire that escape this admittedly suggestive critique of the “as if” of cynical reason. It remains to be explained how the “liberation” of human sexuality, which may turn out to be a new form of social domination in its own right, ever became confounded with human emancipation as such or, at the very least, some cheap substitute for the latter. This problem presents two central questions for the present inquiry. First, why have theoretical elaborations of the body—as gendered, racialized, pathologized, sexualized etc.—been so central to philosophical projects which have sought to abandon the critique of capitalism as the objective totality structuring human life? Second, why have these accounts been so crucial for political analyses on the Left seeking to deny the subjective project of transforming the world and creating a new humanity?

The above provocations demand an account not only of the reification of sexual desire[†] but also of the way in which what was once a mere (but by no means unproblematic) opposition between nature and culture has now become an antinomy in which the same underlying social reality is experienced simultaneously as opposites—and

† On this note see Kevin Floyd’s recent attempt to synthesize Marxism with queer theory, *Reification of Desire: Towards a Queer Marxism* (2009).

an exploration of the way in which discourses on sex and sexuality constitute the *locus classicus* of this field of antinomic thought about nature and culture. It is only by historicizing these antinomies of sexual discourse as internal to a late and unsettling stage of capitalism (of the “cultural dominant” or “postmodernity” in which all pre-capitalist forms of life have been eliminated and collective human activity shapes the entirety of the world down to the vicissitudes of sexual desire) that the category of nature itself can be said to have been liquidated from our cognitive map, also draining its opposite term, culture, of its previous significance or rather, dissolving the cultural into the mode of production of late capitalism in general where the predominant form of work is widely considered to be “immaterial” and the service sector employs the vast majority of the workforce in core capitalist countries. Put simply, at stake in this antinomy between nature and culture, in which both threaten to vanish into the horizon of the unthinkable, is also that old dialectic between humans and nature, the category of labor itself, leaving us with uncertain prospects for some new, emergent political subject. [...]

It is important to remember that the sexual liberation movements of the West occurred at the height of the post-war economic boom. Despite tendencies otherwise, these movements may have given us the terminal point of the libidinal projections of bourgeois fantasy and Utopian Socialists centuries before: the prostitution of our bodies and minds to the impersonal logic of markets. However, to relinquish the kernel of hope that capitalism really contains the new society “in the womb of the old” in abandoning the tired husk of this old-fashioned metaphor strikes me as the central political peril of the present age in which our society threatens the human and ecological future of the planet with disaster. If we can agree upon this fact, then we must proceed to think the twin crises of sex and

the family as sowing the seeds of psychic lack and social dependency out of which a new garden of human relations could be made to flourish. We cannot yet grasp the future subject who would tend this garden or what form the new society would assume, for the present society is plagued with antinomic thoughts, crowding our perspective and confusing our political orientations. The once clear articulation of a class or sexual standpoint from which the totality of capitalism could be understood, indeed *had* to be understood for that class or sexual standpoint to assert herself, appears to have vanished in the overgrown thicket of postmodernity, where we are left with a great many articulations of identity positions with partial claims on social justice, but no central antagonism structuring the political field.

Antinomies of Time

Our period of capitalism can be differentiated from previous capitalist societies by tracing the developments of multinational corporations, a global market and division of labor, mass consumption and the centrality of finance capital in the global economic system [...] Discourses on sex have not been articulated from a position outside or above this history of capitalism and its attendant set of contradictions; rather, they have taken shape and generated a set of philosophical objects within the very unfolding of this history. At first glance, it is difficult to situate sexual discourse within this impersonal global economic system. As Fredric Jameson has pointed out, the totality of this new period of capitalism and its spatial and temporal horizons have become increasingly difficult to cognitively map, for the very reason that it is precisely the spatial division between inside and outside and our sense

of history as such that are lost under late capitalism. In his influential essay “Periodizing the 60s”, Jameson links the development of the culture industry in the First World and the Green Revolution in Third World agriculture, as

a process in which the last surviving internal and external zones of precapitalism—the last vestiges of non-commodified or traditional space within and outside the advanced world—are now ultimately penetrated and colonized in their turn. Late capitalism can therefore be described as the moment in which the last vestiges of Nature which survived on into classical capitalism are at length eliminated: namely the third world and the unconscious.

We are now confronting a rising tide of joblessness in advanced capitalist nations, the appearance of shanty towns in California, and a so-called surplus population of one billion living in slums throughout what is now called the “global south”. Late capitalism’s ubiquitous culture industry has also progressively pillaged the repository of our drives and desires in fashioning a global consumer society through a process of both liberation and domination that primarily appears to us in the reified form of sex and the family in crisis. [...]

Elementary structures of social power have fallen apart within the present post-colonial system of social power, where the culture industry has achieved a global, if not exactly universal, influence, eliminating the opposition between nature and culture itself, or rather, turning this into an antinomy. [...] The very principle of natural law espoused by every variation of social contract theory, which established the legitimacy of bourgeois liberal states, has been exposed as a fiction by the unparalleled number of stateless persons, for whom this present system can only find a place *in camps*. Likewise the immigrants arriving upon the shores of advanced capitalist countries

from the global south discover that it is only by surrendering their “natural rights,” by risking the precarious position of being a *sans papier* and exposing themselves to the caprice of power without legal protections, that they can find work in these States.

Our treatment of the sexual relationship begins to confront a set of difficulties concerning its periodization as a mental category, for we are presented with a fundamental antinomy of postmodernity between temporal continuity with the past and impassable historical lacunae. We need only think of the contemporary conviction of evangelical Christians that the Biblical account of kinship among Semitic nomads (who for instance, practiced polygamy) and the allegorical figures of Adam and Eve in the Judaic creation myth (which, if read literally, implies some form of primal incest between the first mother and her sons or between brothers and sisters) provide the basis for a defense of the modern institution of monogamous marriage. All the while, these same Christians doggedly assert that the Christ figure inaugurates a sort of epistemic break between “Old Testament” and “New Testament” onto-theological orders, invalidating the Mosaic law supporting the institution of polygamy. The recently proposed death penalty for convicted homosexuals in Uganda, resulting from decades of American evangelism in this region, is one symptom of this “globalized” antinomy; that of Thabo Mbeki’s catastrophic AIDS denialism for nearly two decades in South Africa is another.

This temporal antinomy is not isolated to Christian thought, however, and it bears noting that although Foucault in *L’usage des plaisirs* (1984) insists upon the fact that the Ancient Greeks had no category for thinking sexuality as such, this notion being a thoroughly modern invention, his analysis of *aphrodisia* relies nevertheless upon the historical findings of Sir Kenneth Dover’s 1978

that Greek culture maintained a “sympathetic response to the open expression of homosexual desire in words and behavior.” The modern notion of human sexuality is simultaneously experienced as a natural transhistorical category of social reality and as a particular configuration of discourse and political power punctuated by epistemological breaks.

The AIDS epidemic presents us with a postmodern transformation of our collective being towards death, which for Heidegger appeared as a purely contemplative dimension of *Dasein*. AIDS has inaugurated an antinomy at the heart of our most fundamental notion of temporality, as a crisis of reproductive futurity in which birth, coming into being, is simultaneously experienced as death, passing away. We need only think of the fact that children are daily born with this disease to mothers in Africa who will shortly die, leaving behind a future generation of orphans in its wake. In advanced capitalist societies, queer theory has responded to this crisis of temporality not by fostering concrete political projects, but by politicizing reason itself with the so-called anti-social critique. Leo Bersani, for instance, has even gone so far as to suggest that although “nothing useful can come from the practice,” “bug chasing” and “gift giving” among gay men who deliberately seek HIV seroconversion might be “interpreted as a mode of ascetic spirituality.” An “implicit critique,” he writes, of “ego-driven intimacy,” and the practice may serve as a model of “pure love.” In another register, Lee Edelman proposes in his recent monograph *No Future* that queers have a political imperative to self-consciously embody the death drive, to assume the mantle of abortion-advocating opponents of heterosexual reproductive futurity, under the banner of Edelman’s call to arms: “Fuck the children!” Queers must, according to this analysis, ironically become the monsters that heterosexuals fear most. During roughly the same period, HIV-infection rates among

men who have sex with men (the only group for whom infection rates are still increasing in the US) increased 11% nationally, with the sharpest increases among young men, who are racial minorities and economically disadvantaged (“Cases of HIV infection and AIDS in the United States and Dependent Areas, 2005” CDC, June 2007). By refusing the possibility of an alternative future to that of reproduction, “No Future” reflects the impasse of the bourgeois family’s reproductive futurity, which is unable to imagine offspring that are “unlike them.” Thus, the politics most anti-social and oppositional to “marriage and family” is nothing other than the oppositional term within an antinomy producing this whole field of problems. The powerful riptide of increasing rates of HIV and the prospects for an abortive future of humanity seem far too high a price to pay for such political vacuity and intellectual indulgence. But the temporal antinomy remains, and we must also begin to ask ourselves how any “safer sex” campaign could possibly compete with the multi-billion dollar bareback porn industry, which has always constituted the majority of straight porn, but which now disturbingly constitutes over 70% of all gay porn and is literally being downloaded into gay men’s fantasy structures, breaking a decades long industry taboo on shooting gay porn without condoms.

With broken historical links to pre-capitalist forms of life and uncertain ground for the articulation of some natural sexual desire outside the determinants of capitalist society, our relation to and discourse on sex is much more unsettling than the thesis of cynical reason suggests, for we are confronted with a social reality in which sexual desire has itself been alienated into a discursive, spectacular machine whose very function is to flirt with mass death through the affirmation of diverse forms of sexual freedom. This was the essential insight of Michel Foucault’s pathbreaking 1976 study *Volonté de savoir* and

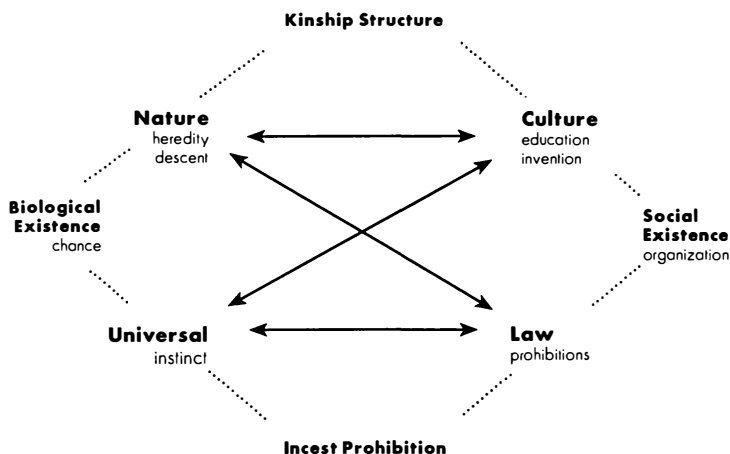


Figure 1. The Elementary Structure of Social Power

the conceptual core of his case for a “biopolitical” stage of capitalist society. His argument for the proximity of our own sexual discourse to that of the Victorians we—*nous autres, victoriens*[†]—are so fond of denouncing has now been abandoned by the self-proclaimed inheritors of his project, who have constructed a veritable postmodern *scientia sexualis* of their own in which a new antinomic formalization of desire has taken shape. It is here that the negative, prohibitive function of the sexual taboo can neither be considered to be the operative elementary principle of postmodern cultural production nor its predominant form of social domination, as it was once conceived

† “We, Victorians” is the best translation of this first section heading of *Volonté de savoir*, which is completely butchered in Robert Hurley’s translation, “We ‘other Victorians’” (9; compare to *History of Sexuality Vol. 1: An Introduction*, 3). *Nous autres*, like its opposite term *vous autres*, is an emphatic we, denoting the enunciative position of those who are speaking, *vous autres* could be rendered with the colloquial “you people.” All translations from this work are my own.

by sociological thought in the tradition stretching from Émile Durkheim to Claude Lévi-Strauss.

Thus we can see a postmodern model of social power emerging, with politics appearing to us in the succinct formulation of Carl Schmitt's friend/enemy opposition, which implies Foucault's formulation of the opposition between sex and violence. Thus, I present the following Greimas rectangle as a representation of this new set of oppositions, affinities and contradictions.

