

QUEERNESS, NORMS, UTOPIA

Jordana Rosenberg and Amy Villarejo

Queer studies and the crises of capitalism. The title of this special issue begs a number of questions at once. The first is historical: which crises? The second is methodological: what has queer studies to do with the crises of capitalism? And the third is speculative: how might a methodology attuned to both sexuality and the specificities of capitalist crisis orient us toward a world other than the one in which we find ourselves currently mired?

As to the first question, we begin by noting that crisis is endemic to the functioning of capitalism and has been since its inception. By this we mean not just that capitalism typically produces speculative bubbles and crashes—though it has, at least since the seventeenth century.¹ More specifically, we emphasize the degree to which capitalism routinely experiences limits to accumulation in the form of resistance on the part of labor, technological and political hurdles, geographic challenges, and so on.² Such crises do not, in themselves, signal the death knell of capitalism. Quite the opposite. Anyone living through the last five (or forty) years knows well how the specter of crisis has resulted in the increased centralization of capital in the hands of the rich, the justification of brutal cuts to budgets and services, and the shifting of media attention from ten years of war and plunder to the minutiae of the market. “Crisis,” then, is not new. Rather, it is a tried-and-true tactic of the consolidation of class power and imperialist nationalism that extends back at least to the Panic of 1893. As with our contemporary crisis, the capitalist classes reaped real benefits in 1893, interrupting the momentum of the thriving populist and labor movements in the United States and justifying a redoubled wave of imperial expansion.³ Thus crises are both ideological and structural. As David Harvey puts it, “Financial crises serve to rationalize the

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DOI 10.1215/10642684-1422116

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irrationalities of capitalism. They typically lead to reconfigurations, new models of development, new spheres of investment, and new forms of class power.”⁴ “Queer Studies and the Crises of Capitalism” turns its attention to the set of crises defining the period we understand as neoliberal capitalism, the long wave of recessions and dispossessions stretching from the 1970s to the present.

In this focus, our special issue comes freighted with the woe of years of war, expropriation of the world’s resources, and the crushing ongoingness of neoliberal capitalism’s assault on humanity, both domestically and abroad. Yet, caught in the crosshairs of our contemporary moment, we are in good company. For even as neoliberal capitalism conscripts subjects to wage slavery, encloses commons, seizes resources, and consigns populations to death and dispossession, movements for resistance and liberation form and flourish in opposition to these depredations. And, informed by such activist interventions, there has been in recent years a wealth of work documenting, defying, and exposing the specificities of neoliberal capitalism and its various poisonous strategies. The dimensions of neoliberalism as an ideology, a politics, and an economic tactic have been eloquently and passionately analyzed in articles and in book-length studies both inside and outside queer studies. Lisa Duggan, David Eng, Jodi Melamed, Jasbir Puar, and Nikhil Pal Singh have shown how “neoliberal multiculturalism” masks capitalism’s structural reliance on racism and imperialism in its seemingly endless quest to create and sustain profits.⁵ Heterodox economists, historians, and critical geographers such as Gopal Balakrishnan, David Harvey, Anwar M. Shaikh and E. Ahmed Tonak, Gerard Dumenil and Dominique Levy, Chris Harman, and Giovanni Arrighi have charted how financialization, the permanent arms economy, falling profits, stagnant real wages, and the debt economy have convulsed the globe for decades. And, constellating the concerns of American studies, ethnic studies, and queer studies, critics like Roderick Ferguson, Kevin Floyd, Miranda Joseph, and José Muñoz have interrogated the historical lapses of political economy and Marxism in thinking gender, race, and sexuality.⁶ Such work has initiated critical rapprochements between Marxism and queer studies, through readings of cultural texts marked by neoliberalism’s inception and rise.

Thus burdened with the miseries of neoliberal capitalism—and buoyed by the uprisings, liberation movements, and thriving critical approaches that interrogate and resist neoliberalism’s spoliations and havoc—“Queer Studies and the Crises of Capitalism” translates these contradictory castings into a robust engagement with the *capitalism* in “neoliberal capitalism.” We take to heart Melamed’s acute rendering of the forces of neoliberal multiculturalism, which, in “suturing liberal antiracism to U.S. nationalism,” “depoliticizes capitalism by collapsing it

with Americanism” (6). This special issue works to resist such depoliticization by specifying, along with Melamed, that neoliberalism is a qualifier for the more precise analytic and historical category of neoliberal capitalism. For, as Nikhil Pal Singh has argued, “liberalism insists on divorcing universal questions of individual rights from a historical context of unequal property relations and . . . primitive capital accumulation” (28). This is a divorce we must not repeat in our own work. Liberal ideology longs to veil the violence of capitalism from view, leaving only fantasies about nationalism and the naturalized fiction of a free market in its place. Our analytic response to such veilings must be to push capitalism always to the foreground as not simply an object of analysis but as the ground and condition of such analysis as well. To this end, “Queer Studies and the Crises of Capitalism” invokes quite specifically the Marxist, anticapitalist, and left lineages of thinking neoliberalism. Neoliberalism, that is, is always *neoliberal capitalism*.

