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Carlos Motta

Editorial—“(Im)practical (Im)possibilities”

We are in the middle of a time in which classical notions of flexibility and freedom actually work to alienate our relations to one another. But in fact the ability to shift, to deviate, to morph should constitute the strongest claim that we are much more than what traditional categories tell us we must only be. It is precisely when elaborate techniques of labor extraction become indistinguishable from sensations of pleasure and self-realization that queerness returns to insist on the freedom to move and the freedom to be what one is and what one wants to be—not as a matter of belief but as a matter of survival. Because we can only see new worlds and new ways of life when we are able to be ourselves, to move between cultural, sexual, or civic roles without being defined by any single one. When this is blocked off, we can barely even see the world as it already is. As normative structures themselves collapse this only becomes more clear as our our bodies, minds, sexualities, and relations to the material world become unstable and start to marble and mingle. In fact we are all coming out of the closet and becoming queer. Some did it long ago, and as forms of exploitation evolve and adapt it becomes clear that taking a queer stance is not any easier today than it was then. This month we're really honored to have artist Carlos Motta guest-edit “(Im)practical (Im)possibilities,” a very special, very queer April issue of e-flux journal.

—Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood, Anton Vidokle

> But, bottom line, this is my own feeling of urgency and need; bottom line, emotionally, even a tiny charcoal scratching done as a gesture to mark a person’s response to this epidemic means whole worlds to me if it is hung in public; bottom line, each and every gesture carries a reverberation that is meaningful in its diversity; bottom line, we have to find our own forms of gesture and communication—you can never depend on the mass media to reflect us or our needs or our states of mind; bottom line, with enough gestures we can deafen the satellites and lift the curtains surrounding the control room.
>
> —David Wojnarowicz, *Postcards from America*: *X-Rays from Hell* (1989)

At the age of seventeen I picked up a copy of *Close to the Knives*, David Wojnarowicz’s “memoir of disintegration,” and found an intensely apocalyptic vision of the world that felt terrifyingly real, confident, and uncompromising. That was the moment I started to understand that my personal struggle as a gay boy growing up in a Catholic South

David Wojnarowicz, Untitled (Face in Dirt), 1990.

American country was part of a much larger political struggle. And it was then that I was able to name the injustice of the system towards queer lives, and my own feeling of urgency with regard to it. Wojnarowicz made the convergence between rage, ideals for a good life, and political commitment evident and urgent: a refusal, despite the discouraging state of things, to adapt to the forces of oppression.

We live in a time of pervasive conformity and strategic pragmatism where, rather than challenge and transform those very structures that have historically denied our (deviant) identities and (feared) bodies, the political aim of mainstream Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex (LGBTI) movements now consists of begging for inclusion in discriminatory legislative, social, religious, and cultural systems. The idea of "equality" has been hijacked by homonormative career bureaucrats who conform to existing systemic protocols, sacrificing the hope of a truly mutable sexual and gender revolution.

Ideas of radical change tend to be regarded as naive and outdated in our increasingly normalized neoliberal climate. Progress is equated with assimilation, and individual and community rights are mostly available to socially and economically privileged sexual minorities who have the resources to be visible. The mainstream LGBTI movement's moderate approach, where

Ryan Conrad, Gay Marriage Will Cure Aids, 2011. Courtesy of the artist.

identity-recognition and tolerance are the foundation of the battle for legal rights, has proven insufficient to confront issues of poverty, disability, criminalization, discrimination, and other forms of oppression that the majority of queer people face. This political inequality and cultural complacency must compel us to insist that social issues *are* queer issues and that social injustice *is* queer injustice.

But reductive binary discourses fail to acknowledge the nuances of the way power operates in society. They simplify the perverse ramifications of political manipulation, to the extent that attaining justice may in fact be *impossible* within the current structure and its institutions. Queer people around the world resist the appeal of the "moderate" mainstream LGBTI movement and its pillar issues, like marriage equality—a battle that demonstrates how an incremental approach to change developed on the terms of institutionalized bureaucracy reproduces systemic disparity. Marriage privatizes social safety nets, destabilizes the bonds of the welfare state, and creates a culture of self-reliance that perpetuates economic inequality.[1] Marriage is often discussed as being about love and sentimental commitment, and legal and moral rights are extended to subjects who conform to a conventional understanding of what a union between people can be. Only two people, preferably a man and a woman, who (faithfully) commit for eternity can be granted access to innumerable social and legal benefits. Those who have not, by fate or by choice, adjusted to that dictate are marginalized by the law and sanctioned by normative morality. Thus, our imperative becomes mobilizing and organizing in multiple directions to build a horizon of possibilities that moves past marriage rights: a task demanding that we fight beyond the reductive identity-based approach that sees inclusion as its primary aim. It demands that we imagine seeking justice on our own terms, via alternative forms of civic engagement.

I am interested in the history of sexual and gender movements, in the way their histories are written and told, and in the pedagogical potential of mediating and producing knowledge through art projects. I am particularly interested in documenting countercultural initiatives and in facilitating discursive platforms that can enable critical conversations around matters of social justice. This issue of *e-flux journal* is born from the convergence of these interests. It was conceived as a continuation of a larger discursive project I have been working on that has manifested in the online and exhibition project "We Who Feel Differently,"[2] and in three experimental symposia that sought to ask what is at stake in the process of the normalization of LGBTI culture.[3] The symposia brought together academics, activists, artists, and theologians to reflect on the representation of sexuality in art, culture, and society at large, proposing a politics of difference and framing non-binary classifications as social opportunities rather than condemnation.

"Difference" is a way of *being* in the world, and as such, it represents the prospect of individual and collective empowerment and freedom. Freedom implies the sovereignty to govern oneself: being human means being beyond parameters, being without sexual or gender constraints.[4] Feeling *differently* entails embracing sexual and gender difference politically; it means embracing our relation to ourselves, forming communities, and working individually and collaboratively to transform the conditions that oppress us. To feel *differently* is to feel with agency, with self-determination. This opposition to the mainstream rhetoric of equality resists the denial of the expansive affective and sexual potentialities that are often deemed immoral, disrespectful, and (sometimes) unlawful; it also suggests an acute attention to the battles of the sexual movements of the past, which can inform present-day activism. This shift also calls for an ethics of solidarity with the social movements of other minority communities.

Considering the unprecedented visibility that some gay and lesbian issues have gained over the last fifteen years, how can sexual and gender politics themselves be "queered"? Who is being represented, and by whom? Who is excluded in the name of LGBTI equality, and how? What practical goals would move us towards a politics of true liberation? Producing critical projects as a form of mobilization serves to reexamine the idea of progress and proposes counter narratives in which queer affects, bodies, and collectivities are unapologetically reclaimed.

Queer art and artists have used strategies of denormalization and resistance to rupture systems of representation—to self-represent, dissent, experiment, construct fantasy, engage in social commentary, and confront power structures. Art has enabled queers to claim our place, to decolonize our bodies, to reimagine our desires, and to constitute ourselves as a political force.

BUILD AN AGENDA
BASED ON THE NEEDS OF
QUEER MINORITIES
REJECT THE POLITICS OF
ASSIMILATION, STOP BEGGING
FOR TOLERANCE
WELCOME THE CELEBRATION OF
SEXUAL AND GENDER DIVERSITY
DEMAND
THE TRANSFORMATION OF
THE SYSTEM
TRULY DESACRALIZE
DEMOCRACY AND DEMORALIZE
THE JUDICIARY
DEFINE OUR
EMOTIONAL AND SEXUAL
NEEDS ON OUR OWN TERMS
VALUE CRITICAL DIFFERENCE
INSTEAD OF FALSE EQUALITY

Carlos Motta, We Who Feel Differently: A Manifesto, 2012. Courtesy of the artist.

Las Yeguas del Apocalipsis, University of Chile Re-founding, 1989.

Breaking the tyranny of silence surrounding our experience of sexuality and gender in society has been a way of owning our presence as citizens of democracy. Think, for example, of the creative strategies used by some members of the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP), a grassroots movement that used "direct action," civil disobedience, performative interventions, video art, and graphic design to confront the indifference and irresponsibility of the US government during the AIDS epidemic. ACT UP was a queer art of rage, one in which politics and aesthetics were indivisible. Or think of the transgressive project of Mujeres Creando, whose public performances, graffiti interventions, and community-building initiatives tackle the violence and discrimination inflicted upon women in Bolivia and elsewhere. Or think of David Wojnarowicz, an artist whose poetic and uncompromisingly political works challenged the normative grounds of society, from the hegemonic authority of the Church to the State's control over bodies. Wojnarowicz's art was a queer art of survival in which the personal was exposed as intrinsically political. Or think of Giuseppe Campuzano's rewriting of the history of Peru from the perspective of indigenous transvestites, a project that exposes a patriarchal logic of representation and exclusion where nonconforming gender expressions are violently omitted from historical narratives. Campuzano offers a complex version of history where gender, race, and class intersect as emancipatory forces.

This issue of *e-flux journal* focuses on contemporary queer culture and art through ten commissioned texts by an international group of authors who reflect on present day counterculture, artistic strategies, philosophical thought, and social activism. The issue asks: Where is the feeling of queer urgency located today? And what is the role of a queer art of resistance?

Beatriz Preciado's "Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics" explains what she calls the "pharmacopornographic" regime: a form of power that has taken over the management of life in the twenty-first century and that is structured by pornography and

Giuseppe Campuzano, DNI (De Natura Incertus), 2009. Courtesy of the artist.

pharmaceutics. Preciado describes the totalizing influence this new regime has on processes of individual and collective subjectivization, in particular regarding the construction of sex and the performance of gender. Preciado tests this austere and overbearing capitalist scheme on her/his own skin by applying doses of testosterone over a long period to observe its effects and simultaneously theorize about forms of resistance to systemic control.

In "Charming for the Revolution: A Gaga Manifesto," **Jack Halberstam** drafts a model of queer anarchism that rejects institutionalized forms of activism, authoritative State politics, and the assimilationist impulse of the mainstream LGBTI movement. Halberstam draws from her theory of "going Gaga" and from her work-in-progress *The Wild* to examine "emergent forms of life through the glimpses we catch of it in queer popular and subcultural production."[5] Halberstam's anarchy is a critical and "impractical" project of solidarity and self-governance. It is a project that refutes the belief that radical change has been co-opted and suggests ways in which it is, and will continue, taking place.

In "Queer Corpses: Grupo Chaclacayo and the Image of Death," **Miguel A. López** revisits the work of Peruvian art collective Grupo Chaclacayo, active from the mid-1980s to the mid-'90s, whose experimental political artworks remain largely underappreciated. Grupo Chaclacayo's practice of radical sexual dissidence took place in the midst of Peru's bloody war against the Shining Path guerrillas, a context explicitly referenced in the group's use of the body as a social site marked by tortuous violence. López also exposes how Grupo Chaclacayo's work responded to the Christian morality propagated by the Peruvian Catholic Church with infamous gender-variant depictions of religious mysticism and agony. The group was rejected by the art establishment and worked from the margins. López also mentions a number of other Latin American artists, placing Grupo Chaclacayo in the context of a regional cultural practice of resistance.

Virginia Solomon's "What is Love?: Queer Subcultures

Graffiti of Mujeres Creando, 2009.

and the Political Present" discusses the pioneering work of the Canadian art collective General Idea in relation to contemporary feminist and queer artists Sharon Hayes, LTTR, and Ridykeulous. Solomon suggest how the work of these artists proposes an alternative understanding of politics "in the face of governmental processes that, then as now, are either unable or unwilling to address grave social and economic injustice." Solomon discusses the way love is invoked by these artists as an a/effective individual and collective force of self-empowerment and social critique.

Greg Youmans's "Living on the Edge: Recent Queer Film and Video in the San Francisco Bay Area" examines the aesthetics and production strategies of queer filmmakers in the San Francisco Bay Area in relation to those of art world capitals like New York. Youmans identifies an ethos of experimentation, a resistance to professionalism, and an embracing of "failure" as radical strategies common to Bay Area artists. Youmans contextualizes his arguments by revisiting the work of The Cockettes and Barbara Hammer, who he uses as examples of marginal art practices that inextricably link the politics of sexuality and gender with the experience of building and living in community.

In "The Defiant Prose of Sarah Schulman," **Ryan Conrad**, artist and cofounder of Against Equality, interviews activist, writer, and cultural critic **Sarah Schulman** about collaborative practice, her commitment to queer self-organization, and, in Conrad's words, "the politics of always coming from the margins." Schulman also shares her views on the risks of creating a biased historical narrative of ACT UP in reference to two recent documentaries about the pioneering grassroots organization.

In "A Defense of Marriage Act: Notes on the Social Performance of Queer Ambivalence," **Malik Gaines** offers a critique of queer critiques of gay marriage. Sharing his personal experience as a gay-married man, Gaines challenges the radical/conservative binary often invoked by radical activists to expose how queer discourses may underestimate the benefits of legally sanctioned contracts—contracts that, in his view, can be subtly queered and disrupted on their own terms.

In "Becoming-Undetectable," **Nathan Lee** identifies the construction of three phases in the history of the experience of AIDS—from outbreak, to rage, to undetectability. Lee's tracing of these "fictions" exposes the complex ways in which the representation of AIDS, like the virus itself, has changed, but continues to (re)produce old and new forms of (representational) crises. Lee engages Tim Dean's analysis of barebacking pornography, Leo Bersani's psychoanalytic critique of the subculture of barebacking, and Rosi Braidotti's ideas on "transformative projects of disappearance" to shape an unexplored ethics of *becoming* undetectable.

Antke Engel and **Renate Lorenz**'s theoretical exploration of the discourse of toxicity in "Toxic Assemblages, Queer Socialities: A Dialogue of Mutual Poisoning" suggests that the *toxic* may be a means to shape queer subjectivities. Structured in two voices, the text uses Renate Lorenz and Pauline Baudry's film *Toxic* as a backdrop to reflect on mug shots—police photographs of "deviant" subjects—and other media technologies that intoxicate as they circulate. The authors ask, "Are there strategies of intoxication that may be turned against themselves? And could the intoxicated social body become the home of queer socialities?"

Lastly, **Gregg Bordowitz**'s new poem "Anhedonia" reflects on the discursive conditions and social climate of the present, expressing how they affect the *voice* in the poem—conditions that resonate with the themes proposed throughout these pages.

These texts draw a world of *(im)practical (im)possibilities*, a place where the realities we desire are not deemed impossible by institutions but instead constitute the drive to transform systematized oppression. The different authors featured here engage with forms of queerness defined by processes of self-determination and self-representation. Insisting on achieving the "impractical" may be the only way to pierce through the tired logic of contemporary political strategy and to challenge the bio-cultural and moral foundations of mainstream society. These texts, the political projects they outline, the artworks they discuss, and the ideas they set forth call for autonomous thinking in the face of a dangerous tendency to conform to restricted political, social, legal, and cultural models. They invite us to work against neoliberal paradigms of individual and collective institutionalization, privatization, and normalization.

Welcome the impractical! Undertake the impossible![6]

We don't seek equality, we seek justice.[7]

Acknowledgements: Many thanks to the *e-flux journal* team of Mike Andrews, Julieta Aranda, Mariana Silva, Anton Vidokle, and Brian Kuan Wood; Stuart Comer; Ryan Conrad; Electra's Fatima Hellberg and Irene Revell; Cristina Motta; Raegan Truax; and the authors of the texts.

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Carlos Motta is an interdisciplinary artist interested in creating platforms to discuss the social conditions of marginalized communities and identities. His works document the political struggles of sexual and gender minority communities and attempts to produce projects of self-representation that challenge normative discourses of sex and gender. Motta believes in the potential of mediating and producing counter-knowledge through art. His work has been presented at the Tate Modern, London; Guggenheim Museum, New Museum and MoMA/PS1, New York; Museu Serralves Porto; Castello di Rivoli; Museo de Arte del Banco de la República, Bogotá; *X Lyon Biennale*; and in many other independent spaces around the world. Motta is a 2012 Creative Capital Grantee and a 2008 Guggenheim Fellow; and is part of the faculty at Parsons The New School of Design and The Milton Avery School of the Arts at Bard College. See more info here .

1
I am indebted to Ryan Conrad, with whom I discussed gay marriage from an economic perspective. His ideas have helped me shape this argument.

2
For the online component of the project, see http://wewhofeeldifferently.info/ . For the exhibition, which took place at the New Museum from May to September 2012, see http://www.newmuseum.org/exhibitions/view/carlos-motta-we-who-feel-differently .

3
"We Who Feel Differently: A Symposium" was organized with Raegan Truax at the New Museum, May 3–4, 2012, see http://wewhofeeldifferently.info/ephemera.php#Symposium . "Gender Talents: A Special Address" was organized with Electra at Tate Modern, February 2, 2013, see https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/wu-tsang-wildness/gender-talents-special . "Godfull: Shape Shifting God as Queer" was convened with Jared Gilbert at The Institute for Art, Religion and Social Justice at Union Theological Seminary, New York City, April 12, 2013, see https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/108668/godfull-shape-shifting-god-as-queer/ .

4
Carlos Motta and Cristina Motta, *We Who Feel Differently* (Bergen: Ctrl + Z Publishing, 2011), 11.

5
From an earlier, unpublished draft of the text.

6
Dean Spade, lawyer, activist, and founder of the Sylvia Rivera Law Project, has also invoked the need to demand the impossible as a way of asserting spaces and identities "deemed impossible" by the existing system. His book *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics and the Limits of the Law* (South End Press, 2011) and his recent video "Impossibility Now!" (with Basil Shadid), first screened during the symposium "Gender Talents: A Special Address," thoughtfully articulate a nonconforming critical queer and trans politic.

7
Parts of this text were presented as introductory remarks during the above-mentioned symposia "We Who Feel Differently: A Symposium" and "Gender Talents: A Special Address."

Paul Preciado

Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics

> I live in a world where many things I thought impossible are possible.
> —Guillaume Dustan, *Dans ma chambre* (1996)

The day of your death I put a 50-mg dose of Testogel on my skin, so that I can begin to write this book. The carbon chains, O-H3, C-H3, C-OH, gradually penetrate my epidermis and travel through the deep layers of my skin until they reach the blood vessels, nerve endings, glands. I'm not taking testosterone to change myself into a man, nor as a physical strategy of transsexualism; I take it to foil what society wanted to make of me, so that I can write, fuck, feel a form of pleasure that is post-pornographic, add a molecular prostheses to my *low-tech* transgendered identity composed of dildos, texts, and moving images; I do it to avenge your death.

I spread the gel over my shoulders. First instant: the feeling of a light slap on the skin. The feeling changes into one of coldness before it disappears. Then nothing for a day or two. Nothing. Waiting. Then an extraordinary lucidity settles in gradually, accompanied by an explosion of the desire to fuck, walk, go out everywhere in the city. This is the climax in which the spiritual force of the testosterone mixing with my blood takes the fore. Absolutely all the unpleasant sensations disappear. Unlike speed, the movement going on inside has nothing to do with agitation, noise. It's simply the feeling of being in perfect harmony with the rhythm of the city. Unlike coke, there is no distortion in the perception of self, no logorrhea nor any feeling of superiority. Nothing but the feeling of strength reflecting the increased capacity of my muscles, my brain. My body is present to itself. Unlike speed and coke, there is no immediate come down. A few days go by, and the movement inside calms, but the feeling of strength, like a pyramid revealed by a sandstorm, remains.

How can I explain what is happening to me? What can I do about my desire for transformation? What can I do about all the years I defined myself as a feminist? What kind of feminist am I today? A feminist hooked on testosterone, or a transgendered body hooked on feminism? I have no other alternative but to revise my classics, to subject those theories to the shock that was provoked in me by the practice of taking testosterone. To accept the fact that the change happening in me is the metamorphosis of an era.

The changes within neoliberalism that we are witnessing are characterized not only by the transformation of "gender," "sex," "sexuality," "sexual identity," and "pleasure" into objects of the political management of living, but also by the fact that this management itself is

carried out through the new dynamics of advanced techno-capitalism, global media, and biotechnologies. We are being confronted with a new type of hot, psychotropic punk capitalism. These recent transformations are imposing an ensemble of new micro-prosthetic mechanisms of control of subjectivity by means of biomolecular and multimedia technical protocols. Our world economy is dependent upon the production and circulation of hundreds of tons of synthetic steroids, on the global diffusion of a flood of pornographic images, on the elaboration and distribution of new varieties of synthetic legal and illegal psychotropic drugs (e.g., enaltestovis, Special K., Viagra, speed, crystal, Prozac, ecstasy, poppers, heroin, Prilosec), on the flood of signs and circuits of the digital transmission of information, on the extension of a form of diffuse urban architecture to the entire planet in which megacities of misery are knotted into high concentrations of sex-capital.

In order to distinguish this new capitalism from the nineteenth century disciplinary regime, I shall call "pharmacopornographic capitalism" this new regime of the production of sex and sexual subjectivity.

After World War II, the somatopolitical context of the production of subjectivity seems dominated by a series of new technologies of the body (which include biotechnology, surgery, endocrinology, and so forth) and representation (photography, cinema, television, cybernetics, videogames, and so forth) that infiltrate and penetrate daily life like never before. These are biomolecular, digital, and broadband data transmission technologies. The invention of the notion of gender in the 1950s as a clinical technique of sexual reassignment, and the commercialization of the Pill as a contraceptive technique, characterized the shift from discipline to pharmacopornographic control. This is the age of soft, feather-weight, viscous, gelatinous technologies that can be injected, inhaled—"incorporated." The testosterone that I use belongs to these new gelatinous biopolitical technologies.

When I take a dose of testosterone in gel form or inject it in liquid form, what I'm actually giving myself is a chain of political signifiers that have been materialized in order to acquire the form of a molecule that can be absorbed by my body. I'm not only taking the hormone, the molecule, but also the concept of a hormone, a series of signs, texts, and discourses, the process through which the hormone came to be synthesized, the technical sequences that produce it in the laboratory. I inject a crystalline, oil-soluble steroid carbon chain of molecules, and with it a fragment of the history of modernity. I administer to myself a series of economic transactions, a collection of pharmaceutical decisions, clinical tests, focus groups, and business management techniques. I connect to a baroque network of exchange and to economic and political flow-chains for the patenting of the living. I am linked by T to electricity, to genetic research projects, to mega-urbanization, to the destruction of forests and the biosphere, to pharmaceutical exploitation of living species, to Dolly the cloned sheep, to the advance of the Ebola virus, to HIV mutation, to antipersonnel mines and the broadband transmission of information. In this way, I become one of the somatic connectives that make possible the circulation of power, desire, release, submission, capital, rubbish, and rebellion.

As a body—and this is the only important thing about being a subject-body, a techno-living system—I'm the platform that makes possible the materialization of political imagination. I am my own guinea pig for an experiment on the effects of intentionally increasing the level of testosterone in the body of a bio-female. Instantly, the testosterone turns me into something radically different than a cis-female. Even when the changes generated by this molecule are socially imperceptible. The lab rat is becoming human. The human being is becoming a rodent. And, as for me: neither testo-girl nor techno-boy. I am just a port of insertion for $C_{19}H_{28}O_2$. I'm both the terminal of one of the apparatuses of neoliberal governmentality and the vanishing point through which escapes the will to control of the system. I'm the molecule and the State, and I'm the laboratory rat and the scientific subject that conducts the research; I'm the residue of a biochemical process. I am the future common artificial ancestor for the elaboration of new species in the perpetually random process of mutation and genetic drift. I am T.

I do not want the female gender that has been assigned to me at birth. Neither do I want the male gender that transsexual medicine can furnish and that the State will award me if I behave in the right way. I don't want any of it. I am a copyleft biopolitical agent that considers sex hormones free and open biocodes, whose use shouldn't be regulated by the State commandeered by pharmaceutical companies.

The consumption of testosterone, like that of estrogen and progesterone in the case of the Pill, does not depend upon any ideal constructions of gender that would come to influence the way we act and think. We are confronted directly by the production of the *materiality* of gender. Everything is a matter of doses, of melting and crystallization points, of the rotary power of the molecule, of regularity, of milligrams, of the form and mode of administration, of habit, of *praxis.* What is happening to me could be described in terms of a "molecular revolution." In detailing this concept in order to refer to the revolt of May '68, Félix Guattari certainly was not thinking of cis-females who self-administer testosterone. On the other hand, he was attentive to structural modifications generated by micropolitical changes such as the consumption of drugs, changes in perception, in sexual conducts, in the invention of new languages. It is a question of becomings, of multiplicities. In such a context, "molecular revolution" could point to a kind of political

homeopathy of gender. It's not a matter of going from woman to man, from man to woman, but of contaminating the molecular bases of the production of sexual difference, with the understanding that these two states of being, male and female, only exist as "biopolitical fictions," as somatic effects of the technical process of normalization. It's a matter of intervening intentionally in this process of production in order to end up with viable forms of incorporated gender, to produce a new sexual and affective platform that is neither male nor female in the pharmacopornographic sense of these terms, which would make possible the transformation of the species. T is only a threshold, a molecular door, a becoming between multiplicities.

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An excerpt from Paul Preciado, *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*, translated from the French by Bruce Benderson and forthcoming from Feminist Press in September 2013.

Paul Preciado is a professor of Political History of the Body, Gender Theory, and History of Performance at Paris VIII. He is also the author of Manifiesto contrasexual, which has become a queer theory classic, and Pornotopía: Architecture and Sexuality in Playboy During the Cold War, which has been named a finalist for the Anagrama Essay Prize. He received his PhD in the Theory of Architecture at Princeton and her masters in contemporary philosophy and gender theory at the New School for Social Research in New York.

Jack Halberstam

Charming for the Revolution: A Gaga Manifesto

At a recent symposium on art and gender politics convened by Carlos Motta at the Tate Modern in February 2013, a series of short manifestos delivered by artists, activists, and scholars had the peculiar effect of casting feminism as part of an anachronistic and naive version of contemporary politics.[1] At the symposium, Beatriz Preciado, author of *Testo Junkie*, rejected the idea of a feminism still organized around male and female forms of embodiment and went on to outline a vision of a new regime of power that had little use for conventional gender demarcations. Outlining the "pharmacopornographic" regimes that regulate the body politic, Preciado gave a dazzling overview of a form of the medico/pharmaceutical management of life. She outlined a bleak vision of death and health that involved a kind of totalized pharmaceutical control of pleasure and pain through the production of new forms of prosthetic subjectivity.[2]

At the conference I delivered an elaboration on my "Gaga manifesto" and unfolded another project on anarchy and transformative politics.[3] At least one participant characterized this as an uncritical celebration of mainstream culture lacking an awareness of the serious and often deadly mechanics of global capitalism. Despite the way that feminism was cast as anachronistic at the conference, Preciado and I, in some ways, were saying similar things in very different theoretical lexicons about the end of social norms, the decaying structures of binary gender, and the technological reinvention of sexuality, gender, and reproduction. While Preciado calls her model of a global rule "sex-capitalism" or "punk capitalism" within a pharmacopornographic regime,[4] I seek openings in this new regime for different formulations of kinship, pleasure, and power. I call these "Gaga Feminism."

Theories of capitalism, unlike theories of feminism, it seems, never go out of style, especially theories of a protean capitalism that evolves as it grows, learning quickly and seemingly intuitively how to exploit every minute shift and change in human behavior. Preciado's theories of capitalism in *Testo Junky* are compelling, fast-paced, and laced with speedy testosterone-induced insights that would not be out of place in a William Burroughs novel. "The truth about sex," writes a blissed out Preciado channeling Foucault, "is not a disclosure; it is a sexdesign."[5] But feminism also lurks in the corners of Preciado's book, occasionally as a superego chastising her for abandoning pure womanhood, sometimes as a poststructuralist peek at what we might call, to misquote The Invisible Committee's *The Coming Insurrection*, the coming exploitation; and at other times, Preciado calls upon a new feminism, with a new grammar of gender, to "turn pharmacopornographic hegemony upside down."[6]

In response to Preciado and in solidarity with this new feminist project that she gestures towards, I propose that even as capitalism shifts course, changes its emphasis, and reorganizes exploitation and currency, feminism and other forms of critical thinking also mutate, shift, and change course; the cluster of critical responses to

Emma Goldman portrait published the publication Mother Earth.

capitalism that have circulated in the twentieth century (anticolonialism, anarchism, socialism, the multitude, the undercommons, punk, critical race theory, critical ethnic studies, and so forth) have also transformed themselves from identitarian pursuits grounded in the histories of exploitation and oppression, to new understandings of solidarity, commonality, and political purpose.

The current critique of feminism, moreover, is implied in lots of different venues. For example, in new philosophical projects like Object Oriented Ontology, mostly male-bodied theorists investigate the relations between subjects and objects and seek to decenter the human subject from accounts of object life without recognizing that this has been a central concern in feminist theory and queer theory for many years. Or in contemporary Gay Studies scholarship, gay men reach back to a time before AIDS and before lesbian feminism to consider the *good old days* of promiscuous sex and cruising, implying in the process that we have thought way too much about the politics of gender and not enough about the materiality of sex cultures. In much of this work, "feminism" is shorthand for a "stuck" or arrested mode of theorizing that clings to old-fashioned formulations of embodiment and returns us to the *bad old days* of gender stability, sex negativity, and political correctness. All of these backlashes gain force despite the continued popularity of Judith Butler's work and the poststructuralist forms of feminist critique that she has authored and inspired!

In what follows, I elaborate on my Gaga manifesto to make clear how, like Preciado, I no longer believe in or remain invested in a feminist or a queer politics organized around norms and their disruption, or one concerned with binary and transhistorical formulations of "men" and "women," "hetero-" and "homo-" sexualities; but, unlike Preciado, I do not believe that the triumph of global capitalism is the end of the story, the only story, or the full story. So, dear readers, please receive this manifesto as an attempt to measure the new genders and sexualities that emerge within subcultural spaces against the new forms of "punk capitalism" described by Preciado, which seem to reterritorialize such new forms of life almost as soon as they emerge. In the hopes that a few disruptive forms fail to be reabsorbed into the global marketplace, I advocate for an anarchistic relation to being, becoming, and worlding.

