

We All Fall (in Love): Socializing With the Anti-Social

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Each year when Spring quite uninvited, / Gives a garden party to the world united, / Everyone gets so excited / They don't know what they're thinking of. / Folks who've spent the winter freezin', / With the balmy breezin' simply lose their reason. / They know it's the open season for falling in love.

The young fall, the old fall, / The red hot mamas and the cold fall. / From the lily white to the black as night, / They all fall in love.

The fools fall, the wise fall, / The wets, the sprinkled and the dries fall. / From the men who drink to the men who wink, they all fall in love.

You may believe your broker / is very mediocre, / At playing with your stocks and bonds. / At business he may blunder, / But he's a perfect wonder, when he plays with blonds. /

Old maids who object fall, / Old men you never would suspect fall. / Even babies who can hardly crawl fall, / Cause they all fall in love.

The wags fall, the boobs fall, / The gold brick sellers and the rubes fall. / From the underbred, to the overfed, / They all fall in love. / The good, very oft, fall, / The hard shelled Baptists and the soft fall. / Just to prove they b'lieve / In the fall of Eve, they all fall in love...

Cole Porter, "They All Fall in Love"
(from the film *The Battle of Paris*, 1929)

Future or No Future, there will always be entertainment. But it is not only for the sake of diversion that I invoke the above ditty from 1929, a very obscure piece by the rather more famous Cole Porter. It is the witty tension between *falling* and *falling in love* – between drive and desire – that thrills and delights me today.

Porter, a struggling young songwriter at the time of "They all Fall in Love", knew well that to speak about falling – in 1929 – he must evoke its pastoral double: hence, not falling, falling *out* or falling *through*, but falling *in*: "in love", no less.

On the side of the fall, Porter gives us misbehavior, perversion, loss of reason, disregard for strictures of class – the *jouissance* of an "open season". Not for a moment do we lose sight of the lyricist's main concern: the suggestive fall is repeated 35 times, with the chromatic emphasis on "fall" providing a poignant musical wink.¹ We thus learn from Porter that even men "you never would suspect", "men who wink", *fall*; also "old maids", who we'd expect to object, *fall*. Not to mention the hard-shelled baptists who, just to prove they believe in the fall of Eve, *fall*. Alas, the song itself couldn't escape gravity, and the movie that introduced it was soon referred to in the press as a *floperetta*.

¹ To fully appreciate this point, one must listen to the lyrics *performed* and not just read them. On the chromatic descent as a typically Porter-esque device, see Wilder 1972, 225–226; Furia 1992, 161.

One hardly needs to be reminded of Porter's better known "Let's Do It – Let's Fall in Love" (1928), where "doing it" performs a similar wickedness. A sample should suffice to recall the effect:

– – Chinks do it, Japs do it, / Up in Lapland even Lapps do it – – /
The Dutch in old Amsterdam do it, / Not to mention the Finns. /
Folks in Siam do it, / Think of Siamese twins. / Some Argentines
without means do it, / People say in Boston even beans do it, / Let's
do it, let's fall in love."

Yes, even we Finns do it. And why not, for as Porter, explains: "It is nature, that's all / Simply telling us to fall / In love."

One is tempted to write such lyrics off – indeed, to naturalize them – as simple "school-yard snickering"², or, a tad less belittlingly, as campy malapropism, a malapropism that in the context of *moderne* Broadway and Tin Pan Alley manage to come off, paradoxically, as both *risqué* and *comme il faut*.³ As Porter himself quipped in another song, from the 1942 *Du Barry Was a Lady*: "Do you do double entry, dear? / Kindly tell me if so. / I do double entry, dear, / But in the morning, no".

I do *double entendre*, dear reader, but in an academic journal, no, no, no...

So what I propose is that we bracket our hand-me-down notions of High Camp and look at these lyrics in the more troubling terms of queer anti-

sociality and its evident counterpart, reproductive futurism.⁴ We saw already how Porter redeems the queer "fall" (into perversion) with the alibi of romantic "love". The queer is thus ransomed with a token of sociality: within the logic of reproductive futurism, we must be delivered from perversion with, not a gay, but a properly happy ending.

Let's not forget that the notion of "doing it" could, even (or especially) in the twenties – known alternately as either "roaring", "mad" or "gay" – radiate such erotic force that George Gershwin's "Do It Again" (1922) was actually banned from the radio.⁵ Likewise, censors insisted that the line "Let's Fall in Love" be included in the very title of Porter's "Let's Do It", "lest the 'it' be taken for what Cole had intended it to mean".⁶ So the fall itself didn't seem to be a problem, as long as redemptive catharsis ensued.

Thus far, the queer that I'm discussing has but moderate gay particularity. Let's consider, to make things just a tad more queer, one of Porter's most famous songs, "It's de-lovely" from 1936 (written for the show *Red, Hot and Blue*, starring Ethel Merman and Bob Hope). The second refrain describes, unforgettably, romance and its discontents:

*Life seems so sweet that we decide
It's in the bag to get unified,
It's delightful, it's delicious, it's de-lovely.
See the crowd in that church,
See the proud parson popped on his perch,*

2 I borrow this expression from the great authority on the American Popular Song, Alec Wilder (1972, 251).

3 Cf. Wilder's gloss on Cole Porter's "Frenchness": "With the score of 'Fifty Million Frenchmen,' Porter had become, willy-nilly, our house composer for 'French shows.' What Broadway wanted was nothing more than musical French postcards: slightly dirty, but cute. Luckily for Porter, he had both the musical and verbal skill to transcend this drearily juvenile role." (Op. cit. 226–227)

4 This stance is part of my ongoing attempt to do (social?) things with so called antisocial theory. See Kalha 2011a (which deals with reproductive futurism's insistent grip on industrial design ideals) & 2011b (which tackles the figure of the Child and sinthomosexuality).

5 Furia 1992, 160.

6 Citron 1993, 79.

*Get the sweet beat of that organ sealing our doom,
Here goes the groom, boom!*

Here we see how Porter teases the heterosexual pastoral to hint at queer vistas of *jouissance*. Indeed, all this nuptial bliss isn't just delovely, it's precisely *de*-lovely (a negation emphasized by the alienating dash). Ever sensitive to the "de" – the prefix that signals undoing – Porter seems to divulge that the negating power of queerness is the bee in his stinging lyrical bonnet. Never mind the sweet beat, our gloomy fate is sealed: "Here goes the groom, boom!"

Can the popular songwriter get away with such fierce anti-sociality? Certainly not. Witness the fourth refrain:

*All's as right as can be,
Till one night, at my window I see
An absurd bird with a bundle hung on his nose.
'Get baby clothes,'
Those eyes of yours are filled with joy
When nurse appears and cries, 'It's a boy!'
'He's appalling, he's appealing,
He's a pollywog, he's a paragon,
He's a Popeye, he's a panic, he's a pip,
He's de-lovely.'*

There you go: reproductive futurism working its magic on the popular song.

As the equally well-known children's rhyme brings home, blissful *k-i-s-s-i-n-g* always comes confined by strictures of the linguistic and temporal order: *First comes love, then comes marriage, then comes baby in the baby carriage*. In light of north American particularity, wherein spelling and

bees are eagerly linked, we must note the coincidence of *spelling out*⁷ and sublimation – perfected in the rhyme through a kind of euphemistic deferral, not allowing the letters to quite enunciate, to meet at the lips.

