

On Solidarity

EVE KOSOFSKY SEDGWICK'S WELL-KNOWN ESSAY "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading" bears an equally well-known subtitle: "You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is About You." Having traced the dynamics of shame so precisely, Sedgwick fully grasped the shaming her subtitle would perform. To locate oneself as its addressee (which Judith Butler and D. A. Miller, her examples of paranoid reading practices, hardly could avoid) was ipso facto to "prove" her point about paranoid hermeneutics. Even worse, it was to expose one's reading—through the play in the subtitle's "You're So Paranoid" on its referent, Carly Simon's "You're So Vain"—as an expression not merely of vanity, but of a vanity so extreme that everything outside the self gets twisted to reflect it. The subtitle links paranoia, that is, to a particular view of narcissism as, in Michael Balint's description, a "relation to the external world in which the person does not take any or enough cognizance of reality," a relation, therefore, that abandons the world for a "reality" no longer tethered to any collective version of truth.¹

Sedgwick's essay, unlike its subtitle, directs its charge of paranoia at "positions" rather than persons, distinguishing between "a paranoid reading practice . . . tied to a notion of the inevitable" and a reparative reading "attune[d] . . . exquisitely to a heartbeat of contingency."² The former, she tells us, perpetuates a "dogged, defensive narrative stiffness," while the latter affirms "queer possibility" (*PR* 147), the hope that "the future may be different from the present" (146), and "the many ways selves and communities succeed in extracting sustenance from the objects of a culture" (150–51). The first "position" ossifies in the rigor mortis of death; the second seeks to generate new openings onto life. Were such a dualism—here used to promote the "queer possibility" of the reparative—imposed upon persons instead of positions, it would sketch a familiar picture of sinthomosexual abjection, the queering through demonization of those construed as threats to the future. But that slip from *positions* to *persons* has taken place from the very start: it's the burden of the subtitle's joke, after all, where reparative sustenance is gathered from the red meat of shaming or

exclusion, from the disavowal of paranoid practices (labeled “stultifying” [124], “rigid” [146], “cruel and contemptuous” [144], “contagious” [126], and “automatic” [147]) in the name of such “communal” (150) values—that is, such communally *normative* values—as “joy-inducing ‘truths’” (148) and “love” (128).³

More about love in a minute. For now, we might ask if vanity and paranoia are relevant in the first place when the text really *is* about you, as Sedgwick’s text clearly *was* about the “paranoid” critics it addressed. I raise this question on the threshold of reading Judith Butler’s “Solidarity/Susceptibility” as, in a sense, about *me* or, more precisely, about the tension between the type of queer theory I have come to represent (focused on irony, negativity, and the death drive) and the type of queer theory associated with the late José Esteban Muñoz (focused on community, social transformation, and the hope for a more inclusive future). Such a binarization of Muñoz and Edelman could easily echo Sedgwick’s opposition of reparativity and paranoia, which itself could suggest the struggle between Eros and Thanatos, freedom and structure, or affect theory and Freud-Lacanianism.

How fitting, then, that Butler’s essay begins by recalling their introduction to Muñoz, which took place at Sedgwick’s home: “He let me know that, just in case there was a rivalry, he belonged to Eve.”⁴ From the outset the one who “belonged” to Eve paranoically anticipates rivalry, however playfully imagined, precisely in order to declare himself on the “side” of reparativity. But with characteristic graciousness, Butler declines to compete: “He had not yet understood that we all belonged to Eve: she was, and remains, the queen” (S/S 1). In what follows I attend to Butler’s fidelity, as exemplified by their engagement with Muñoz, to Sedgwickian reparativity, a fidelity Butler performs by *resisting* its rivalry with paranoia. They reroute the reparative impulse, I suggest, to think Muñoz and Edelman together, not, as in Sedgwick’s reparative program, beneath the all-conquering banner of “love” (which, as Muñoz’s meeting with Butler shows, can easily nurture rivalry) but rather in the service of a “solidarity” whose solidity remains in doubt.

