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#### Their idea that by hacking the resolution and debate they can challenge capitalist capture is false. Capitalism thrives on that narrative of “escape”. Disrupting a logic or social system cannot solve, boring analysis of structures is necessary.

Bluhdorn 07 – (May 2007, Ingolfur, PhD, Reader in Politics/Political Sociology, University of Bath, “Self-description, Self-deception, Simulation: A Systems-theoretical Perspective on Contemporary Discourses of Radical Change,” Social Movement Studies, Vol. 6, No. 1, 1–20, May 2007, google scholar)

Yet the **established patterns of self-construction, which** thus **have to be defended and** further **developed** at any price, **have fundamental problems** attached to them: ﬁrstly, **the attempt to constitute, on the basis of** product choices and acts of **consumption, a Self and identity** that are **distinct from and autonomous vis-a`-vis the market is a contradiction in terms**. Secondly, **late-modern society’s established patterns of consumption are known to be socially exclusive and environmentally destructive**. Despite all hopes for ecological modernization and revolutionary improvements in resource efﬁciency (e.g. Weizsa¨cker et al., 1998; Hawkenet al., 1999; Lomborg, 2001), **physical environmental limits imply that the lifestyles and established patterns of consumption** cherished by advanced modern societies **cannot even be extended to all residents of the richest countries**, let alone to the populations of the developing world. For the sake of the (re)construction of an ever elusive Self, **in their struggle against self-referentiality** and in pursuit of the regeneration of difference, **late-modern societies are** thus **locked into the imperative of maintaining** and further developing the principle of **exclusion** (Blu¨hdorn, 2002, 2003). At any price they have to, and indeed do, defend **a lifestyle that requires ever increasing social inequality, environmental degradation, predatory resource wars, and the tight policing of potential internal and external enemies**.14 For this effort, **military and surveillance technology provide ever more sophisticated and efﬁcient means**. Nevertheless, the principle of **exclusion is ultimately still unsustainable, not only because of spiralling ‘security’ expenses but also because it** directly **contradicts the** modernist **notion of the free and autonomous individual** that late-modern society desperately aims to sustain. For this reason, late-modern society is confronted with the task of having to sustain both the late-modern principle of exclusion as well as its opposite, i.e. the modernist principle of inclusion. Very importantly, the conﬂict between the principles of exclusion and inclusion is not simply one between different individuals, political actors or sections of society. Instead, it is a politically irresolvable conﬂict that resides right within the late-modern individual, the late-modern economy and late-modern politics. And if, as Touraine notes, late-modern society no longer believes in nor even desires political transcendence, the particular challenge is that the two principles can also no longer be attributed to different dimensions of time, i.e. the former to the present, and the latter to some future society. Instead, late-modern society needs to represent and reproduce itself and its opposite at the same time. If considered **within this framework** of this analysis, the function of Luhmann’s system of protest communication, or in the terms of this article, **the signiﬁcance of** late-modern societies’ **discourses of radical change becomes immediately evident**. **At a stage when the possibility** and desirability **of transcending** the principle of **exclusion has been pulled into** radical **doubt but when**, at the same time, the principle of **inclusion is vitally important**, **these discourses simulate the validity of the latter as a social ideal**. In other words, **latemodern society reconciles the tension between the** cherished but exclusive **status quo** – for which there is no alternative – **and the non-existent** inclusive **alternative** – on whose existence it depends – **by means of simulation**. The analysis of Luhmann’s work has demonstrated how the societal self-descriptions produced by the system of protest communication, or late-modern society’s discourses of radical change, fulﬁl this function exactly. **They are** an **indispensable** function system not so much because they help to resolve late-modern society’s problems of mal-coordination, but because by performing the possibility of the alternative they help to cope with the fundamental problem of self-referentiality. In this sense, late-modern society’s discourses of sustainability, democratic renewal, social inclusion or global justice, to name but a few, suggest that advanced modern society is working towards an environmentally and socially inclusive alternative – genuinely modern – society, but they do not deny the fact that the big utopia and project of late-modern society is the reproduction and further enhancement of the status quo, i.e. the sustainability of the principle of exclusion. Protest movements as networks of physical actors and actions complement the purely communicative **discourses of radical change** in that they bring their narrative and societal selfdescription to life. Whilst the declarations of institutionalized mainstream politics cannot escape the generalized suspicion that they are purely rhetorical, social movements **provide an arena for** the physical expression and **experience of the authenticity and reality of the alternative**

#### Their model of fem activism through transgression replicates neoliberalism by refusing the promise of collective transformation

Drucker 15 [Peter Drucker (Peter has emerged in the 21st century as a leading Marxist scholar in queer studies. His special contributions concern the roots of 'homonormativity' in neoliberalism, the impact of neoliberal globalization on same-sex sexualities in dependent countries, and links between queer and anti-capitalist resistance. He is also working on a series of studies on gender and sexual dimensions of Islamophobia, in both Europe and the Middle East. Finally, he continues his long-term work on the history of US and European socialism, connecting it to the left's record on feminist and LGBTIQ issues.); 2015; “Warped: Gay Normality and Queer Anti-Capitalism”; <https://books.google.com/books?id=_ByoBgAAQBAJ&pg=PA301> //BWSWJ]