On to the second, methodological question: what has all this to do with queer studies? Fortunately, this is a question that we do not have to answer alone. Marxist and historical-materialist methodologies undergird the foundational texts of the study of sexuality. From Michel Foucault’s reflections on capital accumulation in *Discipline and Punish* to John D’Emilio’s analysis of gay identity alongside wage labor and Gayle Rubin’s “political economy of sex,” sexuality studies has long deployed the matrices of Marxism and political-economic analysis to illuminate the sex/gender matrix.⁷ This illuminative relation has become truly reciprocal with the interventions of queer of color critique, which ups the ante on traditional approaches to economic questions, turning the optic of queer theory onto political economy and historical materialism. Under such a lens, queer of color critique not only exposes the lacunae in historical materialist approaches but also recovers the force of those approaches that seem ever more relevant today. In weaving together questions of sexuality, critical race theory, and the psyche with economic history and capitalist development, recent work has revived its engagement with historical materialism. This kind of methodological recovery is founded in Ferguson’s reengagement with the Combahee River Collective and receives an exemplary extension in Muñoz’s engagement with Ernst Bloch.⁸ Melamed’s weaving together of a conception of “race radical analysis” with Cedric Robinson’s use of “black radicalism” also exemplifies the kind of recovery work that takes up the legacies of historical materialism to think through the relationship of racialization, imperialism, and neoliberalism. Although not explicitly written from a queer studies angle, Melamed’s “Spirit of Neoliberalism” continues to be an important touchstone for queer studies and is vividly engaged with in Eng’s *Feeling of Kinship*, for example.

What this burgeoning reencounter with historical materialism means for our special issue is an emphasis on the relationship between Marxist methodologies and queer studies. If, as we argued above, neoliberalism must be understood as a mode of capitalism, then the turn to analyzing neoliberalism finds a ready analytic tool in the history of Marxist critique. To our minds, the single most powerful methodological contribution of Marxism is its attention to contradiction in the form of dialectical critique. A dialectical approach to the problematic of neoliberal capitalism, then, is what we aim to provide and provoke here. As such, this special issue begins with one basic presumption: that the encounter between queer studies and Marxist and historical-material analysis, at its best, offers the possibility for analyzing capitalist culture in its dynamic, geographically diverse, and contradictory articulations. We invited authors to consider how queer methodologies illuminate the contradictions in current and historical economic patterns and advance our understanding of the complex structures of global capitalism.

In this focus on contradiction, the Marxist tradition we embrace most closely is Adorno's negative dialectic—a technique that distinguishes itself from the Hegelian idealist dialectic in its fundamentally aporetic quality: a negative dialectic does not posit a comprehensive account of the social world but points up the conceptual barriers to understanding the material conditions of that world. This analytic process is achieved through “thinking in contradictions”: “To proceed dialectically means to think in contradictions, for the sake of the contradiction already experienced in the object, and against that contradiction.”⁹ The negative dialectical approach does not posit an alternative to the contradictions that score contemporary capitalism but reaches toward the possibility of overcoming those contradictions through overcoming the conditions of capitalism. This perspectival shift is praxical; it hinges on the existence of social movements working to overcome current conditions. This praxical viewpoint—a speculative moment necessary to the negative dialectic—is where Adorno invokes the utopian potential of his approach: negative dialectics that exposes the degree to which the conditions under which we live now are “false,” or contingent. “In view of the concrete possibility of utopia,” he says, “dialectics is the ontology of the false condition” (11).

The utopian component of negative dialectics is reliant on social movements. Just so, the encounter of queer studies and capitalist crisis showcased in this special issue also comes mediated by social movements—by the long history of queer resistance to the logic and demands of capitalist (re)production and by the movements for social justice that have come to define the 2000s and beyond in terms of coalition building between and among queer resistance, anticapitalist and antiracist work, immigrant rights, anticolonial struggle, and movements for

national self-determination.¹⁰ Such social movements have illuminated the character of American neoliberal capitalism as it seeks militarily to assert its economic dominance in Iraq, Palestine, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Venezuela, Bolivia, and beyond. In the essays within, and in the extended roundtable, authors consider the regulation and policing of sexuality—as well as the utopian or defiant aspects of queerness—as one critical optic in reconstructing various histories, including the American political landscape post-9/11, the legacies of the Cuban revolution, the militarization of the borders, deindustrialization and the dispossession of the commons, and the baleful conjuncture of slavery and capital accumulation.

