

# **Particularities of Queer Utility: Gay Expertise and the Aesthetic Disposition**

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**The work presented in this thesis is the candidate's own.**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis attempts a reconceptualization of queerness as it is discussed within queer studies and popular cultural forms. It avoids the tendency towards queerness as pure abstraction, in which queerness constitutes an aleatoric force that defines some basic quality of nature (flux, change, chaos, possibility); it also attempts to find creative ways to circumvent a compartmentalization of queerness into identity formation. That is, it avoids describing queerness as either a phenomenon or an identity choice. Instead, this thesis conceives of queerness as a set of functions, or utilities, that enact social processes. In this work, these processes are referred to as 'masks' in order to exemplify their use value. By using Pierre Bourdieu's notion of distinction and Guy Hocquenghem's theory of homosexual desire, as well as engaging with contemporary works of queer theory, it presents an analysis of the figure of the 'gay expert' within popular culture discourses as an arbiter of aesthetics whose queer functionality (not ruling class status) provides him with cultural capital and the power to advise and instruct consumers. This power amounts to the ability to encode and decode cultural knowledge. Additionally, the concept of the 'queer avatar' is explored in analyses of various popular cultural forms, including professional wrestling and popular television series, in which a particular functionality of aberrance is deployed to various ends, including horror, satire, and valor.

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## **Particularities of Queer Utility: Gay Expertise and the Aesthetic Disposition**

### *Introduction*

This thesis is an exploration of the concept of functionality with regard to the development of the homosexual subject, particularly the figure of the gay man, in contemporary Western culture. Drawing from historical, anthropological, and cultural sources, it begins work towards the recognition of the figure of the gay expert as a complex assemblage of functions whose primary aim is to recuperate the notion of queerness via the strict delimitations of what constitutes proper public displays of queerness. To this end, the distinction between gayness and queerness in this thesis refers to a long discussed and much debated conversation that has been taking place in gay/queer circles for decades: namely, that at the expense of social acceptance, gay men have transformed their primary social function, that of the aesthetic expert, from a signifier of conceptual difference into a tool that benefits and reinforces normativity and sameness. The thesis asks what, if anything, has been lost in this process of containing the aberrant, through close readings of cultural texts such as reality television programs that feature gay experts as well as various examinations of a diverse field of texts which foreground some element of queer aberration.

One of the seminal texts that explicitly marked the inception of the debate between queer/gay ideologies in the context of what function gay men have and how that function is taken up and utilized is *Gay Spirit: Myth and Meaning*, a 1987 volume edited by Mark Thompson, which is often attributed as the beginning of the so-called Gay Spirituality Movement. Judith Grahn's contribution to this volume, entitled "Flaming Without Burning: Some of the Roles of Gay People in Society", makes a few tentative claims towards the concept of gay functionality with regard to creativity.

Grahn states: “Society uses all gay people who participate in gay culture, for special purposes. We are closely watched to see what constitutes the limit of a thing—too far out, too much, too low, too bad, too outrageous, too soft... One of the strongest measures heterosexual culture has is how close each of its members comes to being ‘like a faggot’ or ‘like a dyke.’ We are essential to them knowing who they are.” (Grahn, 5)

The concept of queerness has a number of different contextual registers, and the history of its usage in the English language covers three main trajectories. First, the word “queer” appears as a 16<sup>th</sup> century adjective to describe odd or strange objects or behaviors, and was not assigned as a pejorative term ascribed to homosexuals until the later 19<sup>th</sup> century. Some historians associate the beginnings of queer as a connotation of sexual deviance with the colloquial phrase of finding oneself “on queer street”, a term that first appeared in the United Kingdom in 1811, entering queerness into the vernacular as a state of being sexually wrong or out of place. Queer was reclaimed during the 1980s as an identity that defined itself against LGBTQ politics, using the binary of normativity/anti-normativity to describe the oppositional qualities of gay vs. queer, most notably rooted around the notion of assimilationism. It was simultaneously taken up in academic circles (queer theory was coined by Teresa de Lauretis in 1991) as an anti-normative identity politics and mode of thought, and has since become a descriptor for larger concepts of dynamism, flux, and the notion of nature’s ever-changing states. Within the past two decades or so, there has been a marked change in the manner by which academic writing (across the Humanities and within certain sub-sects of hard scientific theoretical writing) comes to understand, to utilize, and to make sense of queerness. Defined widely as a form that takes hold of bodies, queerness traditionally signifies a non-normative relationship to sex and

gender. Bodies are said to engage or perform in queerness; people are said to be queer in the ways that they act, the things that they reject, and the sex that they have. In recent development, however, queerness has undergone what queer theorists have called a “subjectless turn”(Eng, Halberstam, Muñoz, 1), which is symptomatic of the larger so-called ontological turn in the Humanities. This, in part, points to the notion that queerness as a form does not any longer only relegate itself to bodies, but has entered the discourse as a tactical deployment that describes relational and intersectional fields. Things are said to be “queered”; events and non-living objects, atmospheres and phenomena, nonhuman animals, poetic frameworks of various types of literature, even theories themselves, what Jordana Rosenberg so brilliantly calls the “molecularization of sexuality” (Rosenberg, 1), have all become ensconced in the possibilities of what queerness looks like and what it does. Even in places where, previously, the precise opposite of queerness was to be found, scholars are now strategically locating its unwieldy and generative movements. Queerness (and it should be noted that I consider this a problem not only because it takes queerness from “queer people” – but that that it does not sufficiently describe queerness’ potential) no longer requires a body as vessel. It only requires the recognition that within nearly any form, material or conceptual, lies the potential of what I refer to as “flux” and what Alexander Galloway, in his review and reflections upon Rosenberg, calls “queer atonality”: “By queer atonality we mean the notion that queerness can be abstracted to mean deviation as such, aleatoriness as such, or openness as such, and thus, through such extreme abstraction, queerness may be assigned as a proper monicker [sic] for biological and even ontological systems” (Galloway, 1).

I am not aiming simply to utilize the classic arguments of queer theory, nor is my intention to produce a critique of queer theory. Although, there are many texts

associated with that set of practices that I find both useful and harmful. One of the more compelling recent developments is the current so-called anti-anti-relational turn in queer studies that centers around a debate between Lee Edelman's *No Future: Queer Theory & The Death Drive*, which places queerness as “the limit point of ontology, [for] the constitutive exclusion that registers the no, the not, the negation in being” (Edelman, 4), and José Esteban Muñoz' *Cruising Utopia: The Then And There Of Queer Futurity* which “is a polemic that argues against anti-relationality by insisting on the essential need for an understanding of queerness as collectivity” (Muñoz, 16) and is influenced by the discussions of utopianism put forth by Ernst Bloch and, to an extent, Theodor Adorno. Utopianism and anti-relationality inform important aspects of any exploration of queerness as an instrumentalized event; yet to merely focus on the possibilities of how queerness functions or does not function in accordance or discordance with other events ignores a large, perhaps more complex and messier version. How might queerness become understood as something already entrenched in every aspect of sociality, as a set of poetic events that cannot be extracted or compartmentalized into a singularity?

Muñoz' utopianism, which is based in futurity, a “not-yet-here” of queerness, often devolves into abstractions of potentiality. In speaking of a queer manifesto from the liberation movement of the late 1960s, for instance, Muñoz dissects the author's use of “we”: “This 'we' does not speak to a merely identitarian logic but instead to a logic of futurity. The 'we' speaks to a 'we' that is 'not yet conscious,' the future society who is being invoked and addressed at the same moment. The 'we' is not content to describe who the collective is but more nearly describes what the collective and the larger social order could be, what it should be.” (Ibid, 18) This concept of futurity, which Muñoz himself admits falls underneath a particular necessary idealism, cannot

serve a cultural studies approach of celebrating and even sometimes expressing horror at specific scenes of queerness since it presupposes a sort of pure, raw queerness that *exists* elsewhere as a kind of untapped force that is inherently *positive* and therefore superior to other forces. The mode of analysis that interests me is necessitated by a sort of acknowledgment of the radically present nature of a mask or even a moment of rupture, especially when these scenes are deranged, false, mis-activations of queer potentiality. Further, Muñoz' work with futurity tends to bend for the allowance of a 'here and now' regardless of its emphasis on futurity. By speaking of queerness in the present, I do not claim to hold a familiarization with something that has become banal and therefore useless; I merely seek, as a critic, to be struck by whatever forces, either productive or nullifying, take hold of me in my encounter with pieces of culture that insist upon their own presence. Similarly, Edelman's anti-relational thesis, which proclaims that the 'future is kid stuff' and that queers have a specific place within the social that must embrace a certain *jouissance* of negation, seems to me an easy method of excusing the queer subject from the morass of the social from which he and she are most certainly alienated, but not altogether exempted from its machinations. I feel that a convenient social negation is not only a distortion of the truth and a closing down of the possibilities of the queer social being, but that in this similar rejection of "reproductive futurism" found in Edelman and trivial disdain which Muñoz finds in the annoyance of having to navigate around baby carriages on the street, there is an underestimation of heterosexuality's relationship to queer lives. I anticipate both utopic moments and anti-relational moments; they are both surely encountered in the manifold production of queer scenes.

It seems pertinent to include a discussion of the insistent binary of gay pride/gay shame, a line drawn in the sand that has always struck me as paralytic with

regard to queerness' ability to manifest as troublingly cohesive on both sides of this supposed divide. One can, it seems to me, be simultaneously proud and ashamed of their modes of queerness. In fact, these dualities ongoing struggle maintains the precarity of queer sociality as a process that is thought through, without implying some final stand. I will try to avoid diving heading into what is common in queer studies: a widespread use (and often, a misreading) of Judith Butler, Michael Warner's notion of counter-publics, and Leo Bersani's *Homos*, hailed as the seminal anti-relational queer theory text that repositions writers like Jean Genet, Marcel Proust, and Andre Gide in interesting yet problematic ways. It is in fact through Genet that I primarily find a fruitful resistance to both parties in the "relationality" debate. For although Bersani reads Genet as ultimately resisting a "heteroized sociality" (Bersani, 4), I find this interpretation to be a too-simple rendering of Genet's relationship to the social in general, and find Genet, for all of the exhaustive explorations violently enacted upon his work by Sartre, Derrida, Bersani, Edmund White, and others, to still have a potentiality for un-mined materials with regard to the queer life.

I avoid a quantifiable, sociological exploration of homosexuals that seeks to search for or uncover some moral coding or proselytizing rhetoric on the subject; indeed, I hope that what I find within a study of queerness will provoke the very opposite. Although I am not opposed to the idea of a collection or social exploration of interviews with homosexuals, I do not feel that these sorts of explorations produce absolute or a more authoritative knowledge (nor am I interested in thinking about knowledge in such a manner) about what it is that I am trying to describe. There are undoubtedly patterns and exceptions to be uncovered in exploring individual's descriptions of their own experiences, but I am concerned less with statistics than with what Stewart designates as the ordinary affect that emerges between the lived

experiences and the cultural hall of mirrors that is queerness, as well as her understanding of the Heideggerian notion of worlding. A simpler way of putting it might be to say that I aim to speak of what might be unquantifiable or even unspeakable in homosexual lives, yet what is also bound up with the consequences of the traces that are left behind after the enactment of public homosexuality takes place. The vastness of these consequences, understood normatively as a group-formation, use a set of terms and phrases (the closet, coming out, tolerance, gay pride, homophobia, the right to marry, etc.) that belong to a particular strategic formation. Since what is supposedly a matter of identity and its subsequent complexifying can be traced back, at least in part, to activism of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, I seek to understand the historical origins of what culminated in the 1960s with Susan Sontag's damning assignation of the homosexual as the 'connoisseur of taste'.

A predominant reaction in queer studies uses this sort of designation as a starting point from which to position and often reject homosexual grouping as a tainted spawn and tool of bourgeois values, as a deployment specific to this amorphous formation called "The West". Furthermore, this Western narrative of homosexuality, which is said to be voiced and also enforced by both groups and individuals, positions itself to a certain degree as the *only* narrative, part of the mechanism of so-called neoliberalism. The traditional mode of argument within this mechanism is that homosexuality safely becomes public in a society when certain indicators and specific routes of economic and social 'growth' or 'progress' are recognizable. So, without imposing upon every culture this concept of homosexuality, without placing it where it is most certainly does not occur without the prodding of specific mechanisms, I wish instead to focus on its inevitability as a specific mode that is embedded within other mechanisms, such as imperialism, and the implications

of this inevitability as an 'unsustainable' or mis-activated offspring, a public mask which becomes stuck on. This contains a specific utility of homosexual presence similar to what Lisa Duggan famously called "homonormativity". In her widely-cited 2003 article "The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism", she describes the strategies of this particular rhetoric: "The privacy-in-public claims and publicizing strategies of 'the gay movement' are rejected in favor of public recognition of a domesticated, depoliticized privacy. The democratic diversity of proliferating forms of sexual dissidence is rejected in favor of the naturalized variation of a fixed minority arrayed around a state-endorsed heterosexual primacy and prestige."

(Duggan, 3) An example of my engagement with homonormativity involves a fascination with reality television, in which the figure of the gay man takes on the court-jester or minstrel-like role of style guru, or the overwhelming onslaught in films and television shows of lesbian fetishization under the implied, watchful gaze of the male viewer, the nascent "transploitation" industry of programs such as 'My Transsexual Summer' or "RuPaul's Drag Race", or even the possibly satirical commentary of Christwire journalist Stephenson Billings on how the television sitcom 'The Golden Girls' turned a generation of American boys into homosexuals.

My two preoccupations are performing a perpetual balancing act. On the one hand, I aim to expose what is being lamented or spoken against in contemporary queer/gender studies critiques: what is being lost, misused, or exploited in the phenomenon of homonormativity and what might be gained from a resistance to its thrust, both "at home" and abroad via such notions as "pinkwashing" and the rejection of the western narrative of the homosexual by queer Palestinian groups such as Al-Qaws. This necessarily involves the omnipresent conjuring and enforcing of queer dramas in the news with the constant imposition of the question of queerness, of

homophobia, and of panic. A recent and compelling example concerning the reportage on the Neapolitan legacy of the *femminielli* in relation to the capture of the Mafia's first transgender don, Ugo Gabriele, exemplifies such scenes of shocked or speechless media stories that only flounder in the occurrence *sans objectif*, and cannot provide any trajectory for commentary. The queer mask *speaks for itself*. Here it is, yet what to do with it? This first inclination also includes a questioning of some of the absolutist values that are predominant within queer discourse, such as the notion of heterosexuality's irreversible and diabolical association with stultification and state violence, a notion even Muñoz does not escape in his critiques of queer theory.

This notion strikes me as a remnant of a specific generation of queer studies whose impetus relied upon the necessity of an absolutist politics of rejection. I feel that the situation of our contemporary moment demands a more creative injunction into these struggles, which have certainly become more complex as we see not only a failure in mainstream gay politics but conjointly in many of its supposedly radical alternatives. The relationship of the public with homosexuality has evolved into much more than a sheer horror at its manifestation: they have become interwoven, or more precisely, the dazzlingly varied modes of enacting homosexuality presents this already-existing interwovenness on nearly every level of our public imagination. Relations of pleasure, anticipation, hatred, celebration, panic, fetishization, abjection, derision, emulation, occultization, and even self-nullification overwhelm the simple binaries of how we speak of these public scenes, demanding an almost absurdly specific engagement with their manifold expressions.

This brings me to the second inclination, in which I seek to pinpoint instances where manifestations of homosexual desire create scenes or moments of poetic rupture, even if they remain in potentiality, within and through the various medias

peculiar to the cultures that are engaged in these processes, what might be seen as an already-embedded rupture within both the coerced imposition of a homonormative scene and within the culture that finds itself as the site of this coercion. Drawing from Muñoz' dismantling strategy of what he calls "pragmatic gay and lesbian politics" (Muñoz, 2), I hope to begin work towards the concept that there is not necessarily an absolute moment of closed pragmatism inherent to queerness, or perhaps that queerness can never be successfully brought off within the pragmatism scheme that Muñoz attacks.

