QUEER BONDS

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Queers do a kind of practical social reflection just in finding ways to be queer.
—Michael Warner, *Fear of a Queer Planet*

When we speak of queer bonds, what sociality does this "we" speak of? In what ways do our erotic lives constitute legible forms of sociability? And how is sociality both driven and riven by (our) sexual being? Semantically, *bonds* holds together something humane and sociable with the objectivity of the inhuman *thing*: bonds as in physical restraints, bonds of matrimony, of an obligation in law, of atoms. Bondage might describe a medically bound injured limb, a body bound by its culture's vestments, but also, as in S/M, a scene of pleasure willfully embarked on, or the affective extravagances of romantic love. Bonds describe relations that stretch from the strongest forms of human subjection to the most palpably experienced mutuality. Like the void formed by the links on a chain, bonds begin with the interstitial space from which subjects are called into being.[1] The essays in this special issue explore strikingly diverse bonds that appear under different conditions of negation, connections and constraints beyond the contractual agreements between autonomous, positively defined subjects as presumed in liberal theories of the social. In this introduction, we trace a history of queer theory in terms of an interplay between a centrifugal drive away from sociality and a centripetal pressure toward sociable belonging and linkage. We recast the question of queerness as, before anything else, a question of social bonds coequally constituted by the corrosive and adhesive pressures of eroticism.[2] Queer bonds, we suggest, are what come into view through the isometric tension

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between queer world-making and world-shattering, naming a togetherness in failures to properly intersect, the social hailing named by recognition as well as its radical occlusion.[3]

Queer Bonds: The Two Trajectories

This special issue has its roots in the "Queer Bonds" conference that took place at the University of California, Berkeley, in February 2009. One impetus in organizing this conference was to undo some of the acrimony of the debate around the so-called antisocial thesis. The most prominent debates in queer theory of recent years have located the political promise of queerness in the espousal of one of two positions: one must be "for" (a queer version of) the social or one must be, as queer, "against" the social (as we know it).[4] We asked a variety of critics, both established and emerging, to comment on precisely what space is opened up between these trajectories, where they cross and intersect. Such a binary, we argue, presents a false choice, as if queer social negativity engendered no bonds and queer collectivities did not take shape precisely in relation to some negation or incommensurability within the social.

The conference was also motivated by questions both broader and more prosaic. For example, what might the sometimes abstract perspectives on "new relational modes" in the work of Leo Bersani, or on "queerness as collectivity" in José Esteban Muñoz, teach us about negotiating the concrete relational possibilities between, say, monogamy and polyamory?[5] This has a bearing on our own negotiation of practical social and sexual questions: the perennial problem, to adapt a phrase from David Halperin, of "*how* to be gay." Or, more broadly: if one teaches Lee Edelman's *No Future* alongside theories of ontological negation developed in a black psychoanalytic tradition, does one face an impasse of incommensurability, or do the resonances intensify and multiply points of connection in a shared commitment to rethinking the terms of the social through the very labor of traversing its negations?[6] Finally and most broadly, we wanted to assess how far we have come since Michael Warner pointed out how "depressingly easy" it is for queer theory and social theory to ignore each other.[7] Have theories of the social absorbed the insights of the founding texts of queer theory about the centrality of desire in any social formation?[8] And has queer theory made use of all the resources of social theory to understand queerness as a more-than-individual manifestation?[9]

In what we could read as an early theoretical articulation of the "antisocial thesis," Guy Hocquenghem's *Homosexual Desire* (1972) perversely endorses

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the rhetoric of the enemies of that desire, showing them to understand the stakes better than those who would argue for liberal inclusiveness. Quoting a popular sociologist who wrote that if homosexuality were to receive, "even in theory," the slightest legitimation, it would quickly occasion "the abolition of the heterosexual couple and of the family, which are the foundations of the Western society in which we live," Hocquenghem celebrates the fact that what he calls homosexual desire, which does not conduce to oedipal reproductivity, therefore "has no place in the social structure."[10] But if homosexual desire corrodes and resists the social order of "civilization," this resistance is only equal to its ability to suggest new — "horizontal" rather than "vertical" — modes of sociality.[11] From Adrienne Rich's "lesbian continuum" to Michel Foucault's "new relational possibilities" springing into view by virtue of "slantwise" orientation of the homosexual in relation to existing social structures, "homosexual desire" — or what we might now call "queerness" — has long been invested as at once the site of a symbolic disruption (which is also an antisocial negativity) and a particular relational inventiveness.[12]

