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The Anti-Social Turn in Queer Studies

1. The Anti-Social Thesis

Recent work in queer theory under the influence of Leo Bersani's definition of sex as anti-communitarian, self-shattering and anti-identitarian produces a counter-intuitive but crucial shift in thinking away from projects of redemption, reconstruction, restoration and reclamation and towards what can only be called an anti-social, negative and anti-relational theory of sexuality (Bersani, 1986; Bersani, 1996). I call this shift "counter-intuitive" because it upends our understanding of the interconnectedness of intimacy, romance and sexual contact and replaces it with a harsh but radically realistic recognition of both the selfishness of sex and its destructive power. The sexual instinct then, within this formulation, nestles up against the death drive and constitutes an oppositional force to what Bersani terms "the tyranny of the self" (Bersani, 1999: p.4). Rather than a life-force connecting pleasure to life, survival and futurity, sex, and particularly homo-sex and receptive sex, is a death drive that undoes the self, releases the self from the drive for mastery and coherence and resolution; "the value of sexuality itself," writes Bersani, "is to demean the seriousness of efforts to redeem it" (Bersani, 1997: p. 222). Bersani's work, while it clearly situates itself in relation to a very well defined canon of gay male aesthetic production by Jean Genet, Marcel Proust and others, has also been useful for the theorization of femme receptivities (Cvetkovich, 2003) and butch abjection and lesbian loneliness (Love, 2007). And the politics of Bersani's project, to the extent that one can identify a political trajectory within a radically non-teleological project, reside its brutal rejection of the comforting platitudes that we use to cushion our fall into mortality, incoherence and non-mastery.

My own recent work is profoundly influenced by this particular strand of queer theory and in a book in progress on the politics of knowledge, I try to capitalize on counter-intuitive and



patently queer forms of negative knowing. In chapters on stupidity, forgetting, failure and illegibility, I try to expose the logic of the binary formulation that damns certain modes of knowing to the realms of negation, absence and passivity and elevates others to the status of common sense. Stupidity, of course, forms a backdrop for the heroic enterprise of wisdom, and failure provides an abject realm that success must counter. Similarly, forgetfulness is constituted as a kind of entropic force that must be halted by rigorous memory practices. But in each case, the under-privileged category actually sustains purposive and intricate modes of oppositional knowledge, many of which can be associated with and linked to forms of activity that we have come to call “queer.” The book works through a series of exemplary texts drawn from popular culture, dyke avant-garde culture and subcultures and links queer critique to negativity and to an oppositional politics which has both anti-racist and anti-capitalist dimensions.

2. Punk Negativity

Lee Edelman’s book, *No Future*, makes perhaps the most powerful and controversial recent contribution to anti-social queer theory (Edelman, 2005). Edelman’s polemic describes the rejection of futurity as the meaning of queer critique and links queer theory to the death drive in order to propose a relentless form of negativity in place of the forward looking, reproductive and heteronormative politics of hope that animates all too many political projects. The queer subject, he argues, has been bound epistemologically, to negativity, to nonsense, to anti-production, to unintelligibility and, instead of fighting this characterization by dragging queerness into recognition, he proposes that we embrace the negativity that we anyway structurally represent. Edelman’s polemic about futurity ascribes to queerness the function of the limit; while the heteronormative political imagination propels itself forward in time and space through the indisputably positive image of the child, and while it projects itself back on the past through the dignified image of the parent, the queer subject stands between heterosexual optimism and its realization. At this political moment, Edelman’s book constitutes a compelling argument against a US imperialist project of hope, and one of the most powerful statements of queer studies’



contribution to an anti-imperialist, queer counter-hegemonic imaginary and yet, I want to engage critically with Edelman's project here in order to argue for a more explicitly political framing of the anti-social project.