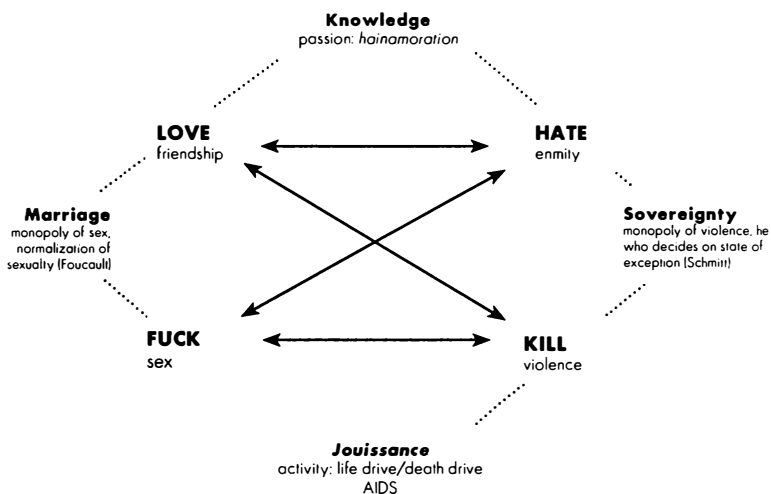


Figure 2. The Biopolitical Structure of Social Power[†]

This biopolitical model of social power replaces the law of the sexual taboo, which was also the basis of Freud's Oedipal schema, with a play of force relations which constitute

† [See Figure 1, showing the foundational elements of social organization which center on exogamy and the incest taboo, as proposed by Claude Lévi-Strauss. While we chose not to include his engagement with Lévi-Strauss, we include both figures for comparison. (An overlapping engagement with Lévi-Strauss, via Gayle Rubin, appears in "Against the Gendered Nightmare" in *Bædan* 2.) —E.N.]

the organizational principle of postmodern societies. It provides both a model of social power without law and a concept of history which corresponds to the teaching of Walter Benjamin's eighth thesis in "On the Concept of History", "that the 'emergency situation' in which we live is the rule". Power would therefore be considered as a productive technology rather than as a prohibitive law and finds a worthy echo in Marx's account of the struggle over the length of the working day, which we might remember required a transforming of the forces of production and the merciless submission of the human body, psyche and temporal rhythms to those of the "infernal machine". It also finds an echo in Lacan's notion of *jouissance*. In other words, we live in a society in which our collective desires are destroying both the planet and the future of humanity, all under the injunction to "Enjoy!" which constitutes the succinct foundational principle for everything from the consumer society—content with its bread and circuses—to the exercise and organization of violence and sex in the form of a state monopoly on violence and sovereign ability to decide upon states of exception on the one hand, and a normalization of human sexuality which insures the regulation and discipline of the population on the other.

Spatial Antinomies

Aside from a collection of parochial world views—which will, in their turn, be revealed to be less remnants of some pre-modern cultural standpoint, but rather as bona fide contemporary cultural recoils—the Western experience is presently marked by a profound extension of sexual freedom and pluralistic affirmations of sexual difference; on the other hand, the conformity of sexual desire, however

polymorphous it may be, with long-established social scripts has never been so pervasive. We need only think of the present political battle for same-sex marriage in the US and elsewhere, where those entrenched on either side of the barricades cling to the idea of “Family Values” as their most precious ideological weapon in service of their respective causes. During this most recent period of capitalist expansion, the media and advertising industries at the core of consumer societies have spread their influence and cultural products into the farthest reaches of the globe, generalizing this profound conformity of sexual desire to such an extent that to even speak of a “Western sexual experience” in the global, homogeneous cultural space of late capitalism seems ipso facto anachronistic. Are we not instead presented with a fundamental antinomy within the spatial logic of postmodernity between homogeneity and heterogeneity? This is the problem with which I would like to begin an exploration of what will be conceptualized as spatial antinomies of sexual discourse.

These antinomies are most pronounced in the fields of thought in which the social order of gender and sex has been most formally rationalized. For this reason, gender studies, queer theory and their interlocutors constitute something like the *locus classicus* of the thought forms we must examine. This body of thought burst onto the scene of the culture wars of America in the late 1980s, modulating: ontologically, between natural or biological essentialism on the one hand and constructivism or performativity based on speech act theory, on the other; politically, between critiques of normalization and attempts to universalize the normal; socially, between the body as a site of individuation within a fixed identity and as the fulcrum for fluid collective affinities and identifications.

In 1990, at a conference of prominent feminists hosted by the University of California Santa Cruz, Teresa de Lauretis coined the term “queer theory” as an attack on

various strains of radical feminism branded as “essentialist”, for insisting upon the gender binary as the primary organizational principle of social domination, and for supposedly ignoring the intersection of gender with sexuality and race. If it could be shown, as Judith Butler attempts in *Gender Trouble* (first published in 1990) that the supposed material basis of gender is not automatically generative of particular desires, or phenomenological determinations of gender, but rather determined in language, the problems of woman’s representation (or lack thereof) before the law, her agency as subject of history, could be sidestepped through a critique of the embodiment of gender, as being a fluid set of subject positions along a continuum within an impersonal network of power. Butler was severely criticized after the publication of this work for the reason that her vision of the linguistic production of fluid subject positions appeared to argue that gender was completely malleable, if not somehow voluntary. Thus, accompanying the New Economy ideology of a cybernetic mode of production capable of unleashing a wave of dynamic growth and explosive productive energies is the idea that *language* rather than some combination of nature and cultural domination produces gendered subjects. Donna Haraway’s 1985 “Cyborg Manifesto” explicitly—though perhaps ironically—makes this connection between a cybernetic mode of production and the destruction of seemingly natural gender binaries, prophetically registering this later shift within feminist theory and praxis to anything and everything thought to be “queer”.

Although the critique of essentialism destabilizes the reification of sexual and gendered social order as being natural, it also realizes a different form of reification. The drive of the most radical strains of queer theory to disrupt all binary oppositions has developed an infinitely regressive tendency towards discovering ever more marginalized intersections of gender and sexuality. With the theory of

the production of gendered subjects through language, the “ghostly objectivity” of the commodity has penetrated the very depths of the body and sex, which are now considered—symptomatically—to be “plastic”. This is the implicit argument of de Lauretis’ later rejection of the very body of thought which she helped to found when she wrote in 1994 that queer theory “has very quickly become a conceptually vacuous creature of the publishing industry.” Michel Foucault once lambasted the hypothesis that the West has been marked by a long history of sexual suppression and the corresponding narrative of a progressive lifting of prohibitions on diverse expressions of sexuality. He writes in his 1976 work *Volonté de savoir*, “Perhaps no other type of society has ever accumulated—and over such a relatively short history—so many discourses on sex [...] Concerning sex, the most long-winded and most impatient of societies may be our own.” His conclusion? “The irony of this apparatus: it makes us believe our ‘liberation’ is at stake.” If the primary mode by which power is exercised over sex is not through silence and suppression but rather through the multiplication of polyvalent discourses on sex, the project of queer theory to pluralistically affirm and speak upon diverse sexualities represents a profound extension of this apparatus of power into ever more domains, to capture ever more subjectivities within the positive, productive mechanisms of power that compel us to speak about sex. A new formalization of desire has taken shape, in which the objects and subjects of sexual desire are coded by linguistic sequences—and the trope of “codes”, their deciphering, their reproduction and disruption abound in this literature—which are thought to determine subjects in the way that binary code produces the Internet.

On the other hand, the bestiary of biological essentialism has given us a whole host of figures: from gay penguins at the San Francisco Zoo to sets of bio-identical gay

twins, which are all used as support for the hypothesis that homosexuality is a natural biological fact. We might doubt whether or not a gene actually codes for social behavior, or whether penguin sociality has anything to do with that of humans. We may point out to these scientists (many of whom are well-intentioned homosexuals) that scientific facts have varied historically, supporting contradictory conclusions in different epochs, and we might even stress upon them the dark socio-political history of biological essentialism (associated with eugenics movements of one kind or another); however, the imperative to prove that homosexuality is natural or normal is also an attempt to prove that it is not a choice, that the objects of our desire are “out of our control.” In other words: an ideological reflection of the way in which capitalism shapes our lives through impersonal forces. The truth of this ideology is as a critique of the more voluntarist strands of queer theory. If geneticists are ever able to conclusively identify a “gay gene” with genetic screening or even manipulate its phenotypic expression, one can only wonder what the market would do with this fact.

Though we may agree that sexuality and gender are socially constructed, we must acknowledge that the very means of constructing it otherwise—or indeed disrupting the totality of the gendered and sexual social order—are out of our hands, and that no amount of “micro-politics” will ever change the lived daily reality of socially overdetermined biological sex, or the differential social burdens foisted upon biologically sexed bodies. We need only think of the way in which birth control has historically regulated and pathologized the female pole of the sexual relationship and the way in which this order of things—tinkering with women’s hormonal balances, surgically implanting intrauterine devices which can cause severe scarring and infertility, the targeting of women as carriers in venereal disease campaigns, not to mention abortion—appears to

us as natural; whereas proposals to regulate the male pole, such as recommending vasectomies as a normal course of medical care for all men and universal access to a reversal of the procedure, are labeled heavy-handed or fascist. The assertion of biological essentialism also shares with queer theory the assumption that gender and sexuality are determined by a sequence of code; whether this code is believed to be a particular sequence of proteins in human DNA passed down through the generation of our species or a codification of language, passed down historically through culture, fixing individuals into subject positions, both perspectives articulate a human social reality shaped by forces which escape our immediate control.

This field of antinomic thought has generated a central political contradiction between projects to universalize the normal and a politics of opposition to normalization. In a 1993 article for *The New Republic*, Andrew Sullivan set the national post-AIDS gay agenda as an explicit campaign for normality through an extension of the right to marry, the right to serve in the military and the right to adopt children. [...] Queer theory's ontological thesis of non-essentialized sexual fluidity is paradoxically shared by the proponents of Evangelical Christian conversion therapy, but these latter derive far more radical political programs from this conviction than the former, and both will soon be steamrolled by the engine of progressive social tendencies in the US and will likely dissolve along with the fringe social movements that spawned them. Indeed, the normalization that queer theory opposes is a far weaker form of social power, and their theorization of a feeble "micro-politics" of resistance is only possible in a political field no longer structured by a primary class antagonism. The growing wave of joblessness across the advanced capitalist world and among its youth in particular—who have in the span of months symptomatically transitioned from the hopeful media label "Millenials"

to the despairing “The Lost Generation”—has already begun to eclipse the international headlines.

We live in a society that largely thinks of gender and sexuality as socially constructed along a continuum with diverse cultural expressions, but we can no longer conceive of how we would transform the present society into one rooted in different forms of human relations founded upon neither impersonal sex nor the old institution of marriage and family. In “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat”, Lukács writes in a cautionary tone:

The reified world appears henceforth quite definitively—and in philosophy, under the spotlight of “criticism” it is potentiated still further—as the only possible world, the only conceptually accessible, comprehensible world vouchsafed to us humans. Whether this gives rise to ecstasy, resignation or despair, whether we search for a path leading to “life” via irrational mystical experience, this will do absolutely nothing to modify the situation as it is in fact.

Because sex constitutes one of the most socially intense sites of the old antinomy between subject and object, perhaps, as the point of indistinction within this old opposition, the body has been central to the postmodern project to reject or sidestep the philosophical tradition of thought on the subject capable of transforming the world; it is for this reason also central to analyses that have abandoned the starting point of capitalism as the closed, objective totality structuring human life.

Of all the grotesqueries of postmodernity, perhaps the most insidious is the general opinion that the transformation of our bodies into commodities, the total colonization of our desire and drives by impersonal market forces and our general enslavement to an economy of flesh, is thought to be evidence of our “liberation”.

[...]

Our Pornographic Attunement to the World and Utopian Desire

If Marx was able to conceptualize the work-relationship as a figure of universal prostitution, what is the analogous social form that would express this new field of antinomies around the body, sex, and language in our era? I would argue that our experience of the world, our postmodern attunement to the world—to borrow another concept from Heidegger—is profoundly pornographic. In our society of the image, pornography, which according to its Ancient Greek root (*pornographia*), is an illustration (*graphō*) in the place of (-ia) the prostitute (*pornē*), marks a fundamental transformation of this “oldest of professions” by the age of mechanical, and now cybernetic, reproduction. If Benjamin characterized the transformation of the work of art by film as a destruction of the object’s aura by the drive toward proximity, we might provocatively argue that the set of libidinal investments of late capitalism crystallized in this pornographic attunement to the world are marked by a profound quality of melancholic manic-depression for this lost aura of sex. What else could explain the stupefying repetition that marks pornography as such a simultaneously frenetic and saddening cultural product in its own right? The revenues of the \$13.6B US porn industry, the majority of which is generated on the other side of the Hollywood Hills in San Fernando Valley, CA, are larger than that of Hollywood, and also more than the revenues of professional football, basketball and baseball put together. Worldwide revenues from pornography exceed \$97B, more than the combined revenues of the top seven internet companies combined.† 37% of all internet

192 { † Google \$22.68B, Amazon \$21.69, eBay \$8.39, Yahoo \$6.53, AOL \$3.42B, Netflix \$1.59B, Earthlink \$775M, pulled from SEC filings.

downloads, one quarter of all internet searches, and 12% of all websites are pornographic. Situated within the culture industry, we might argue that the new cybernetic mode of production has, above all, given us a carnival of flesh unparalleled in its global proportions.