1. Embrace the Impractical!

> A practical scheme, says Oscar Wilde, is either one already in existence, or a scheme that could be carried out under the existing conditions; but it is exactly the existing conditions that one objects to, and any scheme that could accept these conditions is wrong and foolish. The true criterion of the practical, therefore, is not whether the latter can keep intact the wrong or foolish; rather it is whether the scheme has vitality enough to leave the stagnant waters of the old, and build, as well as sustain, new life. In the light of this conception, Anarchism is indeed practical. More than any other idea, it is helping to do away with the wrong and foolish; more than any other idea, it is building and sustaining new life.
> —Emma Goldman, "Anarchism: What It Really Stands For" (1910)

Responding to the idea that anarchism is impractical, that it advocates the use of violence and that it is dangerous,

Video still from Lady Gaga's music video Born This Way.

Emma Goldman asks what we actually mean by practicality and argues for an epistemological break with old ways of thinking. In the essay "Anarchism: What It Really Stands For," she builds on Oscar Wilde's reminder that what counts as practical is simply anything that can be carried out under already existing conditions. What is practical, in other words, is limited to what we can already imagine. This opens up the realm of the *impractical* as a space of possibility and newness. What is impractical, Goldman proposes, could become practical if existing conditions shift and change. Above all, change should break with the stagnant, with what can already be imagined, in order to access and embrace "new life."

My book *Gaga Feminism*: *Sex, Gender and the End of Normal* made the claim that the "existing conditions" under which the building blocks of human identity were imagined and cemented in the last century—what we call gender, sex, race, and class—have changed so radically that new life can be glimpsed ahead. Our task is not to shape this new life into identifiable and comforting forms, not to "know" this "newness" in advance, but rather, as Nietzsche suggests, to impose upon the categorical chaos and crisis that surrounds us only "as much regularity and form as our practical needs require."[7]

In our sense of new modes of embodiment and identification engineered by technological innovation and situated within new forms of capitalism, Beatriz Preciado and I share a common theoretical project. In *Gaga Feminism*, I examined symbols of change like the pregnant man, Lady Gaga, and gay marriage, not to mention new queer families, artificial reproduction, sperm banks, and new forms of political protest, to say that the revolution predicted and explained by Shulamith Firestone in *The Dialectic of Sex* in 1970 had come and gone! Using Marxism as a model for the structure of her feminist revolution, Firestone claimed that if the ability to technologically produce life separate from the female body became possible, then "the tyranny of the biological family would be broken."[8] Since the categories of male and female depend so heavily upon reproductive function, the argument goes, then the separation of childbirth from any essential link to female embodiment would necessarily change the relations of dependency between men and women; shift the centrality of maternity within both the definition of womanhood and cultural understandings of childrearing; and, finally, cause the nuclear family to collapse, allowing for new relations to emerge between adults and children.

Gaga Feminism claims that the existence of sperm banks, artificial reproduction of life, surrogacy, the push for gay marriage, and new arrangements of kinship and households—and not to mention the high rates of divorce—give evidence that the revolutionary conditions for gender transformation have arrived. Of course, this is not to say that "women" have been liberated from their traditional responsibilities for childrearing or domestic labor; indeed, poverty in the US disproportionately afflicts single women struggling to make a living while raising children. Preciado describes something similar in *Testo Junky* when she speaks of new configurations of masculinity and femininity within a global porno marketplace where the currency is pleasure and the labor of producing that pleasure is mostly shouldered by female-bodied people. Describing an order of power that is structured via the orgasm—this is what Preciado calls "potential gaudendi"—she writes: "Femininity, far from being natural, is the quality of the orgasmic force when it can be converted into merchandise, into an object of economic exchange, into work." In other words, femininity no longer describes the cultural norms associated with living in a female body or even a physical proximity to the capacity to give birth; rather, femininity refers to a mode of labor, the production of pleasure, and a bodily relation to reproductive technologies.

By implication, Preciado claims, "heterosexuality" is therefore a "politically assisted procreation technology."[9] Her claim about heterosexuality is both humorous and deadly serious. Heterosexuality has in fact been reduced to precisely this configuration of labor, legitimacy, and logistics. Far from being a "natural" attraction between "opposites," heterosexuality is a state-organized and state-sponsored form of reproduction. Since the alibis for the centrality and hegemony of heterosexuality have faded away (these alibis in the past have been provided by religion, science, and claims on "nature"), we can finally see heterosexuality, and by implication homosexuality, for what it actually is—state-approved intimacy. Now that, in some cases, gay and lesbian partnerships have also been granted state recognition in return for conforming to marital norms such as monogamous coupled units accompanied by parenthood, the whole edifice of the homo/hetero binary described so well by Eve Sedgwick and others in the late twentieth century crumbles. Under such conditions, we need a new politics of gender.

Gaga Feminism proposes that we are in dire need of a new politics of gender capable of addressing the contemporary pressures and values that we project onto

gendered bodies and functions. And, while many people have objected to both terms of my book's title—namely *Gaga* and *Feminism*—and to my sense that anarchism may be worth revisiting, I continue to build upon the traditions that these terms name, refusing the idea that any notion of change or transformation that we may conjure is naive, misguided, or already coopted. I refuse also the hierarchy within academic production whereby those who draw maps of domination are cast as prophets and geniuses and those who study subversion, resistance, and transformation are seen as either dupes of capitalism who propose popular culture as the cure for our mass distraction, or cast as inadequate theorists who have not read their Foucault, Deleuze, or Marx closely enough!

A new era of theory has recently emerged—we might call it "wild theory"—within which thinkers, scholars, and artists take a break from orthodoxy and experiment with knowledge, art, and the imagination, even as they remain all too aware of the constraints under which all three operate. As Lauren Berlant explains in her latest book *Cruel Optimism*, we hold out hope for alternatives even though we see the limitations of our own fantasies; she calls this contradictory set of desires "cruel optimism." After showing us its forms in our congested present—fantasies that sustain our attachments to objects and things that are the obstacle to getting what we want—Berlant, remarkably, turns to anarchy, arguing that anarchists enact "repair" by recommitting to politics without believing either in "good life fantasies" or in "the transformative effectiveness of one's actions."[10] Instead, the anarchist "does politics," she says, "to be in the political with others." In other words, when we engage in political action of any kind, we do not simply seek evidence of impact in order to feel that it was worthwhile; we engage in fantasies of living otherwise with groups of other people because the embrace of a common cause leads to alternative modes of satisfaction and even happiness, whether or not the political outcome is successful. Here we can see how the embrace of the impractical proposed by Oscar Wilde by way of Emma Goldman plays out!

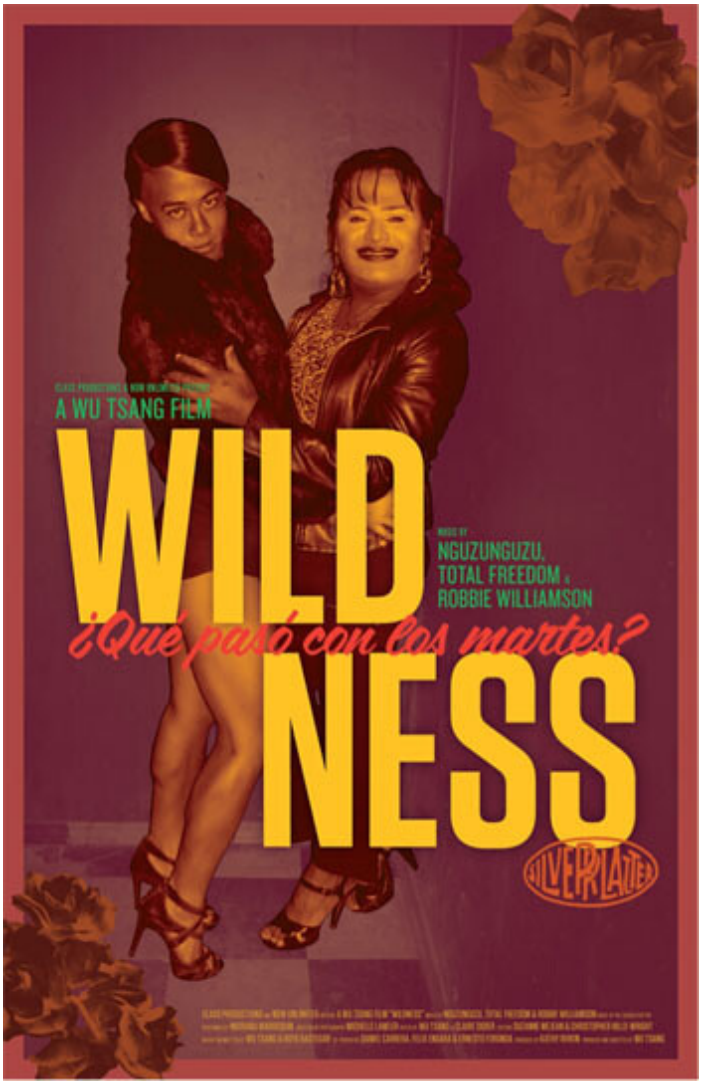
But what is "wild theory"? And what does it want? In some ways, wild theory is failed disciplinary knowledge. It is thought that remains separate from the organizing rubrics of disciplinarity. It is philosophy on the fly. It is also a counter-canonical form of knowledge production. Berlant's archive in *Cruel Optimism*, for example, is wide and varied. It includes both canonical material, performances, stories, and art projects that may not be known by her readership and that therefore require a certain amount of context and explanation. In addition to this wild archive, Berlant produces idiosyncratic methodologies that are born of a desperate desire to survive rather than a leisurely sense of thriving. The desperation that produces "cruel optimism," according to Berlant, is born of a "crisis ordinariness," a mode of living within which we experience life more as "desperate doggy paddling than like a magnificent swim out to the horizon."[11] "Desperate doggy paddling" describes a wild methodology within which we are less preoccupied with form and aesthetics (the "magnificent swim"), less worried about a destination (the horizon), and more involved in the struggle to stay afloat and perhaps even reach the shore, any shore.

For Preciado, wildness is also very much a part of the project of survival in a pharmacopornographic era. The testosterone s/he takes, partly as a body experiment and partly as a mode of gender adjustment, creates in her/him a rush, a clarity, energy, and vision. When he is in the grips of its effects, she sees clearly that the body is not a platform for health, a grid of identifications, a mechanism for desires that get produced or repressed depending upon different regimes of power that hold it in their grip. The body is "pansexual" and "the bioport of the orgasmic force," and as such the body is a "techno/living system" within which binaries have collapsed.[12] The self is no longer independent from a system that it both channels and represents. These are *wild* theories in every sense: they veer off the straight and narrow pathways of philosophy and thought and they make up vocabularies for the new phenomena that they describe at breakneck speed. Each book approaches the challenge of living, of being, and of dying in a world designed not to enhance life but merely to offer what Berlant calls "slow death."

But is that all there is? Slow death, bare life, sexual capital? What else can the wild bring us? Does anything escape these forms of living and dying? Berlant hints towards alternatives throughout her book, countering exhaustion with "counter/absorption," globalization with anarchy. Wild theory lives in these spaces of potentiality even as institutionalization seeks to blot it out.

A brilliant rendition of the elemental struggle between, on one side, wild thought and wild practices, and on the other side, the canny force of institutionalization, can be found in *Wildness,* a documentary film by Los Angeles-based artist Wu Tsang (co-written with Roya Rastega). The film presents the story of "Wildness," a short-lived party hosted by Tsang and his collaborator Ashland Mines, which took place on Tuesday nights at a club called The Silver Platter in the Rampart neighborhood of Los Angeles. On other nights, the club was home to a community of mostly Mexican and Central American gay men and transgender women. When "Wildness" begins to take over and brings unwanted publicity to The Silver Platter, both communities are forced to reckon with the ways in which the competing subcultural spaces cannot coexist, and with the possibility that one will swallow the other. "Wildness" set out to conjure and inhabit a cool, multiracial space where performance subcultures could open up new utopian forms of life.

The utopia that *Wildness* sets out to document can be understood in the terms that José E. Muñoz lays out for



Movie Poster for Wildness. Class Productions and Now Unlimited, 2012.

queer potentiality in *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. Muñoz articulates utopia not as a place but as a "horizon," as a "mode of possibility," a queer future that is "not an end but an opening."[13] He also locates the horizon in temporal terms as "a modality of ecstatic time" and, referencing Ernst Bloch, as an event that is not yet here.[14] Queerness, for Muñoz, is a way of being whose time has not yet come, for which the conditions are not yet right, but which can be anticipated through fresh blasts of queer performance. This sense of a queer community that is not yet here makes the project of "Wildness" legible. What Wu and Ashland set out to do by opening up space for alternative life anticipates another way of inhabiting urban space in which the small success of one local and subcultural scene does not have to displace another one.

Wildness invests deeply and painfully in the idea of alternative space, wild space, but also acknowledges how quickly such a space is reincorporated into relentless

Kerstin Drechsel, Pussy Riot Gruppe, courtesy of the artist.

forms of development.

2. Start a Pussy Riot

A new protest politics have emerged in the last three years in the wake of financial disaster, economic meltdown, the waning of the nation-state, and the rise of transnational corporate sovereignty. Some of these protests have blended art and artfulness in an attempt to escape new police tactics, like kettling, and to evade media narratives that contain the unruly energy of the riot into a tidy story about looting and greed. At a time when the very rich are consolidating their ill-gotten gains at the expense of the growing numbers of the poor, the dispossessed, the criminalized, the pathologized, the foreign—the deportable, disposable, dispensable, deplorable mob—at this time, we should start to talk about anarchy. When the state is actually the author of the very problems it proposes to cure—lack of public funds, low rate of education and health care, treating everything from governance to education as a business, no redistribution of wealth, homelessness—we need to seek alternatives to the state. When the church has more power than the people, when the military gets more funding than schools, when white people get away with murder and people of color linger in overcrowded prisons for minor crimes like the possession of marijuana, we need to seek alternatives to law and order.

The cultivation of such alternatives occurs in a variety of cultural sites: low and high culture, museum culture, and street culture. This takes the form of participatory art, ephemeral parties, and imaginative forms of recycling and different relations to objects, economies, and the environment. As we seek to reimagine the here and now through anarchy, can we think about it as queer and hold it open to new forms of political intervention?

Artist Sharon Hayes variously intervenes in the silent, random, and anonymous vectors of the public sphere by delivering speeches about love in public space, or by positioning herself within the public sphere as a sign that demands to be read. Hayes's performances and her aesthetic protests may use some of the same symbols and signs as a protest march, but they are not congruent with it either in goals or in form. Less like an activist and more like a hustler, a billboard, a busker, or a panhandler, Hayes forces herself upon passersby to give them her message and to often recruit them to give voice.

Sharon Hayes, In the Near Future. Courtesy of the artist and Tanya Leighton Gallery, Berlin.

In *In The Near Future*, Hayes invites people to come and witness her reenactment of moments of protest from the past, like a 1968 Memphis Sanitation strike restaged in NYC at an ACT UP protest site, a restaged ERA rights march, and the revisiting of an antiwar protest. Hayes's events were staged in four different cities where the audience was invited to witness her holding a protest sign in public space and to record and document the event. Presented as photographic slide installations in institutional spaces, Hayes's documentation of these protest-events are not "literal reenactments." Instead, they function as citations of the past on behalf of a possible future, a notion that echoes Muñoz's theory of queer utopia. For both Hayes and Muñoz, the future is something that queers cannot foreclose, must not abandon, and that in fact presents a temporal orientation that enfolds the potentiality of queerness even as it awaits its arrival. Hayes's events call for a new understanding of history, make connections between past and present eruptions of wild and inventive protest, and allow those moments to talk to each other in order to produce a *near future*. She reminds us that politics is work between strangers and not just cooperation between familiars. She directs our attention away from the charisma of visual spectacle and towards a more collaborative and generous act of listening.

In a painting of Pussy Riot, Berlin-based artist Kerstin Drechsel captures the queerness of our moment of riot and revolt. Drechsel's rendering of the masked Russian punk feminist band, currently serving jail time for staging a protest in Moscow's Cathedral of Christ the Savior where they critiqued the Orthodox Church leader's support for Putin's presidential campaign, is spare and powerful. It reminds us of how often anarchy has taken the form of a feminine punk refusal rather than a masculinist violent surge. I outline some of these logics in my chapter on "Shadow Feminism" in *The Queer Art of Failure*, where I revisit feminist performance art from the 1970s as well as anticolonial literary texts to outline alternative modes of resistance that are grounded in refusal and tactics of self-destruction rather than in engagement and self-activation.[15] Within such a framework, performances by Marina Abramovic and Yoko Ono and the novels of Jamaica Kincaid become legible as feminist practices.

The example of Pussy Riot—the group, the painting, the action, and its recreation around the world—gives rise to the question of what new aesthetic forms accompany these suddenly highly visible manifestations of political exhaustion and outrage. Pussy Riot offers hope for new forms of protest. Can we find an aesthetic that maps onto anarchy and stages a refusal of the logic of "punk capitalism"? What is the erotic economy of such work?

There are several reasons why people turn away from anarchy as a political project even when the state is inadequate and corrupt. Some see anarchy as either scary or naive. They fear that it will unleash the terror of disorder and chaos upon society, a chaotic power that the state and capitalism supposedly keep at bay. Politically speaking, anarchy has also been cast as outmoded because the nation-state has given way to transnational capital and the global movements of elites and goods. It is true that capital has gone global and is no longer maintained only through national structures, but this does not mean that the political form of the nation-state has given way to more global forms of rule. As long as most of us experience our political subjectivities through the nation-state, we need to continue imagining alternatives to it.[16]

"Hierarchy is chaos!" says the well-known anarchist slogan. But chaos is a matter of perspective rather than an absolute value. We often see capitalism and state logics of accumulation and redistribution of wealth as natural or even intuitive. We tend to characterize them as orderly systems, yet we could easily argue that the nation-state produces plenty of chaos for the subjects it rules, those it abandons, and those it incarcerates. Capitalism uses chaos on its own behalf while warning subject-clients of the dangers of abandoning market economies in favor of

Kerstin Drechsel, “Aus,” detail from the series "RESERVE," 2001-2005. Oil on canvas. Courtesy of the artist

other models of exchange, barter, and economic collaboration.

In an extraordinary body of work, artist Kerstin Drechsel explores the sexual entropy of the everyday and the chaos inherent to capitalism. Drechsel refuses the neat division between a chaotic world ordered by capitalist modes of production and the chaos of anarchy that capitalism supposedly holds at bay. Drechsel’s work recognizes that capitalism too is chaotic and disordered, that the world we live in tends towards breakdown, and that the state simply manages and marshals chaos for capital accumulation and biopower. Anarchy is thus no more oriented to chaos than capitalism.

In the series *Unser Haus*, Drechsel confronts messiness directly in paintings of explicitly junky domestic interiors. In some spaces, the books and the paper overwhelm the spaces that should contain them; in others, the materials we use to clean away the traces of dirt—toilet paper, for instance—become waste itself.

In this series, an aesthetic of disorder prevails. The paintings dare the viewer to take them home, to hang them on the wall. They threaten to mirror back to the viewer/owner a desperate image of the disorder that the house barely keeps at bay and that this art encourages. The paintings of messy interiors taunt the collector and liken the collecting of art to the collecting of things, useless things, *stuff*. They menace and snarl; they refuse to be the accent on a minimal interior; they promise to sow disorder and shove any environment firmly in the direction of anarchy. In Drechsel’s work and world, the human is just a small inhabitant of a literal wasteland of objects and things. Her world is chaotic and she herself is dedicated to trying to wax, slim, domesticate, and train. Drechsel is working hard towards a conformity that is always just out a reach. And just as the human-like dolls in her work seem to be reaching for some kind of pleasure, space, or activity that will offer liberty, so the object world

Kerstin Drechsel, In Wärmeland #2 (detail), 1998. Vitrine, lacquered steel tubing, plexiglass, fiberboard, acrylic on nettle, various Barbie accessories and modeling materials, animation film plasticine. Courtesy of the artist.

keeps threatening to overrun dolls, humans, homes, and hierarchies with its own form of riot.

In the *Wärmeland* series, Drechsel places hand-made Barbie dolls in dollhouse settings and manipulates them pornographically both to reveal the sexuality that the dolls represent, and to remake the meaning of the domestic and of desire itself. Creating alluring sex scenes with the Barbies and then placing the two lusty bodies in candy-colored environments that make perverse use of Barbie accessories , Drechsel draws out not only the desires we project onto the doll bodies, but also the much more compelling set of desires that draws us to the accessories, to the backdrops, and to the objects in our worlds. As we peer into the dollhouses, we begin to see them as prisons and domestic cages, but also as film sets and stages for strange miniature sexual dramas.

Wärmeland is reminiscent of the Barbie Liberation Organization (BLO), a 1990s group of artists and activists who engaged in culture jamming by switching the voice boxes of Barbie and Ken dolls in toy stores around the country. While previously a Barbie may have been programmed to say, "I am not so good at math," after the BLO liberated it, it said, "Vengeance is mine!"

3. Be Fantastic! Charming for the Revolution! [17]

How do we charm and seduce for the revolution? Let's learn from one of the most charming revolutionary figures to ever grace cinema: Wes Anderson's animated genius, Fantastic Mr. Fox. *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, when watched closely, gives us clues and hints about revolt, riot, fugitivity, and its relation to charm and theft. The film tells a simple story about a fox who gets sick of his upwardly mobile lifestyle and goes back to his roots. He lives a respectable life with his wife and his queer son by day, but by night he steals chickens from the farmers down the hill. When the farmers come for him, Mr. Fox asks his motley

woodland crew of foxes, beavers, raccoons, and possums to retreat with him to the maze of tunnels that make up the forest underground. And in scenes that could be right out of *The Battle of Algiers*, the creatures go down to rise up: they thwart the farmers, the policemen, the firemen, and all the officials who come to drive them from their homes and occupy their land.

We learn many things in *Fantastic Mr. Fox* about being charming, being fantastic, and creating revolt. But the best and most poignant scene comes in the form of a quiet encounter with the *wild* at the end of the film. In this scene, Mr. Fox is on his way home after escaping from the farmers once again. As he and his merry band of creatures turn the corner on their motorbike with sidecar, they come upon a spectral figure loping into their path. Mr. Fox pulls up and they all stand in awe. They watch as a lone wolf turns and stares back at them. Mr. Fox, ever the diplomat, declares his phobia of wolves and yet tries to communicate with the wolf in three languages. When nothing works, he tries gestures. With tears in his eyes, Mr. Fox raises a fist to the wolf on the hill and stares transfixed as the wolf understands the universal sign of solidarity and raises his own fist in response, before drifting off into the forest. This exchange, silent and profound, brings tears to Mr. Fox's eyes precisely because it puts him face to face with the wildness he fears and the wildness he harbors within himself.

Whether you see the scene as corny or contrived, odd or predictable, generic or fetishistic, you know that you have witnessed a moment that Deleuze might call "pure cinema." This scene, in other words, draws us into the charisma of the image; it speaks a visual grammar that cannot be reduced to the plot and it enacts a revolutionary instance that we, like Mr. Fox, cannot put into words. And because we are confronted with the possibility of a life beyond the limits of our comprehension, because we see the very edge of the framing of knowing and seeing, and because we see Mr. Fox reaching for something just out of reach, we, like him, are changed by the chance encounter.

The *wild* here is a space that opens up when we step outside of the conventional realms of political action and confront our fears; it rhymes with Muñoz's sense of queer utopia and manifests what Fred Moten and Stefano Harney call the power of the "the undercommons."[18] The wild and the fantastic enter the frame of visibility in the form of an encounter between the semi-domesticated and the unknown, speech and silence, motion and stillness. Ultimately, the revolutionary is a wild space where temporality is uncertain, relation is improvised, and futurity is on hold. Into this "any instant whatsoever" (Deleuze) walks a figure that we cannot classify, that refuses to engage us in conventional terms, but speaks instead in the gestural language of solidarity, connection, and insurrection.

The wild projects I am making common cause with tend to anticipate rather than describe new ways of being together, making worlds, and sharing space. As Emma Goldman said of anarchy in 1910, the project for creating new forms of political life starts with the transformation of existing conditions. It is urgent and necessary to put our considerable collective intellectual acumen to work to imagine and prepare for what comes after. The *wild* archive that I have gathered here is made up of the improbable, impossible, and unlikely visions of a queer world to come. Change involves giving and risking everything for a cause that is uncertain, a trajectory that is unclear, and a mission that may well fail. Fail well, fail wildly.

X

I would like to thank Carlos Motta for inviting me to the conference that inspired this essay and for working with me so closely to make it a little less wild and a little more thoughtful.

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1
"Gender Talents: A Special Address." See http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tanks-tate-modern/conference/gender-talents-special-address .

2
Beatriz Preciado's interventions are taken from her forthcoming book *Testo Junky: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era* , trans. Bruce Benderson (New York: The Feminist Press, 2013).

3
See my *Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender and the End of Normal* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2012).

4
Testo Junky , 33.

5
Ibid., 35.

6
Ibid., 82.

7
Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will To Power* (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 278.

8
Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (New York, NY: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1970), 11.

9
Testo Junky, 46–47.

10
Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 260.

11
Ibid., 117.

12
Testo Junky , 41.

13
José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: NYU Press, 2009), 99, 91.

14
Ibid., 32.

15
Judith Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

16
Indeed, currently many collectives and radical thinkers have been producing manifestos. In addition to The Invisible Committee's *The Coming Insurrection* (2009), Italian Marxist Franco "Bifo" Berardi has written *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance* (2012), and Fred Moten and Stefano Harney have collaborated on *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (2013).

17
"Charming for the Revolution" is both the name of a short film by Renate Lorenz and Paulina Baudry, and the title of the congress on art and gender politics of which "Gender Talents: A Special Address" formed a part. The congress was curated by Electra and Tate Film.

18
Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Wivenhoe, UK: Minor Compositions, 2013).

Miguel A. López

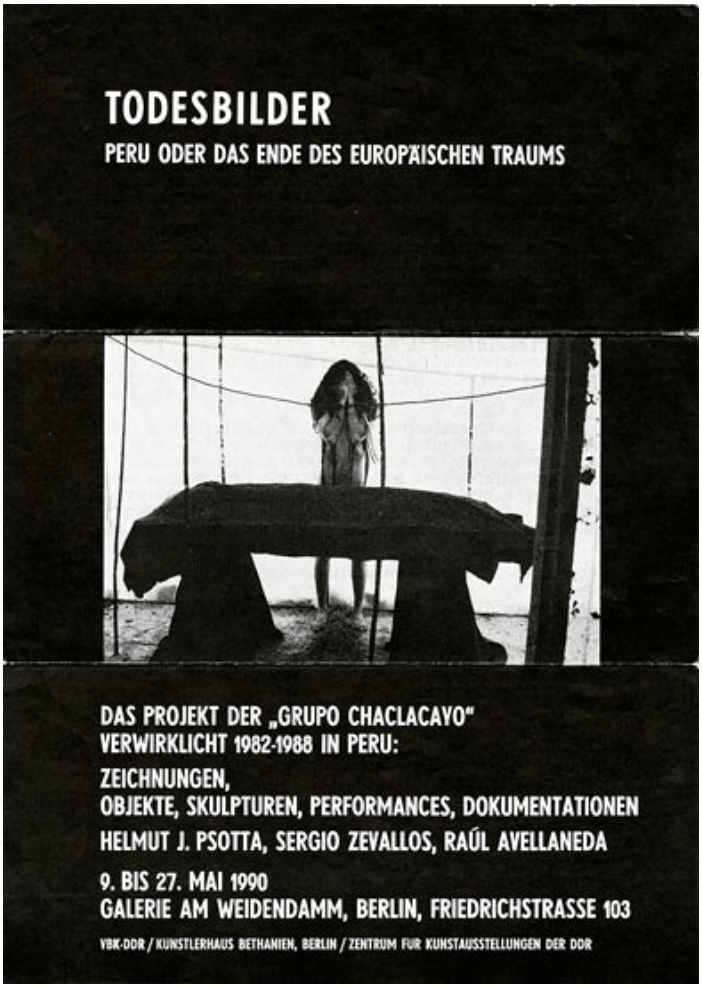
Queer Corpses: Grupo Chaclacayo and the Image of Death

To Helmut, to whose rage and love the ensuing lucubration is due.

The deeply transgressive sexual dissident work of Grupo Chaclacayo (1983–1994) has remained largely unknown until today.[1] Narrated more like a myth or a rumor (almost no one has been able to see their actual works in almost thirty years), this collective endeavor was one of the most daring episodes of artistic experimentation and sexual-political performance to emerge in Peru during the 1980s. These experiments were carried out amidst a violent armed conflict between communist subversive groups and the Peruvian government. Grupo Chaclacayo consisted of three artists (the German Helmut Psotta and his Peruvian students Sergio Zevallos and Raul Avellaneda), who, from 1982 to early 1989, voluntarily sequestered themselves in a house on the outskirts of Lima. In 1989 they were forced to move to Germany by the lack of economic resources in Peru and by the social and political hostility resulting from a war that would leave a death toll of seventy thousand people in nearly two decades (1980–2000).[2] After arriving in Germany a few months before the fall of the Berlin Wall, Grupo Chaclacayo organized an exhibition summing up their work in Peru and including new installations and performances. The exhibition was entitled "Todesbilder. Peru oder Das Ende des europäischen Traums" [Images of Death: Peru or the End of the European Dream] and was shown in cities such as Stuttgart, Bochum, Karlsruhe, and Berlin, among others.[3] The group disbanded around 1995. The works and materials they produced never returned to Peru.

The group's extensive work is an explosive reworking of the surplus materials of urban modernity (such as city waste and detritus), merging representations of mystical pain and religious martyrdom with thousands of images of tortured and mangled bodies. The terror, incomprehension, and fascination their experiments provoked was the result of the darkness of their work: cheap, anti-glamorous stagings that alluded to ideological dogmatism and sickness; homoerotic representations between abjection and necrophilia; transvestite recodings of mystical pain; the use of coffins and bodily remains, excretions, and fluids; and references to fetuses, corpses, and mutilated and crippled bodies. Far from being an orthodox claim to a homosexual sensibility, their work was an experiment in the production of abnormal and deviant subjectivities that undid gender and social identities, using a sadomasochistic and ritual vocabulary to exorcise the oppressive effects of ideology, religion, and the legacy of colonialism.

It is no coincidence that the emergence of Grupo



Poster for the exhibition "Grupo Chaclacayo: Todesbilder. Peru oder das ende des Europäischen traums," Galerie am Weidendamm, May 1990, Berlin.