However, this redemptive lag is also a suspension of meaning, engendering at least a delay in signification, a delay whose temporality is best described as "ironic". Thus, to go back to "It's De-Lovely", we have between the two reproductive refrains the one describing the wedding night:

*All's well my love, our day's complete,
And what a beautiful bridal suite,
'It's de-reamy, it's de-rowsy,
It's de-reverie, it's de-rhapsody,
It's de-regal, it's de-royal, it's de-Ritz,
It's de-lovely.'*

Desire is thus twisted: from drowsy and dreamy *ennui* to the connoisseurial redundancy of gay regalia, the hyperbolic wedding night is rendered polite, elegant – *de*-carnal. (The Ritz may be sexy, but hardly sexual, it's much too "sophisticated" for that.) Alas, the groom doesn't come, he goes, and with a boom. It's *de*-hetero, it's *de*-hot, it's *de*-horny.

And although a baby eventually ensues, there is something amuck with this particular emblem of futurity. We might in fact call it a *faux* futurity: brought about by an "absurd bird", the child is both appealing and appalling, at once a paragon and a panic – ambiguous terms hinting at affective overinvestment, grotesque performance, chaos: *He's a Popeye, he's a panic, he's a pip, / He's de-lovely*. The baby, in short, is both delightful and quite

⁷ Cf. Edelman, on the demand voiced on him to spell out how to live in the wake of *No Future*: "'Spelling out,' in this context, points to the need for pedagogical elaboration by marshalling Symbolic understanding in order to master the Real of the drive." ("Learning Nothing", 1).

heinous. Thus Porter performs *sinthomosexual* abjection – all in inverted commas, of course.⁸ Even the Abominable Baby itself, this panicky paragon, is represented as an ever so potential locus of anti-social pandemonium.⁹

Himself a paragon of panache, Cole Porter may be no Sid Vicious, but the ironic impulse to which his work attests is plenty wicked.¹⁰ To insist to

8 Consider, for analogy, this excerpt of a song for *And the Villain Still Pursued Her* (a 1912 Yale Dramat production): “I take delight / In looking for a fight / And pressing little babies on the head / Till they’re dead. / I have gotten / A rep for being rotten. / I put poison in my mother’s cream of wheat.” Quoted in McBrien 1998, 44.

9 The youngin grows up to be, like his father (and, bizarrely enough, according to his father), a hot number – too hot, even, to be quite “true” (to normative sociality, that is): “Our boy grows up to be six feet three. / He’s so good-looking, he looks like me, / It’s delightful, it’s delicious, it’s de-lovely.” As a matter of fact, the de-lovely young man is such a hit, that “all dowagers send him flowers”, and he ends up in Hollywood; “Good God! Today he gets such pay / That Elaine Barry’s his fiancée, / It’s delightful, it’s delicious, it’s delectable, it’s delirious, / It’s dilemma, it’s delimit, it’s deluxe, / It’s de-lovely.” So the circle “closes” with a relentless (relentlessly queer) reproduction of the past. We are served a maelstrom of delectation and delirium, a strange luxuriousness that is both dilemma and “delimit”. Witness thus the inevitable fall (hardly in love, this time) of another “man you never would suspect”, as he turns out to be precisely a “man who winks”, even making money and a career out of it.

10 The same show, *Red, Hot and Blue*, that outed “It’s De-Lovely”, gave us another Ethel Merman showstopper, “Hymn To Hymen”, one that (unlike “It’s De-Lovely”) has escaped standardization, perhaps because its very commitment to the de-lovely:

“Hymen, thou phony / God of matrimony, / Humble we pray, keep away from our door. / Those thou hast mated/ Say thou art overrated/ And call thee a dated, unmitigated bore./ Why wouldst thou tie us / In wedlock, holy and pious./ Knowing as thou doest / Love is truest when it’s free.”

Here Porter celebrates “free love” and desecrates the institution of marriage, playing with the ideology that links the hymen with holy matrimony, while invoking classical etymology (the Greek *humen* meaning membrane, but also referring to the god of marriage, *Humen*). That hymen, for Porter, represents the “phony god of matrimony”, attests to his role as critic of sacrosanct normativity, yet there is something more going on here, something that remains, at the same time, short of and beyond the ideological proper. Some

talk about love in terms of falling, I would like to suggest, entails a queer perversion of the very term it celebrates.¹¹ Still, we recognize in Porter the sublime effect of the social, what we might call, *pace* Lee Edelman, the violence of the aesthetic impulse.¹² The tendency to always *spell out* the “l-o-v-e” in falling, to highlight the pastoral effects of doing *it*. The reversal of the drive into sublimation, of the appalling into the appealing; the impulse to fall back on rectitude even while abandoning oneself to the fall, in order for *jouissance* to *fall in*.

Thus Porter succeeds in performing, gaily, both the fantasy of *jouissance* and its delimiting counterparts in redemptive functionalism. I stress the both-and. When read in such versatile terms, Porter’s work provides us with the very definition of *queer irony*: a radical discontinuity that feeds off erudition, while warding off “wisdom”.¹³ A being-in-the-know that opposes straight Knowledge, while showing a keen knowingness about rectitude and the powers that be.

Enter, however, historical hindsight to display the full force of allegorical investment. Philip Furia, one of the most insightful connoisseurs of Tin Pan Alley, writes in the early 1990s:

“In ‘Let’s Do It’ his listing of various creatures and their modes of copulation mirrors the very erotic universe it describes – image

might call it misogyny, as it submits, gaily, the female body to the *jouissance* of a pun. Yet the other side of this suspect disregard is in the liberating embrace of the “genderless” drive.

11 Indeed, another invaluable Porter song declares, quite hilariously, “Let’s Not Talk About Love”.

12 Cf. “Hamlet’s Wounded Name”, 10.

13 I am inspired here by Edelman’s de Manean conceptualization of irony. For Edelman, irony functions as the other face of the temporal-futuristic predicament of allegory; it is a corrosive force that sunders the coherence of articulated wisdom and points to the persistent instability that allegory seeks to transcend.

propagating image with an imaginative fecundity that rivals nature's own fecundity. -- the relentless energy that spawns the extensive catalog is itself testimony to the creative stamina that animates the erotic universe. Part of that generative force is Porter's clever word-play, propagating puns out of the simplest terms --. [In 'It's De-Lovely'] the erotic energy of the list is even more explicitly connected with the natural fecundity it celebrates. The verse expresses a 'sudden urge to sing' that is part of the universal fecundity of nature --, and the same creative urge manifests itself in the language of the song as it moves increasingly toward fertile abandon. -- In a lyric that celebrates the inexhaustible fertility of 'Mother Nature' in the spring --, Porter's cataloging matches nature's procreative energy with equally earthy -- and seemingly endless -- verbal fecundity."¹⁴

Milking the breeding analogy for all its worth, Furia ends up rehearsing -- with an ironic fury that all but masks the ideological pull of his discourse -- a conspicuous tautology: *copulation, propagation, fecundity, natural fecundity*¹⁵; *universal fecundity of nature; creative stamina, creative urge*. The notion of "fertile abandon" all but shifts the emphasis from redundancy to oxymoron (at least from a queer, that is, anti-social viewpoint). In any case, the textual effect is that of virilization -- or, if you prefer, an "impregnation" of Porter -- more in line, nevertheless, with age-old conceptualizations of spiritual fertility than with the modern-urbane particularities of Porter's art. I challenge you to find a more dogged instance of reproductive futurism than this Furioso one where we have even "image propagating image", and "word-play propagating puns". If Porter himself lacks credibility as breeder proper, the multiplication is dispensed to embrace the functional fecundity of language itself.

