

## Queer Janus, or why does Queer look in two directions?

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The field of Queer studies has recently been stirred by the opposition between the social and the antisocial turn. At the heart of the debate, one finds questions concerning future directions of the field: should we treasure the fantasy of a widely shared political goal of Queer studies? Or should we step back from ideas of the position of sexual minorities internalized with little criticism, and assimilation politics practised by strategically mainstreamed gay and lesbian organizations? Everyday queer political concerns show that such strict oppositions disregard the complexity and ambiguity of seemingly opposed views. The contradictions are arousing in the discussion about gay and lesbian marital rights and adoption laws, which is gathering steam in Finland in the spring 2013: pleas for sexual minorities' marital rights may ultimately be interpreted as subjection to heteronormative structures. At the same time, the idea of gender neutral marriage compels the so called sexual minority, but also the heterosexual majority, to reconsider the relation between church and state, which positions gender and sexual minorities at the centre of a theological debate and forces a reconsideration of normative habits and traditions.

One of the symptomatic characteristics related to the discussion of antisocial or social turn of queer studies seems to be the detachment from the original theoretical analyses, trains of thoughts and contexts while turning, intentionally or unintentionally, to polemic claims. This

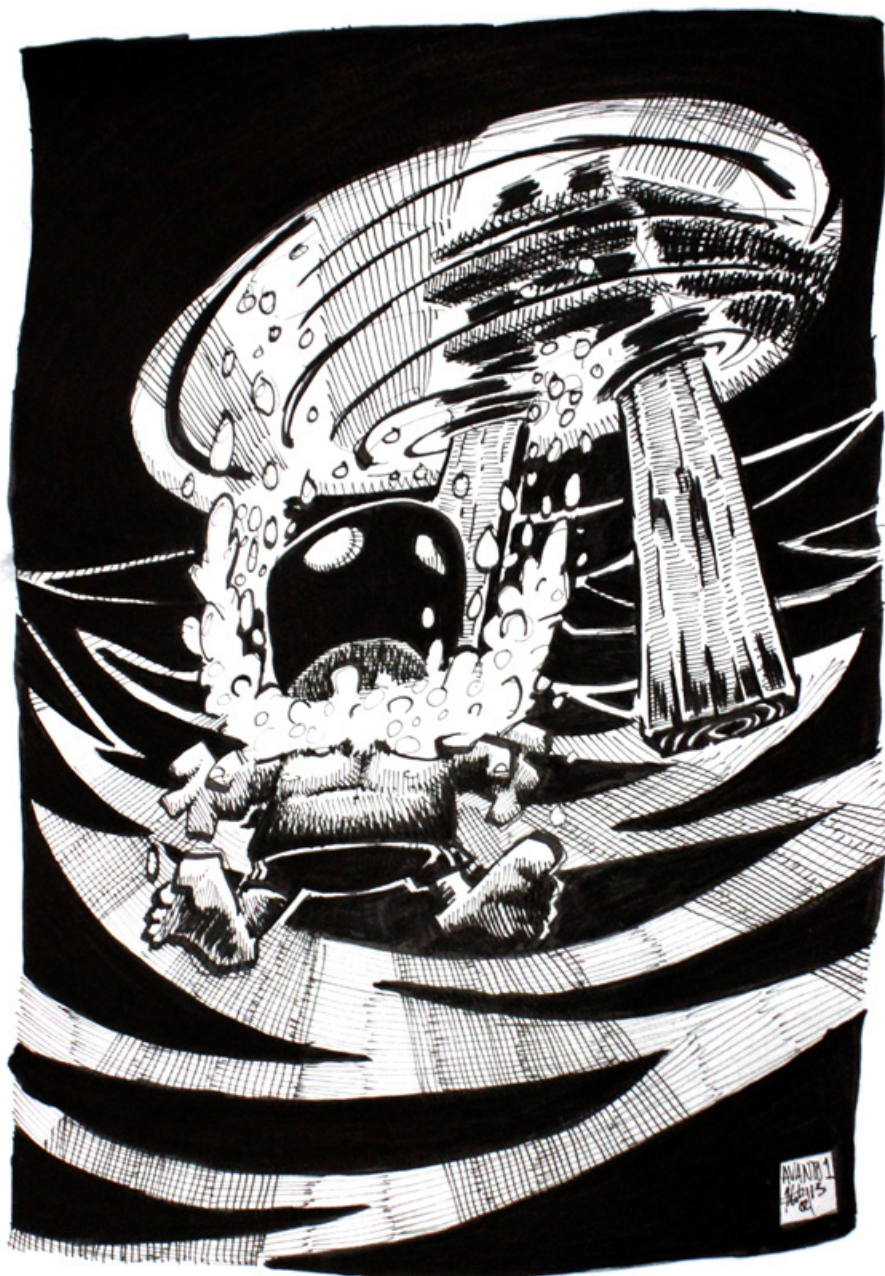


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characteristic raises a question whether antisociality has been widely understood too black-and-white? After all, could it be so that antisociality signifies a return to the outlaw (hard)core of queer? Nevertheless, perhaps the whole aim of the discussion is to recognize and to acknowledge the sphere of the social, after all the issue is being debated within the academic queer community, within its social boundaries. Or, does queerly negation actually, while turning ones back on social and “fucking the future”, provide proper means to outline a new kind of political future, un-political un-future, outside politics of assimilation?

