

Transverse

Transverse Journal



What's Queer about Queer Theory?



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Editorial Introduction: “Perspectives Affects”

It would be dubious to continue in editing this journal as a pyramid hierarchy featuring an Editor-In-Chief at the top, a team of editors beneath her, and the contributors bearing the weight of the issue at the bottom. Ironically, the amount of power individuals within this structure hold increases as their corresponding creative input decreases. This very queer, 11th issue of *Transverse Journal* seeks to ignite a dialogue about queer themes in art and literature, while also engaging in alternative styles in academic writing. Rather than deconstructing scholarly discourse, however, this issue uses it, questions it and experiments with it. As for this introduction, I offer a synopsis of the journal’s contents, in shuffled sequence, that references the contributors who have pounded out their drafts and “corrections” for your merry reading.

In “False Eyelashes for Everyone: Drag as a Model for a Performative Take on Composition,” Amy Danziger Ross effectively puts queer drag into praxis by way of her own stylized composition. The self-referencing article achieves the “repetition with variation” goal of queer expression while also theorizing this endeavor as a cultural phenomenon. Her writing thus embodies a parodic drag performance of academic writing: the article is really an autobiographical work-through composition “dressed up” as an academic paper. Form and content coalesce in this metacritical work that both shows us queer writing and tells us about queer writing.

The question I have for Danziger Ross—or Amy, as she is both author and first-person narrator—is the following: If we are to perceive of this article/testimony as a type of parody of academic writing, who is its targeted readership? If it is a parody of a mimetic piece of academic tone and style, in order for a reader to “get it,” s/he must be familiar with the codes of academic writing. This article and this question can then extend further to address the concept of drag or “repetition with variation” or gender performance: like the Avant-garde work of Marcel Duchamp or Lady Gaga, can queer performance only ever be fully understood by those who already dwell in queer communities?[1] If so, then is it really a political form of art if it seeks to change or advance nothing?

Perhaps this is where we, as critics, scholars and cultural enthusiasts, come in: the role we play is that of interpreters. By analyzing postmodern, Avant-garde, queer art forms, we offer perspectives and dialogue that engage readers and the public in a new way of understanding and of “getting it.”

Like Danziger Ross, Isabella Cooper experiments with “queering.” Her two-part thesis seeks to revise criticism on Radcliffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness*. Most interestingly, she endeavours to shift reception of the novel toward a more positive and hopeful interpretation of its narrative and characters. Furthermore, her analysis includes an in-depth study of the Martyr as archetype in a queer/lesbian context.

Benjamin Grimwood would have stopped Cooper at “Martyr” and asked about the very words we use to construct archetypes. “To queer or not to queer,” he wonders as he considers language as a source of existential crisis. If one is neither self-identified as male or female, does “ze” then experience an absence of (gender) identity? In his Butlerian discussion of the LGBT community and sexual subjectivity, he takes an autobiographical approach to critique the field of queer theory.

Citing Gershen Kaufman’s *The Psychology of Shame* (1996), Noel Glover continues Grimwood’s study of existential queerness by discussing how experiences of shame affect identity formation. Subjects shamed by

heterocentric views of “normalcy” are then made aware of their difference not only in their sexual, gender and orientation “lives” but in all social situations.

R. E. H. Gordon shows how minimalist art like that of Fred Sandback can remove the coded political language that strangleholds bodies and invite viewers to become part of the art as un-gendered beings. This removal or absence makes minimalist art relevant to queer theory by virtue of its phenomenological ideology. Gordon writes, “If queer art can be so easily identified as such through its own self-proclamation, does this imply that the rest of the artworks in the world have no relevance to explorations of gender re-imagining?” (2)

All the writing in this issue considers queering art and most of it queers academic discourse. By blending personal testimony, scholarly research and literary criticism, these writers compliment the journal’s creative writing piece, “Bike Boys Laugh,” by Roberto Ortiz. Ortiz tells the story of a heated encounter between a queer-theorist and a young gay man.

This 11th issue of *Transverse* explores what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls “the importance of perspective effects” (xvii).[2] By using the first-person “I”, along with personal, confessional experiences, the authors of this journal perform a series of spectacles that give readers their lived experiences. Self-identifying as “queer” is less important than being/acting out queerness.

Natalie Pendergast,

Editor-In-Chief

Notes

[1] This question was inspired by a casual conversation I (Natalie Pendergast) had with fellow University of Toronto Comparative Literature Ph.D. student, Kristina Syvarth (Spring, 2011).

[2] Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. “Preface to the 2008 Edition.” *Epistemology of the Closet*. 1990. Berkley, Los Angeles, London: U of California P, 2008. Xiii-xviii. Print.

The Passion of Stephen Gordon:
The Messianic Lesbian Artist in Radclyffe Hall's
The Well of Loneliness

By Isabella Cooper

Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* has often been referred to as 'the lesbian bible' because of its influence, and recent scholarship like Ed Madden's suggests that the novel functions as a lesbian gospel text, which seeks to reconcile homosexuality to society and to the church. But this gospel's messiah figure, Stephen Gordon, is also an artist, and her development into her role of true artist and her development into that of true savior are inextricably linked. For both Stephen and her author, messianic advocacy represents the fulfillment, the ultimate expression, of the lesbian's aesthetic vocation.

In this essay I explore how Hall's figuring of her novel as a gospel or Passion narrative, and of Stephen as a Christ-figure, function as the basis of her own messianic literary effort. She wrote her 'gospel' account of the passion and martyrdom of a Christ-like figure to perform a redemptive, sanctifying work for her fellow homosexuals, and in Stephen's development as an artist we see Hall's project mirrored. By reading *The Well* both as a lesbian gospel text and as a representation of the development of a lesbian artist, we can better understand how Hall conceived of her own messianic role as a lesbian writer. We can also begin to appreciate some of the aspects of the novel that have troubled critics most, including its profusion of religious language and its insistent focus on martyrdom and the tragic aspects of lesbian existence. Furthermore, reading the novel this way allows us to understand it as much more positive, hopeful, and radical than it is generally given credit for.

The Well's readers have frequently noticed the deliberate parallels Hall draws between Stephen and Christ; they have also noticed Hall's identification with both. Some readers have mocked the novel for precisely this reason. But Hall's strategy of creating an alter-ego/ protagonist and identifying her with Christ reflects her understanding of her role as a Christian lesbian artist. She attempts in this novel to perform a powerful work of redemption for those whose desires society and the Church label sinful. In order to combat the stigma of sinfulness, Hall fashions (and speaks through) a protagonist whose Christ-like suffering and self-sacrifice challenge her readers, and whose ability (by the novel's end) to reconcile her commitments to her faith, her art, and her sexual identity enable her to take on a messianic role.

Stephen's identification with martyrdom and with Christ runs through *The Well*, intensifying as the novel progresses. Even before she becomes a writer, the Christ-like attributes that will make her both a writer and a messiah are evident. These attributes are her sensitivity, generosity, and capacity for selfless love and sacrificial suffering. In Hall's schema, these are characteristics of both the artist and the invert, but intensified to Christ-like proportions in Stephen, whose artistic temperament and inversion are both so pronounced. The first explicit identification between Stephen and Christ occurs in Stephen's early childhood; tellingly, it appears simultaneously with Stephen's first identification with lesbianism (or at least with lesbian desire). Infatuated with Collins, the housemaid, Stephen knows no other way to express this love than through self-sacrifice and

suffering. Her love for Collins awakens her religious and messianic impulses, and she prays for the ability to “bear all Collins’ pain” and to “be a Saviour to Collins” (21). She then has a dream in which “in some queer way she was Jesus” (22).

Many years after the incident with Collins, Stephen falls in love with Angela Crossby. Once again, the text emphasizes the Christ-like selflessness of Stephen’s love: “She would gladly have given her body over to torment, have laid down her life if need be, for the sake of the woman she loved” (145). Hall deliberately figures Stephen’s capacity for selfless love as both Christ-like and integrally connected to her inversion, just as she will later reveal both to be connected to Stephen’s artistic vocation. Rather than implying her moral perversity and spiritual depravity, Stephen’s inversion is bound up with the most virtuous and Christ-like aspects of her nature. And in this capacity for selfless love and for suffering, as well as in her artistic talent, Stephen is both representative of inverts and yet exceptional in her virtue, making her an ideal mediator between God (and society) and her fellow homosexuals.

Stephen is also suited to be a mediator through her art precisely because her inversion is so marked—no other character in the novel has a physical body that so clearly declares his or her inversion. Just as Christ, according to Christian theology, had a dual nature (being both God and man), Stephen too has a sort of dual nature which her body clearly expresses, since she is in a sense both male and female (or neither). Puddle, Stephen’s repressed homosexual teacher, recognizes that this duality, when expressed through Stephen’s budding literary gifts, could have redemptive value for their fellow inverts:

Why, just because of what you are, you may actually find that you’ve got an advantage. You may write with a curious double insight—write both men and women from a personal knowledge... For the sake of all the others who are like you, but less strong and less gifted perhaps, many of them, it’s up to you to have the courage to make good (205).

As Stephen’s talent as a writer develops, Puddle continues to hope that Stephen’s work will serve a redemptive purpose. She dreams that Stephen will be able to break the silence imposed on inverts, and give them a voice by speaking the truth about homosexual experience. Hall says that “Puddle loathed and despised the conspiracy of silence that forbade her to speak frankly” (154). Puddle dares not speak frankly herself, but she believes that Stephen can, and that her writing will combat ‘the conspiracy of silence’ which oppresses them. And challenging that conspiracy was precisely what Hall herself attempted to achieve through this account of Stephen’s passion and martyrdom. Stephen’s role as a lesbian writer mirrors her author’s – each must break the silence and write in testament to the truth of lesbian experience.

But Stephen cannot be an advocate for all inverts unless she shares fully in their suffering. Until her final act of sacrifice at the novel’s end, Stephen’s work does not advocate for her fellow sufferers, or even properly convey her identity. Her novels do not deal directly with lesbian experience; instead, they reflect her “curious craving for the normal” (214). Even Stephen recognizes that “there’s something... missing” in them (217). But even though her early novels are indeed imperfect and missing something, they hint at the virtues that will enable Stephen to take on a Christ-like role through her art. These novels reflect the selflessness of her nature, since her very method of writing is a form of self-sacrifice. The text describes Stephen’s creative process as one in which the writer gives of herself sacrificially to provide life and expression for her characters in “the strange and terrible miracle of blood, the giver of life, the purifier, the final expiation” (214). This description of Ste-

phen's giving up her life-blood for her characters is a foreshadowing of the novel's end, in which she is at last enabled, in her moment of greatest suffering, to speak on behalf of her fellow sufferers. When Stephen reaches her 'crucifixion' moment, her self-sacrificial aesthetic as a writer will take on social relevance and become true advocacy.

Hall underscores the godly virtue of Stephen's compassionate, selfless aesthetic by paralleling it with its antithesis: the aesthetic of the playwright Brockett. Brockett "[f]eeds] his genius on live flesh and blood. Carnivorous genius" (234). He does not share Stephen's selfless generosity; as a writer he drinks blood, rather than giving it. He sums up his philosophy as a playwright when he advises Stephen: "People are the food that we writers live on; get out and devour them; squeeze them dry" (232). But Brockett's advice to her is wrong; he advises her to cast herself in a selfish, exploitative role towards her subjects, a role incompatible with Stephen's destiny as an advocate who feels and speaks on behalf of others.

Stephen could never take Brockett's advice, since her writing is inseparable from her self-sacrificing nature; as Claudia Franks notes: "writing continues to be associated in her mind with the suffering that first made it necessary to cultivate her talent" (104), and that suffering, for Stephen, is bound up with her love and concern for other human beings. But Franks claims that Hall portrays Stephen's selfless aesthetic as a failure, and that Hall presents Brockett as "the paradigm of the successful artist" (105). She adds that "because Stephen's ultimate commitment is to ethical action... she can never fulfill her destiny as an artist in Radclyffe Hall's fictional world" (111-112). In fact, the reverse is true. Stephen's selflessness in her life and art is precisely what enables her to fulfill her artistic and moral destiny of speaking for her fellow sufferers. At the novel's end, she can advocate for these outcasts because she is able to feel with and for them so deeply. Brockett, though a homosexual himself, could never perform this messianic work because he lacks Stephen's self-sacrificing aesthetic. It is Stephen's aesthetic that reflects the text's ideal of the highest role of the homosexual author—the messianic role, in which suffering, love, and art are one.

Stephen's Christ-like aesthetic is not perfected until the final scene of *The Well*, when she fully takes on her messianic role. Nevertheless, we see her developing throughout the novel towards that culminating moment of suffering and sacrifice. She is prepared to speak for other inverts by her exposure to their sufferings, an exposure that occurs as she encounters many such people through Valerie Seymour. Depicting Stephen's growing awareness of the suffering of other homosexuals allows Hall to underscore the inverts' need for a messiah, and also to criticize society's and the church's exclusion and persecution of those inverts. In the seamy homosexual bars of Paris, Stephen discovers how many outcasts live in despair, believing themselves "beyond all hope ... of salvation" (387). In the face of such injustice, the homosexual community desperately needs someone to fill the divine role of advocate, and that is Stephen's destiny. Her homosexual friend Adolf Blanc expresses to her the importance of this role: "The doctors cannot make the ignorant think, cannot hope to bring home the sufferings of millions; only one of ourselves can someday do that" (390).

Blanc's words that "only one of ourselves" can speak for homosexuals echo Hall's own conviction, the conviction that led her to write this novel. Her lover Una Troubridge recalled of her: "It was her absolute conviction that such a book could only be written by a sexual invert, who alone could be qualified by personal knowledge and injury to speak on behalf of a misunderstood and misjudged minority" (Dickson 124). Just as only one who was human, and suffered all the pain of humanity, could advocate to God for humankind, so only one who was an invert herself, and who suffered all the pains of inversion, could advocate for inverts. In writing *The Well*, Hall positioned herself, as well as Stephen, in this messianic role. She knew the role would require

self-sacrifice; Una later recalled Hall's telling her "that although the publication of such a book might mean the shipwreck of her whole career, she was fully prepared to make any sacrifice" (Dickson 124). For Hall, sacrifice and suffering were the inevitable cost of the lesbian writer's messianic role.

If the messianic role entails suffering, it is consistent that Hall depicts Stephen's messianic identity as fully realized only at the novel's end, at her moment of greatest sacrifice and agony. This is an appropriate closing scene for the novel; it represents the culmination of Stephen's messianic and artistic vocation. As Franks notes: "Stephen, by the end of the novel, becomes a kind of secular Christ – a martyr because of her anguish but a potential savior...because of her ability to enlighten through words" (118).

Stephen's martyrdom or 'Passion' is that she must sacrifice herself for love, and remain sexually unfulfilled and stigmatized. Her giving up Mary to Martin is in fact the only possible ending to Hall's lesbian gospel. Stephen's martyrdom is necessary in Hall's messianic project; it is her means of touching the hearts of the novel's readers and awakening their sympathy on behalf of homosexuals. Furthermore, relinquishing Mary is Stephen's crucial moment of sacrificial suffering, and it is this 'crucifixion' that transforms her into a true artist. Since it is the result of her inversion, it brings her into communion with the suffering of all inverts and enables her to speak for them. This is a mystical process, like Christ's atonement for sinners through death. At this point, Stephen has visions in which she hears her fellow sufferers demanding that she be their advocate: "Stephen, Stephen, ask your God why he has forsaken us" (236).

