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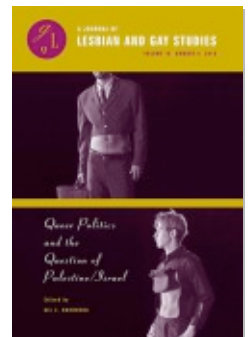
## Theorizing Queer Temporalities: A Roundtable Discussion

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# THEORIZING QUEER TEMPORALITIES

## A Roundtable Discussion

**Carolyn Dinshaw, Lee Edelman, Roderick A. Ferguson,  
Carla Freccero, Elizabeth Freeman, Judith Halberstam,  
Annamarie Jagose, Christopher Nealon,  
Nguyen Tan Hoang**

*T*his roundtable took place via e-mail in March, April, and May of 2006. Participants wrote in clusters of three, sending their remarks back to me to be collated and sent on to the next cluster for a total of three rounds of comments. I edited the results for continuity, occasionally shifting a remark to an “earlier” or “later” place in the conversation, cutting digressions, or adding transitions. Thus the temporality, polyvocality, and virtual space of this production are quite different than a real-time, face-to-face roundtable would have been: perhaps this is fitting for a special issue on queer temporalities. My deepest gratitude goes to all the scholars and critics who participated and to J. Samaine Lockwood and Kara Thompson for copyediting assistance. — Elizabeth Freeman

*Elizabeth Freeman:* To begin with, I'd like to ask how and why the rubric of temporality (however you understand that) became important to your thinking as a queer theorist. What scholarly, activist, personal, political, or other concerns motivated the turn toward time for you? What does this turn seem to open up conceptually, institutionally, politically, or otherwise? Does it threaten to limit or shut down particular kinds of analysis or possibilities for social change?

*Carolyn Dinshaw:* Working primarily on a period in the distant past—the Middle Ages—I have been concerned since day one of graduate school with the relationship of past to present. “Obsessed” is more like it, really: I felt caught between the

scholarly imperative, especially keen at Princeton, to view the past as other and my sense that present concerns could usefully illuminate the past for us now. My dissertation was basically an agon played out between these two positions; by the time of my first book I had developed a moderate historicist view of the past that allowed for connections with the present via discursive traditions like gender. But I had also stowed away, not just as scholarly resource but also as token of affirmation and desire, Boswell's *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, which I—a lesbian graduate student in that desert of normativity, Princeton—had bought as soon as it came out.

*Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Duke University Press, 1999), was my attempt to deal directly with such desire—a queer desire for history. I was again trying to negotiate between alteritists (social constructionists) and those who appealed to transhistorical constants of some sort (essentialists), but this time in my analyses I found that even Foucault, the inspiration of social constructionists, connected affectively with the past. I focused on the possibility of touching across time, collapsing time through affective contact between marginalized people now and then, and I suggested that with such queer historical touches we could form communities across time.

This refusal of linear historicism has freed me to think further about multiple temporalities in the present. Postcolonial historians have been most influential in this process, and the turn toward temporality has been thrilling: it opens the way for other modes of consciousness to be considered seriously—those of ghosts, for example, and mystics. But the condition of heterogeneous temporalities can be exploited for destruction as well as expansion: Ernst Bloch recounts chillingly the Nazis' deployment of temporal asynchrony in recruiting Germans who felt backward in the face of an alien modernity.<sup>1</sup> So we must take seriously temporality's tremendous social and political force.

*Christopher Nealon*: My book is *Foundlings: Lesbian and Gay Historical Emotion before Stonewall* (Duke University Press, 2001). I came to graduate school at Cornell in the early 1990s, the moment of the rise of queer theory in the academy. I'd been working as a reporter at *Gay Community News*, in Boston, where I'd been writing about what turned out to be the heyday of ACT UP's activism; this kept in my mind the idea that the "subjecthood" of social movements was at least as interesting as the vicissitudes of the individual, not least because of the ways that social movements could generate very mobile and responsive kinds of collectivity to meet assault and crisis.

Later, working in the human sexuality library at Cornell, I became inter-

ested in the ways that lesbian and gay writers who lived before the time of a social movement were dreaming of collectivities, and forms of participation in History-with-a-capital-H, that they might never, themselves, experience. I was struck by the strangeness of witnessing that dreamed-of collectivity realized long after the fact, in the archive: a history of mutually isolated individuals, dreaming similar dreams, arrayed before me in the aftermath of collective struggles and new identities.

This two-part sense of queer sodality—fluid in the present, expectant in the past—led me to write about “historical emotion.” That phrase seemed to name both those earlier dreams of belonging to “History” and the feeling a latter-day queer subject might have reading the archive of those dreams.

I’m more attached to “history,” then, than “temporality” or “time,” as a keyword, though I understand that they tangle together.

*Annamarie Jagose*: I’d like to seem a good deal more scholarly but, for a long while when I was working on what turned out to be *Inconsequence: Lesbian Representation and the Logic of Sexual Sequence* (Cornell University Press, 2002), I didn’t know that I was writing about temporality at all: I thought I was writing a book about the persistent problem of lesbian representation and what I considered the shortcomings of various corrective attempts, in popular culture but also in activist and academic circles, to bring the lesbian into the field of vision. But my thinking about the visibility-invisibility dialectic in relation to the figure of the lesbian delivered me to a clutch of terms—sequence, derivation, retrospection, belatedness—that had more to say about temporality than representation per se.