14 Furia 1992, 163, 167-168.

15 Correct me if I'm wrong, but isn't "fecundity" always "natural"?

I do sympathize with Furia (he obviously knows his Porter inside out), yet I can't help but play devil's advocate: does Porter really *celebrate* "natural fecundity" -- or rather its very opposite? It is, more than anything, Furia's own throbbing mimicry of the allegorical that insists on identifying fecundity as nature -- that is, insists on literalizing the drive -- where I see something rather different: anti-social energy and the pulsations of irony. In the thrall of allegorical rescue, Porter becomes an unwilling emblem of the pastoral. "Pastoral" is understood here, not just as rural idealization (Porter was indeed a farm boy from Peru, Indiana), but as having to do precisely with herding (= coming together for reproductive purposes), and why not as in the shepherding duties of a pastor. Here it is the hind-sighted scholar who unwittingly takes up those duties -- invoking, in the process, Porter as a happy herdsman -- to care for the very sociality that the ideology of reproduction so neatly sustains.

Lee Edelman describes, fittingly, how "the sublimity of 'generation' as Nature's 'highest fulfillment' merely sublimates and euphemizes sex when it celebrates procreation. The Child, who must otherwise function as the material evidence of fucking as such, emerges instead as its spiritualization, transcending sexuality and negating it."¹⁶

In theory, this is exactly what happens. Yet Cole Porter, read up close, shows us how the child (now de-capitalized) may occasion a celebration of the queer event, even as the "material evidence of fucking as such."¹⁷ For me, ever the wishful signifier, Porter seems to complete the mission impossible of breeding *jouissance*. The child -- here figurally de-sublimated, or rendered hyper-sublime -- emerges as its queer mirror-obverse; the author redeems

16 "Unbecoming", 9.

17 In the quote above, Edelman discusses bareback pornography; I discuss popular song -- the tenuous affinity between the two remains, of course, a matter of reading.

himself as “mysterious begetter” (to borrow a term from Shakespeareana). That such exceptional figurality is possible does, of course, not rule out the heterogenerative spiritualization of the edelmanian (capitalized) Child, quite on the contrary.

Porter himself puts all this rather pithily in “Where Is the Life that Late I Led” (from the Shakespeare-inspired musical *Kiss Me Kate* of 1948):

*A married life may all be well,
But raising an heir
Could never compare
With raising a bit of hell...*¹⁸

(If only Hamlet could have learned from Porter what Porter had learned from Shakespeare.)

Yet redemption is inevitable: whether it’s Cole Porter himself, flip-flopping the fall, or our wishful readings pursuing allegorical validity, the redemptive impulse performs itself, however nervously, across the trajectory of cultural production. As Edelman puts it, the very *conceptualization* of the queer “zero” (which takes place, inevitably, when we come together to discuss,

“productively”, anti-sociality) automatically turns it into “a One”. The rational One is thus reinforced – the shrew tamed, the fall safety-netted; the animal doing it is fixed, as it were, by the outcoming Child.

But as Porter’s art reminds us, the allegorical impulse is an ambiguous one, never quite as clean-cut as theory might have it. Porter’s queer display¹⁹ of reproductive futurism – the *faux-futurism* of the queer begetter – performs its workings in a troublesome mode, pointing rather to an allegory of unreadability. Fucking with both spiritualization and *jouissance*, Porter renders whatever we think we know about human conception unclear.

Of course, saying this, as has become clear, may itself be just another working of allegory, of what I call wishful/wistful signifying.²⁰ I’m not sure what the antidote for such signifying might be, or what purpose such an antidote might serve. Let’s just say that, for the time being, I’m happy with my readerly schizophrenia.

But let’s bracket Cole Porter for a moment – it was great fun, but it was just one of those things, right? How does all this relate to the journal at hand, dedicated as it is to doing, at most, the theoretical *it*?

18 Or, as the second chorus goes: “The marriage game is quite alright / Yes, during the day it’s easy to play / But, oh, what a bore at night.” This song, “Where Is the Life that Late I led?” is sung by the shrew’s barely tameable husband recollecting nostalgically Italian tricks of past days, such as Carolina (“Where are you Lina, still peddling your pizza in the streets’ a Taormina?”); Lucrecia (“what scandalous doings in the ruins of Pompei”); Rebecca (“my Becky-Wecky-o, could she still be cruising that amusing Ponte Vecchio”), or Lovely Lisa, (“you gave a new meaning to the leaning tower of Pisa”). Porter’s fathers and husbands, it seems, are little more than do-dads. But it is precisely this their figurality, performing a “done up” logic of gender and sexual desire, that renders them indispensable. The figures of foreign trickery in “Where Is the Life” may be women prostitutes, but their framing resonates way too queerly with male cruising traditions to be taken at face value.

19 Cf. Lat. *displicare*, to scatter or disperse.

20 It may be Porter’s historicity that enables such a move, as it were, of ironic-allegorical hindsight. Of course, reading is also contingent on various performances by various artists who interpret the Porter Songbook. That Porter manages to subvert the misogyny while rehearsing it becomes quite obvious upon hearing Hildegard Knef’s 1969 rendition of “Without Love”. The fact that Knef is “an imitation of an imitation” enhances the queer impression, her husky parlando being modelled after the “inimitable” Marlene Dietrich, who in turn ventriloquates traditions of European cabaret, et cetera.

One recognizes in certain recent strands of queer theorizing an insistence on socializing the so-called anti-social.²¹ We might describe this tendency as a porteresque “falling in”. Theory, in the process, is read in terms of political availability, even when its grounding ethos – or perhaps rather, its basic instinct – is fiercely dysfunctional.

Linked with this pastoralizing trend is an adhesion to *literalness*, to straight rather than queer reading, to word-for-word translation. If a critic speaks Lacanian, for example, why do we feel obliged to translate him or her to, say, Foucauldian or Butlerian? Does it all boil down to linguistic alterity – *identity* – one wonders?

Some of us may not mind the jargon, but find anti-sociality simply unflattering to queer habitus; to be sure, it’s more unbecoming than theories of political performativity. Yet you might consider this analogy: what Butler urged us to realize *structurally* about gender, Edelman inspires us to recognize about sociality, community, political viability, and reading itself.²² Isn’t our social consciousness precisely an imitation of an imitation;

21 What I myself am calling for, basically, is *dis-embarrassment*: how might we, first of all, disembarass ourselves from the strictures of righteousness before the queer totally eludes us; how, on the other hand, could we free ourselves from the unreasonable embarrassment that our communal, affective impulses seem to warrant? Hence, I am for socializing *with* the anti-social, but not with socializing *it*.