The raw materials for this strategy were first conceptualized by Guy Hocquenghem in his book *Homosexual Desire*, published in 1973 and widely hailed as the first work of queer theory, addressing the specificity of what I have referred to above as the unsustainable "public mask" of the homosexual. The exception being that Hocquenghem seemed only interested in speaking of gay men and kept lesbians and queer people of color mostly at the periphery of his argument. In an essay entitled *The Screwball Asses*, Hocquenghem makes the assertion that "there are two sexes on earth, but this is only to hide the fact that there are three, four, ten, thousands, once you throw that old hag of the idea of nature overboard. There are two sexes but only one sexual desire." (Hocquenghem, 18) I feel that the assertion, made in the heat of late 1960s activism in Paris, informs a certain method of speaking of desire that has become a standard, reactionary argument against group formation. Ironically, Hocquenghem's effort to de-medicalize homosexuality has, in part, contributed to a popular rhetoric that reimposes the relationality of the sex binary. Issue must be taken as well with the second part of Hocquenghem's statement, that there is only one sexual desire. Throughout his career, Hocquenghem understood this process, to oversimplify, as the harnessing of a kind of raw desire which only signifies as hetero,

homo, or other due to the political machinations of a society whose sole purpose is to compartmentalize and whose citizens are manipulated into reproduction and the enforcement and worship of reproduction, what Edelman referred to two decades later as reproductive futurism. Or else, those unfortunate enough to clash as dissonant or incompatible with this process of harnessing have the displeasure of being fed into a different sort of ensnarement. Having failed the illusion of the Oedipus complex, they settle for the game of the homosexual. The mask is taken up, automatically cementing the position of that individual into a behavioral, cultural template. Hocquenghem laments this as a reduction of the potential of desire; its multiplicities having been reduced to basic inversion or anomaly, the blueprint for enacting new social forms (as Foucault would have it) is nullified. For although the masks might have slight variations (different colors or expressions, for instance) and while they might have a rubbery quality which gives ever so slightly to allow for the movement of the face beneath, they express a unilateral mechanism.

So when I speak of homosexuals within the confines of this thesis, I speak of a group that is defined and regulated by the law of the public mask and is maintained and proliferated by various laws of media and within various public spaces. Therefore, I address the unilateral illusion and the consequences of that illusion's being put forth into the world as a real singularity. Such consequences necessarily affect the human beings who are subjected to the illusory construct of their being gay people who act and look and exist in particular ways. This is what is at stake for me as a writer and a queer subject: What is this illusion, how does it play out in the public sphere, in the media, on television, in film, literature, and therefore in the lived experiences of human beings? How is it enforced? How is it resisted? The next steps in the development of this discourse would be to diagnose the condition of existing in

the world as 'homosexual'; how and where is the unsustainable public mask of homosexuality taken up and worn?

The potentiality of queerness is a vigorously contested concept within the high walls of academic discourse. It is either the great sword of negation or the flickering hope of utopia. Rather than always dwelling upon those examples of queer potentiality that might point towards a strategic way out of normative gay banality either through anti-relational rejection or assertions of collectivity, I wonder what might be learned in an engagement with types of Muñoz' and Judith Jack Halberstam's queer failure that do not harbor a potentiality but fail in a more literal sense. I am speaking of queer masks that surface more and more prominently on our various monitors; treacherous in their collusion with the hetero/homonormative; certainly anti-progressive regardless of one's allegiance within the contentious world of "thinking queer". Perhaps, to speak poetically, these masks are evil insofar as they do not stand apart, so to speak, from these normative worlds, but actually flounder amongst, within, even beneath the onslaught of these banalities, neither negating, rejecting, or circumnavigating. The designation of evil comes from the dogged complicity of these mask's utility in aiding the proliferation and upkeep of normativity; far from just being normal in an inactive sense of assimilation, the normativity that I am speaking of aids and abets larger forms of abuse, empire, and manipulation.

Inspired by Halberstam's recent work *The Art Of Queer Failure*, I am wondering about such possibly humorous (or even failed?) terms as queer dullness, queer servility, the queer-diabolical; all of these absorptions and deployments of queerness-as-futility within what many critics might identify as homonormative or queer liberal scenes, such as in the performance of the gay male on the style television

program (a range of sub-genres contained therein, from the interior design/wardrobe/wedding axis to the heavily ritualized violent camp of pageantry), a performance I feel is invaluable to an understanding of the complexity of the public mask. It is through this sometimes quite stultifying performance of servility in which the homosexual reaches into his bag of tricks (the bag which contains the great and heavy history of not only astute aestheticizing but also the armada of queer gesture and performativity that elsewhere might point to utopia) in order to properly dress or instruct the hetero/homonormative engaged couple, for instance, that we might identify a moment of absolute floundering and compliance with the normalizing thrust that is the bane of utopic/anti-relational academic queerness yet is supposedly the very essence of normative gay politics. In this moment of reaching into the bag of gay tricks, what we might actually discover is a moment that ruptures from both ends; it is certainly an abomination to any redeployment of queerness' potentiality, yet I am arguing that it never explicitly serves a hetero/homonormative inclination. That is, utopic, Halberstamian queer failure might present a means of escape, yet what I wish to explore is actualized queerness-as-failure (which is, in normative terms, a great success of assimilation) before it can be transmuted as potential. In the cheapening and flattening of a queer life into a mask, the system of mask making is exposed as flimsy; the very machination of creating a normative gay subject is essentially made transparent. As Judith Grahn notes, "...we may even venture forth with the idea that all imagery is an illusion" (Grahn, 6).

What is being welcomed with open arms into normativity is precisely *not* queerness, but a unilateral and illusory construct that does not have the strength to hold, or more precisely to *contain*, the poetic weight and history of queerness' expressions. If the conceptual pitfalls of "straight time" (Muñoz's term) are to be

properly regarded as an opportunity for strategic queer failure, then they must be composed of some inherent porousness that has already failed any subject ensconced within. What I am suggesting is that alongside a possible example of queer failure such as Muñoz' celebrating of the performer Dynasty Handbag or Halberstam's invigorating study of Pixar films, we might be able to identify a presence that performs a literal queer failure (in a non-subversive sense) that contains its own brand of negative poetic heft precisely in the impossibility of refusal or escape. I am thinking of the characters from *Queer Eye* or the omnipresent UK presenter Gok Wan (although there is a nearly countless roster of these figures), gay experts whose task is to aid the public in and normalizing itself using the supposedly queer talent of aesthetic optimization. Rather than simply succumbing to the notion that these performances are bad for queerness, or that they perpetuate stereotypes, it is important to understand why their deployment is not only a failure of potential, but also a failure of transmittal. What we might read as happening in the performance may not be what is actually happening. The particular image of the gay expert is composed under a number of slight variations on a theme; there are nuances and subplots, assuredly. Yet these variations, I argue, congeal into something that is read by both normative and outsider publics as monolithic.

Gay expertise, for a large portion of the population, is a representative behavior; it is something that is known publicly to *be* (to be a direct representation of) homosexuality. Dismissing the images we see on television as universally understood to be distortions is simply irresponsible. I have recorded multiple accounts of gay men, for instance, whose entire manner of sociality within a particular grouping (the family, the school, the workplace) are based solely upon the effects of these images. In fact, it could even be said that they are a *welcome* and *desired* access point into

queerness for a straight public previously scratching their heads in confusion or perhaps fighting back feelings of fear at the thought of creating a sociality that accommodates queerness. For example, one gay interviewee insisted that his extended family were not able to relate to him at all until they became schooled in the language of style television and gay expertise. After that, he became a boon to the family: representative of a successful cosmopolitanism, an enviable mastery of the elusive and cruel art of fabulousness, and a marker of that family's automatically bestowed liberal or progressive status. This implies that embedded within the contemporary public's notion of aesthetics is the image of the homosexual.

Within the normative understanding of the progress of gay politics, this omnipresent image is welcomed, celebrated. I often hear such statements as: "Well, at least we are more visible now. We weren't twenty years ago. This is progress." Interpreted within much of queer studies, on the other hand, this presence is seen as inherently negative, homonormative, and anti-progressive. While I agree that the images hold a certain weight and from a certain angle, are quite dubious, I also want to explore what is being lost in the polemical exchange of gay vs. queer in understanding this presence on our various programs.

*On Gay Expertise - Charisma, Prestige, and the 'Poetics' of the Gay Expert*

*"If we behave like those on the other side, then we are the other side. Instead of changing the world, all we'll achieve is a reflection of the one we want to destroy." - Jean Genet, *The Balcony**

*"I'm gonna go out there, on their own turf, in their own world, and show them that I can do exactly what they can do, and in many cases do it better. Because, you know, that's what we do as gay people, we fluff it up and sell it back to them for three times what we paid for it." - Simon Sermon, gay professional wrestler*

Dumontian prestige is a slippery concept; its basic assertions have been misread widely, and yet a close reading reveals an idea that is filled with potential. In Louis Dumont's comparative sociological model foregrounded in *Homo Hierarchicus*, the purity-impurity spectrum generates the idea that differences in standing do not necessarily function coterminously with differences in power. Power can sit alongside ranked orders of prestige. There are a number of significant emergences in Western society that suggest that seem specifically Dumontian in scope. The phenomenon of gay expertise, a peculiarly American invention (really more of a trope modification, as I describe below) has disseminated widely, along with the entire set of behaviors peculiar to the process of globalization, or "global capitalism", which much of academia commonly explain through Foucauldian notions of power relations. Dumont strictly opposes preoccupations with power as a univocal force upon the social. Further, he rejects individualism as an illusory project that basically distorts views of other and self in Westerners. Gay expertise, I argue, is a prestigious order of distinction specific to particular actors, originated in the figure of the gay, white male reality TV host (there are countless subgenres) who seamlessly projects and performs a particular set of behaviors that bestow him with aesthetic authority. In thinking through gay expertise with Bourdieu, one might say that the bestowal is a presupposition of an inbuilt "aesthetic disposition" in the subjectivities of gay men. This is a rather provocative claim, for it basically argues that these

behaviors are reflected not only on reality TV, but also in the social world as we know it in the sense that certain inextricable associations with aestheticism and homosexuality are widespread enough to become legible stereotypes. This association has circulated publicly since at least Susan Sontag's 1964 provocation (in her 'Notes on Camp') that homosexuals are the connoisseurs of taste, and most likely this was a sentiment felt and circulated significantly before then. This claim, then, describes a bestowal which involves massive publics – the ostensibly heteronormative public's bestowal of authority upon gay men writ large, and a significant number of the gay community's acceptance of such a bestowal. I am suggesting that, not unlike the ranked order of prestige commonly associated with the ruling class described by Bourdieu, the "taste" of homosexuals is not only trusted – it is sought out and even, in some instances, emulated.

Of course, it is not so simple. There are certainly a vast set of circumstances in which this prestige does not obtain; there are regions of the United States, for instance, where gay and straight publics alike do not necessarily participate in such social relations, although there is hardly a corner of the "developed" world in which these images are not on some level familiar to any person with a reasonable access to media. This lack of context is usually determined by political inclination or feeling based on region; in more conservative regions in which public representations of homosexuality are scarcer, it necessarily follows that such prestige has no context within which to operate. This is very telling, primarily for the reason that the gay expert emerges as a recuperative template; I mean to suggest that the gay expert does not merely function as an aesthetic disposition with no object - to be perfectly clear, he exists for the benefit of the heteronormative public as a guide and the homosexual public as a representation of respectability and recuperability: his function redeems

him. Therefore, in a cultural space that provides no space for redemption, this function is anathema to the public. That is not to say that there will not be actors who, having experienced such media representations, seek to emulate them. It merely suggests that in many places (my own personal experience makes me familiar with the region of Southeast Texas, for instance) these gay social actors must travel to other regions in order to realize these behaviors as contextually relevant to a public, such as an urban public in a major city like Houston, New York, or San Francisco. Before I begin the discussion of the gay expert, I would like to briefly digress along a historical route that might contextualize *why* homosexuals fit in certain societies as experts of aesthetics.

Integral to early studies (late 19<sup>th</sup>, early 20<sup>th</sup> century) of what eventually becomes “homosexuality” is the inclination towards locating what can only be termed a function; it is through this function (and in some cases, the strategic denial or omitting of such a function) that the homosexual type becomes legitimated. This legitimation traverses a spectrum that describes a subjectivity ranging from perfectly natural and harmless, in the case of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs’ *urning* or Uranian man, on to nearly superhuman and vital to the survival of a group, in the case of Edward Carpenter’s *intermediate type*. It is Carpenter that takes precedence in this particular notion of gay expertise, most notably because the concept of intermediate type does a great deal of work in de-pathologizing homosexuality and eventually getting to the notions of Dumontian prestige, Weberian charismatic authority (which I am describing here as a secular role that has its origins in the sacred), and Bourdieu’s aesthetic disposition. Primarily, the intermediate type concept performs this work through the repurposing of the concept of *inversion* - qua sexologist Havelock Ellis and then taken up widely (perhaps most famously by Proust) - to mean not only a

failed mirroring or negation of heterosexuality, but also a method of conceptual difference that had deeply political implications. Carpenter's work most notably influenced American gay activist Harry Hay in the formation of the Mattachine Society and so began a sort of genealogy that led to what we now call gay liberation politics. From these early 20<sup>th</sup> century conceptions of intermediacy's value up to the historical present, in which the homosexual's role as cultural connoisseur or expert performs a different sort of recuperation, intermediate function rests upon what I am tenuously referring to as a poetics.

In positing poetics as the crux of Carpenter's politics, for instance, which he developed over the course of a lifetime's work of socialist activism that used as its centerpiece the relationship of the homosexual to "rougher types" in the form of working-class men, I am attempting to conceptualize poetics as inherently political (and somehow defining the political) and central to the notion of value emergent in the works of these thinkers. The origins of such a concept will have to be slighted in the interest of time, but suffice it to say that not only a deep interest in British socialism, but also an engagement with non-Western, specifically Indian forms of thought and spirituality heavily influenced Carpenter's (as well as Christopher Isherwood's and E.M. Forster's, after him) formation of aesthetic-political concepts. The concept of poetics used here is taken from linguist and literary theorist Roman Jakobson, and in linguistics refers to language whose primary function is not to reference or disclose information, but exists for itself – Jakobson uses the examples of poetry and political slogans such as "I like Ike" – which he argued foregrounded a phonetic quality that resonated with the American public. In the context of this thesis, poetics refers more broadly to the quality of excess or exuberance that accompanies not only linguistic utterances, but also visual and cultural representations. This quality

has no immediate function or logic and is apprehended by a public as somehow singular. Broadly speaking, I understand the work that queerness does upon the public as primarily consisting of a poetic quality.

Karl Heinrich Ulrichs' concept of the *urning* or Uranian man did the important work of locating the tendency of homosexual desire and queer temperament as a biological disposition, a permanent state of the body, rather than merely a practice or quality that attached itself to bodies. To my mind, Ulrichs' work connects homosexuality to the individual, and legitimates the homosexual subject via what Dumont would call the notion of individualism. Although Ulrichs was a lifelong defender of homosexuality and is often considered the first person to "come out", his framework of inversion does not immediately embrace the possibility of the functional within the Uranian: instead, through the language of individualism, it requests a social space within which the Uranian might be admitted without legal condemnation. Ulrichs published the booklet *Araxes: A Call To Free The Nature Of The Uring From Penal Law*, completed March 24, 1870, which might be the first instance of the minority status argument within what has now become the backbone of the global neoliberal LGBTQ political line: "Just because Urnings are unfortunate enough to be a small minority, no damage can be done to their inalienable rights and to their civil rights. The law of liberty in the constitutional state also has to consider its minorities" (Ulrichs, 3).