While Edelman frames his polemic against futurity with epigraphs by Jacques Lacan and Virginia Woolf, he omits the more obvious reference that his title conjures up and that echoes through recent queer anti-social aesthetic production, namely "God Save the Queen" as sung by *The Sex Pistols*. While *The Sex Pistols* used the refrain "no future" to reject a formulaic union of nation, monarchy and fantasy, Edelman tends to cast material political concerns as crude and pedestrian, as already a part of the conjuring of futurity that his project must foreclose. Indeed, Edelman turns to the unnervingly tidy and precise theoretical contractions of futurity in Lacan because, like Lacan and Woolf, and unlike the punks, he strives to exert a kind of obsessive control over the reception of his own discourse. Twisting and turning back on itself, reveling in the power of inversion, Edelman's syntax itself closes down the anarchy of signification. In footnotes and in chiasmic formulations alike he shuts down critique and withholds the future and fantasies of it from the reader. One footnote predicts critiques of his work based upon its "elitism," "pretension," whiteness and style and the footnote projects other objections on the grounds of "apolitical formalism" (Edelman, 2005). He professes himself unsympathetic to all such responses and having foreclosed the future, continues on his way in a self-enclosed world of cleverness and chiasmus. Edelman's polemic opens the door to a ferocious articulation of negativity ("fuck the social order and the Child in whose name we're collectively terrorized; fuck Annie; fuck the waif from *Les Mis*; fuck the poor, innocent kid on the Net; fuck Laws both with capital Is and with small; fuck the whole network of Symbolic relations and the future that serves as its prop" [29]) but, ultimately, he does not fuck the law, big or little L, he succumbs to the law of grammar, the law of logic, the law of abstraction, the law of apolitical formalism, the law of genres.



3. Anti-Social History

The anti-social thesis as articulated by Edelman and Bersani, as Bersani himself notes, does not spring from nowhere – rather, there are early versions of an anti-communitarian homophilia in early 20th Century Europe. In general, however, we have favored a far more liberal understanding of gay and lesbian identity and, in the liberal Euro-American context, modern gay and lesbian history has favored a narrative about progressive enlightenment within which the same sex couple emerged into liberation towards the end of the twentieth century by throwing off the tyranny of inversion (tyrannical because it presumed heterosexual structures of desire) and by inhabiting non-variant gender identities and refusing role play (Chauncey et al, 1989). Within this same narrative, gays and lesbians are marked as heroic norm-resisters, always part of a social movement or a proto-political group and always somewhat at odds with respectability, decency and domesticity. This narrative, as Michel Foucault argues forcefully in *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, is appealing, compelling, convincing...and utterly wrong. While it is very much “to the speaker’s benefit,” (Foucault, 1980: p. 6) as Foucault cheekily puts it, to tell this kind of story about the remarkable emergence of sexual minorities from the tyranny of repressive regimes, it is also another self-congratulatory, feel-good narrative of liberal humanism that celebrates homo-heroism and ignores the often overlapping agendas of the state and homosexuals, or the family and homosexuals, or decency and homosexuals

In fact, while Foucault replaces this romantic narrative of gay/lesbian resistance with the concept of the “reverse discourse,” we must also trace multiple genealogies for contemporary lesbian/gay/transgender movements only some of which overlap with other radical projects and alternative politics and many of which dovetail with a politics of decency, racialized projects and masculinist enterprises committed to buttressing state power and emphasizing the gendered distinctions between public and private. The apolitical anti-social agenda, I will be arguing in this section, cuts both ways and while it mitigates against liberal fantasies of progressive enlightenment and community cohesion, it also coincides uncomfortably with a fascist sensibility as we will see.



One of the main markers of homosexuality, gender variance, has often marked the site of some of the most energetic disagreements between homosexuals about the political meaning of their sexual preferences – and while for women, the meanings of transgender identifications are read in relation to a feminist project, for men, cross-gender identification as often registered a dividing line between masculinist homosocial agendas and more radical queer politics. When Euro-American medical discourse, under the influence of a psychoanalytic focus upon sexual aim and object choice, shifted gender variance out of the category of homosexual and recognized a new subject position in the transsexual, the continued link between gender variance and homosexuality was cast as anachronistic and either pre-political or socially deviant (Chauncey, 1989). Indeed, as early as the 1920's in Germany in particular, homophile movements made vigorous distinctions between male effeminacy and female masculinity, for example, and a form of homosexuality that involved gender normative partnerships. Gender normative partnerships between men in Germany in the first part of the century actually dovetailed, as various scholars have shown, with the exaltation of masculinism within National Socialism.¹ I will return to this shortly. Male and female cross-gender identification have had different relations to gender politics, masculinism, negativity and domesticity. In fact, we can trace some contemporary feminist mistrust of female-to-male (FTM) gender variance back to the early twentieth century when female masculinity was cast, by Otto Weininger and others, as, simultaneously, a sign of the collapse of gender distinctions and, by implication, civilized society, and a marker of female genius (Weininger, 1903). Early feminists had to fight against social constructions of femininity as passive and weak while guarding against the notion that when they were active and strong, they were masculine or manly. So, while the masculine woman might be cast as socially deviant and possibly criminal in some circles, in others, she was accepted as superior to her feminine and weak sisters – Gertrude Stein, for example, embraced eagerly the ideas of Weininger because it gave her a rationale for her genius and its relationship to her masculinity (Katz, 1978). Stein was not troubled by the anti-feminism or anti-semitism of Weininger, on the contrary, she found it to