When Stephen takes on this messianic role of advocate, her self-sacrificing aesthetic as a writer is perfected. Like the characters in her earlier works, the people that surround Stephen in her vision seem to her like her children, and (also like her characters) she must suffer for these people so that she can give them a voice. Stephen's Passion experience has given her the authority and the words to speak for them at last. If she writes a book now, it will not be like her earlier works, with 'something missing,' rather, she will write the full truth of her experience of inversion. She will begin with the words she speaks as *The Well* ends, words that attempt mediation between God and her fellow inverts: "Acknowledge us, Oh God, before the whole world. Give us a right to our existence!" (437). These words express not just Stephen's, but Hall's passionate appeal, her plea to God and to the world to be reconciled with inverts. These words are the heart of Hall's gospel narrative. This closing scene depicts Stephen's crucifixion, reveals its salvific significance, and hints at a coming resurrection through the written word.

With her figuring of *The Well of Loneliness* as a gospel or Passion narrative, Hall both illustrates, and attempts to fulfill, the role of the lesbian artist. If we understand this project, many of the objections critics and readers have raised to the novel become partially defused. For instance, Hall's repeated references to martyrdom in relation to Stephen, which may strike the reader as overwrought, are vital to the novel's agenda, as they drive home that this is a Passion account. This enables her to make her social and spiritual argument; as Madden points out, her appropriation of Christian language is crucial to Hall's attempt to sanctify homosexual experience (174). Thus, what Franks refers to as the novel's "overemphasis on self-pity and martyrdom" (97) is a deliberate strategy on the author's part and integral to her work.

Since Hall found it necessary for her purpose that Stephen's suffering and martyrdom be representative of lesbian experience, she was compelled to downplay the more happy aspects of lesbianism. Her emphasis on the suffering inherent in lesbianism has led Lillian Faderman, among other critics, to object that Hall "believed that her purpose was best served, not by arguing that women chose to be lesbians for good reasons... but rather by persuading heterosexual readers to feel sorry for them" (320). Catherine Stimpson even refers to the novel as a

“narrative of damnation” because of its insistence on the inevitability of lesbian suffering (98). But what Faderman and Stimpson fail to observe is that, for Hall, suffering is essential to sanctify the lesbian gospel and to inspire the lesbian gospel writer. She could not sanctify inversion or lesbianism to her readers by depicting its pleasures; such an approach would have allowed heterosexuals to continue to dismiss homosexuality as depraved. Hall’s aim was to overturn not just social injustice, but those accusations of moral and spiritual depravity. Hall’s social advocacy, then, is rooted in her attempt to sanctify homosexuality, an attempt she makes primarily through her depiction of a suffering, Christ-like invert.

Suffering also sanctifies the lesbian messiah, simultaneously inspiring her to be the writer of her own gospel. In Hall’s text, suffering is both essential to the artist and a source of artistry—it is no coincidence that most of the inverts and homosexuals in the novel are artists. Likewise, the oppressed African-Americans who sing at one of Valerie’s parties have transformed their suffering into art. Stephen’s suffering as an invert is the source of her writing from the beginning, in that her loneliness and alienation are what initially drive her to written self-expression. But her moment of greatest suffering, her martyrdom, inspires her with a creative and generative energy she never had before, allowing her to take on the messianic role of advocate.

Hall does not recount Stephen’s writing of the great work in which she will speak for her fellow inverts and redeem them in the eyes of both society and church. The ending of the novel suggests that this will happen, but we do not see it. It seems clear, however, that Hall herself attempted to write such a work, and that she attempted, through her account of Stephen’s suffering, to sanctify lesbianism for her readers. To use religious language and a Christ-like protagonist to advocate for homosexuality was an incredibly bold move, and was a key source of objections to the novel in Hall’s day.

But Hall’s project, however bold, was not blasphemous. *The Well of Loneliness* represents her attempt to write in a way that would express and reconcile her tripartite allegiances to her faith, her homosexual identity, and her art. Rather than dismissing her work’s religious commitment as a flaw, readers might better appreciate it as integral to the moral and social argument of the novel, and even as the most daring aspect of that argument. Many critics have too quickly condemned Hall for her commitment to the ‘patriarchal’ or ‘heterosexual’ Christian worldview. Jane Rule voices such a condemnation, saying of Hall: “She worshipped the very institutions that oppressed her, [including] the Church... The ‘bible’ she offered is really no better for women than the bible she would not reject” (61). Similarly, Margaret Breen claims that “lesbian desire remains unspeakable in the novel” due to Hall’s commitment to “biblical paradigms” (195). In fact, the history of the novel attests to its influence in ‘speaking’ lesbian desire: it brought issues of lesbianism into public and literary discourse, and was perhaps the first work to openly give lesbianism a voice. That this voice laid claim to religious language is part of its subversive power. By not rejecting the Christian system, but instead identifying strongly with it, Hall defiantly challenged those who stigmatized homosexuality as incompatible with Christian faith. It was precisely through religious paradigms that she, like Stephen, was able to speak her gospel truth and argue for change.

In *The Well of Loneliness*, Hall both illustrated and attempted to fulfill what she posits in the novel as the highest role of the homosexual or inverted artist: a messianic role. In doing so, she offered a hopeful vision of the redemptive power of art. Hall’s novel depicts Stephen’s Christ-like suffering and martyrdom not to inscribe a ‘narrative of damnation,’ but as the basis of a narrative of salvation-- a work which would perform a salvific act for homosexuals through the messianic mediation of both Stephen and Hall herself. Perhaps that effort did not succeed. But if Hall failed with *The Well of Loneliness* to redeem homosexuality within heterosexual Chris-

tian society, her attempt to do so was nevertheless both unprecedented and bold. At the very least, she managed to break the 'conspiracy of silence' and give voice to the truth as she saw it, and thus accomplished the first task of the lesbian gospel writer.

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False Eyelashes for Everyone:
Drag as a Model for a Performative Take on Composition

By Amy Danziger Ross

Preparing this article has been stressful for me. I gave myself a whole month to work on it, yet day after day I opened my file, stared at the blinking cursor, and then proceeded to do everything I could think of – from cleaning my house to painstakingly peeling the polish from my nails – to avoid composing. As the due date drew nearer, I began to panic: what was wrong with me? I've written probably hundreds of papers before – why was this one giving me more trouble than usual? Then at last I came to realize, as the hours and days passed, and still my file contained not one word, that I was (am) afraid to write about pedagogy – afraid of outing myself as an imposter.

In my ideal of academic discourse, journals are filled with experts presenting fresh, radical ideas that promise to revolutionize the theory and practice of a given field. In order to do this, authors must claim a type of authority on their subject, built upon their facility with the conventions of the discourse: familiarity with prominent theorists, personal experience with the practice of the discipline, and a confident application of the expected jargon and compositional structures.

When it comes to composition pedagogy, however, I am no expert – in fact, not only is my knowledge of the philosophical underpinnings of this field cursory, I have never even taught a classroom full of students. How, then, can I dress myself up in the borrowed rhetoric of this field and expect to pass as an authority on the subject?

In "Inventing the University", David Bartholomae explains that every time a student composes an academic paper, he must "learn to speak our language, to speak as we do, to try on the peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding, and arguing that define the discourse of our community" (3). The use of the first person plural pronoun in the above citation is telling – it seems that the audience for Bartholomae's remarks is meant to be some "we" who have moved beyond the struggles of basic composition students. "We" are the ones in possession of this rarefied discourse, we are the gatekeepers of a "community" of teachers, perhaps, or academics, or experts, or simply experienced writers.

In many ways, I am a logical choice for inclusion in Bartholomae's throng of successful discursive practitioners. I am a writer with some degree of comfort in many different idioms – narrative, analytical, professional, fictional. I have years of experience working with the kind of high brow vocabulary and complex sentence structure Bartholomae argues are necessary for proper academic discourse – the conventions of this particular specialized mode of communication. The subjects of Bartholomae's analysis – the "they" – are what he terms basic writers: "university students traditionally placed in remedial composition courses" (5). Of these students, he writes that "it is very hard for them to take on the role – the voice, the persona – of an authority whose authority is rooted in scholarship, analysis, and research" (5). Yet even I, with all my schooling and experience with various forms of composition, can still manage to be every bit as daunted by the idea of claiming authority in a field slightly outside my custom.

I propose, in fact, that none of us (if I may borrow Bartholomae's inclusive pronoun) is immune to the discomfort suffered by the so-called basic student. Any time we strike out and try to write something new – which, if we hope to advance our respective fields, we must regularly try to do – we will find ourselves in the same position as Bartholomae's students, who must "assume privilege by locating themselves within the discourse of a particular community . . . [so that] learning . . . becomes more a matter of imitation or parody than a matter of invention or discovery" (11).

This may be a scary thought, when one is sitting down to compose a paper on a subject in which one is not an expert. But for teachers of composition, it should also be a useful one – for if teachers and academics can reconceptualize the struggles of their most basic writers as mere variations on their own struggles with composition, they are more likely to be able to help their students find ways to express themselves even in rhetorically uncomfortable situations.

The key to resolving the struggles of both composition students and their teachers may be found in Bartholomae's conception of uncomfortable composition as a form of "imitation or parody." This phrasing comes tellingly close to expressing the notion of "passing," familiar to theorists of queer and other marginalized identities. Historically, passing has referred to situations where a member of a minority group strives to identify with the dominant group by performing a false, imitative identity as realistically as possible. More recently, queer theorists have re-imagined "passing" as a way of embracing a fluid conception of identity that allows people to perform different identities in different situations without any of them being completely "true" or completely "false," as in "Passing/Out: The Politics of Disclosure in Queer-Positive Pedagogy" by Kathryn Conrad and Julie Crawford.

I wish to suggest that both these meanings are relevant to composition, as they allow us to view academic compositions as more or less successful efforts of writers to pass themselves off as authorities on their subject. The second understanding recognizes that all forays into academic writing are, in some sense, performances of a role which may be taken on and rejected at will. The first, on the other hand, recognizes the problematic nature of these performances – that passing in academic writing, as in the contexts of race, culture, or sexuality, is always a risky endeavor. Just as a queer person who chooses to pass as straight in order to claim the authority of the dominant culture runs the risk of being "outed" by her failed performance – a slip of the tongue, a flick of the wrist – so too do writers like me run the risk of being "outed" as non-experts, as false authorities, by our failure to address obvious questions or our use of inappropriate vocabulary.

One possible resolution to this tension between "proper", appropriate performance of the academic role and the "false," inappropriate performance by someone who is uncomfortable in the role is the concept of drag performance. As opposed to passing, the practice of drag demands a heightened, highly-visible performance; there is nothing surreptitious about drag – instead of trying to slip undetected into an uncomfortable performance, the drag artist openly proclaims the fact that he is performing. Drag is a technique by which one acknowledges and even celebrates the disparity between the roles one is most comfortable with, and the role one is currently performing.

This is the role I have chosen to play for the purposes of this article – I have chosen to confront my readers with an open acknowledgement that I am not "one of them," yet I hope to make up for this lack by playfully embodying the disparity between my usual identities and the one I am "putting on." The drag queen does not seek to fool anyone in terms of his identity, but rather seeks to put on an entertaining performance which makes the audience question their understanding of accepted gender roles. By the same token, I hope my play-

ful performance causes my audience to question the supposed differences between "basic writers" and "skilled writers" or full-fledged academics.

Hannah Ashley takes up this idea in "The Art of Queering Voices: A Fugue," in which she explicitly describes the way problematic performances of composition may be thought of as inherently queer: "the heuristics provided by queer theory direct compositionists to examine troubling performances of academic writing, those that are unpredictable, unstable, responsive to context, heterogeneous, uncomfortable, partial, peculiar – queer" (7). She further argues that a queer reading "forces the reader of the 'drag text' to look for new methods and systems of understanding the meaning behind the form of that particular 'text'" (6). In this case, the 'text' to which she is referring is a literal drag performance, which she claims can be read in the same way as any problematic written text. Similarly, I propose that explicitly problematic compositions can themselves be read as a form of "drag," forcing readers to look for new methods and systems of understanding the text.

This technique of "dragging" texts may prove fruitful for giving composition students a rhetorical tool for bridging the gap between the discomfort they feel and the authority they are expected to claim. Beginning composition students are frequently overwhelmed by the teacher's request that they summarize and synthesize readings, produce their own original commentary and conclusion, then perform all these tricks in a challenging and unfamiliar voice. For these students, the playful mimicry of drag composition may provide a way into the conventions of an unfamiliar discourse, while also making use of more comfortable, familiar voices to respond to and challenge accepted dogma.

For example, when composing a classic composition assignment like the argumentative essay, the basic writer can demonstrate familiarity with the conventions of the form by "putting on" an academic voice in certain passages, especially in the form of citations and paraphrasing, but can also choose to respond to these academic voices by employing the more relaxed rhetorical tools of his "home" discourse. With time, the student may be encouraged to try on even more voices than these two – he may eventually employ discourses borrowed from playgrounds, courtrooms, blogs, music, journalism, or any number of other sources more or less familiar to him. Drag gives him a way to approach and appropriate all these voices without the expectation of a perfectly convincing performance.

A possible critique of this approach may be derived from Lisa Delpit in "The Politics of Teaching Literate Discourse." In this essay, Delpit argues convincingly against "specialized" pedagogies designed for poor and African-American students. According to Delpit, teachers with the best and most progressive of intentions make the mistake of denying black students access to discourses of power by encouraging them to compose exclusively in what she refers to "home language": "The sensitive teacher might well conclude that even to try to teach a dominant discourse to students who are members of a nondominant oppressed group would be to oppress them further" (493). Delpit goes on to argue that if students are to have any hope of effecting social change, they must be able to communicate using the rhetoric of the dominant discourse, "using European philosophical and critical standards to challenge the tenets of European belief systems" (498).

This is a compelling notion, but it is problematic inasmuch as it presents the "European belief systems" as something entirely and easily separable from discourse – when in fact, it is precisely the existence of unquestioned discourse that keeps such structures of power in place. Delpit acknowledges this near the end of her essay, stating that, "discourses are not static, but are shaped, however reluctantly by those who participate within them and by the form of their participation . . . Today's teachers can help economically disenfranchised students and students of color both to master the dominant discourses and to transform them" (499). This is exactly what

drag composition strives to accomplish: giving students a tool which allows them to work with unfamiliar discourses without being intimidated by them, and also to alter those discourses through camp performances that allow their "home" voices to show through.

Indeed, this is not merely an ideal for the future, nor a bastard method suitable only for use by remedial composition students. The discourse of academia is already being stretched to incorporate a multiplicity of forms and voices. Ashley's article, referenced earlier, provides an explicit and implicit challenge to the view that there is a singular, dominant mode of composition rhetoric that all writers must appropriate if they wish to participate in the power structure of mainstream culture. In many ways, "The Art of Queering Voices" conforms to our expectations of the standard forms of an academic article. It begins with a brief abstract, ends with notes and works cited, and was published by a legitimate pedagogy journal – it would be difficult to argue that this article does not constitute a mainstream academic text. However, the form of the article also represents an attempt to trouble these conventions and open up the discourse to new and different voices: it is constructed out of a "fugue" of voices expressed in citation and paraphrase. These voices are allowed to overlap, speak to each other, sometimes shed their quotation marks, and generally undermine our expectations that an academic article will present itself from a singular, authoritative point of view. Ashley explains her efforts at drag or queered composition as "performing a voice in part, or out of context, or juxtaposed alongside other voices, in order to poke fun at it, pervert it, break down the reverence for it" (13).