What are the formal and technical innovations of this cultural product over that of prostitution? With porn, the john is replaced by a camera. With the help of editing, the human body is cut up into thousands of visual planes, time is broken up into separate visual experiences of simultaneous action—here, the technique of the close-up permits glimpses, aspects, forensic fragments of the sexual act multiplying a visual experience into a sequence of moments and perspectives for potential erotic attachment. On the other side of this camera lens: millions. Here, its political aspect is revealed in mass participation as the radicalization of the utopian fantasy of radical human sexual community. Unlike the distinctively modern experiences of the cabaret, peepshow or pornographic movie theatre, this mass participation has become a private affair. With the aid of the camera (and now, cybernetic distribution networks) we do not sense the millions of other eyes glued to this shimmering screen, and one's singular experience of this image is not sullied by mass participation in it, permitting the libidinal fantasy of being the only one to have caught this act, to have it as one's own: a definitively postmodern moment in which the mass participates through the mediation of technologies that have an individuating function. Inclusion through separation. But the *jouissance* of sexual desire itself, as desire par excellence, has been alienated into this machine and because this loss is hidden from view—or perhaps hidden in plain sight—we don't even know how to mourn it. However, if there should be a lull in the bland synth music that plagues this cultural form, we may hear the distant sound of sirens outside the window of the room,

and in this intrusion of the outside world into our erotic experience, we might perhaps make the connection, however unconscious, between our collective social death and our detached sexual enjoyment. Melancholia.

Once the lost object is internalized, and here the object is precisely internalized through sexual fantasy and a subjective identification with the camera, the subject is structurally incapable of the “work of mourning” (*trauerarbeit*). [...] The melancholic’s lost object is half-alive, since lost but persisting. To overcome this form of social death requires a project to portray these fragments of lifeworlds as dead, to foreground the painful and hidden loss, rather than burying it from view.

Our pornographic attunement to the world, of which the antinomies of some new postmodern *scientia sexualis* are only the intellectual expression, may have pushed the libidinal fantasy of the Utopian Socialists criticized by Marx to its limits, realizing “the infinite degradation in which man exists for himself.” If late capitalism has succeeded to the point of transforming our psychic drives and structures of desire, we have also lost whatever sense of enchantment the sexual relationship once had. If it is rather impossible today to actually envision what one would desire in another world, a world beyond capitalism, this is because human desire itself cannot escape the totalizing determinations of capital. However, this “crisis of desire” may be the condition of possibility for demystifying this other world beyond capitalism, and demystifying sex itself, so that a thought about non-genital, non-appropriative human love can be formulated. The goal: to think this pornographic attunement to the world positively and negatively at once, to embrace the possibility that even in the most individuated, alienated experience of one’s sexual desire (masturbating alone, in front of a computer screen, in the darkness of a bedroom) there is still a deep drive towards proximity with strangers in their

most intimate moments (reality TV would here constitute a derived cultural form)—a psychic lack striving for the Other. Is there a better allegory for the furtive energies currently animating our political climate after the decline of Socialism and well-nigh burnout of Capitalism? What we need now more than ever is *not* more sexual freedom. We rather need practical and theoretical emancipation from sexuality. At the limit point of our alienation from one another lies the potential for communal being, for it within this pornographic attunement to the world that we might find each other once again, stripped of all sense of moral propriety and the sacredness of property that has become attached to the body as such. It is precisely this valence of the body considered as property, as private parts, as sex, that provides the ideological support for the legal and ethical proposition of all originary legal protections of private property. If such a thing as sexual desire itself has now been placed in common, how do we begin to liberate this potential?

Doubtlessly, such a project of discovering the lost lifeworlds which we are incapable of mourning and the task of representing the loss of any external position from which to evaluate our sex and our desire as natural (a task troubled by a deep seated cultural melancholia) are both essential to any attempt at understanding the utopian longings of the sexual liberation movements of the past, and perhaps, any contemporary project worthy of the name Utopia. [...]

I'd like to ask how it is that the failure of the project of sexual liberation, which has generated new modes of confinement through the extension of late capitalism into the very structure of sexual desire, might be the precondition for a politics beyond sexuality, for a desubjectifying or plebeianizing critical-diagnostic programme. If the antinomies which we have historicized above can be

read as symptomatic failures of our ability to imagine a future and alternative modes of human relations outside the contradictions of late capitalism, how do we move to consider the synchronic or institutional aspects of the movements assembled under the inadequate heading of “sexual liberation”? This question places us back, with sharper analytical tools, into our original problematic: the urgency of practical and theoretical emancipation from sexuality. I’d like to take this project in the direction of an analysis that could break with the antinomies of sexual discourse in a way that would enable a reactivation the social content of historical forms of life that once strove toward a future beyond the mere reproduction of the order of things. These forms of life (homosexuality, for example) could then be evaluated as standpoints from which the totality of capitalism has been directly challenged or called into question, rather than as challenges to some vague system of “normativity”. What alternative models to the family, re-organizations of urban and rural life, re-conceptualizations of pedagogy, and challenges to the prevailing form of human relationships in the military, political party and prisons were elaborated by the forms of life associated with homosexuality? Is the category of friendship a better standpoint from which to evaluate this history? The social content of these forms of life that I have in mind would be that which is not reducible to sex, those aspects of homosexuality which indeed, have very little to do with sexuality as such. ❧



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of Sexual Discourse



Correspondence

☞ Asterion

On nihilism, not-ness, and *jouissance*

☞ Brazo

On Afro-pessimism, binarism, and hybridity

☞ Kirilov

On Gilgamesh, gender, and domestication

☞ Nicholas

On utopia, secrecy, and dissonance

Dear Asterion,

Hello, I'm not sure if we've ever met, and even if we have, I'm writing to you as a stranger. I received a copy of your zine, *Very Bad Nihilist*, in the mail today and read it eagerly in one sitting. Though we don't know each other, your words are powerful and I found them both haunting and moving in a way that I rarely find among contemporary texts. Naturally, I was especially drawn to the section[†] where you critique the journal *Bædan*, a project that I'm involved in and have devoted years of thought and energy to. I'd like to respond in a few ways to the criticism you offer.

Firstly, thank you. We've received a fair amount of feedback on the two issues of the journal, but very little of it goes beyond the sort of ideological consumption of thought that is called reading in the anarchist milieu (and that milieu has a fast metabolism). For most anarchist readers, of most texts, the response amounts to a simple "yes, moving on" or "no, moving on." Of those more rare responses we've received—ones with a thoughtful engagement—many could be described as being knee-jerk, ideological reactions. They tend to criticize our project for being insufficiently Marxist or Nihilist, even not Stirnerist enough. They are reactions based in dogma, which we have very little patience for. Your response stands out, among a very few, as being one that is written from a real place. Your criticism is visceral and deep; something that can only be achieved when writing is free from the constraints found in almost all academic or theoretical writing; something which can only really be found

[†] "No Future", a polemical review of *Bædan* 1. In it, Asterion focuses in particular on our reading of Lee Edelman's book by the same title. See *Very Bad Nihilist*. Philadelphia: CTRL-Z Press, 2015.

in a living-breathing document. For that, I am immensely grateful.

Your critique is something singular, and I want to treat it as such. I don't intend to respond to each point, and I am also not particularly looking to debate the finer theoretical points here (though I'm open to that, in another time and space). I say this, partly because we've attempted to clarify some of these questions in the second issue of the Journal (a critique of psychoanalysis and some further thoughts on revolt being in "Against the Gendered Nightmare", an exploration of different modes and archetypes of being nihilist in "Faces of the Nihilist", and an engagement with many overlapping issues of queerness and nihilism in the correspondence with Critila), but more so because many of the lines and arguments you comment on feel somewhat alien to me reading them today. Not necessarily because I cannot find myself in them or because I couldn't bring myself to say something similar now. Instead, I'd say that these words—all of which being from the first section of the first journal, put to page four years ago—are written from a very specific time and place in my life and the lives of my friends and co-conspirators. They were written as a sort of pained and scathing response to the explosion of "radical queer" anarchist activity over the past several years; a sort of cathartic clearing of the slate that felt necessary for us in that moment. Also, this section was written amidst the emergence and unfolding of the strange sequence of occupation and rioting of 2011. These events seemed to call into question many of the assumptions I had held for a lifetime: all sorts of people were defying the limits of what they thought possible, and to a certain extent the exploration of combative action in the first issue was an experiment in imagining what participation in these moments could mean without having recourse to some idea of "prefiguration" or even of "revolution"—what it could mean to enjoy them, and

what if anything this has to do with the weak possibility of redemption. When encountering these words now, I am called backwards—to a moment before the massive defeat of these events, before the subsequent years of decomposition and hostility and depressions, before betrayals and revelations which cut deep and heal slow—and I can only but acknowledge that something I’d write in the present would have a different tone, to say the least.

It is specifically this tone present in the first issue that I think might be why you accuse us of “proselytizing” a “narrow ideological queerness”. While this criticism is not unfamiliar, it is also far from our intent. We do not intend, despite the easiness of this interpretation, to posit “queer nihilism” as a new dish on the tabletop of ideology. The decision to not have the subtitle return in the second incarnation of the journal was partly to avoid such a hardening into dogma. We are not interested in proselytizing and even less in winning adherents. To the small extent that this has happened, it is to our dismay. I personally find those who crassly parrot our (or any) text as scripture to be among the most annoying people I encounter in the anarchist milieu. If I have no desire to form and seek adherents to an ideology, I also have no reason to defend one. I welcome the critique of the extent to which *Bædan* can be interpreted as such, and I hope you’ll find it less so in current endeavors. The dissonance between intent and reception is in some way indicative of a thing about the written word: a reifying and stultifying effect which we want to combat, to paradoxically turn against itself.

So why? I won’t speak for all the participants in the project, but I think of my reasons as being twofold; on the one hand, as a hostile gesture against the academics and politicians I disdain for their own efforts at ideological machinations, but also as a gesture of communication. I don’t have hope that this journal will reach all that many

with by fewer still. And yet, we have had meaningful conversations stemming from it, some of which have turned to enduring relationships. These are enough for us to continue (and honestly, we might write on even if nobody ever laid eyes on it, solely to sort out our own thoughts). The point is that we view writing as a process of communication, which, despite our pessimism, we find reason to continue. Still, it seems that we have miscommunicated in a way, at least to you, and we owe you some further clarification.

By your account, you seem to have been seeking something in the text which we could not or did not offer. You found our “broad strategy for revolution”/our “vague vision for a better world” to be lacking, you don’t believe that we can “fuck our way to revolution” and criticize our “vague plan”. This is confusing to me, because we do not offer a revolutionary strategy, a vision of a better world, or a plan. I actually don’t think the word “revolution” occurs once in either issue of the journal. This is not an accident. I make no gesture toward a strategy of revolution, because I’m not convinced that a revolution—in the normative sense, in the grand teleological sense, a revolution as event deferred to the future, a revolution as the point “after which” we live—is what I want. I can’t really comment on your claims as to what will happen if my “vision of revolution comes to be” because the vision is not my own. It remains a fact that, not only did all revolutionary attempts of the past century fail, but in many ways they constructed the reality we now live in. I’m not sure if there is a way to redeem normative revolution of this inheritance.

Still, your piece is not the first time I’ve encountered this demand. Every time we give a talk about the journal, or have a discussion of the texts, we are asked the age-old “what is to be done?”; a question I’d prefer not to answer. I prefer this, not because I don’t have dreams and

schemes as to how I might achieve them, but precisely because of these. Anything I'd have to offer would correspond to my particular vision of the life I'd like to live, and I'm not arrogant enough to assume that you want the same thing. It's not that I think I'm some special unicorn and nobody gets me, but that I don't want to meet people on the basis of them accepting and working toward my "plan"; I want to meet people with their own plans and dreams and from there to imagine what conspiracy might exist between us. I believe strongly in the possibility of a coinciding and intertwining of my revolt with others, but this requires others to find and determine theirs first. If I won't say what to do, it is because I despise all the others who do so all too willingly. Were I to lay out a plan for revolution—to say how it is to be done—I'd hope nobody would listen. Please don't read this as an attack on your line of inquiry, this is about a deeply ingrained tendency among all of us to treat whoever is speaking as an authority: to treat the written word as a gospel, rather than as a spell or an experiment. I wake up many mornings and have a hard time finding reason to get out of bed; each day I'm wracked anew with the same anxieties and self-doubt in my own projects and have to convince myself to start again. You say that if we are to shit on the works of so many others, we at least need a plan. I'd say that it is only by wallowing in and acknowledging shit that we can ever imagine something else. If I won't say what to do, it is because to do so would be to lie. I wouldn't want that as the basis for a project of communication. I make proposals, yes, but as a friend says, "that's just something I like." Dispensing with certainty, all we can offer are hypotheses of a different life. I can't apologize for this.