22 Judith Butler wrote in 1993: “To oppose the theatrical to the political within contemporary queer politics is, I would argue, an impossibility – –. Indeed, an important set of histories might be told in which the increasing politicization of theatricality for queers is at stake (more productive, I think, than an insistence on the two as polar opposites within queerness). – – Performativity describes this relation of being implicated in that which one opposes, this turning of power against itself to produce alternative modalities of power – –.” (Butler 1993, 232–233, 241) Though Edelman might not subscribe to Butler’s vocabulary – particularly the 1993 notion of “forging a future” through subversion – he would hardly deny the performative panache and inevitable politicality of his writing.

isn’t sociality a performative *assignment* – one that queers can never (shall never) carry out according to expectation? Yet we, too – or especially we – are conditioned/condemned to ventriloquate sociality; to repeat its normative axioms just as anxiously (and, perhaps, joyously) as we parade our genders.

Here I go, un-practicing what I preach: translating edelmanian into butlerian, and very roughly at that – not doing either one a favor, exactly. On the other hand, there’s nothing wrong with enlisting the services of a Butler to help wash down *No Future* – didn’t I just rely on a Porter to bear its theoretical weight? Let’s just say that the point of the edelmanian exercise is not to deem redemptive sociality “bad” (any more than celebrate anti-sociality as “good”), but rather to analyze the social as ideology, and to point thereby at alternative conceptual vistas.

To elaborate on what’s at stake in our debates on anti-sociality, I would like to take a close – very close, close to the point of paranoia – look at an important critique of the anti-social thesis. Judith Halberstam’s (2008) comment has been one of the most vociferous, but also most intriguingly ambiguous ones. Since most readers are probably both familiar and impressed with the talk/article in question (published in the *Graduate Journal of Social Science*), I will engage in a tactlessly detailed reading of it.

Halberstam’s main theoretical interest is in what she calls “the politics of knowledge” – a term that bespeaks an investment in Foucauldian notions of oppositional knowledge. What Halberstam calls for is precisely a politicization of the anti-social – something that Edelman would probably find oxymoronic. I do not have a problem with such a premise; but it does seem to emerge, problematically, from reading *No Future* “literally” – or, as it were, “manually” – that is, in terms of functional practice rather than theory. Taking on a radically antisocial stance Halberstam proposes, quite in line with Edelman, a “relentless form of negativity in place of the forward

looking – – politics of hope”.²³ Yet she distances herself – emphatically – from the leading theoretical proponents of this negativity, and in the process, ends up *looking forward* to a theory without them. Embracing a surprisingly literal aspect of negativity, Halberstam negates its authors as well as the theoretical disposition of its pronouncements.

While Halberstam claims to be elaborating on a general critical trend, in fact she is talking about certain *male* scholars – Bersani and Edelman – with the latter getting the roughest treatment (due, I suppose, to the polemic topicality of *No Future*). As Halberstam bemoans, “ultimately, [Edelman] does not fuck the law, big or little L”.²⁴ Edelman “seems to mean something (too much) about Lacan’s symbolic and not enough about the powerful negativity of punk politics.”²⁵

Halberstam’s contempt for theory and Lacanian discourse – those “unnervingly tidy and precise theoretical contractions”²⁶ – is remarkable; she finds in Edelman a Lacanian-derived “self-enclosed world of cleverness” that tends to “close down the anarchy of signification”.²⁷ So, for Halberstam, Edelman is a rebel without a cause: he can never be punky, funky, trashy, radically queer enough. Alas, what he is lacking in, is balls.

23 Halberstam 2008, 141.

24 Halberstam 2008, 142.

25 Halberstam 2008, 148.

26 Halberstam 2008, 142.

27 Ibid. According to Halberstam, Edelman “strives to exert a kind of obsessive control over the reception of his own discourse” (ibid.). Since when did it become a form of “obsessive control” to anticipate critique? The function of this rhetorical mode is perhaps not so much to divine or second guess (hence disarm) the tide of critical reception, but to just sigh, *Alas, I know I will be given hell for this, but I cannot help myself*. Halberstam’s point is both clever and absurd, for how does one “close down” the anarchy of signification? Surely not through “chiasmic formulations” and reflective or ironic-sardonic footnotes?

Most intriguing, perhaps, is Halberstam’s choice of cultural texts to posit against the (for her) all too canonical, all too familiar, all too lame frame of reference of theorists like Bersani and Edelman – that is, the Halberstamian “second” canon. Now, I for one, am all for alternative or up-dated canons; even more, for canons deconstructed. Those who haven’t heard as much of Yoko Ono, Jamaica Kincaid or Valerie Solanas as, say Genet or Lacan (but do we really know these men inside out?), truly deserve to hear more about them – much more, even, than the one paragraph per lady that Halberstam offers us. It is not just the schematic speed-reading that troubles me, it’s the way these figures of “good” anti-sociality are pitted against Bersani’s and Edelman’s “spoiled” anti-social canon (been there done *what?*).

Call me conservative, but for me it’s not really the canon itself that we should worry about (canons can be good fun), it’s what we do with the canon that matters. I don’t see Halberstam as yet providing us with truly alternative any more than compelling *readings* of her chosen texts. True, this may be forthcoming. But so far, her anti-canonic move is one of replacing rather than displacing. Indeed, Halberstam seems keen on constructing a new *cannon* mainly in order to annihilate the other, helplessly gay one. It’s not that the latter isn’t queer enough; it could never be queer enough for Halberstam, because it is endorsed by gay men.

Here my reading may tend to the subjective, so please revisit the text to see what *you* think. There lingers, on my palate anyway, a disturbingly ambivalent aftertaste: for example in the way the powerful negativity of Kincaid’s writing is employed to summon its opposite: compassion, benevolence and piety. Halberstam’s (fast food) menu says, in clear block letters, ANTI-SOCIAL RAGE, but it is in fact served up with a benevolent dressing of anti-racism and feminism; sandwiched between the two, the truly unruly: sassy, saucy Valerie Solanas. One is left with a feeling that Halberstam merely *utilizes* her examples, her three graces/spices. Especially

Kincaid, whose potentially pungent, post-colonial “ferocious voice of despair” is pitted neatly against the blandly “impotent” (because gaily apolitical), white, middle-class, middle-aged, male, well-to-do but whining voice of gay theorists. Pleasant, but rather tasteless (and certainly lacking in articulate garnish), this post-colonial-feminist serving of anti-sociality.

As a Finn I feel compelled to ask: what happens to the halberstamian idea of gay white male hegemony when it travels to Europe? Nothing much. It travels first class, and all too comfortably, if you ask me. Witness, for example, a cfp for the Polish journal *Interalia*: their theme being “Is there a gay bias in queer theory?”. A slight (jet) lag, but other than that, the idea has landed in Europe alive and well. (Meanwhile, how many gay male polish queer theorists do we know? I doubt there are many more there than in Finland?)²⁸

One of Halberstam’s articles main aims is to show how gay male anti-social theorizing “coincides” with fascism. Or, as Halberstam puts it:

“The apolitical anti-social agenda, *I will be arguing* in this section, cuts both ways and while it mitigates against liberal fantasies of progressive enlightenment and community cohesion, it also

coincides uncomfortably with a fascist sensibility *as we will see*.”²⁹
[Emphases added]

Here the accident of rhetorical tautology (“I will be arguing...”, “... as we will see”) betrays a nervousness *vis à vis* argumentation, for in the course of her article Halberstam will actually never *argue* (as in: make a case for), nor will “we” ever see an empirical materialization of this purported coincidence between gay theory and fascism. Her “fascist thesis”, then, remains rhetorical rather than analytical. Hence, perhaps, the choice of the verb *coincide*, an ambivalent term which can suggest anything from vague agreement or contemporariness to substantial correspondence.