Other writers are also making use of drag techniques to perform compositions that challenge the notion of a dominant discourse. In "Bi, Butch, and Bar Dyke: Pedagogical Performances of Class, Gender, and Sexuality", authors Gibson, Marinara, and Meem weave the conventional rhetoric of academic discourse together with challenging personal narratives of their experiences as "Others" working within academia. Here again, this choice to perform a multiplicity of voices is made direct and explicit: "We want to move beyond the essentialist act of situating ourselves as scholars authorized to speak about specific issues . . . we present these three 'papers' as one multivoiced article because . . . we believe that maintaining the integrity of each voice helps highlight its relationship to (and against) the others" (537). By explicitly acknowledging their outsider status while still appropriating elements of a dominant discourse in playful or challenging ways, these authors demonstrate that drag composition need not be a tool only for struggling writers, but can effectively challenge writers from "dominant" groups to disrupt their own mode of rhetoric and borrow from a multiplicity of voices.

Furthermore, it is important to stress that, just as drag discourse is not only for beginning writers, neither is it the sole privilege of minority writers. In "Other People's Children," Delpit cites Martha Demientieff, a Native Alaskan teacher, describing mainstream English speakers to her Native students: "unlike us, they have a hard time hearing what people say if they don't talk exactly like them. Their way of talking and writing is called 'Formal English.' We have to feel a little sorry for them because they have only one way to talk" (41). While this may be a useful way to explain the importance of "formal" English to disenfranchised students, I find problematic its suggestion that for some people, "formal" English is their only voice. No one is born into the discourse of formal, standard, or academic English – though cultural background certainly matters, every writer of every background has at some point had to appropriate and be appropriated by dominant discourses.

With this article, I invite all writers to acknowledge – as I did in my introduction – the ways in we are all still beginners, still dressing up in various voices designed to present ourselves as authorities. By the same token, we all have had the experience of feeling "othered" and excluded by given discourses. All writers do and must continue to force themselves into uncomfortable compositions – and therefore the drag technique, though

it borrows from queer theory, is not about dividing dominant from minority, or privileged from oppressed. It is about recognizing the way our identities as writers constantly shift between positions of power and positions of powerlessness. As we participate in these academic discourses, we all may claim authority, but no one should ever feel perfectly comfortable with that singular, "passing" authority. At the same time, no one should be confined to the discourse they were raised in or in which they feel most comfortable. The future relevance of academic discourse depends on our willingness to perform composition in problematic, playful, and challenging ways that incorporate multiplicity of voices in our culture, and within us all.

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Communities of Shame: A Phenomenology of Queer Orientation Before Pride

By Noel Glover

Shame is an isolating experience. The shamed subject is “seen” as socially inimical and becomes the abject object of the social arena. Shame is debilitating because it interrupts communication and alienates its subject. One does not will the cessation of shame, one awaits an invitation for social rehabilitation, to be reunited with one’s “proper” and ideal self by shame conferring institutions, the public receivers and condemners of the shamed, or by counter-public collectives of similarly shamed subjects, looking to convert their shame into pride. In either case, it would be outlandish to advocate for the possibility of communities of shame, collectives of shamed individuals who are not gathering together in order to renounce their shame and replace it with pride, but rather are gathering together in order to collect in clusters of shame and not only identify as shamed subjects, but more importantly, to become orientated by that very shame. Counter-intuitive as this claim may be, it is exactly what this paper will forward. This is already a contested claim, as recently articulated in the publication, *Gay Shame*, and specifically by Heather Love, in stating, “[w]hile the capacity of shame to isolate is well documented, its ability to bring together shamed individuals into meaningful communities is more tenuous,” (Qtd. in Halperin and Traub, 15). I intend to show that communities of shame are not only possible, but always already implicated in any individual experience of shame. The queer subject, living in a state of disorientation, can become orientated by entering into the subject-object dialogue of shame, and while my broader project is to advance this subject beyond instances and communities of shame, it is my hope to show that these communities are, in fact, possible, and that they are a productive means for properly acknowledging the very space into which the queer body extends. Furthermore, communities of shame ameliorate the characterization of the vagaries of bodily dwelling in general. Shame is inter-subjective not only by requiring the shaming and objectifying gaze of the other, but also by referring necessarily to a social framework of collective valuation to which the shamed subject is affiliated in and through the shaming process. Echoing Maurice Halbwachs’ thesis in his paramount work, *On Collective Memories*, where he boldly asserted that no one ever remembers alone, I will begin my project with an equally bold assertion: no one is ever shamed alone (Halbwachs, 1992).

At this year’s (2010) conference for the Society for Phenomenological and Existential Philosophy, Dan Zahavi presented a paper entitled, “The Shamed Self.” In his presentation, Zahavi remarked that shame is part of an evaluative procedure, it is a reflected evaluation that results in a negative stance (Zahavi, 2010). He went on to develop the idea that shame adds complexity to the notion of the self, that beyond the conscious apprehension of heightened self-awareness, shame allows for the augmentation of the notion of the self. A socially and culturally rich self emerges from the inter-personal texture of shame. Zahavi alludes here to a narrative feature in shame, the performativity of shame. While shame is exchanged between subject and object, this exchange is simultaneously part of a greater social narrative that the subject performs, and in so performing, cultivates the very notion of self. The very possibility for shame, first, requires reflexivity in awareness, and an inter-personal extension of that reflexivity. My self-awareness takes the other into account. I become aware of myself because I am a self among others. And while shame jeopardizes my ability to make connections or communicate with others, it also instigates a dialogue of self that necessarily records the self’s inter-subjective position in the

world. This positioning of the shamed subject plays a key role in how s/he may enter into affirming dialogues of shame with shamed others without requiring any kind of move away from shame, towards pride.

In *The Psychology of Shame*, Gershen Kaufman writes, “[n]o other affect is more central to identity formation. Our sense of self, both particular and universal, is deeply embedded in our struggles with the alienating affect” (Kaufman, 16). It is not simply the case that I apprehend myself as having, at a specific point in time, the negative quality of being ashamed, it is more fittingly the case that I apprehend and intend towards the very object of my shame. My self-awareness becomes modified by shame so that my perception is not just directed towards myself as feeling shame, but my intentionality itself leans over against that shame. The emerging personality, dominated by shame, does not simply acquire a dimension of shame, it is shaped by and co-extensive with that shame; it identifies in and through this experience with shame. Shame, then, is not just an interruption in the social flow of experience, it significantly alters how the shamed subject takes up space within the social arena and, in a sense, opens up a new and counter-public social sphere into which one may enter by self-identifying as a shamed subject.

Before discussing further how feeling shame directs the shamed subject not just inward in isolation, but also outward towards these counter-public spheres, we should first consider the very nature of embodiment, what it means to dwell in a body, and what subjective bodily dwelling signifies inter-subjectively with respect to shame. Judith Butler makes the vital and primordial claim in her book, *Undoing Gender*, that we are given over to the Other prior to individuation by virtue of our embodiment (22). This is to say that by existing as a bodily subject, I necessarily co-exist. The space taken up by my body is one against which other bodies are inherently present and leaning, and even before I am able to distinguish my existence, to place my phenomenological and individual status, I must first reckon with the insistent presence of my body given over against the presence of other bodies. This process, of being given over to others, means that the body is never simply an isolated space in which one reflects on and thereby constitutes individuation, the body is a meeting point at which one “find[s] oneself in a trajectory of desire in which one is taken out of oneself, and re-situated irreversibly in a field of others in which one is not the presumptive center” (Butler 25). It is, in fact, the presumptive center of this field of others, a social narrative made up of a trajectory of desires, which is responsible for conferring the status of the shamed subject. Embodiment implies a position according to this center, but the center itself acquires its place only in relation to the bodies of which it is the center. We should clarify, here, that a field of others can form any kind of collective entity. For example, the institution of family can be considered a field of others in which one may be positioned deviantly in relation to a trajectory of desires unique to that specific familial institution. Butler’s claim is of a more general and universal kind but I would advance that it can be translated so as to describe embodiment within any kind of social collective, each with varying regulating trajectories of desires and differently positioned normative centers, but essentially referring to the same phenomenon in which individuation is a feature of one’s place within a region of others. When one is shamed, then, it is because of how one extends in this field of bodies, this space of bodily dwelling. Whether through actions unrecognized or dismissed in the bodily field, or by simply taking a shape, or performing a shape that is unrecognized or dismissed in the field, to deviate within this field is to be, through a process of institutionalized assimilation, shamed or discarded in some sense and removed from any reinforcing participation within this region of others. Feeling shame is feeling diminished within this field under the regulating gaze of a presumptive center that is not made up of conscious others, but instead positioned according to the spaces between those conscious others, a center that represents an inter-personal narrative by amalgamating the trajectory of their desires. To be shamed is to stand at a given and deviant angle against this center, and all bodies that stand “deviantly”, against one center, stand in a kind of unity, aligned in the constitution of a new center. What I am forwarding is that

communities of shame are made up of those bodies that stand at equally deviant angles in relation to the presumptive center of a given institutionalized field of others. To be more specific, the queer subject inhabits a region in the field of others that stands “deviantly” in relation to the center. While the trajectory of desires of normative subjects creates standardizing relational lines between a social narrative at the center of the field and the bodies that inhabit that field, queer subjects are shamed, within this field, by failing to reinforce both the trajectory of desires and the normative narrative those desires come to describe. To be shamed in this sense is to have a disrupting, discordant position and a current of desires that flows against the trajectory of desires that represents the “normal” activity generated within a given field of others. Obviously, it is not just the queer body that upsets the normative flow of desires within this field, there are many ways of being shamed. For example, one can feel ashamed of the way one has treated a sibling, and the gaze of the familial field of others confers this shame because of how one’s actions disrupt the normative flow of desires within the familial collective. Or equally, a person of color can experience this same disrupting and isolating shame within a field of others composed entirely of white bodies and consequently including a presumptive center made up of a trajectory of desires that either does not recognize, or entirely dismisses the person of color’s position within the field. In any case where one is feeling ashamed, it is because of a bodily dwelling that has disrupted the flow of desires within the field of others in which one is positioned during the moment of shame.

While the shame one experiences at odds with the presumptive center of one’s field of embodiment can be debilitating and disorientating, I want to examine how the defiant angles at which one can stand in shame can become regions of orientation, emitting new trajectories of desire; how, while intrinsically remaining spaces of shame, these areas can still amount to meaningful communities without requiring a transformation into pride. This is not to say that pride should be avoided because it is assimilating and normative in nature. Pride remains the ultimate goal, all forms of identity should in some way invoke a sense of pride, but pride has a way of forgetting, of submitting all shame to oblivion, of getting rid of any traces of the diminished, undermined or objectified self, and of leaving behind the very circumstances from which it came forth. There is no pride without shame. In a world of equals there is nothing to be prideful of. This is not a world of equals, and pride is not the origin of redemption, shame is. We must be able to inhabit communities and inter-subjective moments of shame so as to do justice to how one lives inter-subjectively, to how one inhabits the world inter-corporeally, and how one enriches the very notion of the self.

In her book entitled, *Queer Phenomenology* (2006), Sara Ahmed discusses what it means for sexuality to be lived as orientated. Ahmed holds, “[b]odies take shape through a tending towards something reachable, within the bodily horizon” (2). The body takes shape in and through a tending towards what is reachable, and what is reachable is what falls within the limits of the bodily horizon. Echoing Butler’s description of embodiment, Ahmed’s bodily horizon is the field of others, and the something reachable refers to what is reachable within a trajectory of desires. Like Butler, Ahmed is pointing out how the very shape of the self depends on where it is positioned, whom it is positioned against, and most importantly, how that position reinforces the phenomenological limits under which the body comes to be lived “in” in the first place. For Ahmed, “[q]ueer phenomenology might direct our attention to objects that are ‘less proximate’ or even that deviate or are ‘deviant’” (3). This is to say that queer phenomenology looks to re-animate the very inter-corporeal dynamic into which the queer body is posited when positioned in a field of others. In other words, Ahmed is looking to relocate the presumptive center of the field of others, to alter the very stance against which we are given in and through our embodiment. Ahmed’s project begins from primordial disorientation; it is in the absence of orientation that awareness begins, just as it is prior to individuation that the self is given over to the other. Disorientation is how Ahmed characterizes the state of being of the queer subject. The way in which we become orientated

is reducible to the way in which we take the shape of the direction to which we are given over through our embodiment. The direction our body takes depends on how well our body fits within the trajectory of desires into which it is positioned. Ahmed explicates how, in taking up space, the body acquires a direction in that space, in its inhabitation of it. Both the space, and the body extended in that space acquire a direction in and through embodiment. This spatial claim can be expanded by adding that the direction taken up by the body as it extends in space is a feature of the inter-personal texture that is always already assumed in the very act of embodiment. The “direction” described by Ahmed is synchronic with the above-mentioned “deviant angles” in that they are both features of the position of the bodily dwelling self within the greater field of others, a position that delineates the limits of the bodily horizon leaving the self tending towards something, anything reachable. Disorientation is not only that state out of which the queer subject becomes bodily, it is also the consequence of “when the extension of the body in the field of others fails” and subsequently, “[w]hen bodies, or even their experiences, do not extend into space, they might feel ‘out of place’ where they have been given ‘a place’” (Ahmed 11-12). To feel “out of place” where one has been given “a place” is exactly this sense of shame exemplified above. In failing to appropriately extend within a field of others, the queer subject is isolated and disorientated. To be shamed in this way by the gaze of the presumptive center of a given field of others (any social institution or collective entity) is to be initiated within a normative process that would dismiss and remove any and all deviation simply by virtue of inter-subjective bodily dwelling. Ahmed insists that “[i]f we think in and through moments of orientation, we might be able to gather moments of disorientation as bodies around a different table” (Ahmed, 24). I am forwarding that the moment of shame is a moment of disorientation, a place into which one is conscripted and yet a place in which one feels necessarily “out of place”. To gather in moments of disorientation is also to gather around a new presumptive center and to be gathered amidst a new trajectory of desires. This is to alter the very regional shape of the field of others and to expand the bodily horizon. Where there was first only one presumptive center, and one conferring narrative gaze, there are now multiple ones. The reason this gathering is not simply a move out of shame and into pride is because this move does not annihilate the initial trajectory of desires or the original center. While establishing new angles and directions of embodiment is inevitably to inaugurate a certain kind of bodily pride, these new angles are never without their primordial position in relation to the original presumptive center and its normative gaze. A community of shame, then, refers to the dimension within these novel and counter-public spaces that still stands meaningfully against the phenomenological position out of which the queer body emerged, deviant, shamed, and rebellious. A community of shame is this commingling of deviant and disoriented subjects that not only call for the unifying of new fields of others, but call out, as well, against those shaming narratives they were given into, and not just from a newly acquired position of pride, but also from the very shame those narratives were meant to erase.

