

que(e)ry Collective

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“What is queer is perceived as a latent social
residuality that cannot be included in the dominant
idea of the social, it is perhaps the *not-social*, the
asocial, a foreign land to which aliens must be
driven.”

Sally R. Munt, “Queer Sociality”

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que(e)ry Collective Spring 2019 (from left to right):
Kiran Zelbo, Abby Connell, Isaac Jean-François and
Anja Chivukula

Collective Statement

Dear Readers,

que(e)ry could not be more excited to present our second publication of queer and feminist theory from Columbia University's undergraduate community.

Our spring semester has been spent discussing the queer social: all the ways queer people form groups of affinity, networks, and social worlds. In academic settings, queer sociality is taken up by historians, economists, geographers, and anthropologists, all seeking to pinpoint the cultural locations of queerness. The study of the queer social is temporally relevant, as understandings of queerness and what it means to belong to a social category are constantly changing. For this publication, students were asked to explore queer sociality using Juana María Rodríguez's "Queer Sociality and Other Sexual Fantasies" as a starting point.

que(e)ry has been meeting for the last nine months to challenge one another in our thinking both inside and beyond our understandings of queer theory. Our meetings have functioned as both a discussion space and a workshop to perfect these beautiful pieces you now hold in your hands. Happy reading!

the *que(e)ry*
Collective

Campbell Campbell
Anja Chivukula
Abby Connell
Isaac Jean-François
Kiran Zelbo

*Trans*bucket*

Kiran Zelbo

A few days ago, I recalled my 2015 username and password (transbeanie6969), and I logged back into the once bustling and vibrant website *Transbucket.com* for the first time in years. The site now is nearly abandoned – its circuitous toolbar and its laggy links are remnants of a past era. Back when I was first realizing I was trans, *Transbucket* was the epicenter of online transmasculine discussion, and it was for me the most wonderful website on the entire internet.

Transbucket was a place where trans people would share details of our medical experiences. The website invited us to upload pictures of ourselves before and after surgeries, facilitated discussions about different procedures and available surgeons, and gave us the space to congratulate and to celebrate each other. On *Transbucket*, we compiled lifesaving information that literally did not exist anywhere else. Brave pioneers of transgender medicine shared their stories of being the first patients in the world to take on rare variations of top surgery under certain surgeons. Enthusiastic leaders participated in extensive and generative debates about nipple grafts. Trans teachers trained me in the vital skill of using the bathroom after top surgery. I could picture the intimate details of my future for the first time; *Transbucket* opened up the potential for a queer futurity.

Now, *Transbucket* has been nearly completely abandoned, and the transmasculine online community has moved on to other forums. We easily abandon our former sites and

spaces; the security of the past cannot hold as much power as the promises of the future. For a while, *Reddit* and *Tumblr* were popular sites for transmasculine cultural production. Now, massive numbers of trans guys and transmasculine people have turned to *Facebook* as a locus for community. These transmasculine online groups never last for very long; they are, by their very nature, impermanent centers of knowledge and transient havens. The groups overflow with passionate thinkers. However, for many transmasculine people, there is safety in small numbers; it makes stealth easier and visibility less dangerous. As arguments heat up and factions split off, trans leaders stealthily initiate new groups. Again and again we regroup. We find each other in new sites, and through our constant reconfiguration we invite new members to come join us. Transmasculine energy consolidates; our community grows through its constant movement.

The constant movement, dissolution, and reformation of transmasculine online sites of knowledge and community mirrors the way in which trans identity resists finality. Our online fluctuation gestures towards the asterisk that writers often use as an addendum to the adjective “trans*.”¹ The asterisk reminds us that for many people, transition is about growth, change, and movement. Transition is not about reaching towards a static destination. It is reductive and rather boring to think of transmasculine transition as simply female to male. Rather, it does greater justice to trans*ness and it is much more interesting to appreciate uncertainty, and to resist finality. Like trans* itself, the online trans* community exists as a constant state of becoming.

¹ There is a lot of debate about the asterisk, with people now arguing that the asterisk is problematic because it implies that trans by itself only refers to binary trans people. Personally, I don’t mind the asterisk because, as Jack Halberstam explains in his book *Trans**, the asterisk “modifies the meaning of transitivity by refusing to situate transition in relation to a destination, a final form, a specific shape, or an established configuration of desire and identity” (4).