Only once does Butler’s essay explicitly justify this claim. Invoking the notion of disidentification that Muñoz’s first book develops (in their gloss: “the excitement of being bad, . . . the exciting venture of departing from protocols of propriety that seek to shame a wide range of desires and to foreclose potential connections” [S/S 4]), Butler maintains that for Muñoz “Utopia is not a place to which we can go” (12). Despite his affirmation, which Butler later quotes, that “the future is a spatial and temporal destination” (13); despite his insistence, in *Cruising Utopia*, that “we must vacate the here and now for the then and there”;⁵ and despite Butler’s own acknowledgment that he “tells us that sometimes we actively have to find

the utopian, but at other times it comes at us, undeniable” (13); despite all that, Butler highlights Muñoz’s opposition to “progressive time” (12) and to any interpretation of utopia as “a place to which we can go.” Butler sees him, instead, as responding with the hopefulness of defiance to the “seamless future of no future for those abandoned by progress,” confident that “bad sentiments . . . can signal the capacity to transcend hopelessness” and that, in battling the structures of power, “bad attitude is a crucial resource” (12). In this context Butler evokes the filiations of his work with Jack Halberstam’s and Lisa Duggan’s before continuing as follows: “And perhaps Lee Edelman’s ‘bad education’ presents a late-breaking possibility of alliance with Muñoz’s bad attitude” (12).

The namecheck unpacks what motivates Butler’s prior reference to “no future”: a persistent attempt to consolidate what Muñoz and Edelman represent. Flashing into view as the potential for “alliance,” the solidarity whose contours Butler explores holds open the prospect of bridging a divide articulated by Muñoz himself. Having announced near the beginning of *Cruising Utopia* that his book “respond[s] to Edelman’s assertion that the future is the province of the child [*sic*] and therefore not for the queers [*sic*] by arguing that queerness is primarily about futurity and hope” (CU 11), he enacts once more his “belonging” to Sedgwick, performing another version of the scene played out in his introduction to Butler: “The corrective I wish to make by turning to utopia is attuned to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s critique of the way in which paranoid reading practices have become so nearly automatic in queer studies that they have, in many ways, ceased to be critical. . . . Utopian readings are aligned with what Sedgwick would call reparative hermeneutics” (12). In announcing his alignment with Sedgwick here, he links her reparative practice to “futurity and hope,” although Sedgwick herself refers to the “future-oriented vigilance of *paranoia*” (PR 130, emphasis mine), and, after addressing her cancer diagnosis and the “brutal foreshortening of so many queer life spans,” she speaks to the imperative of the here and now, of apprehending “one another immediately, . . . as the present fullness of a becoming whose arc may extend no further” (149). The line of demarcation between Edelman and Sedgwick, and therefore between Edelman and Muñoz, often read as absolute, seems already to be in flux; the project of Butler’s essay is to blur it even more.

If Muñoz himself can tend toward absolutism as readily as Edelman (Muñoz: “we must vacate the here and now for the then and there”; Edelman: “queerness should and must redefine such notions as ‘civil order’ through a rupturing of our foundational faith in the reproduction of futurity”), Butler wagers on ambivalence, resisting the call to rivalry (as in that first encounter with Muñoz) without denying the negativity that inheres in communal relations.⁶ Butler supplements, for example, the anecdote

describing that first encounter by offering, immediately afterward, an evocation of their last: a report received from a mutual friend about a photo forwarded by Muñoz along with a message “exclaim[ing] that this image clearly showed Judith Butler bolting from some exciting night in New York, walking the walk of shame” (S/S2). Where others might see this as prurient, Butler chooses to read it as Muñoz’s nonce-creation of community: “My ‘walk of shame’ was a fiction, and though one could call it a lie, that would deflect from its primary importance as a way of staging hypercommunicability and the spontaneous occasion for confabulating” (4). That’s a mouthful of words to characterize what one *could*, Butler notes, call a lie, a term they don’t exactly refuse in observing that to define it as such would “deflect from” the “primary importance” of the “fiction” circulated by Muñoz. Butler chooses, however, to foreground the utopian aspect of “confabulation”: the investment in creating a collective world of fabulousness and fables—even if, on this occasion, Butler keeps a sufficient distance from it to call out its untruth.