As mentioned above, shame is experienced for many different reasons. Moreover, a potentially infinite variety of instances of shame are available to the inter-subjective self. What I am arguing is that shame functions culturally and socially in not only demarcating a negative conception of social and cultural groups, but also in situating the individuals of those groups in relation to each other. Sally Munt addresses this sentiment in her book, *Queer Attachments; The Cultural Politics of Shame*. She contends that, “...shame, working at different levels, performs culturally to mark out certain groups” (Munt 2). Groups are brought out of otherwise ambiguous social arenas by being visually shamed. Once a group is shamed, the performance of this shame allows other social actors to distinguish between what is a “shameful” group, and what is a “normal” or “proper” group, and in effect, can realize in which group they partake, and with which group they identify. There is a sense in which each individual experience of shame directly refers to or includes the totality of what characteristic, specifically, is being shamed. Whether it is one’s ideology, one’s sexual orientation or simply some fact about one’s appearance, to be shamed individually is to be shamed for what you represent of the group, or col-

lective, that you stand in accordance with. While shame seems, intuitively, to be essentially intra-psychic in that even when groups are shamed, they, “contain individuals who internalize the stigma of shame into the tapestry of their lives, each reproduces discrete, shamed subjectivities, all with their own specific pathologies.” Even our discrete, shamed subjectivities are the result of a broader and unavoidable hegemonic regime of shame deliverance that forges the very framework of our pathological tendencies, be they intra-psychic or inter-psychic (Munt 3). The subject is referred to its position in the field of others by the praxis of shame. Self-awareness, or self-attention is an inherent feature of the gaze induced by another in the act of shaming. Thus, while experiencing shame, the shamed subject is directly grounded in an awareness of being given over to another, being a body in a field of others, the shamed subject is also made (self-) aware of the position that shame allocates for the self against the shaming bodies of the field of others. Therefore, the disorientating effects of the initial experience of shame can be counter-acted by the self-attention that is granted in this moment. This self-attention, though in a sense objectifying and even sometimes debilitating, positions the shamed subject at a specifically “shameful” distance to the presumptive center of the field of bodies, a distance that necessarily aligns that subject with similarly positioned bodies. Because the nature of this field of bodies is such that in order to be shamed, one must first be recognized, and to be recognized within the field of others as “deviant” one must represent a position that is necessarily collective, otherwise the trajectory of desires within the field does not notice the deviation. This has been the case, historically, with the lesbian subject. Well after homosexuality between men was taken up in juridical and medical discourses, it remained an invisible exchange of desires between women. It was only when the proliferation of these “perverse” positions disrupted the trajectory of desires, or narrative flow of a given field of bodies, only when the number and insistence of lesbian women could not, and would not be ignored, did the lesbian become officially and discursively acknowledged, and thus shamed.

So, communities of shame are possible because shamed subjects exemplify fundamentally communal “deviant” positions against a single narrative center. To interrupt the narrative flow of this presumptive center, is to begin the construction of a new center, but most importantly, even before a new center is contrived according to the new and “perverse” positions of bodies, these bodies still stand together, or at the very least, stand alike, not in a state of pride, but still as identifiably shamed bodies whose shame marks the very actualizing attitude of pride. Shame is radically social. As Munt enforces, “[s]hame is a force that acts upon the self, constituting social subjects who are marked and shaped by its interpellating propensities of recognition, misrecognition and refusal of recognition” (203). The shamed subject is shaped by its shame, and fortunately, because the shaming normative narrative is so utterly unimaginative that it only qualifies its subjects in binary oppositions, all shamed subjects are shaped by shame in very similar ways and can thus be shaped into communities of shame.

As we have seen, shame, in arranging the subject in a field of others, not only forces the self to admit to being given over to the gaze of the other merely by virtue of embodiment, but it also encourages the self to become aware of its position against the gaze of the other. In this case, the station of the shamed subject is intrinsically social and implies, at least ontologically, some kind of community. Although we have now seen that the shamed subject is situated, in and through its shame, in a kind of communal space, we have yet to see any indication as to how the shamed subject would enact such a community of shame. As David Caron states in his contribution to *Gay Shame*, “[a]n identity thus defined by its own negation through an identification mediated by disconnectedness and difference cannot produce communities simply on the basis of a shared positive trait” (Halperin and Traub 15). It is one thing to stand communally in and through a shared experience of shame, it is quite another to execute a meaningful and productive community when shame is the only unifying trait. Within our existing formulation of communities of shame, however, the queer subject, for instance, does not simply

share the positive trait delineated by a “deviant” identity; what is shared is a projected and interpellating narrative that does not only arrest the flow of the standardizing narrative at the presumptive center of a field of others, it also wrestles from that center the limits of performativity therein. The identity and orientation that a subject may embody through shame does not merely re-locate the position of that body within the field, it extends the field and, as indicated above, re-configures the bodily horizon. Significantly, it is not just in gesturing towards establishing pride that the field is extended, it is in the very presence of shamed alliances that the horizon of bodily dwelling is expanded. Even in the performance of pride, the residuum of shame still organizes spaces of inter-corporeal communication. Thus, it is by enacting the performativity of shame, by, in the case of the queer body, performing, specifically, queer shame, that queer subjects move, not yet beyond shame, but with shame. It is this movement, before the progression into a performance and articulation of pride, that communities of shame effect real phenomenological change. As Eve Sedgwick asserts,

Shame is itself a form of communication...performance interlines shame as more than just its result or a way of warding it off, though importantly it is those things. Shame is the affect that mantles the threshold between introversion and extroversion, between absorption and theatricality, between performativity and –performativity. (Qtd. in Halperin and Traub 38)

The performativity of shame is its communicability. Shame is the threshold between abject disorientation, and prideful orientation and it is its ability to be communicated by the shamed subject within real communities of shame that allows it to carve new semantic and phenomenological aspects into the otherwise regularizing narrative that is centered within the field of bodily subjects. The performativity of shame, its ability to be communicated, what was described above as a feature that even when transformed into pride, allows the once shamed subject to stand simultaneously, in pride and in that shameful “deviant” position, to be at once both prideful and yet still always already shamed.

In their study entitled, *The Experience of Guild and Shame: A Phenomenological/ Psychological Study*, Gunnar Karlsson and Lennart Sjöberg conclude that:

The gaze of the other is experienced as disclosing (revealing) something very negative. The other’s negative perceptual constitution is one side of a double perceptual experience. The other side is one’s own perception of the other, including the factual or imaginative negative appearance of the other one. (347)

To describe how the shamed subject is objectified passively and “seen” as diminished within the gaze of the other is only one side of perceptual experience. Shame’s performativity lies on the other side of this perceptual experience, where the subject perceives the other as conferring shame. It is out of this second aspect of shame, the reflected gaze of the other within the shamed subject’s perception of its own shame that the subject comes to communicate its shame inter-subjectively. So, it is not simply that shamed individuals enter into a community by being aligned in assigned shamed, sharing only one positive trait, rather, they enter into a community of shame by enacting this double perceptual feature of shame in which they share in how they negatively perceive the institutional gaze of the other that has shamed them. What is shared, then, is a returned gaze, out of shame, that is not possible in pride, and that re-constitutes the gaze of the other in light of the experience of shame. This is how, standing in equally “deviant” positions against the normative narrative of the trajectory of desires into which they are placed by virtue of their embodiment, shamed subjects compose a meaningful collective of shame by communicating, not the need for prideful social arenas of identification, but a returned gaze, inherent to the shamed subject, of the shaming other, that compels the metamorphosis of the bodily horizon and the depositing of new bodily positions within the field of others.

As to the possibility for meaningful communities of shame, then, while they do require a certain degree of conceptual modification, it would be a mistake to assume they are not possible. The shamed subject is always already a member of a community of shame in light of being positioned by shame both through the negative perceptual constituting gaze of the other, and by its own returned and equally constituting gaze that is administered in and through the total experience of shame. The community of shame is implicated in this act of returned negative constitution and in communicating the performativity of this gaze, shamed subjects can join together, a commingling of bodies whose positions within the greater social narrative cause the re-animation of the bodily horizon and consequently, a reconsideration of what the body can intend within the field of others, and prior to involving the assimilating/assimilated pressures of pride, can invoke a phenomenological rupture in the normative tapestry of a given social arena.

Shame is, indeed, isolating, and motivates introspection in that the shamed subject is made self-aware and positioned individually in a field of conferring others, leaning against a trajectory of desires expected to standardize the actions and identification of that very subject. But shame is communal, too, and a means for affiliated orientation. The shamed subject's position is only possible if it is posited within a field of bodily others, and it is only recognized as shameful if it is one shameful position among many. Even when exclaiming from a position of pride, the once shamed subject acts from what is first and fundamentally a position of shame. While pride is the ultimate goal, and undoubtedly the objective for any shamed subjects collecting in affiliation, to be "[a]n identity...defined by its own negation through an identification mediated by disconnectedness and difference," is to have a fractured identity (Halperin and Traub 15). The shamed self is divided and is re-orientated by assuming an identity in partiality. Just as the cyborg in Donna Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto*, the task, for the shamed subject, remains a voice in "opposition of itself" that reflects an apprehended consciousness, splayed in a field of inter-subjectivity, of affiliated difference. This is not identity, but affiliation (Haraway, 1991). This is why the shamed subject necessitates the shamed community. To be shamed is to disrupt complete representation by the normative institutions that would represent you. The shamed subject, just as the cyborg, is a matter of partiality, of incompleteness and, by affiliating in meaningful collectives of shared disorientation and orientation, of transcendence. To be shamed is to join the community of the shamed, and from this community, from the very shameful positions into which the "deviant" bodies were banished, a new field of bodies emerges, one without limited intentionality, limited bodily dwelling and limited identification, one that includes the very bodies of the shamed.

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“Ideas Are Executions”: The Sculptures of Fred Sandback and a Space for Gender Possibility

By R. E. H. Gordon

Last January I cried at the Catherine Opie retrospective at the Guggenheim Museum in New York. I was surprised that I did, because before attending the exhibition I had written off Opie’s photographic series from the ’90s, “Being and Having” and “Portraits” as heavy-handed, predictable, and out-dated—I thought I already knew what kind of social and political work the images did, and had done, and had by now ceased to do. Or, worse yet, I imagined that the images might function as a kind of freak tourism—the museum serving as a safe place from which the typical viewer could gaze, circus like, at the bizarre and laughable people in the images, those who purposely forsake their place in the comprehensive human family made up of the identifiably male and female. I had gone to the museum to see the larger exhibition up at that time showcasing the work of a group of European relational aestheticians, stumbling, by happenstance, into the Opie show and deciding, despite my previous conclusions, to take a look around. After viewing the exhibition itself I parked myself near one of the portraits, looking out into the gallery at the museum visitors as they looked at the images. It was the winter holiday season, and the museum was crowded with people, including many moms and dads with small children, heterosexual couples holding hands, national and international tourists. I looked at their faces as they looked at Opie’s photographs of the ambiguously gendered people—individuals who confound one’s inclination to determine their gender of origin or their gender of desired destination; people who claim their ability to interpret the facticity of a body in ways that so far exceed what this culture had raised me to consider possible. I may have been imagining it, engaging in a wishful projection, but in the faces of these museum visitors I thought I saw something changing: an assumption suddenly questioned, a seldom considered possibility unearthed, overturned, inspected from new angles. I thought I saw this and I was moved in gratefulness that maybe the way our culture understands gender could change, and that art could have something to do with it.

Relevant, How?

This experience initiated a line of questioning about the relationships between queer genders and artistic productions, leading me to interrogate the terms with which we tend to understand art as relating to or not relating to gender. The power in Opie’s work originates in the ways that it specifically and directly addresses gender variant people and cultures, from the point of view of a self-identified queer artist. And, while Opie’s work is an extreme example, the majority of the artwork that is considered relevant to discussions of queer genders and sexualities is work that announces this affiliation in a clearly apparent way through figuration, portraiture, biography of the author, or material or cultural references that make it possible for the viewer to clearly identify the relationship between the work and queer genders, sexualities, or cultures.[1] While I do not want to underestimate the power of these works and interpretations of them (indeed, my museum tears stand as testament to their power), I cannot help but wonder about the ways these strategies of explicit reference create a situation that limits itself in terms of scope and effectiveness. If queer art can be so easily identified as such through its own self-proclamation, does this imply that the rest of the artworks in the world have no relevance to explorations of gender re-imagining? Or, posed in another way, must reconsiderations of gender pertain in any clear way to gender itself? Can artwork create a space to reimagine gender without the use of figuration or cultural reference?[2]

I believe that the answer to this question is and must be firmly negative, as a rethinking of gender involves a reconsideration of terms and categories that may appear only distantly related to actual queer people, bodies, politics, and cultures. As I will argue, queer gender involves a reevaluation of the limits and possibilities of the body itself in relation to space, objects, and people. Our ability to embody and respect a wide array of gender identities is directly related to our capacity to be rampantly creative with the significance of the material facticity of bodies themselves. It is my view that through a reevaluation of the ways materiality itself takes on, possesses, and can change meaning, a space can be created for a more open scheme of interpretation pertaining to the gendered body. I turn to the work of minimalist sculptor Fred Sandback as a means of experimenting with this possibility, engaging in a reading of artworks that have no apparent relationship to gender, but that I read to be capable of, nonetheless, upsetting the fundamental categorical relations that keep the dominant understandings of gender in place. I explore Sandback's works, as well as his own and other scholars' interpretations of his works in relation to queer theoretical accounts of gender variance in an effort to propose a way of reading Sandback's work specifically, and possibly minimalist sculpture more generally, as capable of offering an alternative account of the relationship between the experience of an art object and expanded possibilities for gender.

The Body-In-General

The majority of Sandback's sculptures consist of lengths of acrylic yarn in different colors stretched taut in the gallery space from floor to ceiling or wall to wall in order to create various lines, shapes, and planes. Untitled (from *Ten Vertical Constructions*), for example, a work from 1977 that has been recreated at a variety of exhibitions since, consists of two red strings stretched in the same formation side by side, each string creating the shape of a box without a top, a large angular U shape, originating at the ceiling and stretched straight down to the floor, then across the floor several feet, and then back up to the ceiling where it is fastened and cut. This creates a body-scaled environment in which the viewer moves around the works that appear to be both exactly what they are—taut string—as well as creating the sensation of a transparent wall or plane floating in space. Fred Sandback's sculptures are generally understood as falling within the tradition of minimalist sculpture, bearing strong affinities with the works of Judd and Morris both formally and in terms of their emphasis on the material facticity of the work and the embodied and temporal experience of the viewer as she moves around the sculptures.[3] Sandback's sculptures, according to art historian Yve-Alain Bois, stem from and relate to minimalism, while simultaneously performing a critique of it through an ever further advancement of that movement's own aim to "involve phenomenal space and to unravel it in real time for a moving viewer" (Bois 27-38)[4] Though definitively un-figurative, minimalist sculpture is largely understood to engage with the body of the viewer via an activation of this viewer's experience of embodied perception.[5]

However, the body that is engaged through the minimalist sculptural experience is not in any apparent way a gendered body, or a body defined by the operations of politics, discipline, or power, and is, instead, a sort of "body-in-general." Art historian and theorist Hal Foster summarizes this critique of minimalism's interest in embodied perception by saying that "minimalism considers perception in phenomenological terms, as somehow before or outside history, language, sexuality, and power," and thus fails to regard the viewing subject as "a sexed body positioned in a symbolic order any more than it regards the gallery or the museum as an ideological apparatus"(Foster 43).[6] Insofar as minimalism and its interest in the phenomenology of embodied perception historically proceeded the rise of feminism and queer politics in visual art, it remains largely read to be unrelated to questions of gender, politics, and power.[7] And, if we understand Sandback's work within the tradition of minimalist sculpture, as I believe it makes sense to do, an interpretation of his works through the lens of gender theory certainly does not follow. To extend Foster's analysis of minimalism to Fred Sandback would be to

say that neither component of the experience of this work, namely the body of the viewer or the space of the museum or gallery, is being posed by the work as politically implicated, historically formulated, or socially constructed.