As long as alliances with broader forces of the anti-capitalist left remain few and limited, radical queer activists face the task themselves of working out positions for queer anti-capitalist politics and translating them into public organ-ising and activism. Self-identified radical queer groups have existed, at least intermittently, for the past quarter-century, as a `punky, anti-assimilationist, transgressive movement on the fringe of lesbian and gay culture',7' and a milieu that is 'disgusted by marriage and military and that longs to return' to a radical vision.72 Politically, a wave of Queer Nation groups, following on the 1987 March on Washington and the rise of ACT UP, originated in the us as part of the largest and most militant wave of LGBT activism since the 197os. The different forms of AIDS activism and queer activism that emerged initially in the us and Britain in the late 198os and early 199os posed a radical challenge to established lesbian/gay rights organisations. Self-defined queer activist groups have also appeared more recently in a number of countries in continental Europe. The Pink Panthers in Paris and Lisbon73 have forged a dynamic, Latin European variant of international queer radicalism. Queer-identified groups are also beginning to spring up here and there in dependent countries. But queer radicals' ability to contend for influence in LGBT movements or to set the agenda of sexual politics more generally has been held in check by a number of factors. Queer radicalism emerged in an overall context of societal reaction, in which LGBT militancy was largely isolated from and unsupported by its logical allies. This led to some disturbing ambiguities. Queer ideology has been hard to pin down. In the imperialist countries that have so far been radical queers' main base, the predominant ideological current among them has been a fairly diffuse anarchism. Queer groups have yet to show much of an orientation towards large-scale mobilisation, to take root among the racially and nationally oppressed, or to prove their lasting adaptability to the dependent world.74 While large anti-capitalist parties have rarely made links with Queer radicalism, queer radicals have rarely found their way to a broad political audience. In this sense, the limits of anti-capitalist parties and of small radical queer groups mirror each other. The early Queer Nation groups reflected a certain break in the movement's memory. Although many of the practical stands and philosophical or theoretical points they made had originally been made by an earlier generation of the lesbian/gay liberation movement, young queers were often unaware of this. The emergence of Queer Nation as a distinctive, insurgent current thus showed the failure of lesbian/gay liberation to transmit its history, to make its values prevail in actually existing LGBT communities, or to sustain a vibrant left wing in the LGBT movement. By comparison with early lesbian/gay liberationists, early Queer Nation groups had an even more voluntarist or even idealist mind-set. They tended to see queer identity as consciously chosen and crafted. Many LGBT identities have in fact had a voluntary dimension. In some cases, this has distinguished LGBT oppression from oppression based on race, gender or disability, which are generally not chosen but visible, material and unavoidable. But this is only one aspect of LGBT oppression. The fact that women living apart from men have lower living standards is not chosen; the fact that even the most closeted LGBT people could for generations lose their jobs or homes was not chosen; the fact that the great majority of LGBT people still grow up in straight families is not chosen. Many trans people, however well they fit into a queer milieu as 'gender queers, also do not feel that they have chosen their identities. As early as 1992, failure to tackle trans issues effectively in Queer Nation San Francisco led to the formation of a separate Transgender Nation, though overall the queer milieu proved more supportive than lesbian/gay and feminist milieus had been in the 1970s. The intersex community, which began organising politically with the founding in 1993 of the Intersex Society of North America,75 seems less easy to include under a queer umbrella, largely because intersex people usually have no choice at all about being intersex. Despite its implicit and increasingly explicit opposition to neoliberalism, queer radicalism has also had an ambivalent relationship to the commercial gay scene. It has resisted the assimilationism that it sees the commercial scene as promoting. But a whole series of Queer Nation actions in the 199os focused on invading shopping malls and modifying logos on t-shirts — a tac-tic that risked replacing critiques of consumerism with alternative forms of consumption.76 This contrasted with more frontal rejections of consumerism that were also present in queer direct action groups, like the chant We're here, we're queer, we're not going shopping!' used by ACT UP San Francisco a few years earlier. The sexual radicalism of queer politics has had a complex and contradic-tory relationship to the realities of gender, race and class. Initially, ACT UP reflected the manifest need to respond to AIDS with 'a new kind of alliance politics ...across the dividing lines of race and gender, class and national-ity, citizenship and sexual orientation'.77 Yet queer activism has sometimes obscured rather than highlighted these realities, with an exclusive focus on sex that can erase its intersections with gender, class and race. This erasure can be facilitated by queer politics' slippage from radical anti-separatism to one more form of identity politics, which can rest on 'an unspoken appeal' to a white middle-class model.78 For women in particular, the emphasis on sexual agency that has always been central to queer, while avoiding seeing women exclusively as victims, risks divorcing 'pleasure and sexuality ... from the social structures that organize them'.79 Although the name Queer Nation and its angry separatist spirit were reminiscent of Lesbian Nation, only 20 percent of the original group was lesbian. Its lesbian, working-class and black members began reproaching it early on for being oblivious to their concerns.80 Barbara Smith complained that for Queer Nation 'racism, sexual oppression and economic exploitation [did] not qualify' as queer issues.81 Queer politics in the late 198os and early 1990s largely failed to appeal to alternative scenes and identities rooted among people of colour and women; a number of Queer Nation groups split amid charges of racism and sexism. Nor did the queer contingents and groups that emerged within or joined in the global justice movement, particularly after the 1999 Seattle protests — a promising component of the queer left — succeed to any great extent in linking up with or contributing to shaping alternative queer identities. Clearly there is no straightforward correlation between queer radicalism and working-class politics as such. On the contrary, LGBT working people and particularly non-whites have sometimes reacted against queer radicalism when it demanded visibility of them that would make their lives more difficult in their communities, families or unions. The problem arises when the alternative to assimilation or homonormativity is defined not as organised resistance in forms compatible with long-term survival, but as 'transgression' or 'freedom from norms. This implies the exclusion of those who are 'positioned as not free in the same way'.82 Even when queer anti-capitalists work inside existing queer radical groups, they need to put forward a distinctive approach that challenges the limitations of these groups' politics. Resisting the retreat from class in LGBT activism, queer anti-capitalists should challenge not only heterosexism among straights and gay normality, but also blanket hostility to straights and non-queer-iden-tified gays where it exists among some self-identified queers. When directed against gay men, this hostility risks selectively reproducing traditional homophobic stereotypes of gays as privileged and powerful: images that are seduc-tive in a time of rising homonormativity, but problematic if they do not reflect the ongoing reality of gay oppression. Avoiding all these pitfalls will require seeking new tactics and forms of organising within queer groups.

#### The aff’s rejection of the specific details of political engagement is not radical but continues the prevailing mode of leftist cynicism that eviscerates our ability to construct alternatives to political domination

Burgum ‘15 (Samuel, PhD candidate in Sociology at the University of Warwick and has been conducting research with Occupy London since 2012, “The branding of the left: between spectacle and passivity in an era of cynicism,” *Journal for Cultural Research*, Volume 19, Issue 3)