The work asserts the bare minimum of justificatory rhetoric required in order to humanize and, therefore, defend the human, *individual* rights of the homosexual. Perhaps this framing of the homosexual as legitimate, minority citizen was necessary for its time; regardless, it provides an excellent launching point for the valorizing work of Carpenter which goes quite a few steps further in the valuation of the

homosexual as not only worthy of the bare minimum of human rights, but also in fact an instrumental component of societies: “The Urning, too, is a person. He, too, therefore, has inalienable rights. His sexual orientation is a right established by nature. Legislators have no right to veto nature; no right to persecute nature in the course of its work; no right to torture living creatures who are subject to those drives nature gave them” (Ulrichs, 3). Ulrichs’ categorization of the urning was later complexified by his encounters with other homosexuals who did not fit his characterization of femininity: he developed a spectrum-model for temperament, with the *weibling* (feminine man) on one end and the *manuring* (masculine man) on the other. It is pertinent that in *Araxes*, Ulrichs invokes the names of twenty heterosexual men of influence who he had listed in an earlier publication that shared his view of repealing the anti-homosexual law. He quotes one of his ‘straight allies’ during this period, Swiss cultural historian Otto Henne-Am Rhyn, who asserts that ‘urning love’ is ‘inborn’. Henne-Am Rhyn later betrayed Ulrichs posthumously in a document from 1897. The historian Hubert Kennedy maintains that this ‘apostasy’ was the result of the sinister influence of the Morel/Kraft-Ebing doctrine of degeneration. (Kennedy, 1988) This doubling back on the tentative alliance did not reject the propositions of *Araxes* fully, but merely re-inscribed degeneracy as the trope within which it was situated in the first instance. Henne-Am Rhyn concluded: “It is just a question of a degeneration, whether inherited or not, which is not only one such of our time, but rather is one that is as old as humanity” (Henne-Am Rhyn, 27). Thus, Ulrichs was not simply a pioneer, but perhaps more significantly a voice which added to (and significantly troubled) the multi-tiered and cacophonous discourse of sexual perversion emergent during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

To understand Edward Carpenter's intervention as a poetic intervention or, to be more precise, to understand poetics as the primary elucidation and contribution of Carpenter into the discourse of the homosexual subject, it is useful to turn toward what is, to my mind, the most coherent understanding and deployment of the term. Jakobson's theory of the six functions of language, or communication functions (referential, expressive, conative, poetic, phatic, and metalingual) is by now well known, and yet within poetic function, described by Jakobson that which "...projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination." (Jakobson, 78), I attempt to locate a number of as-yet unexplored strategies in understanding the function of the homosexual as it is normatively regarded in the West and, indeed, elsewhere, as the Western model of homosexual subjectivity infects other spaces. There has occurred a marked and exponential spread of this infection during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century with the advent of reality television and more widely circulated and readily available technological forms.

The poetic function focuses on "the message for its own sake" (the code itself, and how it is used) and is, for Jakobson, not only the crux of poetry, but also advertisements. This is not to say that poetry or advertisements are composed *only* of poetic language (or that any message is ever composed of one communication function), but instead implies that poetic language is *foregrounded* in these forms, that an essential melding of form and function takes place in the successfully conveyed poetic message: "...many poetic features belong not only to the science of language but to the whole theory of signs, that is, to general semiotics. This statement, however, is valid not only for verbal art but also for all varieties of language, since language shares many properties with certain other systems of signs or even with all of them (pansemiotic features)" (Jakobson, 70). This statement, which I take as

something of a provocation and a prompt for research into poetic function in other forms, such as visual rhetoric, seems to suggest that poetics “happen”, as it were, beyond communicative language – that indeed, poetics might structure something like a visual form or a cultural form. If we are to transpose the locating of poetics to an exploration like Carpenter’s, which I believe is precisely what preoccupied Carpenter’s lifelong political ambitions (the locating of poetics in politics), we must understand the *behavior* analyzed in a work like *Intermediate Types Among Primitive Folk* as the message, as it were – the thing being communicated. I might also add perfunctorily that this location and stratification of slippery and possibly problematic behaviors, has turned out to be a predominant feature of ethnography, ranging from the early years of Boas up to the present. Since Carpenter is occupied with positioning a functionality of the intermediate type (that is, the queer subjectivity who holds some non-normative relationship to gender, whether it be in military or religious schema) that might not only recuperate, but also *valorize* and *prioritize* the intermediate as an integral component of society, we must locate what conceptual tool is deployed in order to structure this recuperation. I would argue that the intermediate type, for Carpenter, is more than Ulrichs’ Uranian man/*urning* in that it begins by describing those subjectivities that display effeminacy in a biologically male body, and goes on to describe a wide spectrum of gendered behaviors that encompasses manifestations of masculine behavior in male bodies as well as female bodies, and a rather nuanced spectrum in-between. Therefore, I do not think it a stretch to find ‘contemporary’ intermediate function in late capitalism in the behavior of something like the gay expert.

Poetics, in this sense, would be the recognition of a particular cultural form becoming somehow *exuberant*, which is to say, somehow exceeding (even if this

excess is a lack) its supposed or ostensible function. This is precisely what Carpenter recognizes and makes legible when he locates in the intermediate a privileged, or sacred, social space. His language belies this, as it employs the careful rhetorical form of a scientific, methodological approach (as though the scientist is scandalized somehow by the yield of his own laboratory) so common to work of the age:

One has to enquire first what advantages (if any) may have flowed, or been reported to flow, from the tendency, what place it may possibly have occupied in social life, and what (if any) were its healthy, rather than its unhealthy, manifestations. Investigating thus in this case, we are surprised to find how often— according to the views of these early people themselves— inversion in some form was regarded as a necessary part of social life, and the Uranian man accorded a certain meed of honour (Carpenter, 10-11).

Essentially, Carpenter designates an entire order of distinction composed of queer subjectivities across a broad (trans-global, trans-historical) spectrum based on the concept that their ambiguous or inverted relationships with gender granted them the societal designation of arbiter (he terms them ‘prophet/priest’ or ‘witch/wizard’ in the first section, and elucidates a sort of advanced militarization practice of homoerotic acts between soldiers or warriors in the second section) whether amongst a tribe, an infantry, or a congregation. Here, intermediacy designates the sacrosanct. Due to gender function showing an uncommon exuberance, a special designation emerges for the intermediate type. It could be even be argued that the performance of gender emergent in intermediacy calls attention to the process of gendering itself, thereby making the very existence of the intermediate type (as well as his/her abilities and contributions to a group), to risk oversimplification, poetic contributions deployed by a poetic being. All of this culminates in Carpenter’s proposition that divination, as such, exists insofar as the traits which define it are not supernatural, as such, but are a chameleonic concatenation of qualities peculiar to the queer subjectivity (what I have

thus far termed poetics) which result not in a paranormal shamanism, but what might be loosely termed a social shamanism. That is, in the intermediate type are found qualities that draw from the materials at hand in the social sphere and reformulate them so as to unlock potentials unknown to the rabble. This is a social magic “arising partly perhaps out of the homosexual taboo, but also out of their real possession and command of a double-engine psychic power” (Carpenter, 63). This social magic, as it were, defines the gay expert’s role and relationship to the public, his tribe of loyal followers. This digressive historical context for the origins of gay politics aims to situate the trajectory by which homosexuals came to be not only recognized, but also valorized as having particular qualities that come to be associated with the inbuilt ‘aesthetic disposition’ of Pierre Bourdieu and function as a kind of charismatic authority.

However, it should be noted that this charismatic authority does not function strictly in the manner that Weber defined it; it is not connected to political leadership and does not emerge spontaneously. Rather, what I am arguing is that the gay expert subjectivity is a strategic evocation of charismatic authority, possible only under the conditions of “late capitalism” that we find ourselves in the West in which a citizen’s relationship to the marketplace is one of the primary markers of his worth, and it emerges through a public’s recognition of an inbuilt superlative (or superior) aesthetic disposition that presides over the matter of aesthetics, style, and culture. Once the implications of what an arbiter of aesthetics can truly do in terms of influence is illuminated, we can see that this is actually quite a significant prestige to bear, and it has the potential indeed to translate into acts of power: the manner by which objects are designed, the way that important events are planned, and even the honing of particular qualities in men and women that aid and abet their own reproductive goals.

Of course, this prestige does not come without its detractors, who see it as a strictly damaging template that interferes with and obfuscates gay/queer radical liberatory politics. In fact, this example of the gay expert is a good way of determining what exactly the distinction between gay/queer as a binary comes to mean for many using the terms as opposing descriptors. As Jasbir Puar so polemically states in *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, using the term ‘queer’ when she perhaps means gay: “The proliferation of queer caricatures in the media and popular culture...all function as directives regarding suitable and acceptable kinship, affiliative, and consumption patterns, consolidating a deracialized queer liberal constituency that makes it less easy to draw delineations between assimilated gay or lesbian identities and ever-so-vigilant and –resistant queer identities” (Puar, 46). Since the aesthetic disposition is, in Bourdieu’s view, a disposition always turned towards the trappings of the ruling class – that is, always an aspirational taste, one might say that its very function lies in contrast to the anti-capitalistic model employed by radical queer politics. In fact, gay experts not only act as representatives of refined aesthetic consumerism, they enforce it with authoritative deployments of taste. They are, in this light, foot soldiers of the capitalist State.

In her 1964 “Notes On Camp”, Susan Sontag declared that homosexuals “constitute themselves as aristocrats of taste” (Sontag, 4). Given the argument of distinctions between gay and queer political affiliations, this can be read as an oracular warning. Sontag understood camp as an alternative sensibility: a mode of seeing and enjoyment peculiar to male homosexuals, although her specificity of address remained implicit. In this analysis perhaps began an abstract formulation or prediction toward the super-modern, artificial construct of the gay expert, the moment when the distinction of gayness as an authoritative “way of seeing” becomes prestige,

as well as a way into understanding the mechanics of how standards of taste regulate normalcy. In the half century that has followed Sontag's proclamation, we can readily observe a multitude of spaces by which the utilization of both taste and camp are weapons of social enforcement and exclusion; not only exercised amongst the homosexual tastemakers, but also upon the heteronormative public for whom this process of taste-policing has become an expected and encouraged performance. A caricature has crystallized into an ideal mode in which camp, which I see as emerging most saliently through a hazily locatable set of behaviors called gay expertise, is one of the dominant means by which one achieves perfect taste or is merely recognized as "having" taste in the public sphere. This concept follows Bourdieu's Anti-Kantian notion of taste as determined by the structures of the ruling class. Similarly for Sontag, the homosexual performs a ventriloquizing of aristocratic judgment. Gay expertise, then, is the manner by which gay men perform their peculiarly attuned mode of being. In effect, it is instrumentalized as a service rather than released as some sort of queer force of potentiality.

In the premiere episode of early 2000s Emmy Award winning reality show series *Queer Eye For The Straight Guy* (later shortened to *Queer Eye*), which began the now-familiar tradition of the gay expert program, lead stylist Carson Kressley exclaims "We're here, we're queer, we're checking out your shoes!" (*Queer Eye*) to a female interviewer. He thus repurposes the political chant of the 1970s gay liberationists "We're here, we're queer, get used to it!" or its popular variant "We're here, we're queer, we've come to fuck your daughters!" in order to fit the functionality of the gay expert's aesthetic disposition as a service of productivity for the heterosexual female consumer. The seamless productivity of the gay expert is always dependent upon his ability to unlock a set of codes that are peculiar to his

kind: the aesthetic code. I deliberately say *the* aesthetic code rather than only *an* aesthetic code. For, in the confines of a reality television segment, the subject in question travels along a line of progress within a flattened zone of possibility that Bourdieu would possibly identify as an authoritarian aesthetic disposition that claims an air of objectivity with regard to taste and also performs a type of “symbolic violence” on the public. The subject of a reality television segment, for instance is typically unaware or unhappy about a particular aspect of his/her aesthetic life, and he/she will be transported into the process of heteronormative optimization that only a gay expert can provide: the proper wardrobe, the proper menu, the proper wedding plan, the proper conduct at table, the proper design for a bedroom or bathroom, even the proper pageant choreography. Of course, this is always delivered to the heteronormative subject under the illusory construct of personal style— for instance, a Style TV advertisement for Queer Eye member Thom Filicia’s show *Dress My Nest* premiere declares: “But when it comes to your home - sometimes it takes an expert to bring your personal style into your space!” (*Dress My Nest*) However, after watching countless episodes of gay expert reality programs in which the living room, say, is totally revamped, one comes to realize the very limited repertoire of styles available. Efforts are made by the gay experts not to discover or help unearth the personal style of the client; rather, a seemingly arbitrary yet fully planned assignation is made based upon predetermined corporate sponsorships through the programs’ affiliations with various furniture, makeup, clothing, planning, and food companies. In other words, personal style, as such, is precisely what is being erased.

In his *Economy & Society*, Max Weber states that bureaucracy lives "off of" the world, while charisma lives "in" the world. This distinction strikes me as one of the more important categorical separations in Weberian comparative sociology. While

bureaucratic rationalism makes use of the external forces of a society in order to create a system of efficiency and practicality, charisma and charismatic leadership emerge from the singular, 'divine' presence which is referred to here as having "supernatural qualities and which often carries the mark of revolution". It seems almost a romantic turn in Weber's text, as bureaucratic rationalism is positioned as the inevitable downfall and a type of stagnation into a fixed system that quenches the fire of charisma; charisma is always temporary and its routinization is a matter of course. We might even suggest that Weber sees the inevitable turn towards rational bureaucracy as a somehow parasitic relation when he characterizes it as 'living off' of the world -- that is, having a formation that is sustained by using the energy, as it were, of another system to endure. In the end, we understand bureaucratic rationalism and charisma as inextricably linked, and it is through this distinction that we might be able to rationalize further the mode of aesthetic disposition that is commonly recognized as 'inbuilt' in the homosexual. Indeed, when Weber describes and laments the 'routinization' of charisma, the description is almost too similar to the argument made about queerness being routinized (in this case, by gay expertise) to not compare them.

I want to turn to an unpublished book manuscript by anthropologist Ward Keeler, which describes everyday life, masculinity, and attachments at a Theravada Buddhist monastery in Burma. It becomes clear that there is a primary element of similarity in the manner by which the relationship between monks and laypeople is similar to the relationship between gay experts and their publics. When Keeler states: "The exchange between monks and laypeople is one wherein material goods and obeisance are given (or rather, raised) up in return for immaterial instruction and merit" (Keeler, 12), he is describing an exchange of money for prestigious instruction.

In the case of the gay expert, whose services are mainly immaterial in the sense that they are basically instructing and coaching on the ability for social actors to attune more skillfully in aesthetic matters, there is a clear mirroring of the type of relationship Keeler describes. I would hazard a theoretical suggestion here: that gay experts' relationships with their publics is partly a recuperative performance on the part of the homosexual to get into the good graces of heteronormative society, but also (and this is key) a logical evolutionary social relationship that has its origin in the intermediate expertise described by Edward Carpenter, in which social actors with non-normative relationships to sex or gender are charismatic spiritual-aesthetic guides – their charismatic authority imbues the public with a type of consumerist savvy, a distinction in the sense that Bourdieu defined it. This is to say that gay expertise not only bestows the public with taste, it also supplies it with the competency to detect and harness cultural capital. During our present historical moment in which images of gayness are taken up and used, these distinctions play such an important role in the shaping of discourses and rhetoric about what gayness means and what it can do. For example, in the opening montage of a child pageant show entitled *Little Miss Perfect*, ultra-femme host Michael Galanes declares: “So I’ll open my doors to anyone who needs my advice.” (*Little Miss Perfect*) This introductory montage is followed by Galanes instructing a girl of about 6 to perform in child pageantry. She contorts her face visibly to find the perfect smile as he shouts “Bigger smile! That’s a good smile! That’s a weird smile!” (Ibid.) thereby marking off the boundaries of what becomes too excessive in her performance of smiling.

The image of the 'gay expert' is ostensibly borne by the effort to present a queer life as productive, happy, contributory, and safe, to avoid and help to enforce the avoidance of what Sara Ahmed calls the “affect alien” status of the “unhappy

queer” (Ahmed, 23). Yet these very factors are always bound up in a strictly delimited zone; a queer life can only be presented as such if it follows a very particular path. Predominantly, the queer life must be white or turned towards whiteness, it must be comical, and it must convey white happiness *seamlessly* and *productively*. The seamless productivity of the gay expert is always dependent upon his ability to unlock a set of codes that are peculiar to his kind: the aesthetic code. I deliberately say *the* aesthetic code rather than only *an* aesthetic code. For, in the confines of a reality television segment, the subject in question must travel along a line of progress within a flattened zone of possibility. He or she is unaware or unhappy about a particular aspect of his/her aesthetic life, and he/she will be transported into the process of heteronormative optimization that only a gay expert can provide: the proper wardrobe, the proper menu, the proper wedding plan, the proper conduct at table, the proper design for a bedroom or bathroom, even the proper pageant choreography. It is only when these particular services are required that what Muñoz might call the 'surplus value' of queer performativity is allowed to *produce* heteronormative optimization. That this process is nearly always in the service of some heteronormative scheme is usually buffered by the illusion of mutuality. The gay expert embodies perfect aesthetics, yet has no productive use for aesthetics in his own empty life; he merely wears the styles like a mannequin. Yet here, he is performing a task for his betters. In return, he is granted a bit of time in the king's court.

This analogy is not inaccurate; the gay expert performs a function akin to the court jester of yore, whose ebullient performativity is directed at the production of the monarch's pleasure. Should the court jester fail to produce, there are various processes in place to remove him. Happiness functions on a similar level within this scheme.