Likewise, for the authors of the classic radical feminist polemic "The Woman-Identified Woman" (1970), lesbianism names a refusal to accede to the terms of a social-symbolic system in which "woman" functions only as a secondary, dependent term.[13] The heterorelationality presupposed in the normative definition of *woman* must be replaced, they urge, by a homorelationality; only then will a sociability of women be conceivable in which *woman* will not be a term of difference and subordination. Here, as in Hocquenghem, "the lesbian" does not name an inhabitable position within the existing social structure but an internal rupture within that system — an antisocial or de(con)structive force that nevertheless occasions positively articulated, erotic forms of sociability. For these thinkers, far from recognizable "liberal" identities, *homosexual* and *lesbian* name something that does not yet exist: in Foucault's words, "it's a matter of *constructing* [new] cultural forms" — which also means destroying old ones.[14] Similarly, across his career-long pursuit of Foucauldian "new relational modes," Bersani's account of sexuality as a "self-shattering" exists alongside his ongoing attempt to find (often in art) an intimation of a relationality based on "being as emergence into connectedness."[15] And like his Radicalesbian counterparts, his work reflects a tension between a general account of nonviolent, nonhierarchical relationalities (for Rich and the Radicalesbians elaborated socially and politically, for Bersani aesthetically) and the insistence on queer sexual specificity. Does queerness name the failure — at once destructive and productive — to heed properly the terms of a social order that configures relationality around the drama of (sexual) difference conceived as a binary? In her work on the "lesbian phallus," Judith Butler has

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pursued the failure of selfsame terms, in reproducing themselves, to sustain their own identity—a failure that occasions new horizons of sociable and sexual bonding.[16] Thus thinkers from the Radicalesbians to Bersani, and from Hocquenghem to Butler (and many others), have demonstrated in different ways the premise that if an askew relation to the normative terms of sexuality occasions a certain negative relation to the social, this means it also precipitates a certain reinvention of the social, of the nature of "bonds," a reinvention that is sometimes invested under the sign of transgression, sometimes of utopia.[17] Queer is at once disabled and inventive sociality.[18]

For many of these thinkers, it is sex that is both produced by, and sticks in the gears of, the social-symbolic machinery, derailing and reinventing its terms. For Monique Wittig, if gender ("woman") names a position within the symbolic order, sexuality ("lesbian") names a rupture in that order that is here invested with the power to undo and to reconfigure. Similarly, in *No Future* homosexuality figures a resistance internal to the symbolic order that would undo it. If sex is—or becomes queer when it is—a force of tearing and symbolic rupture, queer theory teaches us that it is, however, also a forging of sociabilities *in* this space of rupture. In other words, the antisocial force of (queer) sex is fundamental to the world-making inventiveness that queer bonds also name. Nevertheless, if sexuality—as what sticks in the gears of sociality *and* occasions its proliferation in ever-new forms—is constitutive of what we think of as queer bonds, this does not mean that we will always know where to find it. Several of the essays pursue sociabilities in which the difficulty of specifying the location of "sexuality" is precisely what is at stake. If queer bonds are social bonds that nevertheless call into question the meaning of the "social," we can add now that the sexual, like the social, remains a question for queer bonds—it *is* the question of queer bonds.

Our interest in the genealogy of queer theory also reflects the important role that theory has played in our personal intellectual genealogies. For us, who came of age in an era in which the leftist optimism of the 1960s and early 1970s had been consigned to the realm of a mythic past, our encounter with social movements happened in reverse: we learned the critiques of essentialism before we knew anything about the movements that had once drawn on its communitarian energies. At this moment in the late 1990s, when we were first experiencing student life, aggressive militarism bore the name of "democracy," massive economic inequality was a normalized global condition, and the AIDS epidemic had made sex—which we had yet to have—seem potentially deadly. In *Homos*, however, which a kindly female professor—knowing me (it doesn't matter which of us) better than I knew myself—photocopied for me and which I kept literally hidden in

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my closet, I read about a "revolutionary inaptitude . . . for sociality as it is known." I certainly felt socially inept and was gratified to learn that there might be a good reason for it, even that what I had perceived as a failing may predispose me to heed the imperative — perceptible only to those who had reasons to perceive it — to reject the existing social order with its bourgeois false values and its murderous fixation on difference, from which the enigmatic trope of *homo-ness* promised (it was not yet quite able to deliver) a radical reprieve. Had I not been waiting my whole life, without knowing it, to hear such words? My voracious appetite for the queer theory I was discovering like an adolescent discovers sex quickly exhausted the reserves of my professor's bookshelf as well as her photocopy account. But she continued to read my responses to the texts I now knew how to scour the library for (during periods when I had carefully ascertained that no one I knew would be working there) with enthusiasm and graciousness: a strange induction by an (I assumed) straight woman into what had become, for me, a "homosexuality of one" — not quite congealed into an identity and in advance of any actual gay relations, but defining, at the least, a theoretical orientation I managed to share with one presumably straight, female professor in what turned out to be, indeed, my very first queer bond.[19] This bond was not quite a gay one — no one was quite gay, not yet, and certainly not together — but it was a queer one insofar as through it, homosexuality manifested not yet as sex but precisely as the incipience of a new but as yet unrecognizable sociability lodged (how could it not be?) at the level of the body.[20] It was queer not as the deconstruction of identity, but rather, we might say, before the disaster of identity had occurred. Here an exchange of ideas and affects — affectionate in several senses, then — happened from positions whose intersection is effected by virtue of that exchange rather than granted in advance by any one person's dense, precipitated lived experience. Queer bonds reach beyond sexual self-recognition because we need a theory of queer sociality that cuts across identitarian positionings that will remain forever incommensurate, and that articulates a bond spanning differences that may remain irreducible.

