

FOREWORD

Wouldn't Take Nothing for My Journey

Nothing awakens the senses like death. Although we don't know (unless we are psychics, oracles, or other intermediaries) if we continue to sense after death, those of us left in the wake of death know all too well the plethora of emotions that rain down upon us after the loss of a loved one. Nonetheless, death is the one event that we are compelled to commit to—in the long and short term—because we can't predict, at least with any precise certainty, its arrival, only its inevitability. We do have some agency, I suppose, around when death might happen if we choose suicide, but even in that instance death may choose not to take the bait. It might, for instance, decide that we have much more living to do, despite our feelings of despondency, depression, or desire to exist in another realm. It is in this way that death is a queer phenomenon: a thing to which one must commit because it has committed itself to us but also something that remains elusive, even in its seeming finality. The interstitial space that precedes death—the anticipation and uncertainty of its arrival—and that which follows—the unknowingness of the afterlife—link it to queer affects/effects with long-term implications. Death, then, becomes an apropos allegory for long-term queer commitments.

To wit, many of the essays in this volume index death as the ghost of queer affiliations: the waiting with and on loved ones who are ill, managing a life-threatening disease, the impending death of a relationship or pet, the purgatory of incarceration, the death wish for gay marriage alongside a valuing of its “afterlife,” and so on. These authors’ engagement with death, I believe, is coincidental, as opposed to an ideological alignment with queer theorists who focus on antisociality and the death drive. They also do not easily align with the counterideology of queer utopia; rather, these authors sidestep those polemics in pursuit of something more nuanced about how long-term commitment affectively registers and effectively responds to queer attachments. As the editors of this volume suggest, these authors “stay around long enough to consider the ramifications of indentured commitments—familial, financial, institutional—that might wax and wane across time.” The concern, then, is not death in and of itself, but death as a temporal and spatial metaphor for how queers commit to commitment in ways that supersede the obvious tautology of such a construction and in ways that are not in bed with heteronormativity. These authors’ promiscuity acutely disavows normativity that flows in either direction—hetero or homo—in an attempt to cheat death at its own game.

Thus, these essays ironically account for how we as queers commit to life and living despite a contemporaneous world in which we are constantly under siege. If we think about how queer existence has been sustained by queer *persistence*, we quickly come to understand the relationship between commitment and the long term. There is a gospel song titled “I Believe I’ll Run On,” the recurring line of which says, “I believe I’ll run on, see what the end’s goin’ be” (Oprah Winfrey used it as the theme song for her talk show one season!). Although the song is about having faith that things will get better at the end, it’s also about endurance and commitment to the journey. Indeed, the song encapsulates the ambiguity of the “end” because it is an unspecified designation (the finish line? Death? Heaven?). Nonetheless, the speaker is going to run, not walk, toward whatever the unspecified state/place because they are committed to the *process* of the journey. Queers, then, have a unique relationship to commitment because we are in a constant process of becoming and unbecoming, and sometimes in ways—like running—that are exhausting. But there is also joy and pleasure in the pursuit of that place that dare not speak its name: unknown, unnamed, unmoored, undone. What we, as queers, have reaped from our undying cathexis to commitment is both the solemnity that follows each and every reminder that white-supremacist heteropatriarchy reigns supreme and the jubilation

that stems from our radical resistance to the same. But for our long-term commitment to care for one another, we would have never survived the hold of the slave ship, the concentration camp, McCarthyism, HIV/AIDS, Don't Ask, Don't Tell, DOMA, and dare I say, Trumpism, although that remains to be seen.

The essays collected here wade into troubled waters but find a life buoy by way of rhetorical flourishes that convincingly argue for the focus on commitment to postmarriage equality. Collectively, they shore up the notion that long-term commitment is not anathema to the radicality, nonnormativity, and transgressive politics that have come to be associated with queer culture. However, they also note that even the more conservative formations of long-term commitment (e.g., gay marriage) have radical material implications that are often overlooked or ignored. Some might construe my suggestion here as equating commitment with a progress narrative of queer equality toward a path of hetero or homonormativity. Yes and no. Yes, in the sense that queer fortitude has afforded many of us (despite the fact that race and class status still make progress elusive to some) access to certain rights. No, in the sense that the goal or even the by-product of commitment is not necessarily “progress” or access to rights or commodities. Sometimes, the commitment is for commitment’s sake, for the experience to live inside the liminal space of queerness, unencumbered. For example, when someone “gets their life” on the dance floor—that liminal space where the body is committed to the exhilarating exhaustion of moving to the pulse of the music. Or that liminal space where the body is committed to the touch, the taste, the sound, the sight, the smell of passionate sex. Or that liminal space where the body is committed to marching, chanting, rallying, laying prostrate in the street, for the right to love and fuck as many or as few or whomever it desires. Or that liminal space where the body is committed to the care of a lover, spouse, parent, pet, plant, or other sentient being because to commit to the care of and for an “other” is to assure our redemption in the long term. For in the long term there will be a reckoning. And in the long term, those who come after will look afresh on how we did and did not commit—not to the end, but to the journey.

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