The gay expert's (who is always either maniacally happy or else playfully snarky: the snark further bolsters the illusion of mutuality) happiness is a kind of mutation: the 'surplus value' of his queer performance conveys a happiness that has no placement other than to serve the process of unlocking the aesthetic code. If, absurdly, the reality-program were for some reason to focus upon the happiness of the gay expert on his day off in which it is shown that he lives a life completely disconnected from this manacle of queer servility (an unlikely scenario), it would run the risk of alienating its viewers with the image of disturbing happiness. If the gay expert were revealed as being happy in having no part of traditional happiness, he would be a real 'downer'. As Ahmed states: "Although we can live without the promise of happiness and can do so 'happily,' we live with the consequences of being a cause of unhappiness for others." (Ahmed, 44) The gay expert does not cause this type of 'unhappiness for others', his remains an unthreatening mask, even when he is instructing a female body how to be sexy or giving hygienic or body-language advice in order to hone the predatory acumen of a heterosexual man's social games. He can instruct upon, but never display sexiness, unless it is through a cartoonish manner, which is to say de-sexed in the normative sense. The gay expert references and performs *sex to death*, up until the moment when it no longer carries any weight. Death and finitude are treated in this regard with an air of superficiality bordering on cruelty that has become hallmark of fabulousness – at any cost, one must maintain one's appearance. In a season 2 episode of *Queer Eye*, the experts are sizing up photos of a client on their cellphones before meeting with him – he is a recent widower and has long hair, of which they always disapprove as it does not exemplify heteronormative maleness. In connecting his long hair with the stagnation of mourning, stylist and "grooming expert" Kyan Douglas states: "He's got a long

ponytail, but the thing is he stopped cutting his hair once his wife died. The first key to, like, getting on the right track is to get your hair cut.” (*Queer Eye*) This statement leads the other stylists to declare: “A fresh haircut, a new sofa...he’s ready to stop mourning and move on.” (*Queer Eye*) Here, the pleasure of consumerism and an alteration of one’s personal style directly connects to happiness and the avoidance, or the overcoming, of the burden of death.

The situation of where public gayness can exist and under what guidelines constantly shifts; articles on public gayness from the early 2000s by important queer scholars such as David Halperin, Michael Warner, and Katherine Sender have already been challenged by the perpetual complexifying of this situation. The onslaught of the gay expert as a ubiquitous presence on style television programs contributes, I would argue, very strongly in this regard. Michael Warner's article 'Publics and Counterpublics', published in *Public Culture* in 2002, relies upon a notion of 'stranger sociability' that creates a method of understanding how publics are formed as networks through which strangers might address each other. In relation to potentiality of audience, this notion of not only addressing, but also *obeying* and *pleasing* the projected demands of the stranger-viewer, is the defining structure of gay expertise. Referring to counterpublics, Michael Warner states: “It might even be claimed that, like dominant publics, they are ideological in that they provide a sense of active belonging that masks or compensates for the real powerlessness of human agents in capitalist society.” (Warner, 15) Since what might be understood as the re-purposed counterpublic of gay expertise is strictly bound to gay servility, its particular public's stranger-sociability scheme is radically relational. The very existence of the gay expert public is a hybrid. It is formed of the ease and seamlessness of its particular transaction. There are, on one side, the avatars of gay expertise that pantomime queer

performativity and disclose the secrets of aesthetic optimization; on the other side, there is the 'normative public' of consumers who are on a perpetual quest for this optimization. This relationship is both symbiotic and parasitic, in the sense that the symbiosis is illusory—the gay expert is actually harmed by his admittance into the relational structure, while the assumed hetero consumer is given a superficial leg up in some area of his or her public life. Since we are now seeing ad campaigns aggressively addressing the neoliberal utopic version of gay buyers, it might not be an exaggeration to assert that any assumed homosexual consumer is automatically produced from this gay expert relation. Of course, the gay public has its exceptions. One episode of *Queer Eye* turned its attention towards a feckless gay man who was not upholding the promise of the stylish homosexual to the public, and had to be reeducated. Even his language was coached as the stylists encouraged him to be “gayer” by referring to things as “fabulous”. At the end of the episode, Carson Kressley announced to him: “Finally, you look like a homosexual!” (*Queer Eye*) This is how we see advertisements “geared towards” a gay public that are embodying a new and perfected form of savvy that is otherwise identical to the previous white, middle class ads; only these have two well-groomed and domestic, attractive (usually white) people of the same sex. The only presumed difference is the sex of our shopping partner. Of course, the gay buyer knows what he/she wants; “tastemakers” articulate and embed the very desire in our public cultures.

Relating a queer public to the defining elements of a counterpublic, Warner insists: “Counterpublics are 'counter' to the extent that they try to supply different ways of imagining stranger-sociability and its reflexivity; as publics, they remain oriented to stranger-circulation in a way that is not just strategic, but also constitutive of membership and its affects. As it happens, an understanding of queerness has been

developing in recent decades that is suited to just this necessity; a culture is developing in which intimate relations and the sexual body can in fact be understood as projects for transformation among strangers. (At the same time, a lesbian and gay public has been reshaped so as to ignore or refuse the counterpublic character that has marked its history.)” (87-8) Warner’s assertion that counterpublics engage in 'different ways' with sociality cannot be read only as an observation. There is, in the description of how counterpublics function and how queer publics have begun to sabotage this function by socially mainstreaming themselves, both a lament and a demand for some third sort of public to perform what is most likely an impossible injunction. The sacred history of queer difference outlined in the work of predominant queer theory is thus tarnished. However, by Warner's own admission, multiple engagements in multiple publics take place within every body. What is being demanded here is exactly the opposite of this multiplicity of publics. Warner calls for a social (or asocial) prioritization of the queer counterpublic above, for instance, the priority of the public of discerning parents or the public of event planners. What I argue is that even in the assimilation of queer bodies into the normative public, there is never a seamless or totalizing erasure of queerness as such. Even in the somewhat diabolical image of the gay expert, there are always multiple points of rupture in the manner of conveyance, which is always compromised, as well as the manner of reception, which is always conditional. The poetics of the counterpublic lodge uncomfortably in the throat of the public, re-defining and mutating the original rather than completely disappearing in an act of absorption. A valorization of these mutations is not being put forth here; there is no singular, locatable queer counterpublic to point towards and to claim allegiance. In fact, to assert queerness above homosexuality does not necessitate an absolution of complicity. There is,

however, what I consider a generative poetic element (normatively and perhaps mistakenly identified in collusion with or as representative of a queer counterpublic) that can be felt to exist in a moment of rupture. My insistence on the recognition of these mutations has much to do with questioning a totalized homogeneity in the gay expert, who is certainly the avatar of homonormativity via Duggan and of homonationalism via Puar. It is through the machinations of the gay expert that I feel Puar's concepts of "U.S. sexual exceptionalism" and "queer as regulatory" are most heavily asserted, as these elevated homosexual subjects tend to and instruct upon the very foundations of what makes a clearly defined, ethical, aesthetically optimal American hetero/homo citizen, or even a 'revolutionary' queer subject. The qualities of these citizens/subjects have become transnational templates. The gay expert, as designated taste-maker, performs the greatest travesty and falsest sense of security with regard not only to obscuring queerness' abetting of state violence and imperialism, but also with regard to the illusion of happiness and equality supposedly produced by the performance.

The public mask of the homosexual's very comportment contains an entire host of implications; gay expertise need not even be explicitly performed in order to function as potential aiding mechanism by which heterosexuals meet and copulate. In a 2012 Huffington Post online article entitled 'Gay is Okay,' Adair Lion's Pro-LGBT Youth Rap, Samples Michael Jackson' describes a pro-gay hip-hop song, with lyrics such as: "Being Christian it's hard to say this/the Bible was wrong this time" and that homosexuality occurs in "every species and every family I've met". Interpreted widely as a 'progressive' song (the comments section is filled with messages of support from the gay community and gay allies) that also contains the perplexing, predatory lyric: "the hottest chicks got a gay in their clique—remember that." In other

words, the heteronormative male population must accept the presence of the homosexual, otherwise intolerable, in order to better the success of their sexual conquests and transactions. In order to get to the “hottest chicks” (for what gay male, the song seems to ask, would be caught dead with an ugly woman?) the straight man must adopt what is most often described as a more cosmopolitan stance towards homosexual presence. The homosexual is thus transformed into the heterosexual guarantor, and the song samples the pitch-shifted voice of popular culture’s most harried and maligned queer figure, Michael Jackson, to convey this message.

So, the queer mask has at least two levels of performance: the instructive and the connotative. Its function extends beyond gay expertise; a cloud of heavy significance hangs over its mere presence as a boon for heteronormative proliferation. This is similar to the co-opted function of what might be called the queer mask of the lesbian, by which heteronormative desire is serviced by the sexual interactions of two women who perform at the implied behest of some third party. In the first instance, the mask of the gay expert is voided of sexuality. In the latter, the mask of the lesbian is loaded with a surplus of sexuality that is treated as a kind of crazed overabundance.

*On Guy Hocquenghem*

Hocquenghem's essay *The Screwball Asses* originally appeared in issue #12 of *Recherches* in March of 1973 on the topic of homosexuality; editor/publisher Félix Guattari was fined 600 francs by the French government for his involvement, and all copies were seized and destroyed. Hocquenghem's piece addresses: "...homosexuality that considers itself revolutionary, that in turn loses sight of the revolution, or falls prey to its pure theory, and that I will call screwball homosexuality (for fun)." (Hocquenghem *Screwball Asses*, 6) While this statement is problematic in that Hocquenghem himself flirts (perhaps strategically, perhaps not) with over-theorization at various points in this text, it is very important to the idea that the work is always attempting to recover: Hocquenghem is attacking what he sees as a paralysis within the gay milieu of which he is a part, both in the context of the methods of organization and language as well as the paralysis of enacting and placing homosexual desire in that space. His engagement with theory is always tactical; he is either dismantling psychoanalytic theory via Deleuze/Guattari or re-working various concepts to de-stabilize the notion of homosexual desire. Thus, this work begins on a 'revolutionary' note in the sense that it seeks to revise, not merely analyze, a way of being that is somehow conducive to 'true' or 'pure' revolutionary rhetoric. There is something of the political manifesto in this work that is appreciated and emulated by a great deal of contemporary work in queer studies and elsewhere. In Hocquenghem there is an early example of cultural studies that seriously engages with the continental theory prevalent in the 20th century. I am also addressing and questioning the framework of that group. (More intro, cultural studies history)

Hocquenghem's *Homosexual Desire* emerged from a feeling of frustration he explains by relating two stories about his life during that time: First, when attempting

to discuss queer desire with other gay members of the FHAR (Front homosexuel d'action révolutionnaire), one of them suggests that they begin the discussion by exploring or addressing the "homosexual desire that exists between us and knowing how it circulates, or does not circulate, in this room" (SA, 7). Hocquenghem cites the effects of this statement upon the group as the paralyzing factor that rendered the group's speech completely useless and caused for no constructive discussion to take place. Second, Hocquenghem tells of a moment in which he is seduced by another fellow member of the FHAR in the bathrooms of the *École des Beaux-Arts* in Paris after a meeting. In the damp, fetid, anonymous atmosphere of the toilets, Hocquenghem's seducer asks him if he is ashamed. "Well, yes, I was ashamed. But I was ashamed of my shame. It is as if homosexual desire could only be inscribed where repression has inscribed it." (SA, 8) In other words, Hocquenghem is addressing the policing of the homosexual upon his own body. This moment creates a necessary paralysis in the so-called homosexual life within Hocquenghem, and exposes the bind of enacting homosexual desire. The meeting they have both just come from concerns the liberation of homosexual desire, the gays of the FHAR feel the need to have their sex in a restroom, the 'classic' site of gay transactions that marks them mythically as secret and forbidden. This paralyzing apprehension is present in most writing about minority-identity politics. If we, the homosexuals are legitimizing ourselves through organization, if we are even "proud" (as we are told we must be by normative gay identity politics) of our sex, the sex that we have with one another, then why is it that we must go to the bathroom or the park instead of the bedroom for our sex? The second part of the paralyzing bind, which speaks back to the first idea, is one of association, of Bersani's relationality. Specifically, the question of how to analyze the public face of homosexuality in terms that should perhaps resist using

what Bersani calls 'heteroized sociality' if public homosexuality might be considered as tactical not through its assimilable but through its dissonant quality. Why is the secretive associated with shame? How can a discussion of gay sex emerge not only through its relation to straight sex? Is the bathroom a place of shameful sex because straight people do not have sex in public toilets? The question of non-relationality Bersani posed in *Homos* bears further consideration.

Even what much of academia considers 'radical queer politics' finds itself in the bind of at once valorizing the cruise and yet also purporting the idea that the act of sex between two members of the same sex is itself an act of transgression, and has the potential of somehow becoming a revolutionary act. The paralyzing question of visibility can always be a stick in the gears of this particular line. Why is the transgression enacted in the darkness of the bathroom, where the revolution is not visible? Why does the homosexual transgress only in relation to the dichotomy of gay/straight? Why, in other words, does it matter where the heterosexuals have their sex? Is it not conceivable to speak of homosexual desire as not some dark underside to heterosexual desire, but instead to consider it within a separate sphere? Is it not possible, for instance, to imagine that sex between homosexuals in a bedroom rethinks the utility of the bedroom, of domesticity in general?

Or must we chide Hocquenghem for his uptightness, for a bourgeois sensibility of looking down his nose at the dank toilet? *Mute Magazine* ran a review of *The Screwball Asses* on [metamute.org](http://metamute.org), authored by B.T.F.A., "an anonymous, reader-led, queer cruising zine". Directions to a "fuckhouse" in Greenpoint, Brooklyn immediately follow a quote from Hocquenghem on "the cruising machine" as both a "defense mechanism against the intrusion of relations of power" and "a romantic resurgence of the desire to love what can only occur once". When Hocquenghem

describes the cruising machine as a defense mechanism, it seems overly simple to merely read this as literal. In order to “defend” against “power”, one deploys the “mechanism” of cruising. If this is not an oversimplification of matters, then it should be, especially for a reader of Hocquenghem who is living and declaring polymorphic desire in the 21st century of ingrained stereotypical masks and 'post-AIDS' forgetfulness. Hocquenghem actually goes on to defend, or at least partially justify, the fact that he had been in a monogamous relationship for nearly two decades. Perhaps the intentions of Hocquenghem not to valorize cruising but to complexify our relation to it as a 'queer community' was lost upon the authors, or maybe it is a deliberate rejection of his ideas. One wonders how the authors of the review would respond to the arrival at their fuckhouse of a person who is not privy to the online articles of Mute Magazine. There is no discussion of how Greenpoint is one of the rapidly gentrifying neighborhoods in Brooklyn, upon which any staged “fuckhouse” scenario is only utopic insofar as the 'bad element' has been barred from the space. They can speak as if the space is open because it is safe to assume its exclusivity. Does this suggest that there is an illusory pantomiming in the supposed revolutionary desire inherent in sexual behavior? It clearly is questionable to practice a sort of revolutionary promiscuity within a regimented framework: 'I will go to the cruising spots every day and I will have sex with everyone who I meet there of the same sex as myself' or 'My wife and I will go to the swinger's club and we will go home with different married couples this weekend' or 'I will design my profile in a certain way in order to attract a certain type of person on a polyamorous website'. The fact of queerness in a body does not necessitate subversion. Subversion is funded, encouraged, practiced by tourists, and ultimately comfortably enveloped within the paradigm of capitalist/oedipal/family that so many so-called sexually liberated seek to

evade. Due to the manner in which these behaviors are advertised and given exposure on talk shows and late-night television, “alternative lifestyles” in many cases actually help to reassure the heteronormative family unit that they are dominant, healthy, and in a position to laugh condescendingly.