Rather than the Situationist spectacle, then, I argue that the reason those on the left are rendered post-politically impotent to bring about change is not because we are deceived, but because we enact apathy despite ourselves. In other words, the relationship between the resistive subject and ideology is not one of false consciousness, but one of cynicism: we are not misdirected by shallow spectacles, but instead somehow distracted by our cynical belief that we are being “distracted”. In this section, I begin by outlining the concept of cynicism as it has been theorised by Peter Sloterdijk and Slavoj Žižek. This then leads us to an analysis of the cynical position adopted by Brand’s critics, which I argue actually demonstrates more political problems on the part of the left than those suggested by Brand himself. For Sloterdijk, cynicism is an attitude that emerges right at the centre of the enlightenment project, where, in contrast to a modernist illumination of truth, “a twilight arises, a deep ambivalence” (1987, p. 22). Rather than the promised heightened consciousness of science that would allow us to see the hidden essential truths behind appearances, the very conception of truth as unconcealedness (aletheia)3 instead creates a widespread mistrust and suspicion of every appearance. Subsequently, “a new form of realism bursts forth, a form that is driven by the fear of becoming deceived or overpowered … everything that appears to us could be a deceptive manoeuvre of an overpowering evil enemy” (Sloterdijk, 1987, p. 330). The surface becomes suspect and the subject therefore retreats from all appearances: judging them to be spectacles that are seeking to oppress through falsity. The result is cynicism. Subsequently, this leads Sloterdijk to his well-known paradoxical definition of cynicism as “enlightened false consciousness” which he describes as a “modernized, unhappy consciousness on which enlightenment has laboured both successfully and in vain … it has learned its lessons in enlightenment, but it has not, probably was not able to, put them into practice” (1987, p. 5). In other words, in the search for a higher consciousness behind appearances, the subject is paradoxically “duped” by their very suspicion of being duped. Furthermore, because the subject thinks they “know” that appearances are just a mask, they disbelieve the truth when it does appear. Like the story of the Emperor’s New Clothes, they fancy themselves to know what is right in front of their eyes (that the emperor is nude and vulnerable) yet they choose “not to know” and don’t act upon it (they still act as if the emperor is all-powerful). As such, cynical reason is no longer naïve, but is a paradox of enlightened false consciousness: one knows the falsehood very well, one is well aware of a particular hidden interest hidden behind the ideological universality, but still one does not renounce it. (Žižek, 1989, p. 23) The audience to the parade of power can see that the emperor is not divine – just a fragile human body like the rest of us – yet they cynically choose not to know and objectively retain his aura. They congratulate themselves on “knowing” that Brand is a trivial spectacle, yet they choose to remain apathetic towards his calls for action. As such, the dismissive reaction to Brand reveals a regressive interpassive tendency of the left to subjectively treat ourselves as “enlightened” to authentic politics and yet objectively render ourselves passive. In a kind of defence mechanism, the left believes that it can avoid becoming the dupe of the latest fashion or advertising trend by treating everything as a matter of fashion and advertising, reassuring ourselves as we flip through television channels or browse through the shopping mall that at least we know what’s really going on. (Stanley, 2007, p. 399) The critics disbelieve Brand, distrusting his motives and seeing him as inauthentic, yet they continue to “believe” objectively in their own marginalisation. As such, the cynical left believe they are dismissing shallow spectacle in the direction of a stronger authentic radicalism, yet what their “doing believes” is the maintenance of their apathetic position. More precisely, it maintains the attitudes of left melancholy and anti-populism. The problem of “left melancholy” points towards the forever-delayed search for authenticity on the part of a cynical left that is in mourning. Coined by Walter Benjamin (1998), the concept points towards “the revolutionary who is, finally, attached more to a particular political analysis or ideal – even to the failure of that ideal – than to seizing possibilities for radical change in the present” (Brown, 1999, p. 19). Suffering from a history of defeat and embarrassment, the left persist in a narcissistic identification with failure, fetishising the “good old days” and remaining faithful to lost causes. As Benjamin himself points out, the cynical kernel of this attitude is clear, as “melancholy betrays the world for the sake of knowledge … but in its tenacious self-absorption it embraces dead objects in its consumption in order to redeem them” (1998, p. 157). In other words, the sentiment is a deliberate self-sabotage that takes place even before politics proper has a chance to begin or “the paradox of an intention to mourn that precedes and anticipates the loss of the object” (Žižek, 2001, p. 146). This then leads us to the second problem of leftist cynicism: anti-populism. As a result of melancholia, the left has developed the bad habit of prejudging all instances of popular radical expression (such as Brand’s) as necessarily flawed. However, to return to Dean again, she points out that this aversion to being popular and successful is a defining feature of a contemporary left, who prefer to adopt an “authentic” underdog position in advance than take risks towards political power. As she argues, “we” on the left see “ourselves” as “always morally correct but never politically responsible” (Dean, 2009, p. 6) prepositioned as righteous victims and proud political losers from the outset. What this cynicism towards instances of popular radicalism ultimately means, therefore, is that any concern for authenticity is ultimately a regressive one, a defence mechanism for a left that “as long as it sees itself as defeated victims, can refrain from having to admit is short on ideas” (Dean, 2009, p. 5). Such an attitude means never risking potential failure and residing in the safety of marginal righteousness. It is the contention here, therefore, that both melancholia and anti-populism can be seen in the cynical reaction to Brand’s radicalism. Somewhat ironically, Brand (2013) even recognised these problems himself when he wrote in his *New Statesman* piece that the right seeks converts while the left seeks traitors … this moral superiority that is peculiar to the left is a great impediment towards momentum … for an ideology that is defined by inclusiveness, socialism has become in practice quite exclusive. Automatically, then, the left denounce Brand and self-proclaimed “radical left-wing thinkers and organisers” bitterly complain how he is getting so much attention for the arguments they have been making for years (for example, Park & Nastasia, 2013). The left maintain distance and label Brand trivial, yet such a distance only renders these critiques even more marginal and prevents them from becoming popular, effective or counter-hegemonic. As Žižek has pointed out, the political issue of cynicism is “not that people ‘do not know what they want’ but rather that cynical resignation prevents them from acting upon it, with the result that a weird gap opens up between what people think and how they act”, adding that “today’s post-political silent majority is not stupid, but it is cynical and resigned” (2011, p. 390). In terms of Brand, this blanket cynical melancholy is typical of the left’s distrust of anything popular, rendering them “like the last men” whose “immediate reaction to idealism is mocking cynicism” (Winlow & Hall, 2012, p. 13). Proponents of a radical alternative immediately adopt caution with the effect of forever delaying change, holding out for that real and authentic (unbranded) struggle and therefore denying it indefinitely.

#### The alternative is to theorize through Marxist Materialism – only collective action focused on a unified front can produce a queer anti-capitalism

Drucker 11 [Peter Drucker; “The Fracturing of LGBT Identities under Neoliberal Capitalism”; Historical Materialism 19.4 (2011) 3–32; <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.1000.69&rep=rep1&type=pdf> //BWSWJ]