This is by no means to claim that there aren’t challenging links between fascism and gay history. To do so would be tantamount to saying that modern queer theory has nothing to do with liberal humanism.³⁰ But I am more interested here in argument and strategy than factual correctness. An example: when Halberstam makes the statement that “gender normative partnerships between men in Germany – – [dovetailed] with the exaltation of masculinity within National Socialism”, she supplies her statement with the comforting phrase “as various scholars have shown” and even adds a promising footnote.³¹

The footnote, however, fails to deliver, for all it does is offer a speedy interpretation (nothing more than a description, really) of a *Canadian* [!] painting *from 1992* [!]. The work features “two homoerotic skinheads – – doing a Hitler salute”, complete with sunset and swastika. While the painting may well tell us something about desire and queer fantasy and,

28 No, there is no gay bias in queer theory *where I come from*, quite the opposite, really. In Finland, “everyone” knows Butler and Halberstam, but has anyone ever heard of D.A. Miller, for example? Edelman was a complete unknown here before the *Pornoakademia* research group invited him to give a talk in 2006. Glancing at the audience in Berlin 2009 (where I gave this talk), I saw but a handful of those famous gay white males, and I’m not sure what cultural woodwork they actually came out of. Are we really to endorse such mathematical exercises? Cf. Halberstam (2005, 219): “A quick glance at the list of participants [of the ‘Gay Shame’ conference at the University of Michigan] - - confirmed this notion, as at least seventeen white gay men were scheduled to speak out of a list of about forty-five participants and only a handful of people of color were listed for the entire event.”

29 Halberstam 2008, 143.

30 Or, say, that the cultural-political activism of Finnish “lesbians” (queer women) circa 1900 wasn’t informed by a broader agenda of Finnish Nationalism.

31 Halberstam 2008, 144.

perhaps, postmodern modes of allegory, it says absolutely nothing about the historical linkage at issue.³²

For Halberstam (drawing here from Andrew Hewitt), the German homophiles of the 1920s and 30s were “early anti-social activists”, whose masculinist ideology was informed by severe misogyny, anti-semitism and *Tuntenhass* (“Faggot hatred”). This is, of course, a highly selective, if not opportunistic reading of German history. One is left unsure of what exactly Halberstam is saying here: is she pointing out relevant genealogical challenges or just showing that there is a guilty conscience to anti-sociality that we should be wary of? Or even: that misogyny and anti-semitism are part and parcel of gay male theory?³³

32 Halberstam 2008, 144 note 1. The painting, “Amorous meeting”, is by Canadian painter Attila Richard Lukacs. Is this painting a “homeroetic” *fantasy* (what and how might such a fantasy signify?). Is the painting, perhaps, a critique; or rather a parody? How might it “coincide” with 1920’s homophilia? Halberstam doesn’t tell. Perhaps because any analysis, even the most rudimentary one, would betray the frailty of her interpretation and ruin the illusionary effect of the footnote as illustration. In Halberstam’s defence it should be noted that she does eventually reference some historically grounded studies, namely Dagmar Herzog’s *Sex After Fascism* (2007) and Andrew Hewitt’s *Political Inversions: Homosexuality, Fascism & the Modernist Imagination* (1996). Again, I am not arguing for correct interpretation or empirical evidence, just analyzing the effects of Halberstam’s text in terms of rhetorical strategy.

33 The question remains (or am I just being a spoil-sport?): why insist, of all possible historical antecedents, on fascism as *the* genealogical analogy for gay male theorizing? In fact, what Halberstam comes up with is suggestive *genealogy*. Something of a mongrel, neither analogy nor genealogy. Suggestion, not just of an anti-social subconscious, but of essentially evil echoes in gay writing. We are left with the haunting shadow of anti-semitism, racism, misogyny and sexism, cannily projected onto Edelman and Bersani.

Halberstam elsewhere states that white gay men “show little interest” in writing and thinking about race.³⁴ To dramatize her argument she refers, ambiguously, to queer theoretical Authority:

“As Sedgwick herself reminds us – –, there is a thin line between homosociality and homosexuality, and white men (gay or straight) pursuing the interests of white men (gay or straight) always means a heap of trouble for everybody else.”³⁵

As this strategic inversion of Sedgwick’s analysis reminds us, the subtleties of sexual difference do matter – as do the different shades of “white”, or the nature of the “interests” being pursued.³⁶ Why is it, I would venture to ask, that gay male “homosociality” gets speed-read in terms of masculinist-fascist *hidden agenda*, while lesbian sociality is imagined as solidarity-enhancing and politically sound *benevolent community*? Isn’t this strangely reminiscent of the gender ideology of old, something that we used to refer to as chauvinism?

It seems almost as if Halberstam *wished* to perpetuate gender; subscribing to gender, better yet, insisting on it, her text actually props it up. (Might one even go as far as to say that this particular text expresses a queer *desire* for gender?) Call me an idealist, but I would like to imagine a queer

34 Halberstam 2005, 220. While analytical sensitivity to race and sexuality do go hand in hand, this should not entail that all queer analysis should at all times explicitly deal with race, any more than all readings of race should be obliged to deal with sexuality. In my mind queer theory (say, Sedgwick’s work) is “by nature” sensitive to the vector of race as well as gender, but this sensitivity should not be reduced to a normative model, or methodical mannerism.

35 Halberstam 2005, 231. To add to the ambiguity, Halberstam refers in the text to Sedgwick’s *Between Men*, but the footnote references (vaguely, without page numbers) her *Shame and Performativity*.

36 What about Edelman’s work on James Baldwin? What about Samuel Delany? Kobena Mercer? Jonathan Dollimore’s work? Such nit-picking is precisely what Halberstam’s essentializing account urges us to stoop to.

space (which is of course a very particular space, and not necessarily a public one) where gender no longer – or, not for the time being – holds first priority. If ever there is a place to contemplate, to savor and sample a discourse *beyond gender* – that is, beyond the *conventions* of both gender and race – then queer theory should be that place.

Of course I realize that one of the things that enables me to utter this may be the happenstance of my biological gender and race. Yet I wonder... why not envision a structural space, a space beyond structure, a theoretical/writerly space, that is heedless of gender? Why not call that space the space of *jouissance*. If there were a way for a “politics of *jouissance*” to transcend its oxymoronic nature, then this space would be where I would first and foremost like to see it emerge. How hot it would be to hook up with Halberstam in such a queer space!

For Halberstam, gender variance seems to represent the ultimate political good. Alas, not so much *Tuntenliebe* as some kind of Butch Redemption, this choosy embrace of variety. I would argue that there is “gender variance” in all same sex relations; and that gender variance itself by no means precludes masculinism. Moreover, I would allow *eros* more leeway – even, perhaps to disassociate itself from masculinism – and see how the Death drive can very well be (though does not have to be) about displacing gender, about renouncing or troubling masculinism, about enjoying, in any case, one’s gender with a pinch of salt.