¹ This association is not so latent and in fact is the topic of a painting by Attila Richard Lukacs, a Canadian painter known for his striking and monumental portraits of homoerotic skinheads – “Amorous Meeting” (1992) depicts two muscular and semi-naked skinheads giving a Hitler salute to the setting sun while embracing. A swastika features prominently in the image and casts a long shadow over the poppy field that stretches between the men and the sun.



be a relief. And Stein could easily be folded into the apolitical anti-social agenda of Edelman and Bersani with her refusal to make sense and to mean in any conventionally clichéd ways.

As for the effeminate man, he was viewed by many as a traitor to a politics of virility and as someone who had betrayed patriarchal fraternity. In early twentieth century Germany, indeed, where the patriarchal state, male bonding and homoerotic fraternity were cast as continuous with one another, the effeminate or cross-identified man was vilified by all sides. The Nazi state, as Dagmar Herzog has argued in *Sex After Fascism*, was opportunistic in its official relation to homosexuality and while sometimes it was convenient to turn a blind eye to the homoerotic bonding within the SA, at other times, it was politically expedient to persecute homosexuals (Herzog, 2007). But the effeminate homosexual was persecuted in Nazi Germany both for his rejection of heterosexual family and for his embrace of the feminine. Some German homosexuals also set themselves up in opposition to gender “deviants” and the effeminate man was seen by them as someone who disrupted the “Gemeinschaft der Eigenen” or the “Community of the Special,” a fraternity of masculine homosexuals.

Andrew Hewitt writes about the early politics of masculinism in a difficult but important chapter titled “The Philosophy of Masculinism” in *Political Inversions: Homosexuality, Fascism & The Modernist Imagination*. Here, he relates the history of male homophile movements in pre-War Germany that emerged in response to the encouragement of homoerotic bonds within Weimar Germany and early Nazism – “masculinism,” as he calls it, responded to a totalitarian impulse for “a liberation of the whole body” and the celebration of the male body within all-male brotherhoods. Emancipation, for the masculinist, in this context meant the separation of men from women, the reduction of women to nature and biology and the elevation of man to culture and politics. The masculinism of early homophiles coincided with conservative emphases on the superiority of male community and with a racialized rejection of femininity. Indeed, male Jews, for these early homosexual anti-social activists, were seen as men who had been made effeminate by their investments in family and home – a realm that should be left to women – and they made connections between the Jews and effeminate homosexuals as men who have not lived up to their virile duty to remain committed to other masculine men and to a masculine public sphere.

“Tuntenhass,” or the hatred of effeminate homosexuals, says Hewitt characterized these masculinists and allowed them to imagine themselves as radical because they viewed male effeminacy as a reproduction of patriarchal understandings of gender polarity. In Hewitt’s account, masculinists like Hans Bluher, a champion of homosexuality and *Männerbunder* and the founder of the male-only youth group *Wandervogel*, were taken with Freudian explanations of erotic drives because Freud moved away from biological explanations for homosexuality and towards cultural explanations. The male, according to Bluher’s brand of masculinism, rises above the herd (race) and the family (woman) and finds his primary bonds with superior men on behalf of superior men – and so, bonds between men surpass racial and familial bonds. Despite the acceptance of Freudian concepts, the masculinists still cast Jews as anachronistic – as stuck in a past political moment that must be eliminated in order to move on to a glorious and totalized contemporary future of men and man-power. This homosexual masculinist future depended upon a commitment to sameness rather than otherness, to the self not the other – and within this trajectory, the Jew and the gender variant man represent the failure of the political project of masculinism.