Aesthetic Experience for the Institutional Critic

However, if it is the case, as Foster argues, that minimalist sculpture, and Sandback's work by extension, does not address the museum or gallery as an "ideological apparatus," why would artist and writer Andrea Fraser be so moved by her experience of Sandback's sculpture as to write her essay, "Why Does Fred Sandback Make Me Cry?" Andrea Fraser's entire career is been defined by her commitment to the critique of institutions through projects that make visible the ideological, political, and social frames that structure the way institutions create meaning. Within her critical framework, there is very little or no room for what she calls "aesthetic experience," if this type of experience can be understood in any way as not entirely structured and thus tainted by what she regards as the highly problematic ideological frames that make museums what they are. Given this, Fraser seeks to determine the cause of her love of Fred Sandback's string sculptures: "What kind of aesthetic experience can be admitted by a hardcore, uncompromising, materialist, sociologically informed 'institutional critique' like myself?" (Fraser 37).[8]

For Fraser, who is greatly influenced by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, art is impossible, and Fred Sandback's work is an art of impossibility. She understands art as impossible because for her it exists in terms of a fundamental contradiction: art is art only insofar as it exists within the field of art, a field that is defined, for her, by a host of violent exclusions, specializations, and commodifications, that make the institution of art one in which access to highly specialized and elite cultural education makes one able to better experience beauty in art objects. This process of exclusion results in a situation in which art cannot exist within the field of art, because the field is antithetical to her hopes for what art should be and do, namely, to provide a widely accessible, inclusive, and participatory space accessible to regular people. So, art cannot exist, according to Fraser, within the institution of art, but it also cannot exist outside the institution of art, because in order to be art at all, it must be understood in the terms set by the field defined as art. Thus, for Fraser, art is impossible, and "if art is impossible, then artists are also impossible, and I myself am impossible" (Fraser 47). And thus she mourns, melancholically, the endlessly unfulfilled dream of an art that exists within the institution of art—art that is understood as such—but that retains the original potential for art as accessible and enriching for a wide array of interested people, rather than a tool of domination of some groups within a culture over others. She mourns the absence of this art, "that can't exist within the field of art, the only place that art can exist" (Fraser 40).

However, Fraser understands Sandback's string sculptures as art that can exist within this impossible contradiction. Sandback's sculptures are able to activate the space of the institution for Fraser in such a way as to create a moment in which the impossibility of art and artists is momentarily undone, in which the contradiction that defines the relationship between art and art institutions is temporarily resolved. This possibility stems, in part, from the extreme "reticence" of the work; it is art that hardly exists, sliding in and out of visibility as one moves around it, causing the space to come alive by means of the creation of empty virtual planes.

By removing himself to the extent that he does, he makes a place for me. Not a place in front of his work, or next to his work, or inside his work... It makes a place for me inside the institution that the work is inside. It is a place that exists between fact and illusion, between reality and fantasy (Fraser 45).

Sandback's work creates a space in which the impossible is momentarily possible—art, and Fraser herself—the artist, can exist within the institution in a way that does not neglect to consider the institution itself but that also renders it momentarily viable and inhabitable. For Fraser, Sandback manages to bring the dream of a participatory and accessible culture of art—what he referred to as “pedestrian space”—into the museum in a way that protects this dream from annihilation by the institution itself, while simultaneously providing a means to focus on and critique the usually invisible, and oppressive, frames that define this institution. This is what I think she means when she says that his work creates a place between, “fact and illusion, between reality and fantasy”: the immaterial frames that define and govern the institution and that make it typically uninhabitable are rendered visible and momentarily inhabitable through a highly material gesture—the intuitive stretching of string between the architectural elements of the space.

The space of Sandback's work is a space of affective possibility created by work that doesn't ask me to feel, and so, I think, allows me to feel, and to be alone, in the presence of this art that's so quiet and still, and makes so little in the way of demands. (Fraser 45)

What is this space of affective possibility? It is a space that allows her to have an aesthetic experience that is based in the formal qualities of the work, an experience which she had deemed impossible because of her criticisms of the institution. The work allows her to have this experience of the materiality of the work and the space in a way that allows the formal beauty of this materiality to coexist, non-contradictorily, with the immateriality of its problematic governing frames. This impossible commingling of the material fact of the work with the immaterial illusion of her criticisms and reparative dreams for the institution is what, I believe, Fraser is referring to when she describes Sandback's work as “an art of objects without shadows” (Fraser 45). It allows her to exist within the impossible contradiction that is art, art institutions, and her life as an artist. The frame becomes visible in a way that points in the direction of being able to exist within this space in a new way.

Impossible Gender

But how could Fraser's interpretation of Sandback's work as creating an impossible yet habitable space, without forgoing institutional critique, pertain in any way to gender? Fraser's analysis makes it possible to understand Sandback's work as transforming the museum into a temporarily habitable contradiction—a spatial experience of beauty within an institution that she had long considered to stifle that possibility. Fraser focused on this reinterpretation of the space of the museum, a space that holds her body according to a largely invisible and oppressive framework. What if we were to extend her analysis, but shift our focus from the space of the museum to the body of the viewer? Could we interpret Sandback's work to offer the same space of possibility to the gendered body? If Sandback's work can be said to provide a way to exist within the oppressive framework of the art institution, could his work also provide a means of existing within the oppressive framework that is binary, naturalistic gender?

In the highly influential introduction to *Bodies That Matter*, Judith Butler describes the situation of the gendered subject to be a similar type of impossibility as that described by Fraser regarding art institutions. On the one hand, the existence of the subject is inextricably bound up with the process of being assigned a sex and assuming a gender. The norms that govern sex, for Butler, are the means by which “‘one’ becomes viable at all, that which qualifies a body for life within the domain of cultural intelligibility” (Butler 2).[9] There is no “I” that either proceeds or follows this process of assuming a gender, but rather the “I” comes to exist within this “matrix” of gender relations itself. In other words, gender is the condition of possibility for the subject, such that there is no conceiving of the human outside of gender. However, on the other hand, the parameters of this

process of assuming a sex and a gender are so severely limited that it is incapable of providing a livable mode of subjectivity to many people. The norms that govern this process dictate that all people belong to either the male or female sex and that their gender identity will follow from their sex as appropriately within the acceptable range of masculine and feminine gender identities.[10] This narrow set of possibilities creates what Butler describes as the “densely populated” yet “unlivable” zones of impossible subjectivity—those subjects who do not or cannot fully attain the status of the properly gendered subject, whose existence in this state of abjection is the necessary outside to the inside of viably gendered subjectivity. Thus, the human is defined as human by virtue of participating in gender, while this gendering exists by virtue of the creation of impossibly gendered subjects, those “humanly unthinkable” subjects who cannot claim full access to the status of the human. This contradictory logic in which the human is defined according to a set of norms that are not accessible to all, is, to extend Fraser’s language, an impossible situation that creates what might be described as impossible subjects—those gender variant individuals who are denied full access to the category of the human and the access to a livable life inherent in this identification.

Additionally, to further complicate the situation, it is not only that there are more and less livable zones of gendered subjectivity—individuals who can and individuals who cannot properly embody the norms of sex and gender. This is true in some very obvious ways, as Butler’s subsequent work in *Undoing Gender* goes on to explore in great detail. But, even for those who are apparently able to properly “comply” with these norms, this excluded zone of improper gender is not only in the strict sense “out there” in other people with unintelligible genders. Rather, this repudiation of the abjectly gendered is internalized as the means by which the viable subject shores up his or her own viability—an “outside” which is inside the subject. In this sense, not only is the situation of governing norms pertaining to sex impossible for those who cannot properly embody them, but it is, to some extent, an impossible situation for everyone. Even for gender normative individuals, the process of assuming a gender is one of endlessly repeated rejection of other possibilities which they may hold within themselves. In order to be gendered, we must bring the institution of gender inside ourselves as means of organizing, accepting, and casting out various components of who we might become. This internalization of this repudiation echoes Fraser’s description of the internalization of the institution of art:

We carry, each of us, our institutions inside ourselves. There’s a museum in here, inside of me, with the Corinthian columns, the grand staircase, and the mezzanine. There’s a system of organization: the way I see things. There are objects and images, and there are texts, and there are voices explaining. There’s an archive that also contains my memories. And there’s a basement where I keep things that I don’t want to show. (Fraser 40)

It is similar with sex and gender: the norms that govern the institution are inside us, our very condition of possibility, determining how we know what body parts mean, what they should and should not do, how gendered beings are to behave, how we are to experience our own or other people’s bodies, and, most importantly, what thoughts and possibilities should be stored so deep in the basement that we forget they were ever there.

Material Ideas

Thus, arguably to varying degrees for all people, the norms that govern sex are such that we cannot live within them, but we also cannot live without them—an impossible situation that Butler’s theory aims to analyze and propose strategies to counter. One of the primary components of this theorization of resistance is a rethinking of the materiality of the sexed body. Butler positions her theorizing of this materiality as a response to various interpretations of the idea of the social construction of gender, which tend, in a number of differing ways, to maintain an oppositional relationship between materiality and ideology in which they preclude and delimit one

another. When gender is thought to be socially constructed, it is often understood in a way that sees gender as a component of the social or the cultural that is then imposed upon the sexed body, which is understood as natural. In this schema, the category of sex goes unexamined, because it is an inert and non-cultural fact that is then made to have meaning through the acquisition of a socially constructed gender. Or, in another understanding of the social construction of gender, in which everything is said to be socially constructed, gender replaces sex in a manner that again draws attention away from the materiality of the sexed body because it has been subsumed into the category of gender entirely. In either case, Butler argues, the relationship between the sex and gender, possibly also understood as the relationship between the natural and the cultural, the real and the imaginary, or the material and the immaterial, remains fundamentally untouched.

To counter these frameworks, Butler describes “a return to the notion of matter, not as site or surface, but as a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to create the effect of fixity that we call matter” (Fraser 9). By this she means that matter must lose its status as an a priori and unconstructed surface onto which gender is applied, in lieu of an examination of the ways in which the materiality and materialization of sex itself operates. Sex can no longer be thought of as a given which is then interpreted via gender, but needs to be understood as a process of in which matter is always materialized. This is a shift away from understanding sex and gender as separate and oppositional terms like nature and culture and towards an analysis of the ways in which the materiality of the body is always also an ideology of the body. There are not bodies first and then ideas about bodies—bodies are always also ideas about bodies.

Material Resistances

This understanding of the materiality of the sexed body is important for Butler, and for this paper, because it provides a possibility for a reinterpretation of the narrowly defined norms that govern sex. It provides this because she understands the materialization of sex to consist of the repetitive citation of norms over time—a process she refers to as performativity. If we think of the materiality of the sexed body as existing in a constant state of avowal and disavowal of various possibilities for its own materialization, there arises the possibility that the matter of a body might materialize differently. In each instance of the citing of a norm, there exists the potential for the norm to be reinterpreted. Discussions about the social construction of gender remain faulty tools for creating change because they retain two distinct spheres—the things themselves and the way we understand them, failing to account for the way that these spheres are not, in lived everyday reality, decipherable at all. There are not things onto which ideas are applied. Rather, the world is populated by thing-ideas—material/ideological objects that cannot be understood using a framework that makes this distinction between materiality and ideology. If this is the way power functions to create meaning, then resistance must be figured as a process of material transformations—the creation of new bodies and objects that signify in new ways.

“Fact and Illusion are Equivalents”

The parallels between Judith Butler’s understanding of the sexed body and Fred Sandback’s descriptions of his sculptures are remarkable. While Sandback had no apparent interest in gender, he regards his sculptures as embodying the same confusion of the distinction between materiality and ideology that Butler employs in her emphasis on the materiality of sex. For both thinkers, the impetus to distinguish from one another the ideas that define a thing and the material facticity of the thing itself is ill-conceived, leading to an incomplete understanding of the ways objects, bodies, and ideas are powerful.

Sandback talks about his work in terms of an indivisible unification of material and idea. He insists in multiple writings and interviews against a separation between the form of his works and their content. This is because for him the distinction itself between the objects and the ideas that they represent is mistaken; there is one entity that encompasses both.

I'm full of thoughts (more or less.) My work isn't. It's not a demonstration of an idea either. It's an actuality. Ideas are also actualities. The notion that there are ideas that then take form, or ideas that can be extracted from the material substratum, doesn't make any sense.[11] ("Notes" Sandback 94-6)

This understanding of the way objects make meaning is manifested in Sandback's creative process. Although Sandback's work has been associated with geometry and systems of measuring, he insisted that it had nothing to do with this. In order to make one of his pieces, Sandback would take his string and enter the gallery space and make decisions, slowly and carefully, about how the string should be hung, based on the feeling of the architecture of the space. The idea for the work came into being at the same moment that the work was materially created. Likewise, he was actively opposed to making work that functioned by way of symbolism, representation, or the communication of ideas through images. For Sandback, his visible work and its invisible meanings are one and the same thing—"Ideas are executions" ("Notes" Sandback).[12]

I interpret Sandback's comments regarding this unification of materiality and ideology within his sculptures as comments that are meant to address a broader conceptual stance in which the factual and the illusory collapse together. In reading his comments, it frequently becomes unclear whether he is talking about his particular works, or about larger metaphysical relationships between categories. He frequently begins by stressing a point about the work, but within a couple of sentences has moved his language away from the specificity of the work and toward an abstract relationship between categories.

In no way is my work illusionistic...My work is full of illusions, but they don't refer to anything. Fact and illusion are equivalents. Trying to weed one out in favor of the other is dealing with an incomplete situation.[13]

My work is not illusionistic in the normal sense of the word. It doesn't refer away from itself to something that isn't present. Its illusions are simply present aspects of it. Illusions are just as real as facts, and facts just as ephemeral as illusions.[14] ("Notes, 1975" Sandback)

In both of these sections, Sandback begins by speaking directly about the work, but ultimately creates a sentence that could be read as either being about the work or about the world more generally—"facts and illusions are equivalents," "Illusions are just as real as facts, and facts just as ephemeral as illusions." He is clearly speaking about his work—but what else is he speaking about? The room? Space generally? The body of the viewer? Bodies generally?