Indeed, insofar as the interest aroused by *this* fiction, by *this* fable, comes from Muñoz’s claim that the “fuzzy picture” (S/S 1) “clearly” (2) shows Butler’s “walk of shame,” it makes sense that, in setting the record straight, Butler sets off that phrase in quotation marks not present when, through *style indirect libre*, Butler puts it in Muñoz’s mouth. The quotation marks both dispute the phrase and attribute it to him. But how does one separate the “spontaneous occasion” for “hypercommunicability” from the stigmatization of the object on which that communication centers? Is it possible to sever the excitement of sharing an image with such a caption from *any* implication in the thrill of shaming to which that caption refers? To ask such questions, to raise the prospect of a less utopian aspect to Muñoz’s utopian “confabulation[s],” might simply betray one’s own fixation in a paranoid position. In that case, though, any reading alert to overdetermination could be waved away as paranoid from within a “reparative” logic. Butler, however, refuses that move, rejecting the “paranoid” suspicion without negating it categorically—rejecting it, that is, while still permitting its *potential truth* to linger: “Was I walking the walk of shame, fearing exposure? And just how exciting would it be if I were? He was, after all, not shaming me but seeking to expose, to break through, a specter of shame he saw walking down the street, and he did so shamelessly, or so I imagine” (4).

Much depends on “or so I imagine.” Having announced for the record that Muñoz’s account of the photograph was wrong, Butler raises, in two interrogative sentences, the possibility that he could have been right: that the figure in the photograph *could have been* Butler, that they *could have been* “walking the walk of shame” and, in so doing, “fearing exposure.” But even were that the case, Butler writes, Muñoz would not have been shaming them

by “expos[ing]” their “walk of shame” but “seeking to expose, to break through, a specter of shame he saw walking down the street.” This seems to mean that, by identifying the photo as Butler’s “walk of shame,” Muñoz (altruistically?) was trying to counter or, as Butler writes, “to break through” the shame he saw, or imagined he saw, in this “specter,” this “Judith Butler,” who, precisely because “fearing exposure,” needed, at least from his “shameless” perspective, liberation from that shame. “Or so I imagine,” Butler adds.

Butler’s ethical impulse inheres above all in such imagining—an imagining they view as the source of Muñoz’s fabled love of gossip. “The gossip asks another to imagine along, build a reality, make it true, if only for the duration of the communication,” Butler asserts (S/S 2). Muñoz’s gossip might be a “lie,” but by “confabulating” a counterreality it also performs a “collective crafting” that “can generate a modality of knowing and recognition among audiences and groups that facilitates modes of belonging, especially minoritarian belonging” (2). This belonging, the paranoid critic might note—especially, but not exclusively, as a mode of *majoritarian* belonging—can demand the negation or exclusion of those who cannot or do not belong, those who are Blackened or queered or othered to secure communal bonds.⁷ Doesn’t the whole of Butler’s work in all its brilliance and rigor try to think, the better to think beyond, the various social foreclosures that produce such excluded lives as unlivable? And aren’t those lives *made* unlivable by their “distance from the norm” (4), by their inability or refusal to participate in the dominant frame of collective “belonging”? Though attached to Muñozian community, Butler never forgets that “it is not really possible to support communal bonds as such without asking what kind of community is presupposed, and what forms of hatred and practices of expulsion are at work in fortifying those communal ties” (15). Can the formation of nonce-communities among some set of those expelled, can “the excitement of being bad, catching someone else being bad, or being bad by gossiping, and so being bad together” (4), avoid stigmatizing others to shore up *those* “communal ties”?

The excitement of gossip, after all, may encourage “malicious fantasy” (S/S 4); it may mock or shame its referent(s); it may batten, to use a Sedgwickian term, on feverish speculation as the one who gossips or confabulates hands down a mimetic judgment in which “the other’s actions are bad, and my behavior is bad” (4), however asymmetrical those two uses of “bad” may be. Although Butler celebrates the “badness” of gossip’s rejection of “a miserable morality” (4), such gossip, in Butler’s reading of Muñoz, remains, at root, reparative, an attempt to “bring others close by soliciting them to build a story with me and so . . . to close the gaps separating all of us by letting excitation bridge the distance” (4). The performativity of gossip thus

enables an alternative version of community by disseminating alternative truths; it engages the imagination on which Butler leans in declaring that Muñoz “was not shaming [them]” and then adding, “or so I imagine.”