Meanwhile, it has been noted by the social theorists that the call for negating the future seems particularly oppressive and gloomy from the vantage point of the people whose “future” has never been (fully) acknowledged, like queers of color ( see e.g. Rodriguez 2011 ). When travelling from the First World to the Third World and back, queer is finally going to face its own internal differences, particularities and normativities. In the recent debates, everybody is eager to claim the position of Other in the queer theory. While the social side reminds us of the queers-of-color, or working class queers, the antisocial side waves the revolutionary flag of true misfits.

The discussion about frontiers and vanguards of queer theory unfolds yet another “turn”, if we consider it from a more historical point of view. Reminding the oppositional ideologies at the emergence of queer theory more than two decades ago, highlighting disputes between gay and lesbian identity politics and queer constructivism, the new binarism of queer studies arises from the need to dismiss the past for the sake of un/future and to display the importance of queer’s potential radicalism. Even though the stakes in queer theoretical debates are no longer a relation to straightforward identity politics the polemics of the past and the present are these antagonistic compositions. Could we say that the internal logic of queer theoretical debate unavoidably rests on reactionary impulses?

Moreover, the debate between antisocial and social queer studies seems to resume the question of gender, once again. Could an antisocial queer scholar be a feminist? The debate of the poles of queer theory also reflects the static gay-lesbian dualism of the 1980’s which was supposed to be transcended by the emerging queer theory. The lesbian feminist theorizations of the 1990’s suspected that queer would constitute a new closet for women, or to appear as a new way to recruit women to gay men’s battles. At the dawn of the Millennium these gendered binary positions were complicated by such identity vectors as race and ethnicity, and now once again, the antisocial turn faces the similar suspicions of abandoning multiple differences such as religion, skin-color, or cultural background restoring queer studies towards white masculinity.

Why then queer studies appear to adhere to binary debates even though its corner stones are repeatedly defined to exceed all dualisms, binary paradigms, or essentialisms? The question can hardly be answered by anyone. Or, perhaps, we should return to Elizabeth Grosz’s view in *Space, Time, and Perversion* published in 1995. In the book, Grosz defines queer as a reactive category which merely “sees itself in opposition to a straight norm and thus defines itself in terms of this norm” (p. 219) without a foundation in itself. Is now time, on the one hand, to ask: Did a social and critical queer theory, even further politicized by intersectional categories of difference, become too normative? Should the queer criticism itself (once again) be queered? Does sex need to be restored to queer studies, as Harri Kalha suggested in his Key note presentation at the Turku Queer Symposium “The Queer and the Wicked” August 2012? On the other hand, those kinds of questions assign the antisocial mode of theorizing to act as a “true queer”, a synecdoche of queer studies at large.

However, if we accept the premise of queer being an opposition to straight norm, does it make internal debates more difficult? Does the



logic of keeping our “lines straight” in front of the norm hinder our discussion about thesis/antithesis/synthesis/new thesis/ inherent in all methodological reflections? In the long run, the binary polemics, as is also the case in the debate between Harri Kalha and Judith Halberstam, render visible the questions such as what is included in queer studies and how does queer position itself. Are some research topics, - themes, or – objectives initially more political than the others? Where did the politics of undefinedness disappear? Is queer merely a two-faced Janus-figure looking at the opposite directions?

We think that the aforementioned methodological debates must be appreciated and esteemed in SQS Journal. The few publishing channels in the field of queer theory should not repress certain topics or constitute invisible barriers. We feel that theoretical debates are unavoidable, necessary, and mutually benefitting.

The SQS issue at hand aims to enable difficult discussions. As editors, we conceive SQS as a forum which asks, questions, or enables dialogue between queer scholars and queer methods. At the time we decided to ask replies on texts which might be concerned as polemical, we had the idea of common forum in our minds. However, we also wanted to highlight the links between queer and activism, that is to say queer’s roots beyond theoretical debates and paradigmatic binaries. Consequently, Jan Wickman’s article examines the role of queer activists in constituting queer studies in Scandinavia comparing the activist traditions in Norway and in Sweden. Monika Myers’s and Jason Crockett’s overview takes activism into a structural level by manifesting for a utopia of queer architecture. Social paradigm is represented in Huai Bao’s social-ethnographical essay on interracial homosexual relationships between North American and Asian gay men. According to Bao, the interracial desires are connected to the processes of negation and idealization based on economic and political



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differences between the men involved. However, the desire also enables the mutual, multifocal cultural exchange. The book reviews of this issue reflect the discussions and polemics of both antisocial and social lines of queer theorizing.

We wish you all inspiring reading moments!

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Editors-in-chief

### References

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