I started thinking about lesbian “visibility” not as a solution to but as a variant of lesbian “invisibility”: both can be seen as the historical effects of a contradictory but tightly worked network of counterweighted relations among masculinity, femininity, heterosexuality, and homosexuality that is internal to the modern sex/gender system. Rather than try to isolate the distinctive outlines of lesbian difference, I preferred to think about the productive possibilities of lesbian derivation. Using a fairly eclectic archive—influential sexological and psychoanalytic texts but also a lurid photo-essay of a lesbian sexual encounter inserted in the 1970s reissue of a popular 1950s pulp sexology title; canonic and popular literature from *Little Dorrit* to *Rebecca*; the erotically surreal diaries of Anne Lister (1791–1840) and their contemporary critical reception—I traced the processes whereby the cultural production of lesbianism as imitative and second-best might usefully be seen as a defense against the difficult knowledge that all categories of sexual registration are necessarily derivative, secondary, and belated.

*Roderick A. Ferguson*: In *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (University of Minnesota Press, 2003), I wanted to extend critiques of historicism from Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd's introduction to *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital* and from Walter Benjamin's "Thesis on the Philosophy of History."<sup>2</sup> Specifically, I wanted to take the critique of progress as constitutive of Western epistemology and rationality and apply that to sociology and its discourses about African American sexuality, discourses that are foundational for how we understand American citizenship. In this way, the sociological figures of the unwed mother, the priapic black heterosexual male, and the working-class homosexual became really important as illustrations of figures outside the rational time of capital, nation, and family. Here, you can probably also see my debt to Max Weber.

I also wanted to use time in a Derridean sense. I tried to think about African American culture, capital, sociology, and black nonheteronormative formations as different types of palimpsests with residues of earlier discourses and histories written on them. For instance, I began the introduction of *Aberrations* with the transgendered prostitute from *Tongues Untied* (dir. Marlon Riggs, USA; 1989) to open a discussion about the racialized and sexualized itineraries of capital in nineteenth-century Britain, which have changed radically, of course, in the contemporary moment, but persist. Using time in this way was also a means for undermining a certain identitarian expectation—that queer of color critique and the analysis of black nonheteronormative formations be a "history of a people."

Recently, I've tried to project a theory of time into other geopolitical histories of racialized sexuality. I've tried to theorize this historical and geopolitical heterogeneity in ways that directly intervene into queer studies. If we think of the past and the present, for instance, as made up of heterogeneous sexual formations, part of that heterogeneity is derived from the various national histories that constitute those sexual formations. In doing this work, I wanted to promote the kaleidoscopic qualities of sexuality so that the question of sexuality for racial formations means interrogating the historicity of the various shards that make up those formations. Hence I've tried to make the question of time simultaneous with the question of historical space and its diversity.

*Lee Edelman*: Opening this conversation with a series of questions presupposing a "turn toward time" already establishes as our central concern not the movement toward time but of it: the motionless "movement" of historical procession obedient to origins, intentions, and ends whose authority rules over all. And so we have the familiar demand for narrative accountings of "how and why," for self-conscious

avowals of motivation, for strategic weighings of what's opened up in relation to what's shut down. Implicit throughout are two assumptions: time is historical by "nature" and history demands to be understood in historicizing terms. But what if time's collapse into history is symptomatic, not historical? What if framing this conversation in terms of a "turn toward time" preemptively reinforces the consensus that bathes the petrified river of history in the illusion of constant fluency? What if that very framing repeats the structuring of social reality that establishes heteronormativity as the guardian of temporal (re)production? These questions shape my recent book, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Duke University Press, 2004), which suggests that the logic of repetition, associated with the death drive, though projectively mapped onto those read as queers, informs as well the insistence on history and on reproductive futurism that's posited over and against them.

I'm less interested, then, in the "turn toward time" than in the turning or troping by which we're obliged to keeping turning time *into* history. Whether polyphonous or univocal, history, thus ontologized, displaces the epistemological impasse, the aporia of relationality, the nonidentity of things, by offering the promise of sequence as the royal road to *consequence*. Meaning thus hangs in the balance—a meaning that time, as the medium of its advent, defers while affirming its constant approach, but a meaning utterly undone by the queer who figures its refusal. This is the truth-event, as Badiou might say, that makes all subjects queer: that we aren't, in fact, subjects of history constrained by the death-in-life of futurism and its illusion of productivity. We're subjects, instead, of the real, of the drive, of the encounter with futurism's emptiness, with negativity's life-in-death. The universality proclaimed by queerness lies in identifying the subject with just this repetitive performance of a death drive, with what's, quite literally, unbecoming, and so in exploding the subject of knowledge immured in stone by the "turn toward time."