Queer Theory as More-Than-Social Theory: Epistemology and Oppositionality

The (male) "homosexual" first came into view as a critical figure of gay and lesbian studies via the brilliant exposition of homo*sociality* and an epistemological complex dubbed "the closet."[21] Homosexuality, it was shown, names not only the sexual preference of a small and oppressed minority but also the central, albeit closeted, obsession of a heterosexuality that never stops producing it as

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the repudiated image of what it must not, but always might, become. Its threat was shown to inhere not in its horrifying difference but in the even more horrifying possibility that it is not different enough: homosexuality as the mortifying figure of *too much sameness*, a malignant hypertrophy of the male bonding or homosociality that subtends the sociality of patriarchy. Through Eve Sedgwick's foundational work in *Between Men* and *Epistemology of the Closet*, the field of gay studies began with the argument that sociality *tout court* cannot be adequately understood apart from an analysis of these erotics configured around the binaries like/unlike, known/not known.

If the theory of the closet was, then, already at the outset an erotic social theory of patriarchy, it is a question for us whether the master trope of the closet can adequately compass today the complex forms of knowledge — of lateral *homo-knowledge* — that operate to the side of the fascinated projections of a phobic heterosexist social order. In other words, is there a queerness today that is not *only* produced through an act of determinate negation and phobic interpellation, as the repudiated projection of what heterosexuality *is not*? We are prompted to ask this question not because we no longer believe homophobia continues to shape the lives of many queers in multiply determined ways, but on the contrary because it does so in increasingly complex ways that might require, for example, a biopolitical alongside an epistemological analysis. In an age in which what Lisa Duggan has termed "homonormativity" has become, in some (albeit limited) contexts, one social possibility among others, it may not still be the case that "coming out" is the central question that determines the epistemological situation of queer bonds. That the epistemology of the closet still operates with deadly homophobic force is evidenced by the ongoing problem of queer youth suicide, recently given attention in the media. Yet "queer bonds" name a mode of recognition to the side of this deadly epistemology, a laterally constituted togetherness that persists in the face of homophobia, sustains us, and allows queer life to go on. How might queerness name a lived "knowledge" rather than an emergence into the light of knowledge? Under what conditions might queerness name, then, an epistemological caesura in the field of the social, a radical uncertainty about what any event of coming together or bonding will have meant, and for whom?

If the brilliant and originating impetus of queer theory derived its object from the operations of the epistemology of the closet, which is to say, the operations of homophobia, this helps explain why from the outset, queerness has been invested as a position or impetus of subversion, resistance, and opposition. Queer theory has been premised from the outset on the idea that queerness represents, in Warner's pithy formulation, a "resistance to regimes of the normal."[22] While we

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wish to celebrate the achievements of oppositionality, and remain invested in an "oppositional" politics, two importantly conjoined phenomena impel us to look for characterizations of queer bonds that hold together both a space of opposition and a space in which queerness is not exclusively oppositional.[23] First is the rhizomatic multiplication and diffusion of regimes of phobic repression; second is the parallel multiplication of shifting zones, forged in resistance, of exemption from these regimes. While self-exemption from phobic regimes is often apprehended under the rubric of homonormativity, we wish to suggest that not all instances of queer exception amount to bad exceptionalism. Spaces of exception may serve — and in many cases have served — as laboratories of "new relational possibilities."

As Duggan, David Eng, Jasbir Puar, and others have argued, the terms *gay* and *lesbian* today have, albeit under certain limited conditions, been successfully assimilated to a liberal discourse of the nation and its sustaining institutions.[24] Here we might simply diagnose the vanquishing of an oppositional "queer" politics by a liberal discourse of lesbian and gay rights. Even so, we might consider this a (limited) political achievement — and indeed a precarious one, as the ongoing campaign to repeal gay marriage rights in those few U.S. states where they exist attests — insofar as it makes available to some subjects access to rights and recognition, as lesbians and gays, that were previously denied them. But as critics have pointed out, one effect of this new liberalism of *content* is to render the *form* of the bond — the married couple — all the more inexorable. Furthermore, as Puar has shown, the ascension to the sanctified realm of national privilege of the (white, able-bodied) gay male or lesbian couple happens at the price of abjecting new categories of racialized and religious others. While some lesbian and gay relations are dignified with the "right" to privacy, as laid down in the *Lawrence v. Texas* ruling of 2003, others (perhaps not so recognizably "lesbian" or "gay") are subjected to ever-increasing surveillance, scrutiny, harassment, and violence. One response to such a state of things would be to redouble our investment in queerness as a *resistance* to the gay and lesbian normative. Yet can we be so sure — today, when assimilation and homonormativity have become such viable and complexly articulated possibilities — that queer will reliably name a category that has successfully distanced itself from "normative" gayness and lesbianism? What is the queer bond between the urban "assimilationist" lesbian housewife and the radical queer outside the charmed circle of sexual normativity? We question the enduring value of any binary that situates gay and lesbian on one side and queer on the other. As long as we continue to inhabit a homophobic social-symbolic order, there will remain something queer about the most ostensibly "homonormative" iterations of gay and lesbian desire; similarly, there is no "radical" queer formation

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that escapes all will to normativity. We argue that queer bonds proliferate and intensify on both the marked and unmarked sides of socially normative systems. In fact, it is precisely because subjects are made unequally visible along lines of gender, race, sexuality, disability, emplacement in global inequality, and class status that we must theorize the fulcrum of our intellectual, political, and bodily commitments in such terms that *no* single figurable construct (i.e., "homophobia," "normativity") can serve to define them strictly by opposition.