All that being said, I do think I owe you an apology. In your critique you detail the ways that reading *Bædan* made you feel not queer enough and not radical enough, and for this I am entirely sorry. There is no part of me

that wishes for this effect, and I'm horrified that I may have invoked it. The possibility illustrates the reason for my reticence toward ideology as written above. I want no part in a game of saying who is or isn't queer, because like you, I'm not sure there is some essential being to the thing. I oscillate between thinking of queerness as purely aspirational and thinking of it as something close to what you call a "not-ness". Your phrasing resonates with me because it feels similar to how I'd describe my own relationship to the concept. For me queerness largely means a sense of not-belonging, of absence, of longing, of a certain distance. I think this can be shared with others, but not on the basis of some common essence. Specifically, the congealing of "queer" into a particular aesthetic, discourse and politics in the present is something I can only relate to with such a distance. Like many, I don't feel at home in the flood of gay assimilation, but I can't say that I feel any differently toward the currents labelled "radical queer". This not-ness is a driving force for *Bædan* as a project, and so I'm sorry to have reproduced it for you.

It occurs to me, that perhaps the best way to talk about this is to say a little more about what being queer or being nihilist means for me (thought I have a complicated relationship with both labels, and rarely claim either). Part of the power of your text is in the promiscuity between forms; its personal, corporeal reality. And so I'd like to address you directly here, without the *Bædan* text as an interlocutor.

I grew up in a situation very different than what you describe as your own: very poor in a miserable and conservative corner of the rural Midwest, and left home as a teenager in order to escape it. I didn't go to college. For me, in that place, my failures of gender, my being a faggot, my not-belonging there meant a constant condition of war. Violence was a strategy for a while, and I'm alive because of it, but ultimately my only means of

surviving was to leave. Along the way I learned how to get by with criminal means. Its worth it for me to constantly remember this and to dwell in it for a moment: queerness and survival are in my life always tied up with fighting and evasion. My own nihilism comes from a contingent realization: that there might not ever be anything other than these. Nobody in our generation can say that we earnestly believe in the revolution imagined by the gay and trans liberationists of past decades. And they did believe in one! This is so important to remember. They believed that their queerness was a precondition for a total transformation of the world, that they were unleashing a wave of energy that couldn't be reversed, that their struggle had huge beautiful implications for humanity as a whole. And the consequence? They died. Almost every single one of the faggot and transfeminine revolutionaries of the 70s was exterminated because their revolution was tied up wholly in loving as much and as freely as they could. They died because a weaponized indifference killed them, precisely because of the way they lived and loved. And the class that survived went on to construct the architecture of my present misery. My own grandfather, as a teenager in 1969, came out as a fag and left my grandmother and one year old father in rural Montana to go to San Francisco and join that revolution. I never met him because he "got sick" and died before I was born. My nihilism comes from the realization that the revolutionary potential of that era is closed to me; the elders are nearly all gone; their stories all but written over as some cheap tract about equality and inclusion.

If I invoke *jouissance*, it isn't as a strategy for revolution, and even less as some theoretical concept locked up in psychoanalytic textbooks. I don't intend it as a salvation, as a dogma, an ideology. I don't set it as a new standard against which one has to be measured. I don't

206 | "think it will lead to revolution" or anywhere certain for

that matter. I invoke it as a way to understand the all too few moments of my life where I've experienced something other than the meaninglessness of the present. When I encountered the word it was as if I had been enchanted by a certain magic, as if I finally had a way to understand those special occurrences. Yes, a few of these moments have been had in the situation of a riot, streets aflame and all that, but it is far from limited to them. I've had similar experiences when enduring tremendous pain, or being overcome with sorrowful rage. I've experienced it in a mob, intimately with others, and completely alone beneath the sky. It is easy to get caught up in overthinking the concept, but it happens in precisely the moments where thought melts away. It is in this sense the amalgamation of all the incommensurate moments of life, the gnostic ones, the ek-static ones. I pursue this phenomenon, not as a means to an end, but as a pure means. I want to expand it and build a line with it to cut through time. I don't have a formula for how to bring it about, and what it looks like for me differs from what it will look like for my co-conspirators and for you. You're right, of course, that everyone will have to find their own insurrection, find the way that feels right to them, but how could it be otherwise?

Recently a friend, a committed and brilliant queer revolutionary, took his own life. In the aftermath, so many mourning comrades got together and sat somberly. When a few spoke, they repeated the expected lines about "not understanding" or not "being able to imagine why." In this I felt alone amidst the people around me. I do understand, I can imagine why. Who are these people that cannot? What charmed existence do they lead to make such a claim? I understand why because I think about it all the time, but always come to Walter Benjamin's comment that "it isn't worth the bother." But as he showed, sometimes it is. My friend grew up queer in a terrible place and time, all the odds were stacked against him, and he was all the

more brilliant for it. He dove headfirst into the antinomies of queer thought and tried to trace these questions to their conclusions. His choices don't surprise me, but they invoke some other feeling in me. In the immediate aftermath I set about the first few days without regard for my job or my obligations, I did what I pleased and I felt that in one way or another I was doing it for him, and I felt deeply affirmed by this. What I've determined since then is that if our struggles likely point nowhere, then all we have is to live a life worth living, to do so with the people who we care for and to extend that life together, to stake a claim to it and defend it, and perhaps to destroy those who'd stop us. I'm not sure if this determination is queer or nihilist, but it feels related to my projects. You describe feeling almost delighted at our description of the commune as an intertwining of pain, pleasure and attack. I had a similar sensation when reading your introductory line: "I think we get one brief chance at existence, and that we're tiny and insignificant in a vast and indifferent universe, and that we matter hugely to a small number of other human beings." I think that too, and I think for me the communal impulse, an impulse not unrelated to what I've elsewhere called communication, is the process of connecting to those small number of others in the past and in the present so as to thicken this mattering and meaning. I think that if we "see if there's something on the other side" as you say, we might see this constellation reflected back at us.

I hope these words find you well,

Nere

Dear Neve,

I must say first how warmed I was by your response. I didn't give the first volume of *Bædan* the benefit of the doubt and was harsh in how I discussed it, I think. In your position, I would probably have struggled to not be sarcastic. The tenor of your response has made conversation a possibility, and I am grateful for that.

I agree that much of what I objected to in *Bædan* 1 was its tone, which I didn't understand because I knew nothing about the experiential and emotional context it sprang from. I am not at all familiar with Bash Back, though I know enough to realize it's an experiment I want to know more about.

In regards to your apology to me for making me feel neither radical nor queer enough: I don't know, maybe that's just my own shit? Not that I'm unusual in this, but I certainly never feel adequate. But maybe I should resist the tendency to blame my own crazy. Perhaps you should have shown some gentleness cuz fuck knows, and you know I'm sure, how hard on ourselves many of us radicals (or whatever we are) can be on ourselves. But *Bædan* is hardly the only far-left (or whatever) text that generates a feeling that we're never enough, how we think and what we do is never enough, we are too much of the world as it is. Wearing out some little piece of the trap a little, one bit at a time, won't get us out of it, but what else are we supposed to do? I think it's worth thinking about how we communicate and discuss the amount of change, the discontinuity, that we need and can't hope for.

Yes, I read *Bædan* 1 looking for an answer to the question of what to do, looking for personalized instructions or instructions at all. I think very slowly I am grokking that it is impossible and undesirable for anyone

to tell me what to do (caveat: unless I'm hurting them or they perceive me to be hurting someone else, in a way that I can be expected to avoid). This is not stating it strongly enough. Maybe "no gods, no masters" means "no teachers, no mentors".

We need to influence each other along other lines of connection and we do need to work together, and maybe this is the hardest part: to work out when we feel enough affinity, when the uncertainty and mistakes are worthwhile; to work out when to commit, in our commitment-to-commitment; to work out when to quit, in our commitment-to-commitment. I am thinking about this in terms of how I "flake" on some things, and stick with others in my own life, and the considerations and feelings I weigh during the ongoing process of choosing to stick with something (organization, event, group, space), of choosing to distance myself from something, of finding myself sticking with or distancing myself though I didn't make a firm conscious decision to do so.

I very much appreciate your sharing with me some of your background, it makes a big difference to me in how I approach both *Bædan*₁ and 2. And ok, I understand that *Bædan* and *VBN* are different genres, though there aren't good subgeneric categories for nonfiction (*Bædan* is perhaps a theory-heavy polemic, *VBN* is a transgeneric/genrefuck political perzine or something like that). But I've got to say that I first started hating, then breaking with straight academic writing because the "I" was always intentionally hidden. I knew I had powerful personal reasons for my desire to spend my life reading and thinking and writing (though at the time I didn't realize there were channels besides academia for that) and became frustrated with not being able to discuss those reasons as part of my work, and frustrated at not knowing others' reasons for dedicating their working lives to the weird little field

210 { I got my BA in. I am wondering what is gained and lost

through a collective pseudonym and content that reveals little about the experiences that lead to the pain and sorrow and rage that have driven the investigations that led to *Bædan*.

You say regarding *jouissance* that “it is easy to get caught up in overthinking the concept, but it happens precisely in the moments where thoughts melt away”—and I certainly was overthinking *jouissance*, but *Bædan* is a cerebral sort of project... and I don’t feel a sense of recognition toward *jouissance* as a concept that can describe my experiences. I feel like *jouissance* is something I need to pursue, whereas nihilism signals something to investigate, with less burden of obligation (counterintuitively, perhaps, given that nihilism carries broader recognition and cultural baggage.)

You and I have very different relationships to violence and to criminality. For me, it is not exactly unknown, but it has been mostly an unrealized threat, a possibility I was aware enough to fear but not to prepare for: my mother physically intimidating me but only very rarely laying hands on me, fucking men I didn’t trust to stop if I said stop, the looks I get in public that only very rarely become verbal harassment but still I feel their weight, knowledge of what can happen to people who are crazy in the ways I am but which hasn’t happened to me (yet) (though I’ve peeked over that precipice), and the bedrock of terror and horror that learning too much about my people’s genocide at too young an age. Long before I learned about the conditional nature of the white privilege granted (Ashkenazi/white) Jews in the US sometime in the course of the 20th century, I was afraid that what had been done to so many people like me, including a whole slew of relatives who hadn’t immigrated to the US or Palestine, could happen to me.

Which all leaves me frightened but without knowledge and experience of how I can effectively respond. No

practice. And which leaves violence against others and criminality, for my own survival and advantage, completely alien. I feel like this makes me less effective in tearing the whole thing down.

I have read *Bædan* 2, and I won't delve into my thoughts on it at this point. But one thing that emerged very strongly while reading it are my feelings on being opposed to civilization itself. Reluctantly, I am drifting toward the conclusion that civilization is the problem, and unfixable (that can't really be proven but what analysis on that level can be). I am digging my heels in, I am scared of where this is leading me, I see myself preferring the known trap and that's frightening too. I want a way out, and there's so much I want to take with me because of the familiar pleasures and the numbing I am so used to and so accomplished at. "Struggle against civilization must be struggle against ourselves as we are, to destroy the structuring of our bodies as vessels of the social order" (*Bædan* 1, 79). Indeed. And I suppose I'm on an ok track, since I was supposed to be a nice Jewish girl and marry a nice Jewish boy and have nice Jewish babies and an MA and a white collar job—and that's not my life at all.

"If our struggles likely point nowhere, then all we have is to live a life worth living, to do so with the people who we care for and to extend that life together, to stake a claim to it and defend it, and perhaps to destroy those who'd stop us." Which I think is all the instruction you can really offer a person, all the instruction I should accept from anyone, the rest must be up to me.

This conversation feels important, and I hope I'm holding up my end. I wrote *VBN* for the reasons you and others wrote *Bædan*: for the meaningful conversations and enduring relationships, and if nothing else to sort out our own thoughts. Sorting out my own thoughts, while

feeling alone in my despair, was how I started working on
VBN, in fact. I'm less lonely these days.

~ *Asterion*



Brajo,

I've been thinking a lot about the conversations we've been having about your critique of the dominant discourse around decolonization and racial essentialism in the anarchist milieu in the Bay Area, and also about your attempts to think about racialization through a methodology similar to what we used in "Against the Gendered Nightmare".† My own thinking about these topics has also been informed by the recent uptake of Afro-pessimist ideas, mostly surrounding a handful of speaking engagements by Frank Wilderson III, as well as the distribution and discussions of his texts. I'm interested in why his ideas have gained such notoriety at this moment, but also about why certain tendencies have needed to position themselves for or against his ideas. (Why have some, Marxists especially, needed to flatly assert "Wilderson is wrong!" while others have all but adopted his argumentation as their new program? Why are his words—"we are trying to destroy the world"—treated so differently than any of the number of ways this same thing might be articulated by kids in the streets of Ferguson or Oakland or posted to Instagram? Why is it necessary for these ideas to be articulated in his way in order for them to have any traction in the milieu?) All of this is to say that I think there is a lot to discuss in these matters, and a correspondence on these points could be both provocative and fruitful. I hope this invitation finds you well,

Nere

Neve,

In the Bay Area there has been a growing anti-capitalist, anti-authoritarian, persons of color tendency. The tendency has expressed itself in many ways, from tabling literature, to unleashing a whirlwind of destruction on sites of domination in the city of Oakland during various demonstrations, and also more clandestine attacks on institutions of gentrification. Much of the discourse around this tendency has focused on a conception of decolonization that relies on a binary understanding of identity. I'm interested in problematizing this by proposing hybrid identities in contrast to racial binaries such as people of color vs. white people. After all, it is a function of colonial power to naturalize and essentialize the racial binary imposed on reality by polarizing two opposing identities, (i.e. white vs. people of color, men vs. women, heterosexual vs. homosexual, old vs. young, etc) and subsuming both identities through representation, participation, or annihilation. This polarization also constructs the grounds and terms in which war for liberation is fought, and more importantly who is allowed to fight. It is here that I'm interested not only in the violent force that *maintains* the imperial order, but also the ways in which this order is *produced* and reproduced biopolitically through identity itself.