*Judith Halberstam:* I would like to be able to attribute my turn to temporality to a rigorous reading of Freud, Marx, or Hegel, or better still Kant, or to a deep and powerful reading of queer history, but in fact most of my ideas come to me in less recognizably scholarly ways. A few occasions come to mind when I try to recollect why I ever thought temporality might be important: I am in a drag king club at 2:00 a.m. and the performances are really bad, and some kid comes onstage and just rips an amazing performance of Elvis or Eminem or Michael Jackson and the people in the club recognize why they are here, in this place at this time, engaged in activities that probably seem pointless to people stranded in hetero temporali-

ties. Or, I am in grammar school in England in the 1970s, and in assembly hall the headmistress wants to let the girls know that it is our responsibility to dress appropriately so as not to “incite” the male teachers to regrettable actions. This, she says, will be good training for us, since we are here to prepare ourselves for marriage and family. I hear a loud voice in my head saying fuck family, fuck marriage, fuck the male teachers, this is not my life, that will not be my time line. Queer time for me is the dark nightclub, the perverse turn away from the narrative coherence of adolescence—early adulthood—marriage—reproduction—child rearing—retirement—death, the embrace of late childhood in place of early adulthood or immaturity in place of responsibility. It is a theory of queerness as a way of being in the world and a critique of the careful social scripts that usher even the most queer among us through major markers of individual development and into normativity.

Someone recently said to me of my new book, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York University Press, 2005), “You are so ambitious to be taking on time and space.” Of course, being the countercanonical creature that I am, I never thought of my project in those terms. I certainly did not ever consider surveying the philosophical literature on time and space, even though I did glance at postmodern geography, and it would be hard to locate my book in relation to any set of “big questions” about temporality and spatiality. People like to say of their work that “this is part of a much larger project,” but I like to imagine that my work is “part of a much smaller project,” one that asks little questions, settles for less than grandiose answers, speculates without evidence, and finds insights in eccentric and unrepresentative archives. I think through the thematics of time and space in my book by consciously and deliberately privileging two rubrics: the transgender body and subcultural spaces. These rubrics have their own logics, their own contradictory relations to temporality, and their own sets of insights about embodiment, counterhegemonic practices and subjugated knowledges. Queer time, in that it shifts our attentions away from discrete bodies performing their desires, offers an alternative framework for the theorization of disqualified and anticanonical knowledges of queer practices. And it lets you say that going to queer clubs and watching children’s film constitutes your research project . . . but it doesn’t attract grant or research money . . . for that you need to promote marriage and having kids and saving gay and lesbian teens from suicide . . . which will be my next project . . .

*Nguyen Tan Hoang*: With Erica Chough, I co-curated *Pack-Switch on Queer Time*, a film-video program for MIX: The New York Queer Experimental Media

festival in April 2005. The catalyst for this program was the same-sex marriage ceremonies that took place with great fanfare at San Francisco City Hall the previous year. Erica and I wanted to intervene in the public discussion around gay marriage and the mainstreaming of queer culture. As videomakers, we also wanted to contest the increasing corporatization of queer film festivals, which has resulted in the further marginalization of “difficult,” experimental work that refuses the model of white-boy-looking-for-love-in-West-Hollywood-narrative-feature. The works we included were *Avant j’étais triste* (dir. Jean-Gabriel Périot, France; 2002); *Skip* (dir. Felix Chang and Marnee Meyer, USA; 2005); *Loverfilm—An Uncontrolled Dispersion of Information* (dir. Michael Bryntrup, Germany; 1996); *A Horse, a Filipino, Two Women, a Soldier, and Two Officers* (dir. Nguyen Tan Hoang, USA; 2005); *The Pool* (dir. Sara Jordanö, Sweden/USA; 2004); *Clay (A Would-Be Ghost Town)* (dir. Sara Mithra, USA; 2005); *School Boy Art* (dir. Erica Chough, USA; 2004); and *To Hold a Heart* (dir. Michael Wallin, USA; 2005).

A central question in *Pack-Switch*—and my interest in queer temporality broadly—is how queer experience gets transmitted from one generation to the next, a process that exceeds, in innovative ways, the heterosexual kinship/reproductive model. Among many paths that delineate “queer time,” two of the most generative for me include (1) retracing a young person’s secretive and circuitous routes to queer culture (through music, art, literature, popular culture) and (2) revisiting the various scenes of queer pedagogy (not only in the classroom and library but also in the park, street, bar, basement, kitchen, chat room, bedroom). An example of the first practice is the inclusion of found footage in many of my videos. This strategy bespeaks a critical desire to mine traces of queer Asian presence in images made for other times and places (e.g., 1970s gay pornography, newsreel footage of Vietnamese boat people, or a Hollywood flop like *Reflections in a Golden Eye* [dir. John Huston, USA; 1967]). At the same time, using found footage also registers my intense pleasure in reassembling and recirculating past images to make them stand in as “evidence” for my present-day queer speculation. Judith’s comments concerning the need to invert or displace linear hetero time lines resonate deeply with me. A sense of belatedness marks the ways in which I have arrived at the present: as a refugee who couldn’t get to the “final destination,” America, soon enough; a gay man who came out after the advent of AIDS (again, too late, having missed the 1970s Fire Island orgies); an artist who is always “emerging”; an academic who doesn’t want to settle down in any one discipline. Instead of bemoaning belatedness as an index of, say, arrested development or lack of responsibility, perhaps we can conceptualize it as a spatial movement out of the mainstream/into the margins. There is also a homonormative time line.