Therefore, we might consider the theoretical and political value of queer modes of sociality that have won space in the world without being reducible to violent modes of appropriative privilege. One example is academic sociality itself. The two of us came of intellectual age at a time when queer theory did not name a radical repudiation of—but rather had carved out a more or less prestigious place within—the academy. More recently, the very fact that several issues of *PMLA* have been devoted to debates in our field, including the debate on the "antisocial thesis," proves performatively that however antisocial queerness may be, it is hardly incompatible with more or less traditional forms of academic sociality (debate, publication, tenure, etc.). For all the sexism, racism, and occasionally overt homophobia we still face in the academy, there do exist spaces (*GLQ* included) where leading an explicitly queer intellectual life in print as a mode of professional advancement names an institutionally viable and socially intelligible path across the profession.

Beyond the major U.S. urban enclaves in which a quotidian queer way of life can become so naturalized that to be homophobically interpellated on the street is in many (though not all) cases as likely to cast shame on the perpetrators as on the victims, there exist both suburban and rural zones in which queer sociality occurs in ways that are also not directly mediated by homophobia. In small intentional communities, such as the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival and Radical Faerie Sanctuaries, and also in rural places that are less self-consciously exceptional, there remain zones of queer sociality that in ultimately temporary and precarious ways claim shifting zones of exemption.[25] For example, the network of queer pot farmers in the Northern California counties—who have been able to operate in the liminally legal way they do as a result of activism in the queer community to make medical marijuana available to (among others) people living with HIV/AIDS—have created queer social and economic ways of being in the world that attempt to function to the side of normative models of capitalism.[26] What do we make of the fact that today we experience so many social spaces in which queer bonds—however precariously and temporarily—manage to appear through something other than *just* an act of defiance or resistance? Samuel Delany

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writes of entering a New York City bathhouse in the early 1970s and marveling at the "variety of institutions that have evolved to accommodate our sex."[27] Can we observe these institutions today within but also beyond spaces devoted to gay male sexual practice: in the activist networks, intentional communities, urban neighborhoods, virtual communities, obsolescent communities, slantwise economic coalitions, and myriad other manifestations of queer sociality?[28]

Finally, we suggest that some "we," however fugitive, has *always* appeared in the interstices of historically conditioned homophobic interpellation, perhaps in the simplest experience of two or more people realizing their queer desire for each other. At the limit, queer bonds do not even require two people; as we see in Mel Y. Chen's essay, an intoxicated encounter with one's couch can be enough. We suggest that the kinds of horizontal affiliations suggested by Hocquenghem's work — lateral epistemologies or *homoknowledges* — emerge precisely where the phobic assemblage fails to reterritorialize. Queer bonds might designate shifting encounters in the borderlands of phobic interpellation, the ephemeral being together of those who find, against the backdrop of a phobic world, themselves and each other in a temporary zone where togetherness seems, for the moment, not *only* scripted by hegemonic forms of power, or *determined* by the resistance to that power.[29] Our queer bonds are not merely a bulwark of resistance, via determinate negation, of the normative socio-symbolic order. It is on the terrain of a social death that a "we" precipitates into a mobile and precarious assemblage perennially in excess of the negations it survives.

In none of these cases is it a matter of a positive, queer social bond made manifest to its participants through a shared identity or membership card. It is not a question of sociability premised on things held intimately in common. If we are "intimate" when we can recognize a symbolically articulated commonality, whence a shared identity, here we should perhaps speak of "extimacy." Lacan coined this term to describe the coexistence of a radical abyss of foreignness and a form of closeness that remains strange, unassimilable, and not reducible to identity. We are extimate when it is precisely our inability to symbolize and articulate a set of conditions that bonds us.[30] Queer bonds are forged not only in resistance to, but also in the borderlands of, the symbolic regimes that police our identities — at the meeting of bare lives, whether in ecstasy or in exhaustion.

Yet the extimacy of queer bonds does not name a rapprochement of populations differently interpellated by phobic regimes in some distant, utopian future. On the contrary, it seeks to articulate a bond that already exists but is not manifested. How might a "we" be spoken that includes both white, economically privileged First World urban subjects *and* subjects in the global south, immigrant sub-

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jects, women and others of color, trans and gender-queer people, bodies not legible as "healthy," normatively "able," and those whose life is subject to specific forms of medicalization (say, around immune disease)? Because normativity cuts across these groups in differential ways, if there is such a bond, it cannot be articulable strictly in terms of oppositionality. Yet terms like *intimacy* or *community* would imply a commonality that may in fact have no positively articulable basis. So how might such a bond of extimacy be conceived?