Recognising the deep roots of the fracturing of same-sex identities necessarily puts in question any universalism that ignores class, gender, sexual, cultural, racial/ethnic and other differences within LGBT communities. These communities and identities are being fractured in large part by fundamental changes in the productive and reproductive order of gendered capitalism. Young queers, working-class and poor LGBTs, transgendered people and other marginalised groups have increasingly found themselves in objectively different situations from people in the consolidating gay mainstream. It is thus no surprise that they have tended to some extent to define distinct identities. The forms taken by alternative, non-homonormative sexual identities do not necessarily win them easy acceptance among feminists or socialists. The lesbian/gay identity that emerged by the 1970s had much to commend it from the broad-Left’s point of view (once the Left had largely overcome its initial homophobia). By contrast, transgendered and other queers can raise the hackles of many on the Left, since their sexuality strikes many as at variance with the mores to be expected and hoped for in an egalitarian, peaceful, rational future. One may doubt, however, whether any sexuality existing under capitalism can serve as a model for sexualities to be forecast or desired under socialism. Nor is it useful to privilege any particular existing form of sexuality in present-day struggles for sexual liberation. Socialists’ aim should not be to replace the traditional ‘hierarchical system of sexual value’85 with a new hierarchy of our own. As Amber Hollibaugh pointed out many years ago, sexual history has first of all to be ‘able to talk realistically about what people are sexually’.86 And in radical struggles over sexuality, as in radical struggles over production, the basic imperative is to welcome and stimulate self-organisation and resistance by people subjected to exploitation, exclusion, marginalisation or oppression, in the forms that oppressed people’s own experience proves to be most effective. This is not to say that Marxists should simply adopt a liberal attitude of unthinking approval of sexual diversity in general, in a spirit of ‘anything goes’. Our central concern must be to advance the sexual liberation of the working class and its allies, who today include straights, LGBs and – particularly among its most oppressed layers – transgendered and other queers. Resisting the retreat from class in LGBT activism and queer studies, Marxists should combat heterosexism and bourgeois hegemony among straights, homonormativity and bourgeois hegemony among LGBs, and blanket hostility to straights and non-queer-identified gays where it exists among self-identified queers. This will require seeking new tactics and forms of organising within LGBT movements. The post-Stonewall lesbian/gay movement waged an effective fight against discrimination and won many victories on the basis of an identity widely shared by those engaged in same-sex erotic or emotional relationships. But this classic lesbian/gay identity has not been the only basis in history for movements for sexual emancipation. In the German homophile-struggle from 1897 to 1933, for example, Magnus Hirschfeld’s Scientific-Humanitarian Committee, the wing of the movement closer to the social-democratic Left, tended to put forward polarised ‘third sex’-theories.87 This is what one might predict on the basis of the evidence that egalitarian gay identities were at first primarily a middle-class phenomenon, while transgender and gender-polarised patterns persisted longer in the working class and among the poor.88 Today in the dependent world as well, transgender identities seem to be more common among the less prosperous and less Westernised.89 Rather than privileging same-sex sexualities more common among the less oppressed, however superficially egalitarian, the Left should be particularly supportive of those same-sex sexualities more common among the most oppressed, however polarised. Another important consideration is the challenge that alternative, nonhomonormative sexualities can sometimes pose to the reification of sexual desire that the categories of lesbian, gay, bisexual and straight embody. Marxists question the fantasy of consumers under neoliberalism that obtaining the ‘right’ commodities will define them as unique individuals and secure their happiness; we should not uncritically accept an ideology that defines individuals and their happiness on the basis of a quest for a partner of the ‘right’ gender.90 How will LGBT communities and movements be structured in a time of increasingly divergent identities? Self-defined queer activist-groups, which emerged initially in the US and Britain in the early 1990s, have also appeared in recent years in a number of countries in continental Europe. They pose a radical challenge to mainstream lesbian/gay organisations, although they have yet to show much of an orientation towards large-scale mobilisation, to take root among the racially and nationally oppressed, or to prove their adaptability to the dependent world.91 In countries where civil rights and same-sex marriage have been won, the process of seeking new horizons and finding appropriate forms of organising seems likely to be a prolonged one – especially since the LGBT social and political landscape seems likely to remain more fragmented and conflict-ridden than it was in the immediate post-Stonewall period. While lesbian/gay identity has lost the central place it occupied in the LGBT world of the 1970s and ’80s, it is still far from marginalised; on the contrary, the new homonormativity shows no signs of succumbing to queer assaults in the foreseeable future. In the dependent world particularly, the diversity of LGBT communities has resulted in an alliance-model of organising as an alternative or a supplement to the model of a single, broad, unified organisation. The broadest possible unity across different identities remains desirable in basic fights against violence, criminalisation and discrimination as well as more ambitious struggles for equality, for example in parenting. On other issues, LGBT rights can be best defended by working and demanding space within broader movements, such as trade-unions, the women’s movement and the global justice movement.92 At the same time, an alliance-model has in some cases facilitated the process of negotiating unity among constituencies – such as transgendered people on the one hand and lesbian/gay people on the other93 – who are unlikely to feel fully included in any one unitary structure. It can constitute a united front between those whose identities fit the basic parameters of the gay-straight divide and those whose identities do not, fostering the development of a truly queer conception of sexuality that, in Gloria Wekker’s words, is ‘multiple, malleable, dynamic, and possessing male and female elements’.94 In a more visionary perspective, developing an inclusive, queer conception of sexuality can be seen as a way to move towards that ‘truly free civilization’ that Herbert Marcuse described a half-century ago in Eros and Civilization, in which ‘all laws are self-given by the individuals’, the values of ‘play and display’ triumph over those of ‘productiveness and performance’, the entire human personality is eroticised, and the ‘instinctual substance’ of ‘the perversions . . . may well express itself in other forms’.95

#### Capitalism is the root cause of heteronormativity and a politics that queers socialism provides the best analytical tools to solve it

Sears 13 [Alan Sears (Sears is the author of, among other works, "Queer in a Lean World" and “Queer Anti-Capitalism: What's Left of Lesbian and Gay Liberation?” and co-author with James Cairns of The Democratic Imagination) interviewed by Andrew Sernatinger & Tessa Echeverria (Andrew Sernatinger and Tessa Echeverria are socialists based in Madison, Wisconsin. This interview was recorded for their podcast, Black Sheep Radio); November 6, 2013; Queering Socialism: An Interview with Alan Sears; New Politics; <http://newpol.org/content/queering-socialism-interview-alan-sears>; //BWSWJ]

TWE: I see that issue all the time where there's a lot of new queer theory coming out, but how do you relate that back to real world experiences and everyday lives in the U.S.? How do your take that language and make it be inclusive not just to people who have those different identities that fall under queer but also for allies and those who want to work together without making it sound like if you don't have our language you can't be my ally. It’s a fine line to walk.

Sears: One of the things that will begin to change that, or solve the puzzle for us, will be when gender and sexual liberation becomes more of a movement again. When there's not a movement, one is less concerned with persuading anybody of anything, so your political terms can become more of a test of whether you have the prerequisites or not than they are terms to move and excite people. It becomes much more of an issue when you're actually trying to build a movement, and building alliances that really do matter.

I firmly believe that we in Canada have more formal rights than in the United States, and these are explicitly lesbian and gay rights: marriage, workplace benefits, and that kind of stuff. A lot of that has to do with the way the union movement in Canada from the early 1980's on really took on lesbian and gay rights. That required a whole lot of alliance building and careful work, so that when the Canadian Union of Postal Workers went on strike in 1981, they fought for both full pay for maternity leave for women and non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in the workplace. That wasn't because it was primarily a queer union. It was because people did the hard alliance work in what was a very radical union, to say, “If we're radical, we need to defend the rights of women, the rights of gays and lesbians, and so on.”

Andrew Sernatinger (AS): That's a good transition because I was going to ask about some of your work where you've written about how gender and sexual identities develop and change in capitalism, and how that has a lot to do with how capitalist work is organized. I was hoping you could run this through because it's a very interesting idea and it's a meeting place of Marxist ideas and queer theory. It strikes me as being really different because there's a mantra that “gay has always existed throughout history,” and now we're arriving at a new place where it can finally just come out. But you're saying something a little more nuanced...

Sears: The idea of the eternal, unchanging “gay” is partly a product of attempting to use human rights legislation—and that part of it makes sense. I think you have to use every tool you can to fight discrimination while building movements to overturn the system. But in doing that the claim became, “it's not a choice at all, we're born this way.” Somehow that should mean we have intrinsic rights, as though if there was any choice at all we'd be outside the realm of intrinsic rights and thus outside of court challenges and so on. But it's a really dubious political distinction: that it's only what you're born with that gives you rights as opposed to choices you make in your life.

It is also a really bad anthropology and a very undynamic view of human sexuality. What we would now call “heterosexuality,” which is only a term that arose in the 1800's, has also changed over time. All kinds of arrangements existed over time, so the idea that at the heart of it was the essential heterosexual or essential homosexual that go unchanged, until finally we've earned the right to express our various sexualities in modern North America, seems to me to be pretty wrong-headed to begin with.

The best works on this, which I first found through John D'Emelio and Barry Adam, basically asked, “What began to change?” since the term “homosexual” was only coined in the 1860's. Why didn't they need a word before? There were certainly same-sex practices. Huge varieties of human societies have had same-sex practices that have taken all kinds of forms. But the “homosexual,” which is kind of the “full-timer,” the dedicated, unvarying same-sex practitioner, only arose as a word in the 1860's, and that's not bashfulness, but it tells us that that full-timers really didn't exist very much up until then.