The Roundtable: Queer Studies and the Spatial Character of Neoliberal Capitalism

In the pages that follow, the conjoined pressure of our authors' investigations and the dynamic collaborative work of the roundtable combine to illuminate the historical relationship between capital accumulation, racialization, and sexualization—a triumvirate of variously determinate forces whose interpenetration has been obscured by the deployment of “crisis” as a way to name the current conjuncture. In the roundtable, we invited authors to speculate on their own innovations on the relationship between political economy, Marxism, and queer studies. In responding, they have encapsulated our aims for the special issue as a set of vivid analytic provocations.

As Miranda Joseph reminds us in this issue, the loud decrying that capitalism is “in crisis” does not necessarily signal a long-term crisis for capitalism. For capitalism has long been fueled by recurrent crises: falling rates of profit, the bridging of gaps between production and consumption with ballooning credit and debt, the explosion of finance capital. Such crises have become occasions for capitalism to “revolutionize” itself—through imperialism, colonization, and increased rates of exploitation, the combined forces of which result in booms and the recuperation of the system, temporarily at least.¹¹

Following the lead of recent queer theories of sensation and emotion, we might understand this latest “crisis” as, at least partly, an *affect* deployed in this moment to put into place and naturalize the intensification of exploitation, the systematic destruction of the gains of labor radicalism, and the unleashing of new, imperialist forms of violence. As Gopal Balakrishnan has explained, the faltering dominance of American neoliberal capitalism occasions an almost panoramic military theater in which the “rogue state” designation applies to an unprecedented number of nations and peoples now targeted for the use of violent force: “For the

few remaining fully sovereign states, the use of military force is afforded cover by the ‘international community,’ while illegitimate ‘rogue’ states are subject to invasive, destabilizing qualifications of their nominal sovereignty in the form of sanctions, international supervision of their weapons programmes, no-fly zones, and regime change.”¹² In representing the stumbling of certain sectors of finance capital as in “crisis,” dominant media and political discourses legitimate—through the invocation of panicked affects—both assaults on domestic services and public programs and imperialist acts of violence as necessary steps toward restabilizing those sectors of profit. In interrogating such ideologies from the perspective of queer studies, we join other recent special issues of *GLQ*—notably “Sexuality, Nationality, Indigeneity” and “Queer Politics and the Question of Palestine/Israel”—in bringing together accounts of such cruelty and violence with an analytics of sexuality.¹³

Such spikes of violence, moreover, reveal the degree to which, as Fred Moten argues in the roundtable, racism and racialization are not only currently but have long been “condition[s] of possibility” for capitalism itself. And, as Gayle Salamon suggests within the roundtable, it is also the case that this violence takes specifically spatial form. The relation between center and periphery, after all, is articulated not only globally but also domestically in a series of intensifying dyads, or what Raymond Williams describes as a relation of “interlocking exploitation.”¹⁴ For Harvey, this interlocking is both cause and result of capitalist “crises.” In its quest to continually produce profit, territories are dispossessed and traditional social structures made insupportable, as capitalism moves within and between nation-states in an endless movement of de- and re-development. This movement wreaks havoc as it makes profit—a spatial logic vividly described by Mike Davis as a vast global network of sprawling “polycentric urban systems without clear rural/urban boundaries”—“megaslums” populated by a highly exploited informal workforce.¹⁵

This increasingly violent territorialization of new lands and resources is key to understanding how capitalism manages to reproduce itself as a system despite recurrent crises of overproduction and overaccumulation. Indeed, an understanding of this process may help us replace what Robert McRuer identifies as the problematic invocation of rhetorics of disability to describe the “terrain” of global capitalism, with a materially grounded and historically based language that describes the mechanisms of capital accumulation. And this hermeneutic of accumulation may also be key to understanding the ideological makeup of the current moment. For if the spatially deployed violence of capitalism exposes the fissures in the current mode of production, perhaps it is the case, as Tavia Nyong’o argues

in the roundtable, that traditional ideological patches—such as marriage—no longer cover the wounds of capitalist profiteering. Nor do they cover the sheer brutality—analyzed dynamically here by Dean Spade—of the state.

Where does this leave us? Strangely, as Kevin Floyd points out, it seems to have left us turning to utopias. Floyd suggests that utopia—as it is currently debated within queer studies—is symptomatic of the limitations of capitalism. As we jut up against the impossibility of capitalist futures, we enact the negation of these futures in the name of another. So a hermeneutics of utopia is embedded in the dialectical nature of negation, the positive claims of which are inextricable from the conditions of suffering and misery that give rise to the negation in the first place. What are some sites on which to apply the analytic pressure of utopia/negation? The contradictory and overdetermined nature of desire, as Lisa Rofel adds to the roundtable discussion, may be one crucial place to look for the dialectical mediation of capitalist contradiction. Or, as Christina Crosby responds, the fissures of capitalism may signal our necessary return to the question of form, and the contradictory character of the literary tropes that accompanied industrial capitalism as well as our own “post-Fordist nightmare.” This nightmare, as Lisa Duggan forcefully reminds us, must be taken into account in all its global reach, and in the heterogeneity of its manifestations: not just “neoimperial plunder,” “slaughter,” “theft and exploitation,” but the “affective roots” of the ideologies that are put in place to naturalize these acts.