Although the assertion that the binaries of the colonial order are ungrounded does not burn police stations to the ground or open prison doors—Fanon is actually correct in posing that only violence will bring about decolonization—a destruction of the colonial logic must take place in order to permanently disrupt the binaries in race and gender relations, so as to stop the biopolitical *reproduction* of these hierarchical categories. Much as Marxists would argue that the struggle of the proletariat to abolish

capital requires the abolition of the conditions that produce the proletariat itself, those who are seeking decolonization must articulate the abolition of the conditions that produce racial binaries and race as a category itself. The failure to do so, as we have seen in many Nationalist struggles for decolonization or liberation, only maintained strict racial binaries, resulting in the reproduction of the white hegemonic institutions which former colonizers used to represent the universality of the colonial order.

This dynamic of organizing under the banner of the “nation” or “people” exists as living evidence of the inability of struggles for decolonization to shed the colonial construct of the nation. Instead they continue to adhere to the colonial notions of fixed borders and the sovereignty of the state. We need to reach beyond the fictions of “nation” and “race”, but how do we express the paradox of using race toward the abolition of race? I’m not offering a straightforward proposal for the trajectory of any fictitious “movement,” but instead questions and thoughts that will discomfort and dislodge the common sense consensus that constructs hegemony within this milieu as well as outside of it. These are just a few questions that ought to be addressed, in the Bay Area as well as in other places, so that in doing so, hopefully new territories and sites of struggle can form and new lines and methods of attack can become realized.

Beyond these broader criticisms of the decolonization tendency within the milieu, here are some other initial thoughts and critiques specifically addressing Wilderson:

1. Wilderson talks about the “libidinal economy” and its need to negate the black body as the psychic foundation of civil society. Essentially for Wilderson the black body is the negative space in which civil society is posited. Yet unfortunately his logic still assumes an essentialist character for the so-called “black body”. This is problematic in a

number of ways. For instance the black body in the US is in a different context than the African black body, or the migrant black body. Secondly, this body is an ungendered body. How does the experience of differently gendered black bodies change what Wilderson is saying?

2. The post-Cold War era's struggle for decolonization ended in the solidification of capitalist hegemony worldwide. The end of the struggle in South Africa with the ANC, and their bowing down to neoliberal trade policies, is a case in point. Wilderson seems to be stuck in this pre-Cold War era politic with his libidinal economy stuff about the negation of the black body. In the post-Cold War era it is the incorporation and representation of that body that is now a key component in maintaining and propelling civil society forward. This is to say that black identity is simultaneously negated and synthesized into hegemony. Both perspectives must be included to adequately understand the postmodern use of identity and power.
3. The third critique falls more along the anti-essentialist tip, and is more prescriptive rather than descriptive. It is hinted at in what I've written above and is almost exclusively talked about in racial terms, but can be elaborated otherwise, and would be interesting to have extreme queer theory elements included. Basically, Homi Bhabha emphasizes the migrant's experience as being "hybridized", the smashing together of cultures, one the place of "origin" and the other the "destination" of the migrant. The ability to muddle the lines between these seemingly "fixed identities" opens space for new identities. He writes: "we must think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and

focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural difference.” For him, because subjectivity is a discursive project, it is possible to transcend binaries and make new identities. These new identities map new terrain in which to struggle. This is similar to the idea of “opacity” in insurrectionary theory, and gets at the heart of the biopolitical production of identities as a way of maintaining power relations. Wilderson seems to stick to the traditional binaries of slave/master or native/foreigner, which overlooks those who have mixed identities, and who are forging new arenas of conflict. As global capitalism shifts and disrupts communities, the hybridized identity of the migrant or the mixed person will become a more relevant position.

4. The last critique I’d like to pose for now is of Afro-pessimism’s lack of acknowledgement of indigenous genocide. This is to say that Wilderson creates a hierarchy of oppression with blackness at the bottom. If this is true, then the hierarchy sits atop a graveyard of already dead cultures. Blackness at least has a negative signifier whereas *Indigeneity* is beyond recognition.

That’s it for now,

Braze

Brazo,

I'm sorry it has taken me longer than I'd like to have responded to your notes; they've given me a lot to think about, especially your criticisms of identity and the essentialism intrinsic to a great deal of thinking around race. I agree with your highlighting of this essentialism in Frank Wilderson's writings. You're obviously right to critique the lack of gender in his thought and the sometimes flippant conflation of blackness universally with the conditions of black people in a particular place and time. In a strange way, a critical reading of his theory shows a lot of parallels to the exegesis of Lee Edelman which made up most of the first issue of *Bædan*. Edelman, like Wilderson, puts forward a theory of the world based on the exclusion and domination of those who symbolically figure as the death drive or negation of the existing social order; a social order stitched together by a familial fantasy defined by this exclusion. Where Edelman locates this symbolic in the figure of the queer, Wilderson finds it in the black subject. Taken by themselves, both queer negativity and Afro-pessimism respectively demonstrate glaring omissions and a flimsy universalism. (I suspect that this problem might actually be the result of these thinkers' situation in the academy, where this type of abstraction can flourish without the need to be tested in anyone's actual life; but more so, where hyperbole and absolutism are rewarded with notoriety.) But, I think that if we play them against and alongside each other, it might be possible to start to give a shape to an understanding of power in this society. Like a chisel and hammer in the hands of sculptor, we can maybe use these against the hardened edifice of domination to reveal a form hidden within.

To be more specific, the Afro-pessimism of Frank Wilderson III is provocative because he offers us a few theoretical tools to indict civilization itself as being built and sustained through racial domination and exclusion. He does this by analyzing the role of the Slave in civil society. By civil society he means all the familial, sexual, cultural and social forms which are usually ignored in political economy, but which are no less constitutive of the world we inhabit. For him, these structures are intrinsically based on a libidinal whiteness which excludes those who are marked as Slaves or the descendants of them. Particularly interesting is his emphasis on the “anthropological scandal” caused by the encounter between European colonizers and hunter-gatherer people; the former being scandalized by the seeming absence of labor and production in the social life of the latter. In his assessment, humanity is defined by work within civilization, and so those who lived outside of work were not human and could consequently be exterminated and/or enslaved based on the desires and needs of Europeans. This view of civilization obviously contains an economic dimension, but it is also founded upon libidinal and psychic structures which continue today. This is helpful if we are interested in understanding the continuing examples of horrific racialized violence that exceed explanation by economic logic and which play out daily in the present. I’m reminded here of the exegesis of Gayle Rubin’s “The Traffic in Women”, which we included in “Against the Gendered Nightmare”, in an attempted to demonstrate the gendering and enslavement/exchange of certain bodies as being the foundational moment of civilization. The Slave, the human-body-as-commodity is the *sine qua non* of civilized life. Edelman, Wilderson, and Rubin would each put forward a specific subject as the embodiment of this capture (which we call domestication) but each of

universal or transhistorical claims. Clearly our project has to differ in that we aren't interested in defining this or that subject as the absolute figure vis à vis civilization. A way out of this dilemma could be to read each of their accounts as one story of domination, which taken together weave a fuller picture of the enemy—an enemy that creates racialized and gendered genres of flesh marked as fair game in its machinations.

As you illustrated, one of the major limitations of Wilderson's body of work is his inability or unwillingness to account for the ways that race no longer functions solely as a machine of exclusion, but that the inclusion and representation of racialized subjects is also a dimension of power. Your point is proven by a world where a black man can be president of the United States while unprecedented amounts of black men are imprisoned and killed on the streets at an ever-escalating rate; it is also proven by a world where we're asked to applaud the spectacle of trans women walking down runways at Fashion Week and speaking on behalf of the Armed Forces, all while street-based violence against trans women continues to escalate. From a queer perspective this contradiction (between exclusion and inclusion) can be sorted through with a critique of what is often called "assimilation". I'm almost afraid to invoke this body of critique, because for the vast majority of the so-called "radical queers", a feigned opposition to assimilation simply looks like demanding different reforms from the State or participation in edgier non-profits and academic institutions than their more obviously liberal counterparts (for some, "radicalism" means little more than the type of attire they wear to a dance party or peaceful protest). But, if I can for a moment set aside the banal discourse of queer anti-assimilation, I'd try to offer a different understanding of the problem. A more fruitful way to conceive of assimilation would perhaps be the efforts by which various subjects stake a claim

to the futurity, familial structures, and humanity from which they've been excluded. Taking queer assimilation as a case, this looks like inclusion in the institution of marriage and symbolic recourse to the Family and the Child. To actually criticize these attempts, it is crucial to point out that as this or that subject strives for inclusion, the eternal position of the Outsider—the subject figured by the death drive—is shifted elsewhere. That this shifting line often (though not exclusively) follows racial contours in the queer context proves Wilderson at least partly correct in his claims about the undying nature of anti-blackness in the US. For everyone who gleefully accepts the warm embrace of the social order, there are so many others who cannot and/or will not, for a multitude of reasons, play the game.

I'm interested in exploring the possibilities you're speaking of with reference to the hybrid life that occurs when individuals cannot wholly embody the essentialist identity positions that they are expected to. This might be the point where there is the greatest complicity between what I think you're proposing and the extremes of queer theory. Those that cannot claim recourse to or representation of a "people" must always be outside the imagined Human Family, and any belief in narratives of progress. It is precisely here that I find the greatest deal of affinity between our projects; in the refutation and disavowal of what we'd call "reproductive futurism" and what Wilderson describes as the claim to a restored equilibrium in the future. Those marked as other and excluded from these narratives will always be subjected to the process of biopolitical identity formation that you've named as the site of representation and also annihilation. I want to hear more about your proposal to reverse the colonial binary logic that produces gendered, racial and sexual identities, because I think it is also one of the questions

a sustained project of destroying identity has to include attacks on both the apparatuses that racialize and gender us, but also the ways we ourselves have been shaped by these. The project you declare of abolishing the conditions that produce race as a category seems crucial to an anarchist project against identity, but I think that its scope is nearly total, because this civilization (and all of its institutions, attitudes, desires, and kinship structures) is the very condition that produces and maintains race.

I suppose I'll end with a point that keeps coming back to me from Wilderson's commentary on the recent uprisings in Ferguson against police murder. In explaining the difference between the project of an activism which demands political inclusion versus his own project he says: "What are they trying to do? They're trying to build a better world. What are we trying to do? We're trying to destroy the world. Two irreconcilable projects." Along with him, there are many of us who are also trying to destroy the world, but the question of the "we" remains. For those of us—hybrids, heretics, queers, anarchists, outsiders—who don't claim membership to the symbolic Family of this civilization, there are so many positions from and reasons why we might also want to destroy the world (and the identities which compose it). The challenge is to locate the complicities and affinities with which to go about the destroying.

Yours,

Nere

Never

Thanks for your thoughts and correspondence with Brazo; they were an interesting read. I am surprised you did not mention pessimism as an overlap between Wilderson's writing and ours. More about this below.

I had a conversation with someone last night that stimulated my thoughts a bit more on the topic. I'll see how much of that feeling I can recreate here.

J—asked if I had heard about the most recent police killing of a black man that has received a lot of media attention because of the current political climate and the existence of a graphic video of the shooting. As you know, I keep my media consumption to a minimum, so I had not. We discussed the political climate and recuperative efforts for a moment, and then he mentioned that at his workplace there had been talk about Mike Brown that had coincided with talk about Robin Williams' death. He expressed feeling upset that their deaths were being discussed in a similar way. And I responded (and sort of realized as I was responding) that they correspond socially: the way media consumers engage with and respond to the death of a black man (when they do at all) is by treating them in an inverted form of how they treat celebrities—becoming falsely familiarized with a stranger so they can act like they know them and respond accordingly (with empathy, sorrow, etc). This is interestingly at odds with what Wilderson talks about as social death. That is, rather than inflicting social death on the black subject the media and consumers are imbuing artificial life. [Insert zombie/Frankenstein allegory.]

I expressed this, and then this feeling was further intensified because J— told a story about something that had happened on Facebook: someone had commented

on one of the reposts of this viral video of the shooting and had expressed objection and disgust at the obsessive consumption of images of black death. J— said he understood but did not agree. I think I do agree, maybe not with the commenter’s entire politic, but with their line of argumentation. I think J— does not agree because he sees power as top-down. I don’t. [Insert reference to “The Reticular Fallacy” or Foucault.] And in particular, I think on a systematic level it makes sense to (and this is in line I think with the methodology that Wilderson uses, based on the little of him I’ve read) see the consumption of these images on social media or other forms of media as a kind of psychological desire or need. (Here is another place I think we overlap with Wilderson: at its root I think queer theory is about centering *desire* in politics, and not only in a positive way as revolutionary politics but also our analysis of how all that other shit—capitalism, democratic government, fascism, anti-blackness...—functions).