We pity those who come out late in life, do not find a long-term partner before they lose their looks, or continue to hit the bars when they are the bartender's father's age. We create our own temporal normativity outside the heteronormative family.

*Carla Freccero*: In *Queer/Early/Modern* (Duke University Press, 2006), both queer and time are at issue. In that book, I sought to disrupt the historicist periodicity of early modern studies as it is generally thought and practiced, on the one hand, and to dislodge the remnants of substantivizing claims made by "queer," on the other. The first half of the book demonstrates the queerness of subjectivity at the heart of the Western lyric tradition thought to instantiate heterosexual love; refutes historicist taxonomies of Western homosexual identity; and tracks the queerly heteronormativizing imperatives of early French nation-state formation by analyzing texts that foreground subjectivity's excess, relative to the normativizing claims made in its name, and that queer time by resisting reproductive futurity, as Lee Edelman calls it, or telos itself. The second half of the book, a work of mourning and thus a working through, proposes queer spectrality as a phantasmic relation to historicity that could account for the affective force of the past in the present, of a desire issuing from another time and placing a demand on the present in the form of an ethical imperative.

I do not know if I have "turned toward" time, if time is something to which one can turn; it is easier for me to think of turning away from not time exactly, but its passing certainly.

I often work on the dead, and as time goes by I have begun to think of myself as a future dead person writing myself out of my time while time is running out. Before, there was always now (mostly there was "now!") or (back) then, or someday, and then it seemed like the deictics were just that, temporal markers relative to a context. At a certain point (then? now?), they became more absolute: past, present, and future became substantive conditions sometimes related to me and sometimes not. I began to calibrate time; it became something to have or not to have, and something that could run out, something I could not watch pass, but that passed anyway. I keep trying to re-turn, but like that angel, I keep getting blown backward, away from or toward. This is my experience of the limit (a limit) to thinking through temporality.

*Freeman*: Hearing you all talk, I'm wondering if it's possible to think relationality across time without some concept of history, and if history boils down to "historicism." I'm curious about what each of you means by history, and/or even by time,

how you see their relationship, and to what extent you can imagine this relationship as already queer, or in need of queering.

*Ferguson:* Benjamin is an important landmark for me, at least in trying to answer this question. I'm thinking especially of "Theses on the Philosophy of History": "The concept of the historical progress of mankind cannot be sundered from the concept of its progression through a homogeneous, empty time."<sup>3</sup> I return to this argument to underline the importance of connecting the question of time to the question of space, especially space as an entity that nations and nationalisms have tried to bring into national and nationalist time. If we apply Benjamin's arguments to the history of oppositional practices and movements—Marxism, revolutionary nationalism, feminism—we can see it as a powerful warning about the precariousness of radical uses of time. Hoang's remarks about a "homonormative time line," for instance, caution us not to have faith in vanguardist conceptions of time. Recruiting previously excluded subjects into a nationalist regimen can be a way of using time to unmake forms of nonnationalist relationality.

I think one of the encouraging aspects of this discussion, as Chris and Carolyn are suggesting, is the refusal of canonical texts of history: history as origin narrative and history as outside textuality, to invoke Lee's arguments. At the same time, several of us seem to acknowledge that disidentifying with hegemonic texts of history does not mean the absolute dismissal of historical projects. The deconstructive turn was very much about the radical critique of the text of history in an effort to produce alternative texts. There's reason to extend and resuscitate that aspect of deconstruction.

*Dinshaw:* Since Beth asked about our use of terms: in that phrase "a queer desire for history," I meant a desire for a different kind of past, for a history that is not straight. I'm using "history" here to mean something that touches on past time, not necessarily a narrative, not necessarily a causal sequence. (Thus, not "historicism.") To think outside narrative history requires reworking linear temporality. It requires "the rewiring of the senses" (Jacqui Alexander's words) in order to apprehend an expanded range of temporal experiences<sup>4</sup>—experiences not regulated by "clock" time or by a conceptualization of the present as singular and fleeting; experiences not narrowed by the idea that time moves steadily forward, that it is scarce, that we live on only one temporal plane. I'm aiming to develop in my work what I call a postdisenchanted temporal perspective, one that opens up to an expansive now but—unlike, say, a medieval Christian view of time and

history—is shaped by a critique of teleological linearity, that is, rejects the necessity of revealed truth at the end of time or as the meaning of all time.

So I appreciate Lee's critique of futurism, sketched here and worked out in *No Future*. But I'm not sure I see that such a critique applies to the very form of the questions we have been asked in this roundtable. Lee's critique of the questions sets up "history" as straw man, in a form in which none of us actually practice it. I bring this up because I think it points to a problem in the field of queer history: some very searching theoretical work on history and historicism has appeared over the last fifteen years or so, but there's a tendency—at least among us literary scholars—to continue to critique "history" (meaning old-style historicism) as if this work had never been done. Maybe this is an index of the difficulty of reworking linear temporality: thinking nonlinearity over and against linearity is hard enough, but figuring out the criteria by which different nonlinear temporalities might meaningfully be brought together—figuring out how to make heterogeneity analytically powerful—is exponentially harder.