Totalizing Affects: Queerness and Temporality

For all the potential in bringing Marxism and queer theory into a productive joint analytic, a number of hurdles still remain. One such hurdle is the question of totality. Indeed, we might say that, ever since the 1990s and the rise of identity politics, queer studies has counterposed totality-thinking with affect in a signature frisson.¹⁶ Is there something that just *feels wrong* about conceptualizing totality within the ambit of queer studies—itself so finely tuned to the interstices, glimmerings, and fleeting connections that somehow miraculously seem to have escaped the thudding reductions and empty equivalences of capitalism and heteronormativity? Whether or not this antimony holds true, it has been the case that the beautiful, endangered details that flourish within queer studies have, for a number of reasons, been posed against a totalizing methodology, and this perceived conflict is the result, at least partly, of equating the Marxist tradition of totality-thinking with universalism. Yet this equation leans more on a commonsensical view of the “total-ness” of totality than it does on the richer theoretical

heritage linking a world of uneven, contradictory particulars and uncovering the violence veiled by the patina of self-evident value attributed to commodities, regulatory ideals, and the state itself under capitalism. How can we reconcile this more fluid notion of totality-thinking with a queer studies ordinarily so suspicious of it? Perhaps it would be useful here to recall Fredric Jameson's investigation into the phenomenology of dialectical thought, which focuses on the moment at which the subject comes to understand himself or herself as an object—subject to and conditioned by the contradictions of the historical field he or she surveys. “There is a breathlessness,” says Jameson, “about this shift from the normal object-oriented activity to such dialectical self-consciousness—something of the sickening shudder we feel in the elevator's fall or in the sudden dip in an airliner. That recalls us to our bodies, much as this recalls us to our mental positions as thinkers and observers.”¹⁷ Jameson's point here is not simply that the body is as much a mediator of the contradictions of capitalism as is the mind, and the concepts and objects it surveys. More specifically, the realization of the subject's position as an object conditioned by these contradictions occasions a shocking return to the body, one that might be explored more broadly by a dialectical queer methodology.

Furthering our rapprochement, it pays to remember, as Ferguson points out in the roundtable, that there are many totalities. Not only the “Eurocentric” universalism pointed to by Martin Jay but a tradition of “broad attempt[s] to appreciate social and epistemic heterogeneity.” This latter sense of totality inheres in the work of Karl Marx and Georg Lukács, in Jameson's antitotalitarian totality, in Mikhail Bakhtin's “open totality,” and in what Kenneth Surin describes as C. L. R. James's whole that is “an always displaced and decentered bundle of temporalities.”¹⁸ The conflation of totality and universalism has been attacked by activists working at the forefront of coalition politics. Indeed, this is a conflation that, as McRuer points out in the roundtable, may be remedied or unstrung by remembering that it is against “bourgeois universalism” precisely that activists, theorists, and all those who, as Rofel puts it, think “in the multiple,” throw themselves wholeheartedly. And we do so with all the force that dialectical totalization—or, if one prefers, a *feeling* for (or shocking, bodily sense of) the contradictory interconnections between what McRuer calls the “bright new gay day” of homonationalist equality and the cuts to public services trumpeted by every politician from former California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger to President Barack Obama—has in its arsenal.¹⁹

We might see this “bright new gay day”—this hypersunny universalism—as a kind of “genre of identity politics.” This is a formulation Ferguson counterposes, in the pages of this journal, to the “scavenger” nature of totalizing. As a

scavenger methodology itself, queer studies might find itself surprisingly in tune with the disciplinary trespass endemic to totalizing thought in its best, most capacious versions. But even if we rehabilitate totality as a queering—or scavenging—of disciplines, we still need to address the sense that queer studies’ attention to affect appears at odds with the potentials of a totalizing approach. Recent work by Sara Ahmed, Lauren Berlant, Ann Cvetkovich, Heather Love, and Salamon has emphasized the methodologically explosive force of an affect studies rooted in political and historicist orientations.²⁰ Here we could cite as inspiration Berlant’s essay “Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency),” which displaces questions of sovereignty and agency from “bourgeois dramatics” (what a great term for the melodramas of crisis management!) to the realm of ordinariness. In her closing thoughts on the agency of self-interruption, Berlant offers a series of clauses that highlight with painstaking precision what a scavenger project might disclose. “In the scene of slow death,” Berlant argues, “a condition of being worn out by the activity of reproducing life, agency can be an activity of maintenance, not making; fantasy, without grandiosity; sentience, without full intentionality; inconsistency, without shattering; embodying, alongside embodiment.”²¹ In “Slow Death,” Berlant reframes crises of embodiment as ongoing; such a reframing could also be linked to the ongoingness of the economic crisis as the condition of capitalism’s reproducing itself. In taking on the conjunctions of the body and the temporalities of capitalism, Berlant brokers a kind of rapprochement between queer studies, political-economic theories of development, and a rather traditional Marxist approach to temporality and embodiment—one we are inspired by and hope to have captured something of the spirit of in this issue.