With this, though, Butler’s reading flickers, and the efflux of a paranoid breath seems to brush the reparative flame. That flicker is visible elsewhere, too, as when Butler reflects on Muñoz’s relation to the people about whom he gossiped: “For a while I wrongly thought if José gossiped about someone that was a sign that he really did not like them. Of course, that still could be true” (*S/S* 2). What the first sentence claims Butler “wrongly” thought the second admits “could be true,” but even that possible truth can’t subvert the belief Butler still affirms (“I eventually grasped that gossip for him was a form of sustained attention and investment” [2]). In order to support this assertion, Butler ventriloquizes Muñoz (“gossip was for him . . . a way of saying: ‘Let’s face it, we live through one another all the time’” [2]) before shifting to free indirect discourse in which their voices blend as one: “We’re saying something about someone to another, and we do not really know if it is true, and it hardly matters, since the pleasure of common imagining exceeds the meager satisfactions of truth” (2). The desire for community with Muñoz, the desire for community Butler *shares* with Muñoz, corresponds to the will to “close . . . gaps” (4) that, Butler knows, “cannot be closed” (5); it exceeds the demand for fidelity to the “meager satisfactions of truth,” requiring the imaginative appropriation of Muñoz so that Butler can bind him more closely to herself.

That, I would argue, is precisely what Butler’s reading of Muñoz accomplishes. Where he declares, unambiguously, “the here and now is a prison house. We must strive, in the face of the here and now’s totalizing rendering of reality, to think and feel a then and there” (*CU* 1), Butler revises his argument, declaring, “What Muñoz calls the ‘not here’ emerges in the midst of the here; the ‘not now’ emerges at the center of the now” (*S/S* 7). In that case, though, the “here and now” no longer takes shape as a “prison house” or as a “totalizing rendering of reality.” It already contains what fractures it, what renders it “not-all”: the “future” that Muñoz poses against it, that he seeks “in the face” of the “here and now” but that Butler finds “in the midst” of it. Insofar as Muñoz, rightly or wrongly, ties the “here and now” to the paranoid, “anti-relational,” Edelmanian position and the “then and there” to the reparative, communitarian, Sedgwickian/Muñozian position, Butler’s reading unobtrusively strives to assimilate the two.

With that in mind it makes sense that Butler would write of Muñoz’s argument (and I offer a broader context here to a passage I cited earlier), “It would seem that we leave a *here* for a *there*, make a passage, but this is no straight passage. The potentialities that appear as rips and tears in the otherwise seamless future of no future for those abandoned by progress are

immanent and furtive possibilities within the present, indicating that this time is also another time, and always has been” (S/S 12). Notwithstanding his rhetorical insistence (“we must vacate the here and now for the then and there”), it only *seems*, Butler argues, that Muñoz directs us to leave the “here” for the “there.” In reality, the Muñozian “potentialities” that “appear” (picking up on “it would seem”) “as rips and tears in the otherwise seamless future of no future” are already “immanent” in the “present,” in the “here and now” of an Edelmanian “no future” that only seems, therefore, to be “seamless” or, as Muñoz would have it, “totalizing.” The “potentialities” that Butler qualifies as “possibilities in the present” inhere in the drive that evokes the null set, the ontological exclusion, the void of the Real internal to every iteration of the “here and now,” the “nothing” that looms so large in Edelman’s notion of “bad education.”

Butler elicits this reading of Muñoz by imbuing his defense of reparative analysis with the negativity seen in his earlier work on disidentification, a word that appears more frequently in the twenty pages of Butler’s essay than in all of *Cruising Utopia*. In fact, in *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, Muñoz places disidentification *in opposition* to utopia: “disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology. Instead of buckling under the pressures of dominant ideology (identification, assimilation) or attempting to break free of its inescapable sphere (counteridentification, utopianism), this ‘working on and against’ is a strategy that tries to transform a cultural logic from within.”⁸ It makes sense that Butler would find such a strategy of transformation congenial; it owes much to Butler’s indispensable work on performative resignification. By reading his earlier book as a lens through which to focus the claims of his later one, Butler brings out, constructs, or confabulates a Muñoz who is closer to Butler and to Edelman, as well. We can locate this critical endeavor in a series of questions Butler asks that seems to balance the communitarianism of Muñoz’s utopia with Edelman’s more “paranoid” take on the logic of social organization: “if community bonds are ambivalent, wrought from disidentification, how do we understand and confront that destructive potential which, Freud tells us, is part of the unconquerable nature of humans? Does utopia overcome ambivalence, hatred, aggression, those death-drivish elements that enter into disidentification? If disidentification contains the kernel of utopia for Muñoz, does it then follow that utopia retains the trace of disidentification?” (S/S 15–16). That final sentence’s chiasmus effects at the level of its rhetoric what the whole of Butler’s essay attempts at the level of its argument: a nonflamboyant de-rivalization expressing utopian investments not purchased at the cost of critical commitment to negativity and ambivalence, to what Butler describes as “a wound in the world no humanism can repair” (18).