Hocquenghem goes on to consider another of the articles appearing in the same issue of *Recherches* alongside his essay, called “Arabs and Us”. In this anonymous article, in which the authors describe a scene in the countryside of Morocco that is host to sexual encounters between themselves (presumably French, Caucasian homosexual males) and the fantastically eroticized image of rustic Arabic farmers. The scenario is framed as “uncontaminated as yet by urban capitalist relations and where a subsistence economy subsists [sic]...But return to Paris is inevitable, and there, Arabs are no longer admirable Arcadian shepherds but industrial sub-proletarians. And that is where things get complicated.” (Hocquenghem, 10) In attempting to reverse modes of power via sex, in allowing the Arab to anally penetrate them, the authors enact what Hocquenghem exposes as a hypocritical reversal of its aim. For this is precisely what the act is, an “allowing” of transgression; the French man fantasizes that he is somehow avenging the oppressed population by opening his body to be sodomized, but what he is actually doing is reifying the otherness (and therefore the subordination and political impotency) of his sexual partner. “What an extraordinary desire, not only does it satisfy itself, it commits a political act as an alibi: I get fucked in the ass by the people my father and grandfather have fucked in the colonial wars, before doing so in their factories. But such an equation is absolutely false: I lend my ass for fifteen minutes to someone that the bourgeoisie has mythically sodomized its entire life, to the point of perfecting in him the male pride that was already instilled by Islam.” (Ibid, 11) Moreover, by using anal penetration as a symbol

of punishment and of an assertion of authority, the entire anecdote can be said to not only expose the immense political travesty of this utility of anal sex but also its potential as 'revolutionary' in the first instance.

Hocquenghem addresses the hierarchies of sex by reading through psychoanalytic theory and invoking the reconceptualizing inclination of Anti-Oedipus: "Today's homosexual does not embody polymorphic desire: he moves univocally beneath an equivocal mask. His sexual objects have already been chosen by social or political machination." The insistence here is that homosexual desire does not escape the hierarchies imposed upon desire by bourgeois culture, that in fact homosexual desire is only enacted via these very rules, materialized in dichotomies such as top/bottom. Actually, the top/bottom dichotomy continues in 2011 to structure normative male homosexual desire relations, with the proviso that "versatile" be included as a kind of mediating category. One can categorize themselves as versatile, as if to say: "I can do anything", when in actuality it merely translates to: "I will top or bottom." Rarely does one hear (in nearly any documented or discussed instances of sexual rules between 'groups' of gay men throughout various histories and cultures) that anal sex is not necessarily the manner by which gays "go all the way." There are and have always been alternative practices in BDSM and other sexual spaces, yet it cannot be denied that anal sex still occupies the space of actual sex. "In sum, reintroducing the anus can degrade the phallic signifier only if it reaches all society, and furthermore, only if anal penetration is performed in both directions, in couples considered to be the elementary component of study. However, we know that the heterosexual couple can only reach this stage by using accessories and fetishes." (Ibid, 24)

As Hocquenghem states, to ask is to de-sexualize oneself amongst the population of askers, what Hocquenghem refers to as speech bodies. "...those who have power through speech without having lost power through the body could desire anyone. But the West has instilled in us such a dichotomy between the body and speech that having power through speech will eventually make us suspect that we have lost the desirability of the body. And so speech bodies refuse to make love to other speech bodies, speech against speech in the tumble of bodies, for they are afraid of abdicating their power of speech in the fray." (Ibid, 18) It is difficult to speak of persecution; any claim to victimization can be met with scorn and derision, and perhaps rightfully so. The common argument against the rhetoric of victimhood has its place in a refusal to acknowledge the self as victim as well as a refusal to acknowledge the static boundaries of, say, the State and the People. Jacques Rancière, perhaps one of the canon's most vehement refusers of the canonical, famously states in *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*: "The notion of a state apparatus is in fact bound up with the presupposition of an opposition between State and society in which the state is portrayed as a machine, a 'cold monster' imposing its rigid order on the life of society." (Rancière, 29) Much queer/postcolonial theory labors over the assertion that matters are never as simple as persecutor/persecuted. In many ways, there is no better case study of the self-policing and turncoat, self-sabotaging nature of revolutionary desire than in the scenario of the male homosexual in the Western kingdoms of the United States of America and the United Kingdom. Perhaps it is tactically idealistic to attempt to prove such a concept, that there was something that was betrayed in homosexual/queer desire, something that was co-opted and tarnished and made into a function of repression, homogeneity (both of the self and the other). I cannot help but to pursue this hypothesis, because not only is that something still

present in certain bodies and discourses, and not only does that something arise unexpectedly and uninvited into bodies and media and discourse, but it also is more complicated than merely being a something. This was of great significance for Hocquenghem, as Michael Moon points out in his introduction to *Homosexual Desire*: “While 'homosexual desire' does not exist, properly speaking, Hocquenghem is unwilling to let matters rest there; the book that ensues follows from his perception that there is something there about what is commonly thought of as homosexuality or 'homosexual desire' that has extraordinary and, indeed, unique effects on everyone in our culture.” (Moon, 17) Homosexuals, like any public 'group', are in the world and not in the world: that is, they are making themselves present all the time, whether or not we wish to negate them through ideological erasure or academic sleight of hand. They are present and grouping themselves constantly and perpetually in different formations and new manifestations as varying groups of human beings with both static and stagnant images and highly regimented 'fluid' images. So, I will speak of persecution (as well as the entire lexicon of homosexual trappings) as a multi-faceted and slippery mechanism by which to further unpack the ongoing paradox of uncovering the something in queerness.

“The persecution of homosexuality has its source in a homosexual desire.” (Hocquenghem, 21) It is safe to say, even in 2011, that our media outlets, our psychoanalysis, our churches (both religious and secular) continue to be so obsessed with homosexuality that the relation between persecutor and persecuted has edified into a perpetual, erotic farce. Hocquenghem finds an explanation of this obsession through a reading of Freudian and post-Freudian psychoanalysis. To be fair, most of Hocquenghem's critiques arise from readings (many of which he terms 'misappropriations') of Freud's studies on homosexuality. He structures his ideas in

connection with Lacan and with Deleuze and Guattari's anti-oedipality. One major contention with Freud lies in the hypothesis of 'persecutory paranoia', in which the homosexual subject's repression of his own libido causes him to see homosexuality (in various threatening and hidden forms) manifest around him constantly.

Hocquenghem saw this hypothesis as playing out exactly in the reverse: society's paranoia towards its own homosexual libido causes it to obsessively pursue and police perceived homosexual emergences. Additionally, Hocquenghem sees Freud's idea of homosexuality leading to paranoia reversed in the work of some scholars, who essentially posited that paranoia causes homosexuality. "In 1965, during the Stockholm conference on homosexuality, W.H. Gillespie reverted to Rosenfeld's assertions on the relation between homosexuality and paranoia, describing homosexuality as 'one of the most frequent defence mechanisms used against paranoid anxiety'." (Hocquenghem, 60-1)

What is interesting here is that Hocquenghem is basing the discussion of paranoia around a study Freud made of Daniel Paul Schreber, a prominent German judge who made his 'condition' of experiencing the desire to 'experience sex as a woman' public. Freud conceptualizes Schreber's condition as being out of his hands; in a sense, he has been victimized by society. As Hocquenghem states: "For Freud, too, the emergence of Schreber's homosexuality in the form of paranoia is due to some fault in the repressive social machinery..." (Ibid, 59) What psychoanalysis 'does' to the homosexual is of great concern; however, that psychoanalysis would come to be in cahoots with a particular and fascistic brand of expressing homosexuality is perhaps only hypothesized. The relationship has become more complex, in that psychoanalysis of the late 20th early 21st century has various strategies and interpretations of homosexual desire that range from outward condemnation to a near-

proselytization. It no longer merely attempts to “trumpet[s] the existence of homosexuality everywhere” (Hocquenghem, 22) while creating a panic amongst the public with regard to the safety of heteronormativity, it now also reassures the public and the homosexual subject (who it continues to diagnose: homosexuals are treatable now not necessarily as subjects to convert per se, but to convert into normative homosexual subjects. This has become its own psychoanalytic end.) that homosexual desire is safe, assimilable, profitable, and even humorous insofar as it is both harmless and entertaining.

Hocquenghem also shows how Freud's concept of the “polymorphously perverse”, in which desire is understood as “fundamentally undifferentiated and ignorant of the distinction between homosexuality and heterosexuality...” (Hocquenghem, 74) was distorted by a number of figures (such as W.H. Gillespie) in order to subsequently dismiss his concept of bisexuality as being founded on “a mechanical relationship between neatly defined psychological and biological elements...” (Ibid, 76) What many critics identify as “popular psychology”, sometimes maligned as that faux-ideology that has seeped into every level of public discourse: the home, the workplace, the military, the talk show, the podcast does nothing less than to police the behavior and self-conceptualization of the homosexual. This is nothing new: during the early 20th century, psychology/sexology worked diligently to maintain the strict compartmentalization and medicalization of the homosexual, amongst both outright condemners and those that were supposedly 'sympathetic' to the plight of the homosexual. As Jeffrey Weeks states in the preface to *Homosexual Desire*: “Even the reformers, such as Magnus Hirschfeld in Germany or Havelock Ellis in Britain, worked within the framework of homosexuality as a specific individual 'variation' or 'anomaly'. This much was common throughout

America and Western Europe.” (Weeks, 24) Homosexuality still retains a polemical status within the realm of contemporary psychoanalysis, and has developed an even more refined political position on both sides of the debate. We still see homosexuals being subjected to conversion therapy, which amounts to torture, in an effort to eradicate their desire; this is almost always presented as being a practice of psychoanalysis that is explicitly connected to some shadowy right-leaning, religious backing. In countries like the US and UK, torture of homosexuals is presented by the media as occurring in places like Africa, South America, and the Middle East. Thus, attention to the more hidden and discursive processes of torture that occur in the West are deflected. These images may serve as satisfying to those that merely abhor homosexuality, but for those who 'tolerate' homosexuals, these images are used to prove economic and social progressiveness at home, and barbarism abroad. Unharmful homosexuals are one of the symbols of progress of leftist rhetoric.

The Left's much more complicated relationship with homosexuality has embraced homosexual desire as a workable psychoanalytic process, whereas it used to be that the chief aim of psychoanalysis, before it fragmented and became co-opted by bipartisan politics, was to either convert the homosexual to heterosexual or to absolve him or her of their desire altogether, exposing the heterosexuality which always lurked beneath. By workable, I mean to suggest that psychoanalysis working under the banner of neoliberalism now works with the homosexual subject in 'dealing with' or 'coping with' their desire not in order to repress or sublimate it, but to 'adjust' to it. This means by first embracing homosexual desire as normative and then assimilating it into popular psychoanalytical discourse. This is not to say that much of our culture does not still (rather covertly) consider the homosexual to be a sick sub-human; it merely implies that the means of manipulating and playing with that concept have

multiplied and become more sinister. In fact, homosexual 'reality' television figures such as the fellows from *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* in the U.S. And Gok Wan from the U.K.'s *How to Look Good Naked* actually perform routine psychological magic tricks upon the public via the style-less subjects whom they are coaching. For instance, Gok Wan might tell a woman (and always does, for this is what the program is based upon) who feels physically unattractive that she must think of herself as attractive in order to feel attractive. He cites being fat as a youngster and his homosexuality as ways of evoking the archetypal outcast. Homosexuality has become a tool for engaging instantly with the public under the boo-hooing illusion of the alienated viewer, of conjuring a particular type of pre-programmed sympathy and of embodying a particular type of wisdom: the wisdom of the inhuman body. However, the message here is that the inhuman/less-than-human must always be humanized.

Leo Bersani, in his seminal work *Homos*, begins to outline a concept of homosexuality as strategically anti-social: "Perhaps inherent in gay desire is a revolutionary inaptitude for heteroized sociality. This of course means sociality as we know it, and the most politically disruptive aspect of homo-ness I will be exploring in gay desire is a redefinition of sociality so radical that it may appear to require a provisional withdrawal from relationality itself." (Bersani, 7) One question Bersani pushes emerges from his background in psychoanalysis: why the notion of the homosexual as having 'failed' to engage in the Oedipal relation rose to such prominence amongst psychoanalysts of the 20th century. He questions why the male homosexual was not instead understood as defying the relationality (Bersani is also interested in understanding the possibilities inherent in reworking relationality) of heteronormative oedipality. In other words, why were homosexuals seen as psychological anomalies and failures rather than successes? Why weren't they

understood as latently expressing a comfortable level of femininity within themselves which transports them along a different trajectory altogether than the Oedipal relation? And if the homosexual successfully evades the Oedipal relation, what is the potential of reconceptualizing or discarding oedipality as the fulcrum of family relations? What underlies Bersani's *Homos* is a similar question of the anti-social that Hocquenghem started with *Homosexual Desire*. The entire work (and much of what is now considered canonical queer theory, such as Lee Edelman's *No Future*) focuses on holding up these questions of sociality that continue to concern queer studies. Damon Young and Joshua J. Weiner's GLQ introductory article "Queer Bonds", puts forth some interesting concepts, astutely describes the pull between the social/anti-social tendencies in queerness: "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)." (Young & Weiner, 224)

What Hocquenghem saw as a true obsession with homosexuality is still very much a prevalent mode of thought in today's public and academic spheres. Bersani also mentions that "homophobic America itself appears to have an insatiable appetite for our presence." (Bersani, 11) It is just that the methods and mediums by which this obsession can be expressed have exploded onto the multiples stages of media that have emerged even since *Homos* was published in 1995: the obligatory homosexual lifestyle op-eds in every "leftist" editorial, the bromantic trope of the gay elephant in the room (whether it is the gay man or the lesbian who is clowned) that has seeped into, has become ingrained within the template of any film about men in conversation with one another (buddy movies, farcical physical gag comedies, action movies, male-oriented rom-coms, horror films, etc.), the ever-present homosexual style guru on

every reality television program, the lesbian embrace which is a universal mode of arousal and is present in nearly any advertisement, film, television program, pornography aimed at men, etc., the church that obsesses itself with excluding and condemning gays, or else the church that obsesses itself with using gays as a gateway into the expensive house of liberalism, or even the church that is mired in gay scandal, the presence of the homosexual as a mascot for money, economic growth and development (see pinkwashing) in all business-related and public relations ventures. The homosexual has become synonymous with imperialism of the highest order, and this is seen as a great success. Homosexuals wrapped in American flags with no penises, homosexuals with guns in fatigues who promise not to look in the showers, homosexuals with children at the PTA meetings who have finally given up expelling their seed into a void, homosexuals on Wall Street (both in the ivory towers and occupying), homosexual psychoanalysts who smile on television and reassure the public of homosexuality's benevolent nature, it goes on... – “Almost all homosexual behavior is bourgeois, and this is not meant in the moral sense in which workerism denounces a class spirit or bourgeois stigmata. It is meant in the sense that homosexual desire is mechanically recited rather than invented. It is because this desire functions exclusively around sex, and not the totality of the body. It is because it is not so indisputable that the anus ignores sexual difference, because it is not so certain that the reinvestment of the anus will weaken the great phallic signifier, since the desiring use of the anus calls for the phallus just as strongly as does the orthodox social usage of the vagina, even if it passes over shame.” (Ibid, 23) In Hocquenghem's epiphany, the homosexual's sexual interaction is just as much of a “ghetto” as the heteronormative one: “As long as we are not burned at the stake or locked up in asylums, we continue to flounder in the ghettos of nightclubs, public restrooms and

sidelong glances, as if that misery had become the habit of our happiness. And so, with the help of the state, do we build our own prison.” (Ibid, 25) An addendum must be supplanted with this statement in our modern time where a glorious negation, alas, cannot. The homosexual still does bask in the cruise, the restroom, and in many cultural situations merely for nostalgic purposes and not to protect the body from harm. However, now there is a reflection, a monstrous, hall of mirrors visage that returns the evil gaze of the evil gays, and that is the public face of the homosexual. Surely, Hocquenghem could not have predicted that not only has the homosexual community helped the state in its private imprisonment, but has also ascended to the roster of the shining faces that are representative of “public imprisonment” itself, and not only of ourselves but of women who come to us for advice and coquettishness, of men who want to be hip, of voters who want to be “open-minded”, of politicians who want to wear a new face, of governments who long for malls to be built upon the ruins of their old places, of viewers who long for a taste of what is “fabulous”, meanwhile only ever sabotaging what was perhaps useful in public queerness: making a good parent instead of questioning the coupling and reproductive mechanism, marrying pride to militarism instead of protesting systemic slaughter, marrying each other in churches and on the steps of city halls instead of demanding the rights and benefits of the “married” (who are statistically the eventually-divorced) and refusing to kowtow to its broken ritual. Is this not the reaction, en masse, of a queer “group” which screams of refused victimhood to the oppressive heteronormative public, as though victimhood were not also a mantle we voluntarily place upon our heads because it is easy to do so? This is precisely because the monstrous has become itself co-opted by us and against us for them, and by that I mean to say that being a queer monster now means something that can be worked out on TV, it something that is relatable. The de-

monsterization of the public faces of queerness fits a template that is useful to bipartisan squabbling and strategies like pinkwashing.