Jasbir Puar’s coda, “The Cost of Getting Better,” builds on Berlant’s conception of “Slow Death” to take on the intersection of disability studies with the spatial and temporal logics of neoliberalism and homonationalism. In her discussion of the “It Gets Better” project—in which queer teens are encouraged to emplot themselves within a *bildung* of capital accumulation, assimilation to a feel-good nationalism, and nuclear-family building—Puar exposes the implied (and denied) movements that score the logic of urbanization and immigration. Drawing on Nyong’o’s observations about the narrative logic of “It Gets Better,” Puar describes the demand to “get better” as “a call to upward mobility that discordantly echoes the now-discredited ‘pull yourself up by the bootstraps’ immigrant motto.”²² Adding to this analysis of the spatial injunction of “getting better,” Puar argues that the migratory logic of “getting better” is married to a set of presumptions around capacity and debility. “It Gets Better,” in other words, imagines spatial movement and nationalist assimilation in terms of the resuscitation of a

debilitated body: “The subject of redress and grievance [in the “It Gets Better” project] . . . functions . . . as a recapitulation of a debilitated body.” In highlighting capacity and debility as the conditioning registers of current debate around queer assimilation to the imperial nation-state, Puar brings together a queer studies perspective on bodiliness and disability with the problematic of finance capital. Given that “the latest phase of capitalism got an ersatz form of growth primarily through credit-card consumerism and asset bubbles” and that medical debt has been cited as the pre-eminent cause of credit card debt, the role of medical debt in growing the neoliberal state and supporting finance capital cannot be underestimated.²³ Puar’s negative-dialectical assault on the commonsensical injunction to “get better” exposes the contradictory material and ideological undercurrents threading through the seemingly seamless articulation of queerness with an imperial nation-state producing and profiting from debility. Thus Puar models the sort of serious engagement with thinking about—and beyond—the neoliberal-capitalist state of which queer studies is capable.

Theorists of affect have asked how we can be attentive to the underdog emotions of queerness while still refining the tools of a queer critique that does not seek to affirm queer culture so much as analyze its historical articulations. It is this historicizing, critical impulse that drives the reconnoitering of totality and feeling—or negation and utopia—and that brings to the foreground the conditions in which, as Moten puts it here, “the question of totality becomes the question of utopia.” Along these lines, scholars have interrogated the queer registration of the contradictions of temporality itself. In regarding these contradictions as the mediation of what Elizabeth Freeman has termed the queer “sensation of asynchrony”—or of what Molly McGarry describes as the “theories of embodiment” that stake themselves on a very queer investment in the enduring presence of the past in the present—queer studies takes on, with a kind of totalizing force, the historical arrangement and transformations of the very grounds of thought, feeling, and political action itself.²⁴

If queer studies is now reencountering the question of utopia within the Marxist tradition, it is only through the kinds of concretizing negations made possible by a recent wealth of work that specifies the baleful cohabitations of queerness and nationalism, queerness and racialization, queerness and the neoliberalization of the globe. In Puar’s words, queerness may be seen, in a number of important contexts, as “a process of racialization” deployed by the neoliberal nation-state to manage and control populations—to ensure ideological homogeneity in queers for whom an oppositional relationship to the state had once been paramount, and to legitimate neocolonial wars and plunder in the name of an empty “revitaliza-

tion” of liberal subject-formations held to be the ideal citizens of the neoliberal state.²⁵ This trenchant analysis of the increasing violence endemic to the neoliberal state’s quest for dominance shares a theoretical and future orientation with Muñoz’s utopian casting of black radical traditions that highlights capitalism as the key framework against which radical futurity pits itself.²⁶

Perhaps it is the force of both such angles — the “willfully idealistic” along with the spatiotemporal analytic — that creates the conditions for the turn to utopia within queer studies within these pages, and the rapprochement with Marxism more generally.²⁷ Taking as a guide not only the kind of call to horizontality issued by Muñoz but also the kind of spatiotemporal thought characteristic of Giovanni Arrighi’s diagnosis of capitalism as having a cyclical motion that confounds even those notions of historical progression dear to capitalism’s discursive heart — the participants in the roundtable take on utopia not simply as an unimaginable future but as a diagnostic methodology that zeros in on the uneven action of capitalism, the spatial differentiation of global production, and the prolonged, overlapping, and recursive temporal pulses of social contradiction itself.