Here we might recall Kimberlé Crenshaw's famous concept of intersectionality, which pays heed to the precipitation of multiple forms of difference within a single lived experience. She figures intersectionality as the site of a traffic collision in which one cannot say what caused the accident; one can only say that it took place.[31] If *extimacy* describes the bodily being of queer bonds, at the broader level of biopolitically regulated populations we might speak of "extrasectionality." Whereas intersectionality refers to the way multiple forms of oppression collide in one subject position, extrasectionality refers to the bonds formed between multiple, incommensurate positionalities, which at the limit need not be human. We might think that no such meetings are possible. However, as we see in Chen's piece, our material lives are already saturated with such extimacies: the lead in the paint on children's toys, for example, connects the seemingly "intimate" domestic sphere of the American consumers of these toys to the Chinese laborers who produce them. Here two very differently positioned populations are made extimate to each other in material ways. This is hardly a bond we can simply invest as a utopian figure; it is a bond, however, that occasions a certain discursive, erotic and political transconnectivity, and configures a relationality that persists in fraught ways, whether acknowledged or not. Extrasectionality is this extimacy of differentially positioned populations, the site of a meeting where we fail to meet. As Elizabeth A. Povinelli puts it in her essay: "We meet where we are divided. But we are divided in a way that we can never meet."

Thus, the "negative" component of queer bonds need not always look dramatic and destructive, that is, recognizably "antisocial." The "negative" can also mark zones in which the furies of phobic interpellation are bracketed or displaced onto another scene. Teresa de Lauretis suggests that sexuality, a paradigmatically perverse movement of translation that eludes *any* figurally stable formation, occupies a space—a heterotopia—that is not of the order of meaning and politics. How, we ask, might we apprehend the polymorphously perverse also in its social being? Can it characterize not only psychic subjects, but also modes of sociality? Zakiyyah Iman Jackson concludes her piece here with the words: "I hope that we can dream a reprieve together." What *are* we dreaming when we dream a reprieve—

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together — and where in the world *have we already for some time been in practice dreaming it*? We might ask how the delicate windows of nondelegitimation — that is, fragile zones of privilege — we experience every time we forge a queer bond might be geared toward forms of sociality that are not exploitative, racist, phobic, and imperialist.

The Special Issue

Comprising as many as three "generations" of queer scholarship — from founding figures like Teresa de Lauretis, who first proposed the term *queer theory* in 1990, to midcareer scholars as well as doctoral candidates — the essays in this collection aim less to identify a "new wave" in queer scholarship than to uncover the ways that alongside its project as a theory of the subject (of "queer" subjects), queer theory has also always already been a project of theorizing the relations *between* subjects, relations that can indeed make the subject-object distinction itself difficult to uphold.

Chen's contribution, "Toxic Animacies, Inanimate Affections," challenges us to pursue the analysis of relationality beyond the recognizably human by introducing two conceptual figures: *toxicity*, which names the traffic between bodies bypassing intentional modes of relating, and *animacy*, which suggests the way discursive practices both racialize inanimate objects and invest them with a "life" in a way that brings together linguistic and biopolitical categories. Together, these two terms chart out how queer bonds might reconfigure the terrain of a sociality that extends beyond the human scene of recognition and troubles the distinction between life and death, the animate and the inanimate, the recognizably "social" and the "anti-." Here queer bonds involve no Hegelian drama of recognition; they presume no intelligible field of interlocution or any successfully realized social interpellation. Chen is less interested in the social drama of hailing than in the biological fact of inhaling. "Standing before you, I ingest you. There is nothing fanciful about this. I am ingesting your exhaled air, your sloughed skin, and the skin of the tables, chairs, and carpet in this room." This is how she describes the "bond" that belies the social drama of recognition and identity, a bond also in play in the radical negativity of a comic moment when, snuggled against the arms and back of some body, she fails to distinguish between her girlfriend and the couch.

In "Queer Family Romance in Collecting Visual Culture," Whitney Davis considers the queer alternate genealogies disseminated not through patrimony or matrimony but through the transmission of visual culture, precisely where individual objets d'art themselves "have no inherent homoerotic legibility." Developing

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out of Freud a concept of *queer family romance* to mark genealogies whose erotic and affective charge appears in the combination and enchainment of objects — the queer bonds obtaining between the objects rather than as a property any one object possesses individually — Davis follows these bonds from Freud's account of Leonardo da Vinci, through a little-known early-twentieth-century sexological treatise by Elisàr von Kupffer important to Freud, back to Leonardo's own visual record and Thomas Beckford's eighteenth-century collecting practices. In this "extraconsanguinary mosaic," the medium of transmission is not blood but rather art and fantasy, a dissemination of images "to posterities that need never even know our names."[32]

Povinelli's essay, "The Part That Has No Part: Enjoyment, Law, and Loss," is a moving meditation on the limits of the term *queer* and the ways regimes of sexualization cannot be considered to operate equally for subjects differently positioned in relation to settler colonialism. She gives an account of a grammar lesson with her now-departed friend Ruby Yarrowin, one of the last people for whom Emiyenggal was a spoken way of life. In the wake of the "Intervention" — an about-face in government policy that recast Indigenous communities in Australia as sites of sexual perversion and abuse rather than exemplars of a traditional culture that must be respected — she asks whether it can make sense here to celebrate Ruby's location "outside the charmed circle of sexual normativity" and to reclaim it in the name of "queerness" as the enjoyment that erupts outside any social order. Reflecting on this twenty-year-old encounter, Povinelli asks: Do we comprehend it as productive of a certain excess in or beyond the law? As a "practice of the self" that allows a new "assemblage of material to emerge as ethically sensible"? Or as the site of an impossible encounter between subjects so differently positioned in relation to the law, sexuality, language, and economic privilege that it seems no meeting is possible? But an encounter *has* taken place, one that spans both *jouissance* and exhaustion, shared affect and eroticism in incommensurability. Obligation emerges as one name for bonds of sociability bearing even on the dead. But in what way can this obligation, this theory, this sociability, still be said to be "queer"?