This public face can only ever revert to a monstrous quality that is mediated by its handlers. That is, the original monstrousness that is non-relational, amoral, and poetic is supplanted with monstrousness that is a shadow of heteronormativity, immoral, and banal. As Bill Marshall points out in his work *Guy Hocquenghem: Beyond Gay Identity*, Hocquenghem lamented these emergences as practically inevitable in a 1977 collection of essays, *La Dérive homosexuelle*: “The time will come when the homosexual will be no more than a sex tourist, a nice Club-Med member who has been a bit further than the rest, whose horizon of pleasure is a bit broader than his average contemporary.” (Hocquenghem, 132) The problematic reconfiguration of public homosexuality as comfortably occupying its own niche of consumption, as not merely acceptable as public mask but enjoyable insofar as it remains compartmentalized, these fears gripped Hocquenghem fervently. Bill Marshall further quotes *La Dérive* in its rejection of “this movement of closure which is founding new sexual bourgeoisies.” (Marshall, 18).

Where Hocquenghem falters in *The Screwball Asses*, if it is indeed a faltering, comes during his attempt to theorize “true” homosexual desire. I question whether or not he falters because I perfectly understand the desire to utilize the language which repels you, attempts to control you, dismisses you as inverted, narcissistic, and paranoid: I am of course speaking about theories of psychoanalysis that Hocquenghem is constantly engaging with, struggling against, and attempting to repurpose. If this engagement falters, then so be it. It is composed of a necessary desperation, like most of Hocquenghem's language it strives to regroup what is essentially impossible to grasp, attempts to make use of various violent acts of

language aimed at the desire and the perpetually contradictory community that he finds himself a part of and yet despises. Hocquenghem asserts: “The social sphere, in any case, is nothing but a chaotic mix of phantasms which all stem socially from the unique model of heterosexuality, a model that has circulated an incredible number of clichés issuing from classical psychoanalysis. It is assumed for example, that homosexuality is narcissistic. But the heterosexual, naively searching in vain for his homologue in the other gender, is branded by narcissism as much as the homosexual, who searches for his opposite in the same gender, imprinted with the heterosexual model that he refuses to follow and yet mimics.” (Hocquenghem, 44-5) A double bind emerges here in which Hocquenghem insists upon the gross miscalculations of psychoanalysis in diagnosing the homosexual subject, yet he simultaneously falls back upon many of these very psychoanalytic formulations in order to bring forth certain assertions on homosexual and heterosexual desire. In the quotation above, for instance, he denies the narcissism that is branded upon homosexual desire, yet concedes to the notion that the homosexual “searches for his opposite in the same gender, imprinted with the heterosexual model...” a quotation that seems to significantly problematize everything that has preceded it. That is, if Hocquenghem wishes to conceptualize homosexual desire as indeed being non-relational, as not being the shadow of heterosexuality, then he must formulate a rejection of psychoanalysis that is not conditional. Of course, one might argue that he is speaking about that concept of homosexuality that is screwball homosexuality. In fact, throughout this work Hocquenghem does fluctuate between speaking of the screwball asses and what might be called the asses of the ideal image, the asses that are not, for Hocquenghem (and for other thinkers), real yet. As Young and Weiner point out: “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." (Young & Weiner, 225) Essentially, by declaring that homosexuality "refuses to follow and yet mimics" heterosexuality, Hocquenghem is making a larger assertion that by enacting homosexual desire, a body automatically and always traps itself within extremely strict boundaries. The heterosexual model that has carved indelible routes into the pathway of enacting desire delimits these boundaries. The very indelibility of these pathways is one source of contention one might find with this argument; the other is the idea of "true" homosexual desire.

The following two very short chapters in *The Screwball Asses* vigorously defend this idea that Hocquenghem insists upon, the idea of "true" homosexual desire potentially manifesting. What is ironic is that, for Hocquenghem, this truth can only emerge through various psychoanalytic and linguistic games. I refer to them as games because, while they are diverting in terms of conceptual efficacy (in that Hocquenghem is always hinging on possibility: perhaps they could work, perhaps not) they are unquantifiable manifestations of psychoanalytic formulation that seem to point to a homosexual subject who has fallen prey to a paranoia imposed upon him precisely by psychoanalytic rhetoric. Hocquenghem's doubts of true homosexuality are healthy, even revolutionary (as he would have it), up until the point that he devolves into these exercises. They are based on the idea that sublimation is the gateway into "making love", and that non-desire and the "desire to desire" must meet in this formula in order to produce this problematic enactment of truth. This is not to disavow Hocquenghem entirely, merely to state that it is puzzling that in *The Screwball Asses* as well as in *Homosexual Desire*, he makes every effort to repurpose Marxism and psychoanalysis to counteract these very paranoias. To use the terms of

the oppressive regime of language as the escape route does not, at this juncture, seem beneficial to either Hocquenghem or the community he seeks to awaken or to dissolve. He begins: “If we examine the limit case of the transvestite, we realize that he is more woman than women, since he desires to be a woman whereas a woman is subject to her gender. And since the only image of woman is a masculine one, this man shall recite woman a thousand times better, without intermediaries, without any orders being transmitting [sic] to the other, once he has decided to apply that image to his own body, instead of to his mother, his sister or his wife. The transvestite is the most perfect image of the woman man desires and the image farthest removed from the woman whose existence man obstructs.” (Hocquenghem, 45) While this concept is thrilling, even utopic in that it transforms what Butler might call 'gender performativity' into an avatar of 'pure' womanhood, I also feel that it is problematic. It is based on the notion that the transvestite is ordered under a 'univocal' sign, the very sign that Hocquenghem reviles. Under this sign, the Hocquenghemian transvestite is always desiring to be a woman rather than desiring to be a man dressed as a woman or desiring to be an embodiment of indeterminacy. This makes the following assertion about the self-application of the sign of the woman rather murky. We can never know if the transvestite not only declares and performs woman in his own body but also inscribes this mask onto his mother or sister or wife. It is simply not tenable to assume that he does not. There are multiple ways of enacting the transvestite, both through the mouth of the transvestite and the sneering public. Jennie Livingston's documentary about the drag scene in Harlem, *Paris is Burning* (released in 1990, two years after Hocquenghem's death, and being shot while he undoubtedly suffered from the immortal tagline of so many gay deaths, and the same for many of *Paris is Burning's* subjects: AIDS-related illness) reveals a spectrum of transvestite self-philosophy,

ranging from emulation to self-protection to exuberance to subversion. Today, on programs such as RuPaul's Drag Race, we are offered an image of drag that is either playful in the name of fabulousness, or else sentimentalized in the vein of Oprah-style personal freedoms. There are always exceptions, of course. Tammie Brown, a drag queen from the show's first season, perfectly encapsulated a paradoxical queer manifestation of transvestitism that simply could not assimilate itself comfortably into the machinations of the program. This created moments of poetic indeterminacy, uncomfortable comedy, and, of course the early elimination of Tammie from the show. This is why we cannot accept the idea of transvestitism as Hocquenghem presents it.

Among the various other hypotheses Hocquenghem comes up with in this concept of true homosexual desire, most notably is the idea of his having to conceive of some kind of coupling between himself and a lesbian. He finishes by saying: "Suddenly, I feel my attempt to describe this couple has gone too far, that its experience can't escape being theoretical, tinged with Machiavellianism and terribly experimental. And then I laugh and I don't give a fuck. I know the time will come when the desire to desire shall be stronger than the desire to dissect. In a month, in a year, what difference does it make? I know that hands and mouths arouse penises and clitorises. Must they necessarily belong to the same gender as ours, under the pretense that all policing enforces their belonging to the other?" (Ibid, 68-9) This text generates a fair amount of paradoxical and contradictory mysteries and pleasures.

Hocquenghem openly admits this and even encourages the idea that it is unavoidable, that his very speech is phallic, invoking psychoanalytical apologist rhetoric of having opened his mouth in the first place. I believe that this particular movement in his writing has derailed the readings of the aforementioned queer zine or the MIT Press

who distributes the semiotext(e) intervention edition. Their website features quotations from the book that, in their isolation, actually sorely misrepresent the purpose of the work. Also, in reprinting this idea, which is printed everywhere that Hocquenghem's name is invoked, that Hocquenghem is “often considered the father of Queer Theory”, they seem again to misunderstand the author's intention. For, one major aspect of queer theory (whose ideas have become canonical) was to perform a number of interpretations that result in systematically removing homosexual desire from the homosexual subject rather than attempting a synthesis of enacted homosexual desire as simultaneously manifesting in certain subjects and in every socio-cultural manifestation imaginable. Conflating the differences in homosexuality as present within a body and present within a text, even. Perhaps it is precisely those passages where Hocquenghem missteps in conflating the potentiality of desire into a universal enactment that nominate him as father of queer theory.

Hocquenghem's work often stands in direct contrast to much of what we now call queer theory; in this work he is not rejecting the idea of homosexual desire, he is merely problematizing it. Bersani, in the section of *Homos* which focuses on the Butlerian (as well as Wittig, Halperin, and Warner) desexualizing of queer desire, states: “There is a more radical possibility: homo-ness itself necessitates a massive redefining of relationality. More fundamental than a resistance to the normalizing methodologies is a potentially revolutionary inaptitude—perhaps inherent in gay desire—for sociality as it is known.” (Bersani, 76) It is the way in which homosexuality is conceived by both the straight and gay public, and the way in which homosexuals police themselves in their speech, thoughts, and actions (thereby sabotaging action or real desire) that he is attacking. It goes unspoken within this work, and perhaps I am projecting my own desires into the work of Hocquenghem,

but there seems to be an underlying sense that although Hocquenghem rejects the notion of homosexuality as categorical otherness, he still looks toward the notion of the queer subject who is fragmented yet constantly working within this fragmentation to possibly convey or deliver some kind of strategic moment of deliverance to the public, even if this is merely remote and temporary.

The daunting task of 'speaking of' homosexuality (and its emergence in the body, in the law, on the screen) is challenging primarily for the reason that any attempt to address the actions of a specified group of human beings conjures up one of the great academic arguments: that of the problem of identity. Various discursive interventions within academia challenge any 'simplified' notion of the social: the fallacy of conflating the 'Social with the Real', or speaking of 'the Real' in general, for instance, is another area of conflict. However, my analysis begins with two presuppositions: that any analysis or diagnosis of a particular group is already to some extent the analysis of an illusory construct, and that the particular illusory construct in question (the illusion of the homosexual) is, strictly speaking, very complex and eminently contradictory. That is, to speak of homosexuality is to speak of a specific method of constructing 'identity' that belongs to 'the West' and which is part of a mechanism of what is often called 'neoliberal' imperialism. The traditional narrative within this mechanism is that homosexuality 'emerges' in a society when certain indicators and specific routes of economic and social 'growth' or 'progress' are recognizable. So, without imposing upon every culture this concept of homosexuality, without placing it where it is most certainly does not occur without the prodding of specific mechanisms, I wish instead to focus on its inevitability as an emergence that is bound up within imperialism and the implications of this inevitability as an 'unsustainable' (to borrow a phrase from environmentalism) realization of desire. I

wish to build upon the analogy of the harnessing of 'raw' desire (in the Hocquenghemian sense) into the specificity of what I call the unsustainable 'public mask' of the homosexual. For while I agree to a certain point with Hocquenghem's assertion in *The Screwball Asses* that “there are two sexes on earth, but this is only to hide the fact that there are three, four, ten, thousands, once you throw that old hag of the idea of nature overboard. There are two sexes but only one sexual desire.” I feel that the assertion needs certain modifications. The first part of the statement, that there are two recognized sexes on earth insofar as the bourgeoisie would have us believe, we must allow for the moment to remain unmodified. Any dissent from this point that Hocquenghem challenges is usually met with a simple biological argument which dismisses the claims of trans/inter/asexual as merely re-combinations of male and female. Rather than concede to the idea of a third sex, public discourse has us shift the narrative of the trans body or the intersexed body (using the weapons of psychoanalysis and biology) into a question of organs. The organs will 'out', so the story goes: the person's gender (what Hocquenghem seems to actually be speaking of) may be 'indeterminate', but then they are suffering psychologically. But biological sex is never a case of indeterminacy under this view. If they have genitalia, they are sexed. If they have the genitalia of both sexes, one must be removed. In this manner one can see the way in which this argument might develop and has indeed developed on both sides of the debate. Many sound arguments have been put forward in academia and elsewhere.

My issue is with the second part of Hocquenghem's statement, that there is only one sexual desire. This strikes me as extremely challengeable on a variety of levels. Throughout his career, Hocquenghem understood this process, to oversimplify, as the harnessing of a kind of raw desire which only manifests as 'hetero', 'homo', or

'other' due to the political machinations of a society whose sole purpose is to compartmentalize and whose citizens are manipulated into reproduction and the enforcement and worship of reproduction. Or else, those unfortunate enough to emerge as dissonant or incompatible with this process of harnessing have the displeasure of being fed into a different sort of ensnarement. Having failed the illusion of the Oedipus complex, they settle for the game of the homosexual. The mask is taken up, automatically cementing the sociocultural position of that individual into a behavioral, cultural template. Hocquenghem laments as a reduction of the potential of desire; its multiplicities having been reduced to mere 'inversion' or 'anomaly', the blueprint for enacting 'new social forms' (as Foucault would have it) is nullified. For although the masks might have slight variations (different colors or expressions, for instance) and while they might have a rubbery quality which gives ever so slightly to allow for the movement of the face beneath, they express a unilateral mechanism that is the mechanism of the homosexual.

In this section, I have spoken of a group that is defined and regulated by the law of the public mask and is maintained and proliferated by various laws of media and within various public spaces. Therefore, we address the unilateral illusion and the consequences of that illusion's being put forth into the world as a 'real' singularity. Such consequences necessarily affect the human beings who are subjected to the illusory construct of their being gay people who act and look and exist in particular ways. This is what I hope had been made clear as being at stake for this project: What is this illusion, how does it play out in the public sphere in the media, on television, in film, literature, and therefore in the lived experiences of human beings? How is it enforced? How is it resisted? The refusal or resistance of gay identity takes shape throughout various modes of discourse, often from opposing points of view. Jasbir

Puar's *Terrorist Assemblages* and Donovan's *Androphilia* have in common only this immediate refusal; their respective messages can be said to directly oppose one another. For one thing, Puar writes from the context of a platform of urgent ethnic positioning to question and problematize neoliberal queer discourse. Not only is the question of queerness wrapped up in notions of ethnicity, it creates vital strategies in using queer political action to undergird the issue of colonialism, for instance in the question of Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It must be said as well that Puar's text is academic in the sense that it uses a language whose tradition can be traced back through queer theory and philosophical texts. It is not a text that everyone will read, but it is also a text that everyone cannot read, at least without familiarizing themselves with a large body of theoretical, queer, and post-colonial discourses. On the contrary, Donovan's text is eminently readable in the sense that it is written in extremely plain language and repeatedly reminds the reader of its 'populist' inclination. It is also not a text that everyone will read, but is certainly a text that everyone can read. It lacks the editorial precision and numerous citation of an academic text to a nearly ridiculous degree, having its fair share of typos and sections that are virtually repeated. Given its use of a sort of idealized notion of maleness/masculinity, these flaws can almost be read to work for the text. Donovan defies popular theoretical discourse primarily by basing his discussion around what would undoubtedly be considered a naïve travesty in his declaration of maleness as its own formation of ethnicity. In many ways, Donovan is simply reinstating a masculinist worldview that theorizes the position of the androphile amongst this milieu. That is, *Androphilia* attempts to re-frame the notion of maleness along a line of logic that is sometimes insightful and revisionist, and sometimes naïve. Rather than merely dismissing this construct as misguided or reactionary, or to deride it as merely another form of identity-compartmentalization, it

is perhaps beneficial to identify both the effective and regressive or counter-productive moments in the text. One moment of allegiance with much of queer theory lies in Donovan's use of the term 'heteronormative' to question the idea of gay marriage. Although he privileges the same-sex relation between men as a poetic kind of fraternal bond, he does so via the refusal of the marriage ritual as a 'heteronormative' act of assimilation.

## *Wrestling With Queer Avatars*

*'Mmmm, I am big. It's the pictures that got small. Sunset Boulevard, 1950.'* -Goldust, (quoting Gloria Swanson) appearing on a parody of Piper's Pit, 1996.