Like Leo Bersani’s elaboration of a non-redemptive politics in *Homos*, Hewitt’s work is interested in refuting a wholly liberal tradition of reading homosexuality back through radical social movements. He wants to remember a far **less liberal tradition of homophilia** from the early 20th century, and from Germany in particular, in order to unpack the relationship between eros and politics and to see that eros is not always and everywhere a force for good that has been met by negative and repressive power. Hewitt asks us to think of homosexuality as a historically specific phenomenon not a continuously resistant movement and so he proposes provocatively that we ask the question: “what was homosexuality for” politically speaking and at any given historical moment (81) rather than asking how it was repressed or gained recognition and acceptance.

Within these genealogies we can find tensions between same-sex and gender variant traditions of queer activism and identification. Of course, it is not possible to argue simply that homophile movements from pre-Nazi Germany echo through contemporary gay male masculinist movements, and yet we should theorize contemporary gay male politics of vigorous



masculinity and anti-domesticity at least in part in relation to their historical antecedents rather than only in relation to the radical homosexual movements of the 1960's. And, it also seems important to note the presence of earlier tensions between feminists and female-to-male transgender subjects even though those tensions do not flow easily into contemporary arenas of disagreement. Suffice to say that tensions about the meaning of gender-variant and gender-stable versions of homosexuality have a long history and that history has criss-crossed the anti-social agenda. The politics of masculinity, as opposed to the politics of gay social movements or the politics of gender variance, names a political strand that can easily incorporate forms of female and male masculinism while casting all feminine identification as a source of inferiority and as contrary to the nation state.

4. A Queer Politics of Negativity

I am arguing then that we need multiple genealogies of gay/lesbian/trans history in order to sort through the multiple political projects that have been called queer or gay during the 20th C. And that we need to think carefully about the problems with a progressive and positive liberal agenda and about the potentially sinister associations that can be drawn between apolitical negativity of the kind Edelman outlines and the masculinist anti-domesticity and anti-reproductive politics of homophile movements in the 1930's with Nazi sympathies.

And yet, I remain drawn to the politics of negativity but want to articulate it differently than Edelman and Bersani. So what does or would constitute the politics of "no future" and by implication the politics of negativity? The Sex Pistols, we may recall, made the phrase "no future" into a rallying call for Britain's dispossessed. In their debut song, written as an anti-celebratory gesture for the Queen's silver jubilee, *The Sex Pistols* turned the National Anthem into a snarling rejection of the tradition of the monarchy, the national investment in its continuation and the stakes that the whole event betrayed in futurity itself, where futurity signifies the nation, the divisions of class and race upon which the notion of national belonging depends and the activity of celebrating the ideological system which gives meaning to the nation



and takes meaning away from the poor, the unemployed, the promiscuous, the non-citizen, the racialized immigrant, the queer:

“God save the queen/She ain’t no human being/There is no future

In England's dreaming...Oh god save history/God save your mad parade/ Oh lord god
have mercy/All crimes are paid. When there's no future/How can there be sin/

We're the flowers in the dustbin/We're the poison in your human machine/We're the
future your future. ..God save the queen/We mean it man/And there is no future/In
England's dreaming...No future no future/No future for you/No future no future/No
future for me.”

No future for Edelman means routing our desires around the eternal sunshine of the spotless child and finding the shady side of political imaginaries in the proudly sterile and anti-reproductive logics of queer relation. It also seems to mean something (too much) about Lacan’s symbolic and not enough about the powerful negativity of punk politics. When *The Sex Pistols* spit in the face of English provincialism and called themselves “the flowers in the dustbin,” when they associated themselves with the trash and debris of polite society, they launched their poison into the human. Negativity might well constitute an anti-politics but it should not register as apolitical.

There are many examples of anti-social theorists in a feminist context or in post colonial contexts and these are writers who articulate the scope of an explicitly political negativity: we can think here of Valerie Solanas and Jamaica Kincaid but also of the performance art of Marina Abramovicz and Yoko Ono. Jamaica Kincaid’s novels oppose the optimism of the Colonial vision with a ferocious voice of despair, refusal, negation and bleak pessimism and Valerie Solanas articulates a deeply anti-social politics which casts patriarchy as not just a form of male domination but as the formal production of sense, mastery and meaning. Abramovicz and Ono both perform a version of feminism that locates femininity in the negative territory of masochism, passivity, vulnerability and castration.