It seems to me that Sandback's comments mirror the form of the work itself, in that they are meant to point the viewer both towards the work and away from it simultaneously. Sandback's works bring us toward them through their sculptural presence, but they then point us toward what was already there but likely unnoticed—the space we inhabit, our bodies within that space, and the invisible frames that define both of them. This is the contradiction that these works embody: they are an intensely material manifestation of immaterial forces, rendering a rare moment in which we can experience their simultaneity. Just as Fraser responded to the way the works allow her to regard the space of the art institution in new ways, Yves-Alain Bois comments on the way that Sandback's works transform the experience of the viewer's presence in the gallery. For Bois, the effect of

Sandback's sculptures coalesce as the viewer moves about the space, bringing him towards a realization not only of the existence of the slice of space delimited by the yarn but also that "we, too, are in the field," resulting in a process by which it is, "only gradually that space ceases for us to be the neutral and homogenous container of the piece and becomes its modulated, lived material, as well as the substance of our experience" (Bois 34).[15] As this occurs, Bois describes the effect this has of troubling our ability to, "live in the space of the room as we could before," because "we can no longer distance ourselves from it, survey it from the secure viewpoint of the beholder we were a moment ago." The space ceases to function as a "pre-existing, stable ground"[16] as its factual and illusory qualities become simultaneously apparent. The experience of Sandback's sculptures brings the viewer to what was, in a sense, always already there but was not visible: not only that the viewer is a body in space, but that this space is deeply ideological; not only that the perception is embodied, but that this embodiment is simultaneously an idea. "His yarn—our world," writes David Raskin, "has the vitality of matter breathed alive" (Raskin 74).[17]

Additionally, Fred Sandback wanted his work to be relevant to the ways that people actually live. The term he and a friend coined in 1968 "pedestrian space" refers to the markedly unspectacular realm of quotidian experience, the space in which he aimed for his work to exist:

Pedestrian space was literal, flat footed, and everyday. The idea was to have the work right there along with everything else in the world, not up on a spatial pedestal. The terms also involved the idea of utility—that a sculpture was there to be engaged actively, and it had utopian glimmerings of art and life happily commingling." ("Remarks" Sandback)[18]

The work was meant to engage with everyday life and with regular people, and to be useful in some way that exceeded the instance of experiencing it. To the extent that Sandback's works are material-ideas, or are able to dissolve the distinction between reality and fantasy, they were meant, I believe, to make these ideas apparent in the rest of the world outside of museum—inside our homes, for example, or regarding our own gendered bodies. His art was concerned with a restructuring of a conceptual framework performed on the level of the material, and this restructuring was intended to effect the way we experience the world far removed from the art gallery. Sandback's sculptures manifest the same confusion of terms that is necessary for a rethinking of sex and gender, and, in doing so, invite us to understand our own bodies in light of this reformulation.

New Objects, New Bodies

In addition to Judith Butler's focus on interrelationship between the visible and invisible functioning of the sexed body, numerous other thinkers within the fields of queer and queer/feminist scholarship have argued in favour of a reformulation of the relationship between materiality and ideology, the real and the imaginary, fact and fantasy. From theorists who focus on the relationship between gender and virtuality such as Donna Haraway, Sandy Stone, and Elizabeth Grosz to Judith Halberstam's emphasis on fantasy in relation to queer embodiment to José Muñoz's theory of disidentification, numerous feminist and queer theorists articulate a diverse yet strong call for an understanding of the body as irreconcilably wavering between the real and the imaginary. I would like to conclude by offering two informal examples of ways in which gender variant people engage in the embodied creativity that becomes feasible when the distinction between fact and fantasy deteriorates.

Queer genders and sexualities excel at the reinterpretation of highly gendered body parts. It is not a stretch to say that breasts may be the very most femininely coded body part, from their erotic interpretations, to

their role in pregnancy and nursing, to our culture's obsession with clothing them, adorning them, enhancing them, and fantasizing about them. Many, if not most women strongly identify their breasts with their sense of femininity and their sense of personhood, made possibly most apparent by the prevalence of post-mastectomy support groups that acknowledge the loss of a breast for many women as an experience of the loss of their femininity. However, in a culture that so strongly equates breasts with femininity, there exist many masculine women who have engaged in an individual and/or communal process of material reinterpretation of their breasts. By material reinterpretation I do not mean that the breasts come to change in any objective sense such as size or weight, but that on the level of experience, the breasts themselves have transformed into something new, a new body part with a new social and personal significance. Is there such a thing as a masculine breast? Or a breast that does not pertain in any clear way to masculinity or femininity? I would contend that there are, a reality that is well known among communities of proud masculine yet self-identified women. Rejecting the prevalent gendered meaning of one's body parts does not have to result in a disavowal of one's body. Rather, as many masculine women can attest, the process of material transformation, though often difficult and complex, can and does change the significance of the sexed body in such a way as to actively create new bodies.[19]

In addition to transformations of the significance of body parts themselves, many queer sexual practices also involve the incorporation of external inanimate objects into the bodily schema. We are all familiar with the experience of incorporation of various prosthetics—our eyeglasses, clothes, cars, and electronics that come to feel as if they are extensions of our actual bodies. Dildos are widely used erotic objects, and surely there are as many experiences with them as there are people who use them. For many, however, the dildo comes to transcend its status as an inanimate object and is conceptually, emotionally, and physically incorporated into the user's body in a way that challenges a firm delineation of the boundaries of the body.[20] This kind of experience with a dildo is comparable to a popular perceptual trick known as "The Rubber Hand Illusion" in which a person sits at a table in front of a mirror with her real arm under the table and out of sight and a rubber arm arranged on the table in a way that appears in the mirror to be the real arm. After a while, the subject of this illusion will start to have real sensory experiences in the rubber hand, including an actual experience of pain if the rubber hand is "injured". The brain, it turns out, does not always make a firm sensory distinction between objects and body parts. The use of a dildo can operate according to this same principle, being a source of real, and not only symbolic, physical pleasure on the part of the wearer. For many dildo wielding queer people, this relationship with a silicone phallus far exceeds the possession and use of an inanimate object, as the object comes to be experienced as an extension of the erotic and gendered body. The dildo is, in this case, a perfect example of the type of hybrid object/idea that Butler, and, strangely enough, Sandback describe. The dildo is not an object that is being interpreted through some intellectual decision to imbue it with meaning, and, instead, is transformed from one kind of object into another. The seemingly immaterial forces that comprise erotic desire, gender identity, and sexual fantasy are not merely applied to this object. Instead, the ideas become material at the same moment that the material object becomes imaginary, bringing new valences to the phrase "ideas are executions."

Free for the Taking

In drawing out some possible parallels between Fred Sandback's sculptures and queer genders, I aim to provide a new angle with which to view them both. I also want to explore the ways in which artistic productions have the capacity to provide shifted conceptual frameworks with which to experience the world, changing the way we view spaces, objects, ourselves, and one another in contexts far removed from the museum or gallery. Additionally, I hope to encourage a sort of rampantly creative reading of artworks on the part of viewers, a

reaching outside of the set of creative productions that apparently address the issues that are most important to them in hopes of finding new relevance in unexpected places. In this case, people with an interest in queer subjectivities, politics, and cultures are, I believe, underserved by limiting their interest to only that art that situates itself as being apparently relevant to these issues. Just as the culture of gay nightlife has long made it standard practice to appreciate and appropriate songs that, in their original context, send a strong message of imperative heterosexuality, I hope that art viewers will be no less eager to find relevance in work throughout the history of art and in contemporary practice. This reinterpretation of a broad range of seemingly irrelevant material in the context of queer subjectivity can serve as an important resource in the formation of new articulations of bodies and how they can be gendered.



Fred Sandback

Untitled (from *Ten Vertical Constructions*)

Original 1977, remade here at Dia: Beacon, New York, 2003.

[1] Some contemporary examples that come to mind include Del LaGrace Volcano, Jenny Saville, Kalup Linzy, Ryan Trecartin, LTTR and affiliated projects, Mike Kelly, Jim Lambie and John Waters.

[2] Two remarkable exceptions to my generalization that only art with apparent queer themes, imagery, figuration, or cultural references is read in terms of queerness come to mind here, see David Getsy's discussion of the works of John Chamberlain in Getsy, David. "Immoderate Couplings: Transformations and Genders in John Chamberlain's Work" *It's All in the Fit: The Work of John Chamberlain*. Published by The Chinati Foundation, Marfa, Texas. 2008. pp. 166-211. And Judith Halberstam's discussion of the work of Eva Hesse and Linda Besemer, among others, in Halberstam, Judith. "Technotopias: Representing Transgender Bodies in Contemporary Art" *In a Queer Time & Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. New York and London: New York University Press, 2005. Jose Muñoz's work on Elizabeth Peyton and Larry Clark might also be exceptions, although his arguments revolve around pointing out queer or gay seeming people and acts in work made by openly straight artists, which is not exactly the point I am trying to get at here.

[3] For comments on Sandback's links with minimalism, as well as excellent descriptions of the experience of a Sandback sculpture, see Raskin, David. "Art That Just Goes 'Ping'—Sandback's Vibration" *Apollo*. March 2007. pp. 72-75.

[4] Bois, Yve-Alain. "A Drawing That is Habitable." *Fred Sandback*. Friedmann Malsch, Herausgeber and Christiane Meyer-Stoll, eds. Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz Verlag. 2005. pp. 27-38.

[5] A view exemplified in Krauss, Rosalind. "The Double Negative: A New Syntax for Sculpture." *Passages in Modern Sculpture*. Cambridge: The MIT Press. 1983, and well as in Foster, Hal. "The Crux of Minimalism." *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*. Cambridge: The MIT Press. 1996.

[6] Foster, Hal. "The Crux Of Minimalism." *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*. Cambridge, London: The MIT Press. 1996. pp. 43, as well as footnote 37 to Chapter 2.

[7] Also, see Foster, Hal et al. "1969" *Art Since 1900: 1945 to the Present*. New York: Thames and Hudson. 2004.

[8] Fraser, Andrea. "Why Does Fred Sandback Make Me Cry?" *Grey Room*. Issue 22, Winter 2005. pp. 30-47. pp. 37

[9] Butler, Judith. "Introduction." *Bodies That Matter*. New York: Routledge. 1993. p. 2.

[10] The realm of socially viable genders is, I should add, malleable and changes over time—an exception to this limited framework of male and female sex corresponding to masculine and feminine gender has been, in recent years, expanded in some cultural circles to allow access to personhood to certain individuals afflicted with what is understood as certain medical disorders of sex or gender, namely intersexuality or transsexuality.

[11] Sandback, Fred. "Untitled" *Fred Sandback*. Friedmann Malsch, Herausgeber and Christiane Meyer-Stoll, eds. Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz Verlag. 2005. pp. 94-96. pp. 96. Notes originally written for inclusion in the exhibition catalog published by the Kunstraum, Munich, in 1975.

- [12] Sandback, Fred. "Notes, 1975." Published on Dia:Beacon website:
<http://www.diabeacon.org/exhibs/sandback/sculpture/notes.html> Visited July 26, 2009.
- [13] Sandback, Fred. "Notes" *Fred Sandback*. Friedmann Malsch, Herausgeber and Christiane Meyer-Stoll, eds. Ostifildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz Verlag. 2005. pp. 88. Originally written in 1973 and first published in *Flash Art*, No. 40, March-May 1973, pp. 14.
- [14] Sandback, Fred. "Notes, 1975." Published on Dia:Beacon website:
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- [16] Ibid, 34.
- [17] Raskin, 74.
- [18] Sandback, Fred. "Remarks on My Sculpture, 1966-86." *Fred Sandback*. Friedmann Malsch, Herausgeber and Christiane Meyer-Stoll, eds. Ostifildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz Verlag. 2005. pp. 120. Text written in 1986 and first published in *Fred Sandback: Sculpture, 1966-1986*. Munich: Fred Jahn, 1986. pp. 12-19.
- [19] Judith Halberstam's *Female Masculinity* is an excellent exploration of the ways in which the gender of a body can be reinterpreted. See Halberstam, Judith. *Female Masculinity*. Durham and London: Duke University Press. 1998.
- [20] For an interesting philosophical discussion of the limits of the body and its incorporation of external objects, see Grosz, Elizabeth. "Body Images: Neurophysiology and Corporeal Mappings." *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 1994.

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‘To Be [Queer] or Not to Be [Queer]’:

The Paradox of ‘Constant Revision’ and the ‘Paraphilia’ as Case Study

By Benjamin Grimwood

To answer the question “what’s queer about queer theory?” would be to un-queer “queer” itself.[1] How does one put into words what resists meaning in the first place?[2] Whenever we, as scholars, affix defining characteristics to what we say constitutes “queerness,” “queer” becomes an immutable identificatory category such as any of those it was coined to resist and, therefore, becomes obsolete. Nonetheless, I would argue that “queer,” as a concept, permits optimal queerness — that is, indeterminacy — so long as one does not essay to read it directly and instead leaves it undefined and de-centered. I am a visual person, so perhaps this analysis of “queerness” may benefit from my synesthetic way of interpreting “queer” space. Indeed, many scholars and I describe “queer” in terms of “I’ll-know-it-if-I-see-it,” which supports Michael Warner’s contention that “queer” has always already been “largely intuitive” and “half-articulate” (19). Certainly, I often find it difficult to put into words what I recognize visually — what I see — as “queer.” One could say that studying visual “queerness” necessitates a “looking awry,” Slavoj Žižek’s concept for “discern[ing] features that escape a ‘straight-forward’ ... look” that would otherwise go unnoticed (vii; 3). By dissuading oneself from looking straightforward at a “queer” space, one acknowledges, through the construct of dominant language, the other details which could be said to connote its “queerness.” For this essay, I tender the example of the screen saver, which proffers one memorable template whereby a vacuous, colorless space shifts constantly with bursts of colored rays erupting around its absence. Though a picture may be worth 1000 words, as the adage goes, paralleling this image to the project of defining “queer” space is productive. One easily observes the way I initially described the screen saver and how I implied that the colored rays dance around the vacuous space. Because of the construct of dominant language, we can access the words needed to describe such projections more readily than the words to describe the constantly shifting “absence.” For example, we could label the rays by color, by intensity of light, or by celerity. “Queer” acts as a nucleus, but it lacks the consistency to be understood as anything other than “absence”: of space, of color, of intensity of light — of the normative.

If “queerness” can be said to transpire in a vacuous space, then perhaps it would be more appropriate to understand it as a “_____.”[3] Such a move represents it — if “queerness” can be represented — through “anti-language” and asemiotics. The presence of the letter, of the comprehensible word, fails to signify categorical resistance since it depends on the dominant language with which we express ourselves to one another (and with which this very essay constructs itself). The fully queer essay would present itself unintelligibly — a jumble of nonsense or a matrix of blank space whereby liminality constitutes a “whole.” The queer cannot “speak” for itself. The “queer” inflects itself “by a sense of potentiality that it cannot yet quite articulate” (Edelman 114, *emph. added*). Many would say that queer scholars’ (exemplified by Judith Butler’s) obfuscatory prose functions queerly to render “queerness” inarticulate. Others, such as Canadian pedagogues Mary Bryson and Suzanne de Castell, have employed a style of grammar that disrupts the immutable stream of letters that comprise the written word with symbols such as “<,” “/,” and “>” (for example, “queer<y>ing”) (285, 287, 296). I stand

on the side of the latter because it offers an alternative reconstruction of the most basic unit of language, the word, whereas Butler's syntax can still be interpreted, as convoluted as it often becomes.

Often, scholars abuse queer potential because they fail to read around "queerness" as I have described it. One of the worst offenses to "queerness" is scholars' proclivity to rely on the verb "to be" in order to define it. I associate "to be" more with existentialism, the body of philosophy that privileges the conditions of one's ontology before one's essence, recognizes one's fundamental capacity for freedom, and demands authenticity and responsibility of one's actions in line with one's concrete existence. In contradistinction, poststructuralism — often taken to be one of the bases of a "queer theory" — emphasizes one's lack of inherent subjectivity, meaning "queer" does not yet exist, *per se*. Because of the primary emphasis on one's concrete existence as the basis of knowledge, existentialism and its intrinsic agreement with the verb "to be" opposes queer's siding with the "not to be" — that is, the complete repudiation of "to be." Hence, I disagree with scholars who use any form of "to be" to describe "queer" (which is why I emphasize instead a reading of the symbols around it). Queer specificity is an erroneous task. An oft-cited quote by preeminent queer theorist David Halperin states point-blank and problematically: "Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers. It is an identity without an essence" (62 *emph. his*). "Is by definition?" "There is?" "It is an identity?" (*emph. added*). Halperin has un-queered "queer" in multiple ways, not the least of which is his obvious dependence on third-person, present-tense versions of the infinitive "to be" to describe "queer" directly. However, if any part of these sentences can be read queerly, it would be his use of "there is," of which "there" is famously vacuous and frowned upon in scholarly writing.[4] Otherwise, Halperin's straightforward attempt to define "queer" undoes his own project.