Chaclacayo paralleled the appearance of an unprecedented countercultural and alternative cultural scene in Lima between 1982 and the early 1990s, known as the " *subte*" [underground] movement. These disruptive practices took the form of collective experiences at the intersection of rock and punk, ephemeral and precarious self-constructed architecture, DIY fanzines, anarchist movements, junk aesthetics, scum poetry, and shock theatre. A characteristic of these new radical groupings was the refusal to be silent in the face of the torture and disappearances that were part of the "dirty war" that the Peruvian state conducted against many sectors of the civil population as a response to subversive activities and attacks by Shining Path.[4] Rock groups such as Leuzemia [a changed spelling of "Leukemia"], Narcosis, Zcuela Cerrada [a changed spelling of "Closed School"], Guerrilla Urbana [Urban Guerilla] and Autopsia [Autopsy], as well as album covers, agit-prop flyers, and collages produced by artists such as Herbert Rodríguez, Jaime Higa, and Taller NN, testify to the willingness of anarcho-punk artists to confront the dire situation in Peru.[5]

This radical moment in music was similar to one that took place in architecture, with the anarchist, ephemeral public interventions by a collective called Los Bestias (1984–1987), or in poetry, with the ephemeral "commune" founded by Movimiento Kloaka (1982–1984), which used literary production as a space of social struggle. The rebellious attitudes of these freaks, queers, misfits, drunks, and malcontents caused some friction with Shining Path and orthodox communist discourses, but also with traditional socialist parties, including the spokespeople and critics of the new cultural Left, who saw in these scandalous activities the signs of social disintegration instead of the yearned-for socialist unity. These new subcultural groupings demanded a distinct form of identification and collective communication through their socially marginalized bodies, which had no place in traditional society.[6] The reactions to Grupo Chaclacayo illustrated the hostility and revulsion that attended the rise of Lima's underground movement.

It is revealing that some of the initial reactions to the work of Grupo Chaclacayo used the conservative discourses of art to condemn and pathologize these operations of gender disobedience. After their first and only exhibition in Peru, which took place at the Lima Art Museum in November 1984 and was entitled "Perú, un sueño..." [Peru, a dream...], a local art critic denounced the alleged excesses and political incorrectness of the group's work. Invoking orthodox notions of artistic quality and moralist ideas, the critic Luis Lama described the group's photographs, installations, and collages as a "null pseudo-artistic misrepresentation," an "allegory of decadence," "paraphernalia of blasphemy," a "vivisection of degeneration," a "homosexual myth," and an "excessive search for pathos." He excluded the work from serious artistic discussion and instead addressed it clinically, calling the group's images "psychopathological...perversions that are closer to Lacan than to Marx."[7] The outrage aroused in the art critic was a sign of the danger these queer grammars posed—and still pose—to the heteronormative social and cultural order. His horror seemed amplified by the place these deviant practices occupied: a museum then supposedly reserved for the modern art of the elite—preferably male, white, straight, clean, and disciplined.

Where to situate the overlooked practices of sexual disobedience, sadomasochistic actions, and "crip" representations of Grupo Chaclacayo?[8] How to intervene in the rhetorics employed by artistic discourses to differentiate the moralizing and "correct" aesthetic of the heterosexual body from others marked by disability, deviance, and abjection? Is it possible to recover these episodes of subaltern visibility and sexual disobedience for art history without turning them into mere exotic figures or footnotes in dominant narratives? What political strategies do theatricality, ridicule, and sickness offer for imagining micro-histories that shatter the privileged space of heterosexual subjectivity?

Sergio Zevallos (Grupo Chaclacayo), Ambulantes, from the series "Suburbios," 1984. Courtesy Sergio Zevallos.

"I am the bride of Christ"

Grupo Chaclacayo's self-imposed exile in 1982 began with the departure of the German artist Helmut Psotta from the art school at the Pontifical Catholic University in Lima, where he had been a visiting professor.[9] While he was teaching at the art school Psotta organized workshops that directly addressed the growing violence of the internal armed conflict, nurturing a profoundly visceral and bodily artistic practice that contested the academic and religious norms of the university. It is for these activities that Psotta was removed from the university after only a few months of teaching. This is when Zevallos and Avellaneda decided to drop out of art school and work with him. The move to a vacant house on the outskirts of Lima, initiated by Psotta, was an attempt to gain some distance from homophobic, conservative local mores, but also from the art system, its economic circuits, and its models of good taste and social validation—models in which the group's own practices would find no place. Through actions and images produced in that house, and occasional forays into public space (cemeteries, schools, beaches, and old abandoned houses), the group gave birth to an unusually profane sexual iconography that stood somewhere between a sexual-political dramatization of Catholic devotion and a queer resignification of a sinister landscape where tortured and murdered bodies were discovered on a daily basis.

One of the first actions of Grupo Chaclacayo, even before it was constituted as a collective, was a procession with a small altar made of garbage, done by Zevallos while still attending art school in 1982. The poorly-made sculpture was inappropriate for the modernist aesthetic values of the academy, but even more threatening was the act of taking it into public space on a pilgrimage that parodied a massive Catholic rite. These first exercises were a prelude to the group's characteristic artistic production: elaborate

Grupo Chaclacayo, Perú, un sueño [Peru... a dream], Museo de Arte de Lima, 1984. Installation view with series of assemblages-boxes by Raul Avellaneda; photos and sculptures by Helmut Psotta. Courtesy Sergio Zevallos.

representations of abnormal corporalities and desires. From then on, their work would acquire a strongly theatrical component, as well as a sarcastic transvestitism that used symbols associated with fanaticism and religion to, for example, transform papal miters into Ku Klux Klan hoods or Christian crosses into Nazi swastikas—linking unacknowledged relatives within the same totalitarian genealogy. Many of these mise-en-scènes mixed elements taken from altars, religious prints, popular graphics, pornographic magazines, children's drawings, photographs from family albums, coffins, and press clippings, allegorizing not just the obscene covert criminality of the confrontation between government and insurgent groups, but also staging the death sentence of deviant and sexually dissident bodies within a highly repressive heteronormative regime. These sexually dissident bodies were especially vulnerable in a time where the HIV/AIDS crisis was driving new forms of legal and institutional control over the body and sexuality through normalizing and moralizing rhetoric, which would expand internationally throughout the decade.

Once formed as a group and established on the outskirts of Lima, Grupo Chaclacayo's first (and most powerful) performances, directed by Psotta, were held at the shore of the Pacific Ocean, involved many collaborators, and were documented by photographer Piero Pereira. In Pereira's series of photographs entitled *La agonía de un mito maligno* [The agony of an evil myth] (1984), various naked people appear half-covered with robes and hoods in a sort of obscure oceanfront wake or ritual sacrifice. These sinister figures stand in front of bodies that are half-buried in the sand. In other images from the series, these fake celebrants hold a vigil for the dead bodies. The furtive and intimidating ceremony evokes religious symbols, but also the symbols of right-wing extremist organizations. Other images from the series show a cross-dressed figure, in the guise of Saint Rose of Lima (the first Saint of the Americas), traversing a desert dotted with black flags and crosses, and finally collapsing in agony.

The image of Saint Rose (1586–1617), venerated for her spiritual devotion and her self-inflicted corporeal punishment, was a persistent symbol in the actions, paintings, and drawings produced by Grupo Chaclacayo.

Sergio Zevallos, from the series "Estampas", 1982. Charcoal, chalk and collage on photocopies. Courtesy Sergio Zevallos.

Saint Rose is revealed by the group as an ambiguous symbol of how pain and extreme suffering are associated with the promises of redemption propagated by the discourses of religion and the state, highlighting the role of religious imaginaries in the histories of Western oppression.[10] "That which used to happen through the Church now happens through the banks and the politicians," said Psotta in 1990, alluding to the hidden alliances between Christianity and the exploitation and violence that maintain a moral and economic order in which the sacred is always a fetish or a commodity.[11]

Other appropriations of the portrait of Saint Rose can be found in the series of drawings *Rosa Paraphrasen* (ca. 1985–1986) by Helmut Psotta and in the early series of collages *Estampas* (1982) by Sergio Zevallos. In the latter series, the body of Saint Rose, the so-called "bride of Christ," appears deformed, cross-dressed, and violated by a cohort of malformed angels and seraphim. Saint Rose also appears as part of a pagan sex orgy, emphasizing the incestuous and erotic matrix behind religious mandates. In other actions carried out as a response to some of the most violent crimes of those years, the painful punishment of Saint Rose's body echoes the government's politics of extermination masked by religious devotion.

In the series of photographs *Rosa Cordis* (1986), made by Sergio Zevallos in collaboration with the poet Frido Martin, a character in drag with a black tunic and a crown of roses (an allusion to Saint Rose) applies make-up, then masturbates next to what seems to be a dead body in a cubicle that is dyed red and covered with *Playboy* clippings. In the following image, the saint changes into a hooded figure and sodomizes the cadaver.[12]

Rosa Cordis was a reaction to governmental actions such as the bestowal of the prestigious Order of the Sun medal on Saint Rose for the four-hundredth anniversary of her birth, just a few weeks before the vicious "slaughter of the prisons," and a few months after the extrajudicial executions in Lurigancho prison.[13]

The vanity and arrogance of authoritarian discourse are also represented through parodic "documentary" works, such as *Retrato de un general peruano* [Portrait of a Peruvian General] (1987) by Raul Avellaneda. This work consisted of a portrait painting and various look-alike drawings and photographs of a seventy-year-old general who was the husband of the owner of the house the group rented, and who declared himself a follower of the Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet. The group also confronted authoritarian discourse through collective actions for the camera that denounced the perverse complicity between some local conservative bishops and the military forces that clandestinely tortured and murdered indigenous and peasant communities.

Grupo Chaclacayo staged some of these actions in the context of the celebrated first visit of Pope John Paul II in 1985, when he stopped in several Peruvian cities and provinces (such as Lima, Arequipa, and Ayacucho, a city devastated by the war). The Pope's visit was a very important media event, addressed by the group through homoerotic photographs in which a figure of the Holy Father, half naked, half covered in white robes, lustfully runs his red-dyed hands over what looks like a mixed-race dead body.[14]

Grupo Chaclacayo was very aware of the complicity of right-wing religious authorities in the "dirty war" waged by South American dictatorships against leftist opponents during the 1970s and '80s. In those years, conservative Church hierarchies not only turned a blind eye to the torture and disappearances committed by the anti-communist authorities, but in many cases colluded with them to persecute priests and Church workers who took a stand against human rights abuses. Conservative Church authorities also sought to condemn progressive ideas such as those of the Liberation Theology movement, which embraced a critique of unjust economic and social conditions and proposed a reading of Catholic faith through the eyes of the oppressed and the poor, which

Sergio Zevallos (Grupo Chaclacayo), in collaboration with Frido Martin, Rosa Cordis, 1986. Print on Hahnemuhle paper. Courtesy Sergio Zevallos.

detractors described as "Christianized Marxism."[15]

The Soldier and the Priest, the Child and the Corpse

The actions and representations of Grupo Chaclacayo on the subject of queer religiosity can also be understood as an attempt to revive the stories of androgynous devotion and transvestite rituals that have been constantly suppressed throughout history. The use of Catholic imagery by the group exalts the cheap forms of visual representation of Andean Virgins and local saints, establishing operations of self-identification with popular and lumpen culture (everything considered poor and vulgar from the urban, upper-class perspective), which the group interspersed with images of prosthetic limbs, crosses, portraits of children, blood, mangled bodies, gunpowder, and semen, proposing a renewed space of political antagonism. The images are a staging similar to what queer theorist Beatriz Preciado has described as the "unspeakable attraction between the soldier and the queer, between the dyke and the queen, between the cop and the whore, between the artist and the illiterate, between the aesthetic of the martyrs and sadomasochistic sexual culture."[16]

These queer forms of theatricalizing power and of resignifying religious morality can be related to a wide repertoire of Latin American sexual disobediences and pagan feasts, which have rarely been shown and discussed. For instance, the drawings of phallus-altars for the Virgin of Guadalupe by the Mexican feminist Mónica Mayer in the late 1970s; the feminist religious posters and stickers printed with prayers for abortion rights and freely distributed by the Argentine collective Mujeres Públicas [Public Women]; the liturgical experiences and subversive actions of the Chilean duo Yeguas de Apocalípsis [Mares of the Apocalypse] during Pinochet's dictatorship; the performances, graffiti, protests, and street theater by the Bolivian anticapitalist anarcho-feminist collective Mujeres Creando [Women Creating] in open confrontation with

Sergio Zevallos (Grupo Chaclacayo), Untitled, 1989. Performance at the IFA Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen, Stuttgart, April 23,1989. Courtesy Sergio Zevallos.

hegemonic political and religious systems of power since the early 1990s; the recent street pilgrimages of Chile's first trans saint, Karol Romanoff, organized by the Coordinadora Universitaria de Disidencia Sexual [University Coordinator of Sexual Dissidence] (CUDS); and the surreptitious public appearances of Peruvian drag queen Giuseppe Campuzano as an Andean Virgin. These deviant performances undo devout models of femininity (the mother, the Virgin, the wife, the blessed), but also undermine the strong component of morality that organizes behavior in public space. National ideologies, traditional family values, and Catholic devotion are part of a strong conservative social matrix in South America. Abnormal sexual-political practices confront and subvert this matrix by intervening in the codes that divide the social body into normal subjects and sick subjects, into proper sexualities and wrong sexualities, into people who deserve to live and people who deserve to die.

It is the denunciation of heteronormative protocols and the pathologization of queer and disabled bodies (subjects with either mental or physical impairments that make it difficult for them to meet the productive demands of capitalism) which have recently given rise to a collective platform for resistance and for enacting new political communities. The stance against concepts of normalcy (corporeal, sexual, social, and mental) taken by both queer bodies and crip bodies does not advocate for inclusion into majority values, but rather for a radical transformation of certain systems of meaning and social structures that label non-normative bodies as "disordered." The political potential of crip as a means of fighting the hegemony of able-bodied, heterosexual standards lies in its ability to fracture the collective understandings of what is a desirable social body, thereby putting into question the reproductive/sexual and moral well-being of a nation.

In a recent, very moving silent performance entitled *Lifeline* (2013), Peruvian drag queen Giuseppe Campuzano (who was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis two years ago), in collaboration with Germain Machuca, asserts the experience of the queer and the disabled by showing his own vulnerable, almost motionless body in drag in a wheelchair. Campuzano is pushed along by his friend in a room filled with images and texts of deviant bodies from the pre-Columbian era to the

Giuseppe Campuzano, in collaboration with Germain Machuca, Lifeline, 2013. Performance at the Sala Luis Miró Quesada Garland, Lima. Photo: Claudia Alva.

present, which Campuzano collects as part of his project *Transvestite Museum of Peru*, a queer counter-reading of history.[17] As the artist Renate Lorenz has written regarding the queer resignification of pain, the drag "prevents the body perceived as sick from being completely integrated into the discourse on sickness and from eliciting pitying or sentimental reactions."[18] Like the work of Grupo Chaclacayo, the action by Campuzano reclaims the devalued body and returns to the public eye that which had previously been expelled and labeled as abnormal or sick. These representations resignify queer and crip culture in a process through which bodies that had been denied their human status acquire, by other routes, the possibility of being subjects of enunciation, of being political agents of knowledge production.

The crip vocabulary mobilizes the subversive possibilities of disability, pain, and even death. In Grupo Chaclacayo's work, the presence of prosthetic bodies, skeletons,

Sergio Zevallos (Grupo Chaclacayo), A Few Attempts About The Immaculate Conception, 1986. Print on Hahnemuhle paper. Courtesy Sergio Zevallos.

corpses, and mummies, which are used to stage scenes of annihilation, suggests a different war beyond the Peruvian armed conflict, one both underground and unnoticed: the war declared against effeminate, weird, ugly, monstrous, and sick people. The social pleasure that the death sentence of the homosexual produces, the yearning for the disappearance of gender non-conforming and disabled bodies, emerge in the group's performances as a way of twisting the prevailing hypotheses about the origins of political violence in Peru. Contrary to these prevailing hypotheses, Grupo Chaclacayo locates one of the origins of this political violence in ideas of able-bodied heteronormativity, which are integral to the maintenance of the nation's healthy borders and to the accepted war against any subject disobeying the hegemonic regimes of the "normal."

The reading of these bodies advanced by certain critics, who asserted that these bodies required psychiatric rehabilitation or even incarceration, continued to hound the group's homoerotic artistic grammar. In a 1989 article, the art critic Luis Lama (who had rebuked their work on moral grounds in 1984) dismissed the group's work, then exhibited at the Künstlerhaus Bethanien in Berlin, accusing it of being "shrill and frivolous apologies" for Shining Path.[19] Beyond the threat that such accusation entailed for artists (at the time, it could mean persecution, kidnapping, torture, or forced disappearance), it is revealing how these anarcho-queer outbreaks were associated with the terror produced by the Shining Path's armed raids in Peru.

Lama's denunciation represents a powerful example of how the group's inappropriate expressions of sexuality were interpreted as a threat to the national body. Equating "terrorists" with "queers," however subtly, was an example of how this hyper-sexualized theatricality and cripple-homosexual fiction that blended the soldier and

the priest, the child and the corpse, could be a metaphor just as explosive and threatening to heteronormative discourses as the murderous Shining Path group.

X

A preliminary version of this text was presented at the panel “Latin American Art as the Programmatic of the Political: The New Constructed Canon?” chaired by Claudia Calirman and Gabriela Rangel, during the XXX International Congress of the Latin America Studies Association (May 23–26, 2012) in San Francisco, California, and at the seminar “Campceptualisms of the South: Tropicamp, Performative Politics and Subalternity” organized by Beatriz Preciado at the Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona - MACBA (November, 19–20, 2012).

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1
This research is part of a collective project conducted by Red Conceptualismos del Sur (Southern Conceptualisms Network) about the transformations in ways of understanding and engaging in politics that took place in Latin America in the 1980s. The first phase of this project was recently presented at the exhibition "Losing the Human Form: A Seismic Image of the 1980s in Latin America" at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía Madrid (October 2012–March 2013) and Museo de Arte de Lima (November 2013–February 2014). Part of this research was conducted in collaboration with the Peruvian researcher Emilio Tarazona between 2008 and 2011. Some of these materials will be presented for the first time in Peru at the exhibition "Sergio Zevallos in the Grupo Chaclacayo, 1982–1994," curated by Miguel A. López at the Museo de Arte de Lima in November 2013.

2
The armed conflict in Peru ended in 2000 with the fall of the right-wing dictator Alberto Fujimori and his criminal and corrupt government. The principal actors in the war were the Shining Path Maoist organization (founded in a multiple split in the Communist Party of Peru), the "Guevarist" guerrilla group Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (or MRTA), and the government of Peru. All of the armed actors in the war committed systematic human rights violations and killed civilians, making the conflict bloodier than any other war in Peruvian history since the European colonization of the country.

3
The show toured from 1989 to 1990 at the *Institut für* Auslandsbeziehungen (ifa) in Stuttgart, the Museum Bochum, the Badischer Kunstverein in Karlsruhe, and at the Künstlerhaus Bethanien in Berlin, among other venues. In addition, the group presented a series of live performances in Maxim Gorki Theater, Berlin, in May 1990. Their last presentation as a group was at Fest III (September 29–October 3, 1994) in Dresden, with the participation of, among others, the Yugoslavian/Slovenian band Laibach, the dance-theater company Betontanc, the filmmaker Lutz Dammbeck, and the artist and theoretician Peter Weibel.

4
On December 30, 1982, the government of Peru granted broad powers to the armed forces for "counter-subversive" campaigns in the parts of the central Andes deemed to be in a "state of emergency." The human rights abuses that resulted were part of a deliberate strategy on the part of the military government. See Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación, *Informe Final* (Lima: CVR, 2003).

5
For a short history of Lima's punk scene and "subte" movement, see Shane "Gang" Greene, "Notes on the Peruvian Underground: Part II," *Maximum Rocknroll* 356 (January 2013). See also Carlos Torres Rotondo, *Se acabó el show. 1985. El estallido del rock subterráneo* (Lima: Editorial Mutante, 2012).

6
For a longer reflection about the radical artistic interventions and the underground scene in Peru in the 1980s, see Miguel A. López, "Discarded Knowledge: Peripheral Bodies and Clandestine Signals in the 1980s War in Peru," in Ivana Bago, Antonia Majaca, and Vesna Vukovic (eds.), *Removed from the Crowd: Unexpected Encounters* (Zagreb: BLOK & DeLVe – Institute for Duration, Location and Variables, 2011), 102–41.

7
Luis Lama, "Pobre Goethe," *Caretas* (December 3, 1984): 63.

8
"Crip" is a play on the word "cripple," and its use here refers to the political resignification of disability and the questioning of how and why disability is constructed and naturalized. The "cripple" movement reclaims language and self-representation to direct them towards different modes of existence, confronting the dominant ideologies of "normalcy" and its medical lexicon. The movement also aligns itself with other bodies that have been pathologized, such as the homosexual. Crip activism and theory mobilizes the subversive potential of disabled bodies that refuse able-bodied norms, the productive demands of capitalism, and static identities. For the intersections of crip and queer, see Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (New York: NYU Press, 2006).

9
Helmut J. Psotta (1937–2012) was born to a Jewish mother, Rosa Grosz, and a German father who was member of the Nazi Party. Psotta attended the Folkwang School in Essen, but found the school's ideological tensions unbearable. Soon after he left the school, Psotta worked with metal designer Lili Schultz in her class at the Düsseldorf School of Arts, where Psotta met Joseph Beuys. At the age of twenty-three Psotta visited South America for the first time. He taught at the Institute of Design in the Architecture Department of the Catholic University of Santiago de Chile, and after seven years decided to visit Germany. Shortly thereafter, there was a military coup in Chile and his return to the country was no longer possible. Psotta moved to Gahlen, in Germany, where he created one of his major early series, entitled *Pornografie—für Ulrike MM* . He gave some lectures and seminars at the Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten in Amsterdam, at the Jan van Eyck Academy and the Academy of Fine Arts in Maastricht, and at the Design Academy Eindhoven, among other schools. During these years his mother died and he decided to move to Utrecht, where he produced the series *Konkrette-Poesie* and the cycle of drawings entitled *Sodom—für C. de Lautréamont* . Despite various offers, he refused to make his work public, as he believed that only through anonymity could he be free as an artist. He eventually received an invitation to teach at the Art School of the Catholic University in Lima, where he lived between 1982 and early 1989.

10
Helmut Psotta, "Die Koloniale Jesusbraut Rosa von Lima und die Korruption der weißen Kaste order. Eine lyrische Version europäischer Brutalität...," in Grupo Chaclacayo, *Todesbilder. Peru oder Das Ende des europäischen Traums* (Berlin: Alexander Verlag, 1989), 39–49. The beatification of Saint Rose of Lima in Rome in 1668, and her canonization by Pope Clement X in 1671, can be interpreted as a strategic gesture by the Church to consolidate its hierarchy and to symbolically proclaim the success of the processes of evangelization in the Americas.

11
Dorothee Hackenberg, "Dieser Brutälitat der Sanftheit. Interview mit Helmut J. Psotta, Raul Avellaneda, Sergio Zevallos von der Grupo Chaclacayo über 'Todesbilder,'" *TAZ* (January 26, 1990), 22. In a 1921 text, Water Benjamin describes capitalism as a "religious phenomenon" whose development was decisively strengthened by Christianity: "Capitalism is purely cultic religion, without dogma. Capitalism itself developed parasitically on Christianity in the West—not in Calvinism alone, but also, as must be shown, in the remaining orthodox Christian movements—in such a way that, in the end, its history is essentially the history of its parasites, of capitalism." Walter Benjamin, "Capitalism as Religion," trans. Chad Kautzer, in Eduardo Mendieta (ed.), *The Frankfurt School on Religion: Key Writings by the Major Thinkers* (London: Routledge, 2005), 260.

12
For these images, the poet Frido Martin (Marco Antonio Young) performed as a queer Santa Rosa. Martin was one of driving forces behind the radical Peruvian poetry of the early 1980s, appearing with the Movimiento Kloaka and with the rock group Durazno Sangrando (consisting of Fernando Bryce and Rodrigo Quijano) in several public performances and poetry readings.

13
The "slaughter of the prisons" refers to the political repression that took place on June 18 and 19, 1986, following a riot by prisoners accused of terrorism in various prisons in Lima. The riot was started with the intent of capturing foreign media attention before the 18th Congress of the International Socialist (June 20–23, 1986), which was organized for the first time in Latin America. This slaughter was the greatest mass murder of the decade.

14
The speech of John Paul II in Ayacucho was delivered in the city airport, in February 1985, right next to Los Cabitos army headquarters, where a large number of peasants were brutalized and punished under suspicion of being "terrorists." The inhabitants of Ayacucho had been denouncing these crimes since 1983, but they were ignored by the conservative archbishop

Federico Richter Prada and by other local religious authorities who collaborated in the preparation of the papal speech. The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (CVR) confirmed in 2003 that at least one hundred people were killed and illegally buried in Los Cabitos in those years. For a moving testimony by a Jesuit priest who confronted the subversive groups, military abuse, and right-wing religious authorities in Ayacucho during 1988 and 1991, see Carlos Flores Lizana, *Diario de vida y muerte: Memorias para recuperar la humanidad* (Cusco: Centro de Estudios Regionales Andinos Bartolomé de las Casas, 2004).

15
One of the founders of Liberation Theology was Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez Merino, who coined the term "liberation theology" in 1971 and wrote the first book about this theological-political movement in 1973. See Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A T heology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1988).

16
Beatriz Preciado, "The Ocaña we deserve: Campceptualism, subordination and performative policies," in *Ocaña: 1973–1983: acciones, actuaciones, activismo* (Barcelona: Institut de Cultura de l'Ajuntament de Barcelona, 2011), 421.

17
Action performed at the Sala Luis Miró Quesada Garland, in Lima, as part of the project *eX²periencia* curated by Jorge Villacorta in February 2013. For a broader consideration of *Transvestite Museum of Peru* see Giuseppe Campuzano, *Museo Travesti del Perú* (Lima: Institute of Development Studies, 2008); and Miguel A. López, "Reality can suck my dick, darling: The Museo Travesti del Perú and the histories we deserve," *Visible Workbook 2* (Graz: Kunsthaus Graz, 2013).

18
Renate Lorenz, *Queer Art: A Freak Theory* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2012), 81.

19
Luis Lama, "Perversión y Complacencia," *Caretas* (November 20, 1989): 74–76.

Virginia Solomon

What is Love?: Queer Subcultures and the Political Present

Like others among the twenty or so people witness to Sharon Hayes's *Everything Else Has Failed! Don't You Think it's Time for Love?* (2007), I spent each lunch break during the week of September 17th, 2007, crying at the intersection of West 51st Street and 6th Avenue in midtown Manhattan. The performance consisted of Hayes walking out of the United Bank of Switzerland (UBS) building shortly after noon carrying a small speaker and a microphone on a stand, and reciting a love letter from an anonymous speaker to an absent "you."[1] The letters gradually established a loose narrative in which the speaker has been separated from her lover by circumstances related to the war in Iraq.[2] The two had been able to maintain something of a relationship via letters, but the speaker has stopped receiving replies from the lover and, as such, has resorted to speaking the letters in public in the hopes that this gesture will inspire a response.[3]

Surely my tears flowed because of this longing, this gesture of love rendered unrequitable by ostensibly unassailable, intertwined institutions that keep the lovers apart: the military-industrial complex, states and citizenship, and homophobia. Hayes's skill at delivery—her ability to use her voice to convey the yearning and the loss contained within the letters—certainly contributed to this intensely emotional response from her audience. The passion and conviction with which she infused her voice stood in stark contrast to the besuited bankers scurrying about during their lunch hour talking on their cell phones. She tried to make eye contact as unsuspecting people walked in front of her, in the space between her speaking body and the audience gathered to listen to that day's oratory. Occasionally, someone would stop, but more often than not, if they even noticed her, they would quickly look away and hurry along out of eye—and earshot.

Sharon Hayes, Everything Else Has Failed! Don't You Think It's Time for Love?, 2009. Performance.

This clear disjunction between the audience and the general public served a purpose within the performance, alluding to how love functioned as the basis of Hayes's antiwar statement. The dynamic present between those who understood and were interested in the performance, and those who didn't and weren't, productively reproduced the structure of subcultures, illustrating the gulf between those who live comfortably within the values and hierarchies of dominant culture and those who use those structures against the mainstream.[4] As such, Hayes highlighted that her use of love was drawn from a subcultural context, raising the question of what love means within that setting.[5]

Everything Else Has Failed... points towards specific instances in which subcultures have mobilized love to political effect. The most prominent reference is to the American hippie counterculture of the late 1960s, which looked to love as a way to construct an alternative social order while simultaneously protesting the war in Vietnam with such slogans as "Make Love not War." For hippies, dropping out of society and forming alternative economic and kinship structures with different standards and ethics—all through the language of love—was an intensely political act. Not surprisingly, Hayes has pinpointed the origins of this performance's title in an archival image from Berkeley in the late 1960s, which depicts a man sitting in the middle of a protest holding up a sign that reads: "Everything Else has Failed! Don't You Think It's Time for Love?"[6] The sentiment conveyed by the sign, and by Hayes some forty years later, is that love encompasses an alternative understanding of political activity in the face of governmental processes that, then as now, are either unable or unwilling to address grave social and economic injustice.