I also wonder if *jouissance* is as hopelessly devoted to gender stability as Halberstam likes to think. In fact, the “feminist passivity” that Halberstam celebrates through the examples of Yoko Ono and Marina Abramovicz, is something that many gay male theorists – notably Bersani and Edelman – can certainly relate with. On the other hand, one might ask whether such a subversive embrace can count as anti-sociality (which, again, is not to say that it should have to). After all, isn’t feminism proper invested in

communality, steeped in social ethos, committed, as Edelman would say, “to intelligibility as the expanding horizon of social justice”?³⁷

Again, I offer mitigation: to continue to rally the cause of gender sensitivity *vis à vis society*, but to express a more post-social attitude within the queer context? A post-social attitude that respects nuance as well as nastiness? (That the employment of such double-talk is reminiscent of the closet doesn’t automatically render it a bad idea; for surely one still speaks differently *unter uns*?) This might entail a recognition of queer antipathies between us.

One of the most scary – and compelling – bits in Halberstam’s critique is the gloss on Valerie Solanas. We know Solanas as founder of the underground organization SCUM (*Society for Cutting Up Men*), yet it was with a 32 millimeter revolver that she infamously fired at and nearly killed the faggot Andy Warhol. For Solanas, gay men were utterly useless, patriarchal garbage. I quote: “While straight men are walking dildos, gay men or faggots embody all the worst traits of patriarchy – –.”³⁸ Thus writes Halberstam and there are no inverted commas. She is thus not actually *quoting* Solanas, but rather speaking in accord with her.

Thus negativity, in Halberstam, oddly morphs into condemnation. Or am I now reading Halberstam (too) literally?³⁹ Do I not recognize the queer irony in her text, as well as its intertextual flirtation with Solanas? In

37 Edelman 2004, 107.

38 Halberstam 2008, 150.

39 Halberstam’s last sentence in the section on Solanas ends in an interestingly ambivalent note: “[W]e have to recognize that this kind of violence is precisely what we call upon and imply when we theorize and conjure negativity.” (Halberstam 2008, 150). One is left perplexed: is this really the endorsement it purports to be, or rather a (sarcastic?) questioning of anti-social theory intended to materialize potentially in the reader’s mind: *You asked for it, now deal with it*; aka: *here’s a taste of your own medicine, guys*.

fact, I am not sure where to look for this irony, although my gut feeling is that Solanas might best be read in terms of queer hyperbole. Still, I must maintain: where Edelman's theoretical negativity, as I understand it, has to do with (eventual/inevitable) *self*-negation, in Halberstam negativity seems to become a negation of the other. Halberstam's theory, in other words, is not anti-social, it's just *unsociable* – most clearly *vis à vis* one particular minority group: gay men.

I do commend Halberstam for placing the cat on the table (as we say in Finnish). To be sure, it is part of the pastoral impulse to sweep untidy figures such as Solanas under the rainbow-colored rug. Who can deny it: "*She's appalling, she's appealing...*" Among other things, Solanas might eventually inspire a more structurally-oriented reading of queer antipathy – whether real or rhetorical – that is, open up an analytical opportunity, one that is neither political nor passive, but perhaps queerly enlightening, or just stimulating.⁴⁰

It is this troubled ambivalence that, at the end of the day, makes Halberstam's anti-social analysis⁴¹ relevantly queer – perhaps partly in spite of itself (like it or not, such ambivalence is a trademark of most truly compelling texts). Halberstam may envision herself as constructing, constructively, an "alternative" archive, but her off-stage performance of queer antipathy – perhaps representing a *jouissance* of its own – cannot help but steal the show.

40 Alas, for Halberstam this route would probably be anti-climactic. No to analysis, yes to action, declares Halberstam's banner.

41 One hesitates, though, to call it an analysis, for her text is more a strategic maneuver. This is not to ostracize her, nor to claim that the rest of us are immune to strategic impulses in writing – far from it – just to note that in Halberstam the presence of agenda seems unusually blatant. Not exactly a hidden one then, yet somehow disingenuous in its claim at objective, constructive reckoning rather than divulging a *jouissance* of its own.

Canons, Scope and Size

Glorify Sixth Avenue, and put bathrooms in the Zoo, but please, don't monkey with Broadway!

It does seem I committed a major *faux-pas* by kicking this article off with Cole Porter. For what Halberstam most has a problem with what she calls the "gay male canon". While embracing the negative in the anti-social, she forcefully dismisses the "tiny archives" that fuel its articulation. Of course, it really isn't about size, but scope, comprehensiveness; yet Halberstam is too eager to disclose her investment to accept that bigger isn't necessarily more beautiful – "Size Does Matter", says the heading to her section on archives.⁴²

What, then, constitutes this scrawny archive, this oxymoronic *wee canon*, that is always already a canon of petty single-mindedness? Well, pretty much everyone and thing that I happen to be soft for, from Judy Garland to Tennessee Williams, from Broadway Musicals to Andy Warhol. Including, naturally, the likes of Oscar Wilde and Alfred Hitchcock. And Lacan. And, I presume, Derrida and de Man. Virginia Woolf, too, is part of the teeny weeny canon, while Gertrude Stein apparently isn't.

As utterly different as all these figures are – let alone the idiosyncratic readings they are known to inspire – they are taken wholesale to represent the useless, masturbatory monomania (my words, this time) of gay theorizing. Ignored is the simple fact that while, say, Hitchcock is inevitably canonic, Edelman's readings of Hitchcock certainly aren't. Here we run the

42 Sure enough, a big bulge can be a turn on, but mainly when it involves a swelling dynamic, and *reading* is precisely such a moment of swelling, expansion. Halberstam, if you ask me, is not blowing hard enough to make a mountain out of a molehill. This said, I do appreciate the suggestion of antisocial irony in the title *Size Does Matter*.

obvious risk of “straightening” out the canon rather than working against its grain. Straightness does work in miraculous ways.

Halberstam’s *diy*-hard canon leaves me feeling ambiguous, not least for its temporal orientation: it harks back at a radical feminist past while seeking to construct, manual-ly, a queer future. Of course, all canons are, at bottom, *Do-It-Yourself* ones, far from the unyielding monuments that Halberstam invokes. Were we really aware of the queer subtleties involved in, say, a Cole Porter ditty? No doubt Halberstam would be quick to dismiss Porter as way too gay – too Broadway – to be relevant.

Yet, as suggested by the porteresque notion of “doing it”, it is up to us to do our thing with canonic signification, to have our way with *canonical notions* (and not so much “the canon” itself, which is just a lifeless body of work until we engage with it). Our healthy critiques of the canon can easily become more canonical than the canon they wish to undermine. I would thus urge critics to partake in “doing it” – that is, in *reading*, for surely it is reading that offers the subtlest and most disorienting way to play havoc with the archive. As Edelman, discussing Hamlet and Derrida, stresses:

“[T]he archive’s anticipatory promise of ‘the future to come’ commits it – – to an act of ‘self-repetition, self-confirmation in a *yes, yes*.’ Such a ‘yes’ affirms, in the name of the future, an identity, precisely that of the One, that obliges the future to conform to the past, to affirm itself as survival within an economy of reserve. – – this future, like the ‘yes’ by which archivization proposes to affirm it, performs a compulsory return to the One of the law and of the father.”⁴³

Digesting Hamlet while reading Halberstam, one cannot help but think the two H’s in tandem: to see how Halberstam projects the “zero” onto gay

⁴³ “Hamlet’s Wounded Name”, 16.

white males; how she abjects them in an act of “violent messianism” that ends up, in spite of itself, acculturating and enshrining queer memory. This by way of hailing a Brave New Canon, one that masks paternal legislation with maternal community.