*Jagose*: Time and history: these two terms, apparently straightforward and even self-evident, can seem next to meaningless when untethered from any specific intellectual context. In the abstract, I find I can't say what "history" or "time" means for me, let alone what their relationship to each other might be. In *Inconsequence*—and as that title remarks—I was thinking about how queer scholarship might most strategically inhabit the logics of a postsexological culture in which sexual value or relevance is crucially indexed to temporalization or chronological progression, and about how queer scholarship might best imagine modes of being lesbian that refuse the consequential promise of "history."

In this roundtable discussion, I can hear resonances with that project, although not always necessarily in a harmonious key. Reading these exchanges and recalling through them the broader constellation of scholarship they represent, I wonder about the ease with which we reify queer temporality, that adjectival "queer" throwing a proprietary loop around properties or characteristics that have long been theorized as at the heart of "time" or, for that matter, "history." Carolyn mentions postcolonial scholarship in this regard, for example, while Carla's work draws strongly on notions of Derridean spectrality, Lee's on Lacanian fantasy. Acknowledging these and other intellectual traditions might make us hesitate to annex the queerness of time for ourselves. Rather than invoke as our straight guy a version of time that is always linear, teleological, reproductive, future oriented, what difference might it make to acknowledge the intellectual traditions in which time has also been influentially thought and experienced as cyclical, interrupted,

multilayered, reversible, stalled—and not always in contexts easily recuperated as queer?

*Freccero:* I want to echo Annamarie’s question by asking what the specificity is of “queer” in relation to temporality, since I agree that not all nonlinear chronological imaginings can be recuperated as queer. I’ve heard José Muñoz suggest something similar to what Chris invokes regarding possibilities for relationality or community in queer temporal reimaginings as a way out of the repro-futurism of both hetero- and (as Hoang salutarily reminds us) homonormative temporal schemas.<sup>5</sup> Carolyn’s eloquent formulations about desiring a different kind of past and developing a postdisenchanted temporal perspective also help me think about how and why history or historicism becomes what is at stake in such a discussion. Susan McCabe’s review essay “The Rise of Queer Historicism” thinks helpfully about how to retain a historicist commitment for queer studies (and vice versa) by working through the contradictory and converging commitments of queer and LGBTI studies in relation to history.<sup>6</sup> Derrida’s discussion of spectral inheritance leads me to think about how queering can happen within the normative frameworks of reproductivity and transform them. So, for example, what might be created is an intergenerational quasi-relationality (I am talking about writing here) whose goal is a certain communicative abstraction in the interests of achieving a different world or doing the work of getting there, again without knowing where “there” is or how to do it. If, in the Western tradition, there are philosophers who so conceived their projects, passing on their timely out-of-time thoughts to an unknown future—and if this project has, to some degree, “worked”—then I would like to think about how one might craft a feminist, transnational, and queer genealogy that could speak as loudly and across as many centuries.

*Nealon:* In writing about “time” and “history,” we’re definitely (though often implicitly) writing about the possible forms and destinies of queer community. But I also think, when we talk about time, we’re talking about economies. I see this in Judith’s description of the time of subculture, with its reserves of the human and the creative; and in Annamarie’s focus on secondarity and “inconsequence” as they give the lie to understandings of sexuality, any sexuality, as foundational—which suggests to me that we need to read sexuality as historical, that is, made out of found materials, secondhand. I also hear the economic in Rod’s use of the word “itinerary” to talk about both capital and, implicitly, the time of raced sexuality—which echoes, for me, Hoang’s foregrounding of “recirculation” for the purposes of “speculation”—a spatializing and mobile set of practices that material-

ize time, perhaps in a way that mimics the movement of the commodity. I certainly share Carolyn's interest in "communities touching across time," and I'm curious about one contemporary variant of that transtemporal touch, which I find in Lee's turn, not so much to "time" but to the language of radicality and—in the Badiou he cites—piety: piety in the sense of "keeping faith with" a radical event.

One question I would have for other folks here would be: how are our theorizations of alternate temporalities legible not only as attempts to think through the possibilities of movement and community but also as attempts to think through or around or against the dominant form of the social organization of time, that is, the time of the commodity? How are touch, or faith, or wandering, or speculation, or delay, related to that time?

*Freeman:* It strikes me that many of you are involved in theorizing new forms of relationality, or theorizing relationality not only otherwise than the dominant ways but otherwise than the dominant ways of homonormative theory. The rubric of time at least seems to offer the possibility of unmaking the forms of relationality we think we know. Implicit in much of this is Foucault's suggestion that homosexuality is a way of inaugurating, creating, proliferating, shifting social relations. In this sense, might homosexuality (let's call it queerness) itself be a form of future-making, of re-creating the social, though perversely enough, not in the name of the future?