If "queer theory" could be said to have "queerness" at all, I would emphasize its potential for constant revision — a process in which scholars have engaged for twenty years now since Teresa de Lauretis first coined "queer theory" (iii). "Queerness" would locate itself only in the revisional process — the "doings" between one conclusion and another, the abstract space between scholars' shifting discourse. David L. Eng, Judith Halberstam, and José Esteban Muñoz have articulated that "queerness" remains true to its "queer" potential because it is "open to a continuing critique of its privileged assumptions" (3). To some extent, "queer theory" may have first been undone by de Lauretis simply because she brought the word into existence and tried to make meaning of it. Any "theory" depends on dominant language because knowledge is a rhetorical construct. A "queer theory" is doomed to fail at the outset because we are stuck with dominant language — the same dominant language through which "queer" would optimally not be expressed. John Champagne has written about the inability of gay men to conceptualize themselves outside the "imposed frameworks that contain them" (qtd. in *Ad-num*). However, this conclusion presumes an "outside" to the "normative." A poststructuralist perspective would look at the discursive negotiation within the dominant language, as no pure "outside" exists.

While expressing a "queer theory" may seem hopeless, it is nonetheless an ideal to which some scholars aspire, as I have hinted with my repeated use of the "optimal." To my knowledge, no one has ever achieved it, nor will he, she, or ze. Like Butler's famous "gender performance," it paradoxically requires repetition — "paradoxical" in that to achieve some semblance of stability would elicit the fixed quality "queer" resists in the first place. However, as Butler emphasizes, gender performance never becomes absolutely stable because it requires repeated performances and, therefore, contains the potential to be destabilized readily. Within this space, scholars become agentive in the deployment and reception of "queerness."

What is my motivating impulse to defend this re-articulation of “queerness” as the “_____” in which the process of constant revision takes place? To put it pointedly, I find it unreasonable for scholars to suggest that “queer” is no longer “radical.” Queer theory of the present can offer important social insights, as Eng, Halberstam, and Muñoz have conveyed (2). I also find it ludicrous for scholars to suggest that queer theory has lost the purpose for which it came into being. On the contrary, “queer” — as a relative of poststructuralism and its enunciation of the “death of the subject” — was “dead”[5] on arrival and has often been mobilized in the context of AIDS-related deaths in the late 1980s (Edelman, “Homographesis” 96; Pearl 23). One of the most absurd claims I hear lodged in academia — as far back as the invention of the term “queer theory” nigh twenty years ago — is that somehow a “queer theory” has become “commonplace,” “mainstream,” or “status quo,” as if everyone speaks its “language” fluently. But, by my own (constant) revisions, how can a “queer theory” not still contain radical potential? It appears these scholars’ warrant is that the use of the word “queer” at all indicates overuse and co-optation by “mainstream” forces. “Mainstream” forces cannot signify academia because, however unfortunately, academia now exists, in the public imagination, apart from its original use-value as the producer of knowledge to enrich democracy. It has become an impotent, cobwebbed castle that no longer shines over the nation. It is, effectively, a “niche market.” Therefore, in my experience as a young gay white middle-class man[6] living in the United States of America[7], I have never witnessed “mainstream” (i.e. normal) forces pilfer and prostitute the word “queer” as a radical retaliation for political ends.

For the most part, “queer” still suggests its origin as a homophobic epithet. Regardless of the word’s re-orientation in academia, scholars cannot forget its history and what it means to the public at large who hears it. For this reason, the contemporary lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (hereafter LGBT) rights movement has not “gotten hip” to academia’s political re-purposing of “queer,” favoring instead emphases on identity politics, strategic essentialism, and assimilation to pander to “normal” citizens (Benshoff and Griffin 269). The rhetoric of “born this way” and “just like you” poisons the LGBT argument to achieve equal rights. Although no scientific evidence currently exists to support the “born this way” motif, “just like you” has been more effective (albeit marginally) to demonstrate to heteronormative, un-like-minded citizens that all concerned share Burkeian consubstantiality[8]; individual A “just happens to be homosexual.” I would prefer an alternative to such “strategic essentialism” because, frankly, I am not “just like you” and I do not “just happen to be homosexual.” This argument trivializes how profound an impact all queerly identified individuals’ sexual preferences have on our everyday lives.

Albeit paradoxically, queer politics should be made to benefit the world at large to allay the physical, emotional, and symbolic violence perpetrated against queerly identified individuals in many nations. Because one of the first ways to perpetrate violence is through language (both in what is said and left unsaid), the dominant language must be restructured for the benefit of all. Though I do not know what it would look like, an “anti-language” could ideally dispel the pretense of contemporary hierarchical discourse and alleviate some of the harm that transpires against societal Others under it. However, because the universalization of “queer” would make it “normative” (its greatest enemy), “queer” has not been deployed for this purpose. At best, “queer” must have an ambivalent relationship with society at large. Annamarie Jagose affirms, “Rather than represent queer as unequivocally either progressive or reactionary, [I argue] that it does not have any fixed value” (5-6). Nevertheless, because of the long way LGBT people have to go in modern society, queer theory’s lack of productive intervention in modern discourse does a tremendous disservice to the enrichment of society. Queerly identified people need something like it to make our lives better. In their influential “What Does Queer Theory Teach Us about X?,” Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner contend that “what queer theory teaches us about x is not about politics in the usual sense but about personal survival. Like feminist, African American, Latina/

Latino, and other minority projects, queer work strikes its readers as knowledge central to living” (348, *emph. added*).

Why does only the intelligentsia get to deal with a “queer theory” when bigger problems exist between which we — as scholars, as citizens, as humans — are obligated to intervene productively? Indeed, an extremely salient critique of queer theorists contends that we engage with “queerness” in a manner akin to crusty intellectual masturbation, polymorphously and perversely spouting off meaningless words.[9] For that matter, queer theorists’ claim that “queer” has become mainstream — applicable, if at all, only to academia — does not seem at all cogent, especially with conservative pedagogical critics such as David Horowitz advocating the demise of, for example, lesbian and gay studies (Nelson 23). In queer theory’s infancy, Berlant and Warner dispelled one of the greatest myths of the emerging *œuvre*: “The critical mass of queer work is more a matter of perception than of volume. Queer is hot. This perception arises partly from the distortions of the star system, which allows a small number of names to stand in for an evolving culture” (343).[10] The beatification of queer theorists such as Judith Butler, the late Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Teresa de Lauretis, Michael Warner, David Halperin, etc. has aggrandized (and, un-queerly, canonized) a privileged few who cannot be said to account for a “mainstream” force or a “status quo” (Jagose 110). I challenge these critics to quantify how and to confirm that some majority of the academy speaks “queer theory” as a mother tongue. In fact, Berlant and Warner share that “most practitioners of the new queer commentary are not faculty members but graduate students” (343, *emph. added*). It is we, graduate students, who must interrogate our own aggrandizing of what is, at best, an academic “niche market.”

Jeffrey Escoffier has warned of the danger of queer theory becoming “unrepresentative and intellectually narrow,” encouraging “lesbian and gay studies [to] remain in dialogue with the communities that gave rise to the political and social conditions for its existence” (48). It is important to tease out the associations fostered in the apparent contradictions between identity politics and “queerness.” My investment in LGBT people and politics (especially in having identified myself as a gay white middle-class man) and my willingness to push “queer” to its theoretical and logical conclusions (within the space of constant revision) is a seeming contradiction that scholars suggest is not so. Jagose elaborates that “queer theory does not simply default on the commitment of lesbian and gay studies to politics and community; what it does is call into question the knowledges which maintain such concepts as if they were self-evident and indisputable” (111). Butler adds that “the deconstruction of identity is not the deconstruction of politics. Rather, it establishes as political the very terms through which identity is articulated” (*Gender* 148 *emph. added*). Indeed, “queer” agrees with the open-ended construction of politics (Jagose 107). One can never know in any qualifiable or quantifiable sense how one source of communication with a government official can be more effective than another; therefore, publishing a paper can be as effective as carrying a sign, staging a protest, or writing a letter to one’s Congressman (111). In the hopes of taking the first steps toward intervening productively, if not paradoxically, for the enrichment of America, my frustratingly conservative home, I submit this paper.

Along with it, I suggest a new locus for “queer theory” that has not received enough scholarly attention: the matter of paraphilia. A paraphilia is a socially, and sometimes legally, prohibited sexual practice that psychiatry has stigmatized as “deviant” and “abnormal.” Some of the more infamous paraphilias include paedophilia (desire for prepubescent children), sadism and masochism (domination and submission), necrophilia (desire for corpses), and urophilia (desire for urination, or “golden showers”). Austrian psychotherapist Wilhelm Stekel coined the term paraphilia in the 1920s, combining the Greek roots *para-* (beside, aside) and *philos* (loving). It was not added verbatim to the infamous Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (hereaf-

ter DSM) until 1980 (and, before then, it was referred to as “sexual deviation”) (Milner, Dopke, and Crouch 384). Though clinicians intended paraphilia to be morally neutral[11], it is nonetheless etymologically similar to “perversion” and has often been interchangeable in mainstream deployment of the term. The new DSM-5, which will be published in 2013 and is currently under revision, intends to split the label of paraphilia into “paraphilia” and “paraphilic disorder,” classifying the former as “not ipso facto psychiatric disorder” and the latter as “a paraphilia that causes distress or impairment to the individual or harm to others” (“Proposed”). The proposed revision for the DSM-5 (“paraphilia” vs. the redundant “paraphilic disorder”) is one step toward the legitimacy of the “paraphilia,” but it is not enough since the same root maintains the pejorative connotation. I see the necessity of controlling self- or other-destructive behavior, but it should be characterized as self- or other-destructive behavior (as “doing”) and not as stemming from deviant sexuality (as “being”). Until then, queerness must present a persistent critique of the DSM in its efforts at categorization.

The historical case study of paraphilia en route to legitimacy is “homosexuality,” as Michael Warner reminds us (Trouble 59). The most famous revision of the DSM happened in 1973, when, under the pressure of the steadily growing gay rights movement, the American Psychiatric Association ultimately removed desire for people of the same-sex from the 1974 seventh printing of the DSM-II. In his indefatigable text *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1, Michel Foucault locates the birth of “sexual perversion as mental illness” discourse within the nineteenth century, submitting that the word “homosexuality” was an 1870 invention of the clinic, a “species” to be organized taxonomically and turned into discourse (36, 43). The fact that the American Psychiatric Association ultimately removed desire for people of the same-sex from the DSM warrants interrogation. This is not to say that I, as a gay white middle-class man, am not happy to be liberated from the clinic, but such a move should be regarded with suspicion. Such a move neglects other “sexual deviants,” relegating them to the periphery. The single term “sexual deviant,” which requires reference back to a “norm,” does not perfectly encapsulate all of the unique “cases” of “sexual deviancy” — that is, the necrophile is more than likely not also a urophile (although people may have more than one paraphilia) and he or she may not also be homosexual. The use of “paraphile” as a catch-all term demonizes all equally and irrespectively (perhaps by abjection, perhaps legally). What “gets in” to the manual and what “gets out” seems to be arbitrary and culturally dependent.

I would compare the unique removal of same-sex desire from the DSM to the recent identity-politic-ridden push for national non-discrimination against sexual orientation and gender identity. I shall provide here specific evidence that demonstrates to me why strategic essentialism is so problematic. In 2007, gay men and lesbians (especially those lobbying for the Human Rights Campaign) abandoned their transgendered brothers and sisters in not opposing an Employment Non-Discrimination Act in Congress that was no longer trans-person inclusive (Eleveld). Where is the compassion? Why hack off valuable limbs in pursuit of the goal? Similarly, in the clinic, only people with same-sex desires have been liberated from the oppressive DSM, and yet the others with so-called paraphilias continue to be deranged “sex fiends” left to their own devices? Homosexuals are no better off, as Foucault writes that “the psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted from the moment it was characterized” (43). Thus, it is today as it was in 1870: “Sexual disorders once considered paraphilias (e.g., homosexuality) are now regarded as variants of normal sexuality” (Kafka 6). No matter its “newfound legitimacy,” homosexuality will always be characterized as inferior to normative heterosexuality. Despite the play of forces that permitted its removal from the DSM in 1973, the word itself continues to carry the connotations it has maintained since incipience, evidenced in George Lakoff’s study of “homosexual” versus “gay” as terms to frame the current gay rights debate (Lakoff). The new strategic word is “gay,” not “homosexual,” as he points out. The word “homosexual” evokes the image of those unseemly, over-sexed Sodom-and-Gomorra types. Nevertheless, the proliferation of aberrant sexualities through psychiatry

has engendered a contemporary discourse of power, whereby the homosexual is hegemonic and legitimized and the paraphile, manic and marginalized.

Many — but not all — popular works of queer theory ostensibly elicit a similar hierarchy. Many deconstruct “traditional” sex organs and neglect other parts of the body that can be sources of sexual pleasure, desires for which that are called “partialisms,” “partial” because they signify isolated body parts. For example, the “podophile” desires feet, the “nasophile” desires the nose, the “adipophile” desires fat flesh. Sexual engagements with such stimuli comprise “fetishes” which continue to be socially and medically pathologized. Western society at large thinks of a paraphilia as a sub-category to one’s ontological sexual preference: heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, etc. (i.e. the “gay leather daddy,” with gay first and leather second). The LGBT scholarship on which much of queer theory has focused has indulged in a “charmed circle,” emphasizing non/identities and sexual behaviors prior to the means for physical stimulation (Rubin 13). Compelling (i.e. queer) transgression locates itself around unnamable pleasures derived from physical contact. “Queerness” should reclaim paraphilias, heretofore at the periphery, as unstable loci that simultaneously channel and critique what is “queer.”

Jagose has suggested that “queer raises the possibility of locating sexual perversion as the very precondition of an identificatory category, rather than as a destabilization or a variation of it” (113-4). Although popular discourse substitutes “paraphilia” and “fetish,” what is closer to the truth is that a paraphilia may be much less a sub-categorical “fetish” than a sexuality qua sexuality. The paraphilia comes to inscribe itself all over the paraphile’s thoughts and actions, instituting sexual proclivity as a constitutive “sexuality.” But if the “paraphilia” per se does not destabilize the notion of an identity, the queer revision reconsiders it through the matrix of “precondition,” which offers room for the preclusion of identity. As sexuality comes to define itself through repetition of the sex act, which imitates a stable desire, active deviations from the “normalized” sex act facilitate the destabilization of an overarching, pre-determining desire. Instead of permitting a linear, determinate relationship, queer scholarship should emphasize the “precondition” of “sexual perversion” through the locus of the sex act (though this may be somewhat reductive of “queer”).