Edelman’s suggestion that the very concept of the human is “determined by the structuring fantasy of the phallus”, gains in resonance here. As Edelman explains, the fantasy of the phallus “provides the template for the sovereignty and coherence of the subject, who is thereby at once allowed and compelled to enter the order of meaning. Enshrouded in the veil of fantasy that alone enables it to function, the phallus stands as the figure for the solidification of the ego – –.”⁴⁴

Read in this light, Halberstam’s account can be seen as a severely, however tacitly gendered, and hence, conservative and convention-bound one: it is about suspect men and masculinity – a masculinity that is both admired and abhorred. Does Halberstamian bravado in fact attest to some kind of “phallic display”, seeking to solidify the lesbian-feminist ego – drawing from a “homophobic” distaste for gayness (in tune with, if not devoted to, some form of lesbian separatism)? Eager to be recognized as “one of the guys”, Halberstam (which is of course to say, her text) adds to the old *male—female* dichotomy the twist of a new, dialectical hierarchy, one that suggests a valorization of “real” masculinity at the expense of gay-maleness, the latter standing as the figure for tired canons, political impotence, stylistic masturbation, etc. There is, as it were, a roughneck⁴⁵ quality to such

⁴⁴ “Unbecoming”, 17.

⁴⁵ I say roughneck, though red-neck might also be an appropriate designation. Halberstam’s subscription to “peasant reason” and functional “common sense” notwithstanding, there are obvious echoes of modern urbanity (as opposed to urbaneness) in her writerly habitus: echoes of the street urchin, the lad, the punk – as her reference to Sid Vicious already explicates.

bravado: an estimation of straightness that to me seems rather unqueer – except perhaps in its very queer, radical distrust of gayness.

If this all sounds unreasonable, it should, because the point here is to note how hopelessly insufficient – as well as somewhat misleading – our conceptual conventions are when applied *within* a queer context. What is this queer mixture of feminism and masculinism that my reading so roughly and rudely points at? Gay misogyny, for example, is not misogyny proper; nor does “lesbian homophobia” equal homophobia proper. Not exactly penis envy or phallic investment, not exactly homophobia or misandry, yet perhaps somehow conceptually related to these? In any case, a strikingly undertheorized issue, this admixture, and certainly calling for a recognition of negative affect within queer theory. So yes, do let’s continue to explore the eventual workings of gay homosociality, but let’s not forget to deconstruct the lesbian-social, as well as other socialities, affects and antipathies.

Jane Gallop has written:

“– ‘an entire little mythology’ *makes us think* that feminists *should* critique and demystify male writing –. Feminist ideology produces a morality that could condemn as deviant any pleasure that does not serve the enhancement of female identity. – – male homosexuality may figure as the exemplary thorn in feminism’s thorny relation to perversion.”⁴⁶

“In fact”, Gallop later added, “what I call feminist ideology or feminist normative sexuality is not, I believe, feminist but a residue of patriarchal ideology which some feminists continue to hold unanalyzed.”⁴⁷

46 Gallop 1988 [1984], 110.

47 This latter point is from her reflective commentary to the original article (p. 116). In other, equally intriguing, instances Gallop shows how she herself started showing symptoms of the anti-(gay-)male-theorist stance. Dis-splaying

So Gallop, in a perverse move, brings together feminism and Roland Barthes – the theoretical stylist par excellence – to challenge feminism’s distrust of gay writing, and ponder on the troubled contradiction between perversion and political responsibility. Does this 1984 realization still hold true?

Style, in my mind, is *the* theoretical underdog here, as crucial as it is in both defining and distorting the queer. Fueled by stylistic anxiety, language becomes a figure of protection, just like the figural Child. (Language, that is, as opposed to social viability.⁴⁸) Halberstam speaks less about style, but she does touch upon it, for example in recounting the limited “range of affective responses” that gay male anti-social theory engenders: “fatigue, ennui, boredom, indifference, ironic distancing, indirectness, arch dismissal, insincerity and camp.”⁴⁹ Halberstam even gives us a scholastic

these symptoms – dispelling them by splaying them open – she leaves little for the critic to scrutinize: “Much more profoundly silenced is the influence of Michel Foucault, never explicitly mentioned in any of my work”, Gallop reflects on her writing, adding, “I was loath to mention him”. Gallop pleads guilty as charged, and I, for one, vote for annulment. Particularly disarming is her admittance to a theoretical gynosexuality: “My rationalization for this omission was that I was writing in a feminist context and that those theoretical names would alienate my readers.” So Gallop had to suppress what she calls her “commerce with men (thinkers)” in order to seduce women (readers).

48 We might consider, in terms deriving from the idea of social maturation, factitious theory as Child-like – as it were, regressive. Such writing fucks with adulthood and the temporal logic that maintains sociality. Logically, the disavowal of such investment bespeaks a strict investment of its own: those who are imagined as having access to the “innocent fun” (a misreading, for such fun is never innocent) of writerly *jouissance* will inevitably encounter resistance, because they are confusing the adulthood that insists on steering clear from the Child. It is not just the child that is safeguarded, but childlikeness insofar as it confuses adult difference. Cf. Kalha 2011b.

49 Halberstam 2008, 152.

definition of “the camp archive”: a “repertoire of formalized and often formulaic responses to the banality of straight culture”.⁵⁰

Let’s recall Edelman’s oft quoted dictum from the first chapter of *No Future*:

“Fuck the social order and the Child in whose name we’re collectively terrorized; fuck Annie; fuck the waif from *Les Mis*; fuck the poor, innocent kid on the Net; fuck Laws both with capital ls and with small; fuck the whole network of Symbolic relations and the future that serves as its prop.”⁵¹

This is, as Halberstam puts it, “a ferocious articulation of negativity” – an articulation whose ferociousness clearly inspired Halberstam’s own text.⁵² But this is also an instance of queer style, of striking a writerly pose: indeed, a hyperbolization of affect. Not so much ferocious, then, as precisely *fierce* (with all its imprecise connotation in gayspeak). Tim Dean, in his version of the anti-antisocial critique, is clearly on to something in whiffing out an aroma of spectacle in Edelman – which of course doesn’t prevent us from

50 Camp is a naturally matter of taste, but I’m surprised that Halberstam so readily identifies certain rather campy sentiments (intensity, earnestness, incivility, brutal honesty, mania) with her “second archive”, the non-camp, non-gay male one. (Has Halberstam forgotten the queer importance of being earnest?) Halberstam also suggests that narcissism is at odds with the anti-social: the effect of self-shattering, for Halberstam, represents “the opposite to narcissism in a way”.