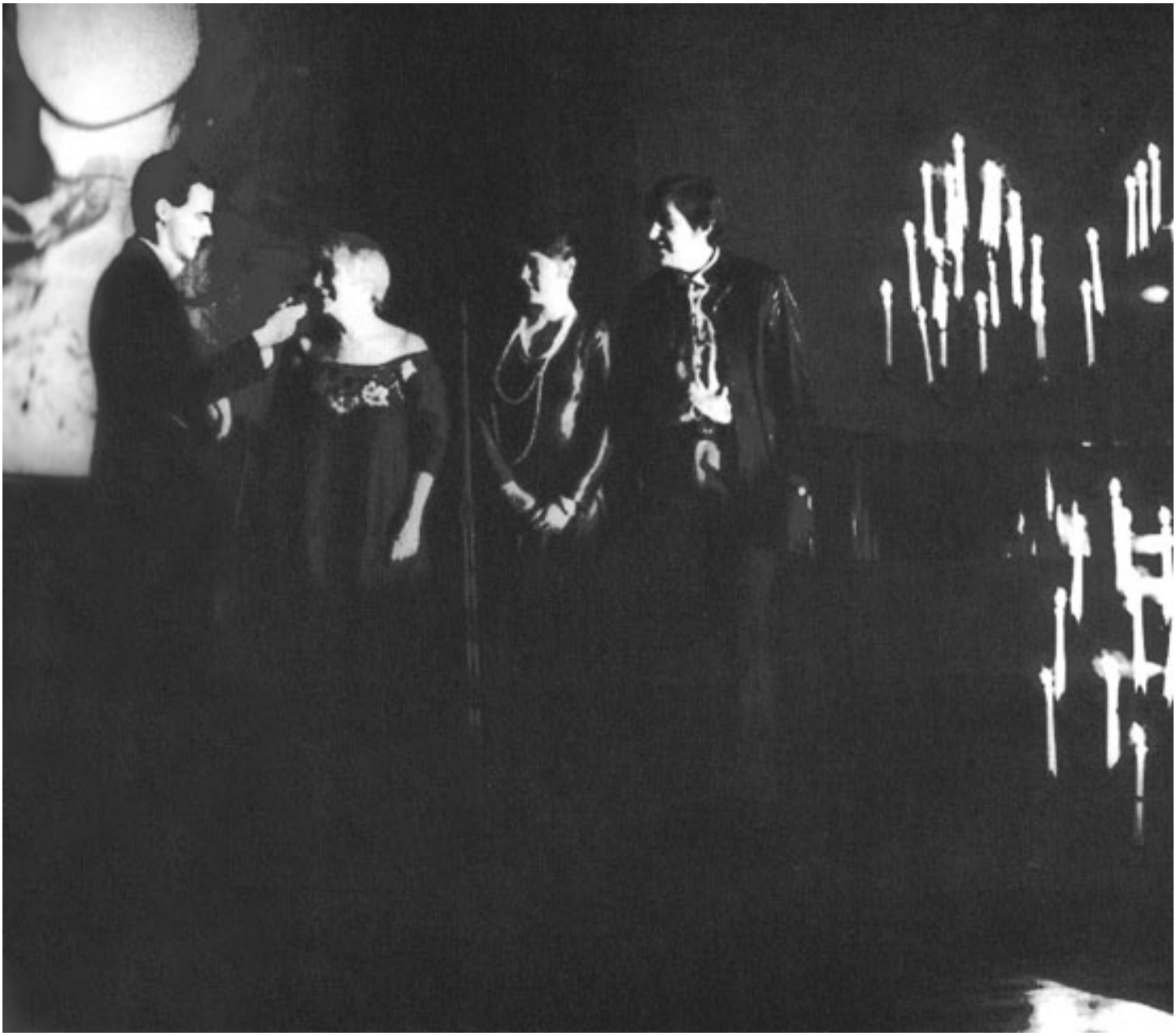
What this alternative, subcultural, and queer form of politics is—its shape, scope, temporality, and purpose—receives systematic exploration in the intermedia practice of the Canadian artist group General Idea, active from 1969 to 1994. The example set by General Idea offers some answers to the questions raised by how Hayes positions her use of love, based on how the group engaged with the politics of everyday subcultural life throughout its career. General Idea's work helps us see how Hayes and other queer and feminist artists in her milieu use their art practices to explore not just alternative methods of politics, but an entirely different model of what constitutes politics altogether. The goals of this politics are not to institute different public policies or forms of government that are more equitable. It is, rather, about creating spaces, systems, and structures in the present moment for subcultural participants to have some form of agency: to determine their own morals, values, and hierarchies; to establish their own terms of identification and subjectivization; and to briefly exist without being subject to immediate policing by dominant culture. A contingent subaltern version of performative biopower, as opposed to a movement to completely overhaul society.[7]

Consisting of the trio AA Bronson, Felix Partx, and Jorge Zontal, General Idea's entire practice highlighted the political operation of subcultural social life, of the everyday activity of subcultural participation, in contrast to elections or demonstrations.[8] In a 1997 catalog essay, Bronson expressed the group's motivation in terms that uncannily echo the statement on the Berkeley protester's sign, though for General Idea even the hippies represented a form of orthodoxy:

> We had abandoned our hippie backgrounds of heterosexual idealism, abandoned any shred of belief that we could change the world by activism, by demonstration, by any of the methods we had tried in the 1960s—they had all failed ... We abandoned bona fide cultural terrorism and replaced it with viral methods.[9]

General Idea disidentified with the bona fide earnestness of the hippies' methods, not so much because those methods had failed to change the world, but because of the counterculture's aspirations to change the world in the first place. Rather than try to instrumentalize social life to overthrow dominant culture, to repeal sodomy laws or end wars, the subcultural politics that General Idea highlighted created alternative social orders in the present, using the systems and structures of dominant culture against itself to allow different possibilities for identification and subjectivization.

From the outset, General Idea incorporated its subcultural social milieu into its performances, videos, installations, and even its magazine, *FILE*, published from 1972 to 1989. The group demonstrated an exceptional commitment to both underscoring and also modeling the ways that subcultures function politically. Its work emphasized the role that alternative ideas about sexuality played within those subcultures. Sexuality was about more than just sex and desire, however—it stood in for a form of critically engaged embodiment, including the entire matrix of identification and subjectivization that frequently constituted the primary site of intervention for these subcultures, be they the group's correspondence art network or its local gay bar scene (though it is no coincidence that many of these sites overlapped). As Bronson described it, "The whole thing about sexual freedom was a big topic, and the lack of definition around sex was more important than identity really. It was very free-form, and there was this idea that sex could move in any direction at any time."[10] Denizens of these subcultures used the forms and structures of identity available within dominant culture, but redeployed them in a manner that refused many of the assumptions that undergirded mainstream ideas about identity, including its fixity and its essentialism. The prominence of taking on assumed names and characters within General Idea's



General Idea, The 1971 Miss General Idea Pageant, 1971. AA Bronson, as the Master of Ceremonies, announces the three finalists of the pageant: Margaret Coleman, Tina Miller, and Marcel Dot.

network—as the group did twice over, not only with their individual names but also with their collective identity—is an obvious example of this tendency. Sexuality was a primary site that the group chose to present in its exploration of the political operation of subcultures, presenting the body, not the public sphere, as the site of intervention.

One of the group's first large-scale projects exemplified its commitment to performing subcultural politics. The *Miss General Idea Pageant* provided a framework for General Idea from its first iteration in 1970 through its last performance in 1978. The performance materialized differently with each staging, as a fully scripted event in 1970 and an actual competition in 1971.[11] Subsequent pageant performances, from 1974 to 1978, restaged aspects of the 1971 event to rehearse audience reaction for the next competition, set to occur in 1984.[12] The grandest of these rehearsals was *Going Thru the Motions*, which took place at the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) in 1975. The event was a large-scale affair, with elaborate staging, many parts, and multiple musical interludes by the popular Toronto-based band Rough Trade.[13] What was noteworthy about the event, as it applies to General Idea's relationship to its subcultures, was how it blended scripted and unscripted elements. The group

conceptualized *Going Thru the Motions* as a performance for video, and the cameras rolled from the first guest's arrival through the last's exit, capturing the intermission with as much detail and care as the staged and scripted elements. The audience played as much of a role in the work as the figures on stage, perhaps even more so, as the entire event revolved around rehearsing the audience's reactions to prepare for the event to come in 1984.

Marcel Dot's winning submission for The 1971 Miss General Idea Pageant. Photo: Vincent Trasov.

The importance of subcultural social life, and specifically socializing, to *Going Thru the Motions*, and to General Idea's practice in general, becomes clear over the course of the intermission. The group included a bar, the Colour Bar Lounge, as part of the setting for the performance. It was a fully stocked cash bar, though it quickly sold out of alcohol and had to be resupplied part way through the event. General Idea specifically constructed and filmed the activity at the Colour Bar Lounge, and included interviews with members of the audience that reference it. These interviews discuss various drinks on offer at the bar, like the Golden Shower, that specify these as sexual subcultures. By highlighting this space of drinking and of cruising, the group not only references a history of artist bar hangouts, such as the Cedar Tavern for the Abstract Expressionists or Max's Kansas City for the Minimalists and Warhol's entourage, but also turns viewers' attention to the subcultural orientation of the entire pageant performance. General Idea incorporated prominent members of its subcultures into its performances, and used subcultural spaces as part of the staging of the *Pageant*.

While General Idea emphasizes the fact that it incorporated its subcultures within *Going Thru the Motions*, it explains the political operation of those subcultures in a later work that also takes place at the Colour Bar Lounge: the 1979 video *Test Tube*. The video unfolds like a television program, another form which General Idea occupied and rearticulated for subcultural purposes.[14]

Test Tube takes the form of a soap opera, but through the story of the episode it also clarifies General Idea's subcultural politics.[15] The video unfolds over five sections, each of which presents a different political ideology in three parts: General Idea in the Colour Bar Lounge establishing the ideology of the given section, an artist and new mother considering that ideology in relation to different frameworks for artistic practice, and then a drink for sale at the bar—a metaphor for the ideology. These settings—a bar, a domestic household, and advertising—link the consideration of politics to the spaces and activities of everyday life.

In the scenes from *Test Tube* where General Idea speaks, the group combines the language of research and development with that of intoxication, playing on the ability of capitalism and dominant culture to intoxicate subjects and distort their perception such that they no longer recognize how either shapes their lives. At the same time, General Idea uses the video to demonstrate how systems and institutions of dominant culture offer the possibility for inhabitation and redeployment for subcultural purposes. Later in the video, Jorge Zontal explains, "We don't want to destroy television. We want to add to it. We want to stretch it until it starts to lose shape, stretch that social fabric! Just imagine all those new sensibilities taking up more and more room, all those chaotic situations on the fringe of society flooding into the mainstream."[16] This statement encapsulates the group's presentation of subcultural politics, of occupying and rearticulating dominant culture to create space for alternative social orders and modes of identification. This was its viral method, set against hippie heterosexual idealism, performed on a daily basis through

General Idea, General Idea's Test Tube, 1980. Poster produced for the North America premiere of Test Tube. Offset print.

General Idea, Test Tube, 1979. Video still from General Idea's Colour Bar Lounge.

subcultural social life.

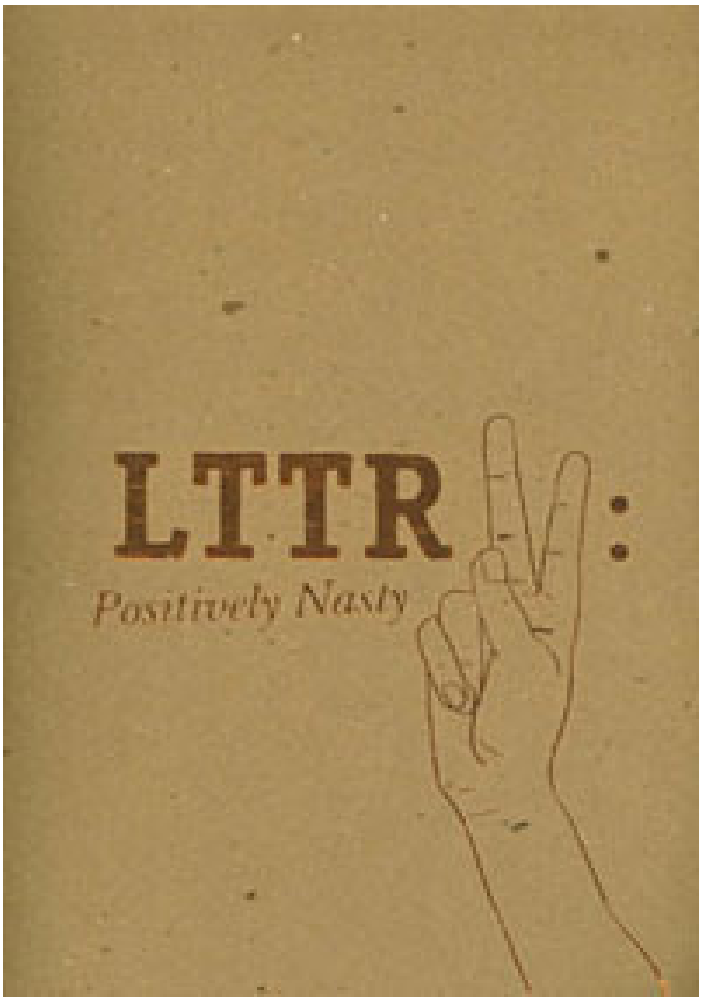
I began work on a dissertation on General Idea shortly after first moving to New York, and it presciently provided me with a framework and a vocabulary to understand what I viscerally felt to be so pressing and vital in work like Hayes's performance. While General Idea presents an alternative and expanded notion of sexuality as part of its subcultural politics, though, it falls upon contemporary queer and feminist artists to expand upon General Idea's observations within a specifically and self-consciously queer social life and community. Describing why she was drawn to the protest photograph from which the performance draws its title, Hayes notes that it pointed to the social act of love—outside of a romantic context in its declarations to an indeterminate "you"—as itself political.[17] Hayes does not explicitly define the love that she references and performs within *Everything Else Has Failed...*. When discussing the project, however, she often refers to the work of another artist, Emily Roysdon, who explicates love as a politicized aspect of everyday queer life. Roysdon, whose work engages photography, choreography, and curatorial practice, specifies love as "a strategy, medium, site, and scene."[18] She clarifies, "I must be explicit—Queer Love. Queer love exemplifies itself by its lack of singular object relations and an insistence on unstable and mutable boundaries."[19] And her notion of love is inextricable from queer subcultural life: "The

theater of queer love employs politics, poetics, and aesthetics in equal measure."[20] This love, for Roysdon, denies the very structures of dominant culture in part because of its refusal to differentiate among art, politics, and the social realm.

For both Roysdon and Hayes, love is a lived critical engagement with and disarticulation of dominant culture. Hayes models this through her composition of the letters, drawn from historical love letters, speeches, protest songs, and slogans—from Bob Dylan lyrics to ACT UP slogans to lines from the resignation speech of New Jersey governor Jim McGreevey, delivered in 2004 after being caught in a homosexual extramarital affair. Re-speaking has long been a part of Hayes's work. But *Everything Else Has Failed...* presents this form of appropriation and rearticulation—of occupying utterances from other times and contexts and using them for one's own purposes—as part and parcel of Roysdon's understanding of love, and thus intimately constitutive of queer life.

Two queer and feminist art collectives, one of which has Roysdon as a member, invert the emphasis in *Everything Else Has Failed...*, more concretely presenting queer social life while more obliquely engaging with traditional ideas of politics. These two groups, LTTR and Ridykeulous, both have wide-ranging practices that include intense collaboration, both in the groups' own work and also in the art of others that they incorporated into their own.[21] Much like General Idea, both groups have organized shows, printed matter, and events that double as social occasions. As such, like General Idea, these collectives use their artistic production to highlight the political operation of queer subcultures, in the process rearticulating the temporality and ontology of politics.

LTTR, an artist collective founded in 2001 by Ginger Brooks Takahashi, K8 Hardy, and Emily Roysdon, with Ulrike Müller joining in 2005, describes itself as "a feminist genderqueer artist collective with a flexible project oriented practice," including "an annual independent art journal, performance series, events, screenings and collaborations."[22] LTTR works from its social and artistic cohort, creating performances, events, and printed matter that provide its peers space to interact with each other and to present their own work as part of a larger conversation about the politics of social life. Their art events are intentionally indistinguishable from social events, and programmed conversations take on an added urgency and relevance because of a radical equality among all participants, be they tenured professors or artists without gallery representation. Much contemporary art has engaged with the idea of the social, and of social practice, where the latter term refers to art practices that serve a specific social function, like founding a non-accredited art school, a la The Bruce High Quality Foundation University (2009–), or establishing an office to serve as the headquarters for an immigrant rights movement, as Tania Bruguera did with *Immigrant Movement International* (2010–2015).[23] LTTR has certainly participated in this discourse about participation and social practice art, but at the same time, the group has rejected much of this discourse's universalist framing in the interest of a specifically subcultural address. While other participatory practices have tried to demonstrate that the art object is always embedded in a world defined by social relations, LTTR makes already existing social practices the *stuff* of art.



Cover of the magazine LTTR 5—Positively Nasty, 2006.

While LTTR creates opportunities for its social circles and their practices to materialize, another queer and feminist art collective, Ridykeulous, produces publications and events that more explicitly formalize the extent to which the network it belongs to views making art as inextricable from making a subcultural community. Founded in 2005 by artists A.L. Steiner and Nicole Eisenmann, the project has materialized in the form of exhibitions and a zine, but also as more loosely structured events and even angry letters to artists, art publications, and the *New York Times*.

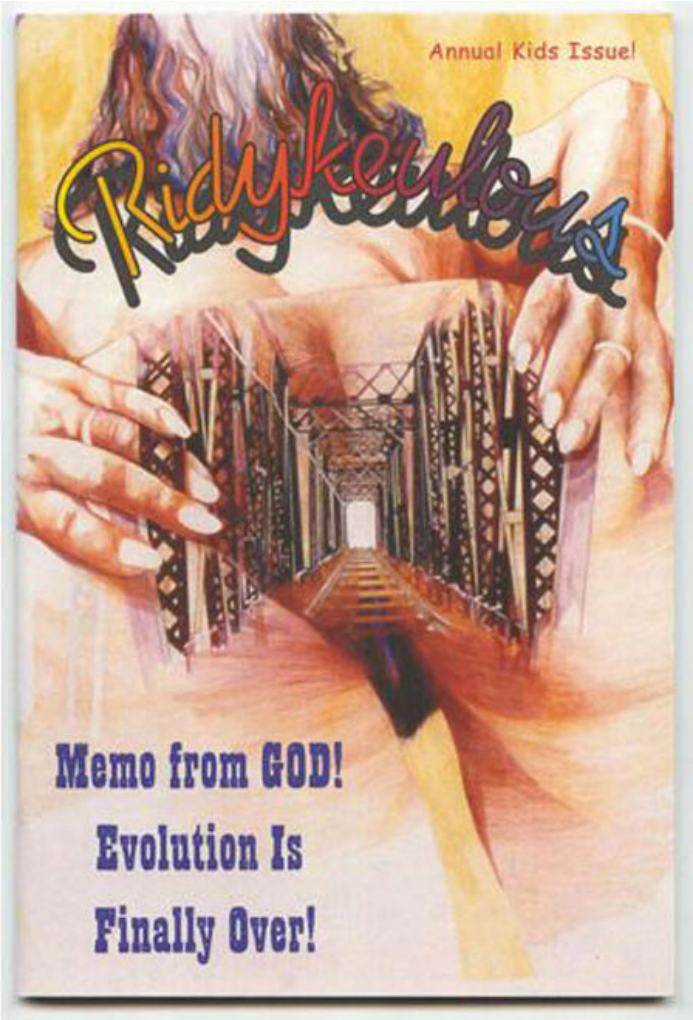
Steiner and Eisenmann have described Ridykeulous as an amorphous, collective enterprise that is itself a social transaction.[24] The group is deliberately undefined, with projects materializing through conversations with friends and not just between its two primary artists.

In a 2009 interview, Eisemann elaborated on the group and its relationship to social interactions, clarifying how its collectivity is an extension of its social and artistic subculture:

> I think collectivity is really ... sometimes it's about using other people's skills or other people's ideas but its also about understanding what a community is. Collectivity has lost its form in the art world because it seems to be about making products but I don't think that anyone working collectively, either singularly or collectively (or singularly and collectively like we are because we're doing both), I don't think anyone is doing it because they want to make stuff. They also want to do it because of the social interactions and then the social interactions, of course, enumerate when you call together a group. Say I am doing this project and people show up—then they're automatically a part of the collective. It's not like they are an audience. We are really hostile to the idea that people come as audience members because I think that's really passive.[25]

Ridykeulous posits an even more intimate relationship between the various forms of labor that constitute artistic practice and the labor of supporting a subculture, since its work is inexorably both. Because its work is even more socially oriented, and because the work of the colleagues who it includes is often so resolutely indicative of the collaborative milieu that supports so many artists, Ridykeulous enables a social and artistic subculture that uncannily echoes General Idea.

Putting General Idea in conversation with Sharon Hayes, LTTR, and Ridykeulous demonstrates the continued urgency of General Idea's presentation of subcultural politics as not just an alternative avenue to achieve social change, but as an entirely different conception of politics. The two moments seem to share not only disillusionment with traditional structures of politics, but also a different temporal address. Subcultural politics and queer politics both work in the present, making space for alternative social orders and modes of subjectivization now, rather than trying to affect change in the future. The street is not dead, and public policy certainly matters, but not all subjects have access to the street, and public policy seems increasingly unable to adequately address the matrix of factors that impact inequality in our contemporary moment. We cannot regulate our own banks, let alone flows of global capital based on alienation



Cover of the Ridykeulous journal, 2006.

and exploitation. Once again—as the Berkeley youth did, and General Idea did, according to Bronson—we face a failure of traditional politics. As such, Hayes, LTTR, and Ridykeulous, not to mention many of the other artists who constitute their cohort, offer a politics of the present, highlighting how their queer subcultures create alternative social and economic orders now, however ephemeral they may be, while also working towards more traditionally recognizable forms of social justice.[26]

Ultimately, what General Idea observed, and what seemed to motivate the urgency I felt participating in the scene that included Ridykeulous and LTTR, was a reformulation of what constitutes politics, and a reevaluation of the stakes of the social field and social life in light of this reformulation. By linking artistic and cultural practice, the artists under discussion here highlight the power of each to act on its own, without needing to be instrumentalized within a larger project of social change. Each artist or group highlights social activity as an agent that has the power to analyze, explicate, and impact culture at large. This potential is not limited to subcultures, subcultural

practices, and subcultural objects. Rather, as General Idea and the other artists I have addressed demonstrate, it is within these sites that this potential is self-consciously explored and productively exploited. By formalizing social life within their work, these artists model the generative nature of social life, of the present, and of the ephemeral. This model carries as much pertinence now as it did forty years ago for communities disenfranchised by official institutions of culture and government, communities that need a way to formulate and make sense of themselves and their lives outside of mainstream structures.

X

Virginia Solomon is an art historian, critic, and curator who specializes in modern and contemporary art, culture, and politics. Her interests concern the political potential of everyday social life, and she focuses on art practices that highlight this potential in both her written and curatorial practices. She currently is working on a dissertation at the University of Southern California, on the Canadian artist group General Idea. This dissertation, titled “Modeling Subcultural Politics: General Idea, Sexuality, and Signification, 1969-1994,” places the group’s practice in the context of an expanded and evolving conversation concerning the relationship between art and politics, and argues that its incorporation of sexuality enabled it to reconfigure what constituted both political and artistic activity. Her shows, including “Tainted Love,” (co-curated with Steven Lam, La Mama La Galleria, NYC, 2009) and “Shary Boyle and Emily Duke: The Illuminations Project,” (ICA, Philadelphia, 2011) build upon these questions. Solomon was a Helena Rubinstein Fellow at the Whitney Independent Study Program for the 2007/2008 academic year, the 2009/2010 Canadian Art Research Fellow at the National Gallery of Canada, and the 2010/2011 Whitney-Lauder Curatorial Fellow at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia.

1
The performance occurred as part of the show *25 Years Later: Welcome to Art in General* , installed at the UBS art gallery on the occasion of the non-profit arts organization Art in General's twenty-fifth anniversary. Rather than a retrospective of the organization's work, the show was conceived of as a series of creatively staged encounters between art and the public. For more on the exhibition, see http://www.artingeneral.org/exhibitions/425 .

2
Although the details of the story are ambiguous, over the course of the performances it becomes clear that for a time the lovers lived together in New York, until the absent lover's family demanded that she leave the country, having something to do with the war in Iraq. Hayes's speaker offered to accompany the absent lover, but the offer was refused. Thus began the epistolary exchange that provides the context for the performance.

3
Documentation of the entire piece, including audio, is available at the artist's website here http://www.shaze.info/ .

4
The model of subcultures that I use throughout this essay draws from the work done at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, particularly as enumerated by Stuart Hall and Dick Hebidge. Both scholars looked at the everyday activity that constituted participation in a variety of subcultures, from soccer hooligans to punks, and discussed how that activity constituted an active political engagement with creating space for alternative structures and values. Two aspects of their discussion of subcultures are particularly pertinent to this essay. The first is the fact that everyday social activity can constitute active political engagement, and the second is the prominence of détournement within subcultures, wherein subjects take a process or object from dominant culture and use it for a different purpose. Both of these scholars render everyday activity political—political because of the work it does in the present moment, rather than trying to affect change in the future. The artists discussed here likewise endow everyday life with political agency. See *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain* , eds. Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (New York: Routledge, 2000); and Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

5
For more on the role that subcultures play within this work, see Virginia Solomon, "Politics of Queer Sociality: Music as Material Metaphor," exhibition catalog, *Farewell to Post-Colonialism: The Third Guangzhou Triennial* (Guangzhou: Guangdong Museum of Art, 2008), 314–317.

6
Julie Carson, "Now, then and love: Questions of Agency in Contemporary Practice, Interview with Andrea Geyer, Ken Gonzales-Day, Sharon Hayes, Adrià Julià, Juan Maidagan, Emily Roydson (LTTR), Stephanie Taylor, Bruce Yonemoto and Dolores Zinny," *Exile of the Imaginary: Politics, Aesthetics, Love* (Vienna: Generali Foundation, 2007), 163.

7
In the first volume of his *History of Sexuality* , Michel Foucault describes biopower as a method through which the modern, capitalist nation-state controls populations by disciplining bodies via productive, and not just repressive, processes. This carries the consequence that norms and discourse create the possibilities and limits for bodies, in addition to explicit forms of regulation that allow and prohibit behavior. In the case of subcultures, power flows in the opposite direction, in the sense that subcultures provide a space to rearticulate norms and discourse, and for the bodies of the participants to enact that rearticulation.

8
Bronson, Partz, and Zontal were pseudonyms for Michael Tims, Ron Gabe, and Slobodan Siai-Levy, respectively.

9
AA Bronson, "Myth as Parasite/Image as Virus: General Idea's Bookshelf, 1967–1975," *The Search for the Spirit: General Idea 1968–1975* , ed. Fern Bayer (Toronto: Art Galley of Ontario, 1998), 18.

10
Interview with the author, March 10, 2008.

11
Any consideration of General Idea, particularly of its work through 1975, owes an impossible debt of gratitude to Fern Bayer, the group's archivist, who helped organize the most thorough consideration of the group's early work for the exhibition *The Search for the Spirit: General Idea 1968-1975* , and its attendant catalog. For more, see *The Search for the Spirit* , ibid.

12
The competition at the 1971 pageant occurred based on photographs submitted by friends of General Idea, who followed criteria that the group outlined in the submissions packet sent to each participant. Vancouver-based artist Marcel Dot (Michael Morris) was crowned Miss General Idea 1971–1984 for his photo, which "best captured glamour without falling into it," parodying glamour without enacting it as a part of his persona. General Idea crowned Dot Miss General Idea 1971–1984 for a number of reasons. The date—because of its Orwellian connotations and its association with a general notion of the future—was evocative of the correspondence network of which General Idea was a part. Many of General Idea's cohort also made work throughout the early 1970s that incorporated 1984, including Glenn Lewis's *The Great Wall of 1984* , which consisted of a wall of cubby holes, each of which was filled with an object submitted by another member of this correspondence network. *The Great Wall of 1984* was installed at the National Library of Canada in Ottawa. From a purely logistical standpoint, though, General Idea also granted Dot a thirteen-year rein because the group could not fathom organizing another competition in 1972, and because the year 1984, due to its connotations, seemed as good an end date as any.

13
Rough Trade was a new-wave band founded by Carole Pope and Kevin Staples in 1968, though it did not perform as Rough Trade until 1974. The band achieved relative success, due in part to its frank embrace of raw sexuality, with out lesbian Carole Pope frequently performing in bondage attire.

14
The work was commissioned by De Apel in Amsterdam as a part of the gallery's series of artist videos made for Dutch TV. Steeped in Marshal McLuhan's ideas about the power of technology, and witness to the ways in which TV disseminated American culture as a form of unmarked, universal global culture, the work nonetheless also continued General Idea's exploration of the possibilities of subcultural politics.

15
The video tells the story of Marianne, an abstract painter struggling to juggle the conflicting demands of the market, a desire for critical cultural relevance, and a new baby.

16
General Idea, *Test Tube* (1979)

17
Julie Carson, "Now, then and love," 163.

18
Ibid., 160.

19
Ibid.

20
Ibid.

21
Not coincidentally, each group has included Hayes within various projects, further demonstrating the social and discursive connections that inform their intertwined pursuit of art practices which highlight the politics of queer subcultural life.

22
See http://lttr.org/about-lttr.

23
For more on this interpretation of this genre, see Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (New York: Verso, 2012).

24
Interview with the author, March 22, 2009.

25
Ibid.

26
Many of the artists who regularly work with LTTR and Ridykeulous also work with a number of queer of color social outreach

organizations, including the Silvia Rivera Law Project, Queers for Economic Justice, and FIERCE, a member-led organization devoted to developing leadership and community improvement for queer youth of color. Each of these organizations include art as part of its outreach, and artists donate work to benefit auctions.