What made that possible? There were lots of same-sex practices, but the idea that one has a primary orientation towards your own gender or towards another one became possible largely with the rise of capitalism and the separation of work and home life. The relationships in which you keep yourself alive, sustain new life, take care of your emotional needs, wash yourself, rest yourself—those relationships are different in capitalist society for most of us than our working relationship, where we earn the money to make the rest of that possible. Most of us go out to work and then come home. Once that happened, the relationships at home can take a whole bunch of different forms. There is a certain kind of space created for exploration that would not have been possible before.

The basic capitalist structure created new kinds of possibilities. And a range of different people, including Foucault but also Marxists have looked at the rise of sexuality specifically in this context. Foucault looks much less at the capitalist character of it, but they look at that separation of work and home.

Now, from the point of view of governments and state-policy makers, this was a bad thing. In England in the 1840's and 50's, there were all these “Condition of the Working Class” reports, where state officials went into so-called slums and were very worried with what they thought of as amorality among working people. So then you began to get, from the point of view of capitalist states, a whole new direction, which was to ban homosexuality and regulate sexuality and gender behavior through schools and so on. In the 1880's, you get male-homosexuality outlawed in Britain, and in Canada, which was following Britain. Not women's same-sex practices, or lesbianism; it wasn't outlawed basically because Parliament would not admit that women had enough of a sexuality to be sexual with each other. It wasn't a positive measure, but a total denial of women's sexual agency at all. The rise of capitalism created certain possibilities but also, from the point of view of the state, different kinds of constraints.

AS: Thinking about it through the twentieth century and linking it back to today, it seems like one of the major markers that starts to distinguish the gay rights movement, and then the mark between gay and queer, is the Post-War Accord and the change of the family structure. Maybe you could run that through for us?

Sears: What happens with the end of World War II and the development of new social systems is that you began to get the stabilization in new ways of particular family forms within layers of the working class -- though the Post-War Accord didn't include everyone.

That at first was incredibly gender-normative. There was a kind of gender panic after World War II, where large numbers of women had been involved in paid labor. After that there was a period of incredible repression. In Canada, that took the form of a purge of basically anyone who they identified as gay or lesbian from the civil service. The idea was that people who are homosexual are more likely to be black-mailed by the Russians, and thus in a Cold War era are a threat to national security. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the police force who did the major security work in Canada like the FBI does in the States, actually tried to invent a “fruit machine” that would identify gay civil servants so they could be fired.

The first impact of the post-war period was an attempt to force a heterosexual normative family form, and to use the increased income, assistance, and social security that working people had won to try and create a very specific model of the family within sections of the working class: disproportionately among white folks. Then, beginning with the women's liberation movement, people began to refuse that—not that there wasn't resistance along the way, but in the 1960's women quite assertively mobilized around these things and began to demand a change in the way this post-war stabilization was affecting the family form. Feminism, the rise of the women's movement, and the beginning of the Black Power movement, began to create models and new ways of thinking so that gays actually began to identify what they were facing as a political oppression, which a very small number of political gays had done before that. Most communities' people just thought that this is the way it is. Then it became politicized by a movement that fought against the dominant normative form that developed after the war.

There's some opening up in the family form, but at the same time not breaking the bounds of capitalism that began to have huge influences on what ultimately got achieved by that movement. It's much more about coupledom than it is about liberation; about couples' rights rather than sexual liberation in any sort of way. The whole movement became so defined by purchasing and lifestyle and so on that capitalism has had its influences on this end as well.

TWE: It's interesting where you ended that because I did want to talk about the commercialization of gay and lesbian identity. During Pride Month, part of me is excited as a queer person to celebrate that, but then I go to events and I see corporation after corporation and the message of “Buy Gay Things” as a way to prove your gay identity. Could you go into how capitalism changed to commodify gay identity while it's still silent on the rights? How can capitalism change to adapt while still exclude the vast majority of gay or queer people?

Sears: In terms of a new low for Pride in Toronto, this year the Executive Director for Pride Toronto, which is one of the three biggest in North America, opened the Toronto Stock Exchange with all kinds of Pride signs, ringing the bell. It really was a sign of where things have come.

I was at a couple of the early Pride Marches in Toronto, and it was scary. It's hard to imagine now what it was like to feel that there's a good chance that you're going to get attacked, people throw things, you are being exposed to a lot of contempt and there's very few of you. It felt pretty daunting at the time. Anything except for a mass march did at the time. So to see the change from these scary little gatherings to this festival with streets lined across the Toronto community is shocking. In a way there's excitement with that: I do think that even though queer bashing continues, and we have to be clear that the violence hasn't gone away and that people are still afraid, there are changes that are important that need to be celebrated.

But the question needs to be asked at some point, why is it that we made gains at a time when in fact most movements seeking change were pushed backward? Affirmative action, abortion rights, and migrants were hugely under attack and being brutalized; unions are being attacked and workers are giving up all kinds of gains; general labor law is going backwards. Why is it that we've made advances? Some of it is because people fought, that does make a difference that people were defiant, and angry, and mobilized. But what we gained, and it's only in retrospect that you see it, is largely what was most compatible with capitalism.

Of all the things we were fighting for, there was the idea of generally opening up gender and sexuality in real ways, so that people would have realms of play, both in the engineering sense and in the creative unalienated activity sense. Instead what happened was that we won the rights that were most compatible: coupledom, where marriage is becoming officially monogamous, certain workplace benefits (which make a huge difference and should be fought for), but also this idea that we mark ourselves by the consumption of very specific commodities. You see that in terms of clothing and hairstyles, going to certain places. That cuts out people with low-income; they can't be visibly queer. Often people of color are excluded because the character of that commercialization has whiteness built into it, often in fairly clear ways. It seems like we've won a lot, and then you realize that what we've won is the relatively easy stuff that fits with this system. In fact, it risks dividing ourselves much more and potentially limits what we can gain.

TWE: Chelsea Manning (at the time referred to as Bradley) was going to be one of the honorary grand marshals at the Pride Parade in San Francisco this year; then they decided to cut Manning from the line-up. I thought that was interesting to show how nervous people are about the Pride Parade's receptions, and the unwillingness to engage with other controversial issues that connect with gay and queer issues, such as military resisters or antiwar movements—keeping those as separate things from “gay rights.”

Sears: Earlier you referred to alliance building. You can build radical alliances for change with other people who are facing deep exclusion and oppression, or you can try to build alliances with essentially elements of the mainstream ruling order, with Democratic or Republican politicians, to try and become an insider. That's a different kind of alliance-building than the kind we were referring to before, but it's unfortunately what the main body of the movement has gone for, insofar as the term movement can even apply. That means you don't want to do anything that would offend corporate bosses, mayors, Democratic politicians, and so on. You end up pushing out anything that's controversial.

To their credit, Toronto Pride hasn't pushed out Queers Against Israeli Apartheid (QAIA) despite the fact that the City Council has threatened to defund Pride if QAIA, opposed to Israeli pink-washing, marches on Pride day. They've marched each time, and Pride has stuck with their right to march and City Hall has backed off. Occasionally some guts are still shown, but overall it's all about showing yourself off to those who you want to see you as allies, who are sadly the most powerful and that means massive compromise.