When J— described the objection on Facebook, I felt the truth of this: the weird way these spectacles of black death, almost hand-selected out of the much greater phenomenon, feed a need, almost like the function of the killing arenas in ancient Rome, but in which the audience is fulfilling their desire not only for violence but for feeling bad about what they are seeing, so that they can feel better, can absolve themselves of their participation in, and creation of, the phenomenon of the non-spectacular killings, through a ritual reminiscent of the Catholic absolution and mass. It’s a catharsis. (I have my reasons for saying *they* but I could also say *we*.) Of course the media analysis, the political analysis of the killing is that it’s the racism of the police officer, or at most the systematic racism of the police force. To say it is the need of the society is to go *much* farther in this, and that is what I was impressed by in the Wilderson interview: that he went much farther and said the killings are the product of a

psychological desire or need of the society itself. I would add to this, not only the killing but the consumption of its image.

On a sort of side note, the part of that Wilderson interview I was most skeptical of was his claim that all black people are basically on the same page as him, maybe subconsciously, and are framing and limiting the discourse to make it bite-sized enough to swallow. I don't outright reject the claim. It's a fascinating one and very useful as a thought experiment. My skepticism comes in that it seems, in a strange way, incredibly optimistic. And I'm deliberately not objecting to it as an act of representation, because while it does seem to be that, it is also a really interesting provocation, and a useful place to think from. I'd like to skeptically accept it for a time too see where it would go. I find it interesting because it suggests a way that a staunch pessimism can act to harbor a small but intense kernel of optimism. And that strategy feels very relevant to our project.

Bits of discourse come my way from nearby milieus, and in these bleak times I have been catching more professions of optimism, made not in secret, not encrypted, but for the sake of public appearance. When radicals say openly how starry-eyed they are, how heroically undefeated by the prevailing nihilism and egoism of the world, I find it hard to believe. Aside from their not having understood what they claim to be undefeated by, something suggests a façade. How many of the most outwardly hopeful are also the most resigned? And how many harbor behind a hermetic pessimism some intense and secret glimmer?

~A—

Novy

If the last few parts of this discussion have been trying to understand critique and expand Wilderson's Afro-pessimism then this section is my formulation of what I think could be a possible way forward.

Fanon emphasizes the existential transformation that takes place when wielding violence against the colonizer during the war for decolonization. It is here, during this transformation, that the skills to build a new life are acquired. This is the sentiment that I'm trying to capture. Most people who hear me talk about some of the ideas we have discussed earlier, like hybridized racial identities or ungendered bodies, almost always respond in one of two ways. The first is that this understanding of identity is nihilistic in the sense that without solid essential identities to fight from, there is no inherent direction for us to struggle towards. I couldn't agree with them more; the only inherent direction that any essentialized identity can go is assimilation, representation, or destruction—all three of which are the productive sites of hegemony. The second is that even if we accept this nebulous concept of identity, how do we find each other in order to destroy civilization? And this is where Fanon steps in. It is also something I have seen taking shape in Oakland's anti-police uprisings. The lived experiences of revolt brings a multitude of identities together, people who are worlds apart: the PhD student and the Acorn housing project resident are setting fires together. These experiences change us forever: we carry them with us on our way to work, we hold our heads up a little higher. This new intensity in living spills over into other aspects of our lives, and emboldens us to seek out more of what we previously thought was impossible, and acknowledge that it's only within reach when we are

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together. This togetherness forms the foundation for new identities based on solidarity and affinity.

Braze



Brazo,

This question and potential—which we could call phenomenological—that you raise about revolt is one that I’d like to engage on a few levels. You start from Fanon’s idea of self-transformation through conflict, and I think this is one of the more interesting points in what I’ve read of him. I’m reminded of a passage from the conclusion to *Black Skin, White Masks*:

I am not a prisoner of History. I must not look for the meaning of my destiny in that direction. I must constantly remind myself that the real leap consists of introducing invention into life. As I move through the world, I am endlessly creating myself.... There should be no attempt to fixate man, since it is his destiny to be unleashed. The density of History determines none of my acts. I am my own foundation. And it is by going beyond the historical and instrumental given that I initiate my cycle of freedom.

This starting point is interesting to me because it shows a singular and willful effort to not be constrained by the historical apparatuses which defines and racialize us as individuals. It could prove worthwhile to think through what this “real leap” out of history could look like, whether individually or together.

As a way of pursuing this I’d like to counterpose some ideas from James Baldwin, who, similarly to the above Fanon quote, says:

I was not born to be what someone said I was. I was not born to be defined by someone else, but by myself, and myself only.

I'm sending you a draft of a piece I've been working on, which focuses largely on his book *No Name in the Street*. In this memoir, there are a few moments where he takes up this question of the creation of a new people or a new identity. Much of his discussion focuses on certain efforts by the Black Panther Party—their liberation schools, breakfast programs and health clinics—which he describes as “techniques of self-realization” and as “a force working toward the health and liberation of the community.” In reading his descriptions of these projects, I was struck by the way they're strangely juxtaposed against his articulation of his own alienness and exclusion from the very communities in question. Where the Panthers and other revolutionaries aspire for the health and liberation of a people or a community, Baldwin finds himself in exile from, and later a stranger in the communities that formed his identity. And so his own efforts of self-realization and creation have to take a different approach. He says that any people who recognize the necessity of creating themselves must “examine everything, and soak up learning the way the roots of a tree soak up water.” For him this is related to a sense of seeking truth and abandoning or correcting certain delusions. In this process, he has a special place for friends and lovers, who he says are uniquely able to help one, at times, overcome said delusions. This challenges those approaches that prioritize the creation of homogenous peoples as a whole, by instead pointing toward a type of creation and truth-seeking which happens within specific relations of friendship, affection and love. This can be seen in the way he describes those in San Francisco at the end of the sixties who were “in the streets in the hope of becoming whole,” driven by “their blind and moving need to become organic, autonomous, loving and joyful creatures; their desire to connect love, joy, and eroticism, so that all flowed together as one...”

For Baldwin, there is something special about the confrontation of black and white people in the US that creates the possibility of experience which can then create some sort of new identity. He says:

no one knows precisely how identities are forged, but it is safe to say that identities are not invented: an identity would seem to be arrived at by the way in which the person faces and uses his experience. It is a long drawn-out and somewhat bewildering and awkward process.

This bewildering and awkward process of experience is perhaps what you're talking about when you describe the project residents and grad students setting fires together. As clarified in the interview, "Go the Way Your Blood Beats", Baldwin connects this capacity for experience to the potential he sees for black people in the US to embrace struggles for liberation around gender and sexuality. "The capacity for experience is what burns out fear." I think what's most worthwhile in the events and ruptures of the past year is the capacity for confrontation and experience.

While I'm fairly pessimistic about the potential of this self-creation on a large scale, I can say that I've seen racial divisions deteriorate more intensely in a single night of rioting than through years of circular discussions, caucuses workshops, "ally trainings", etc. If I don't entirely have hope for the type of togetherness you're describing, I still have to express a lot of appreciation for the discursive shift you're proposing. I think that your reorientation toward the experiential quality of these moments is a necessary turn away from some of the more idiotic ways of thinking about the last year. Of all the terrible discourses, one of the worst has to be the one expressed by a banner I've seen out lately which reads: "strong communities make police obsolete"—as if police are the price we pay for the sins of our inadequacy; as if police would just wither away if our "community" was strong enough;

as if police are necessary for any reason other than the violent enforcement of the social order. Perhaps what's more disturbing about this sentiment are the efforts of nightmarish self-policing (or, sorry: "community policing") imagined by its advocates.

Nearly as troubling as the above sentiment is the more popular one that imagines rioting as a sort of extreme protest for redress of grievances. The only thing more bewildering than a vague hope in meaningful change to policing in the US is the spurious reasoning by which people think these events would bring such reforms about. Some recent articles (such as Delio Vasquez's "Poor Person's Defense of Rioting", and Joshua Clover's "Propaganda, Deed") argue that it is more correct to think of the practical dimensions of rioting, rather than their function as symbolic or political events. Clover says:

A riot is more or less by definition the moment when the presumptions of a functioning and just democratic state—one in which citizens might petition for the redress of grievances—start to collapse. A riot is a riot because, at least in part, it is not simply a message.... With luck, it is the discourse of something more potent and practical.

Vasquez poses the contradiction similarly:

The question is then, when you smash a window, are you doing so because you are looking to grab some food, or some diapers, or a TV to sell so that you can make next month's rent? Or are you smashing a window to express anger and frustration, and so that maybe the elites or general public pay attention to your political views?

While I appreciate what these two are trying to do in proposing a shift from the political to the practical, something remains missing for me. Your proposal has helped
232 | me to begin to articulate what that missing aspect might

be. Obviously my reasons for rioting are not to send a message or put force behind this or that political program, but also I'm not necessarily there for the "practical" reasons of looting a cell phone or some whiskey. Surely there are people here for both of these reasons, but I think there is another. Missing from the idealist and the materialist justifications of rioting is what I'd risk calling the spiritual dimension. If "we are trying to destroy the world", then these events pose an opportunity to materially experiment with or enact such a destruction.

It is worth saying here again, that the world is made up of a vast array of apparatuses of control, surveillance, and subjection. These apparatuses, through our engagement and entrapment within them, also serve to produce us as racial, gendered and political subjects. A riot, more than other moments, is a space where we have the opportunity to attack many of these apparatuses. Beyond police, surveillance cameras, businesses, and other more obvious examples, we can also identify a series of other racializing apparatuses at play in the riot: the good citizen and the white ally (who each in their own way try to reconsolidate a fraying whiteness), the activist with their politics of respectability and representation, the NGO and cadre operatives and their attempts at consolidating authenticity and leadership. Because of the dual nature of these apparatuses (control and identity-production), attacking them offers us the ability to strike concretely at the world we despise, but also to create ourselves anew in the process of such attack.

I turn the corner to see that people have built a fiery barricade bigger than I've ever seen. The police have been reduced to faint shadows behind the wall of fire. I forget them and turn the other way. Some people are writing the names of the dead across the walls; others have looted paint cans and are throwing them through the windows of grotesque boutiques. People are seizing and holding

space in order to process emotions that we are expected to bury in our daily lives. Some kids are looting cell phones from a shattered storefront; a man is chasing them with a camera; I'm chasing him with a hammer. All around me, strangers have obscured their identities and are breaking the things they hate, finding unlikely accomplices in the process, and determining their true enemies. There is an openness in all of this in each moment: to strangers, to potentials, to undoings, to conflict, to eros.

Yours,



Dear Comrades,

I want to begin by congratulating you all on another fine edition of your publication. While I can't praise your work enough, I fear that the present conditions in which I write will allow me to get carried away by my enthusiasm.

To be more forthcoming and specific, whenever I set about to craft an epistolary composition, I always feel a peculiar sense of ease and comfort. Personally, the experience of letter writing is, for me, concomitant with the collapse of a series of conscious and/or subconscious restraints that otherwise manage to hold my pen back. In fact, without these exceptional circumstances, I do not believe that I would be able to muster up the courage to approach the daunting subject that I wish to address, namely *The Epic of Gilgamesh*.

Although I gladly welcome their arrival, these rare snatches of expressive freedom do not necessarily generate positive results with any regular consistency. So, for this reason, I would like to apologize in advance for any loose or crude formulations that I might let slip through unnoticed. Fortunately, even for a self-avowed dilettante, such as myself, interpreting *Gilgamesh* is entirely up for grabs: the perplexing variety of ancient fragments that have come down to us, the recalcitrance of their Sumerian and Akkadian cuneiform to definitive translation, and the utter strangeness of their subject-matter will continue, in combination, to unfailingly confound the modern understanding. With all of these preliminary words of caution now put in place, I would like to respond to the reading of *Gilgamesh* that appeared in *Bædan* 2, and hopefully extend it in a direction that you can find agreeable.

More specifically, I would like to draw your attention to some of the similarities that I have recently noticed

between your anti-civ interpretation of *Gilgamesh* and those put forward by the various theoreticians of the Kurdish struggle for autonomy, such as Abdullah Ocalan. Interestingly, what I have found is a certain shared understanding of the epic as a prototypical account of human domestication at the foundations of ancient Sumerian society through the coeval imposition of civilization and patriarchy. Moreover, *Gilgamesh* is regarded as both an origin myth and a period piece that has yet to reach a definitive conclusion. The saga details the emergence of a Leviathan monster that has never disappeared from the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates, but has instead swept the entire world with its wrath.