The world of professional wrestling is a theatrical multitude: atmospheres conjured instantly and without warning as characters make their entrances and exits, emerge victorious or meet defeat, in a convoluted stream of interweaving stories and vignettes. The structure of the programming plays like a real-time soap opera, in which the narrative is backed by what is known in the industry as 'kayfabe', the underlying 'suspension of disbelief' sub-narrative that portrays the events that occur outside of the main plot (that which occurs in the ring/arena) as 'real'. Good guys are called 'faces' or 'babyfaces', while villains are called 'heels'. 'Heat' is generated by a wrestler as a force that acts upon the real-time atmosphere of the narrative. The audience responds passionately to the presence of the face or heel. A common criticism of professional wrestling is the obvious fiction it portrays and the manner in which its audience is perceived as being 'tricked' by said fiction, but I would argue that this is a severe underestimation of the affective atmosphere generated by these events. The athletes/actors that portray the complexly evolving (some actors will have as many as ten different 'ring names' over the course of their career, with different histories and rivalries, personas and signature moves) must be trained in 'ring psychology', a method by which a particular mentality and performativity is cultivated. Further, the templates of character that are performed are quite rigidly attached to some of the most exaggerated stereotypes available; therefore, moments of rupture from such templates as 'the angry native' (originated by Abdullah the Butcher in 1958), the 'buffoon hick', or 'the mystical warrior' give way to some of the most interesting, inadvertent escapes from pre-programmed performances of template recorded on television.

One of the most interesting moments in US professional wrestling was marked by the emergence of a “violent, unhappy queer” template that I categorize as ‘strategic queerness’ enacted within the entertainment industry. This was the result of an evolution of flamboyant performativity that could be partially traced back to the legendarily effeminate (heterosexual George Wagner) Gorgeous George of the Golden Age of Wrestling in the 1950s, whose valet sprayed his feet and the ring with perfume and sanitizer before each match and was the only person allowed to touch him during matches. Gorgeous George, also known as “The Human Orchid” and “The Toast of the Coast”, and “The Sensation of the Nation” was the American Wrestling Association World Champion of 1950. He wore beautiful robes from a collection that the announcer would insist had an alleged value of over \$200,000, caused riots in which people were stabbed, threw leis and gold “Gorgeous Georgie pins” (as opposed to bobby pins) at the audience, all the while referring to them as peasants. Both James Brown and Muhammad Ali cited George as influencing their style, and I believe these unlikely testimonials from public figures associated with the virility of heterosexual maleness serve to illustrate the evolution of the violent, unhappy queer monster from the “cowardly pretty-boy” antics of George (which are always based in class) to the contemporary trans-horror of Goldust.

During the 1980s, a Welsh wrestler known as “Exotic” Adrian Street (who began his career in the 1950s as a ‘physique model’) further evolved the queer/androgynous persona by deploying a camp, European sensibility that presented a number of odd behaviors new to the WWF at that time. After being heckled by an audience one evening, Street decided to exaggerate his queer behaviors; this resulted in an overwhelming reaction of homosexual shame-horror. It also created the unspoken understanding of queerness template that Goldust later used to exaggerated effect;

Street never declared his queerness, but repeatedly and antagonistically reminds the audience through his actions. For instance, he *designed* and wore outrageously camp drag outfits, he articulated an exaggerated narcissism, he was brought out to the ring on a sedan chair covered in balloons and held aloft by shirtless men, and he performed in various music videos. In one, he proclaimed himself “as tough as Marciano and as sexy as Mae West”. Street started the ploy of kissing his opponents as an evasive action (once prompting the statement “A man kissing another man! I can’t believe it!” from the ring announcer), and even put make-up on his felled rivals before kicking them daintily in the face with a high-heeled boot. This was considered an inordinately outrageous defilement by the audience, as their most virile and heteronormative heroes were most often the victims of this attack.

Most notably, however, was the appearance of Miss Linda, Street’s valet and real-life spouse. She was one of the first female valets in the industry, and supplanted the traditional male managerial role with fey, primping attention to Street’s person. She combed his blonde pigtailed and rubbed his chest continuously during promos, for instance. This relationship allowed for a fetishization of Miss Linda that was not sexual; rather, it uses her body to exalt the body and sensibility of Street’s exaggerated narcissism. During an interview with Street, rival wrestler Jimmy Valiant interrupts and gives Miss Linda an “unwanted” kiss, prompting the following diatribe from Street:

“That’s the sort of thing that I—(*slaps Miss Linda, who is smiling, in the head*) don’t you laugh, wipe that silly smile off your face! Don’t you dare, don’t you dare smile! I caught you smiling! (*To interviewer*) That’s the sort of thing that happens in New York, I’ve heard about it; but this is ridiculous, absolutely ridiculous! As far as I’m concerned, all those blue-bleached, fat, waddling American women that hang around with him—the likes of him and Dusty Rhodes and all those people—are far better off getting themselves a ticket and going off to

India, because in India, cows are worshipped! I tell you what, if it hadn't been for the fact that I was afraid of messing up my beautiful gown, I would've smashed him to the floor and I would've kicked every one of his teeth out! How dare he?"

Here, Adrian Street articulates a stereotype of gay male misogyny in its most exaggerated form. At one point, after Street interrupts Dusty Rhodes by poking at him suggestively, he throws Miss Linda in between himself and the provoked Rhodes. He uses her body as a shield from harm that aligns his faggotry with the expected accompanying cowardice; yet Miss Linda is also a means of access to the pleasure that, for him comes accompanies contact with the male bodies of his rivals. He lures them in and then harms them while they are weak by displaying her. This utility of the female body often renders the opponent physically unable to perform, as though her presence has put them under some sort of spell. This is indicative of an old-time cartoon in which a character like Bugs Bunny is transformed into a kind of dysfunctional, babbling buffoon by the kiss or merely the passing by of a woman. Street sabotages the man-to-man template of the wrestling match by introducing an element of chaos or variable that causes the heteronormative flow of the wrestling match to malfunction. In so doing, he creates a negatively charged atmosphere of non-sexual tension between himself and the female subject that brings to him the prize of contact with men's bodies that supplants the sweat required (and the supposed non-desire) with a 'dishonest' strategy and erotic play. In his refusal or lack of desire to engage sexually with his valet, Adrian Street creates an exuberance of atmosphere that so markedly possesses and horrifies the audience. He is cheating them of the seamless procedural elements of wrestling by changing the order and hierarchy of possible moves. He cheats the system by mining for pleasure in sacred male spaces. Portrayed by heterosexual actor Dustin Rhodes (Dustin Runnels), Goldust's queer persona (the aspect of his performance which expressed a frightening, abominable

desire for other male performers) eventually disintegrated to make way for more palatable forms of aberrance. Goldust's early significance stemmed from his particular method of generating heat, via an explicitly queer, predatory mask. During the character's early years, at the beginning of what has come to be called the 'Attitude Era' of WWF, he was known to molest his opponents in the ring, obsess romantically over them during ongoing 'feuds', and maintain a preoccupation with Hollywood's 'golden era'.

One of Goldust's early rivalries/obsessions was with industry favorite Rowdy Roddy Piper: a macho, kilt-wearing heel turned face who had an entertaining kayfabe feud with Cyndi Lauper and hosted the often hilarious interview vignette sequence "Piper's Pit" during the 1980s. In the incredible hype sequences leading up to the match, Piper promised to 'make a man' out of Goldust at Wrestlemania XII. The two met before the match for what was called the "Hollywood Backlot Brawl" during which Goldust ran over Piper in his Gold Cadillac. This was followed with a chase scene down the Anaheim freeway with Piper in hot pursuit in his Ford Bronco in a parody of the O.J. Simpson car chase footage. During the subsequent match, Goldust pinned Piper and loomed threateningly over him: as his face lowered towards Piper's, the arena announcer cried out: 'Oh, it's going to kiss him!' The rage-shock level of the crowd reached a fever pitch, and the kiss, an aggressive re-appropriation of Adrian Street's evasive kiss move, sent Piper into a convulsive fit of anger. This tactic of creating a frenzied queer panic brilliantly served the remainder of the match, as Piper humiliated Goldust by kissing him back, spanking him, forcefully grabbing his penis, and finally stripping him down to lady's lingerie. Goldust fled the arena ashamed, covering his chest like an exposed woman as his valet concealed him with his cloak:

an utterly abject queer monster stripped of the ornaments necessary to seduce and frighten the ‘heteronormative’ audience.

Goldust appears in quasi-drag and gold body paint, calling to mind the ‘violent camp’ aspect of John Waters’ film work in that his drag *fails deliberately* in order to transform ambiguity into true abjection: there is no doubt that the hulking mass beneath the blonde wig and gold corpse paint is a man. Rather than create an illusion which creates a desire in the beholder and which is later the subject of embarrassment and shame, Goldust’s drag seems to mock desire itself. He is an imposing figure; humorous, large, foreboding, queer, not vastly different from a Divine or Leigh Bowery presence in terms of the overall affect his performativity generates. Goldust’s early monologues created bizarre and erotic atmospheres that underpinned his rivalries, for example his early feud with wrestler Razor Ramon seemed to convey something else entirely, some incantatory queer poetics:

“Hollywood is my home park, my home territory—the town that put the (*long inhalation, gropes chest*) ‘Gold’ into Goldust—the city where the myth was born. But, hark! Who goes there? Someone who claims to shine like a star? (*Scoffs*) Well, I apologize, but the sun beating down off of one’s gold-plated razor doesn’t tend to have the same glow as the golden light sabers which *explode* from my precious metal. (*Long inhalation, sweeps hair back*) Ooh, hot—like the Jurassic lizard, I must guard what is rightfully mine. I must let no man think that his star *shines* brighter than mine. I must secure the legend; I must live up to the name—(*whispered slowly*) *Goldust. (Kisses the air)*” (transcript from televised WWF Goldust ‘pre-debut vignette’, 1995)

I use the example of Goldust’s queer mask for two reasons: First, the presence and popularity of such a character exemplifies the so-called alliance of homosexuality with the ‘death drive’ in a manner that literally performs its effects before an audience. His actions, even his very presence, contain the very death of their contentment as a group of people gathered in an arena in order to enjoy a performance. A stick is wedged in the gears of seamlessness. Second, the supremely

negative heel heat generated by Goldust's presence, while normatively read as a creation of 'homosexual panic', would here seem to signify something much more complex. It might even help to understand homosexual panic not as a basic fear of being penetrated or converted into a homosexual or a fear of losing one's maleness or virility, but as an actual *betrayal*, performed publicly, of the utterly silent homosexual desire-bond (commonly read as 'homosociality' for fear of suggesting that heteronormative populations might experience moments of actual desire for one another's bodies that does not transform them wholly and without question into full-blown homosexuals) that exists publicly between men. This draws and extends upon David Halperin's discussion of the difference between 'effeminate' and 'passive' via the trope of "'Softness', either may represent the specter of potential gender failure that haunts all normative masculinity, an ever-present threat to the masculinity of every man, or it may represent the disfiguring peculiarity of a small class of deviant individuals. Effeminate are men who *succumb* to a tendency that all normal men have and that all normal *men have to guard against or suppress in themselves...*" Goldust is an avatar of shame-horror, a caricatured version of the professional athlete or soldier who comes out of the closet, only to be scorned for 'lowering morale'. Morale, in this instance, is almost certainly not morale per se, but a code of silence between men that essentially requires an upkeep of silent, fraternal desire to exist between their bodies. When this desire surfaces, the mystique is shattered. The desire, so expertly concealed and perhaps even enacted 'privately' in silent cruises or moments of admiration in some locker room, in pats on the ass out on the field and kisses in the pub, must now be addressed and crystallized in a public forum, before an audience. The Cuban adage for down-low homosexual encounters, '*se dice nada, se hace todo*' (say nothing, do everything) has been violated. What redeemed Goldust

was the kayfabe storylines that accompanied his queer presence: like Adrian Street, he was always associated in some manner with a female valet, Marlena (played by his then real-life spouse, Terri) and his orientation was always suggestive rather than explicit. His queerness could only remain a flirtation, as any truly queer desire in the narrative would probably not have allowed his character to achieve crossover status with fans. He was portrayed during later vignettes as harmless, comically afflicted with Tourette's syndrome, servile to "Stone Cold" Steve Austin (who suggestively shoved a hot dog into Goldust's mouth when his Tourette's outbursts became uncontrollable), and accompanied by a leg-humping dwarf called Hornswoggle who he dressed up like himself and nicknamed 'Minidust' in homage to Austin Powers. Moreover, the integrity of Goldust's character-identity is much more malleable than what is typical even in the chameleonic pro-wrestling industry. Generally, an actor will debut a character and play out that character's narrative along a linear progression before retiring the name or suspending it in hiatus—whereas, Goldust's character evolved into a queer jester role in which he unprecedentedly reinvented himself as parodies of various other wrestlers or even as public figures such as the aforementioned Powers, Prince (The Artist Formerly Known As Goldust), Marilyn Manson, and Steve 'The Crocodile Hunter' Irwin in irreverent and campy referential riffs on popular culture, yet maintained his underlying identity as Goldust. The most creative Goldust scenario involved Dustin Rhodes' rejection of the Goldust mantle and subsequent burning of the Goldust costume as he faked a transformation into born-again Christian and was often seen in the audience in mock protest of the sinful nature of the WWF, holding signs with messages such as "He Is Coming". These turned out to be referencing the messianic return of the Goldust character later in the season.

How can this simple relation encompass Goldust, how can he merely be a figure wearing a queer mask through which an audience could express hatred and disgust at the disclosure of some secret desire? In the specificity of his movements, his speeches, the poetic gesture of his very presence, there is something larger and perhaps indescribable at work, something that I can impotently call ‘poetic’ or refer to as ‘affect’ for lack of proper language to describe its strength. Indeed, this fleeting element of the queer monster is fading with the onslaught of neoliberal LGBT dogma. The trailer for a 2006 documentary called “Changing Perceptions: Profile Of An Openly Gay Pro Wrestler” produced and edited by Victor Rook, can be viewed on YouTube. (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IJ0Q0uL3a0Q&feature=endscreen>) It depicts a rather ‘homophobic’ interview with Adrian Street, and counterbalances it with a testimonial from a ‘real-life’ homosexual professional wrestler called Simon Sermon. Sermon states that he is not interested in incorporating “the make-up and the flowers”, not interested, in short, in what he rejects as an outmoded and anti-progressive queer performativity. His performativity is embedded in the heterosexual wrestling scene: he is merely wrestling *as* a gay man, not disrupting the flow of wrestling as a queer abomination. He makes a statement peculiar to homosexuals of the contemporary public scene who are interested in social acceptance and victory via relationality. The performance of homosexuality is therefore hijacked from its unproductive or untethered status as interruptive force and rerouted into the productive pathway; Sermon is most interested in ‘using’ his gayness to ‘do straightness better’.