1) Jamaica Kincaid's Colonial Rage: In a recent *interview about Autobiography of my Mother*, Kincaid was told: *Your characters seem to be against most things that are good, yet they have no reason to act this way -- they express a kind of negative freedom. Is this the only freedom available to the poor and powerless?* Kincaid answers: "I think in many ways the problem that my writing would have with an American reviewer is that Americans find difficulty very hard to take. They are inevitably looking for a happy ending. Perversely, I will not give the happy ending. I think life is difficult and that's that. I am not at all -- absolutely not at all -- interested in the pursuit of happiness. I am not interested in the pursuit of positivity. I am interested in pursuing a truth, and the truth often seems to be not happiness but its opposite"² Kincaid's novels do indeed withhold happy endings and she adds the fine shading to the narrative of colonialism by creating characters who can never thrive, never love and never create precisely because colonialism has removed the context within which those things would make sense. In *Autobiography of My Mother*, for example, Kincaid provides her readers with a motherless protagonist who, in turn, does not want to be a mother, to reproduce under colonialism or to claim kinship with her colonized father. She opposes colonial rule precisely by refusing to accommodate herself to it or to be responsible for reproducing it in any way. Thus the autobiographical becomes an unwriting, an undoing, an unraveling of self. Kincaid concludes an interview about the book, which the reviewer has called "depressing" and "nihilistic" by saying: "I feel it's my business to make everyone a little less happy."

B) Valerie Solanas and the War on Men: A worthy goal and one to which radical feminist Valerie Solanas dedicated her life and work. Solanas recognized that happiness and despair, futurity and foreclosure have been cast as the foundations of certain forms of subjectivity within patriarchy and she relentlessly counters the production of "truth" within patriarchy with her own dark and perverted truths about men, masculinity and violence (Solanas, 2004). For Solanas, patriarchy is a system of meaning that neatly divides positive and negative human traits between men and women. Solanas inverts this process casting men as "biological accidents" and at the

² "Jamaica Kincaid Hates Happy Endings," interview in *Mother Jones* by Marilyn Snell (Sept./October 1997).



same time refusing to take up the space of positivity. Instead she colonizes the domain of violence and offers, helpfully, to cut men up (SCUM) in order to demolish the hegemonic order. While straight men are walking dildos, gay men or faggots embody all the worst traits of patriarchy because they are men who love other men and have no use for women. In the manifesto this is called "faggotry" and men are supposed to both fear and desire it. For Solanas, men, in all forms, are the enemy and there is no such thing as a male rebel; Solanas famously made theory into practice when she took a gun and shot Andy Warhol for "stealing" a script from her. While we might be horrified by the anarchic violence of Solanas's act, we also have to recognize that this kind of violence is precisely what we call upon and imply when we theorize and conjure negativity.

C) Abromovicz and Ono and Radical Passivity: Yoko Ono's nine minute performance "Cut Piece" involves the artist sitting on stage while members of an audience come up and cut pieces of her clothing off. The audience is mixed but as the performance unfolds, more and more men come to the stage and they become more and more aggressive about cutting her clothing until she is left, semi nude, hands over her breasts, her castration, vulnerability and passivity fully on display. How can we think about time, identity, femininity, masochism, gender, race, display, spectatorship and temporality in this piece? What is the self that comes undone in 9 minutes for an audience and is it feminist? What is the time of action? What is the time of passivity? How can we think about this refusal of self as an anti-liberal act, a revolutionary statement of pure opposition? Marina Abomovicz has performed similar acts of unbecoming – a piece where the audience is invited to use various objects on her in any way they please for example. Both artists use the performance stage as a way of engaging the murderous impulses of audiences against women, against artists, against self.