To resort to a dubious binarism: if Butler's head is sometimes with Edelman, Butler's heart is always with Muñoz. Steadfast in solidarity with the latter's communitarian dream, Butler shows that attachment to Muñoz even while mediating what many see as his major dispute with Edelman: the claim that the reproductive futurism theorized in *No Future* rests on the whiteness of the Child constructed to assure its domination. Consider Butler's balancing act, with its slight but noteworthy tilt, while negotiating between Edelman's and Muñoz's different approaches to futurity: "The problem is not just that heterosexual normativity invests the child [*sic*] of sexual reproduction with the capacity to open the future; the problem is that for kids of color, the future is too often foreclosed" (S/S 6).⁹ Joined in a single sentence by way of a mediating semicolon, these two independent clauses bring together Edelman's analysis of futurism and Muñoz's subsequent critique; they do so, however, through a minor but nonetheless telling lapse in usage. By declaring "the problem . . . not just" the heteronormative investiture of the "child," Butler leads us to expect a supplementary formula preceded by "but also." Such an additive logic would offer a fuller analysis of "the problem" than that afforded by either interpretation on its own. In the absence of that "but also," Butler privileges, however subtly, the second—the "Muñozian"—clause, with its more straightforward assertion ("the problem is that"), over the earlier and more qualified claim that marks the "Edelmanian" clause ("the problem is not just that"). Butler does so, however, while retaining the trace of the rhetorical construction that puts both clauses on an equal footing.

Even so, Butler construes the tension between them as more apparent than real. If in Edelman's theory the figural "Child," which different groups can tailor to their various ethnic or racial needs, is ideologically produced to control persons and behaviors those groups see as threats to their future, then the fact that living children of color are too often *denied* a future hardly refutes Edelman's claim. Instead, this fact speaks to the widespread perception, in cultures shaped by anti-Blackness, that nonwhite persons, including nonwhite children, may endanger the survival of the Child.¹⁰ But sustaining the lives of "kids of color" in the face of anti-Blackness need not mean opposing anti-Blackness in the name of "kids of color," turning "kids of color" into another iteration of reproductive futurism's Child. The "future" at stake for "kids of color"—as for any particular child (poor children, immigrant children, differently abled children, trans* children, children of religious minorities, to name but a few)—may conflict with the "future" of the Child made to figure a particular community's survival; that the former are commonly sacrificed on the altar of the latter constitutes one of futurism's most devastating effects. Butler suggests as much by returning, with a small but notable difference, to this question and the rhetorical

formula invoked when Butler addressed it earlier: “When [Muñoz] reminded queer theory that kids of color don’t always have or expect a future, he was claiming that both space and time are organized according to a political horizon that establishes *not just* the reproductive future of whiteness *but* the whiteness of the future. In one sense, the future is a white thing; in another, that white thing called the future forecloses on another sense of futurity, the one that opens up through the tear or the break” (*S/S* 7, emphases mine). By supplementing “not just” with “but” this time, Butler comes closer to completing the idiom’s parallel construction while making the case for recognizing two senses of “the future”: one addressed to the reproduction of what structures a social order (as, for example, anti-Blackness), the other to the negativity that undoes that reproduction.