Greg Youmans

Living on the Edge: Recent Queer Film and Video in the San Francisco Bay Area

This past December, I made a short video with my boyfriend and collaborator Chris Vargas about the relationship in the early 1970s between San Francisco's hippie drag troupe the Cockettes and future disco diva Sylvester. On New Year's Eve 1969, the Cockettes danced into the spotlight with a rambunctious, drug-fueled stage performance as part of the "Nocturnal Dream Show," Steven Arnold's midnight experimental-film program at the Palace Theater in North Beach. More performances followed and the group gained prominence with write-ups in countercultural rags like *Rolling Stone* and *The Village Voice*. In 1971, the Cockettes were invited to take the ragtag show that they had invented in a lawless town on the Western edge of the world all the way across the continent to New York City, the center of art and civilization. They were scheduled for a series of performances at the Anderson Theater, and Sylvester, a peripheral member of the troupe who aspired to bigger things, was booked as their opening act. The singer took a more ambitious and committed approach to his art than other members of the group, placing more value, for instance, on practice and rehearsals. Apparently his commitment paid off, because New York audiences and critics responded well to his act. The Cockettes, by contrast, were a complete flop in New York. As they bombed night after night, Sylvester distanced himself in order to avoid getting dragged down with them. At one point he even trashed their show from the stage before they came out.[1]

Chris and I felt that this chapter from queer art history was indicative of a perennial tension between San Francisco and New York art, as well as of the difficulties—and difficult trade-offs—San Francisco queer artists face when they try to break out beyond their "provincial" roots. In the video, I embody an artist in the tradition of the Cockettes and Chris embodies one in the tradition of Sylvester, and we argue over how we're going to restage that historic show so that "this time, things are going to go right." Will we spotlight a solo performer or rush the stage with a big motley crew? Will we present an elegantly pared-down set or a thrift-store hodgepodge?

The video was a chance for Chris and me to riff on some of the things that both appeal to us and frustrate us about Bay Area art: the pull toward loose improvisation over scripting and rehearsal, the regular admixture of performers and nonperformers on stage or in front of the camera, the customary refusal of polish or professionalism, and the way that brilliantly inventive preproduction of sets and costumes often gets paired with half-assed production values when it comes to shooting and performance (and vice versa). Our own ongoing video collaboration evinces these same qualities, which is doubtless why we felt compelled to make the piece. It was also a chance for us to wrestle with definitions of quality and professionalism that, we often feel, do not come down to us from any local source but instead from foreign capitals of "the art world," like New York.

In fact, we made the video for a New York audience. It was part of a program of holiday-themed performances and videos organized by Bradford Nordeen, the director of Dirty Looks, a monthly showcase of queer experimental film and video that has been running since January 2011.[2] Nordeen presented the holiday special in collaboration with E.S.P. TV, a project that enhances art and music performances with live greenscreening, signal manipulation, and analog video-mixing as it records them to VHS, and then airs them as a monthly show on Manhattan Neighborhood Network public television.[3]

The line-up for the holiday special included live performances by many queer and art-world celebrities, such as Dynasty Handbag and Justin Bond. Our piece, beamed in from the opposite coast, was one of a handful of "Video Christmas Cards" thrown into the mix. As such, it lacked the liveness, and the live effects, that marked the rest of the show. Chris and I also weren't there to see how the audience responded. Perhaps we fell flat like the Cockettes did in 1971. Maybe today's version of Angela Lansbury stood up and walked out. Maybe someone in the audience cried out in desperation for today's equivalent of Jackie Curtis to save the show.

The Cockettes, date unknown.

Nordeen hosted the special as Mary Boom!, a drag persona that he has modeled on former porn star and veteran cable-access host Robin Byrd.[4] As I watched the special online,[5] I was struck that it was clearly an instance—and I say this affectionately, with a San Francisco mindset—of "bad drag." Nordeen was building on a long tradition in which drag queens and other queer performers gloriously inhabit and engage with the low-budget, long-tedium format of cable access, with perhaps the most famous case being *The American Music Show,* which ran on Atlanta public-access TV from 1981 to 2005.[6] Face to face with Mary Boom!, after having just made a video about how "bad" queer art is indigenous to the Bay Area and doesn't fly in New York, I was forced to rethink my position. Perhaps, ultimately, "bad" queer art is not that different in San Francisco and New York, except that in the former it tends to be presented with childlike naiveté and exuberance, and in the latter it's often cloaked in irony, *Weltschmerz*, and jaded asides. And, of course, the drugs—or at least the drug references—are different on the two coasts. But is there a deeper distinction? Watching the holiday special made me more curious about the specificity of queer art made in the Bay Area, and what it is, if anything, that makes our local productions distinct.

I want to use this essay to think about why so many queer artists *choose* styles and approaches that read—from the outside, and even sometimes to other queer people—like failure. I present this analysis specifically in relation to film and video work made over the last decade in the San Francisco Bay Area, in an effort to think about the specificity of that place, though without meaning to preclude the possibility that what I say might also apply elsewhere. I believe Bay Area queer film- and videomaking is animated by particular understandings of queer individuality and queer community, understandings that in turn shape both the production histories of the works and the final forms they take. This analysis develops first from my embedded experience as a participant in this culture and then moves into analysis based on interviews with film and videomakers whose work I have not been directly involved in.[7]

It Takes Two to Make a Thing Go Wrong

Since 2008, Chris and I have collaborated on a video series called *Falling in Love...with Chris and Greg*[8]. It's a scripted, comedy-based project that is loosely based on our own relationship and designed to address a number of issues in queer life and politics: everything from gay marriage to trans embodiment and from open relationships to financial precarity. We often fight during our shoots because I want to do multiple takes while he'd rather do just one or two. I've come to realize that we have this conflict because we take two distinct approaches to performing our video alter egos, which relate in turn to two distinct currents in the history of queer film and performance. On the one hand, there are the many film and video projects in which "ordinary" people, like me, are transformed through performance for the camera and the ritual of the shoot. And, on the other hand, there are the many projects in which already "extraordinary" people are given a stage in which to be their already-extraordinary queer selves.

Barbara Hammer's mid-1970s films, made in the Bay Area, are early examples of the first current. She made *Menses* (1974) and *Superdyke* (1975) collaboratively with large groups of women. In each film, onscreen performers engage collectively in absurdist, disruptive actions in

Gearing up for collective absurdist action in Barbara Hammer's Menses (1974).

urban space (e.g., dressing up as Amazon warriors and running around Dolores Park, or pushing shopping carts overflowing with tampons through a Payless Drugstore parking lot) and then they move to the countryside for equally collective, and in some cases equally absurdist, nude rituals. Hammer devised a loose script for each action in *Superdyke*, while for *Menses* she organized a pre-shoot slumber party with the women in the film in order to collaborate in designing the performances, e.g., a ceremonial drinking of menstrual blood and the partaking of a codeine eucharist, or the wrapping of a body in toilet paper until it resembled a huge tampon.

Watching the brave but often sweetly tentative performances of the women onscreen, one has the sense that *Superdyke* and *Menses* were not designed as showcases for already-extraordinary queer subjects but instead as projects to enable and record the becoming-extraordinary of "ordinary" people. The film projects were designed to catalyze the performers to become more than they are in everyday life: more erotically liberated and more out and proud about their identities as lesbians and/or feminists. Moreover, inscribed on celluloid, the performances endure, spurring each woman to continue being the queerer person that they became during the shoot.[9]

As for the second current, any of a number of Andy Warhol's films, for instance *Camp* (1965), could serve as the historical example. He assembled a "cast" of already gloriously non-normative queer people—people who could never assimilate, even if the world were kind—and then he turned on the camera and off they went. Or, perhaps more accurately: there they were.

In the films of this second current we encounter the dynamic that José E. Muñoz talks about at the end of his book *Cruising Utopia*, where "failure" and "virtuosity" are intimately bound together.[10] Queer films in this tradition perform the balancing act of presenting a performer who succeeds at doing something amazingly well, even if it is simply at being their own indelible selves, while simultaneously presenting that performer failing to be normal, professional, or mass-audience-ready. Both must be inscribed in the film. To have one without the other would be to create a work of art that is merely good or bad, but never queerly sublime.

Film still from Lizzie Borden's Born in Flames (1983).

It strikes me that multiple takes are antithetical to both of these currents within queer filmmaking. In relation to the first, magical spells don't get do-overs: the "ordinary" person must commit one hundred percent to the ritual transformation; they must take the risk and make the leap. And in relation to the second, already magical people shouldn't require them. In other words, the need for multiple takes calls into question the validity of either the word, in the first instance, or the spirit, in the second. And in both instances, when a viewer gets the impression while watching a film that there were multiple takes, it drains the project of its documentary charge, the sense that queerness existed here. It renders it instead pure fiction, made by people who played it safe.

Interstitial Modes of Production

Chris is also working on a project with another collaborator, Eric Stanley. Their movie *Criminal Queers* is a feature-length experimental narrative video that explores the intersection of radical queer politics and prison abolitionism.[11] I was asked to play the role of a normatively gay jury foreman who condemns one of the leads to a life behind bars for sabotaging a gay wedding. I prepared the character, scripted the monologue, shopped for props, memorized my lines, and practiced the performance on my own before the day of the shoot. But when I got to the set, there was barely any rehearsal with the rest of the cast before the camera was turned on. Then, after one take, Chris and Eric began to move the tripod for the next shot, as if that was it: one take was all they needed.

In the case of *Criminal Queers*, the refusal of multiple takes cannot be linked to a drive to get the video finished as quickly and efficiently as possible. We shot that scene back in 2008, and as I write this in 2013 the movie is still in production. I honestly don't know why it has taken them so long to get the thing made but I know that they have both been profoundly inspired by Lizzie Borden's 1983 film *Born in Flames*, which famously took five years to pull together. *Born in Flames* is set in America ten years after a socialist revolution has failed to transform the lives of women and other marginalized people. Across the film, we witness a diverse group of feminists in New York City struggling to put aside differences of race, class, and ideology and fight together for revolutionary change. The film's mode of production parallels its onscreen content: it is an outsider film made at the margins of a hostile society by inventive activists who have cobbled together time, resources, and community. It makes sense that *Criminal Queers,* having drawn inspiration from the form and content of *Born in Flames*, would also emulate the way that it was made.[12]

Homages to *Born In Flames* can also be found in Gary Fembot's *AIDS Camp* (2009), where a character is shown obsessively watching the film, and Sarolta Jane Cump's *California is an Island* (2009), where the Amazon Queen Califa broadcasts her message over the radio. *Criminal Queers* is also not the only Bay Area project to take a long, long time to get made. Cary Cronenwett's *Maggots and Men* (2009) also took five years. But beyond these explicit

parallels to Borden's film, what is striking is that all of these Bay Area queer films and videos, and many more beside, likewise deploy an interstitial and community-based mode of production. It is evident in Cump's forthcoming video about water politics called *The Gold Fish*[13](scheduled for release in spring 2014), Michelle Tea and Hilary Goldberg's omnibus *Valencia: The Movie/s*[14] (premiering June 2013), the many performance videos made since 2008 by Lovewarz (Siobhan Alluvalot and Sara Thustra), Luke Woodward's bicycle porn *Tour de Pants* (2008), and other recent projects by Cronenwett, Fembot, Stanley, and Vargas. Living in the Bay Area, it seems like everyone invariably knows at least someone who is involved in each of these films and videos. In this way, the larger community is able to keep abreast of the status and progress of each one. Moreover, it is not necessary to play six degrees of separation to tie them all together. One can connect them through a handful of shared performers and crew members: for instance, performance artist Annie Danger has contributed her talents to almost every title mentioned above.

Obviously, a lengthy production can result when a filmmaker with a minimal to nonexistent budget is compelled to organize shooting around the commitments of busy and unpaid friends and loved ones. (The budgets of the above films and videos run from $500 to $60,000, though at the higher end this includes about half as in-kind donations.) Likewise, one-take performances can result because, in such circumstances, the filmmaker must shoot quickly, before attrition or, worse, mutiny ensues. But even when friends and lovers are apparently willing, patient, and available, Bay Area queer filmmakers seem to favor ways of working that will ensure that the seams of the production remain visible onscreen: the edges of handmade sets, the half-memorization of lines, the rushed quality of certain performances, and, in general, the hazy border between the diegetic space of the film and the straight-documentary space of the "real world" that the makers have infiltrated or ambushed to get their shots.

I suspect that for most of these recent queer films and videos, an interstitial mode of production was as much elected as it was compelled. Recent Bay Area queer film and video projects have embraced amateurism, often eschewed multiple takes, and set up challenges of scheduling and other production tasks as a way of ensuring that indexical signs of an alternative mode of production, another way of doing things, end up inscribed in every shot. Also, by foregrounding the scene of production, these approaches help to prevent communities from morphing into "casts."

Trailer for Gary Fembot's movie *AIDS Camp*.

Prefigurative Filmmaking and Melancholy Utopianism

Gary Fembot told me he makes his films in part because he lives alone. It is a way for him to bring people together and see what his friends are up to. In the past he organized large brunches for this purpose, and filmmaking isn't so different: he still gets stressed out and sometimes bossy. Fembot, who was a zine editor and a musician before becoming a filmmaker in the mid-2000s, also told me that his film projects often begin with visions of scenes involving many people, and he then makes the films to bring those visions to life. With *AIDS Camp*, he pictured a riot scene with a stampeding crowd, like the scenes he remembered from old B-movies, and for his more recent film *Together People* (2012) he envisioned a New Wave op-art pie fight.

A prodigious vision of community also animated Cronenwett's *Maggots and Men*. The film reimagines the 1921 Kronstadt rebellion, when a group of anarchist sailors stood up to the Bolshevik government late in the course of the Russian Civil War, and it famously features a large cast of trans men in most of the roles. Cronenwett remembers that when people came together to make the film, it was a very affirming experience. The widely-publicized shoots were a chance for trans men (and others) hailing from far and wide and from diverse communities to meet each other, and, as he pointed out to me, they did so in a context that was not a support group but instead an art project based on non-trans history. In addition to the many days of filming, the production included group rehearsals as well as work parties for building the sets and making the costumes. These last took place every Sunday night in San Francisco when there wasn't a shoot. Cronenwett and the other filmmakers, including Director of Photography Ilona Berger and co-Art Directors Flo McGarrell and Zeph Fishlyn, also organized a fundraiser every year at which bands performed and things made at the work parties were sold, such as anchor patches sewn onto beanies bought at the Dollar Store.

There is a strong connection between the people involved in these projects and activist networks. Many of the filmmakers are also activist organizers, and in making their films they apply their skills in organizing people and in building a prefigurative community, which is to say a community already rooted in the values that, as activists, its members are trying to instill in broader society. Sarolta Jane Cump pointed out to me that virtually all of the makers and many of the participants in the films and videos discussed in this article were involved to some degree in Gay Shame in the early 2000s. The group, which still exists, forged a radical alternative to gay normativity and targeted, among other actions, the corporate-sponsored Gay Pride celebrations held in the city each June. The sets and props for *The Gold Fish*, *Maggots and Men*, and *Criminal Queers* are reminiscent of the cardboard and papier-mâché props used by Gay Shame in its protests and street theater, and which were

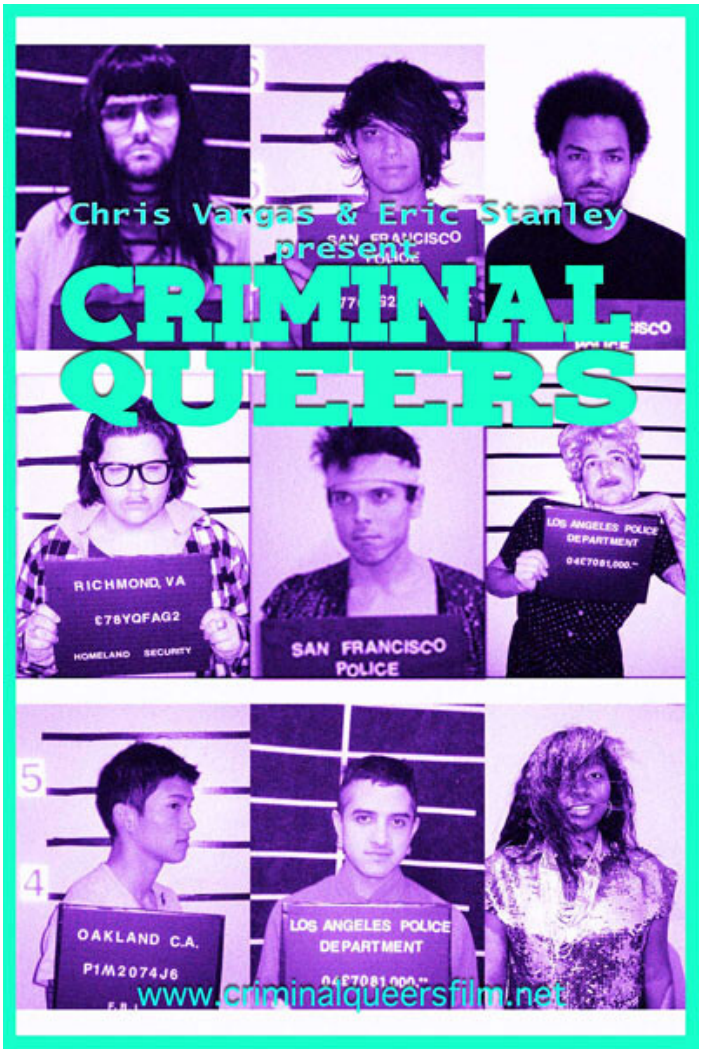
A gathering of river creatures in Sarolta Jane Cump's The Gold Fish (forthcoming 2014).

likewise built in work parties. Cronenwett and Cump were both careful to point out to me that their film projects do not draw upon and seek to build exclusively queer activist networks and communities: punk and environmentalist networks are also key. Cronenwett named Punks Against War and Art and Revolution as two other influences on *Maggots and Men*, and Cump's film is developing as part of the Bay Area-based art/science/performance intervention The Water Underground.[15]

Although they often motivate each other, prefiguration is a different project than utopianism. The former is about making the world one needs in the here and now, while the latter is about imagining the world one wants in a future elsewhere. It is striking that *Born in Flames*, which is filmed in the crumbling infrastructure of Reagan-era Manhattan, is a key reference for so many recent Bay Area projects. The urban setting of Borden's film is a world away from the rural, wide-open spaces that inspired many of the queer political and filmic visions associated with the Bay Area in the 1960s and 1970s, from hippie communalism to Faerie land to lesbian separatism, from the films of James Broughton to those of Barbara Hammer. In those projects, natural spaces are presented as being impossibly free of the shadows, margins, and social divisions that define life in the corrupt, civilized city. In many ways, today's queer Bay Area filmmakers are operating with a different mindset, in a different era, and in a different Bay Area than the ones that gave us the Summer of Love, back-to-the-land feminism, and the freewheeling Cockettes.

This is not to say that utopian impulses and wide-open spaces have disappeared from the new crop of films, but when they appear there is often a strong sense of melancholy around them. Fembot's *AIDS Camp* plays with the tension between urban punk bricolage and rural hippie utopianism. Between San Francisco, where the slutty hero lives and works at the beginning of the film, and the rural hillside where an intentional community of feminist psychics resides, there is the AIDS Camp, an outdoor prison under a freeway overpass where people with HIV and AIDS are quarantined in large pens. The film connects the US government's creation of AIDS (a theory expressed by characters in the film) to corporate greed, wealth disparity, gentrification, and urban displacement. Although the revolutionaries of the hillside eventually liberate the prisoners, the film ends with an ambivalent image at the border of hope and aimlessness. Fembot is drawn to public art dating from the late 1960s and early 1970s because he feels it was actually made for people instead of as a corporate afterthought. During the film's final credits, Fembot wanders alone around the tiered, concrete landscape of the Fort Worth Water Gardens, a downtown public park built in 1974 that is also featured in the 1976 dystopian science-fiction film *Logan's Run*.

Maggots and Men is similarly ambivalent in its vision of



Poster for the movie Criminal Queers, directed by Eric A. Stanley & Chris Vargas.

utopia. Cronenwett had originally planned on making a more erotic film, along the lines of his 2002 short *Phineas Slipped*. He wanted to make a homoerotic sailor movie and to set it in a time and place other than the contemporary US, where romance could flourish uncorrupted by US militarism and imperialism. A friend of his had a boyfriend who was an anarchist with a penchant for wearing sailor suits and who was obsessed with a little-known chapter from history about "an island of anarchist sailors." Cronenwett put the words into Google and found out about the Kronstadt rebellion. As the project developed, sexual content became less important and the anarchist history, which he also found sexy, took center stage. The Kronstadt sailors are the same group that was involved in the 1905 uprising depicted in Sergei Eisenstein's 1925 film *Potemkin*. Cronenwett hadn't seen *Potemkin* when he began working on *Maggots and Men*, though it grew to be a major influence on his film's politics and aesthetics, as did theater groups of the period like the Blue Blouse agitprop troupe, which appears in the film to help guide viewers through the history.

In this circuitous way, Cronenwett's project ended up being about the challenges of building and maintaining an intentional, anarchist community in the shadow of a hostile state, just like *Born in Flames* and a number of the other Bay Area films and videos discussed in this essay. But, unlike those other works, the film is set in the past—not the present, the future, or an alternate present—and, moreover, it recounts a historical chapter that ends badly: the Kronstadt rebellion was violently repressed by the Bolshevik army. Cronenwett's film was shot half on 16mm and half on Super 8, whereas the other projects discussed in this essay were shot entirely on video or Super 8 or a combination of the two. Choosing to shoot on 16mm necessitates a more considered approach to virtually every aspect of the filmmaking process, and it is therefore not surprising that *Maggots and Men* features, in the main, more aesthetically beautiful imagery and more polished performances than the other Bay Area films and videos discussed here. Combined with the film's historically removed subject matter and the choice of a Russian-language voiceover, its polished form creates a distancing effect that contributes to the produced feeling, at least for me as a viewer, of melancholy utopianism.

Criminal Queers, *The Gold Fish*, *Tour de Pants*, and the other Bay Area projects are animated by the feeling of a new society flowering in the margins of a dehumanizing present. This feeling is present too in *Maggots and Men*, provided one is able to watch it with an eye to its production history and with an awareness of the revolutionary trans community that was both enabled and recorded by the film. But in this layered viewing, we are also taught the hard lesson that, on it own, queer liberation is never enough.

Trailer for Cary Cronenwett's movie *Maggots and Men.*

When the Edge Becomes the Center, What Happens to the Margins?

Rebecca Solnit has written about San Francisco's historical identity as a city at the end of the world, far removed from what was happening on the East Coast, including its sophisticated art market. Today though, as Solnit notes, San Francisco must contend with its new identity as the center of the world, or, more accurately, its identity as a bedroom community for people who work in the center of the world forty miles to the south in the Silicon Valley.[16] As the city suffers from the same rapacious forces of development and neoliberal reform that destroyed Manhattan, only lagging behind a few years, it will be interesting to see how the films and videos of Bay Area queer artists continue to mine and reinvigorate local traditions and values while, inevitably, also forging connections elsewhere.

Although all of the film and video projects discussed in this article take a DIY approach to production, many of the makers have become remarkably savvy, even professional, when it comes to funding postproduction and distributing their final projects. The Sylvester in me of course wants makers to know how to get their work made and seen within a system that offers little support to independent artists. At the same time, the Cockette in me worries that this professional savvy in funding and distribution will influence the preproduction and production phases of these makers' future projects, as they get a better sense of what granters like to fund, colleges like to teach, galleries like to show, and festivals like to screen. Will the next generation of Bay Area queer film and videomakers—or this current generation as it gets older—continue to build ragtag communities and make flowers grow in the margins of the city? Or will there be no margins left? Or, perhaps, no artists left who can afford to live in them?

X

Greg Youmans is a writer, historian, and videomaker based in Oakland, California. He earned his PhD from the History of Consciousness program at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and is current a Scholar in Residence of the Beatrice Bain Research Group at UC Berkeley. His first book, a study of the groundbreaking 1977 gay and lesbian documentary was published in 2011. He is now working on a biographical project about Bay Area queer poet and activist Tede Matthews (1951-1993).

1
This history is presented in Bill Weber and David Weissman's documentary *The Cockettes* (2002) as well as Joshua Gamson's book *The Fabulous Sylvester: The Legend, the Music, the Seventies in San Francisco* (New York: Henry Holt/Picador, 2005).

2
See http://www.dirtylooksnyc.org/ .

3
See http://www.esptvnyc.com/.

4
Rachel Mason, interview with Bradford Nordeen, *Bad at Sports* blog (Nov. 4, 2011). See http://badatsports.com/2011/bradford-nordeen-and-dirty-looks/ .

5
See http://www.esptvnyc.com/E-S-P-TV-25 .

6
Clips from *The American Music Show* can be found on YouTube at http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL015B4AC6F62DBDC5 . Thank you to Ricardo Montez for introducing me to the show.

7
I interviewed Sarolta Jane Cump by phone on March 13, 2013, and Cary Cronenwett and Gary Gregerson (aka Gary Fembot) by phone on March 14, 2013.

8
See http://fallinginlovewithchrisandgreg.com/ .

9
The ideas in this paragraph are developed in Greg Youmans, "Performing Essentialism: Reassessing Barbara Hammer's Films of the 1970s," *Camera Obscura* 81 (2012): 100–135.

10
José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia* (New York: NYU Press, 2009). See also Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

11
See http://homotopiafilm.net/.

12
For Borden's account of the production history of *Born in Flames* , see her interview with Jan Oxenberg and Lucy Winer, *The Independent* (Nov. 1983): 16–18. A special issue of *Women and Performance* dedicated to the topic of the film's significance is due out later this year, edited by Dean Spade and Craig Willse.

13
See https://web.archive.org/web/20150226194001/http://saroltajanecump.com/goldfish.htm .

14
See http://web.archive.org/web/20130120194045/https://www.radarproductions.org/press/valencia-the-movies/ .

15
See http://waterunderground.wordpress.com/ .

16
Rebecca Solnit, "Image Dissectors," in *Radical Light: Alternative Film and Video in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1945–2000* , eds. Steve Anker, Kathy Geritz, and Steve Seid (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 16–18. See also Rebecca Solnit, "Diary," *London Review of Books* 35.3 (Feb. 7, 2013): 34-–35, http://www.lrb.co.uk/v35/n03/rebecca-solnit/diary .

Ryan Conrad

The Defiant Prose of Sarah Schulman

Sarah Schulman has been a formidable presence in the New York cultural and queer activist milieu for more than thirty years. She has fought for abortion rights, for women's reproductive health, for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer rights, and against the AIDS crisis. In addition to participating in action in the streets, Schulman has also published numerous novels, plays, screenplays, and nonfiction books. In these works, Schulman has chronicled her experiences and the politics of her various communities in sensuous and candid detail.

The impact and reception of Schulman's work, however, has always been controversial. From her claims that the content of the successful 1996 musical Rent *was lifted from her novel* People In Trouble (1991) *to her oft-cited difficulty publishing on politically volatile themes like intergenerational gay relationships and the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, controversy is never far behind her. In the face of such circumstances, Schulman remains a prolific writer and committed political agitator. Despite the systemic exclusion of lesbian and queer writers from most mainstream publishing houses and the political exclusion she has faced from the politically atrophying queer community, she continues to demand accountability of both.*

I talked with Schulman, Distinguished Professor of the Humanities at the City University of New York, about her two most recently published nonfiction books, The Gentrification of the Mind *(2012) and* Israel/Palestine and the Queer International *(2012). We discussed queer collaborations, the rapidly changing publishing industry, queer mentorship, and the politics of always coming from the margins.*

—Ryan Conrad

Ryan Conrad: Do you feel that there is something particularly queer about collaboration as a mode of art-making and political organizing? Together you and Jim Hubbard are responsible for some amazing projects, including the founding of what is now called the MIXNYC Queer Experimental Film Festival and the ACT UP Oral History Project. You two also coproduced the HIV/AIDS activism documentary *United in Anger* (2012). Can you talk a little bit about your ongoing investments in film and video and how you and Jim came to collaborate on so many large multi-year projects?

Sarah Schulman: Jim and I have been collaborators for twenty-seven years. I love Jim and we are mutually accountable people with a lot of follow-through and resonant values. I have collaborated with people all my life in one-on-one, small group, and large community settings,

but I honestly don't have any ideology behind it. It wasn't a conscious decision. Jim is a filmmaker, and back in 1987 when we cofounded MIX, I was dating a filmmaker. We saw that experimental cinema was a natural match for queer audiences because our lives had no known form. Straight people had conventional narrative: romance, marriage, motherhood—but we had formal invention. At the same time, we saw that the experimental film world was homophobic and could not integrate most queer work. The few gay film festivals did not understand experimental. So the natural introduction of experimental into the broadly based, multi-class queer community made perfect sense. We cocurated the festival for seven years and then did the unheard of thing of handing over a fiscally and emotionally healthy organization to younger people, in this case, young curators of color—most notable Rajendra Roy, who is now film curator at MoMA, and Shari Frilot, now at Sundance. Today, MIX is lovingly run by Artistic Director Steven Kent Jusick and its programming committee, board, and volunteers.

RC: You and Jim are among what feels like very few role models for younger generations of queer artists and activists like myself. What excites and keeps you motivated to be part of more radical artistic and political projects over the long haul? Growing older and staying radical is something I think about often, as I've just turned thirty. For me, there weren't many older queer role models out there who stayed radical and hadn't either died during the AIDS crisis or dropped out of public view.

SS: One of the advantages of being in a cultural vanguard is that we are constantly defining our own terms, creating new community-based institutions, and having the joy of discovery that comes with breaking new ground. These kinds of activities attract the best people. I am constantly surrounded by great young people who are doing wonderful and exciting things with their open hearts and minds. It's a real blast of life. I am almost always interested in being part of the world, engaging, thinking, listening, and doing. That's the way I like to live.

RC: One of your most recent projects was coproducing the documentary film about ACT UP called *United in Anger* (2012). This documentary, which combines archival footage, commentary, and excerpts from the ACT UP Oral History Project, will serve as a great popular education tool for future generations. What has the response to the film been like?

SS: The film argues that ACT UP was successful because of multiple communities acting in their own ways, simultaneously, which created a zeitgeist for change. We show a range of significant actions and campaigns, from forcing fast track for drug testing at the Food and Drug Administration, to the invention of video activism, to interrupting mass at Saint Patrick's Cathedral when the Catholic Church got on public school boards to stop condom distribution, to ACT UP's four-year campaign to get benefits and testing for women with AIDS. We included homeless people fighting for AIDS housing, poor women, women of color, drug users marching in the streets for treatment, and many other overlapping kinds of people and actions. This message appeals enormously to grassroots communities around the world because everywhere people want change, and the film is clear that it is possible for them to create it. We have shown the film in Brazil, all over Europe, and in the United States. Our international premiere was in Palestine and I am on my way to show the film in Abu Dhabi and Beirut. The only sector that has not responded to the film is the corporate sector. They have favored a different film, *How to Survive a Plague* (2012), which argues that a handful of white individuals working with pharmaceutical companies transformed the AIDS crisis. Corporate media loves individual white heroes and hates the idea of coalitions across class and race. Unfortunately, that mythic, nonexistent story does not work to create change, and anyone who tries to model it will not get very far. It is the critical mass that actually transforms paradigms.