TWE: Here in the States, there's been a lot of gearing up around marriage equality and getting laws passed state-by-state. I've been to a lot of meetings, like Occupy last year, where people were having a lot of discussions about marriage equality. The issue that always came up was healthcare, and I would go and talk about the need for healthcare for everyone (single-payer), so I really appreciate you pointing out that instead we're winning rights to coupledom. The issue I saw coming out of the AIDS movement was the fight for healthcare and not just for marriage.

Sears: I agree completely. Personally, I believe we should always oppose legal discrimination; therefore I support marriage rights only because it ends the heterosexual monopoly. The other side of it is the cost of focusing explicitly on marriage rights. If it's only about workplace benefits for a limited portion of the population, there are a lot of queers, or just couples, who don't benefit from that because they're working in situations where they don't have benefits. That's true of a lot of the workforce now.

Remember that we are not fighting for couple rights, but universal rights ultimately, rights that should apply to anybody. We're a little bit closer to that in Canada than in the United States because of single-payer health care. Part of what's remarkable in the differences between the two countries is that it was easier for unions in Canada to win same-sex workplace benefits for unmarried gay couple simply because the cost of healthcare in the U.S. means that employers hate adding to the family.

The basic thing is that it's about healthcare, it's not about couples, but it's also about sexual freedom! That means different things to different people. That may mean couples, that may mean having sex with a lot of people; different people have different preferences and needs. If we are talking about sexual liberation, we're talking about the idea that as long as everyone is consenting, people should have the right to do those things. In general, there's shame that exists in this society about sexuality, where people can't even talk to their partners about what they want to do or what they don't want to do. Images of sexuality are everywhere, every billboard, every car ad, and yet in reality people are incredibly silenced about their sexualities, about what they want and need. There's some locker-room bravado that some men have, but that's not really sexuality, it's bragging about conquest.

We've made some gains, but we haven't really achieved some of the most basic things around sexual openness, non-stigma, and choices.

AS: One of the reasons we wanted to do this interview is that we wanted to push-back against some of the guiding wisdom in the socialist movement, which seems very hesitant about queer politics. Now people are against a lot of concepts that came through queer theory: the word queer, notions of privilege, and a lot of the more challenging concepts that are not as clearly delineated in Marxist theory. It seems like there is a kind of tension about sexuality with Marxists, but it's something I hope will change. Maybe you could comment on that, and what your experience has been in this area.

Sears: I recently was reading a book by Sheila Rowbotham about “utopian socialists.” They were people in the 1800's who considered themselves socialists and had great aspirations for what a better world would be like. It's clear that many of them, especially women but also some men, were thinking about sexual politics as part of what we would now call the liberation struggle. Some of them were thinking explicitly around same-sex practices, but a lot of them were thinking about what real sexual freedom would mean.

That strain of utopian socialism gradually got pushed out through the twentieth century by Marxism within the socialist movement. Even though there were some places where Marxism and sexual liberation found new meeting places, overall there was a lot of interpretation of Marxism in terms of economic categories: class, the workplace. You'll find a lot of Marxists to this day who talk obsessively about the power that workers have at the point of production, meaning in the workplace -- it's true that is an important source of power and I'm not trying to deny the power of a general strike. But if our politics only focus on the workplace, it's a place where sexuality is largely excluded.

At the very best, the better end of Marxism has tended to adopt and work out the best ideas liberals have about sexual freedom. Through the twentieth century, certainly in my period as a socialist and queer activist, my view looking back on the record of a socialist-queer movement was that it was largely picking up the best knowledge of the liberal-left of the existing movement and putting out a liberal political practice. I think one of the things that we've learned from the queer movement is that that's not good enough. There are all kinds of people who are left out of that. We need to be on the leading edge of those who are asking the tough questions about who's left out and why, and what do we do about that? How does “gay” work with patterns of racialization—it's not an accident that white folks tend to come out more, it actually has to do with the whole definition of who counts as gay or lesbian and how that works culturally, racially.

Marxism, or socialism in its broad sense, provides tools for thinking about all this. If the separation of work and home is part of the way “gay” begins to exist as a category, what does it tell us about this category? There are all kinds of questions we can look into, like, “Why is the workplace so gender-normative?” “Why do particular kinds of workplaces run around a very explicit kind of masculinity?” It's not simply that “those guys are like that” -- so what are the dynamics of the workplace that operate to create gendered behavior in certain ways and then police it?

If we're talking about liberation, how do we begin to address that part of sexual freedom that is having a place to have sex? That means we should be deeply concerned about homelessness. We should also be concerned about young people who often have no space as they're becoming sexually active and end up having their sexuality in the cracks. As long as we, as socialists, don't think that our tools are exclusive, as long as we're engaging with queer theories, with anti-racist theories, with feminist theories, there's a lot we can do.

This gets to what real freedom looks like. Marx's ideas about alienation and un-alienation, the idea that humans thrive by making our mark on the world, are tools that can be helpful in offering a vision of gender and sexual liberation that begins to ask questions about why the gender system persists, why sexuality occurs only in the cracks; what is it about work that is a rejection of hedonism, work as duty, the squeezing out of the joyful aspects of life. That means challenging the kind of socialism that's often there in organizations: “All work and no play makes socialism a dull boy.” A lot of the focus on the workplace and the economy, as if capitalism exists simply as a set of economic relations and not also as a set of cultural and interpersonal relations, that kind of socialism is heading towards a dead-end. Part of the revitalization, building the next-New Left, will be restoring the excitement: what would revolution really bring about?

TWE: How do you see socialism and queer activism partnering up, and where can those be providing strengths for each other so that we can start to move forward?

Sears: The more that I've thought about this, the more I've come to believe that the best socialist thinking in all areas is hybrid thinking. It's not purely “socialist,” but involves deep engagement with the theories, thoughts, and actions of those involved in struggles and how the world appears to them. “Queering” socialism offers opportunities, not only in the realm of gender and sexual liberation, but also in terms of approaches to work and all areas of life.

In queer theory right now, there's a lot of talk about queers as transgressors: we act up against the dominant set of sexual relations, which is non-queer. But permanent transgression is kind of unsatisfying, and socialism can help us move from transgression to transformation. The goal is to change the whole set of relations to a new realm of freedom, and then we wouldn't even know what queer would look like anymore.

Together, queers, socialists and anti-racists can begin to ask questions about how it is that the idea of “gay” is now being used globally as part of a western imperialist power strategy. How did that happen? What is it about “gay” that is exclusionary? How is it that all kinds of other same-sex practices in the world don't count, or are seen as a lesser-form, a not-yet-out form of sexuality, and a particular kind of self-proclaimed gay and lesbianness that has tended to occur among certain layers of disproportionately white folks in Europe and North America. Socialism provides some of the tools, but not all of them.