This latter sense of the future, “foreclose[d]” by the former and dominant sense (in which “the future is a white thing”), only emerges through “the tear or the break” that refuses the future as we know it: as communitarian survival. Reinforcing the way this echoes the logic behind Edelman’s call for “no future,” the second sense of futurity—its utopian or Muñozian sense—is curiously negative in Butler’s presentation. It consists solely of “the tear or the break” by which it emerges from the first sense and recalls in this Butler’s earlier reference to the “rips and tears in the otherwise seamless future of no future”—“rips and tears” that inhere in the here and now to disrupt the “seamless future” promised by a reproductive futurism intent on reproducing its idea of the future as an identitarian preserve, guaranteeing, thereby, “no future” for those who put that future at risk. Edelman, of course, makes plain that his “no future” is impossible but, then, so is Muñoz’s utopia, which, according to Butler, “is not a place to which we can go.” The solidarity of Muñoz and Edelman springs from this relation to impossibility (the impossible escape from reproductive futurism and the impossible realization of utopia). Such impossibility, however, is central to Butler’s notion of solidarity, which “Solidarity/Susceptibility” describes as a “converge[nce] at the site of our disidentification” that “requires an impossible and disparaged desire to break free from forms of subjection that are regularly renamed reality” (*S/S* 18).

Edelman and Muñoz converge through Butler’s focus on ambivalence and on the dissidence that makes every identification a disidentification, too. “Solidarity/Susceptibility” thus achieves what Butler, making reference to the Freudian death drive, positions outside the essay’s intent: “A fuller discussion of this issue [the death drive] might throw new light on some of the debates that pit relationality against negativity in light of the fact that love is structured by ambivalence, but this is not my aim this evening” (*S/S* 15). I have been arguing, to the contrary, that throwing such light is indeed one of Butler’s aims: that Butler’s wager on ambivalence, routed through

disidentification, envisions a reparative reading no longer rivalrous with paranoia, one sufficiently paranoid in itself to linger on the confluence of love and hate. “Solidarity is not exactly a form of love,” Butler writes, before hastening to add, “unless we understand ambivalence as constitutive of love” (18). Viewed in this context, love and hate, creation and destruction, solidarity and aggression, no longer face off against each other. Eros and Thanatos—which Butler aligns with “the bonds of community,” on the one hand, and “the death drive” (15), on the other—are interdependent and indistinguishable in every form of relation.

Notwithstanding a deep attachment to the communal ideal of Muñoz’s utopia, Butler knows that the “sentiments of solidarity” so crucial to minoritarian belonging also enable and perpetuate “quotidian forms of white supremacy” (S/S 15). The rise of Trumpism among white Americans (like the global resurgence of antiliberalism) exposes the “collective potential” in sharing the feeling of living an unlivable life, or one seen as becoming unlivable, as by no means confined to those “on the margins or locked into minority status” (15). Defenders of white supremacy, heterosexual privilege, and male domination may experience such “collective potential,” too. Their feelings, like the “collective[ly] craft[ed]” narratives that “lift [them] off from reality” (2), may lack any basis in reason or truth, but reason and truth cannot stop them. QAnon’s conspiracy theories express, like Muñozian gossip, the “possibility of being lofted into an unreality through a kind of improper behavior that has its political necessity” (5). Like gossip, the right wing’s lies provoke “communicable excitation” (4), consolidating those susceptible to their “utopian” possibility by inciting them to “mov[e] past shame and in solidarity against those who would derealize, diminish, or destroy [their] lives” (8). Butler recognizes, that is, the ambivalence with which we must think communal relations. While trying, in “Solidarity/Susceptibility,” to distinguish between “fascist frenzy” (13) and the “communicable excitation” (4) that “passes over into and through the crowd” in the “collective movement” of “communities on the margins” (13), Butler has to admit that “the bonds of community” (16) can sustain, and be sustained by, tyranny.

That may explain why Butler’s essay ends with a consideration of mania, which they read as a break from reality that attempts, however “unrealistic[ally]” (S/S 16), to overthrow tyrannical forms of constraint whether psychic (the assaultive superego) or social (authoritarian nationalism). In that sense, mania, as Butler notes, although it “offers . . . a cipher for understanding . . . forms of insurrectionary solidarity” (17), also “involves ‘tearing’ at . . . social bonds” and exposing “the negativity that every identification seeks to cover” (16).¹¹ Even at its most reparative, then, solidarity may consist, in Butler’s phrase, of “solidarity *against*.” The making and

unmaking of community, the enabling and disruption of futural projections: these can no more be separated from each other than can the promise of the “there and then” from the insistence of the “here and now.” The solidarity of Muñoz and Edelman, of “relationality” and “negativity,” of the “reparative” and the “paranoid,” as Butler’s essay reads it, is *not (just)* a solidarity with the “there and then” and *not (just)* a solidarity with the “here and now” *but also* a solidarity *against* whatever impedes the critical labor of (re)imagining reality, even if it purports to do so under the auspices of “love.”