*Edelman:* If anything passes for an article of faith among those working in historical analysis, it's that what they're doing mustn't be confused with "old-style historicism," in Carolyn's phrase. I might be more inclined to believe this if it weren't repeated quite so often. But the very need for such repetition bespeaks the *logic* of repetition at the heart of historicism itself: a largely unthought repetition that's not about sameness or sharing across temporal borders, though those are topics that Carolyn has importantly addressed. No, the repetition I have in mind is the symptomatic sort, indicative of an encounter with what can't be assimilated to any systematic understanding, what doesn't conduce to the logic of periodization or identity. Call it the queerness of time's refusal to submit to a temporal logic—or, better, the distortion of that logic by the interference, like a gravitational pull, of some other, unrecognized force. Borrowing from Lacan, I've associated that force with the Real and with *jouissance*. It names nothing less than what remains at once most intimate and most foreign: the uncognizable drive that knows no object, no identity, no positivization of its pure imperative. I'm struck, therefore, by Carla's account of construing herself as "a future dead person." That resonates

for me with Barthes's observation that in writing we're always already dead. And together these insights reinforce what it means to be subjects of a drive, to be "written" by what we do not control or recognize or even desire. It's important, therefore, to remember that the drive does not conduce to our "good"; it gives no cause for the optimism I hear in efforts to associate queerness with community, or a transformative future, or new forms of relationality. If queerness marks the excess of something always unassimilable that troubles the relentlessly totalizing impulse informing normativity, we should expect it to refuse not only the consolations of reproductive futurism but also the purposive, productive uses that would turn it into a "good." We're never at one with our queerness; neither its time nor its subject is ours. But to try to think that tension, to try to resist the refuge of the "good," to try to move, as Carla suggests, into the space where "we" are not: that is a project whose time never comes and therefore is always now.

*Nealon:* My interest in the formations of history, though, is an interest in the conditions that produce it, as much as the content it produces, so I don't think of myself as acting in ignorance of the radical economies to which Lee so patiently wishes to turn our attention. . . . It seems to me that the whole point of doing historical work is to situate it along the seam of its becoming-historical, which is a way to keep it in touch with that which eludes it. This had never meant for me, though, that what eludes history is a priori and forever uncapturable by it; I'm not sure it's ours to know that in advance.

*Jagose:* Is "writing about the possible forms and destinies of queer community," as Chris suggests, or "re-creating the social," as Beth puts it, evidence of the value of rethinking temporality or a bad habit we've fallen into? The logics of community can sometimes seem so elastic as to encompass at once the normative ideologies we're trying to outrun and the transformed relationalities that we'll be afforded if ever we make it. If our working through time and history keeps delivering us to community, perhaps that is because community, together with history, might usefully be thought "along the seam of its becoming"; thought about, that is, as holding open a queer (because radically impersonal) promise. In this sense, community could be another name for what Lee is calling "the space where 'we' are not."

*Freeman:* Speaking of drives, and going back to Chris's question about wanderings, I'm curious about how sex itself—sex as bodily practice, not sexuality as identity—infuses or intersects with queer temporality.

*Halberstam*: Obviously I would so much rather have talked about history and historicity but I will shoulder the responsibility here for sex talk. Where to begin really? Sex and its relation to temporality? I find Beth's work on "temporal drag" useful and inspiring here, especially her sense that we have a hard time identifying with practices and identities and political positions that are located in the past.<sup>7</sup> As someone who sexually identifies as a "stone butch," I am always surprised to hear that apparently there are no stone butches anymore! People often tell me that stone butch was an identity bound to the 1950s and apparently dependent on a preliberation understanding of lesbianism or queerness. Or, now I hear from younger trans folks that stone butchness can be "resolved" by transitioning. So what does it mean to engage in a sexual practice whose time is past?

*Dinshaw*: Or, how does it feel to be an anachronism? I'm working on exactly these issues—the experience of temporal asynchrony—in the context of late-medieval mysticism and the people who write about it, so I find Judith's comments very interesting. My work at the moment deals with the late-medieval mystic Margery Kempe and the first modern editor of Margery's *Book*, and they're both dead, so I'm excited that I can pose this question to Judith, a self-professed living anachronism! To be honest, though, I figure into this article I'm writing, too: I'm yet another subject of anachronism, experiencing a kind of expanded now in which past, present, and future coincide. My point in all this is that one way of making the concept of temporal heterogeneity analytically salient, and insisting on the present's irreducible multiplicity, is to inquire into the felt experience of asynchrony. As I was suggesting earlier, such feelings can be exploited for social and political reasons; the evangelical Christian movement in the United States, for example, works off of people's feeling out of step with contemporary mores.

*Halberstam*: I also find that the emphasis within contemporary sexual subcultures on "flexibility," flexible desires/practices/identifications, marks people with strong identifications as pathological in relation to their rigidity and that the binary of flexible and rigid is definitely a temporal one—it ascribes mobility over time to some notion of liberation and casts stubborn identification as a way of being stuck in time, unevolved, not versatile. These are the symptoms of subtle homonormativities, as Hoang suggests; they cast sexual liberation as the other of time-bound sexual practices. Many of these characterizations of homonormative desire also presume a white subject and then cast anachronism onto communities of color—for example, as white middle-class queers scurry into gender and sexual flexi-

bility, communities bound by butch-fem, perhaps working-class Latina, or some black communities seem to be “behind” the curve of history. Oh wow, I guess I talked about history after all.

*Dinshaw:* If I understand it correctly, Rod’s interpretation of Benjamin’s dictum as a caution about radical uses of temporality reinforces the point that “felt asynchrony” can be exploited or even produced (and extends it spatially into thinking about making and unmaking forms of nationalist and nonnationalist relationality): there’s clearly powerful social and political potential in manipulating lives along temporal lines.