In de Lauretis's "Queer Texts, Bad Habits, and the Issue of a Future," a queer text is one that "carries the inscription of sexuality as something more than sex . . . as enigma without solution and trauma without resolution." Sexuality, in its Freudian and Laplanchean iteration as *drive*, is, for de Lauretis, inherently perverse, antisocial, and queer. In a powerful reading of Edelman's *No Future*, de Lauretis reclaims the so-called antisocial thesis for a queer feminist position. Sexuality is what interrupts our attempts to make sense, and to make sense of

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ourselves. It thus operates in a different register to the one in which she locates gender, politics, and the proliferation of politicized identities. At the level of politics and of identity, we must, of course, orient our projects toward the (impossible) realization of a utopian future. But sexuality, de Lauretis argues, is not of the order of utopia; it is, like theory, of the order of what Foucault calls "heterotopias," which "stop words in their tracks" and "make them mean something else or displace them onto another scene." A translation is needed, as she puts it, from theory to politics, from words to things, from the disturbing heterotopia of conceptual figures to the utopian orientation of the ego, of sense-making, of politics, and of the future.

For Juana María Rodríguez, by contrast, in "Queer Sociality and Other Sexual Fantasies," sexuality should itself be theorized as a form of sociality, one that "is at its core an attempt at recognition" in which, however, "recognition always risks failure," and in which the politically "painful and dystopic" can be reclaimed by fantasy. She insists that inhabiting the position of racialized "bottomhood" in fantasy can recast the value of what she calls being *servicial*, attentive to the needs and desires of others. "Mutual consideration" and taking care emerge here as the necessary condition of any sexual politics. Rodríguez wants to invest sexuality as itself a utopian scene of fantasy — "nonreproductive, perverse, multisensory, asynchronic, full of possibility" — even as she acknowledges that sexual fantasies might be "soiled, messy encounters brimming with social and psychic abjection, domination, and pain." These dangerous forms of relationality can be mined for erotic value, which in turn holds a utopian political promise. In refusing to embrace fantasy as a merely abstract category but instead delving into its (racialized and abject) content, and in her belief that queer sexual practices themselves constitute a form of what Warner calls "practical social reflection," Rodríguez participates in a long tradition of queer feminist thinking about sex, a tradition that includes Gayle Rubin's "Thinking Sex," and Cherríe Moraga and Amber Hollibaugh's "What We're Rolling Around in Bed With: Sexual Silences in Feminism."[33] Rodríguez, breaking those silences once again, offers us a powerful theory of sex and of queer, racialized sexual fantasy as creative forms of world-making.

The final section of the special issue is a collection of short pieces titled "Critical Bonds," where scholars pay homage to a figure with whom they forged an important, sometimes unexpected, queer intellectual bond. Such queer scholarly bonds are, after all, the basis of our intellectual lives, comprising as they do both appreciation and occasionally fraught (mis)recognitions. D. A. Miller gives a haunting appreciation of Barbara Johnson, in memoriam — a late rejoinder to

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her piece "Bringing Out D. A. Miller." It is as much a fascinating perspective on the divergent ways a gay man and a lesbian, who went through graduate school at Yale together, differently articulated their sexualities and intellectual lives as it is a moving portrait of the erotics of reading and being read. Heather Love, in turn, takes up Miller as a subject, reading materials from the breadth of his career both to underline the significance of his contribution to queer theory and to uncover there, unexpectedly, a rich and fascinating analytics of class abjection and aspiration. Carla Freccero reprises her response to Bersani's reading of Claire Denis's film *Beau Travail*, questioning his investment in Galoup as the figure of the orphan who, refusing to abide by the logic that insists that "Father Knows Best," might "stand up and simply leave the family tragedy by which Western culture has been oppressed at least since Oedipus's parricide." With an affectionate riff on her own queer bond with Bersani as "gay daddy," Freccero shows that we may not need to become orphans in order to invent relational modes not based on a desire to know and to subjugate. Finally, Jackson reads David Marriott's *On Black Men*, taking up his analysis of racialization as "ontological nullification" and reclaiming it for a black lesbian feminist project that focuses on processes of identification rather than what she calls the "reification of identity." Jackson powerfully and provocatively argues that the bond between queerness and blackness may require an analysis that goes beyond the frame of "intersectional" identity politics and (re) turns to the question of ontology.