BELIEVE IN US

Campbell Campbell

helicopters out / my face on a milk carton / you can’t find me,
 mom / i’m abandoning my home / hollow faces & patched up
 roofs / shedding my identity / to follow the beautiful people /
 whose fists thump to the music / who dance in the street /
 who use speed to create fire / i watch them from my window
 / i may be in love with the redhead / she’s responsible for the
 smoke / rainbow fumes putting straight people to sleep / i
 was ten when my mom fell asleep / my babysitter & twin
 brother passed out in the bathtub / my dad followed the
 beautiful people after stealing my mother’s purple dress /
 stolen moments / i used those hours to explore my undone
 seams / me in my brother’s clothes / me dancing to the queer
 music in the mirror / me pronouncing the word dyke with
 pride / me, the songbird released from my cage / hail
 redheads everywhere / i searched the playground for more
 like me / i wanted to show someone what i found / but my
 hopskotch buddy didn’t believe me / *gay? sounds fake,*
sounds like a way of saying fuck you mom! / how can you
 understand the sweetness of honey if you’ve never tried it /
 how can you understand the hunger / i hate staring into eyes
 blank with confusion / i run away in the name of eating
 loudly & dancing shamelessly / maybe i’ll find my dad and
 he’ll share his flag with me / maybe i’ll marry a redhead and
 we’ll wear matching suits to the wedding / who cares / i am
 awake

Behind Closed Doors

Isaac Jean-François

I'll open with a series of queries. What composes a sociality behind closed doors—a sociality that is heard but not seen? Who made and/or closed the door, and what things lie behind it? Can the door be a hindrance, a signifier of a cell, or is the enclosure freeing in that has the *potential* to open?¹ Betty Carter begins her 1979 recording of “Open the Door” with what sounds like “hold it o-.” The door, in this scene, is a mediating feature of sociality. Yet, the hold of the soon-to-be-opened door, the “o-,” freezes an impending social experience. The door, and those that *are* around/with it, is part of the social. The door is opened in its being-held, an impression on this enclosure disrupts its fixity.

I cannot help but think of this scene as a marking of a social that may or may not come; a social that *is* in this “may or may not.” So what about those fleshly things that rest on the other side of the door’s handle or the flesh that parties flush against the door, concealed as the door is opened? This is in opposition to a legible social, or normatively affective systems of matter (e.g. *knock knock* [opening] “Hey [comrade/subject]! Come in...”) that feed off of the abject flesh and fleshly things and spaces that allow the social to come into being (e.g. what exists behind the door or the matter that is swept in different directions by the force of the door). A social is a phenomenon, a burst of (in)activity between matter that is predicated on a kind of, what Karen Barad calls, “‘exteriority within’...a doing—enactment of boundaries—that always entails constitutive exclusions...”² *Feeling* with Carter, and *mattering* with Barad, I am compelled to consider the subjectivities that bud and fester behind closed doors.

Stuff is *bursting* in-and-around Carter’s open-and-shut door, and she wants us to know that. Consider the words of Fred Moten, who writes, “black performance has always been the ongoing improvisation of a kind of lyricism of the surplus—invagination, rupture, collision, augmentation.”³ And what if those who write/sing of/to the “lyricism of the surplus” *are* not there when the door is opened, but only when the door *is* about to open. Those who *are* potential and, no, I don’t mean potential to *do* but, rather, potential to swing in rest or jive in flight.

It’s about (il)legible movement and gesture dynamically partying with (il)legible stillness and silence. Might we be able to party along with or because of “our consent to that (nonsingle, paraontic) sociality”?⁴ A sociality that is not contingent upon intelligible forms of recognition and openings? A sociality that thrives in the seal of the soon-to-be-opened enclosure?

*If you will not come to me I'll come / To you.*⁵

¹ Think, here, of a stomata in a leaf or protein pump in a cell. A aperture that *can* open or remain closed. In this turn to thingly qualities of non-human organisms, I hope we might be able to consider a sociality that may be composed of a-human and non-living forms and experiences.

² Karen Barad. *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007, 135. I do not include this quote here to suggest that Barad is especially interested in “the door,” or solid demarcations of enclosure, but to argue that the putative solidity of the door is produced in the social conjurings of the enclosure.

³ Fred Moten. *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003, 26. 26

⁴ Fred Moten. “Erotics of Fugitivity.” *Stolen Life*, 2018, 263.

⁵ Betty Carter. “Open The Door.” *The Audience With Betty Carter*, Betcar, 1979.