*Jagose:* Yes, and because the experience of being out of time or in time with some moment that is not this one—the experience I understand Chris to have persuasively invoked with his notion of “feeling historical”—might as easily be lived in the register of brutalizing normativity as queer radicality, it’s important to question the reification of queer temporality, the credentialing of asynchrony, multi-temporality, and nonlinearity as if they were automatically in the service of queer political projects and aspirations.

*Nguyen:* I want to add to Judith’s comments that the championing of sexual flexibility and versatility is, as Alan Sinfield thoroughly demonstrates, intimately linked to the *ideal* of modern, Western lesbian and gay relationships as egalitarian, untainted by hierarchies of class, age, gender, and race, and the power imbalances these hierarchies inevitably entail.<sup>8</sup> In my experience, this aspiration to egalitarianism pertains not only to white middle-class queers but also to “sticky rice” (gay male Asian-Asian) relationships as well; that is, the “bad” model of interracial white-Asian pairing (especially if marked by differences of age, class, language, education, nationality, and body size) is seen by some gay Asian men as retrograde, while Asian-Asian couplings (regardless of the same set of differences) are deemed up-to-date and progressive, the new “norm.” The assumptions of a U.S.-based sticky rice politics become especially problematic if imported to an Asian context. For example, the idea of Bangkok as a “gay paradise” is not merely a white gay male fantasy but, increasingly, one for economically privileged Asian Americans as well as Asians from wealthier territories in Asia (e.g., Singapore, Taiwan, Japan, Korea, Hong Kong). Ironically, from the perspective of the foreign gay tourist, the flexibility and versatility of a sexually tolerant Thailand position it as both premodern and postmodern, out of time *and* of the time.



*Nealon:* Let me see if I can join Judith and Hoang in trying to think through the “time” of sex and its practices: just a sketch, an array of examples.

We can still think of the “time” of the epidemic in productive ways, following on important work in the 1980s and 1990s; what is the texture of the time bought by the AIDS cocktail? What is the racial and national time of the shifting geopolitical profile of AIDS?

Or we could think of the reverberation-time of mini-outbreaks, like the recent, resistant strains of staph in New York and San Francisco, which excite old fears and produce new practices (more flip-flops in the locker room!). We could think of the “time” of monogamy, its up times and its down times; or the slow, wormhole-time of fisting or getting fisted; or the time of the “quickie” in the men’s bathroom; or the “time” of the visit to the bar—say, the visits made by working-class men, or men of color, to predominantly white, middle-class gay bars—by men who hang around for ten or fifteen minutes, feel unwelcome, then leave, to return in a month or so. What is the “time” of the repeated attempt? All these questions are of potential interest to scholars of gay male sexuality.

*Nguyen:* This brings to mind the argument that gay male cruising swerves from or evades capitalist/national time viewed as re-productive, in the sense that such a logic deems public cruising to be “wasteful” loitering or strategically opportunistic. Yet I have reservations about a celebration of gay male cruising as a subversion of heteronormative time frames because this kind of assessment commonly privileges urban space and freedom of movement/reservoirs of time that remain inaccessible to a lot of queers.

To recall the metaphor of packet-switching and the powerful role of new communications technologies in reconfiguring queer time and space and queer relationality, it’s fruitful to consider how the Internet has transformed queer male cruising. On the one hand, you have the alarming conflation of queer communities with a singular market demographic—for example, community membership entails buying a Gay.com membership. On the other hand, cyber cruising has the potential to proliferate, and hence destabilize, established sexual identities and communities. The virtual “gay marketplace of desire” also creates a meticulous quantification of socially marked bodies (stats, pics) and acts (serosorting, sexual positioning), including those that qualify as “efficient” and those that are a waste of time.

Another cyber cruising practice that bears mention here is barebacking (since the Internet is understood to be the primary venue where barebackers locate sexual partners). One “explanation” for this practice is that seroconversion

to positive status constitutes a desirable identity or a more authentic gay identity for some gay men, and a way to acquire membership in the gay community. This process gives us pause to consider the “consolation” and “refuge of the good” of queer community and at the same time represents an ironic enactment of the refusal of reproductive futurity and exemplifies in a perverse manner a “new form” of relationality.

*Freccero:* A sexual practice whose time has past, being an anachronism . . . these evocative ways of thinking time with the being and doing of bodies provoke me to wonder again about that problem of homogenous (on the one hand) and linear (on the other) time. Is this because it’s so hard to think the body’s temporality as anything other than linear and homogenous? Certainly it’s no accident that teleology is so crucial to our imaginings of time: we’re born and then at the end, yup, we die. In between we seem to go from “prematuration” to maturation to aging and decay; concepts like growing, then growing up, then aging, getting old, and dying sketch a predictable, inevitable, irrevocable time line. But psychoanalysis, for example, honors the queer temporality of embodied being in all its sensate complexity and, in particular, describes better than many languages the strange relation between libidinality and temporality. Is there time in the unconscious? And what is fantasy’s relation to time? When I desire, and when I stage the scene of fantasy (fantasy always seems to be a staged scene), I struggle against the brutal hegemony of the visual’s conceptualization of the body—overwhelmingly, in this culture anyway, structured by linear time—for what might otherwise be a far queerer experience of the body’s persistence in time.