What about this joyous, challenging, gutsy liberation movement, that when I first came into politics was just fun: dirty, nasty, celebratory, fun. How do we bring the ethos of that kind of movement into socialism? If we can do that, we'll have a way more potent set of tools, because it won't just be about the dull duty, and not about disapproving of everyone else and their crimes and political deviations, but talking about where we're heading and the incredible celebration of human potential: what we could be, the way we could be living, the stuff you see in every human being that gets crushed out of them. When you get together the queer, the socialist, the anti-racist, then you start to point to what it all could begin to look like

## Case

#### Reform towards gender inclusive science education is possible – rejecting it all together makes science more exclusionary

Gwyneth Hughes, Center for Learning Technologies, University of East London, ’01

(“Exploring the Availability of Student Scientist Identities within Curriculum Discourse: an anti-essentialist approach to gender-inclusive science,” Gender and Education, Vol. 13, No. 3, pp. 275–290, 2001)

This article has aimed to take the gender and science education literature a step further by relating the discourses and practices of science education to the production of individual scientist identities. However, holding onto the security of gender binaries both masks the complexity of the production of scientist subjectivities, and is in danger of perpetuating gender exclusionary discourses and practices. In recognising that student subjectivities are **complex and shifting**, and that there is a multiplicity of ways in which students can be positioned within curriculum science, the study demonstrates that student scientist subject positions at least interact with positions of gender, class and ethnicity. Scientist **identities thus require negotiation and construction**. A new theoretical framework emerges that gives a much more complex picture of gender subjectivities within science than is obtained from the straightforward mapping of masculinity and femininity onto science/non-science or physical science/biological science binaries. Scientic knowledge in the dominant curriculum discourse is presented to students as detached, incontestable and inaccessible. Physics is held up as the ideal model for positivist science so it is unsurprising that there is little space for competing discourses here. Evidence from the study supports this. The first two examples above confirm that where these dominant curriculum discourses are very pervasive in physical sciences, available scientist subjectivities are likely to be limited in a manner that is consistent with statistical evidence that physical science is the preserve of high- iers and/or middle-class males. However, **there are assured scientist subjectivities available for some female students that depend on possible interactions between ethnicit**y, marginality, educational background/achievement as well as gender, a point that has been underemphasised in many previous studies

The third example indicates that constructivist, student-led investigations, observed here in biology, offer opportunities for reconfiguration of dominant discourses. Here new scientist subjectivities that **do not depend on exceptional achievement** **and/or adherence to gendered binaries emerge**. If competing discourses were also more available in physical sciences, then a similar expansion of available student scientist positions might also develop for females and males alike. A reduction in rigid science/non-science specialism could also support more hybrid identities.

Anti-essentialism does not, therefore, **spell an end to feminist arguments for gender-inclusive science.** While rigid and objectivist science is only compatible with a narrow range of student gender and ethnic identities, socially relevant and more constructivist science can generate a wide range of scientist subjectivities, increase the possibilities for scientist identities and thus open the way towards a **more inclusive science curriculum.** Thus, the research gives theoretically informed support for the claims already being made by science education reformers that reworking of the science curriculum provides a vital step in making science accessible beyond the traditional limited range of mainly male and some female academically well-positioned students. In a climate of increasing disillusionment with science in education and by the public at large, wider acceptance that it is science that needs reforming, not its students, cannot come too soon.

#### The critique is essentialism

Gwyneth Hughes, Center for Learning Technologies, University of East London, ’01

(“Exploring the Availability of Student Scientist Identities within Curriculum Discourse: an anti-essentialist approach to gender-inclusive science,” Gender and Education, Vol. 13, No. 3, pp. 275–290, 2001)

However, there are dangers of essentialism and oversimplification when making associations between the subjectivities of male students and the masculinity accorded to abstract science. **Not all females are deterred by symbolically masculine disciplines**, while not all males are encouraged. For example, Mirza (1992) has suggested that young black women favour the more ‘masculine’ subject areas. Biology falls under the umbrella of abstract science, yet can also be associated with the feminine. In addition, a focus only on gender, which is usually narrowly based on heterosexuality, and a lack of consideration of other power relations based on ethnicity or class, **tends to mask complexity**. The contradictions which arise from gender essentialism have been challenged by post-structuralists who argue that subjectivities are not fixed by social structures (Francis, 1999). **Such recognition that students are not passively situated in educational discourse**, but actively negotiate subject positions within discursive constraints, points towards new ways of understanding the complexity of gender issues in science and technology **that do not rely on, or perpetuate, universalised gender categories** (Weiner, 1994; Volman, 1997; Henwood, 1998).

#### Centering on gender fails – elides complexity – perm solves best

Edward R. Carr, PhD, Associate Professor Department of Geography University of South Carolina, coordinator for the Bureau for Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance, consultant to the World Bank, and Mary Thompson, PhD, Research Fellow, Bioversity International, and the Basque Center for Climate Change, ’14

(“Gender and Climate Change Adaptation in Agrarian Settings: Current Thinking, New Directions, and Research Frontiers,” Geography Compass 8/3 (2014): 182–197)

The tendency has been to conceptualise women everywhere as a **homogenous, subjugated group…**

**such representations are problematic on multiple accounts**, particularly in their failure to account for

the complex interactions between gender and other forms of disadvantage based on class, age,

‘race’/ethnicity and sexuality.

In short, dividing communities and even households into gendered categories reveals both differential and distinct vulnerabilities and opportunities between these social groupings. However, relying on the categories “man” and “woman” as the principal means of capturing the varieties of experience at play in any context risks overlooking significant differences with regard to knowledge, resources, and power within gender groups that shape development and adaptation outcomes. Further, **such framings tend to cast men and women in oppositional roles that, while sometimes appropriate, can obscure situations in which men and women are interdependent and can work together to mutual benefit** (Kaijser and Kronsell 2013, 8).

#### Gender can’t be an overarching theory of conflict

Catharine A. **MacKinnon**, J.D., Ph.D., Professor of Law @ University of Michigan and Visiting Professor @ University of Chicago Law School, [“Symposium on Unfinished Feminist Business: Points Against Postmodernism,” 75 Chi.-Kent. L. Rev. 687; **2K**]

**Feminism has** also **never,** to my knowledge, **had** what is called **a "monocausal" narrative,** at least I haven't. **We do not say that gender is all there is. We have never said it explains everything. We have said that gender is big and pervasive,** never not there, that it has a shape and regularities and laws of motion to it, and that it explains a lot--much otherwise missed, unexplained. It is a feature of most everything, pervasively denied. **That does not mean that everything reduces to gender**, that it is the only regularity or the only explanation for things, the single cause of everything, or the only thing there. It is also worth repeating that sexual politics, in **feminism, is not an overarching preexisting general theory that is appealed to in order to understand or explain, but a constantly provisional analysis in the process of being made by the social realities that produce(d) it.**

#### That turns the entire K

**Butler**, professor of rhetoric, Johns Hopkins, **’90** (Gender Trouble , Judith, p13)

Feminist critique ought to explore the totalizing claims of a masculinist signifying economy, but also remain self-critical with respect to the totalizing gestures of feminism. The effort to identify the enemy as singular in form is a reverse-discourse that uncritically mimics the strategy of the oppressor instead of offering a different set of terms. That the tactic can operate in feminist and antifeminist contexts alike suggests that the colonizing gesture is not primarily or irreducibly masculinist. It can operate to effect other relations of racial, class, and heterosexist subordination, to name but a few. And clearly, listing the varieties of oppression, as I began to do, assumes their discrete, sequential coexistance along a horizontal axis that does not describe their convergences within the social field. A vertical model is similarly insufficient; oppressions cannot be summarily ranked, causally related, distributed among planes of “originality” and “derivitaevness”.