RC: As a younger queer who didn't live through the '80s and '90s as an adult, I take the content of these kinds of historiographical projects very seriously. They are among the few ways younger generations can learn more radical queer histories and make sense of the massive loss of life during the worst of the AIDS crisis. Watching David France's film *How to Survive a Plague*, I couldn't help but feel like everything I taught myself about ACT UP over the last decade was wrong, or at least that France's film only told a very small and partial story about treatment activism within ACT UP, without really framing it as only part of the story. I was squirming in my seat as pharmaceutical representatives were uncritically given airtime throughout the second half of the film. Former ACT UP and Gran Fury member Avram Finkelstein pointed out in a December 2012 article entitled "AIDS 2.0" that "it's likely we're now witnessing the solidification of the history of AIDS. It would be bad if it were an incomplete one."[1] To say the stakes are high in how we frame our own histories in films like *How to Survive a Plague* and *United in Anger* is an understatement, isn't it?

SS: The highest. If AIDS activism is historicized as the activities of white individuals cooperating with pharmaceutical machines, then not only will more lies be in place, but communities receiving this information will be deceived about how political transformation actually works. It's a crippling piece of propaganda.

RC: But I also wonder how projects like *United in Anger* or your 2012 AIDS memoir *The Gentrification of the Mind* might encourage or inhibit activism in the present with their backwards-looking stance? Queer scholar Heather Love describes the necessity of looking back on queer history, but also warns against the ways queer histories of

Sarah Schulman, 1992. Photo: Julia Scher.

Logo for MIX New York Queer Experimental Film Festival designed by Sasha O'Malley.

Video still for United In Anger: A History of ACT UP (the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power), 2012.

trauma and loss can be problematically recuperated, romanticized, or totalized into a disingenuous linear narrative of progress.

SS: These are two different projects. *United in Anger* was directed by Jim Hubbard to help audiences today understand how change is made and to show that regular people can transform the world. It is an organizing tool that looks forward by showing the contemporary audience not what to do, but how successful tactics are developed. *The Gentrification of the Mind* is about understanding the consequence of experience. Hopefully, it models a kind of awareness, a desire to understand, but this book is not a primer for change.

RC: How might either project fall into the trap of nostalgia? In the introduction to *The Gentrification of the Mind*, for example, you don't respond too kindly to some seemingly naive younger queers who are unaware of older queer artists. There is a bit of a "back in the good old days" tone. Perhaps as one of those younger queers myself, I'm sensitive to how this gap in knowledge is articulated by people who experienced the AIDS crisis first hand. I think a lot about all the ways I had to struggle, with very little help or resources, to learn my own queer histories, especially as a small-town fag.

SS: I don't agree that these works are nostalgic. The historic cataclysm of the mass death experience of AIDS—among its many consequences—facilitated the transformation of the Gay Liberation movement into the Gay Rights movement. In my book *Stagestruck: Theater, AIDS, and The Marketing of Gay America* (1998) I showed how an earlier stage of this diminishment was the transformation of a political movement into a consumer group, a niche market for advertisers. By the time I wrote *The Gentrification of the Mind* in 2012, it was clear to me that the goal of changing society has been replaced by society changing us. The outcome of this change is that queer people are tolerated only to the degree that we reflect dominant cultural values. Awareness and consciousness of these trajectories is essential to understanding why we are where we are. It is true that we live in a culture that falsely naturalizes events. When gentrification first started, we were told that it was a natural evolution. Now we understand that it was a deliberate policy. The global AIDS crisis was also constructed. It was a product of fifteen years of indifference and neglect by the US government and private pharmaceutical companies, an indifference that was only overturned through activism. There are material histories that produce our contemporary moments, and without understanding them we can't see ourselves.

RC: Could you talk a little bit about why you decided to write *The Gentrification of the Mind* and *Israel/Palestine and the Queer International* as memoirs? Both books are first-person historical narratives. What does this style of writing accomplish that other modes of writing cannot? Do you see limits in working in the genre of memoir?

SS: I don't consider *Israel/Palestine* to be a memoir. I was forced to call *The Gentrification of the Mind* a memoir because one of the readers at University of California Press wanted to block the book based on my pro-Palestinian views. University presses have this undesirable system where anonymous "readers," chosen by the press, can block or censor passages or even entire books without having to discuss the issue with the writer or reveal their identities. In this case, she made many phony criticisms designed to repress any criticism of Israel. To avoid having the book blocked, I had to take out a chapter and call the book a "memoir" to avoid her charge that it was an improper publication for an academic press.

RC: If not memoir, what style of writing would you call

Protest on March 3rd, 2013 to end the ban on Palestinian-related organizing at the LGBT Center, New York.

these two books? I ask this because I think it's interesting that both of your books were published by academic presses (Duke University Press and University of California Press) while neither of these books are particularly scholarly.

SS: I call them "nonfiction." The publishing venues have to do with conglomerations in corporate publishing that push books that would, at one point in US history, be published by mainstream presses to smaller presses. For example, *Lesbian Nation* by Jill Johnson was published by Simon & Schuster in 1973. Now many of these kinds of books are published by university presses, which in turn makes it harder for non-academic nonfiction books to get published.

RC: In your newest book, *Israel/Palestine and the Queer International*, I can't help but notice how generously vulnerable you make yourself throughout the text. The book focuses largely on your own personal journey, as a diasporic New York Jew, to understand the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. You come to feel that you have an ethical responsibility to fight injustice perpetrated by the Israeli government against Palestinians. In the first half of the text, you acknowledge that you knew little about the politics of the struggle there, and you discuss all sorts of difficult and uncomfortable feelings you had while working through this issue. Can you talk about how it feels to have this very personal book published, a book that reveals a lot about you and your family history? How have people responded?

SS: I don't think it really registers as vulnerable or even personal, just as true, or as trying to know what is true. I have been talking and writing conversationally all of my life, or at least it feels that way, so the book's tone feels natural and consistent. In terms of reader response, I find that there have been two sets of reactions: interested

Illustration for article "The Gay Agenda," in The New Civil Rights Movement.

Jews, queers, and others get a lot out of the book, since it takes something that they have been told is "very complicated" and makes it available for consideration. On the other hand, the reaction of fanatically right-wing Jews has been pretty pathological. Comments have ranged from "She should be raped by Muslims" to "This freak deserves a Rachel Corie moment" to being called "The face of self-hating Jewry." And of course, the NYC LGBT Center banned me from doing a reading from the book. Meanwhile, the straight mainstream has entirely ignored the book. From Frank Rich to *The Nation* to *The New York Review of Books*, *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times* and NPR—it remains entirely ignored.

RC: The threat of rape and death seems to occur when any of us from the margins stick our necks out to demand political accountability. As cofounders of the Against Equality Collective—an online archive, publishing, and arts collective committed to challenging mainstream gay and lesbian organizations' demand for inclusion in the

Sarah Schulman reading from her book Israel/Palestine and the Queer International at the LGBT Center. Photo: Alex Kane/Mondoweiss.

institution of marriage, the US military, and the prison industrial complex via hate crimes legislation—Yasmin Nair and I have also received pretty graphic and detailed death threats. And these threats came from other gay people no less! In one of the chapters in *Israel/Palestine and the Queer International*, you detail the rather pathetic process through which the NYC LGBT Center created the ban that prevented groups organizing around the Israel/Palestine issue from meeting there. You even note that you weren't able to screen a queer film related to the Israel/Palestine issue at the Center after the ban was put in place. When you tried to organize a reading there, you must have known it would not be accepted. Based on your writing and your activist history, it seems that you're a pretty savvy political organizer, so I imagine your book reading was part of a political strategy to provoke dialogue and challenge the Center on the issue. Was this the case?

SS: Actually, I did not know that it would be rejected. Quite some time had passed since the ban was put in place and my request was as conventional as could be. I was asking to read from a book that had the word "queer" in the title and that was published by reputable publisher. It was a pretty nerdy request. I thought that they might be ready to ease into reason.

RC: Your book also has the words "Israel/Palestine" in the title, which is clearly something the Center had a policy banning, as described at length in your chapter "Backlash." I'm surprised to hear that your decision to read there wasn't politically strategic, when there is an entire chapter in your book on "Finding the Strategy." Your proposed book reading and its subsequent rejection by the Center, which caused great uproar and actually forced the center to reevaluate its position on the matter, all happened sort of accidentally?

SS: New York Queers Against Israeli Apartheid (NYC-QAIA) asked me if I would let them propose a reading from my new book at the LGBT Center. I said yes. I felt it would be ridiculous for the Center to ban me from reading from a book on queer politics published by Duke University Press. I didn't think they would be that completely out of it, or at least I hoped they wouldn't. But they were. Fortunately, Tom Léger—a brilliant activist and the publisher at Topside Press—immediately put up a petition that automatically sent an email to Glennda Testone, the director of the Center, for each person that signed. Within two days she received a thousand emails. I was out of the country touring with *United in Anger* at the time and didn't even know he was doing this. Jim and I are going to Beirut soon, where I am giving the exact same talk that was banned at the Center. Crazy, right?

Support for Palestine at "Pride London" parade, 2012.

RC: I think it's pretty great that the proposal that you read at the LGBT Center has really helped push the issue there. From what I've read though, ever-vigilant opportunists like New York City mayoral candidate Christine Quinn have swooped in to praise the Center's new "hate speech guidelines," which seem a bit vague if not rather dubious.[2] It will be interesting to see what happens in the future considering you still don't have a date for your reading and the Center has a history of trying to ignore people until they go away.

SS: Quinn used to be a cut dyke when she was young. We got arrested together protesting Irish queers being excluded from the St. Patrick's Day Parade in New York City. But she is on the wrong side of free speech because Stuart Appelbaum, a gay labor leader who supports current Israeli state policies, was her first big endorsement for mayor. He fed her language coming right from the Israeli Prime Minister's office claiming that supporting a nonviolent boycott, divestment, and sanctions movement is "hate speech."[3] The Israeli government has tried this in Israel and in Toronto and now she is their dupe for trying it here.[4] It's vulgar anti-constitutional politics.

RC: It seems like Quinn has been on the wrong side of many issues since she gained institutional power through becoming a City Councilor in New York.[5] She was the central focus for the now defunct theatrical queer activist group The Radical Homosexual Agenda. I imagine the mayoral race in New York City this year is going to be really interesting for queer New Yorkers. Speaking of the future, can you tell me a little more about what projects you have in the works and how you plan to continue building towards the queer international?

SS: Right now I am organizing both the Homonationalism and Pinkwashing Conference at CUNY in April and the first Palestinian Writers panel at The PEN Global Visions Conference in May. I will be teaching at the Lambda

Literary Emerging Writers Retreat in Los Angeles in July as well as at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown in August. I'm also collaborating on three movies and have a play reading at both the New York Theater Workshop in April and the Trinity Repertory in May. I also have a new novel for sale called *The Cosmopolitans*. I wanted it to sound like a Henry James book. It is a rethinking of French novelist Honoré de Balzac's *Cousin Bette* (1846). It is set in New York City in 1958 and for that reason it evolves into an answer book to James Baldwin's *Another Country*. It's set in that same bohemian milieu, with interracial and mixed sexualities, but this time the women are real.

X

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1
See http://www.artwrit.com/article/aids-2-0/ .

2
For the Center's new "hate-speech" guidelines, see https://web.archive.org/web/20130304013529/https://gaycenter.org/spaceusepolicy .

3
For the Campaign for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) against Israel, see https://bdsmovement.net/ .

4
For the Toronto story, see http://web.archive.org/web/20150107072426/http://queersagainstapartheid.org/2010/06/23/queers-against-israeli-apartheid-wins-battle-against-censorship/ .

5
On Quinn's record, see http://web.archive.org/web/20130312035043/http://radicalhomosexualagenda.org/ .

Malik Gaines

A Defense of Marriage Act: Notes on the Social Performance of Queer Ambivalence

Tradition! Tradition! Tradition!
—"Tradition," *Fiddler on the Roof* (1964)

On television, people marvel at the change. Marriage, that privileged heterosexual union, that millennia-long social institution said to be sanctified by the Christian God and his analogues, now seems to be going the way of other revered cultural traditions like slavery and human sacrifice; its terms are no longer so clearly defined. In the spring of 2013, eleven full-fledged nation-states permit "same-sex marriage"; predictably, most are in Europe, though Argentina, South Africa, and Canada are on the list. In some countries, gay marriage is working its way through the system, and in some countries, the map is fractured, with some jurisdictions recognizing the legal coupling of two men or two women, and others not. Such is the case in my country, the United States of America, a prominent nation-state with a lot of attitude. Here, the highest judicial instrument, the Supreme Court, reviewed in the week prior to this writing two cases that test the legal definition of marriage. As it's a court that in its current composition precariously balances an extreme right wing against a moderate social democratic wing, it's somewhat surprising to many, and disturbingly telling to others, that these cases appear to be heading toward an expansion of gay civil rights.

As many readers will know, one of the cases under consideration challenges a law passed by the US Congress in 1996 and signed by then-president Clinton, ominously titled "The Defense of Marriage Act," which anticipated this current moment by preemptively protecting the federal government from invasive gay marriages granted by states, which are the conventional custodians of marriage rights. The other case, the "Prop 8" case, covers a complex turn of events in California where this writer was among the 36,000 people (more frequently referred to as 18,000 couples) gay-married in 2008 inside of a narrow legal window between a court's spring decision and an autumnal voter referendum. My semi-legal spouse and I were in Washington, DC on the day this case was argued and we visited the steps of the court, where activists, media, and onlookers gathered.

Most of those assembled were supporters, though detractors were there as well, from the normative mom + dad types, to the extremely paranoid and inflammatory, dressed as Jesus Christ, holding big books, bearing gigantic signs conflating sodomy, AIDS, a degraded Uncle Sam, and men kissing—a mélange of gay-hating and straight-marriage defending. Two nice women who work at the Library of Congress approached us on their lunch

My Barbarian performing at Participant Inc, New York, 2006. Photo: Geir Haraldseth.

break, and though they were aware of the general contours of the discussion, they asked us to explain the ins and outs of the cases, which are both rather baroque.

The entire episode reminded me of two points I wish to raise here: the first is that these legal problems resemble less the solid march of normative hegemony causing my radical queer friends and allies so much apprehension, and more a messy hodgepodge of confusion around the arbitrary constructions of citizenship, statehood, and human rights that have shaped participation in modern representative states since the European Enlightenment. The second issue is that the most prominent critics of gay marriage are many of the most reactionary forces out there, and though I agree with much (but not all) of the queer critique of marriage, I would ask my queer sisters, brothers, and others: Whose coalition do you really want to join?

White House (gold piano), 1928. Photo: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs.

There is nothing fair in this world
There is nothing safe in this world
There is nothing sure in this world
There is nothing pure in this world
There must be something left in this world
Start again!
—"White Wedding," from Billy Idol's album *Billy Idol* (1982)

In May 2012, I participated in a symposium organized by Carlos Motta and Raegan Truax as a part of "We Who Feel Differently," Motta's exhibition at the New Museum. There, within a broad range of presentations about sexuality, difference, policy, and media, Motta and others expressed some of the views constituting what we might call the queer critique of marriage. This critique has three basic parts: one principled, one practical, one strategic. The first is that marriage itself is a conservative institution, half of the public-private partnership that constitutes capitalist societies and their punishing, exploitative, compulsory regimes, and it should be abolished rather than expanded. The second is that the political agenda of queer activism, which originated in the heroic efforts of people fighting for their lives, has been hijacked by privileged cisgender white gays and lesbians who have diverted all political resources toward marriage and away from the urgent issues still facing vulnerable people, which include legal housing and employment discrimination, access to public resources, problems of criminal justice, and a culture of violence. The third is that queerness is a marginal, deviant, oppositional, countercultural, radical space that should be preserved,

not co-opted. Points one and two are right on; the third deserves some unpacking.

Asked to conclude a day of panels with a short performance, I decided to push back a little through what I've been calling a discursive piano bar act, weaving together the American songbook with pop while singing at the piano, and filling the intertextual gaps with some commentary. A genre that mobilizes ambivalent potential, the gay piano bar set brings musical-theatrical materials together, mining Broadway and popular archives that often connect to historically closeted producers, and songs that were famously executed by performers around whom queer allegiances and identifications have created extra-textual meanings. The genre may be anachronistic in an era of out positivity, when the careful nuances of the closet are no longer required, and theatrical subterfuge, codes, and ironic double-meanings no longer function as the only ways to speak about sexuality. But brought out of the closet, these expressive strategies can say even more, and more explicitly, while offering access to a historical practice of gay critical ambivalence.

Nina Simone and her daughter at the piano, date unknown.

Ambivalence has been discussed of late as a useful model for managing a matrix of positions, rather than as simply an abdication of positionality. The term helps us think beyond binary structures, and about multiple ways of being that can and must be negotiated and renegotiated provisionally, all the time. In relation to heteronormativity, queerness is already an ambivalent position, and one made of differences.[1] The queer subject cannot be constituted in any ontological sense. Imagine the queer people you know and try to arrange them into a unity and you may find, as I do, that none exists. Queer is everything that's not heteronormative. "Not this" or "not that" is no way to define being, particularly in the Western philosophical tradition that brought us the idea of the individual autonomous subject in the first place.

In other writing, drawing on histories of African American cultural production, looking at expressive forms that also derive from a prohibited subject position, I have thought about the experience of subjectivity as a more dynamic opportunity for action than the mode of agency attributed to subjecthood. "The subject"—of law, of grammar, of human rights, the consumer, the citizen—is a universalized yet restrictive formation that is fulfilled by objects. In the black tradition, objecthood has been a more pervasive experience than subjecthood. On the other hand, everyone has access to subjectivity and some ability to express its terms. Remembering that these histories are different, but considering the ways that civil rights struggles attempt to gain access to agency, and following contours of the public discussion, it's instructive to look at what blackness and queerness share. In both, one can appreciate the ways that daring people have taken terms shaped around exclusion and produced from them multiple positions from which to act. These positions are mobilized not by a universal notion of being, but from the bottom up, built from experience.

Same-sex marriage is experienced and expressed differently depending on one's position: hedge fund guys, working-class moms, weirdos in love, gay middle managers, those in practical need of health insurance, immigration status, and so forth. With all of these different experiences in mind, it becomes necessary to complicate the antagonism between normative/radical, center/margin, culture/counterculture. In each of those formations, the second term is instigated by the prior term. The prior term is in fact structured around, mobilized by, dependent on its supposed opposite. To be named, heteronormativity must exist in relation to a defined abnormal object, while the subjective experience of queerness is rather flexible and less easily defined. Queerness can mean being more than one thing at a time, can be ambivalent, and is productively understood as a collection of simultaneous differences. In this sense, valuing the ambivalence of subjectivity is a way to imagine beyond rational binary formations that always use a subject to put an object in its place. All of this is to reiterate that the radical queer critique of same-sex marriage misses some of the point of what's valuable in breaking oppressive dominant terms into little queer pieces. This breaking-up is also the aim of my discursive piano bar act.

> Now we begin
> Now we start
> Only death will part us now
> —"One Hand, One Heart," *West Side Story* (1961)

Many people who know my partner Alex Segade and I have heard the story of our meeting. It's 1991 and we've just started college, having moved away from our families

for the first time only a month before. It's National Coming Out Day, a new invention, and we both singly attended an event earlier on a campus lawn. Now, later at night, I'm alone in my dorm room watching my VHS copy of *West Side Story* for the millionth time. It's raining and I'm feeling late-teenaged melancholy. I've "come out," but no one really cares. In my recent past I've had one sex partner and a distant gay friend on the telephone, but no real boyfriends; my gayness was mostly expressed up until this point in the wearing of tight cut-off jean shorts. It's the final scene where Maria is waving the gun around over Tony's dead body as everyone watches dejectedly; "Shoot me too, Chino!" she exclaims in her unfortunate accent. I'm crying, of course. In comes my roommate. He's into rock bands that will blow up a few months later and change popular music for the rest of the '90s, but he was into them first. He's not into *West Side Story*. With him are a couple of other cool types: a smart-looking mod-ish girl and a punky gay guy with a shaved head and a pierced nose. He knows *West Side Story* quite well. We hit it off immediately, talk all night, and never really stop talking.

West Side Story rehearsal photographs, 1957. Photo: Leonard Bernstein Collection, Library of Congress.

Some time later we had cutely awkward sex in another dorm room while one of us was coming down from LSD. We moved in together with other gay guys the following year, moved in together as a couple the year after, and after years of less formal creative collaboration, we cofounded My Barbarian in 2000, first a band and then an art performance group that is still very active. Recently, we both had the flu and watched *West Side Story* together in HD, which looked really weird and amazing, and we both cried at the end. Having invented a sturdy relationship out of our own evolving terms, marriage never occurred to us until the political Right started warning against it and passing laws prohibiting it. In 2008, seventeen years after that first dorm room meeting when I myself was seventeen, marriage became a legal possibility in the great state of California.

Back at Motta's 2012 symposium, I broke down Laura Nyro's *Wedding Bell Blues* and sang, "Radical queers, I love you so, I always will." I offered some of my commentary while the music played: "Some of these folks just don't like marriage. Just not their preferred agenda item. Too bourgie for them. May as well join the army. Fly a predator drone. Guess they're not trying to get on anyone's health insurance." In my own defense of marriage act, which was grounded in my subjective experience of having married someone specific, this last point is one I want to reiterate, and is perhaps the more practically important of the three defenses I am going to make here. I don't know where all of those queers who are opposed to same-sex marriage get their medical coverage. I imagine many don't have any, while others have decent jobs or personal wealth that provide it. Others live in nation-states that give everyone health care and perhaps can't relate to the desperation of this system. In our current household situation, one of us has a job that provides benefits while the other does not. This arrangement has flipped back and forth over the years, but no matter which of us has access to health care, we are now able to share that access. We weren't always. Why would we reject an apparatus that allows us, at a cost of course, to share access? I'm picturing a scene in Bertolt Brecht's play *The Mother* where it's made clear that it is better to strike and starve than accept the exploitative terms of class oppressors. That may be true on some ideological plane of existence. Given the outcomes of communist revolutions so far, I'm willing to take the impure chance that it's better to have health insurance in the USA than not, even when that access is unfortunately denied to so many others. This does not cancel out better goals, like universal health care, but it allows many of us to live long enough to work toward such better outcomes. My partner and I are child-free artists, relatively healthy, raised in the middle class, but still, this access seems like a dire need. As I consider those who I know are more vulnerable than us, I would not reject for them the possibility of an accident of rights-construction providing them with the ability to care for their bodies.

If I am dancing, then shoot my down
If I am wooing, get him out of town
For I'm getting married in the morning
Ding, dong, the bells are gonna chime
Feather and tar me
Call out the army
But get me to the city hall
Get me to the country clerk

God damn, get me to the church on time
—Adapted from "Get Me to the Church on Time," *My Fair Lady* (1956)

The first queer couple I knew who got married were a trans-woman and trans-man whose official state documents denied their gender identities but depicted them as an opposite-sex couple, allowing them to marry. This arrangement worked for them, particularly when one of the two tragically passed away and the other, her legally recognized spouse, was empowered to tend to various details. These practical matters are no small thing in the real lives of real people. With this kind of circumstance in mind, but also with a interest in confronting the state as documented same-sex-ers, and knowing our rights would soon be taken away again by the popular vote, Alex and I went through the process of getting married. First we had to get a license from the East LA Country Clerk's Office. The forms were new and confusing to the officials who suddenly had to refer to "Partner A" and "Partner B" rather than "bride" and "groom." There was a lawsuit filed at the time by a person who claimed she was being discriminated against when she was denied the title of bride on her County form; that lawsuit was rejected by the court.

Cole Porter, date unknown.

License in hand, we returned to that municipal site, which resembles a public restroom in a National Park or some other small official structure. Others there waiting in line to get married appeared to have legal concerns such as impending prison sentences or threats of deportation. Some were dressed in prom-like costumes, but most were not. We wore jeans and somewhat European un-tucked shirts. Unlike what was happening at the same time in Beverly Hills and West Hollywood, we were the only gay/lesbian couple at the East LA Country Clerk's Office that day. Though we conspired briefly to keep them away, we realized that would be mean, so our six parents were there: my white feminist mother, a retired high-school teacher and former activist; my African-American conceptual artist father; my Italian-American stepfather, a onetime newspaper reporter who later worked in government; my young stepmother who emigrated from El Salvador; Alex's Russian Jewish mother, a former high school teacher who was once a model and is now an anti-bullying activist; and Alex's Cuban/Puerto Rican father, a retired Spanish professor, poetry translator, and innovator of Chicano Studies. The eight of us were not quite the picture of normativity as we gathered around a plastic trellis archway adorned with dusty fake flowers under fluorescent lights before a confused Justice of the Peace in a black robe behind a clunky podium bearing the State Seal of California, which depicts an Amazon warrior princess, a bear, and incoming Spanish ships. The official stumbled each time she said Partner A and Partner B, having to upend a script she had no doubt delivered a thousand times. Nor could she pronounce our names. The declaration of marriage, one of the key examples of the performative speech act that we trace from J.L. Austen through Judith Butler and the rest, felt particularly provisional, uttered for the first time, not at all standardizing. "Husband" and "wife" were obliterated in favor of the more neutral "spouses." I giggled the whole time, because it was all so charming. Later we had mojitos with our families, then went home and had gay sex.

Rather than a sense of conservative assimilation on that day, I felt more like we were doing our part to peacefully destroy the sanctity of marriage. My second defense of marriage is this: when we do it, we are redesigning a pillar of heteronormativity and doing damage to the deleterious fidelities that bind gender, law, language, and the family. Many in the public sphere scoff at the conservative conjecture that same-sex marriage could lead to polygamy, bestiality, and all manner of redefinitions. In this one instance, I wonder if they could actually be right.

For me love is you and you love me too
Boyfriend is really a silly word
Let's share a bed
From death back in time 'til the day we were wed
Gay marry me, gay marry me, gay marry me
Hey-wa hey-ya
—Gay Shaman/Gay Marry Me, My Barbarian's concert performance *California Sweet & the 7 Pagan Rights* (2005)

"My Barbarian, always ahead of the law, always a step ahead," I said while singing at the symposium, referring to this pretty little song that was part of a story about a man who marries a gay polar bear, which borrowed from Native American cultural forms, tastefully, but in a way that I probably wouldn't do now. In its original concert, that number was performed right before our a anti-Pentagon

Liberace's piano suit. Photo: Chris Canipe.

witch-opus finale about the 7 pagan rights; and after a ballad about gay marines sharing a last night in Iraq, which followed a lively sax-y piece about the deadly labor conditions of drug-dealing cruise-ship dancers in San Diego, which was mixed with a short disco dance, which came after a cool pop song/monologue about an empowered, sexy older straight woman in Santa Fe, which was preceded by a showstopper about the coerciveness of realist acting, which came after a synth-y rock anthem about ancient destroyed cities, which followed an opening incantation of wartime druids.[2] My collaborators and I were in a constant state of mythic reaction to the Bush Administration in those days, and the Rove crew had pushed anti-gay-marriage legislation as a key to their 2004 continuance, so that inevitably ended up on our list of references. When we performed this concert, gay marriage seemed far from permissible. We were invoking it as a representation of resistance. The song goes on to say:

> So what if our union dissolves the state
> Small price to pay for my soulmate
> In the future's apocalyptic-post
> I'll be with the man I love the most

The song managed to play both the radical negativity attributed to queers and the romantic nihilism of queer aesthetics, while warmly and sincerely embracing a positivist outcome: an ambivalent performance.

It's not only queer sex that we rightfully protect with our identity constructions, but also queer love, in its various forms, which of course include many non-procreative partnerships. The legal language that condones these relationships and condemns others tends to speak annoyingly of "loving" and "committed" "couples." While it is injurious to all that rights and access are unevenly distributed, I would rather the state move in the direction of recognizing queer love and queer commitments than maintain the positions it held on even those matters when we were kids, when anyone other than today's kids were kids. I recently read an essay Gregg Bordowitz wrote about Act Up in 1987, where he declares: "As a twenty-three-year-old faggot, I get no affirmation from my culture."[3] I was a little younger than that then, and though I would have put it differently, I felt pretty much the same way. In the public discourse, even beyond marriage, there has been a distinct shift of tone. A twenty-three-year-old faggot today might even get just a little bit of affirmation from the culture.

The USA affirms many worse ideas than queer love. My third defense is that putting queer love in public may contribute to the common good. Many queer relationships, with their provisional negotiations of power dynamics, sex roles, extramarital relations, and ways of maneuvering around family structures and old prohibitions, might be very useful political models. Queer love can be part of the subjective experience that exceeds agency and its requirements. "We need to recover today this material and political sense of love, a love as strong as death. This does not mean you cannot love your spouse, your mother, and your child. It only means that your love does not end there, that love serves as the basis for our political projects in common and the construction of a new society. Without love, we are nothing."[4] This tender passage from Hardt and Negri reminds us that same-sex marriage is not the problem, but that where it exists, it is only the beginning of a solution.

> I'm a maid who would marry and will take with no qualm
> Any Tom, Dick or Harry
> Any Harry, Dick or Tom
> I'm a maid mad to marry and will take double-quick
> Any Tom, Dick or Harry

Any Tom, Harry or Dick
—"Tom, Dick and Harry," *Kiss Me Kate* (1948)

I ended that performance, as I end these notes, with this quippy sexy bit from Cole Porter, the brilliant closeted author of syncopated double entendre and happy/sad melody. While referencing a disciplinary history in which the manner and placement of a wedding in a narrative defines the form itself, this send-up of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* confirms that a sassy lass can make of marriage whatever she wants. I haven't found marriage to be any more essentially conservative than the schools I've attended, companies I've worked for, museums in which I've shown work, or states to which I've paid taxes. At least in this institution, I chose my own partner. We are simply participating on another platform with another system, negotiating for the best outcome. While power works to order differences, differences can also work in excess of power. Queerness can endure marriage.