Value, Perversion, Fantasy

If this special issue seeks to test the impact of economic analyses on queer theory — and vice versa — it resolutely does not seek to mark a new orthodoxy for cultural critique. At bottom, we propose that political philosophy and queer theory together offer powerful ideas for addressing problems of justice, redistribution, and recognition. A key idea that threads through this project — and one that links the above issues and points of departure — is that of the value form. As Gayatri Spivak has commented, “The question of value is everywhere. I mean, there is a value theory of everything, not just a value theory of labor. Because value, simple and contentless, is just a form in use when things are made commensurable.”²⁸ The value theory of labor (as Spivak calls it, reversing the usual order of reference) or labor theory of value (which appears to restrict the latter by the former) suggests that human labor-power, the capacity to work, is what predicates the worker/subject; it is what workers/subjects are because it is what they have to sell. This is labor objectified, labor deadened. As people are reified, commodities come to life, and the world of things appears independent. But there is more to Marx’s understanding of commodity fetishism than this: these outward appearances of commodities conceal their inner relations, but furthermore these mystifying appearances themselves also and crucially belong to the social realities they conceal.

Queer studies has established hermeneutics and methodologies that are

particularly sensitive to the imbrication of these social bonds with the economic structures of capitalism. And the questions originally opened by theories of sexuality rooted in social and economic analysis—like Foucault’s, D’Emilio’s, and Rubin’s—continually press us to reimagine and retheorize the conditions of capitalist modernity and the mediation of these economic structures by sexuality and gender. Indeed, if queer studies has recently engaged with renewed vigor the analytic categories of relations, bonds, and affects, this special issue specifies, historicizes, and analytically situates these bonds, relations, and affects in terms of the contradictions of the value-form: in terms of affective value, the value of labor, and the value of social relationships. In thus framing our issue, we take inspiration from such theorists as Wahneema Lubiano, who has noted how insistently the wage/labor ethos is gendered and how “without any specific contextualization, work is presented as its own absolute good, because work and ownership are what empower *men* to make decisions, to exercise freedom.”²⁹ Following on a dazzling body of thought from Friedrich Engels (in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*) to Luce Irigaray (e.g., in her essay “When the Goods Get Together”), Lubiano sees lodged within the production of value a spectrum of human relationality and social regulation not fully captured by the identity-labels of gender, sexuality, race, and kinship or family.³⁰

Lubiano, like Spivak, proposes gender and sexuality as *internal*, necessary to producing both value and freedom. In her essay for this special issue, Carla Freccero uses the question of value as the occasion to take stock of the spectralization of queers: both in popular culture and in queer theory of the past twenty years. Rather than resist how culture dematerializes queerness, Freccero reclaims this abstraction as the ground for future historiographical work and posits a new theory of queer materiality. In an astounding queer constellation that ranges from an early modern treatise on the family to Louis Althusser, Slavoj Žižek, Jameson, and Irigaray, Freccero traverses the difficult divide between “subject” and “collectivity,” exploring both contemporary and traditional sites where commodity exchange, sexual difference, and sexuality/desire converge.

Janet Jakobsen, too, asserts that sexual relations are part of, not prior or ancillary to, the relations of production, relying on the economist David Ruccio’s work to understand the historical matrix of social and sexual relations. In an account that spans the inception of Protestant rationality to the contemporary conditions of what she terms the “secular” Protestantism in the United States, Jakobsen considers heteronormativity as a name for this matrix. That is, by understanding sex as a kind of fulcrum or nodal point among saliently interrelated but

discontinuous vectors of social life (economic value, moral value, the predication of the subject, the formation of public policy), Jakobsen enables us to understand how fully heteronormativity has saturated the realm of late-capitalist production. Her strong reading of this historical matrix of social and sexual life usefully proliferates further questions. Some are corrective: to what extent does Marx naturalize “the family” as a restrictive model of social organization or follow heteroreproductive logic, where queers are pathologized as non(re)productive? Some inquire into abstraction as such: can we press the value form into new service for thinking desire and sexuality? What routes, following these strands of feminist and queer theory (including the work of Gayle Rubin, Judith Butler, and others), allow for analyses of immaterial labor (or affective labor) that do not merely analogize them with material labor (or claim to supersede it)?