As these essays all go to show, the space that queer bonds traverse is not homogeneous — and it may not always be legibly homosexual. Yet whether or not it remains recognizable as such, sexuality persists in all these essays as a force, at once, of incapacity and of creativity. What makes these bonds queer is a *simultaneous* adhesion and dehiscence, a centripetal pull toward the social and a radical centrifugal drive away from it. In her concluding remarks to this volume, Butler suggests that sociabilities may emerge precisely from a certain "failure of transmission." And queer bonds may entail, as she puts it, a sociality that is "not always sociable." What Butler suggests is an ontological condition of sociality grounded in the material fact of our interdependence as bodily beings might also be described, we suggest, as a sociability *without* sociality, a bare being together that emerges where symbolically mediated social relations fail because of the pressure of affectivities in excess of or to the side of known identities and forms of recognition. Queer bonds mark the simultaneity of "the social" and a space of sociability outside, to the side of, or in the interstices of "the social" — bonds that occur not in spite of but *because* of some force of negation, in which it is precisely negativity that organizes scenes of togetherness. We hope this constitutes one step toward an account of queer-

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ness as both a social and what we might call a more-than-social theory: queerness as a way of being-with and a mode of intimacy (or indeed extimacy) that can face — but is not for that reason delimited by — the manifold degradations of the world we manage, in spite of everything, to forge together.

Notes

For their comments and their friendship, we extend our heartfelt thanks to the following individuals, whose commitment to and support of us have sometimes been demonstrated by their willingness to disagree: Michael Allan, Judith Butler, Jessica Davies, Carla Freccero, David Halperin, Heather Love, Anna Mollow, Marques Redd, Shaul Setter, Eric Stanle, Timothy Stewart-Winter. We owe a great debt of thanks to the editors of *GLQ* for their support and mentorship. Thanks are also due to Daniel Boyarin, without whom the Queer Bonds conference could never have taken place, and to the many other speakers and respondents who made that conference the exciting intellectual event that it was: Jac Asher, Leo Bersani, Julian Carter, Terry Castle, Tim Dean, Didier Eribon, Elizabeth Freeman, Jonathan Hall, Michael Lucey, Dana Luciano, David Marriott, Robert McRuer, Stefania Pandolfo, Adam Phillips, Darieck Scott, Kaja Silverman and Linda Williams. Finally, thanks to Elizabeth J. Lane for giving body to the idea of "queer bonds" in her beautiful photographic works, one of which appears on the cover of this issue. More of her work produced for the Queer Bonds conference, as well as for progressive nonprofit organizations, can be viewed at http://elizabethlane.zenfolio.com/.

1. As described, for example, by Raymond Williams's notion of "structures of feeling," in *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977). For queer theoretical implications of this notion, see Elizabeth Freeman, "Time Binds, or Queer Erotohistoriography," *Social Text*, nos. 84–85 (2005): 57–68.
2. For an account of eroticism as tied to the negativity of radical dissociation *and* a form of being together or bondedness, see Georges Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, trans. Mary Dalwood (San Francisco: City Lights, 1962).
3. Although *queer* came to new prominence with the rise of queer theory in the 1990s, it was an available category for a slantwise relation to the social long before then. See, e.g., Paul Goodman, "The Politics of Being Queer" (1969), reprinted in *Nature Heals: The Psychological Essays of Paul Goodman*, ed. Taylor Stoehr (New York: Dutton, 1979), 216–25.
4. Frequently cited as an instigating text in these debates is Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).
5. Leo Bersani, *Is the Rectum a Grave? and Other Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 69, 100; José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 11.

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6. See, e.g., Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove, 1967); Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987): 64–81; and David Marriott, *On Black Men* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).
7. Michael Warner, ed., *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), viii.
8. Critiques of the centrality of the liberal autonomous subject in leftist social theory have been resistant to accounts that create a strong place for queerness. The conversations between Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (London: Verso, 2000) manifest the dissonance of confronting continental leftist political theory with an analytics of gender and sexuality. Work on social theory in a broadly Deleuzian vein has more consistently foregrounded desire, but has decidedly moved away from the radical potential of queer desire that was evident in the first flowering of this tradition; compare Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2004) and Manuel de Landa, *A New Philosophy of Society* (New York: Continuum, 2006) to Félix Guattari in *Soft Subversions: Texts and Interviews, 1977–1985 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996)*, and in his introduction to a special issue of the journal *Recherches, Grande encyclopédie des homosexualités: Trois milliards de pervers* (Paris, 1973); Gilles Deleuze in *Proust and Signs* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); and Guy Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993). Something similar has happened in the Derridean tradition, which has addressed sexuality and the body more openly, but tended to stop short of homosexualities; see, e.g., Jacques Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (London: Verso, 1997); Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991); Nancy, *Corpus* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008); and Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).
9. There have been, of course, some important attempts to link queer theory and social theory. In *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone, 2002), Warner intervenes powerfully into the Habermasian model. For an attempt to use Pierre Bourdieu's social theory, see Michael Lucey, *Never Say I: Sexuality and the First Person in Colette, Gide, and Proust* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006). See also David M. Halperin, *What Do Gay Men Want? An Essay on Sex, Risk, and Subjectivity* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007). For another useful attempt to frame queerness as a social (and therefore concretely historical) question, see Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007). Anthropology continues to offer rich resources for the intersection for queer and social theory. See, for instance, David Valentine, *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