If we use "radical passivity" as another anti-social mode, we can begin to glimpse its politics. In a liberal realm where the "pursuit of happiness," as Jamaica Kincaid might say, is both desirable and mandatory and where certain formulations of self (as active, voluntaristic, choosing, propulsive) dominate the political sphere, *radical passivity* may signal another kind of refusal, the refusal quite simply to be. While many feminists from Simone de Beauvoir to



Monique Wittig to Jamaica Kincaid have cast the project of “becoming woman” as one in which the woman can only be complicit in a patriarchal order, feminist theorists in general have not turned to masochism and passivity as potential alternatives to liberal formulations of womanhood. Carol Clover famously cast male masochism as one explanation for the popularity of horror films among teenage boys and we might similarly cast female masochism as the willing giving over of the self to the other, to power (Clover, 1992); in a performance of radical passivity, we witness the willingness of the subject to actually come undone, to dramatize unbecoming for the other so that the viewer does not have to witness unbecoming as a function of her own body. Indeed, radical passivity could describe certain versions of lesbian femininity. Judith Butler’s work on the “lesbian phallus” argues for the recognition of the potentiality of masculine power in a female form but this still leaves the feminine lesbian unexplained and lost to an unphallic modality (Butler, 1993). The anti-social dictates an unbecoming, a cleaving to that which seems to shame or annihilate; and a radical passivity allows for the inhabiting of femininity with a difference.

The radical understandings of passivity that emerge within Marina Abramovic’s and Yoko Ono’s work, not to mention in Faith Wilding’s legendary piece “Waiting,” all offer an anti-social way out of the double bind of becoming woman and thereby propping up the dominance of man. The feminist archive of the anti-social, needless to say, looks far different than the gay male archive deployed by Bersani, Edelman and countless others.

5. Size Does Matter: Tiny Archives

The real problem, to my mind, with this anti-social turn in queer theory, then, has less to do with the meaning of negativity – which, as I am arguing, can be found in an array of political projects from anti-colonialism to punk to avant garde feminism – and more to do with the excessively small archive that represents queer negativity and the concomitant attachment to a pure and positively queer past. Even as authors like Edelman and Bersani commit whole-heartedly to a politics of anti-futurity and anti-redemption, still they trace their anti-social project through a



heroic archive of literary texts by Genet and others rather than the quite dismaying archive of anti-social, masculinist, transphobic sexism as articulated by German homophiles. The gay male archive preferred by Edelman and Bersani oddly coincides with the canonical archive of Euro-American literature and film and furthermore, it narrows that archive down to a select group of anti-social queer aesthetes and camp icons and texts: it includes then, in no particular order: Tennessee Williams, Virginia Woolf, Bette Midler, Andy Warhol, Henry James, Jean Genet, Broadway musicals, Marcel Proust, Alfred Hitchcock, Oscar Wilde, Jack Smith, Judy Garland, Kiki and Herb but it rarely mentions all kinds of other anti-social writers, artists and texts like Valerie Solanas, Jamaica Kincaid, Patricia Highsmith, Wallace and Gromit, Johnny Rotten, Nicole Eiseman, Eileen Myles, June Jordan, Linda Besemer, Hothead Paisan, *Finding Nemo*, Lesbians on Ecstasy, Deborah Cass, Sponge Bob, Shulamith Firestone, Marga Gomez, Toni Morrison, Patti Smith and so on.

The gay male archive because it is limited to a short list of favored canonical writers is also bound by a particular range of affective responses. And so, fatigue, ennui, boredom, indifference, ironic distancing, indirectness, arch dismissal, insincerity and camp make up what Ann Cvetkovich has called “an archive of feelings” associated with this form of anti-social theory. But, this canon occludes another suite of affectivities associated, again, with another kind of politics and a different form of negativity. In this other archive, we can identify, for example: rage, rudeness, anger, spite, impatience, intensity, mania, sincerity, earnestness, over-investment, incivility, brutal honesty and so on. The first archive is a camp archive, a repertoire of formalized and often formulaic responses to the banality of straight culture and the repetitiveness and unimaginativeness of heteronormativity. The second archive, however, is far more in keeping with the undisciplined kinds of responses that Bersani at least seems to associate with sex and queer culture and it is here that the promise of self-shattering, loss of mastery and meaning, unregulated speech and desire are unloosed. Dyke anger, anti-colonial despair, racial rage, counter-hegemonic violences, punk pugilism, these are the bleak and angry territories of the anti-social turn; these are the jagged zones within which not only self-shattering (the opposite of narcissism in a way) but other-shattering occurs.