Furthermore, both readings take the taming of the wild, forest dweller, Enkidu to represent the process whereby the communal and matricentric forms of life ushered in by the Neolithic revolution were overturned with the initial appearances of civilization in Mesopotamia. Consequently, Ocalan sees the pacified Enkidu as the earliest symbol of a Kurdish collaborator.[†] This likeness seems to be more than purely allegorical, when we consider how the Kurdish self-identity continues to remain intimately connected to their geographic standpoint, as has been preserved in the still current proverb: “We have no friends, but the mountains”. Similarly, the story’s narrator tells us that Enkidu once belonged to the tribes of Gutians and Horritis, which, translated literally from Sumerian, means “people from the mountains”.[‡] With no stretch of the imagination, I assume that the same sylvan peaks these tribes once inhabited to avoid Sumerian

† Abdullah Ocalan’s “History as an Account of Conspiracy and Treason: Lessons to be Learned”, in *Prison Writings: The PKK and Kurdish Questions in the 21st Century*.

‡ Ali Kemal Ozcan, *Turkey’s Kurds* and Mehrdad Izady, *The Kurds: A Concise History and Fact Book*.

military incursions today provide shelter for guerrillas against the merciless bombardment of Turkish warplanes. Likewise, it was within this range of cedar-lined summits, presently referred to as the Zagros,[§] where the great goddess Aruru, who created the teeming human race, “wet her hands, pinched a piece of a clay, and cast Enkidu into the wild.”[¶] It is no surprise that Aruru was prominently worshipped under her *nom de guerre*, Ninhursaga, which can be rendered as “Queen of the Mountains.”

Of the seven great deities of early Mesopotamia, Aruru was the most highly esteemed fertility goddess as she retained the rightful link between the cult of femininity and the unfettered freedom manifested by the wilderness. By submitting to the norms and discipline of Sumerian civilization, Enkidu betrayed both aspects of his earth mother with a disloyalty that finds its modern equivalent in Barzani and his unabashedly capitalist KRG.** As was convincingly demonstrated in the previous edition of your journal, it was another female deity, known as Ishtar or Inanna, who facilitated the domestication of Enkidu through the ritual of *hieros gamos* enacted by her devotee Shamhat.†† It seems to me that the decline of the

§ Actually, Sumerian civilization’s other major achievement, besides initiating human domination, was bringing the once plentiful cedar trees on the Zagros to near extinction, as its timber was the primary material used for architecture. It is telling that environmental devastation was even a consequence of the very first civilization. Today, the trees on the mountain are mainly oak.

¶ *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Tablet One.

** That is, the Kurdish Regional Government established in northern Iraq with the express purpose of unfairly distributing petrol dollars and conspiring with Turkish State.

†† “Enkidu listened to Shamhat speak: ‘You are handsome Enkidu, like a god. Why wander the wild with the beasts? Come let me lead you to Uruk-the-Sheepfold, to the temple home of Anu and Ishtar, where Gilgamesh is perfect in strength, a wild bull lordling over

true and great lady of the heavens, Aruru, is what subsequently led to the supremacy of the thoroughly urbanized Ishtar within the stone gates of Sumeria. In what follows, please allow me to close by trying my hand at a little amateur Assyriology, as I attempt to tease out what appears to be the inverse relation between the two goddesses.

With regards to the *Gilgamesh Epic*, the task of interrogating the connection between the invocations of Aruru and Ishtar proves to be no simple endeavor. In what must be regarded as nothing other than a clear case of institutionalized sexism, the dismal lack of scholarship on the role of women in the epic is all the more discouraging.[†] Nevertheless, we should begin by noting that although Aruru and Ishtar are both considered fertility goddesses, the narrator of the epic maintains their distinction, which seems to be upheld in other facets of Mesopotamian culture.[‡] Aruru enjoys closer links to birth and fecundity, whereas Ishtar tends to be associated with war in her tutelary function as guardian of the city Uruk. So, while Ishtar does not entirely relinquish her maternal features, her productive power tends to be muted by her other characteristics.

Ocalan claims that Aruru was actually demoted to Ishtar, and her descent is revealed in the series of myths involving both goddesses with Enki, god of the earth.[§]

men.' Enkidu heard her and her words found favor." *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Tablet One.

† Rivkah Harris in *Gender and Aging in Mesopotamia* has noted in her masterful attempt to correct this abhorrent shortcoming that "despite the many articles devoted to the *Gilgamesh Epic*... images of women [have] received no more than a passing comment or an occasional footnote."

‡ For instance, each respective goddess seems to appear in separate myths featuring Enki.

§ See Abdullah Ocalan's "History as an Account of Conspiracy and Treason: Lessons to be Learned", in *Prison Writings II: The PKK*

Deemed a symbol of the patriarchy, Enki's assorted interactions with Aruru, which also included *hieros gamos*, somehow reduced the latter's significance until she became Ishtar. Perhaps assuming a certain level of familiarity amongst his readers with the nuances of Mesopotamian mythology, Ocalan unfortunately puts forward little to no justification towards this highly plausible assertion.[¶] However, despite the lack of presented evidence, Aruru's transformation may go somewhat towards explaining the aporia, which has never ceased to baffle scholars, as to why Ishtar paradoxically embodies a manifold of conflicting tendencies and attributes.** As was carefully elaborated in *Bædan 2*, Ishtar encompasses a fundamental contradiction: like Aruru, she is a goddess of nature, but she exclusively oversees a form of nature that was exclusively confined within the walls of the city, thereby neutralizing the uncultivated and feral so that it can be deftly administered by kings. Therefore, I maintain, that Ishtar harbors Aruru's traits for the sole purpose of dominating them: she is pavement on a growing forest; she is a suffocating garment on a nude body; and, most importantly, she is the oppressive weight of the gender binary inflicted upon a previously matriarchal society.

Of course my argument demands much more thought, but enough with the speculating. All I hope to have achieved through this still unpolished line of reasoning is that the played-out, primitivist term "rewilding" is

and Kurdish Questions in the 21st Century.

¶ I imagine that this argument is expounded at greater length in Ocalan's yet to be translated study entitled *The Heirs to Gilgamesh*.

** For a survey of the primary and secondary literature concerning Ishtar's antinomic characteristics, see Rivkah Harris's "Inanna-Ishtar as Paradox and a Coincidence of Opposites", in *Gender and Aging in Mesopotamia*.

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taken up once again as the battle-cry that has been voiced
throughout Rojava:

“Let us return to the Neolithic!”

Yours affectionately,

Kirilov



Dear Kirilov,

Thank you for your kind words, and for your thoughtful elaboration upon our engagement with the Gilgamesh epic. I'm especially grateful to have received your letter, as it opens up the possibility, on my part, to assess and clarify some of the problems and potentials of thinking mythologically. Before addressing your argument directly, I think it's a necessary digression to sort out a few points about the mythic and the divine. In the introduction to his translation of the epic[†], Stuart Kendall highlights some of the contradictions of reading *Gilgamesh* in the present, two of which are worth mentioning here. The first, is the problem of what he'd call a humanist reading of the text. He criticizes the majority of *Gilgamesh* scholarship which interprets the text as an early document of a human-centered worldview which deals in supposed universalist themes of human existence. He argues against this hubristic propaganda, and instead for a more "open" and "discomforting" view of what the text has to say about humanity. The second point follows from this, and concerns the role of deities in the text. He attacks those who attempt to read a Christian metaphysics into the tablets, emphasizing that the modern view of divinity does not map neatly onto the distant past. He says:

we can observe that the gods in the text are numinous, they are forces at work in the physical world, and that they always meet in assembly, or counsel. As the dynamic forces of the wild, the gods are always already assembled, ever present around us, some more active in certain moments than others. When all of the gods are active at once, as in the dramatic flood narrative, the

† Contra Mundum Press, NYC, 2012.

results are confusing and confounding even for the gods themselves. To speak of the assembled gods is to speak of the numinous realm of the whole, a realm that can be as cruel and terrifying as it can be fecundating and restorative.

In *Gilgamesh*, the gods are not “heavenly fathers” excised from the profane, they are corporeal beings who live among humans: they can be met, defied, even killed. His reading seems to support your suspicion that the “Queen of the Mountains” is also an earthly force.

Kendall quotes Nietzsche in order to say that an attempt to delve into this numinous realm requires that one travel

into night and horror, into the products of a fantasy used to ghastly things. What earthly existence is reflected in these repellingly dreadful legends about the origins of gods: a life ruled over by the *children of the night* alone, by strife, lust, deception, age and death [...] in this brooding atmosphere, combat is salvation and deliverance, the cruelty of the victory is the pinnacle of life’s jubilation.

In order to face these children of the night, Kendall implores us to read the epic as an archetypal root-text of our own consciousness,

as if it recorded myths, dreams and visionary encounters relevant to our own emergent sense of self, long since buried not only in the sands of Iraq, but deep within us. This type of reading is different from the universalizing humanist reading most notably for the discomfort that it occasions.

He wagers that in reading the text in this way, we can uncover which of these myths have become “fundamental to our civilization.”

I think this attempt fits nicely with your provocation that the mythic plays out in the present day conflict in the region where Gilgamesh's Leviathan took hold. If I may digress again, I'd like to draw your attention to the sensationalist *New York Times* article[†] published this week detailing the theological, bureaucratic, and economic institution of sex slavery within ISIS. The testimony of Yazidi girls and women, some of whom were rescued by Kurdish combatants, reveals that the expansion of the Islamic State into the Yazidi towns in the northern mountains of Iraq was about much more than a strategic territorial expansion. The stories of several sources bear undeniable similarities: housing and transportation infrastructure indicate a premeditated campaign of enslavement, the "distribution" of women and girls as rewards to ISIS fighters and sold for profit, and also the religious dimension to the institutionalization of rape and sex slavery. Several informants describe their rapes being book-ended with prayer, and justified by the commonly held interpretation of Yazidi religion as "Devil worship"[‡]. In ISIS theology, Yazidi "Devil worshippers" are afforded even less protection than monotheists, as they worship seven archangels and are not "people of the book". Current estimates suspect that ISIS is holding and trading thousands of Yazidi women and girls as sex slaves.

While this narrative is horrific, I'd ask for your patience as I unpack some of this in a way that should be instructive in this discussion. Firstly, I would like to point out that in *The Spell of the Sensuous*, David Abram lucidly illustrates the way that the history of "people

† "ISIS Enshrines a Theology of Rape", August 14, 2015.

‡ It is worth noting that this belief, held by many in the region, has to do with the story of their chief archangel Melek Taus falling from grace with god. Many Abrahamic theologians interpret his as "fallen angel" equivalent to Satan. The Yazidi, however, celebrate him, for having defied God. His defiance?—He refused to worship Man.

of the book” has always been to dominate, enslave, or eradicate those peoples who retain an oral tradition and an animistic cosmology. In his view, those who practice oral tradition are marked as fair game for any means of violence. His book details the violent repression of oral cultures at the hands of alphabetic Leviathans all over the world. He argues that the witch hunts can be read as the extermination of one of the last remaining oral traditions in Europe. Most readers will be familiar with Silvia Federici’s analysis[†] of these same events as a campaign of “primitive accumulation” necessary for the emergence of the Capitalist mode of production. We might augment this reading with the analysis of Fredy Perlman[‡], who contends that all civilizations need this type of “accumulation” of free slave labor, and that the gulags and death camps of the past century are the continuation of something intrinsic to Leviathan. Perlman’s argumentation finds support in Gayle Rubin’s reading[§] of Claude Lévi-Strauss which illustrates that the gendering, capture and exchange of bodies amounts to the first commodity relation, the precondition for complex hierarchical society, what Camatte[¶] would call “Capital”. This analysis risks pointing toward the slave system of ISIS as a return of something archaic, but we must resist this impulse. In their own ways, Andrea Smith, Saidiya Hartman, and Hortense Spillers^{**} can each be read in order to demonstrate that this same economy of

† In *Caliban and the Witch*.

‡ In *The Continuing Appeal of Nationalism*, cited at length in “Against the Gendered Nightmare”.

§ “The Traffic in Women” in *Deviations*, also cited at length in “Against the Gendered Nightmare”.

¶ See *This World We Must Leave*, which includes Camatte’s limited engagement with the FIAR’s Françoise d’Eaubonne.

244 { ** In *Conquest, Scenes of Subjection* and “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe” respectively.

sexual violence was instrumental in the genocide of Native Americans and in the chattel slavery system in the US. Far from the exception, these practices underly the very foundations of this civilization. Thus, we could read the current happenings in northern Iraq as just one episode in an unbroken continuum of domestication wherein certain bodies are gendered and racialized, marked for abysmal violence, exchange and subjection. Slavery and sexual violence figure as the *sine qua non* of Leviathan's nightmarish reign.

And so, rejecting its exceptional status, I would like to interrogate the playing out of this violence as such in mass media. At the risk of moving too quickly, I'd argue that we need these stories to occupy the headlines, because they are inseparable from the libidinal history and psychic life of the civilization we live within. These are the *children of the night*, the forces dwelling in the collective unconscious that must be projected onto another so as to deny their foundational status.