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10. Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, 71.
11. This notion of horizontal relations as a solution to the problems of difference posed by vertical relations has been taken up by Leo Bersani, "Sociability and Cruising," in *Is the Rectum a Grave?* 45–62; and Tim Dean, "Cruising as a Way of Life," in *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 176–212.
12. Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," *Signs* 5 (1980): 631–60; Michel Foucault, "The Social Triumph of the Sexual Will," in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow, vol. 1 of *The Essential Works of Foucault* (New York: New Press, 1997), 160; and Foucault, "Friendship as a Way of Life," in *Ethics*, 138.
13. Radicalesbians, "The Woman-Identified Woman," in *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*, ed. Linda J. Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1997), 153–157. See also Monique Wittig, *The Straight Mind* (New York: Beacon, 1992).
14. Foucault, "Social Triumph," 157.
15. Leo Bersani, "Sociality and Sexuality," in *Is the Rectum a Grave?*, 104. For a counter reading on Bersani as "antirelational," see Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 11; see also Judith Halberstam, "The Politics of Negativity in Recent Queer Theory," in "Forum: Conference Debates. The Antisocial Thesis in Queer Theory," *PMLA* 121 (2006): 823–25.
16. Judith Butler, "The Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary," in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 57–92.
17. In her essay in this volume, Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, drawing on Hortense Spillers, argues that enslaved Africans existed in a "state of injury that made gendered and sexual normativity impossible." For Jackson, queerness and blackness share similar features in their exclusion from normative, symbolic regimes of social order, and thus in their capacity to suggest a rethinking of that order.
18. For more on the relation between queerness and disability, see Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (New York: NYU Press, 2006).
19. D. A. Miller, *Place for Us: Essay on the Broadway Musical* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 23.
20. This is, of course, exactly the kind of sociability described in the anecdote about Sedgwick's unnamed "friend" in the introduction to *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). This anecdote inscribes in the genesis of this text—and the moment in the evolution of the field it came to stand for—exactly the kinds of queer bonds it did not make a place for theoretically.
21. Cf. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia, 1985). The "classical" theory of the closet can be found in D. A. Miller, "Secret Subjects, Open Secrets," in *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 192–220, and, most paradigmatically, Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet*.

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22. Warner, *Fear of a Queer Planet*, xxvii. For the critique of normality, see especially Warner, *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999). For a more utopian version of this argument that deals with race and class, see Samuel Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (New York: New York University Press, 1999).
23. This notion of queerness as what we are calling "oppositionality" has been hotly discussed in recent work on gay shame and queer negative affect. See David M. Halperin and Valerie Traub, eds., *Gay Shame* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). See also the (very different but not unrelated) account of the activist activities that went by the name of "gay shame" in Matt Bernstein Sycamore (aka Mattilda), ed., *That's Revolting: Queer Strategies for Resisting Assimilation* (Brooklyn: Softskull, 2004).
24. See, e.g., Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon, 1993); David L. Eng, Judith Halberstam, and José Esteban Muñoz, "Introduction: What's Queer about Queer Studies Now?" *Social Text*, nos. 84–85 (2005): 1–17; Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).
25. On the former, see Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); on the latter see Elizabeth A. Povinelli, *The Empire of Love: Toward a Theory of Intimacy, Genealogy, and Carnality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006). Clearly in both cases—and this is only most evidently manifest in the way transphobia has been a hotly debated issue in both kinds of space—in no way has a sociality based on exclusion been completely left behind. We consider this a serious problem while still believing in the value of the radical, utopian self-exempting work these communities (and many others) have tried to do.
26. This was the result of Proposition 215 in 1996—the same year retroviral medication became widely available. Again, the fact that these communities will inevitably make economic compromises with capitalist models does not erase the value of their defining gesture.
27. Samuel Delany, *The Motion of Light in Water: Sex and Science Fiction Writing in the East Village* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 179. For a contemporary defense of such queer utopianisms, see Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 49–55. For a vigorous critique, see Joan W. Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry* 17 (1991): 773–97. What seems most interesting in this moment in Delany is the part of that "evidence" that is constituted by what is *not* experienced—whether it manifests as fantasy or trauma.
28. Hakim Bey locates such "temporary autonomous zones" as far back as eighteenth-century pirate "states" composed largely of defectors from colonialism and empire. See Peter Ludlow, ed., *Crypto-Anarchy, Cyberstates, and Pirate Utopias* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001).

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29. For a recent psychoanalytic attempt to think the latter, see Bracha Ettinger, *The Matrixial Borderspace* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).
30. See Jacques Lacan, *Seminar VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Dennis Porter (London: Routledge, 1992), 139; Jacques-Alain Miller, "Extimity," trans. Françoise Massaridier-Kenney, in *The Symptom* 9, www.lacan.com/symptom/?p=36 (accessed July 18, 2010); and Joan Copjec, *Read My Desire: Lacan Against the Historicists* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), ch. 5.
31. Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 139 (1989): 149.
32. In a very different register, this project recalls Dean's analogous argument that contemporary barebacking practices project a lineage and a genealogy that is based on intimate but anonymous bonds forged with those we will never know and who will never know us. See Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy*.
33. Gayle Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," in *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, ed. Carole S. Vance (London: Pandora, 1992), 267–93; Cherríe Moraga and Amber Hollibaugh, "What We're Rolling Around in Bed With: Sexual Silences in Feminism," in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, ed. Ann Barr Snitow et al. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983).

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