51 Edelman 2004, 29.

52 Cf. Halberstam 2008, 154: “If we want to make the anti-social turn in queer theory, we must be willing – to embrace a truly political negativity, one that promises, this time, to fail, to make a mess, to fuck shit up, to be loud, unruly, impolite, to breed resentment, to bash back, to speak up, and out, to disrupt, assassinate, shock and annihilate –.” Surely *we* cannot “make the anti-social turn”; if it even is a “turn”, it is surely not one for *us* (for the communitarian “we”) to “make”. Ferocious as her rhetoric is, Halberstam’s “negativity with a promise”, this negativity that “breeds”, is perhaps not so much a negativity as a positivity that spits in your face.

putting Dean on the spot to account for his very dis/taste. For Halberstam, Edelman isn’t enough; for Dean he seems too much – *just too very very*.⁵³

To be sure, Edelman’s writing occasions its own kind of *jouissance*. But most importantly, Edelman’s “fuck this and fuck that” is not a political *we must* fuck this and that; nor is it a didactic how to fuck this and that *correctly*. To deduce, as Halberstam does, from a polemical figure of speech an agenda – one that Edelman will inevitably fail to deliver – is to succumb to a literalness quite foreign to theory, and reading/writing as we know it.

Halberstam pines for a “more explicitly political framing of the anti-social project”.⁵⁴ This phrase expresses her agenda-orientation through and through: *explicit, political, framing, project*. We might ask: is the edelmanian anti-social really a “project”⁵⁵, let alone one whose politics can or indeed should be framed, explicitly? How does one, finally, “explicate” the anti-social?

My point is not to naïvely celebrate a de-politicization of theory (theory is always political by implication), but to heighten our consciousness of

53 Dean 2008, 126–127, 138. I am wary of reading Dean out of context, for his actual argument has little to do with stylistics. He is rather interested in reframing the concept of the death drive for a “queerer”, more undetermined and less predictable vision of futurity. His critique of Edelman’s paranoid/melodramatic polemic urges us to consider the positions of identification that theory offers: “– Edelman’s thesis about the power of queerness to shatter the social makes some subjects the heroic agents – rather than the vulnerable objects – of that shattering. – Some of us are sufficiently privileged to embrace and then deploy the death drive, instead of being simply subjected to it. In this way, *No Future* offers certain readers a comfortably radical point of imaginary identification” (127). Important as this point is, it is only tangential to my present concern for queer antipathy, style and disavowal.

54 Halberstam 2008, 142.

55 Edelman himself does indeed speak of a “project” (2004, 3), one at odds with and thus hopelessly entangled with politics.

theoretical premise on the one hand, and strategy, agenda and antagonism, on the other: in short, of the theatre of theory. Of antipathy as the shadowy, shady, seedy twin brother of affectivity. At the same time, my reading of Halberstam highlights the obvious problem with the anti-social, namely that it is always so tightly interlocked with the social – with affect and community.

As Edelman explains: in resisting (methodically, one might say) the viability of the social, he is seeking to inhabit “the space outside the framework within which politics as we know it appears and so outside the conflict of visions that share as their presupposition that the body politic must survive.”⁵⁶ *Outside the framework; outside the conflict*: isn’t this relentless outsider position, this ethos of disassociation, the very definition of queer? (Yes, I did call it an ethos.) A position that is rendered theatrical through its very “obscenity”?

Edelman’s chosen space, however, is the space of theory, of reflection – the space of reading which is always already a space of writing. On the other hand, he is careful to refer to politics *as we know it*. It is, thus, not so much question of a foreclosure of political energy as a displacement of its foundational terms. Edelman is not per se anti-political (except perhaps in the rhetorical sense) any more than he is against probing attempts to redefine the political. The stance he takes in *No Future* (and I emphasize that it is a *stance*) is first and foremost against reasonable politics, the politics of reasonability. That the future *will* fold out in unpredictable ways, is something that *No Future*, the book, already attests to. For *who knew?* Who knew that the anti-social “turn” would find such a powerful polemicist in Edelman? Who knew that Hitchcock could be read thus? Who knew what the little birdie would turn out to be saying when it sang *tweet-tweet-tweet*...

⁵⁶ Edelman 2004, 3.

Earlier in this paper I referred – playfully/tastelessly? – to Halberstam’s critique as an unsavory dish, one that left this particular gourmand with a sore belly. Whether it is Halberstam or myself dishing out the dirt, we are “as community” left with an ambivalent *Nachgeschmack*. However, while Halberstam’s critique may, from *my* viewpoint, be a belly-buster, it would be naïve to ignore the sexy magic it works on many others. The halberstamian banquet – all that ballsy bravado, spiced up with political vigor – may well represent supreme edibility to many readers.⁵⁷ Such an investment is a natural part of the dialectic I have been examining. To be sure, the piquant flavor is part and parcel of the erotic desirability that zests up the public figure of a hot theorist.

As it happens, this particular social impulse is aptly described by the Bard from Peru, Indiana in the song “Brush Up Your Shakespeare” (from *Kiss me Kate*, Porter’s take on the *Taming of the Shrew*):

*Brush Up Your Shakespeare,
start quoting him now,
brush up your Shakespeare,
And the women you will wow.
Just quote a few lines of “Othello”,
And they’ll think you’re a hell of a fella.*

*When your baby is pleading for pleasure
Let her sample your “Measure for Measure”
If she says she won’t buy it or tike it
Make her tike it, what’s more “As You Like It”.*

Brush up your Shakespeare, and they’ll all kowtow.

⁵⁷ Joseph Litvak (1997, 8) quotes Louis Marin: “What is edible is always to a certain extent a little bit of all three of the following: a desirable erotic body awaiting consummation, an economically appropriated possession, and a linguistic sign exchanged within a system of communication.”

Enter the affective notion of theory as seduction: to be sure, both “gay male” theorizings and their “lesbian” counterparts are invested in notions of lived-in *jouissance*. We all *kowtow* to something. Whether it is our Shakespeare or Sid Vicious we brush up, we summon not just community, but also erotic responses: *The women she will wow*.

At the end of the day, we all are prone to a touchy-feely social drive. Thus I want to end by saying, shamelessly, of Edelman: at civility he may blunder, but he’s a perfect wonder when he plays with theory. He writes with aplomb, and we simply lose our reason – it is, after all, the open season for falling... in love. But for those of you who kowtow to Halberstam, I do “understand the reason why / You’re sentimental, ‘cause so am I, / It’s delightful, it’s delicious, it’s delovely...”

Reference matter & Bibliography

Selection of Cole Porter songs to be enjoyed with the article

- “And the Villain Still Pursued Her” (1912)
- “My Cosy Little Corner In the Ritz” (1919)
- “Let’s Do It – Let’s Fall in Love” (1928)
- “They All Fall in Love” (1929)
- “It’s De-Lovely” (1936)
- “Hymn To Hymen” (1936)
- “Where Is the Life that Late I Led” (1948)
- “Brush Up Your Shakespeare” (1948)
- “Experiment” (1933)
- “Let’s Not Talk About Love” (1941)

Unpublished talks and manuscripts

- Edelman**, Lee: “Learning Nothing: *Bad Education*” (2006).
- Edelman**, Lee: “Unbecoming: Pornography and the Queer Event” (2007).
- Edelman**, Lee: “Hamlet’s Wounded Name” (2008).

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