The anti-social archive must also be an archive of alternatives, however, and it must mix high and low, known and unknown, popular and obscure; and this archive where the promise of self-shattering, loss of mastery and meaning, unregulated speech and desire are unloosed. By way of a queer conclusion and as a gateway to thinking of the queer alternative or anti-anti utopianism, let me give an example of a low cultural text with an anti-social bent and a radically alternative vision: the new Disney feature *Over the Hedge* dramatizes a dialectical stand off between some woodland creatures and their new junk food consuming, pollution spewing neighbors. As the creatures awake from the winter hibernation, they discover that while they were sleeping, a soulless suburban development stole their woodland space and put up a huge wall or hedge, a partition indeed, to fence them out. The creatures, raccoons and squirrels, porcupines and skunks, turtles and bears, band together to destroy the colonizers and to refuse the suburbanites depiction of the woodland dwellers as “vermin.” The band of creatures even features a Hegelian possum that plays dead when in danger and explains to his daughter wisely: “Playing possum is what we do. We die so we may live!” Ultimately, this children’s feature offers more in the way of a vision of collective action than most independent films and critical theory put together and the film’s conclusion points to queer alliance, queer space and queer temporalities as the answers to the grim inevitability of reproductive futurity and suburban domesticity.

6. The Queer Alternative

In my work on “alternative political imaginaries,” the alternative embodies the suite of “other choices” that attend every political, economic and aesthetic crisis and their resolutions. Queerness names the other possibilities, the other potential outcomes, the non-linear and non-inevitable trajectories that fan out from any given event and lead to unpredictable futures. In *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*, social historians Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker trace what they call “the struggles for alternative ways of life” that accompanied and opposed the rise of capitalism in the



early seventeenth century. In stories about piracy, dispossessed commoners and urban insurrections, Linebaugh and Rediker detail the modes of colonial and national violence that brutally stamped out all challenges to middle-class power and that cast proletarian rebellion as disorganized, random and apolitical. Linebaugh and Rediker emphasize instead the power of cooperation within the anti-capitalist mob and they pay careful attention to the alternatives that this “many headed hydra” of resistant groups imagined and pursued. We need to craft a queer agenda that works cooperatively with the many other heads of the monstrous entity that opposes global capitalism, and to define queerness as a mode of crafting alternatives with others, alternatives which are not naively oriented to a liberal notion of progressive entitlement but a queer politics which is also not tied to a nihilism which always lines up against women, domesticity and reproduction. Instead, we turn to a history of alternatives, contemporary moments of alternative political struggle and high and low cultural productions of a funky, nasty, over the top and thoroughly accessible queer negativity. If we want to make the anti-social turn in queer theory, we must be willing to turn away from the comfort zone of polite exchange in order to embrace a truly political negativity, one that promises, this time, to fail, to make a mess, to fuck shit up, to be loud, unruly, impolite, to breed resentment, to bash back, to speak up and out, to disrupt, assassinate, shock and annihilate, and, to quote Jamaica Kincaid, to make everyone a little less happy!

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1. The Anti-Social Thesis. Recent work in queer theory under the influence of Leo Bersani's definition of sex as anti-communitarian, self-shattering and anti-identitarian produces a counter-intuitive but crucial shift in thinking away from projects of redemption, reconstruction, restoration and reclamation and towards what can only be called an anti-social, negative and anti-relational theory of sexuality (Bersani, 1986; Bersani, 1996). And the politics of Bersani's project, to the extent that one can identify a political trajectory within a radically non-teleological project, reside its brutal rejection of the comforting platitudes that we use to cushion our fall into mortality, incoherence and non-mastery. Anti social turn halberstam. Halberstam's article on antisocial turn in queer theory. University. University of Sussex. Course. Critical Issues in Queer Theory 920Q3A. Uploaded by. Sara Comuzzo. Following debates surrounding the anti-social turn in queer theory in recent years, there has been a renewed interest in the role of activism, the limits of the political, and the question of normativity and ethics. Queer Futures engages with these concerns, exploring issues of complicity and agency with a central focus on the material and economic as well as philosophical dimensions of sexual politics. Queer Futures engages with these concerns, exploring issues of complicity and agency with a central focus on the material and economic as well as philosophical dimensions of sexual politics.