X

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1
I'm using Berlant and Warner's definition of "heteronormativity" here: "A complex cluster of sexual practices gets confused, in heterosexual culture, with the love plot of intimacy and familialism that signifies belonging to society in a deep and normal way. Community is imagined through scenes of intimacy, coupling and kinship; a historical relation to futurity is restricted to generational narrative and reproduction. A whole field of social relations becomes intelligible as heterosexuality, and this privatized sexual culture bestows on its sexual practices a tacit sense of rightness and normalcy. This sense of rightness—embedded in things and not just sex—is what we call heteronormativity." Though crtically understood as a "cluster" itself, the important result is that unifying "sense of rightness." Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, "Sex In Public," *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 24, No. 2 (Winter 1998): 59.

2
José Muñoz, discussing part of this work, wrote: "This performance imagines a time and place outside the stultifying hold of the present by calling on a mythical past where we can indeed imagine the defying of Christian totalitarianism, where we spin in concentric circles that defy linear logic, where one's own ego is sacrificed for a collective dignity, where queer bodies receive divine anointment, where the future is actively imagined, where our dying natural world can be revivied, and once again, where collectively we follow our spirits." *Cruising Utopia*: *The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York and London: New York Univ. Press 2009), 179.

3
Gregg Bordowitz, "Picture a Coalition," *October* 43 (Winter 1987): 183.

4
Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 352.

Nathan Lee

Becoming-Undetectable

> A narrative, it seemed to me, would be less useful than an idea.
> —Susan Sontag, *AIDS and Its Metaphors*

I want to talk about what happened to us: to a very specific "us," and some very strange happenings. I want to tell a story, to give a history to things oblivious to history. What I'm after is a queer problem and it won't stop moving. I like how they say, *you're just going through a phase.* That's what's happening to us, we're going through phases. But a phase isn't a thing, it's a word that comes from a way of talking about how things *appear*. (Originally, the moon.)

1. Ruptures

The Stonewall riots inaugurated the delayed adolescence of queer sex: a catching up on acting out. Empowered by an unprecedented sense of public agency and private experimentation, gay men established commercial sex spaces to foster an ethos of multi-partner promiscuity. *Sous les paves, la plage* was rewritten for Greenwich Village: beneath the stones, the sling. Fucking was happening on a wholly new scale and in new ways, as pleasures were reconceptualized to serve novel purposes. "By a curiously naıve calculus," wrote one memoirist of the era, "it seemed to follow that *more* sex was *more* liberating."[1]

Something else was liberated in this upheaval, another kind of body with its own modes of experimentation: a strange bundle of molecules so elemental in composition and capable of such limited action that it confounds the very definition of what constitutes a life-form. If biologists have reached no consensus on the question of whether viruses should be classified as living organisms or not, epidemiologists, on the other hand, have clarified the conditions that enabled the long dormant and ecologically circumscribed human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) to proliferate along the circuits of desire forged by an accelerating sexual culture.

First diagnosed as a disease afflicting North American gay male communities, AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome) was initially called GRID (gay-related immune disorder), and immediately marked as a specific problem of these communities. This association, despite its persistence to this day, was revealed as a historical contingency unmoored from a true viral genealogy. The emergence of HIV is now traced back to the late nineteenth century, sparked by the political and ecological upheavals of European colonialism in equatorial Africa.[2]

Group Material, AIDS Timeline (Berkeley). 1990.

Things and migrations: The geopolitics of AIDS are inextricable from the nature of its material operations. Unlike an outbreak of Ebola, which swiftly erupts as a legible, and thus containable, terror, HIV operates on principles of patience and stealth. On average, ten years elapse from infection to symptoms. The initial burst of viral reproduction, when bodies are at their infectious peak, go unregistered by standard tests. AIDS, as Susan Sontag noted, is a temporal disease, and thinking in terms of "stages" has been essential to its discourse. The circuitous route by which the landscape of HIV/AIDS has been mapped onto history is predicated on the elusive temporality of the virus itself.

2. Status

How many of us will be alive for Stonewall 35?
—ACT UP poster

That AIDS was immediately confronted as a postmodern phenomenon par excellence and only later addressed as a postcolonial complex is a testament to the vehemence—and context—of the critique that rose to challenge it. Aids Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) exemplifies a second phase in queer sexuality, in which the revelation of a catastrophic co-becoming with inhuman forces was met by new concepts of being and new forms of being together. Under the sign of Saint Foucault, these techniques of the self were produced with, and through, an urgent task of making-visible in the domains of discourse and politics, art and activism. The AIDS crisis, as many have noted, is a crisis of representation.

Resolving the question of *what* HIV/AIDS is has always been tangled up in the problem of *whom* it affects. The development of an antibody test for HIV in 1985 inscribed a new form of identification: the categories of "positive" and "negative." In the vernacular of sexually transmitted diseases, one may be said to "have" herpes or hepatitis, but it is only with HIV that the presence or absence of a virus so forcefully marks one as a specific type of *being.* "What's your status?" is, from a semantically neutral perspective, a question so open-ended as to be meaningless. Yet when asked by one gay man to another, signification collapses to a strict binary. This positive/negative dyad immanent to gay male culture is subsumed, in turn, by a further division whereby populations marked by the HIV dichotomy are isolated as members of a "risk group" in relation to a naturalized "general population."

Reflecting on this politicization of HIV/AIDS discourse in the early years of the epidemic, Susan Sontag noted that an AIDS diagnosis exposes an identity that might otherwise have remained hidden: to detect, etymologically, is related to uncovering. This uncovering of identity effects its confirmation and, "among the risk group in the United States most severely affected in the beginning, homosexual men, has been a creator of community as well as an experience that isolates the ill and exposes them to harassment and persecution."[3]

The work and play of this community has been the focus of recent attention in light of the twentieth anniversary of the founding of the ACT UP. The constellation of documentaries, exhibitions, publications, oral histories, and media stories illuminating this terrain bear witness to the enduring vitality of a critical history—while leaving shadowed the complex flows of power that remain undisclosed and unattended to in the ongoing evolution of HIV/AIDS.

3. Undetectable

We are in the midst of constructing a third phase of queer sexuality. The year 1996 saw the advent of highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART), which enabled a reduction

ACT Up New York: Activism, Art, and the AIDS Crisis, 1987-1993, curated by Helen Molesworth and Claire Grace, The Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2009.

of viral load to levels that elude conventional testing, thus inaugurating a third form of status and a new concept in biopolitics: "undetectable." To the overdetermined categories of positive and negative has been added an elusive third term belonging to those who are simultaneously both. Signifying a presence that is absent, predicated on suppression and surveillance, the undetectable occupies an indeterminate space and produces new forms of connectivity, at once increasing the capacity of a body and subjecting it to a relentless regime of control. Novel sexual practices have once more emerged, as has an entirely new matrix of representation, connectivity, and sociality. The "end of the AIDS crisis" intersects with the dawn of the internet era.

Each of these three phases is a fiction assembled in retrospect, and their component markers are not so easily fixed as to make an immutable periodization. The libertine sexual ethos of the post-Stonewall era, for example, was not repressed but merely reconfigured during the AIDS crisis. "It is our promiscuity," Douglas Crimp argued in 1987, "that will save us."[4] Who gets named as "us" here is of course a problem, in the sense that it articulates a particular matrix of seeing and speaking, naming and locating, gathering up and casting away. A history for whom? A story in what language?

It is "we," the privileged class of the undetectable, who are empowered to speak of a "post-AIDS" culture. It feels rude and arrogant to write such a sentence, but to pretend things are otherwise is something worse, a falsification. I belong to a generation of North American gay men that has never known sexual identity without the specter of HIV infection—and yet for whom AIDS had largely retreated from everyday reality, distanced by media, history, geography. I was six years old when doctors in the United States diagnosed the first case of GRID, and fifteen when I first had sex with a man, a thirty-year-old architect I picked up at my local library where, on the racks of newspapers, one could read of a boy named Ryan White who had acquired HIV through a blood transfusion.

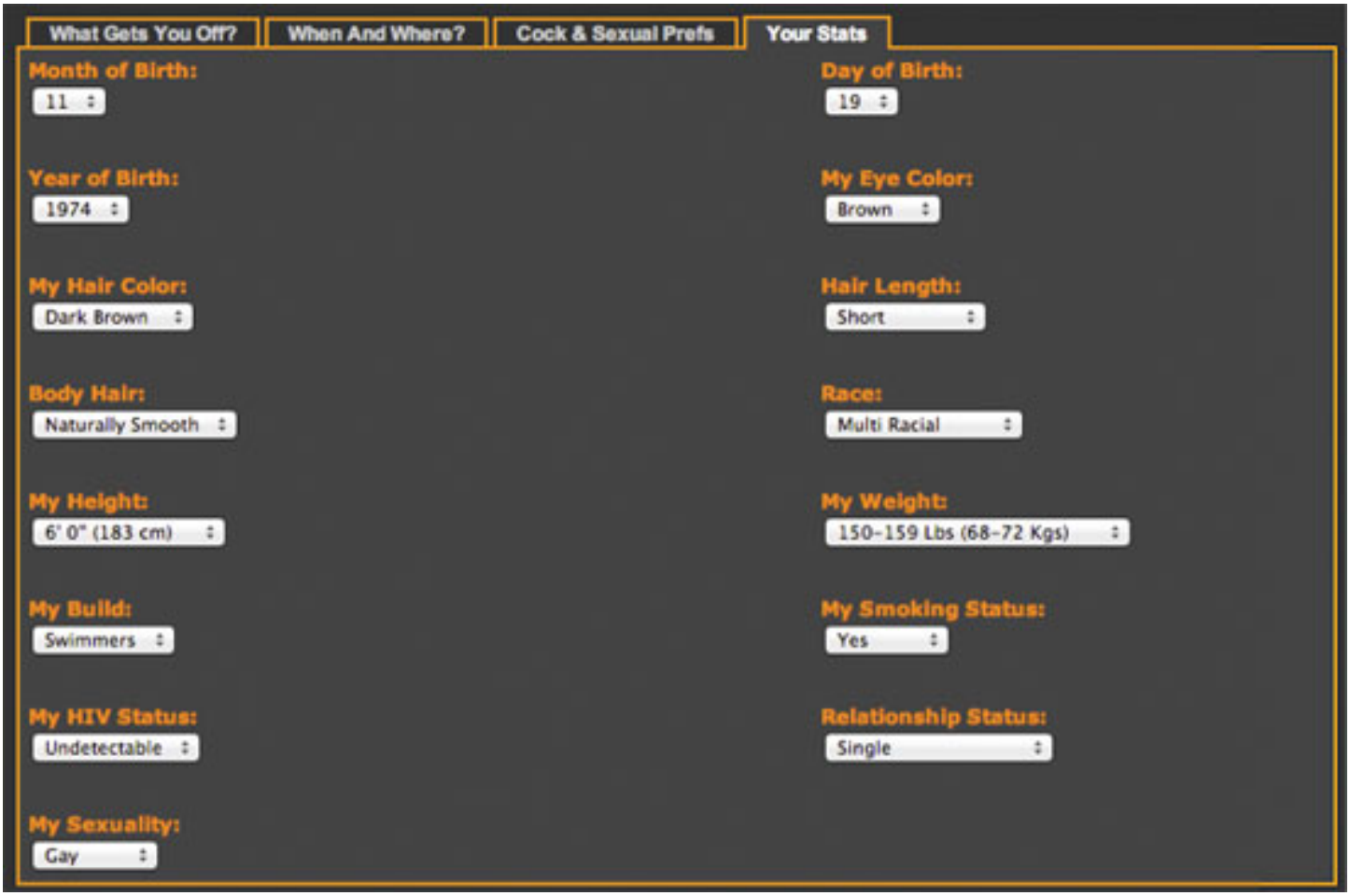
My coming out as gay in the early nineties was attended by a twofold anxiety: the cultural marginalization of sexual difference, and the coding of this difference as death. In 1996, the year of the HAART breakthrough, I moved to San Francisco with a boyfriend. I remember the spontaneous street party that broke out in the Castro when Clinton was elected president. I remember, that year, seeing men sick from AIDS, hollow eyed and skeletal, walking with the help of friends or lovers. Condoms were everywhere, buckets of them for the taking. When I moved to New York in 1999, I vividly remember the surprise (and slight annoyance) at having to actually *buy* condoms, no longer a ubiquitous freebie. By then, it had been a long time since I saw people visibly afflicted with AIDS in public.

There was no halcyon "before" of unprotected sex for my generation. We have inherited an official safer sex discourse with little but condemnation for sexual contact unmediated by prophylaxis, and a cultural ethos that sanctions unprotected sex principally as something "earned" in the context of a committed relationship subject to rigorous testing—of boundaries and trust no less than antibodies. Sex has always entailed risk, but the quantitative increase of sexual risk under HIV/AIDS has led to a qualitative difference in the formation of sexuality. As Eric Rofes has written of the "post-AIDS" generation:

> They have had to contend with profound linkages between gay sex and disease. The primary language about sex that has been placed in their mouths and wired into their brains has a vocabulary of "risk," "condoms," and "safer sex." Instead of living through the period of gay liberation and sexual freedom, then having a house fall on them, they've constructed their sexual identities and networks amidst the reality of a rapacious, sexually transmitted virus.[5]

The concept of a "post-AIDS" generation thus signifies a curious double inheritance: those for whom sexuality is inextricable from HIV and for whom, at the same time, AIDS no longer exists as an immediate reality. I know many people with HIV, but no one with AIDS. The privilege of this situation will seem incomprehensible, if not obscene, to the global millions without access to treatment for HIV infection. If the concept of the undetectable signifies one set of conditions for those coming to terms with successful treatment of HIV (displacing, perhaps, the positive/negative binary with the more urgent categories of insured/uninsured), it mobilizes an entirely different assemblage of problematics at the global level.

A scandal of racism and inequality, at once an instrument



Screenshot of www.barebackrt.com

and a pathology of neoliberalism, the AIDS crisis is not merely "not over"—it persists as an overwhelming malignancy. The very language of crisis seems to index a spiraling perpetuity: *krisis* from κρίσις, "the turning point in a disease." AIDS has not stopped killing. HIV has not stopped spreading. And yet, as Rofes asserts, AIDS as "we" knew it *is* over. "How can some of us have this feeling that AIDS is over when we have the knowledge that it is not? How can two such different understandings of what is happening around us coexist?"[6]

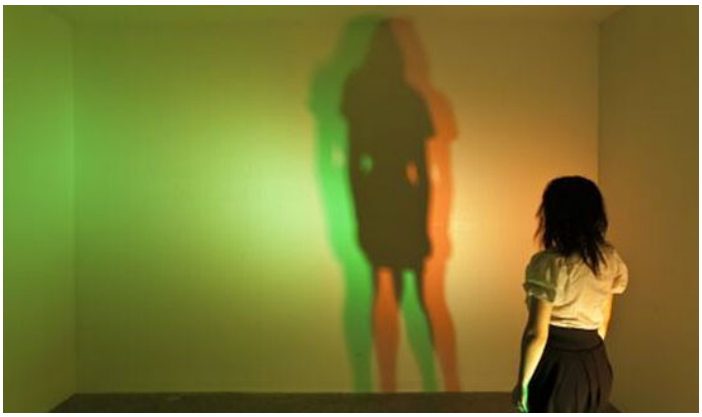
Undetectability is founded on this queer coexistence, a constitutive indeterminacy. The virus, if no longer the catalyst for a lethal syndrome, was and remains a central problem of the gay male body. It inhabits both the infected as reality and the uninfected as potential. Drugs have curtailed its lethality but not its ubiquity, and the long-term effects of combination therapies, which continue to evolve, are an open question. We know that AIDS is not what it was, but we're not at all sure what it has become.

4. Unnatural Participations

> *An entire sub-race was born, different—despite certain kinship ties—from the libertines of the past.*
> —Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*

Representation thus remains very much at stake—and contested—in the undetectable era. Its terms have shifted in strange, often counterintuitive ways. One of the seminal texts of undetectability, Tim Dean's *Unlimited Intimacy*, argues for the radical potential of bareback subculture. Organized as a self-conscious practice in the late nineties, barebacking—the deliberate abandonment of condoms for anal sex—not only acknowledges but *affirms* viral transmission. Claiming its own distinct language and rituals, fantasies and communities, codes and representations, barebacking, in Dean's provocative analysis, is neither a denial nor rejection of the survival techniques developed in response to AIDS, but their very elaboration into "the next logical step in the enterprise of

gay promiscuity."[7]



Susanne M. Winterling, (Your Shadow Is Reading Funeral Rites [Room of Light for Funeral Rites]), 2009. In the exhibition Coming After, curated by Jon Davies, The Power Plant, Toronto, 2011. Photo: Toni Hafkenscheid.

Dean's critique of bareback pornography—an industry outlaw when his book was published, by now ubiquitous and thoroughly assimilated into mainstream porn production—addresses the problem of "what happens when the attempt to represent non-normative sex comes up against norms of representation."

> The fact that HIV, like all viruses, remains invisible to the naked eye poses a challenge to which bareback porn may be regarded as a response. Confronted with an invisible agent that nevertheless is known to be transmitted sexually, the pornographic principle of maximum visibility must generate strategies for making appear on screen something that cannot be seen.[8]

One such strategy unique to the genre is the use of subtitles. The desired object, the making-visible of a "breeding" inside the body, is rendered as text. Dean cites a scene from *Plantin' Seed*, an early film from the notorious (and wildly popular) bareback porn company Treasure Island Media. The subtitle, a technology of translation, is here deployed to transpose the physical fact, sensation, and fantasy of internal ejaculation into the domain of language:

> The audience sees subtitles rather than semen; testimony substitutes for visible evidence. We could say that, instead of the image of whitish fluid suddenly coming out of a penis, viewers are given, in white lettering at the bottom of the screen, a representation of something suddenly coming out of someone's mouth.[9]

Someone or something: *Plantin' Seed* is an image producing its own utterance. As a form of representation grappling with the limits of representation, bareback porn is, Dean argues, a form of thinking, a mode of embodied thought. If, despite the mainstreaming of condomless pornography, the highly self-conscious subculture of barebacking as reflected in the videos of Treasure Island Media represents a minority practice, it is precisely this anomalous position, this bordering, that bestows conceptual force.

Leo Bersani has written of the startling ways in which barebacking may be thought of as a "social practice that, perhaps unprecedentedly, actualizes, in the most literal fashion, psychoanalytic inferences about the unconscious."[10] Unsurprisingly, a psychoanalytic critique of barebacking sees only death (drive). "Nothing can come from this practice," Bersani declares:

> Power has played no tricks on the barebacker: from the beginning he was promised nothing more, and has received nothing more, than the privilege of being a living tomb, the repository of what may kill him, of what may kill those who have penetrated him during the gang-bang, of what has already killed those who infected the men who have just infected him.[11]

What Bersani elides in his account of barebacking as an "ego-divesting discipline" is the fact that barebackers *have* been promised something more: a reprieve from the automatic death sentence of HIV. Bersani writes as if the antiretroviral revolution never took place. Dean rightly cautions that barebacking is an overdetermined phenomenon that cannot be said to depend on the advent of HAART. At the same time, he notes that the greatly expanded lifespan of HIV carriers is inextricable from the development of bareback culture. Where Dean strategically underplays the role of HAART in barebacking to consider the larger context of its practice, Bersani ignores it altogether. As such, his characterization of barebacking as death-driven strikes me as a totalizing and misguided imposition of his theoretical biases on both the empirical reality and motivating fantasies of barebacking, an image of thought unsuited to the *krisis* of undetectability.

"We are in a time of relational crisis," writes Bersani, "of a dangerous but also potentially beneficial confusion about modes of connectedness, about the ways in which who or what or how we are depend on how we connect ... If there is no moment at which human connectedness has not already been initiated, we might nonetheless posit, largely

Craig Damrauer, Silence = , 2008–2010.

for heuristic purposes, different plateaux of relationality."[12]

The difference, perhaps, of *A Thousand Plateaus*? For Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, every claim for "what we are," any discourse on the nature of being, is systematically overthrown in favor of an ontology, an ethics, and a practice of *becoming*. An experiment in how to do things with viruses, a production of the body as desubjectivized multiplicity, barebacking is, in the terminology of Deleuze and Guattari, pack practice par excellence: a becoming-animal of the "pig."

In the vernacular of barebacking, Dean explains, "men are pigs and wolves and horny toads, gaily cavorting, feeding and breeding."

> [*Wolf]* is an outmoded term for male sexual aggressor ... whereas *pig* is a term of more recent derivation that designates a gay man whose motto is "No Limits!" ... Or perhaps wolves metamorphosed into pigs. A term of approbation in bareback subculture, *pig* refers to a man who wants as much sex as he can get with as many different men as possible, often in the form of group sex.[13]

It's tempting (if only for heuristic purposes) to read this metamorphosis of wolves into pigs alongside the critique of Freud developed by Deleuze and Guattari. Becoming-animal is their corrective, in part, to Freud's interpretive reduction of a wolf pack in one of his patient's dreams to a single, Oedipal wolf.[14] And yet the most articulate and dedicated of bareback polemicists would go even further, conceptualizing their pack practice as the vanishing point of a becoming-imperceptible.[15] Treasure Island Media founder Paul Morris has framed the "irresponsibility" of barebacking as a willful devotion to a transindividual ethos "with little regard for anything else, including life itself."

> The everyday identity evanesces and the individual becomes an agent through which a darker and more fragile tradition is enabled to continue. Irresponsibility

Video still from Plantin' Seed, directed by Paul Morris, 2004.

> to the everyday persona and to the general culture is necessary for allegiance to the sexual subculture, and this allegiance takes the gay male directly to the hot and central point where what is at stake isn't the survival of the individual, but the survival of practices and patterns which are the discoveries and properties of the subculture.[16]

To align oneself with "practices and patterns" in opposition to subjecthood accords precisely with Nietzsche's famous proposition that "there is no 'being' behind doing, effecting, becoming; the 'doer' is merely the fiction added to the deed."[17] This is not to claim that every bareback power bottom is some kind of jizz-drenched *Übermensch*, nor that the neo-Nietzschean "death of the subject" proclaimed by the poststructuralists has found its kinky apotheosis. The practices and patterns of bareback subculture arise from specific cultural and political contexts, and they have real consequences.

In her powerful, cautious essay on "The Ethics of Becoming-Imperceptible," Rosi Braidotti affirms such radically transformative projects of disappearance. We yearn, she says, to dissolve into a flow of inhuman becomings—with all the joy and pain this entails, and despite having lost so many to "dead-end experimentations of the existential, political, sexual, narcotic or technological kind."[18] If barebacking has emerged as a problem and a paradigm of the undetectable, we are only just beginning to find ways to discuss such strange happenings.
"Becoming-imperceptible is the event for which there is no immediate representation."[19]

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Thanks to Johanna Burton, Christoph Cox, and Douglas Crimp.

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1
Michael Callen, *Surviving AIDS* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990), 4.

2
See most recently Craig Timberg and Daniel Halperin, *Tinderbox: How the West Sparked the AIDS Epidemic and How the World Can Finally Overcome It* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2012).

3
Susan Sontag, *AIDS and Its Metaphors* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1989).

4
Douglas Crimp, "How to Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic," in *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism* , ed. Douglas Crimp (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), 253.

5
Eric Rofes, *Dry Bones Breathe: Gay Men Creating Post-AIDS Identities and Cultures* (New York: Haworth Press, 1998), 8.

6
Ibid., 10.

7
Tim Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on Bareback Subculture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

8
Ibid., 112.

9
Ibid., 134.

10
Leo Bersani and Adam Phillips, *Intimacies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 43.

11
Ibid., 50.

12
Leo Bersani , *Is the Rectum a Grave? And Other Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 87.

13
Unlimited Intimacy, 49.

14
See Deleuze and Guattari, "One or Several Wolves?" in *A Thousand Plateaus* , trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 26–38.

15
"If becoming-woman is the first quantum, or molecular segment, with the becomings-animal that link up with it coming next, what are they all rushing toward? Without a doubt, toward becoming-imperceptible. The imperceptible is the immanent end of becoming, its cosmic formula." *A Thousand Plateaus*, 279.

16
Paul Morris, "No Limits: Necessary Danger in Male Porn," paper presented at the World Pornography Conference, Los Angeles, California, August 8, 1998.

17
Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* , trans. Walter Kauffmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 45.

18
Rosi Braidotti, "The Ethics of Becoming-Imperceptible," in *Deleuze and Philosophy* , ed. Con stantin V. Boundas (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2006), 133.

19
Ibid., 156.

Antke Engel and Renate Lorenz

Toxic Assemblages, Queer Socialities: A Dialogue of Mutual Poisoning

An imposing drag queen in a leopard-print top flaunts her *décolleté* after the show. She totters through the glitter, tinsel, and pills scattered on the floor and walks over to a massive tropical plant, from which she fishes out a lighter, lights a cigarette, and breaks out in a terrible cough, exhaling glitter from deep in her throat. In the background, a slideshow displays oversized portrait figures wearing fanciful masks made of various trashy but glamorous materials, partly referencing protest cultures and queer subcultures since the 1970s.

A curious communication between doubled images takes place, since the drag queen on stage as well as a punk figure now appearing there are the same figures portrayed in the projected slides. The punk appears in a cut denim vest, cheeky samurai-style hair tuft, and colorful makeup emphasizing the dark glitter eye shadow. Positioned in front of the photographs, curious doublings and overlappings are created as the punk recites a list of all the toxic substances that come to mind. Her tone of voice remains undecided, somewhere between condemnation and ovation, and the list seems to induce her to start cleaning the floor. Yet this transforms into a dance with a broom and a vacuum cleaner, where the whirling silver tinsel, the body in movement, the masks gazing from behind the figures onstage, and the tropical plants together form a queer assemblage—one that carries with it histories of intoxication. Destructive pleasures and pleasurable destructiveness are bound up with desiring relations.

In a further shift, the address to the audience returns from the punk to the drag queen, who, posing on a comfy chair, enters into a self-reflective monologue that turns into a complaint, then an accusatory dialogue that reveals the formerly intimate after-show scenario to have been a film production. A fight with the media apparatus over its inherent power relations, and the doubts and desires for recognition and control on the side of the protagonist, expose conditions of queer sociality and its limits.

And then it starts all over again with a cigarette smoked out of exhaustion on a toxic glimmering stage.

Toxic (voice 1)

The film *Toxic* (2012) shows two protagonists in an undetermined time: a glamorous punk figure (Ginger Brooks Takahashi) and an imposing drag queen (Werner Hirsch), both of unclear gender and origin.[1] They linger in an environment of glossy remains and a forest of toxic plants. The background images of transformed ethnographic and police photographs are projected on a screen in a rhythm set by the clicks of a camera. The punk's speech and performance reference early feminist artworks such as Yvonne Rainer's dance piece *Inner Appearances* and Mierle Laderman Ukele's grooming of

Pauline Boudry / Renate Lorenz, Toxic, 2012. Film installation at Paris Triennial "Intense Proximity," Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers. Photo: Oudidade Soussi-Chiadmi.

art institutions.[2] The drag queen reenacts an interview with Jean Genet from the 1980s and blames the filmmakers for exposing her to the police-like scenario of being filmed. The camera turns and depicts the *space-off*, the space outside the frame, thus revealing the apparatus of film production and the personalization of its regime.

When Pauline Boudry and I started our research about the discourse on and employment of "toxicity," we initially focused on the so-called mug shot. The mug shot—invented in the late nineteenth century—is a way to photograph a human with two cropped and paired sights, one frontal, the other from profile. It was used by various state and scientific institutions, such as the police or anthropology, to identify "characters," which meant, to install social hierarchies and to legitimize privileges. The photographers and viewers acquired normalcy and privilege through marking the photographed as criminals, sex workers, homosexuals, black people, and people from the colonies. This history fundamentally troubles the usage of the visual and photography in contemporary art:[3] How can we produce, in the frame of this violent history of visualization, representations of bodies that rupture and queer this legacy of violence? We started from the assumption that it could be useful to see not only substances—chemicals or parts of plants, for instance—as toxic but the film apparatus as well, its history since the nineteenth century and its social effects, but also the way we continue to work in it. Furthermore, the film apparatus uses chemicals for transmuting light, which is reflected by objects and captured in images that cannot be separated from their means of production.[4] Moreover, these images have been used to poison. However, neither the effects nor the critical dosage is predictable.

Our shooting took place in Paris, where the film was supposed to premiere as part of the Paris Trienniale, which was entitled "Intense Proximity" and dealt with French anthropological and colonial history. Accordingly, the Paris World's Fairs of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were ghosts that accompanied our search. Pauline and I discussed W.E.B. du Bois's series of 363 photographs called *Types of American Negroes, Georgia, U.S.A*, which were his contribution to the *American Negro Exhibit* at the 1900 World's Fair in Paris

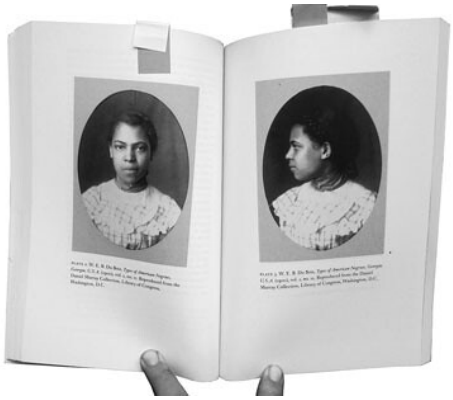
Pauline Boudry / Renate Lorenz, Toxic, 2012, film still. photo: Oudidade Soussi-Chiadmi.

and won him a gold medal. While largely making use of the mug shot, Du Bois's photographs still might be seen as toxic to the legacy of racist taxonomy and eugenics, which were so overwhelmingly present at the World's Fair. Du Bois's photographs utilize familiar elements: shots from the front and from profile, no full names, no explanatory captions which might point in the direction of critique, social antagonism, or antiracism. But the doses, effects, and affectivities are different: instead of producing "white" viewers and inviting them to learn to identify the individuals represented, to scrutinize the bodily markers, the gaze here seems to be more complicated. The light is softer, the eyes of the photographed are allowed to wander and look off camera, they sometimes grin, they look as if in complicity, or it seems they almost can't hold back from laughing.