*Queer Exuberance - Satire*

A middle-aged white woman, a citizen of the United States, appears before the city of Lincoln, Nebraska in opposition to a proposed ‘LGBT protection ordinance’. Her speech essentially “wants” to call for the censorship and strict policing of homosexuals in the public sphere, yet instead produces a sort of aimless, improvised rant. This woman is Jane Svoboda, a 52 year old resident of Lincoln and the inspiration for a Facebook page entitled ‘Crazy Blue Protesting Lady’ that, at last count, had over 3,500 ‘likes’. Ms. Svoboda is evidently a staple on the University of Nebraska-Lincoln’s campus, where she is often seen dressed in a blue jacket, handing out literature and pamphleteering to students. Svoboda’s entire five-minute ‘proposal’ reads like a transcript from a performance art piece, as the woman inadvertently reflects on queer abjection, the death drive, masks, and the demise of Whitney Houston:

“I’m Jane Svoboda. *Winter Wipeout* TV show had broken bones and manslaughter every minute. *Winter Wipeout* show is produced in Holland by gays, bis, and orgiers. Why do gays like to see people *perishing*? P-E-N-I-S goes into the anus to rupture intestines. More a man does this the more likely he’ll be a fatality or a homicider. Getting pleasure while the other man passes away reverberates another homicide later. UNESCO United Nations has gender and bioethics conferences combined. Only gays go to gender studies. Gays are the bioethics genociders in hospitals. Uh, ‘Children can be eliminated,’ the feds stated in this December eleventh article, uh, the Lincoln Journal Star, page six. Gays should not be employed in hospitals or any health occupation. Whitney Houston was found without clothes in a bathtub. Every corpse found without clothes has a partner that did away with them. (*Clears throat*) Lesbians and gays rarely live past forty years old because it is common for a partner to do away with them, or they self-inflict. (*Clears throat*) We want everyone to live as long as possible, to be *eighty* years old instead of *forty* years old. *Don’t go gay*, it’s not healthy. Anus licking causes sepsis. If not given antibiotics within a half hour, they perish. Uh, have no gays in education. A high percent of gay men in school grounds molest boys, partly because they don’t have AIDS yet. Be on the side of the innocent boy who gets F’s and D’s (*clears throat*) a year after being molested. *Don’t allow hundreds of molestations a year—with this equality-ordinance!* Where are our schoolteachers who should be speaking about this today? Hillary Clinton’s roommate four years in college was Eleanor or ‘Elde’ Acheson, a gay woman, daughter of Dean Acheson. To avoid going gay like Hillary Clinton did,

college students need single rooms and single gender dorms. Going lesbian is not normal; a college woman is seduced with illegal Rohypnol to go gay. Otherwise they think is ab-horrent. Lesbian professors state: ‘Wives are enslaved by their husbands’. All you married councilmen know this is not true! And this is deranged thinking. The Can—Have no gays in education, The Canadian Gaëtan Dugas was the first person to get AIDS in 1980. He depressed his immune system with pot; he ruptured intestines as his partner became a *corpse*! Candida fungus grows hugely on a *corpse*! AIDS is a Candida fungus disease. Roman senators went to Roman baths to be promiscuous gay, bis, and orgiers, then went to the Coliseum to watch Christians get mauled and *perish*! Do gays become diss-sasdistic? *Yes*! They cuss after coupling, don’t like the land they lay on, and eighty percent of those that did treason by the year 2000 were gays. Don’t employ gays in military, education, health, or psychology. They are the genociders, molesters, treasoners, and deranged. Gay is not a behavior, by the way— a gay *is* a behavior, it’s not an identity. Shoplifters don’t make good salespersons; gay’s behaviors aren’t needed for military, health, education, and psychology. Don’t encourage gays, do not harm gays. Gays can transform (Mediator: ‘One minute’) I have—let’s see, gays can transform to be celibate to live to be eighty years old. Uh-- (*pause*) Gay persons want to adopt children. The California Board of Education said last year ‘Children in San Francisco have the worst scholastics, failing all subjects, all grade levels. They cry all day and rape each other hetero without being told not to.’ Give us your molested children deranged by seeing only gays kissing. Don’t ask, don’t tell what you do in your bedroom and you’ll be respected for your work. Read the book *Nijinsky*, uh, to understand that bisexuals always become insane. A wedding dress is for a woman, not for a man. Jesus was kissed by Judas, a homo, who tried to sabotage Jesus’ kind ideas. Do you choose Jesus, a celibate, or Judas, a homo? You *have* to choose. This is a result of a ten-year study by over seven hundred psychologists PhDs, read ‘Crisis of Generational Pursuits (Mediator: That’s your five minutes) at any Lincoln City School.’ (Mediator: Thank you.)” –(2012 YouTube video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nMANMIe0ZZI>)

The overwhelming tone of this screed, delivered in a most bizarre and awkward manner, is assuredly “offensive”. However, to naively allow the reading of this performance (for this is undoubtedly what it is) to end there is not only to give undue and misplaced credit to the tirade, but also to entirely obscure its layers of poetic humor, overabundance of unbridled, absurd mental atmospheres, and overall extremely *queer* nature. Miss Svoboda’s presence at the public hearing, dressed in solid white with matching white hat in what is possibly an unconscious homage to queer sex columnist Dan Savage’s re-appropriation of *santorum* as a frothy mixture of

semen, feces, and blood that is excreted from the rectum following (what must be a particularly violent and badly timed) bout of anal sex, creates a palatable sense of discomfort amongst the audience members. One can sense, even from only viewing the proceedings on YouTube, that her presence was queer insofar as she disrupted the flow of the meeting with a moment of rupture so absurd that it actually strengthens any attack on 'right-wing lunacy' purported by 'liberal' discourses and the dominant discourse on 'gay marriage equality' by presenting an image of the most extreme facets of anti-gay propaganda as queer caricature. She *goes too far*, as it were, thereby betraying any allegiance to the moderate Right (although she almost certainly has some connection to the Tea Party, which is a kind of repository for disgruntled pseudo-libertarians and religious fanatics) via espousing views that have no political tether with which to be comfortably sold to a significant number of voters. Her explicit and mythic discussions of sex project outwards into the space of the council room like poisonous arrows, exploding the anti-sex Santorum speaking points into a form of stream-of-consciousness incantation. She seems to be articulating a series of vignettes in a display of what comedienne Maria Bamford might refer to as 'Unwanted Thoughts Syndrome'. We see a young man who is seated behind her squirm uncomfortably; he bursts into laughter, covers his mouth with a folder or sheet of paper, shakes his head in disbelief, and looks left and right in a desperate plea to connect with others who might be experiencing the powerful affect generated by Ms. Svoboda's speech.

A few days after the original YouTube video went viral, an article entitled: 'Video of testifier's anti-gay words goes viral, but there's more to the story' appeared on the Lincoln Journal Star website, which revealed that Ms. Svoboda is a diagnosed schizophrenic. It was revealed that Ms. Svoboda appears quite often before the

Lincoln City Council, and is a 'registered lobbyist'. The article treads a fine line between aiding in the ridicule attached to Svoboda's image and attempting to cast her as a sympathetic figure with quotes like: 'She once brought in a large stick figure that she said was her mother's ghost, but the council told her not to bring in props anymore.' The article laments the overwhelmingly callous and insensitive responses that had appeared in the comments sections of the various websites that had reported upon her tirade. Two rather interesting things occur in this article: first, the manner in which the author of the article fails to understand (and in so doing, provides a counterattack for liberal media) that the reason behind any misapprehension of Ms. Svoboda's condition is undoubtedly because it is Tea Party rhetoric *par excellence*, here taken to an unprecedented, unbalanced 'queer' performative. For many undiscerning viewers of Svoboda's speech, this was simply an especially insane person from a growingly insane set of messaging that is not too far removed from "the real thing". The line between mental illness and Tea Party rhetoric is thus obscured. More urgently, however, is the instant disqualification of Ms. Svoboda's rights to speak as human via the conjuring of her illness. It is as though a schizophrenic is incapable of harboring a viewpoint, and that any affirmation of agency can be nullified by invoking their illness: they are not really a person, but a chaotic assemblage of irrationalities and neurons misfiring, and so their words are meaningless. This is an issue that has been taken up by psychiatrist and author Thomas Szasz and others. Further, in momentarily using the common parlance of "queering" that had currency in certain critical theory practices over the past few decades ("queering" the text, for example), Ms. Svoboda's illness makes her *too queer* to speak on queers; yet, her "sane" counterparts deploy the very arguments she

puts forth, and often via methods that are scarcely less performative than Svoboda's tirade.

There is perhaps no greater example of this overabundance of sabotaging fanatical rhetoric than its current deployment as satirical commentary on the website ChristWire.org, whose byline reads "Conservative Values for an Unsaved World". The website frequently attracts the ire of unwittingly complicit liberal reactionaries as well as support from overzealous Christians, and creates a stirring and effective discussion around these notions of taking discourse too far, to the point where it "fails" by betraying the subject it so vehemently and mythically espouses. Notable figures duped by ChristWire's brilliant satire include Howard Stern and Rachel Maddow.

The website's most infamous author is one Stephenson Billings; his author byline on ChristWire describes him as an "investigative journalist, motivational children's party entertainer, and antique soda bottle collector all in one special, blessed package." Billings' articles tend toward the vehemently anti-gay, with a brilliant twist: he almost always implicates himself as a repressed homosexual and often as a pedophile via his musings. His profile on ChristWire goes so far as to explicitly eroticize his experience of being born again at age 33, when he: "...wept such hot, messy tears like a child. That's the experience I want to share with young people. That's what gets me up in the morning and keeps me awake at night." Billings' tears are suggestively his ejaculate, hot and messy, and the gift of orgasm bestowed from adult to child is the gateway to spiritual rebirth. As Hocquenghem's "libidinal reinvestment of the anus" seeks to destabilize heteronormativity via the enactment of anality (rimming, anal sex) as epiphany, Billing's "hot, messy tears" satirically destabilize and make explicit the pedophilic relation that has become the

unspoken code, for instance, of the discourses surrounding Catholicism in contemporary media coverage. The priest's erotic pleasure in the body of the young boy is the path to Christ. Not only that, but this is Billings' very ontological mode. It "gets him up" in the morning" and fills his nights with preoccupation. He performs the predator, with special emphasis placed on the exaggeratedly oblivious form of the messaging.

In an interesting development, ChristWire creators Bryan Butvidas and Kirwin Watson gave an interview where they admitted to the site's satirical nature but added that Billings was a mysterious figure who had begun sending them unsolicited articles and whose actual levels of satirical elbow-jabbing were unknown to them, being that he refused to meet them personally or appear in public. I am personally convinced of Billings' being in on the joke, as it were. I am a friend of his on Facebook and daily marvel at his posts, which present him as a clown fetishist and yet continue to draw in duped individuals to post incredulous and enraged comments, from both sides of the debate. Billings, regardless of allegiances, is quite a brilliant online presence. His ability to enrage and confuse is nearly unprecedented; further, a number of the topics he chooses to rail against, especially concerning homosexual males, are often thinly veiled and astute commentaries on homonationalism, homonormativity, and the body fascism of homosexual public scenes. He is undoubtedly Puar's most unlikely ally. My first encounter with Billings' work was in 2009; he wrote an article entitled '*The Golden Girls: How One TV Show Turned A Generation Of American Boys Into Homosexuals*', which brilliantly skewers the 1980s sitcom (one of my favorites, incidentally) in a manner that, like Ms. Svoboda, also replicates queer strategies of critique. For Billings, this is conveyed in the stereotypically 'catty' tone peculiar to homosexuals in his discussions of the actresses' wardrobes, personalities, and

mannerisms. For instance, the first line of Billings' article reads: 'The Golden Girls television program was never much to look at.' This barbed insult is a classic example of what, in the drag world, is known as 'throwing shade'. The manner of delivery is veiled, indirect, and carries the weight of implication. What is so brilliant about this method of attack is that it is one of the most prominent comedic devices of *The Golden Girls* deadpan character Dorothy Zbornak (portrayed by the late, great Bea Arthur) during one of her trademark criticisms of one of the other characters on the show. Dorothy would often finger a bit of lint, unseen to the viewer, on the sleeve of her victim's sweater as she nonchalantly insulted them, as if examining a sub-par specimen that is nearly unfit for her discerning eyes. Thus, an unlikely bridge is formed between Billings and the object of his supposed attack. He conveys a bitterness and hidden desire of contact with the decadent homosexual bodies he 'attacks'; it is highly reminiscent of the famous moment in Thomas Mann's novel *Death In Venice*, when the protagonist Aschenbach is on a boat to Venice and expresses a kind of fascinated disgust with an older homosexual man he meets there whom he identifies with the transfixed public mask of queerness. As the novel progresses, Aschenbach begins to recognize his own impending transformation into this sort of man; it is a plunge into the abyss.

Billings also criticizes the women of *The Golden Girls* in a misogynistic turn that recalls the very sexist tactics peculiar to homonormative gender policing. It is characterized by an exceptionalism based in a false sense of familiarity with the subject one is criticizing; a gay man claims an entitlement to speak viciously of women because he invokes the mask of the gay expert in matters of femaleness. This is an unspoken weapon in Billings' either satirical or else brilliantly oblivious bag of tricks. One of the great travesties of anti-queer sentiment centers around the notion of

“lifestyle choice”, in which critics question and reject the selection of queerness as a practice. What is often undisclosed or even unrealized about this rejection is the idea that the object of obsession is not a lifestyle per se, but merely the choice to engage in or to avoid queer sex. Abstinence is held up as the escape route. And yet, the socialities of queerness, the ways in which queer bodies articulate publicly, show themselves undeterred in some of our contemporary scene’s most supposedly conservative zones. In fact, a number of prominent anti-queer voices employ the performative sociality of faggotry, which I will describe shortly, as *the* means by which their most venomous views are expressed. I argue that since there are a number of accompanying presuppositions embedded within Western faggotry that embody presentability, cruelty, precise and cutting criticality, and fascistic wisdom or expertise, that it provides an ideal template in matters of persuasive public conveyance. Of course, the American public constantly hears stories about those male political and religious figures that enforce anti-queer rhetoric most vehemently engaging covertly in the very practices that they deplore. These are all well documented scenarios, and they are reported upon luridly and with a sort of perverse pleasure by the media at a constantly multiplying rate. Yet, what seems more compelling is not that queer desire flows amongst these forbidding bodies, but that the most performative queer socialities are their weapons and that these socialities have the uncanny ability to conjure an ambiguous and fruitful zone of possibility. Fascinatingly, this figure aligns themselves with some basic tenets of radical queer thought by sabotaging the message that he is ostensibly supporting. He does this by positioning the homosexual as the centerpiece of the dissolution of American values and giving voice to the national obsession with homosexuality. In this way, the performance of a figure like radio presenter Michael Savage illustrates this point

repeatedly. During one of his trademark anti-gay marriage broadcasts from 2009 which has since been uploaded to YouTube, he describes a clandestine group of “white communists” who use a fictitious category of people, namely the “homosexual community”, to “push a radical Marxist agenda” onto America by using gay marriage as a tool for sabotaging and dissolving the heteronormative family unit. Savage, perhaps inadvertently, voices the potentiality of queerness as an instrumentalized event; that which has the “power” to dissolve normalcy. He voices this threat cloaked in the sociality of faggotry: a voice that many gay people identify as homosexual, a manner of critique that “reads” politicians for not being as well-read as he, and an assurance of experience that ensures the listener of eventual epiphany and gratitude. With Savage, whose real name is Michael Weiner, there has been an exhaustive effort by the media to paint him as a closeted, self-loathing homosexual by uncovering his past associations with Allen Ginsberg and quoting excerpts from a semi-autobiographical novel he wrote in 1983 called *Vital Signs*: “I choose to override my desires for men when they swell in me, waiting out the passions like a storm, below decks.” (Weiner, 23) So, the figure that emerges through the various signals occupies an indeterminate zone: a figure who might or might not be queer, who might or might be aware of the potentiality of his language, and whose history, or what is known of it publicly, might or might not have steered his behavior towards this space.

## *Conclusion*

This thesis has attempted to reconcile two major conceptual forces at play within the framework of homosexual public representation and functionality; namely, containment and excess. It has tried, in the course of its analyses, to begin the work of mapping a historical trajectory. In this trajectory, the figure of the homosexual is first located in his excessive form; he is reviled, policed, murdered, experimented upon. His birth, as such, is an aberration. Ultimately, his sociality is contingent upon the possibility of his containment. This is to say that in order for homosexual to exist publicly, his public mask (as I have perhaps questionably referred to his sociality in this work) had to, through various means, be molded in order to fit pre-existing, recognizable social templates. The monster that he was recognized as had to be tempered to a less threatening, or at least less excessive, force. In the gay expertise analyses I have attempted to reconcile the method by which this containment comes into play as a largely self-styled apparatus in the postmodern age. I have positioned this as a contemporary, 21<sup>st</sup> century phenomenon that is conveyed to the public via the genre of reality television and, specifically, the sub-genre of the lifestyle expert program beginning in 2003 with *Queer Eye*. Moreover, I have attempted, through a survey of the work of such early gay liberationist figures as Edward Carpenter, to connect this phenomenon to a sort of logical, linear tradition in which the homosexual approaches the social as a figure of wisdom.

Second, I have explored the notion of queerness in its relation to the discipline of queer theory and queer analyses of texts, beginning with the work of radical theorist and activist Guy Hocquenghem. In a sense, what this historical trajectory reveals is a cyclical scheme that the figure of the homosexual traverses across time, and which splits off into various sub-trajectories. Some of these, such as the radical

queer politics trajectory, attempt to recuperate and functionalize the notion of excess for political, strategic ends. So, the cycle fluctuates between moments wherein containment and excess are necessary states of being given to particular modes of representation and political ends. The debate, as it stands within current queer studies conversations, still rests within this polarity. The details of its arguments modify and shift with time, and as the analyses within this thesis attempt to show, often lead to dead end conversation, stifled by the repetition of the ages. Yet, as I have also shown, there are also moments in which potential to alter the substantive elements of the debate appear in the form of potentialities, shifts of affect, strategic discursive impulses, and utopic divergences.

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