In their final sentence Butler returns to the space of solidarity: “There we find a collective incitement to take in the air and start to aspire; there we take each other’s breath away only to let each other breathe more fully and there—or here—consume the furtive potentials of one another’s life as a practice of utopian persistence” (18). “There—or here”: the de-idealization continues to the end, where “utopian persistence” remains in the shadow of the death drive’s compulsion to repeat, especially insofar as that persistence is said, with slightly ominous implications, to “consume the furtive potentials of one another’s life.” Nourished by Butler’s account of ambivalence, a paranoid critic might question the claim that “there we take each other’s breath away *only* to let each other breathe more fully” (emphasis mine), but Butler’s ambivalence about ambivalence only reinforces their point. The aspiration of this “only” requires the utopian labor of “persistence” because the “there” where we “let each other breathe” is *imagined* from the “here.”¹² If its impossible aspiration necessarily excites ambivalence, compounded as it is of Edelman’s death drive and Muñoz’s utopian ecstasy, then Butler affords us the chance to engage that ambivalence without resolving it, to make it the ground of a solidarity that “opens as a wound in the world” whenever we imagine, *here and now*, new ways to think our reality.¹³

Notes

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1. Michael Balint, *Primary Love and Psychoanalytic Technique* (London, 1952), 65; quoted in David Grauer, “Homosexuality and the Paranoid Psychoses as Related to the Concept of Narcissism,” *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 24, no. 4 (1955): 518.
2. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You’re So Paranoid You Probably Think This Essay Is About You,” in *Touching/Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performance* (Durham, NC, 2003), 147. Subsequent references will appear within parentheses in the text after the abbreviation *PR*. “It is not

people but mutable positions—or, I would want to say, practices—that can be divided between the paranoid and the reparative” (150).

3. For an incisive reading of this oscillation between persons and positions in Sedgwick’s essay, and for a brilliant engagement with the reparative/paranoid binarism in queer theory, see David Kurnick, “A Few Lies: Queer Theory and Our Method Melodramas,” *ELH* 87, no. 2 (Summer 2020): esp. 363–67. Commenting on a passage from Sedgwick’s essay, Kurnick writes:

Sedgwick’s simile for paranoid practice here is of course a paranoid person: vehicle has crashed into tenor, in a move that blithely contradicts her stated desire not to let the essay’s psychoanalytic vocabulary shade into psychoanalytic diagnosis. By the time we reach Sedgwick’s description of a figure she calls “the Foucauldian paranoid” (*PR*, 132) or her characterization of paranoid reading as “cruel,” “contemptuous” and “ugly” (*PR*, 144), it is difficult to separate this argument about hermeneutic method from a characterology, even a demonology. The contrasting terms in the essay—“pleasure and nourishment” (*PR*, 137), “epiphan[y]” (*PR*, 147), “surprise” (*PR*, 146) and “love” (*PR*, 128)—complete this deeply binary structure while doing little to return us to questions of interpretation that are supposedly the object of discussion. (363–64)
4. Judith Butler, “Solidarity/Susceptibility,” *Social Text* 36, no. 4 (December 2018): 1. Subsequent references will be given parenthetically in text after the abbreviation *S/S*.
5. José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York, 2009), 185. Subsequent references will be given parenthetically in text after the abbreviation *CÚ*.
6. Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC, 2004), 16–17.
7. Although *Representations*, by editorial policy, capitalizes *Black*, it calls for the use of the lower case in such cognates as *blackening*, *blackness*, and *antiblackness*. Notwithstanding this policy, the editors have kindly granted me permission to capitalize such usages, too. One of the affordances of the capitalized *Black* is its reminder that racial discourse links Black identity to an abstract concept of Blackness determined by projection, disavowal, and fantasy. Blackening, Blackness, and anti-Blackness all relate to the possibility of *being* or of *being perceived as* Black and so, in my understanding, should be capitalized as well.
8. José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis, 1999), 11.
9. I call attention to Butler’s decision to use the lowercase form of “child” because Butler finesses the difference between the figural Child, about whom I write as the guarantor of reproductive futurism, and any actual or historical child, whose sociopolitical value rests on its ability to embody that position. By noting, in the subsequent clause, that “kids of color,” all too often, may find the future foreclosed, Butler recognizes that the one who is charged with “open[ing] the future” is not the “child” per se but the Child as ideological construct. That Child, as I’ve argued elsewhere, has no universal or predetermined (racial, ethnic, or class) identity; it’s a malleable figure readily deployed by majoritarian and minoritarian communities alike as the ground for political mobilization.
10. As I mention in the previous note, the image of the Child has no transcommunitarian racial specificity. Among many examples one might adduce, let me cite the antigay legislation recently proposed by members of Ghana’s parliament. Explaining his support for this oppressive bill, which goes so far as to criminalize expressions of support for LGBTQ+ rights, Ghanaian lawyer Theophilus Donkor declared: “They [MPs] want to end the advocacy for LGBTQ+ and that