Time and again, quite diverse body markers refuse to function as signs of racial difference; some of the portraits display middle-class clothes and decorative elements such as Victorian chairs, books, and lace curtains. Shawn Michelle Smith describes how the careful weighing of elements makes use of toxic effects: "By 'signifying' on the form of the criminal as well as the scientific mug shot, Du Bois's photographs suggest that for some (white) viewers, the middle-class portrait of an African-American was equivalent to the mug shot of a criminal ... It is precisely this transformation of the black image in the eyes of white beholders (a transformation of the black image into a criminal mug shot) that Du Bois's Georgia Negro portraits unmark."[5] It is striking that Du Bois successfully showed this presentation amidst the World's Fair of 1900, which is known for its specifically racist "human zoos."

We were also looking for images of homosexuals and transvestites, a search that turned out to be more difficult. With the support of our friend and colleague Virginie Bobin we finally found portraits of homosexuals and transvestites at the Paris police archive. These so-called *pederastes* were caught and photographed by the police in the 1870s. Their photographs were taken at a time when the state institutions had not yet developed their own visualizing methods and apparatus. They obviously took the apprehended homosexuals to commercial photography studios and had them photographed in a bourgeois setting, with the same poses of pride and peacocky self-presentation that had been developed as means of recognition by the establishment. This inspired the thesis that we experimented with during the shooting of *Toxic*: Even if the cinematic apparatus tries to allow for unmediated objectivity and knowledge about "stranger danger,"[6] it might—as dirty and uncanny by-products—also produce ec/static bodies and queer connections. As a first step we produced a series of photographs–assemblages of historic mug shots and a range of elements from protest movements and queer subculture. These assemblages became the backdrops of our film. These assemblages became the backdrops of our

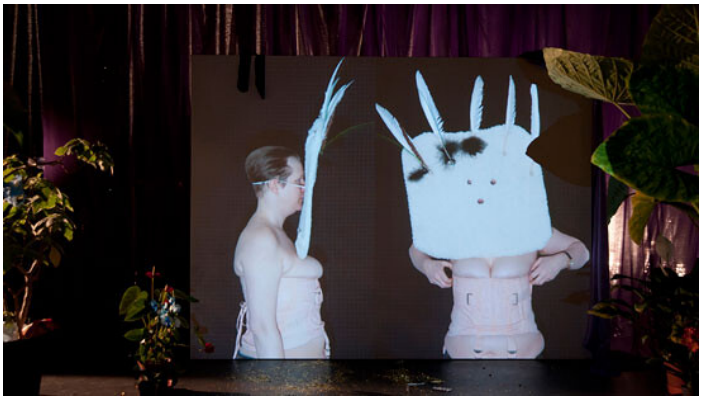
film.



Top: W.E.B. du Bois: Types of Amercian Negroes, Georgia, U.S.A, in: Shawn Michelle Smith, Photography on the Color Line. W.E.B. Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004, photograph by Ouidade Soussi-Chiadmi Bottom: Pauline Boudry / Renate Lorenz, Toxic, 2012. Vitrine with fifteen photographs of "pédèrastes" from the 1870s, Paris Police Archive.

Toxicity (voices 1 & 2)

The discourse on toxicity alludes to many different fields of politics, especially those touching on the body, such as HIV/AIDS and the history of AIDS movements, illness in general, and the engagement of patient movements (e.g., the SPK, or "Socialist Patient Collective"), drugs, and the question how they intervene into the pace of capitalism, bodies in transition and the freeing of hormones from medicalized practices. Furthermore, toxicity and media have an intimate relationship. Yet they are by no means monogamous, but rather develop multiple and dynamic connections that could be called "toxic assemblages." Mug shots intoxicate bodies that are captured by the



Pauline Boudry / Renate Lorenz, Toxic, 2012, film still. Photo: Oudidade Soussi-Chiadmi.

criminalizing or pathologizing gaze. Subjectivities, insinuated as toxins of the social body, inhabit fantasies and travel in media images, thus becoming self-fulfilling prophecies. The usage, production, and circulation of media technologies spread poison globally, although in highly differentiated and differentiating ways.

Yet assemblages are neither stable nor foreseeable. Therefore, the question is where and how toxicity may also develop pleasurable, enabling, surprising, and curative effects. How might media and technologies that poison and hurt also cure and empower? Are there strategies of intoxication that can be turned against themselves? And could the intoxicated social body become the home of queer socialities? Queer socialities are built upon the simultaneity of pleasure and pain. They do not forget their constitution in histories of abjection, alienation, and appropriation. They understand violence, conflict, and unequal power relations as feeding the desires and struggles for freedom and belonging. Thus, in the following we will fantasize, think, and quarrel about the toxic as a means of queering subjectivity and sociality. We envision a sociality formed not by healthy, sane, and self-same bodies claiming wholeness, autonomy, and control, but by toxic (intoxicated/intoxicating) bodies affected by and affecting toxic assemblages and forming queer socialities.

Desiring Assemblages / Queer Assemblages / Toxic Assemblages (voice 2)

According to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, a body is not an isolated entity, but involved in assemblages as well as being an assemblage itself, consisting of dynamic relations among objects, images, and concepts.[7] The *body without organs* seems a particularly promising figure, since it consists of parts which are no longer organized in order to be functional for a whole. Those dis-organized parts escape categorization, hierarchization,

Pauline Boudry / Renate Lorenz, Toxic, 2012, film still. Photo: Oudidade Soussi-Chiadmi.

and subjectivization, yet they still form a unity that affects and gets affected, a unity whose activity may change directions, and may grow or be reduced in intensity and speed. Deleuze/Guattari are not interested in drawing clear-cut borders between human, animal, technological, animated, or lifeless bodies, nor between imaginary bodies, body images, and flesh. Rather, they ask about processes of *becoming*. Dynamic relations form and transform particular assemblages; they may *territorialize*, that is, stabilize in a normative or idealized format, yet they may also *deterritorialize*, and they are celebrated when providing occasions for *lines of flight*.

From a queer perspective, I am attracted to the fact that in Deleuze/Guattari's thinking, it is desire that conjoins assemblages and keeps them moving.[8] Desire shows up as assemblage, while the assemblage is a *desiring-machine* (Deleuze/Guattari), or as Margit Shildrick puts it: Desire "comes into being through what Deleuze and Guattari call 'desiring machines,' assemblages that cannot be said to exist outside of their linkages and interconnection."[9] Accordingly, assemblages produce desire by connecting and moving. So what would it mean to combine reflections on toxicity with the dynamics of desire? Is there a specific affinity among desiring assemblages, queer assemblages, and toxic assemblages? Does the combination of toxicity's capacity to affect bodies and desire's capacity to connect bodies have the potential to capture and transform complex relations of power and domination?

Queer-feminist approaches that focus not primarily on gender and sexuality, but instead look at gender and sexuality's heterogeneous connections with other dimensions of embodied subjectivity, point out that desire is simultaneously a conservative as well as a transformative force. It differentiates and creates hierarchies, yet it also disrupts normalized expectations and inspires unexpected connections.[10] Furthermore, desire is seen as unfolding a constitutive force not only in subjectivities and intimate social relations, but in societies. Queer-feminist approaches link a Deleuzo-Guattarian notion of desire's productivity being *prior to* power with an understanding influenced by Michel Foucault, which considers desire as a socio-historical *product of* power (or, more specifically, of power/knowledge systems).[11] The two moments of desire as stabilizing and challenging relations of power are neither played against one another nor subordinated to a harmonizing synthesis.

With regard to the question of how the movements of desire are actualized, how desire produces connections, and how it is possible for these connections to become queer, Elspeth Probyn comes to the conclusion that desire moves in images, or that images "move as lines of desire."[12] Images bring a specific socio-historical imaginary into play. They materialize in bodies or show up as visual material. The movements of images make it possible to

Pauline Boudry / Renate Lorenz, Toxic, 2012, film still. Photo: Oudidade Soussi-Chiadmi.

liberate desire from being bound to a subject or an object and thus also elude the hierarchical subject/object arrangement. Images traversing the "surface of the social" undermine the notion that the assemblage takes place *between* reified objects, signs, or bodies.[13] Alternating ambiguously between notion and imagination, imprint and designed surface, images are both singular and concrete. Through attention to images, Probyn undermines readings that understand Deleuze/Guattari's concept of desire as ahistorical, transcendent, or ontologizing. At the same time, she also emphasizes that representation cannot be constrained to the field of the regulated production of meaning or controlling power, but rather makes use of the linkage between imagination and desire to impel anticipative and transforming movements: "The image, thus freed from its post within a structure of law, lack, and signification, can begin to move all over the place. It then causes different ripples and affects, effects of desire and desirous affects."[14]

The imagery of *Toxic* and the accompanying considerations by Renate Lorenz and Pauline Boudry remind us that images are also loaded with violence. Thus, the connections and movements of desire may actualize themselves in a simultaneously intoxicated and intoxicating image. Toxicity also demands that we find our way back from the image to the body, since the toxic reveals the vulnerability of the body and its capacity for being affected. This image-poison-body assemblage needs to be addressed if we desire social transformation, and if art and politics aim at undermining hierarchies, exclusions, and normalizations. To "construct the possible," as Probyn puts it, requires "images of bodies and desires, history and histories that are central to reformulating the social."[15] Yet, "the possible is only real with the addition of an act of mind that throws its image back into the past once it has been enacted."[16] Such desiring movements between past and present that invite the future as an immediate possibility characterize *Toxic*, as they do most of the previous films by Boudry/Lorenz. In inviting embodiments, which in "transtemporal drag" transgress clear-cut borders between past, future, and present, between image and body, between identification and desire, they provide a space for queer sociality.[17]

Queer sociality, as envisioned by Elizabeth Povinelli, is able to integrate histories of exploitation, domination, and violence into friendship practices fueled by joy, happiness, and respect.[18] Acknowledging and acting upon conditions of irreducible difference, asymmetry, and power becomes possible due to an understanding of desire as carrying with it a simultaneity of pleasure and pain. Yet, while for Jacques Lacan *jouissance* is an antisocial experience, Povinelli insists that *jouissance* may be shared, and indeed may turn into queer sociality. Her conviction that embodied subjectivities and relationships—which carry sexist, racist, heteronormative, ableist, and colonial legacies—might be transformed, but not without conflict

and injuries, develops from her friendship with an old indigenous woman named Ruby Yarrowin. Their friendship developed very slowly from a linguistic research process, which, in moments of joy again and again confronted both of them with the ongoing pain induced by the white hegemony of Australian settler colonialism. The asymmetric research setting, the striving for language and understanding, Yarrowin's kinship relations in contrast to Povinelli's lesbian self-understanding, created unbridgeable gaps. Facing these differences while acknowledging the limits of communication nevertheless created an intimacy of *jouissance*, joyful and painful at the same time. Looking at wider social practice that developed from the bonding built upon *jouissance* and, in fact, extending beyond Yarrowin's death as a kinship community that incorporated Povinelli, she proposes the term "queer sociality." If we now conjoin queer sociality and the toxic, we want to focus on the body as an assemblage, more precisely as a desiring assemblage, a model which challenges distinctions between bodies or between bodies and images in order to allow for a transformation of socialities.

Queer Socialities (voice 1)

Everybody in the team was sick when we were shooting *Toxic* at Aubervilliers in February 2012. The illness, whose cause was unknown, produced a strange but overwhelming union of us all through infection. We wondered if it was a virus (influenza or a stomach flu) or if it was in fact a substance, a toxic one. Could it have been a cure, if taken in a small dose? Yet, in higher concentrations as we experienced it, it produced a quite tough body-substance-object-connection. However, it allowed for escapes (staying in bed, alone or in company; being comforted by cushions; refusing to work; dreaming instead of functioning). At the same time, for some of our bodies it was too much to take. Thinking back to this collaborative illness, I ask myself if the body thinks differently and produces differently under such conditions. Did our bodies act on forms of collectivity in the course of the production? Or, the other way around, was our serious illness caused by the filming of *Toxic*? Was there a certain predisposition to feeling sick, since we were obsessed with toxic processes? My assumption is that toxicity is something different than a feature or a substance that can be isolated; rather, it occurs as part of a certain relationality.[19]

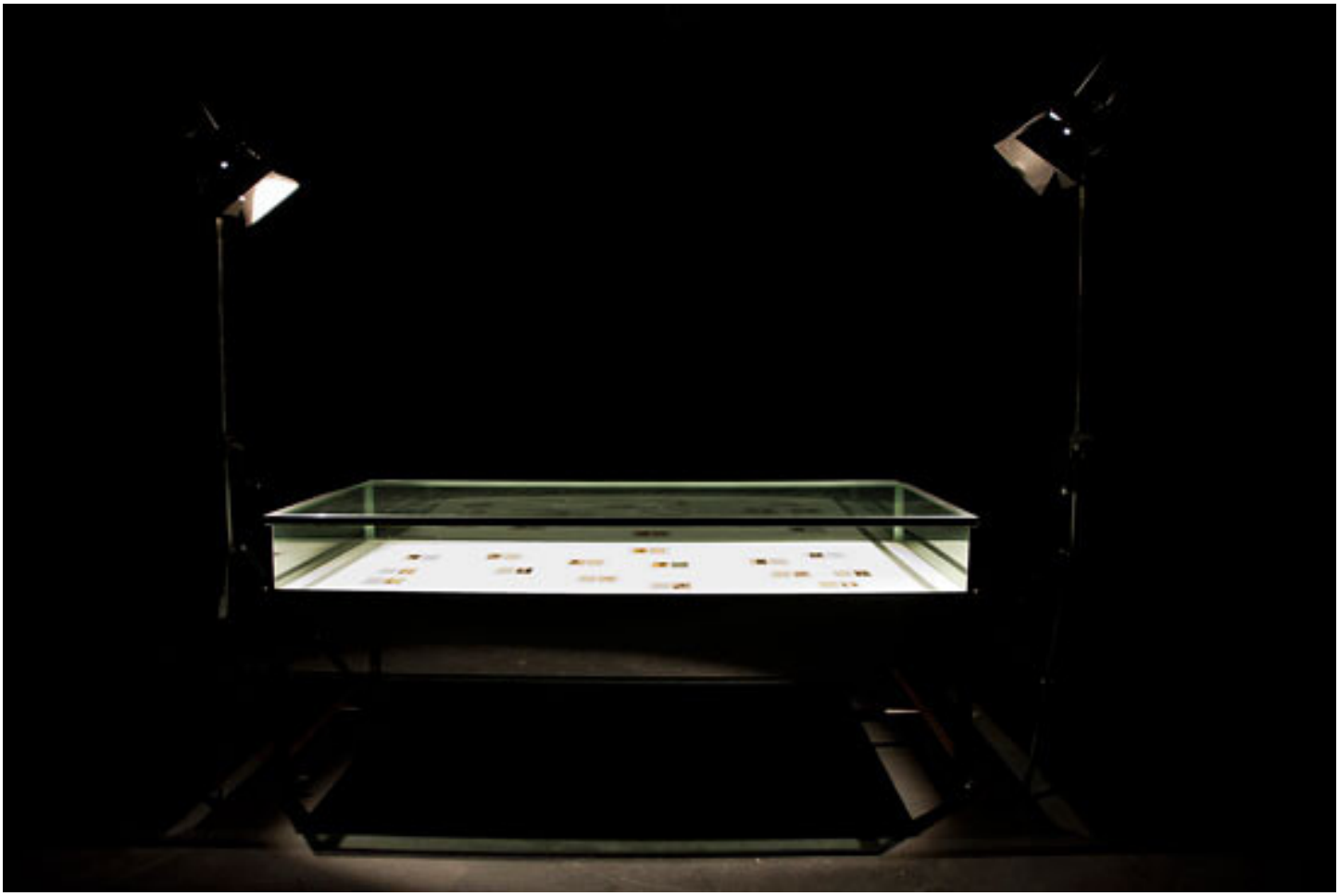
Mel Y. Chen echoes this argument when she argues that discourses of toxicity often produce or uphold social hierarchies and racist assumptions.[20] One of her examples is toys produced in China for export and marked by Western media as toxic and dangerous to kids. Apart from the fact that this danger seems to target white, middle-class kids, the media coverage also ignores the toxic working conditions in China grounded in Western consumerism. For the matter of understanding the complex effects of toxicity, her text makes a couple of interesting twists and turns. Once the reader feels sure about comprehending her argument on the hierarchizing effect of discourses on toxicity, she unexpectedly shifts attention to her personal condition of "multiple chemical sensitivity." She explains that she cannot leave the house without a mask, and when she's outside she perpetually scans her surroundings:

> Some passenger cars whiz by; instinctively my body retracts and my corporeal-sensory vocabulary starts to kick back in. A few pedestrians cross my path and before they come near, I quickly assess whether they are likely (might be the "kind of people") to wear perfumes or colognes, or sunscreen. I scan their heads for smoke puffs or pursed lips prerelease; I scan their hands for a long white object, even a stub. In an instant, quicker than I thought anything could reach my liver and have it refuse, the liver screams hate, hate whose intensity each time shocks me.[21]

The reader becomes aware that Chen's critical attitude towards discourses of toxicity does not help her in keeping her personal relation to toxicity and its harmful effects at arms length. Recognizing her intense hatred of those who might expose her to a toxin, she draws another unexpected connection: she is reminded of the hatred she experienced in others when they confronted her, the adolescent butch of Asian origin, with homophobic and racist comments. Obviously, the relationship between bodies and toxins cannot be explained by chemical reactions, but depends upon and affects the organization of the social. Chen, in addition, does not only see others as potential danger, but she is seen as dangerous herself; wearing a mask, she appears to others as a potential bearer of a virus, such as AIDS or SARS.

Following these considerations, I would like to rethink the connection between body and toxin. Instead of understanding it as an encounter of two entities (the body confronted with a substance that might be either healing or destructive), the body-toxin relationships come into view as an assemblage of elements. Fueled by power relations, the assemblage is flexible in its configuration, functions, and effects. Thus, not a toxic substance, not an intoxicated body, but *becoming-toxic*: an embodiment without differentiation between "taking poison" and "being poison," a body configuration which cannot be understood by applying common categories. Ambivalences are not only allowed but facilitated: between poison and cure; between the drug, which is enjoyable and enables different body practices, and the substance, which intoxicates, paralyzes, or even kills.

In *Queer Art*, I suggested the term "drag" as name for



Pauline Boudry / Renate Lorenz, Toxic, 2012. Film installation at Paris Triennial "Intense Proximity," Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers, vitrine with fifteen photographs, two theatre spots. Photo: Oudidade Soussi-Chiadmi.

this kind of assemblage.[22]Drag introduces yet another feature: it allows for ambivalences between bodies and images, or phantasies of embodiments. Drag is a hybrid between body and image, neither a document nor a fiction. The application of the term drag and the acknowledgement of its hybridity allow me to see *Toxic* as not intending to represent or document "deviant" bodies. There might be similarities to bodies, but it seems more accurate to talk about *embodiments*. These are always "other" (not "other than normal" but "beyond"), in "another time" and "elsewhere." They are saturated not only with public fantasies but also with haunting images from the past. Thus, drag facilitates the production of a particular reference to the practices of shows, of freak shows, of male and female impersonators, of cakewalks, of epileptic dances, of cross-dressing: practices that drive and have driven gender, sexual, and anti-racist activism and which have tested out and reproduced strategies of estrangement and distancing from norms and normalcy.

As I suggest in *Queer Art*, drag as an artistic practice might break hegemonic interpellations, producing a temporal and spatial distance—a deferral and a gap—between an experience and its possible effects on the process of subjectivation. Thus, drag assemblages do not engage in "doing gender/sexuality/race," but instead support an "undoing." If, as Judith Butler writes, I am constituted through norms that are not of my own making, then drag helps to understand how this constitution occurs.[23] Furthermore, it reconstructs it on one's own body. But at the same time, drag is a way to organize a set of effective, laborious, partially friendly, and partially aggressive methods of producing distance to these norms—for instance, to the two-gender system, to being-white, being-able, and to heteronormativity. In its (un)doing capacity, drag proposes images in which the future can be lived. Drag, then, is fabricated by sets of bodily characteristics and actions. While it may indeed depict norms, it is by no means subjected to them.

Pauline Boudry / Renate Lorenz, Toxic, 2012, film still. Photo: Oudidade Soussi-Chiadmi.

Becoming-indigestible: The Intoxication of Projective Integration (voice 2)

While drag undermines the norm, experiences of inequality and hierarchization still need to be considered in relation to processes of normalization that integrate rather than exclude. Normalization may appear as, for example, addressing "difference as cultural capital" in neoliberal consumer culture, or through appropriating the former "other" as an indicator of a tolerance built upon a subtle hierarchy between who tolerates and those tolerated. Thus, one may also ask whether the ec/static bodies and queer connections that *Toxic* displays, and which have been honored here as the "dirty and uncanny by-products" of the media apparatus, are by now an integral part of a socially acknowledged "possible." I coined the term "projective integration" in order to point out the inherent role of images and their projection onto social bodies for such processes of neoliberal modernization.[24] Images employed in these processes function as projections of today's contradictory character of difference: on the one hand, difference perceived as cultural capital, providing promising features to the individual, and on the other hand, difference that carries with it the threat of stigma and devaluation. Projective integration strives to activate the individual by stimulating the desire to manage skillfully the precariousness of difference. The individual challenge consists in developing a sovereign mode of embodying precariousness. On a social level, projective integration is a form of biopolitical management that imposes on the individual the responsibility for failure, success, and thus social inequalities and hierarchies, while simultaneously securing the hegemony of a neoliberal achievement principle and market logic.

So, if one longs for recognition and the inclusion of differences and singularities, but does not believe in or agree to being subsumed within neoliberal pluralism, how can one resist? What are the options of queer cultural politics and artistic practices? In addition to the considerations on drag, I would like to introduce the notion of *becoming-indigestible*. This notion underlines the paradoxical moment of being incorporated, yet not built into the system. It refers to the idea of toxicity, since it implies remaining non-assimilable. I would like to consider whether it might prove useful as a critique and reworking of social processes of projective integration. The toxic—resisting being digested and split up into useful parts that can be integrated into the system—turns out to be a means of either changing or, maybe, destroying the system from within. Even if it finally gets discarded, the toxic can have effects on its host that are threatening, even life-threatening, or pleasurable. Following Chen, I would like to ask about queer productivity and queer socialities, even in "queer-inanimate social lives," that "toxicity propels, not repels ... inviting loss and its 'losers.'"[25]

I understand becoming-indigestible not simply as a queer political strategy *against* processes of projective integration, but *in favor of* a "move beyond the painful 'antisocial' effects to consider the sociality that is present there ... the queer-inanimate social lives that exist beyond the fetish, beyond the animate, beyond the pure clash of human sex."[26] And note, it is *becoming*, not *being*, indigestible. Becoming, according to Deleuze/Guattari, is not a temporal process; it refers neither to a linear development from A to B nor to the continuity of development. As they write in *What is Philosophy?*, becoming is

> not the transformation of one into the other ... but something passing from one to the other ... It is a zone of indetermination, of indiscernibility, as if things, beasts, and persons ... endlessly reach that point that immediately precedes their natural differentiation.[27]

Thus, transtemporal drag comes back to mind, with its claim of indiscernibility between future, past, and present, as well as its perpetual suspension of the question regarding the artificial naturalness or natural artificiality of bodies and images: "becoming is neither an imitation nor an experienced sympathy, nor even an imaginary identification."[28] Becoming-indigestible, therefore, does not reveal anything about the subject or object of digestion, but implies "something passing" that, in fleeing established forms of subjectivity and sociality, forms queer, toxic-desiring assemblages. This might be what Chen experiences in the intimacy with her sofa, which in moments of hypersensitivity provides, as she describes, for an animated interobjectivity between the sofa's mammal skin and Chen's own, as well as for a different perception of her lover, whom she conflates with the sofa.[29]

Returning to *Toxic*, I would like to ask whether becoming-indigestible might also prove useful for

conceiving artistic strategies that aim to challenge intoxication by cultural images or social relations. As *Toxic* proposes, subjectivities developing from processes of intoxication may decide to function as toxic themselves rather than seeking detoxification. This is a double-edged attempt, since it steps into a tradition of declaring those who have been exposed to intoxication toxic themselves and treating them accordingly. *Toxic* plays out this reversal, or shall we call it perversion, ironically. The people wearing masks in the mug shots experience an amplification of their presumed monstrosity, while they are simultaneously protected by the masks and seem to wear them proudly or even as protest signs; or rather, it is not a wearing of masks, it is practicing drag. There is an ambivalence between sympathy and threat: "Sometimes a mask is still a mask, even if it is simultaneously a masquerade."[30] Played out as desiring assemblages between the images on the screen, the figures in drag, the potted plants, and the production crew resembling and sacrificing the apparatus, power and violence are embodied and incorporated, but not digested. The historical format of the mug shot remains visible. Thanks to a vivid cough, intoxicating substances spread all over the place. The glittering whirl gets stuck in the vacuum cleaner rather than being sucked in. Thus, one could say that *Toxic* becomes-indigestible—a site of queer sociality among those "who celebrate existence outside the charmed circle of sexual normativity"—because it does not dissolve or neutralize the toxicity of the media apparatus, but embodies its connection to *jouissance*, indiscernibly pleasurable and painful.[31]

X

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Renate Lorenz is an artist and cultural scientist, mostly in the fields of Art and Queer Theory. She is showing her art work internationally (together with Pauline Boudry), recently at the 54. Venice Biennial (2011), at the Paris Triennial (2012), at SLG and Tate Modern, London (2013). Her recent english publications are Queer Art (Transcript, 2012) and the artist book Temporal Drag (Hatje Cantz 2011). She is professor for art and research at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna.

1
(2012) by Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz, film installation, vitrine with fifteen photographs, curtain, theatre spots, Super 16mm, 13 minutes. Director of photography: Bernadette Paassen. Performers: Werner Hirsch, Ginger Brooks Takahashi.

2
Yvonne Rainer, *Inner Appearences* , 1972; Mierle Laderman Ukeles, 1979–80.

3
Kerstin Brandes, *Fotografie und "Identität". Visuelle Repräsentationspolitiken in künstlerischen Arbeiten der 1980er und 1990er Jahre* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2010).

4
Today's digital technology depends on toxic substances and working conditions in the production of cameras and computers.

5
Shawn Michelle Smith, *Photography on the Color Line: W.E.B. Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), 90.

6
Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (Routledge: London, New York 2000).

7
Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia 2 (* 1980), trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

8
Ibid.; Gilles Deleuze, *Desire and Pleasure* (1977), trans. Melissa McMahon. For queer theoretical approaches, see Elspeth Probyn, *Outside Belongings* (London: Routledge, 1996); Elizabeth Grosz, "Refiguring Lesbian Desire," Laura Doan (ed.), *The Lesbian Postmodern* (New York: NYU Press, 1994), 67–84; Chrysanthi Nigianni, Merl Storr (eds.), *Deleuze and Queer Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2009).

9
Margrit Shildrick, "Prosthetic Performativity: Deleuzian Connections and Queer Corporealities," in Chrysanthi Nigianni and Merl Storr (eds.), ibid., 115–33, here 124.

10
Probyn, ibid., 43; Antke Engel, "Desire for/within Economic Transformation," *e-flux journal* 17 (June 2010). See https://www.e-flux.com/journal/17/67418/desire-for-within-economic-transformation/ .

11
Cf. Deleuze, *Desire and Pleasure*, ibid.; Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1* (1976), trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1980); Probyn, ibid., 48.

12
Probyn, ibid., 59.

13
Ibid., 13.

14
Ibid., 59.

15
Ibid., 117.

16
Gilles Deleuze, *Michel Foucault: Philosophe* (Paris: Seuil,1989), 17; quoted in Probyn, ibid., 117.

17
Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz, *Temporal Drag* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2011);

18
Elizabeth Povinelli, "The Part That Has No Part: Enjoyment, Law, and Loss," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* Vol. 17, No. 2–3 (2011): 287–308.

19
Karen Barad describes a microorganism, a dinoflaggelate called *Pfiesteria piscicida*, which is neither plant nor animal, but able to change its nature according to the conditions of its environment. This microorganism, which is also called "killer dinoflagellate," is responsible for a mass killing of over a billion fish. It is highly toxic for fish but, interestingly, this feature can only be proved in the presence of fish. Without being in contact with fish, no toxic nature or substance can be found. Cf. Karen Barad, "Nature's Queer Performativity," *Qui Parle* Vol. 19, No. 2 (2001): 133ff.

20
Mel Y. Chen, "Toxic Animacies, Inanimate Affections," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* Vol. 17, No. 2–3 (2011): 265–286.

21
Chen, ibid., 274f.

22
Renate Lorenz, *Queer Art: A Freak Theory* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2012).

23
Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

24
Antke Engel, "The Surplus of Paradoxes: Queer/ing Images of Sexuality and Economy," in Celine-Marie Pascale (ed.), *Social Inequalities & The Politics of Representation: A Global Landscape* (London: Sage, 2013), 176–188.

25
Chen, ibid., 281.

26
Ibid., 282.

27
Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* , trans. Bernd Schwibs and Joseph Vogl (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1994), 173.

28
Ibid.

29
Ibid., 278.

30
Chen, ibid., 279.

31
Povinelli, ibid., 302.

Gregg Bordowitz

Anhedonia

A fantasy, as if on a sailing ship:
Making my calculations, sweat soaked wet
Lying flat, bunk above, close, hidden
The gaps between bent slats dangling weight
Pressure applied, visibly registered
These modern ships can almost berth themselves
Corseted in my sleep, I can't breathe
Stuck in this enormous estate, interred
My crinoline scratching against itself
Now I am royalty after the feast
As my engorged body is stiffening
Wealth and privilege become the atmosphere
I am queasy from the listing of goods
Indigestion, that's how words are absorbed
How the I, we, us conceive abstractions
All endure through tamed familiar doubts
Watch thought spread under the service; stain
The image is a Thanksgiving table
O! this puzzlement fails to capture it
The troubled meaning of the verb contemn
Poetry, is itself a kind of ill
My organs jiggle, laugh lyrics, they sing
Neither surface nor content can compose
Resolve pleasure—Fun devolves into sin
Working through is always an epic fight
I just want to say, "get over yourself"
Yet I know I'm talking to no one here
How the dead rob us of our mortal joy
I escape like a stowaway princess

X

Gregg Bordowitz is a writer and artist. His most recent book "General Idea: Imagevirus" was published as part of Afterall Books' One Work series. Bordowitz is currently the Program Director of the School of the **Art Institute of Chicago Low-Residency MFA Program**.