Notes on the Anatomy of Hegemony

Anja Chivukula

I want to speak of a certain kind of glimpse. Most recently, I have felt it in becoming conscious of, in beginning to think through, my own skin. Picture it: on a train to Brooklyn, a +1 to a birthday party for a friend of a friend, I realize I am the darkest in a group of over a dozen people. I do not say that I am the only who is not white, no matter how much that is what it means, because it is not what I have noticed. Rather, I spend the rest of the night flipping my hands back and forth in front of me, seeing how brownness settles into the lines on one side, olive pallor on the other.

What I have taken from this fleeting moment, from the shock of pale skin against my own, is a glimpse of something I did not recognize. Recognition being, in the Althusserian sense, that “of course” which founds ideological understandings. For “of course” it might be true that I was the only one in that group who, at least visibly, was not white. But that is not what interests me. What I want to speak of is that moment of realization itself, when the part of me which goes about categorizing everything I see (which recognizes, as it were) was so jarred by its own conclusion that it stumbled. In that instant there was still whiteness (I do not claim to think outside of it), but bleeding through it was the threadbare fact of pallor: subway lights on sweat-shine skin, hands pinkish on both sides. This was certainly not a moment outside of recognition altogether—I still saw skin, hands, people—, nor was it one outside of the recognition of race; rather, it was a moment in which I became aware of the outline of one of my own recognition processes, and in doing so gained a glimpse of an inaccessible underneath.

In thinking through such an underneath, my goal is not to find a vision of something truer; I am not looking for the thing-in-itself, as Kant might put it. Rather, I am interested in glimpses like the ones I have had as indicators of a space of possibility. Such glimpses show how at the same time that I cannot claim to ever think outside of hegemonic determinations like race, I can know that they are built on and in conditions of material possibility, the which perpetually exceed their own recognition. And it is in seeking to commensurate these ideas with my own understandings of my life that I come to queer theory, as a field of study whose proper object is the construction, disruption, and enforcement of regimes of ideological signification. Taking the the contours of such overlapping systems of recognition as the terrain for a struggle in search of a currently unthinkable way of moving through the world—what might be called queer sociality—is no small task, then, and I seek here only to offer a small comment on such endeavors.

My worry is that there might be a tendency in some of the more utopian pursuits of queer sociality to claim some current practices as already queer in some ultimate sense, as already a radical disruption of present regimes of signification. While I agree with the rejection of most negative, dystopian lines of thought on queer sociality (I think the Juana María Rodríguez article which inspired this issue does a good job of outlining why), my reasons for doing so align with my hesitance to accept some of the more utopian viewpoints as well. As I see it, to claim current hegemonic constructions as inescapable is to ignore that they are founded on spaces of possibility, that the ways of recognizing the world they provide and enforce are not necessary ones. At the same time, I worry that some utopian views around queer sociality participate in the foreclosure of such possibilities by determining certain existent practices as themselves already sufficiently beyond recognition.

What both such views might miss is the fundamental, material nature of ideologies that innervates the recognition processes which constitute them. I mean here that, on a pseudo-Althusserian framework like the one I am thinking through, it is worth remembering that each act of recognition is neither accidental nor necessary. It is not that we all happen to think the same way about certain existent beings, nor that in doing so our thought is guided by a fundamental fact of human existence, but rather that our current world is structured specifically to facilitate such a process. That is, there is always a material arrangement of the world beforehand which provides for (and, perhaps, partially constitutes) the act of recognition within an ideology. That these material arrangements might well be disrupted undermines the dystopian view in showing that ideological formations are not at all inevitable. Simultaneously, however, I worry that the most optimistic of utopian views neglect such material conditions in favor of a flimsier—and thus more malleable—view of ideology as primarily immaterial.

This is to say, then, that we cannot settle for etching some thing called queer sociality upon the face of a pre-arranged world as it is. My metaphors are stretching thin: I do not mean to move towards simple exteriority/interiority. I am thinking still through skin: that which is of the body and also its outside, a permeable border, necessary for embodiment but not sufficient. We can watch as language emerges through it and from it, see the words as it gives them shape, and yet we can know we must not neglect the lungs, the throat, which make possible this materialization. We may not see them—they are underneath—but we might know they matter still.

The thoughts I sketch out here draw on the work of Louis Althusser, Antonio Gramsci, Juana María Rodríguez, Jacques Derrida, Jean-Paul Sartre, Judith Butler, Franz Fanon, and others.

We invite you to use the next two pages to consider your own response (e.g. drawing, score or text) to the question of queer sociality.