Grace Kyungwon Hong’s essay, “Existentially Surplus,” proposes “irrationality” as one rubric that helpfully propels this inquiry. Like the contributors we have been discussing, Hong is energized by a diverse lineage of thought, from Marx himself to queer of color critique. The latter, particularly Ferguson’s *Aberations in Black*, enables her to understand the production of surplus forms of life within capitalist social relations. Capitalism’s death drive, or its irrationality, which is not external but endemic, rears its head in the specific politico-historical formation we call neoliberalism as disposability: following Zygmunt Bauman, Hong sees mass disposability, or the production of new categories of disposable people, as fundamental to the globalization of capital. Her ultimate question, then, has to do with the utility of the categories of race, gender, and sexuality in naming these vectors of valuation in the present moment. To be surplus, in other words, is to be raced, gendered, and sexualized, as she says, “in ways both old and new.” We should not be surprised that Hong turns to Cherríe Moraga’s body of work (across genres and decades), since Moraga’s relentless and passionate voice has shaped crucial strains of feminist, queer, Chicana activism and art practice since the 1980s. What Hong finds in it for her project is the very dialectic of loss and utopia (or “making tribe”) we cited earlier in this introduction, now crucially mediated through a discourse on death that is key, in Hong’s understanding, to the condition of being surplus.

Lisa Marie Cacho echoes Hong’s urgency in marking exclusion, particularly the insidious effects of the progressive political inheritance of affirming sexual and gender normativity in order to attribute social value to race and ethnicity. Her reading of Carla Trujillo’s novel *What Night Brings* is not, however, an indictment of progressive traditions but instead a lively demonstration of what

it means to read textual detail as social antagonism. In her attention to domestic and ritual elements of everyday life—including the loaded symbolism of a lowly egg, Cacho discovers in Trujillo’s prose a shifting landscape of valuation, political alliance, and social struggle. The contradictions governing relations between poverty, patriarchy, heteronormativity, and violence become calibrated in Cacho’s reading of the novel to offer insights into debates about immigration. Fixing her gaze on the novel’s aspirational character, “Eddie-me,” voiced through the longings/imaginings of the queer Marci, Cacho ultimately finds in the possibilities of queer gender (female masculinity, butch affect) the momentum for a preliminary recoding of the matrix of value.

In Meg Wesling’s contribution, the question of value is front and center. “Queer Value” presses on the concept of value to mediate or “suture” the psychic and the material. Initially reconfiguring an idea of queer labor through a reading of a documentary about Cuban drag queens, *Mariposas en el Andamio* (*Butterflies on the Scaffold*), Wesling proposes this reading as a way to understand “how we might articulate the labored economies of sexuality and gender more generally—that is, how the performance of gender and sexuality enabled, compelled, disciplined, and produced at any given historical moment constitutes a form of labor, accruing both material and affective value.” *Mariposas* (a film about which one of us has written elsewhere) documents simultaneous historically specific transformations.³¹ Indeed, what makes *Mariposas* an aspirational project worthy of our close attention, in Wesling’s careful reading, is its attempt not to chart gendered and sexual “disidentifications” but to resignify normative gender and sexuality from the heart of revolutionary faggotry, a heart that is no less bound to the future of a local community than it is grounded in the flows of global exchange. Indeed, reading drag as a form of productive labor (and drawing on a lineage of distinguishing labor from work from Marx through Arendt), Wesling ultimately proposes a vision of gender as the self-conscious production of human work and therefore a deeply social understanding of the predication of the subject. This is, finally, a story about who we are and might be in relation to others and how we are or could be queer only in relation to material and social conjunctures. Back, then, to the future.

Notes

1. On the Dutch tulip bubble, see Fernand Braudel, *The Wheels of Commerce*, vol. 2 of *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th–18th Century*, trans. Sian Reynolds (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); and Anne Goldar, *Tulipmania: Money, Honor, and Knowledge in the Dutch Golden Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).
2. The literature on finance and crisis is vast. See, for starters, Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times* (London: Verso, 1994); Gopal Balakrishnan, *Antagonistics: Capitalism and Power in an Age of War* (London: Verso, 2009); David Harvey, *The Limits to Capital* (London: Verso, 2007); Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital and the Crises of Capitalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Anwar M. Shaikh and E. Ahmed Tonak, *Measuring the Wealth of Nations: The Political Economy of National Accounts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Gerard Dumenil and Dominique Levy, *The Crisis of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011); Chris Harman, *Zombie Capitalism: Global Crisis and the Relevance of Marx* (New York: Haymarket Books, 2010).
3. The Panic of 1893 is treated in a great many works of history and receives particularly strong attention in Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); and in Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Movement: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978). It may also be worth noting that 1893 was the year the British created the Durand Line through India, demarcating Russian from British colonial interests in the region. On the Durand Line, see Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York: New Press, 2008).
4. Harvey, *Enigma of Capital*, 11.
5. “Neoliberal multiculturalism” is Jodi Melamed’s term describing the ideology of race accompanying neoliberal political and economic policies. See Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon, 2004); David Eng, *The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Jodi Melamed, “The Spirit of Neoliberalism: From Racial Liberalism to Neoliberal Multiculturalism,” *Social Text*, no. 89 (2006): 1–24; Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black Is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 2005).
6. Kevin Floyd, *The Reification of Desire: Toward a Queer Marxism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009); Miranda Joseph, *Against the Romance of Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); José Muñoz, *Cruising*