#### Framing gender as an ontologically superior explanation relies on violent, totalizing categories that cause their impacts

Carline **New** **‘4** (Review of *Undoing Gender* by Judith Butler)

(<http://www.equinoxjournals.com/ojs/index.php/JCR/article/viewFile/1487/984>)

In this book of eleven previously published essays Butler expounds her recent thinking on gender, transgender and sexuality. For readers unfamiliar with her work, Butler is famous in feminist and poststructuralist circles as the author of Gender Trouble (1990), Bodies that Matter (1993) and other works advocating the deconstruction of gender, both as an academic position and a political goal. In this book she focuses mainly on the ethical argument for what could be styled, on an analogy with Trotskyism, ‘permanent deconstruction’. In asides and addenda she also discusses the work of other poststructuralist feminists, and in the last chapter (‘Can the “Other” of philosophy speak?’), describes her own relationship with philosophy, especially that of Spinoza and Hegel. The assumption underlying these essays is that most ontological claims about gender are **excluding** and therefore **oppressive**. The implicit position is that realism is never fallibilist, but invariably rigid. Butler suggests that every theoretically based taxonomic claim has countless victims whose lives have been rendered ‘unlivable’. Her quest is for all those currently marginalised to be recognised and afforded livable lives. This requires, she believes, permanent provisionality about gender possibilities and in particular about what it means to be human. It will be easier to do justice to Butler’s argument if we first consider a crucial ontological disagreement between the feminism of the ‘second wave’ (1970s and 80s) and that of the ‘cultural turn’ which has attempted to replace it. Second wave feminism developed a **distinction between sex and gender** which was seen as liberatory at the time. ‘Sex’ meant biological sexual differentiation (bodily dimorphism and distinct, interdependent reproductive capacities); ‘gender’ meant the identities, normative attributes and social practices culturally associated with sexual difference.1 Both sex and gender were understood as real and causally powerful, but they had different ontological status. For Butler this distinction is **foundationalist** and **deeply misleading**. She explained in Gender Trouble that sexual difference is only retrospectively binary. The adults who surround the new baby at birth inspect its body through gendered spectacles. If it does not readily fit their presuppositions about the only two ways of being human, they ‘normalise’ it with knife and hormones, socially exclude it—or both. Sex is thus naturalised by gender, produced on the surface of the body as a **binary fiction** which **delimits** our idea of **what it is to be human**. Since the 1990 publication of Gender Trouble, Butler has revoked its strong idealism which verged on radical body-scepticism. Nevertheless, she continues to insist that sexual difference is the product of a norm, and gender **is** the normalising apparatus. In this she disagrees not only with (1) ‘theorists of sexual difference who argue on biological grounds’ but also with (2) structuralists and poststructuralists who argue, following Levi Strauss, that ‘sexual difference is a fundamental nexus through which language and culture emerge’ (p. 211). Some of these poststructuralists (Lacanian and post- Lacanians) consider patriarchy inevitable, while others believe it contestable. As a group, (2) are preferable in Butler’s view since for them sexual difference is, though powerful, ethereal and empty of content: ‘some of them evacuate sexual difference of every possible semantic meaning’ (p. 210). They at least are not essentialist in the old ways, for all they say is that the difference between men and women is culturally constitutive— they do not specify what it is or what it constitutes. Nevertheless, even those among group (2) who believe the Symbolic and its patriarchal law can be changed are in practice gloomy about how long it will take. Butler’s critique of Lacanian and post-Lacanian conservatism in the essay on ‘Gender regulations’ is excellent. Compared with poststructuralist French feminism, Butler’s own view is positively sociological. She holds that gender is ‘a form of social power’, a norm, rather than ‘a model that individuals seek to approximate’ (p. 48). Sexual difference is among its products, firmly situated in the field of discourse rather than material reality. Further, she distinguishes the ontological status of this norm from its effects, and describes how it is reproduced through the acts that follow it and the ‘idealisations reproduced in and by those acts’ (ibid). While the norm cannot be independent of its instantiations, it is irreducible to them. Although Butler rejects the physical reality of sexual difference, she is a realist within the sphere of discourse, and even a believer in emergence. But does Butler really reject the physical reality of sexual difference? It would be an odd position for one who sees sex change operations for transpeople as so potentially liberating that it is worth accepting pathologising diagnoses to get access to them. Like many poststructuralists, she is profoundly ambiguous about the ontological status of the body. I understand her as meaning that some people have a penis and some a vulva in much the same way as some people have a bigger nose and some smaller—there are physical differences, but their social salience is entirely contingent and constructed, and there is no sharp line between male and female reproductive organs any more than there is between a big and a small nose. She remarks—oddly, and surely wrongly—that ‘one cannot apprehend sexual difference outside the racial and ethnic frames by which it is articulated’ (p. 10). Further, while sexual difference is real enough within these parameters, it is not necessarily important: other ‘constituting social forces’ ‘such as the economic or racial conditions by which one comes into being, the conditions of one’s adoption, the sojourn at the orphanage’ (p. 10) may have more power to shape the individual. There are two points elided here. Is sexual difference a human species characteristic, with the usual range of variation and with intelligible cases of incomplete or different development? My answer to this is ‘yes’, despite the existence of a small minority of intersexed people whose numbers are greatly exaggerated by strong social constructionists. Secondly, is sexual difference always and inevitably socially and psychologically highly significant? The answer to this is not so clear, and it is a different sort of question. If in some social contexts other identities and experiences tend to be more salient, this does not undermine the reality of sexual difference nor show us the extent of its causal powers. Usually, however, Butler holds that where a person fits, and whether they fit, into the ‘**contingent binary’ of gender** has a tremendous effect on their lives. People who are intersexed are regularly, as children, subjected to coercive surgery. People who are transgender are frequently refused the surgery that would free them from distress. ‘The task of all these movements [intersex, transgender and queer] seems to me to be about distinguishing among the norms and conventions that permit people to breathe, to desire, to love and to live, and those norms and conventions that restrict or eviscerate the conditions of life itself ’ (p. 8) Norms that are enabling for one group may be **destructive** for another. Butler’s idea is to empower us to seek change by showing that the normative apparatus of gender is merely conventional, and to expose the ways in which gender regulation treats some people as unreal—a lack of recognition which, she claims, is **even more devastating in its effects than oppression** (p. 30).

#### Gender root cause arguments are hegemonic – that’s the root cause of their impacts

**Butler**, professor of rhetoric, Johns Hopkins, **’90** (Gender Trouble , Judith, p9)

Whether gender or sex is fixed or free is a function of a discourse which, it will be suggested, seeks to set certain limits to analysis or to safeguard certain tenets of humanism as presuppositional to any analysis of gender. The locus of intractability, whether in “sex” or “gender” or in the very meaning of “construction”, provides a clue to what cultural possibilities can and cannot become mobilized through any further analysis. The limits of the discursive analysis of gender presuppose and preempt the possibilities of imaginable and realizable gender compositions within culture. This is not to say that any and all gendered possibilities are open, but that the boundaries of analysis suggest the limits of a discursively conditioned experience. These limits are always set within the terms of a hegemonic cultural discourse predicated on binary structures that appear as the language of universal rationality. Constraint is thus built into what that language constitutes as the imaginable domain of gender.