If any work can be said to have contributed invaluablely to this focus, it is Butler’s reorientation of the phallus to accommodate lesbianism. Building off of the work of Jacques Lacan, Butler highlights that the “phallus” and the “penis” are not synonymous outside patriarchal discourse (“To the extent that the phallus symbolizes the penis, it is not that which it symbolizes”) and that the institution of a “lesbian phallus” depends on this destabilization (“Lesbian” 166). The “phallus” can symbolize any body part, and its discursive reorientation disrupts its heterosexist proclivity (167). When Butler notes that “‘having’ a phallus can be symbolized by an arm, a tongue, a hand (or two), a knee, a thigh, a pelvic bone, an array of purposefully instrumentalized body-like things,” “partialism” invokes itself (170). Butler acknowledges the paradox of the lesbian phallus to recall and to displace “the masculinism by which it is impelled,” but the “partialism” can function apart from the support of an essentialized sexuality such as lesbian identity and, thereby, it departs from reiterating any connotations that may precede it (170). One who engages in the “partialized” sex act cannot be readily interpreted as “heterosexual,” “homosexual,” etc. because the locus of his or her desire is not the traditional sex organ that defines that sexuality (i.e. the homosexual male and his desire for the penis). If one with adipophilic partialism engages in “gut sex,” a ribald term for the stimulation of one’s erotogenic zones by profuse flesh, he or she could be enjoying any human body because all are capable of producing fat. The protruding belly is also not a traditionally conceived “sex organ” (the penis, the vagina) or sexual receptacle (the anus, the mouth), and so its potential for pleasure elicits non-straightness.

At the outset of her “Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary,” Butler confesses both the awareness of her inevitable failure to produce a “satisfying essay” about the “dissatisfying” phallus and the paradox she faces in constructing a “lesbian phallus” that both subverts and subsumes its patriarchal implications (143). Here, it may be appropriate to extrapolate the motifs of “failure” and the “paradox” to characterize the conclusion(s) of this essay. Earlier, I stated that “queer” is an ideal to which scholars aspire and that scholars consistently fail to achieve it. Comfortingly, Butler writes elsewhere that culture’s compulsory heterosexuality is also doomed to fail as it attempts to “imitate and approximate” its own illusion of stability (“Imitation” 313). Nevertheless, if all of queer scholars’ attempts to assert the unique values of “queer” are doomed to fail, I should admit my own shortcomings. I have noticed that in stressing a new locus for queer theory, I also paradoxically affix a defining characteristic to what constitutes “queerness” (not to mention its antithesis, the “normative”). I privilege paraphilia over same-sex relations engaged with traditional biological sex organs and, thereby, hierarchize through discourse and undo the silent queerness of paraphilia unto itself. Can scholars write/speak without performatively uttering “queer?” Can the contingency of “queer” be implied without having to refer to it directly — by speaking around it, as I contend queer scholars should do to optimize “queerness?” While “failure” and the “paradox” of attempting to answer the question “what’s queer about queer theory?” may seem to put me ultimately at a loss, I take solace in one last proposition by Butler:

If I have any agency, it is opened up by the fact that I am constituted by a social world I never chose. That my agency is riven with paradox does not mean it is impossible. It means only that paradox is the condition of its possibility (*Undoing* 3).

The paradox of “queer” inevitably adulterates this essay, although I would defend that it has been manifested in a productively contradictory way. Nonetheless, I take comfort in my articulation of the unfazed radicality of “queer,” its proclivity for genesis in the nebulous process of constant revision, and its potential to allay physical, emotional, and symbolic violence perpetrated against queerly identified individuals by perpetually deconstructing dominant language and defiantly exposing society to its discriminations. Collectively, these have presupposed its continued possibility.

Notes

[1] It may be useful to take into account that, when David L. Eng, Judith Halberstam, and José Esteban Muñoz ask about the queerness of queer studies, they always (seemingly) calculatedly include a time referent: now (1). Should time necessarily be implicated in considering “what’s queer about queer theory” for the purposes of this essay?

[2] As Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner have pointed out, “queer theory is not the theory of anything in particular, and has no precise bibliographic shape” (344). They go on to state that “the danger of the label queer theory is that it makes its queer and nonqueer audiences forget these differences and imagine a context (theory) in which queer has a stable referential content and pragmatic force” (345). It is important to note that a stable “queer theory” is as much an illusion as the concept of a compulsory “normativity.”

[3] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, arguably one of the progenitors of a “queer theory,” has suggested that “queer” has a “gravity” capable of “deepen[ing],” although I would argue otherwise (9). The “deepening” of “queerness”

depends on the idea that space has measurable width, depth, and height. Because it cannot be proven, it can also not be proven otherwise.

[4] Also famously vacuous is the term “a lot,” which one former teacher of mine refused to see as anything other than a place for parking. The fact that Eng, Halberstam, and Muñoz use it to describe “what’s queer about queer studies now” also indicates a productive reading of “queer” without assigning to it any fixed meaning (3).

[5] However, a revision of a “queer theory” and the “death drive” may emphasize instead the process of returning to life.

[6] I find it worthwhile to highlight the contradictory nature of my grounding my subjectivity squarely in essentialist notions while articulating the constant revision of a “queer theory.” As I will come to defend in this essay’s conclusion, I hope that this paradox will permit my agency.

[7] A fascinating notion is that nationhood and nationality, like queerness, requires repeated performance. One such paradigm is the Queer Nation: “By juxtaposing queerness with nationality, Queer Nation successfully denaturalizes conservative and essentialist understandings of nationhood” (Brasell, qtd. in Jagose 108).

[8] See Burke, Kenneth. *A Rhetoric of Motives*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1950. Print.

[9] Berlant and Warner have reasonably addressed the mainstream gay press that has largely ignored or repudiated all of academic queer theory, citing the periodicals *Advocate*, *Out*, *Deneuve*, and *Ten Percent* (347).

[10] Berlant and Warner go on to say that “academic citation creates its own virtual world. In the 1990s, that world has allowed queer talk to be taken seriously. But it would be wrong to take this provisional seriousness for a fully inhabitable world or to suppose that queer theory has become dominant in any general sphere of endeavor” (346 emph. added). “Queer theory” — and, by extension, “queer” — is a virtual world: a world that does not exist. It is a space in which nobody/no bodies live(s).

[11] Another well-known term also intended for moral neutrality was Freud’s “polymorphous perversity,” which describes the ability — usually of the prepubescent child — to derive pleasure from any part of the body. “Polymorphous perversity” is frowned upon by society-at-large because the child must socialize himself or herself to compulsory heterosexuality. This proves that the term “polymorphous perversity” was constituted from the moment it was characterized.

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Bike Boys Laugh

By Roberto Ortiz

There was nothing about my naked body to evoke tough motorcyclists or tranny superstars, but that was what Marco wrote about, thought about, and talked about, even at the start of a one-night-stand with a man fifteen years his junior (although I made believe it was twenty). After taking a long time to remove his black shoes and jeans, Marco was still wearing his black leather jacket, dress shirt and briefs. I did not waste any time taking off my brown hoodie and white undershirt, the cool gray sneakers with red shoelaces that I had just bought on sale, my Dickies pants, and the even cooler printed boxer shorts that I kept from my ex. Not that I felt at ease showing off my naked body, but after a few wine glasses I was drunk and horny and ready to roll around in bed. Plus I had a strong suspicion that Marco might change his mind if I didn't hurry, not due to lack of desire, but to fear of future regret.

Marco had been taking such a long time undressing that I guessed he was self-conscious about getting naked in front of me. Did he think nakedness would make our age difference more evident? His hesitance to strip struck me as odd coming from a man who spent most of the night arguing that the films of Kenneth Anger and Jack Smith held the keys to queer liberation and the performances of Mario Montez and Holly Woodlawn were as moving as Meryl Streep's. Leaning against the hotel room wall, Marco talked about the fascination he felt in his youth when he first saw *Scorpio Rising* on a revival house in Manhattan. But he seemed to be lecturing to himself, sounding more interested in invoking a lost feeling than on passing it on to me. As I waited in bed, Marco's slow undressing gave me time to remember that, before moving on to actually having sex, there was a problem I needed to address.

"That's very fascinating, Marco," I said, as I pulled him by the black leather jacket towards me, trying not to sound exasperated, "but there's something important I need to warn you about first."

"What's wrong?" he asked, switching his cool professorial tone to that of concerned parent. "Are you okay? Have you changed your mind? We can just cuddle, you know? That might be better."

"Hell, no!" I snapped. "I've wanted to hold this jacket and pull down your pants ever since you started theorizing about biker boys and Manhattan urinals over dinner. But I need to warn you first."

"About what?" he asked with increased concern, smiling and caressing my cheek. "Are you sick? If that's it, don't worry. Don't you have condoms? I must have one somewhere, and if not we can . . ."

"No!" I snapped again, pissed at the thought. "It's not that. I'm not sick, at least not that way. The problem is that, when you touch me, I'm going to have a hard time stopping myself from laughing."

"What? You're going to laugh when I touch you?" I nodded, and by the tone of his voice I knew that, like the men before him, Marco didn't get it.

We had been introduced that night by my friend Graciela, a college professor who invited him to talk about 1950s biker pictorials at a conference on the queer Avant Garde. Graciela emailed and texted me all week long to remind me. Organizing the event was a big deal for her and I would benefit from meeting the keynote speaker. However, I missed his lecture at the last minute because I went to stalk the ex-boyfriend whose cool boxer shorts I was wearing.

I was riding my banged-up cruiser bike to the university when I saw him ride on the opposite direction. I had no idea my ex was back in town and I felt the need to follow him. It was because of him that I had abandoned my bourgeois graduate student ways to become an underground queer artist, only to have him leave me a few months later to do trapeze art with circus freaks. Since his departure, I had been torn about which route to take. Should I go on with my ex's ideas that the only way to be truly queer was to live on the margins or should I follow Graciela's advice and finish my degree? I rode my bike to a café where I saw my ex greeting a cute and very young hipster. They hugged and kissed on the cheeks as I rode past the coffee shop, careful that they wouldn't see me. I was tempted to casually confront him, but Graciela's constant texting kept me from getting off my bike and making a scene.

By the time I rode back to the university, the lecture was over. "You're always bitching that there are not enough smart adult men in this city and then, when I bring one, you neglect him," Graciela admonished me, but then asked me to join them for dinner. "I'm really mad at you, but I still want you to meet Marco. He's a sweetheart. You'll see. That's him over there."

Marco was standing outside the lecture hall, talking to my obnoxious former classmates, fundamentalist queers that swore on their theory bibles. Marco looked alright. He was not the stereotypical daddy-type, with body hair and belly, nor was he an eerily well-preserved middle-aged gay man who walks around in tight young adult clothes. He had a clean-cut salt-and-pepper hairstyle, a small and lean frame, and carried himself with an elegant charm that made him seem youthful.

"I don't like older men," I said dismissively. "I don't need a father figure."

"I'm not trying to set you up, but he might help rekindle your interest in schoolwork."

"There's no spark in his eyes. He's probably unhappy, working on his papers all day long."

"You don't look too happy yourself. You'll both cheer up when you hit the clubs after dinner."

"Oh, so I'm the designated queer this evening. Why not ask Tom? He's preppy, respectable, in a committed relationship, has professional prospects, and will adopt several children in the future."

"Tom would bore him. He's too prissy and conventional. Marco's written many books and articles about the pre-Aids alternative queer arts scene. It's fascinating work. You should read it."

As Graciela introduced us, courteously making me sound way more interesting than I was, Marco's sweet demeanor struck me as being at odds with writing about the subversively drugged out gazes of Lower East Side trannies and the resistant torsos of sexually ambiguous white guys named Joe. I was guessing, of course, since I had little idea of who Marco was and I had never read anything he'd written. All I knew about was the title of his lecture and what Graciela had just told me. I also had no clue about that tattooed twink I saw with my ex at the café. I would have to google them both later.

Overall, Marco struck me as an ordinary college professor, perhaps a bit cooler than average thanks to the fashionable black leather jacket that brought back memories of watching *The Wild One* on TV. Marco was still wearing it, and I kept touching it, as I addressed my problem.

“Don’t get me wrong, Marco,” I explained. “I won’t laugh at you. It’s just that I’m very ticklish.”

“Oh,” he said, sounding relieved, “that’s not a problem. Just tell me, where are you ticklish?”

“I tickle pretty much everywhere. Come on, try it. Touch me anywhere you want. You’ll at least make me giggle.” Marco touched my chest so softly that I could barely feel his fingers. “You don’t have to be so cautious. Go ahead, touch me... really touch me.”

Marco went at it again, putting both hands on my chest and sliding them down very slowly. As I made an effort not to laugh, I thought Marco’s fears of getting naked in front of me were absurd, though it was even more absurd to be lusting for him after we spent the first part of the night bickering. During my two years and a half of graduate school, I had quickly fallen in and out of love with the theories about sexuality to which Marco dedicated the bulk of his adult life. At first they enlightened me and seemed liberating, but they soon struck me as pedantic, closed off from the people that they sought to validate. That belief was confirmed after hooking up with my ex, a jack-of-all-trades queer artist that would have never been welcome at academic social circles, although they might end up writing or lecturing about him someday, if his work somehow fit within a theoretical argument in question. And yet, in spite of my objections, my friend Graciela and her guest speaker were the ones spending time with me, treating me to dinner and wine, while my radical ex lover was too busy with someone else.

During our first bottle of wine, I bitched and undermined Marco’s arguments about the 1960s queer Avant Garde at every opportunity. I accused him of idealizing the past, in isolation from the present. Graciela gave me killer looks, but Marco kindly put up with my petulance and even agreed at times. By the second bottle, I was still disagreeing with him, but I had also started wondering what I would look like wearing that black leather jacket hanging on the back of his chair. I started noticing that Marco was kinda cute and thought we should consider skipping the clubs. By the third bottle of wine, I was agreeing with Marco’s arguments and wishing we had cruised public bathrooms together in tough biker costumes. I also started fantasizing about pulling down his pants. I realized my ex’s boxers would have to come off soon and I wondered how much the touch of Marco’s hands would make me laugh.

“Seriously, I hope you won’t mind,” I said after I noticed Marco was baffled by the sound of my laughter, in spite of the warning.

Marco touched me again. His hands felt nice and soft on my chest, but this time I didn’t make any effort to contain myself. He smiled, stopped touching, and jokingly said: “You do have a problem. Have you always been this ticklish?”

“Yeah, and it sucks sometimes. I’ve discovered most gay men don’t like to laugh during sex. They think I’m making fun of them. But the ones who like to laugh in bed turn out to be more fun.”

“I remember reading an article that said ticklishness was like protection from sexual aggression. The author argued that . . .”

“Oh, please, don’t try to analyze me. Just go on.”

Marco smiled and started playfully testing my body, touching different parts to see if I laughed. He was clearly getting amused. Laughter probably did not play much of a role in his sexual intercourses, just like laughter doesn’t play much of a role in academic discourses. Did laughter play a role in the lives of those queer artists he admired so much? I was tempted to ask, but I didn’t want Marco to get back into lecture mode when he hadn’t even finished taking off his clothes. I didn’t mind the jacket and shirt. In fact, I liked touching that black leather jacket as he tested my body, but I also had that increasing desire to pull down that underwear... and I did.

As I pulled down, however, I stumbled and fell. Marco put his hands around me to pick me up and I felt ticklish all over. I couldn’t help it. I had to laugh and laugh and laugh. But he didn’t let go, or was bothered by my laughter. He laughed along with me. The laughter made us forget age differences, intellectual disagreements, and imminent departures. And so we spent the night rolling in bed laughing. We laughed about biker boys, about drag queens, about older scholars, about ticklish men, about our bodies, about our fucking. And I got a nice black leather jacket to go with my cool printed boxer shorts.

Bios

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