- Utopia: The There and Then of Queer Theory* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).
7. “The two processes — the accumulation of men and the accumulation of capital — cannot be separated; it would not have been possible to solve the problem of the accumulation of men without the growth of an apparatus of production capable of both sustaining them and using them; conversely, the techniques that made the cumulative multiplicity of men useful accelerated the accumulation of capital” (Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* [New York: Vintage, 1995], 221). See also John D’Emilio, “Capitalism and Gay Identity,” in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, ed. Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983); and Gayle Rubin, “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex,” in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975).
 8. Roderick Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); and Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*.
 9. Adorno, *Negative Dialectic* (London: Routledge, 1973), 115. To think in contradictions exposes the antagonisms that comprise social relations under capitalism because, as Alfred Sohn-Rethel has painstakingly argued, intellectual and manual labor are inextricable, and these antagonisms (between capital and labor, and between use and exchange value) embed themselves within the concept itself. See Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labor: A Critique of Epistemology* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities, 1977). See also Slavoj Žižek’s engagement with Sohn-Rethel in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1997).
 10. A necessarily incomplete list of these movements would include the following organizations: AlQaws, Aswat, Critical Resistance, Queers Undermining Israeli Terrorism, Queers Undermining Israeli Apartheid, Queers for Economic Justice, Labor for Palestine, International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network, Gender Justice LA, No Human Being Is Illegal, Border Action Network, Left Turn.
 11. On the structural nature of capitalist crises, see Arrighi, *Long Twentieth Century*; Balakrishnan, *Antagonistics*; Neil Smith, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008).
 12. Balakrishnan, *Antagonistics*, 102.
 13. Gil Z. Hochberg, ed., “Queer Politics and the Question of Palestine/Israel,” special issue, *GLQ* 16, no. 4 (2010); and Daniel Heath Justice, Mark Rifkin, and Bethany Schneider, eds., “Sexuality, Nationality, Indigeneity,” special issue, *GLQ* 16, nos. 1–2 (2010).
 14. Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 51.
 15. Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums* (New York: Verso, 2006), 10.
 16. Floyd explores this legacy at length in *The Reification of Desire*.

17. Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 308.
18. Kenneth Surin, "The Future Anterior: C. L. R. James and Going Beyond a Boundary," in Grant Farred, ed. *Rethinking C. L. R. James* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 192.
19. Schwartzenegger proposed cuts of up to \$750 million to in-home supportive services (IHSS), which provides home care to seniors and people with disabilities, and proposed eliminating adult day health care provided through Medi-Cal. "Race to the Top" is President Obama's competition for federal funding for education reform, based upon measures of student and school performance. Diane Ravitch provides a careful indictment of that program's potential impact in her blog on the *Huffington Post*: www.huffingtonpost.com/diane-ravitch/obamas-race-to-the-top-wi_b_666598.html
20. Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009); Gayle Salamon, *Assuming a Body: Transgender and Rhetorics of Materiality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).
21. Lauren Berlant, "Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency)," *Critical Inquiry* 33 (Summer 2007), 759.
22. Tavia Nyong'o, "School Daze" September 30, 2010, bullybloggers.wordpress.com/2010/09/30/school-daze/; Puar, this volume.
23. Gopal Balakrishnan, "Speculations on the Stationary State," *New Left Review* (2009), 14.
24. Elizabeth Freeman, ed., introduction to "Queer Temporalities," special issue, *GLQ* 13, nos. 2–3 (2007): 159; Molly McGarry, *Ghosts of Futures Past: Spiritualism and the Cultural Politics of Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).
25. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, xi.
26. Muñoz on Baraka: "If the condition of possibility for blackness is a certain radicalness in relation to capitalism's naturalizing temporal logic, the black radical tradition is engaged in a maneuver that helps elucidate queer futurity" (*Cruising Utopia*, 87). Puar on terrorist assemblages: "This unknowable monstrosity is not casual bystander or parasite; the nation assimilates the effusive discomfort of the unknowability of these bodies, thus affectively producing new normativities and exceptionalisms through the cataloguing of unknowables (Puar, xxiii). Thus "[O]pening up to the fantastical wonders of futurity, therefore, is the most powerful of political and critical strategies, whether it is through assemble or to something as yet unknown, perhaps even forever unknowable" (Puar, 222).

27. Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 96.
28. Yan Hairong, "Positions without Identity: An Interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak," *positions* 15, no. 2 (2007): 429.
29. Wahneema Lubiano, "But Compared to What? Reading Realism, Representation, and Essentialism in *School Daze*, *Do The Right Thing*, and the Spike Lee Discourse," in *Representing Blackness: Issues in Film and Video*, ed. Valerie Smith (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 113.
30. Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (New York: Penguin, 2010), and Luce Irigaray, "When the Goods Get Together," in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).
31. See Amy Villarejo, *Lesbian Rule: Cultural Criticism and the Value of Desire* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).