*Ferguson:* One of the things that I’ve been thinking about lately—something that I think dovetails with the discussion about the temporality of sexual practices and subjectivities as well as the overall question of history—is the ways in which normativity attempts to close off prior critical and sexual universes. I’m thinking about how powerful texts like Hélène Cixous’s “Laugh of the Medusa” or Essex Hemphill and Joseph Beam’s *Brother to Brother* were for me.<sup>9</sup> In very different and uneven ways, they were trying to join the question of critical intellectual production to projects articulating new sexual horizons. As a historical formation, contemporary normativity seems to close the lid on those prior critical discourses that tried to thwart normalization. Normativity seems to do so by making minoritized practices like French feminism or black queer artistic and activist practices into historic quests for legitimacy and evaluating legitimacy through how well we surrender claims to sex and sexual heterogeneity. We need to find ways to oppose

that historical reading with other ones—ones that insist on seeing critical intellectual interrogations around race, class, gender, and nation as part of the ignition of other sexual imaginations.

*Halberstam:* Future dead people of the world unite! I am amused by Lee's reworking of Carla's comment via Barthes, in order to suggest that "we're always already dead." I know it is not an inherently or obviously amusing statement, and yet, well, there are so many situations when one might feel that one is definitely among future dead people like department meetings, for example. I jest, of course, but notice how impossible it is *not* to create community and a future, even if that community is made up of the dead, the semi-dead, and the vegetative and even if that future has already come and gone. I think the relentlessness of Lee's critique of inhabiting "the refuge of the good" is utterly compelling . . . for certain subjects in certain social locations. For others, that place of pure critique might constitute epistemological self-destruction, and so I would argue for a kind of counterintuitive critique, one that works against the grain of the true, the good, and the right but one that nonetheless refuses to make a new orthodoxy out of negativity. Here I would mess up the discipline of relentless (and therefore predictable) critique using Carolyn's odd temporality of the "postdisenchanted" and Rod's understanding of the unpredictable and undependable temporalities of the radical and the normative, and I would join with Hoang in questioning "a celebration of gay male cruising as a subversion of heteronormative time frames"—cruising may in fact inhabit rather than oppose the time of capital and consumption. What is the time of the alternative and when will it come? How does the subversive cycle around into the dominant? How does the dominant continually situate itself *as* alternative? How do you get from here to somewhere else? Or, to cite the Streets: "Let's push things forward / That ain't a bag it's a shipment / This ain't a track it's a movement."

*Edelman:* One of the great things about thinking in conversation with the scholars brought together here is that it forces me to face up to the necessary consequences of their—and my own—positions, and to come, if only provisionally, to new and unexpected understandings of the demands of what I've been calling queer negativity (recognizing that the phrase is simultaneously redundant and a contradiction in terms). For instance, when Judith points to the "epistemological self-destruction" that can attend resisting the "refuge of the good" and warns against making "a new orthodoxy out of negativity," I am struck by the fact that nothing could be more orthodox than this warning against a new orthodoxy. And it prompts me, not

against Judith, but in concert with her own most forceful interventions, to insist that critical negativity, lacking a self-identity, can never become an orthodoxy. To the contrary, the resistance to the straw man of an orthodox negativity constitutes the final ruse of “the good,” the final defense against the risk to Judith’s unidentified “others” of “epistemological self-destruction.” Why not endorse, to the contrary, “epistemological self-destruction” for all? Why not accept that queerness, taken seriously, demands nothing less? The fantasy of a viable “alternative” to normativity’s domination—a fantasy defended as strategically necessary when not affirmed as unquestionably good—offers nothing more, as Judith and Hoang and Rod implicitly recognize, than futurism’s redemptive temporality gussied up with a rainbow flag. Maybe we need to consider that you *don’t* get “from here to somewhere else.” Maybe we need to imagine anew, “We’re here, we’re queer, get used to it,” not as the positive assertion of a marginalized identity but as the universal condition of the subject caught up in structural repetition. That’s what makes queerness intolerable, even to those who call themselves queer: a nonteleological negativity that refuses the leavening of piety and with it the dollop of sweetness afforded by messianic hope.

## Notes

1. Ernst Bloch, *Heritage of Our Times*, trans. Neville Plaice and Stephen Plaice (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), pt. 2, esp. 97.
2. See Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), 253–64; and Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd, introduction to *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital*, ed. Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 1–32.
3. Benjamin, “Theses,” 261.
4. M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 308.
5. José Esteban Muñoz, “Queerness as Horizon: Utopian Hermeneutics in the Face of Gay Pragmatism” (lecture, University of California, Santa Cruz, April 21, 2006).
6. Susan McCabe, “The Rise of Queer Historicism,” *GLQ* 11 (2005): 119–34.
7. Elizabeth Freeman, “Packing History, Count(er)ing Generations,” *New Literary History* 31 (2000): 727–44.
8. Alan Sinfield, *On Sexuality and Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).
9. Hélène Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa,” trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs* 1, no. 4 (1976): 875–93; Essex Hemphill, ed., *Brother to Brother: New Writings by Black Gay Men* (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1991).