- is the essence. They don't want LGBT to be indoctrinated to teach children [sic]. . . . A lot of people say it is not needed but if this advocacy is allowed it can destroy the children"; "Anti-Gay Bill Will Protect Children in Ghana—Lawyer," *GhanaWeb*, July 28, 2021, <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Anti-gay-bill-will-protect-children-in-Ghana-Lawyer-1318870>.
11. Butler incorporates passages from this essay into chapter four of *The Force of Nonviolence*. In that later version this "tearing" is no longer attributed to "mania" but rather to the ambivalence that expresses itself in the polar opposition of suicide and mania. Discussing the various consequences of Freud's view of war and destructiveness, Butler writes: "The first is that a corrective to forms of accelerated nationalist sentiment is precisely ambivalence, the 'tearing' at the social bond that follows from a mindful self-distancing from its exhilarations and hostilities—and from the restrictively nationalist framework"; Judith Butler, *The Force of Nonviolence: An Ethico-Political Bind* (New York and London, 2020), 115.
 12. In their superb introduction to *The Sense of Brown*, Joshua Chambers-Letson and Tavia Nyong'o describe the shift from Muñoz's focus on the "not-here" of queerness in *Cruising Utopia* to the "here and now" of brownness in the later book project. Discussing his notion of "the brown commons," they write: "Such a vision of a brown commons is not a utopian vision for the future, but instead a description of the actually existing here and now"; Joshua Chambers-Letson and Tavia Nyong'o, "Editors' Introduction: The Aesthetic Resonance of Brown," in José Esteban Muñoz, *The Sense of Brown*, ed. Joshua Chambers-Letson and Tavia Nyong'o (Durham, NC, 2020), xxxi. I might add, to match Butler's remembrance of their last encounter with José, a recollection of my own. On October 18, 2013, two months before he died, José and I chatted and reminisced with each other (there was probably some gossip, too) during a leisurely dinner in Somerville after a talk that he gave at Tufts. His lecture was drawn from material that would posthumously be published in *The Sense of Brown*. After talking about why I found his work in this project so compelling, especially insofar as it elaborated, far more fully than *Cruising Utopia*, the negativity on which the concept of disidentification rests, we spent several hours discussing the imbricated trajectories of our writing, and then passed on to recalling our adventures together when my partner, Joe, and I lived for a year in New York. We laughed at the recollection of a party that Joe and I held at our apartment where José passed the evening largely chatting with Eve, while his then-boyfriend seemed to do nothing more than Hoover up refreshments. The dinner ended with our joint reconstruction of the night we all spent at Flamingo East seeing Kiki and Herb together. We promised, in parting, to keep in touch—would he be at January's MLA?—hugged each other and said goodbye. Two months later he died.
 13. In *The Force of Nonviolence* Butler writes: "The task appears to be finding a way to live and act with ambivalence—one where ambivalence is understood not as an impasse, but as an internal partition that calls for an ethical orientation and practice. For only the ethical practice that knows its own destructive potential will have the chance to resist it" (111).