Our engagement with James Baldwin in this issue of the journal offers us a few tools we can use to sort through this complicated and violent interplay between the mythic and the profane, wherein those cast as Devils (whether in the historic justifications of chattel slavery, the extermination of oral cultures all over the globe, the witch hunts, or the current enslavement of the Yazidi) are made available for the desires and uses of another. He said, in "Stranger in the Village", that "I must accept the status which myth, if nothing else, gives me in the West before I can hope to change the myth." He spoke of looking upon the glorious old churches of Europe as one of the Devils it had cast out. This self-recognition on Baldwin's part amounts to a sort of slippage in time. He often elsewhere speaks in individual terms as having himself been a slave, a Devil, having been raped, having been forced to labor, having been lynched. The "I" and the "me" in Baldwin's chronotaxis

functions as a sort of hole in spacetime (but also in his self) where the stories of the past and his present are experienced as fluid and interchangeable. In “Between Strangers and Friends”, we teased out some of Baldwin’s thinking around patience and revolt, resolving the apparent contradictions by applying a messianic view. If Baldwin found in himself a deviant patience, it was because he—having crossed the Atlantic, having worked the fields—was speaking from a place outside of linear time. He recognized the immanence of redemptive violence in the same way Benjamin recognized the monuments of the Bourgeoisie as ruins before they crumbled. He fixed his gaze to the slippages between these holes in time.

As I’m sure you’re also aware, one of these strange holes opened up this week (one with inexplicable synchronicity with our present inquiry), when Hugo Pinell, one of those accused of aiding George Jackson’s failed prison escape in 1971, was killed in New Folsom Prison. Pinell had spent roughly four decades in solitary confinement, having been convicted of opening the throats of San Quentin prison guards in solidarity with Jackson’s fateful escape attempt and the ensuing riot. When, this week, he was released from solitary, he was assassinated almost before his lawyer was made aware of his entrance into general population. Following this, New Folsom Prison erupted into another Black August riot. Genet, as discussed in this issue, argued that Jackson’s writing had made him more-than-human—mythic—and that his writing was a weapon in the form of a book. How else can we interpret these events, or those combatants in the mid-seventies who took up arms in Jackson’s name, and later participated in subversive prison actions in turn? In this context the supposed linearity of time and the neat cleavage of the mythic and the profane are revealed for the bad jokes they have always been.

In “A Holey Curiosity” we explore a queer hole topology as a way of exploring these disjunctions and recurrences in space and time. I would argue now that such a topology might be directed toward the current situation in the territories farcically demarcated as Iraq and Syria. By force of will, a hole has opened up—a discontinuity in Leviathanic time wherein some have taken up again that old quixotic attempt at freedom and autonomy. People have taken to the streets and to the mountains with arms in order to keep that hole open, old friends and ones we’ve never met have been taken by its gravity and contributed in their own ways to its proliferation, all while the Erdoğan regime and ISIS (with the backing of NATO and the US) try with all their might to seal it up forever. Some, commenting from afar, debate whether this hole is sufficiently anarchistic, or if it points toward communism. Forgive me for being crass, but I can only think of this debate as idiotic and far too normative for my taste. One cannot measure a hole in spacetime with ideological instruments. If I have no interest in “Democratic Confederalism” or the machinations of this or that party leader, it is because my gaze is fixed at the void and what it opens onto. Benjamin tells us that such a void might open up anywhere or in any moment. When it does, the question is how to stretch, prolong and make an escape through it.

Setting aside whatever theoretical disagreements might exist between a YPJ fighter and myself, I can only celebrate their commitment, in the face of sex slavery or death, to choose neither; to blast open the unbroken historical continuum that unites the “sacred prostitution” of the oldest civilization with the theologically justified system of sex slavery in an emergent one. In ISIS theology, death at the hands of a woman bars a combatant from heaven. I like to think that these armed women, with full knowledge of the theological implications, are in their own way actualizing Baldwin’s insights into myth and

the messianic when they, prior to dispensing with their enemies, sing a battle-cry to announce themselves as such.

To return to the remainder of your letter, I fear that I've already said too much and could scarcely hope to answer your contributions better than Diane di Prima did in her "Revolutionary Letter #32" when she wrote:



not western civilization, but civilization itself
is the disease which is eating us
not the last five thousand years, but the last twenty thousand
are the cancer
not modern cities, but the city, not
capitalism, but ism, art, religion, once they are
separate enough to be seen and named, named art named
religion, once they are not
simply the daily acts of life which bring the rain, bring bread,
heal, bring
the herds close enough to hunt, birth the children
simply the acts of song, the acts of power, now lost
to us these many years, not killing a few white men will
bring
back power, not killing all the white men, but killing
the white man in each of us, killing the desire
for brocade, for gold, for champagne brandy, which sends
people out of the sun and out of their lives to create
COMMODITY for our pleasure, what claim
do we have, can we make, on another's time, another's
life blood, show me
a city which does not consume the air and water
for miles around it, mohenjo-daro was a blot
on the village culture of India, the cities of Egypt sucked
the life of millions, show me
an artifact of city which has the power
as flesh has power, as spirit of man
has power

Yours,

Nere



A— and Nery

I've read through your first, and most of your second, issues and have found myself greatly affected by your ideas. I still have much to reflect on in regards to the issues you cover, but I am especially curious about your thoughts on utopia and its potential contributions to your anti-social projects.

I unexpectedly read through most of José Esteban Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* alongside the first and second issues of *Bædan* and I enjoyed the dialogue that began to occur between your work and Muñoz's.

An element of Muñoz's utopia that (as has been covered in our own correspondences) you appreciate is his discussion of ecstasy:

ecstasy... is not consigned to one moment. It steps out from the past and remarks on the unity of an expansive version of temporality; hence, future generations are invoked. To know ecstasy... is to have a sense of... what I attempt to describe as the time of queerness. Queerness's time is a stepping out of the linearity of straight time... a self-naturalizing temporality. Straight time's "presentness" needs to be phenomenologically questioned, and this is the fundamental value of a queer utopian hermeneutics. Queerness's ecstatic and horizontal temporality is a path and a movement to a greater openness to the world. (Muñoz, 25)

In his model of queer time, 'here and now' is abandoned for 'then and there.' To live in ecstatic time is to depart from a linear timeline and exist in temporal ecstasy—that is, to travel between moments of ecstasy from then and there. The past "is performative" (28) in that its ecstasies

can be utilized and observed during the present while simultaneously signaling future theras full of new ecstasies. This liminality between then and there was particularly striking to me, mostly because it reminded me of the flying of Benjamin's anti-futurist Angel of History. To live in temporal ecstasy is to expose oneself to the 'wreckage' where, in addition to faces of ghosts, moments of ecstasy can be found. In your first issue, you conceive of this temporality as essential for the redemption and rediscovery of friends lost within dominant narratives of history—Muñoz expands this and identifies a queer longing for future ecstasies that succeed those in the wreckage. I am curious as to what you feel about this temporal liminality. In its rejection of a progressive future, queer utopia guarantees that queerness may never be achieved primarily because the pleasures of ecstasy are immune to measurement. I feel that your conception of *jouissance* and critique of civilization resonate greatly with Muñoz's conceptions of ecstasy.

There is a beautiful contradiction that arises, though, in that while your *jouissance* attempts to shatter our civilized selves, Muñoz's ecstasy attempts to find pleasure in some type of societal space. To elaborate on this, I turn to the 1990 documentary *Paris is Burning*. Muñoz writes:

Certain performances of queer citizenship contain what I call an anticipatory illumination of a queer world, a sign of an actually existing queer reality, a kernel of political possibility with a *stultifying heterosexual present*. I gesture to sites of embodied and performed queer politics and describe them as outposts of actually existing queer worlds. The sites I consider are sites of mass gatherings, performances that can be understood as defiantly public and glimpses into an ensemble of social actors performing a queer world. (49, emphasis added)

For its time, the queer ball was the ideal manifestation of Muñoz's sentiment. They were, for many queer and trans youth of color, primary outlets of pleasure and ecstasy. Despite the realities of hustling and homelessness that many of the ball children experienced, there was always something to *look forward* to in the ball. A longing for the queer rituals that took place in these balls often propelled the children to not only survive, but transcend the oppressive realities of straight time. As Dorian Corey, one of the featured drag queens in the film, shares in regards to *realness*, an essential component of ball ritual involving the mimicry of some variation of straight, white, American, bourgeois lifestyles:

[b]lack people have a hard time getting anywhere and those that do are usually straight. In a ballroom you can be anything you want. You're not really an executive but you're looking like an executive. You're showing the straight world that "I can be an executive if I had the opportunity because can look like one, and that is like a fulfillment."

Thus, in their manipulation of commodity culture, ball children created a beauty that stimulated the curative ecstasy of the ball's utopian energy and, consequently, allowed them to escape the "stultifying" and violent realities of their socioeconomic locations.

This utilization of commodity culture is particularly significant for Muñoz, considering his thoughts on the subversive nature of the quotidian object. In his analysis of Frank O'Hara's poem "Having a Coke with You", (see attached) Muñoz identifies, in the act of consuming a Coke, "a vast lifeworld of queer relationality, an *encrypted* sociality, and a utopian potentiality. The quotidian act of sharing a Coke, consuming a common commodity with a beloved with whom one shares *secret* smiles, trumps fantastic moments in the history of art" (6, emphasis added).

In his detection of “an opening and indeterminacy in what for many people is a locked-down dead commodity” (9), O’Hara highlights the encrypted nature of ecstasy. To consume a Coke with a lover and create meanings of happiness—“secret smiles” and “encrypted sociality”—is to develop an ecstasy that is ineffable and unintelligible. Muñoz believes in the manipulation of the commodity by “queer cultural workers” (9) to create linkages of love, smiles, and ecstasy that are incoherent within dominant structures and necessary for survival.

These texts are just a few examples—I’m sure you have lived through and are aware of many others.

So, my curiosity is centralized on reconciliation. The “contradictory nature” of utopian ecstasy and nihilistic *jouissance* isn’t actually contradictory. Within theoretical language, these modes of pleasure are logically incoherent—but the encrypted pleasures of these ecstatic projects (as you’ve shared in our earlier conversations) transcend language.

I end this letter, then, with a reflection on two poems from your second issue. The spirits of “The Idealist” and “The Militant” seem, initially, oppositional to each other. The Militant is one who finds energy in the continual bloodying and destruction of the world. It is his duty to seek vengeance and “cast out and denounce as traitor” (*Bædan* 2, 185) those who stray from the path of his violence. He has no patience for “softness.” He exists within an eternal cycle of death and war. The Idealist floats. His spirit is less invested in battle, and more in the beautiful “unreality” (144) of his inner world. His existence is simply to be, to absorb the beauty of his visions and ride them “fully and possessively” (144). The sensuality of his nature is obviously distinct from the penetrating hatred of the Militant, and yet, it is not impossible that the two eventually unite. The modality of their fusion is dissonant. And consequently, most resonant. When an idealist learns to

bædan

destroy, when a militant learns to love more deeply and intimately, there is only awakening. Queerness may never arrive, but the synthesis of their love beckons us to come closer to wherever queerness may be.

Yours,

Nicholas



HAVING A COKE WITH YOU

is even more fun than going to San Sebastian, Irún, Hendaye, Biarritz, Bayonne
or being sick to my stomach on the Travesera de Gràcia in Barcelona
partly because in your orange shirt you look like a better happier St. Sebastian
partly because of my love for you, partly because of your love for yoghurt
partly because of the fluorescent orange tulips around the birches
partly because of the secrecy our smiles take on before people and statuary
it is hard to believe when I'm with you that there can be anything as still
as solemn as unpleasantly definitive as statuary when right in front of it
in the warm New York 4 o'clock light we are drifting back and forth
between each other like a tree breathing through its spectacles

and the portrait show seems to have no faces in it at all, just paint
you suddenly wonder why in the world anyone ever did them

I look

at you and I would rather look at you than all the portraits in the world
except possibly for the *Polish Rider* occasionally and anyway it's in the Frick
which thank heavens you haven't gone to yet so we can go together the first time
and the fact that you move so beautifully more or less takes care of Futurism
just as at home I never think of the *Nude Descending a Staircase* or
at a rehearsal a single drawing of Leonardo or Michelangelo that used to wow me
and what good does all the research of the Impressionists do them
when they never got the right person to stand near the tree when the sun sank
or for that matter Marino Marini when he didn't pick the rider as carefully
as the horse

it seems they were all cheated of some marvelous experience
which is not going to go wasted on me which is why I am telling you about it

We find an impulse toward connection and revolt which is not based upon a morality or on a programmatic politic, but instead upon the ineffable lived reality which exceeds these discourses. If we desire to destroy the conditions of our—and so many others’—exclusion, it is out of a desire to abolish all that separates and alienates us from this sensual world and from each other. After all, the Fool’s journey is completed—by way of the madness of the Moon, the vitality of the Sun, and the cosmological mysteries of the Star—with entrance onto the World. This is what we seek in that great betrayal of the human family: to create ourselves on our own terms, to connect and co-conspire, to forge a new ecstatic communication, to discover and grow worlds from which to attack—

to flip the Welcome Table
to burn the Great House.