

*The
Anti-Social
Turn*

excerpt from
haedam — journal of
queer nihilism

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The Anti-Social Turn

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No Future, Edelman's magnum opus of queer negativity, offers a series of crucial lessons for *baedlings*; that is, for those of us whose queerness means the refusal of society and not any negotiation with or within it. In our reading and use—or abuse—of Edelman's singular work, we have no choice but to take him to task for his academic form, his position within institutionalized queer theory, and the separation between his theory and practice. His project fails in that it locates queer negativity within various cultural productions—literature, film—and yet never works to unveil this negation in the context of lived revolt or of active struggle against the society he purports to oppose.

In exploring *No Future*, we insist on expropriating it from the ivory tower of theory and using it as a tool for our life projects. Against the safe interpretations offered by the academy and its theorists, we embark on an elaboration of queer negativity that means nothing less than the destruction of the civilized world.

Judith/Jack Halberstam, another popular queer theorist, reads the significance of Edelman's text in regard to what they term the anti-social project, but also experiences it as lacking:

Edelman's polemic opens the door to a ferocious articulation of negativity (“fuck the social order and the Child in whose name we're collectively terrorized; fuck Annie; fuck the waif from *Les Mis*; fuck the poor, innocent kid on the Net; fuck Laws both with capital Is and with small; fuck the whole network of Symbolic relations and the future that serves as its prop”) but, ultimately, he does not fuck the law, big or little L, he succumbs to the law of grammar, the law of logic, the law of abstraction, the law of apolitical formalism, the law of Genres...

Elsewhere, Halberstam more explicitly frames their particular interest as follows: “I want to engage critically with Edelman's project here in order to argue for a more explicitly political framing of the anti-social project.”

Halberstam's aim is like ours, in a way. Edelman's ferocious negativity remains caught within the web of formal knowledge and domination that is the academy. Trapped within these laws—logic, abstraction, formalism—Edelman's theory, as it stands, can only

serve to be a somewhat more naughty articulation of the law of the social order itself. And yet Halberstam's alternative project fails in the same way. We don't desire a more explicitly *political* framing of the anti-social project, when the logic of politics itself can only really offer us more abstraction, more formalism, more of the same. For us, queer theory is only important to the extent that we make it a tool or a weapon for our projects. But in this we cannot look to politics, which is the science of organizing and representing society. Instead we have to exceed Edelman's project, discarding his apolitics in favor of an explosive *anti-politics*.

If Edelman opened a door, as Halberstam argues, for an anti-social queer project, then let's cross through the threshold and let's set the whole house on fire while we're at it. What follows is a close reading and overthrowing of *No Future*. These are the vital elements of the theory without the baggage of the academy, the crucial points of the text sharpened into weapons for anti-social projects.

Pure Negativity

Edelman's project, insofar as we can imagine it as a starting point, is intriguing because for him queerness is fundamentally negative. Whether in the form of gay assimilation, identity politics, or 'radical queer' subculture, any contemporary engagement with queerness must reckon with decades of capitalist integration into society and its state. These varying forms are joined together through positive queer identity as a shared content. If we read Edelman with a great sense of catharsis, it is because his conception of negative queerness allows us to discard all the identitarian baggage which accompanies queerness.

This move against a positive queer projects is a crucial one; it illustrates one truth about capital. Capital is predicated on accumulating value—*any* value—for its own self-reproduction. Capital is in a constant process of revolt against itself. Subjects which were once marginalized or annihilated by the civilized order are absorbed into its circuitry, positions that could mark an outside are moved inward. There is no positive queerness that isn't already a site of society's reproduction. The positivist institutions

of queerness—its dance parties, community projects, activist groups, social networks, fashion, literature, art, festivals—form the material structure of civilization. Whatever antagonism or difference these forms possess is thoroughly re-made in capital's image; all value extracted, all danger neutralized. To our horror, queerness becomes the *avant-garde* of marketplaces and the dynamic lifeblood of the advanced postmodern economy.

This analysis of positivism is not particular to queerness. One can as easily point to any number of anarchist projects and expose the ways in which they reproduce the very alienation they aim to overcome. Cooperative business, radical commodities, independent media, social spaces, Food Not Bombs: when positive anarchist projects aren't doing social work to stave off collapse or upheaval, they are developing the innovations (self-management, decentralized production, crowd-sourcing, social networking) that will help to extend capital's reign into the next century.

The departure from these forms is the elaboration of queerness in the negative. In this linking of queerness and negativity, we join Edelman, who defines queerness thus:

[Q]ueerness, irreducibly linked to the “aberrant or atypical,” to what chafes against “normalization,” finds its value not in a good susceptible to generalization, but only in the stubborn particularity that voids every notion of a general good. The embrace of queer negativity, then, can have no justification if justification requires it to reinforce some positive social value; its value, instead, resides in its challenge to value as defined by the social, and thus in its radical challenge to the very value of the social itself.

Put another way, we are not interested in a social project of queerness, in queer contributions to society, in carving out our own ghettos within the material and symbolic structures of capitalist life. Rather, our engagement with queer theory must be attuned to locating the moments which reveal the potential undoing of society, its structures and its relations. For Edelman, a theory of queer negativity begins from an exploration of the fantastic position of queers within society's collective imaginary. His methodology is to navigate the discourses and nightmares of right-wing heteronormativity. Citing one fundamentalist pundit

after another, he fleshes out the terror with which the anti-queer establishment imagines the threat of queerness. A thread persists through history into the present which imagines queers as the destroyers of social cohesion, the ‘gravediggers of society,’ the repudiation of the values of hard work and family, the persistent wave which erodes the bedrock of the monetary and libidinal economies, thieves, tricksters, hustlers, sinners, murderers, deviants, and perverts. Queers are not just damned, they are the proof of society’s fundamental damnation as well. Sodomites, after all, are named for their symbolic position as the sexual symbol of civilization’s decadence and imminent annihilation.

Analyzing an example of this fantasy, Edelman writes:

We might do well to consider this less as an instance of hyperbolic rant and more as a reminder of the disorientation that queer sexualities should entail: “acceptance or indifference to the homosexual movement will result in society’s destruction by allowing civil order to be redefined and by plummeting ourselves, our children and grandchildren into an age of godlessness. Indeed, the very foundation of Western Civilization is at stake.” Before the self-righteous bromides of liberal pluralism spill from our lips, before we supply once more the assurance that ours is another kind of love but a love like his nonetheless, before we piously invoke the litany of our glorious contributions to the civilizations of east and west alike, dare we pause for a moment to acknowledge that he might be right—or, more important, that he ought to be right: that queerness should and must destroy such notions of “civil order” through a rupturing of our foundational faith in the reproduction of futurity?

Edelman’s desire for a queerness that would hear itself called a threat to the social order and takes this as a challenge rather than an insult is paralleled by the text “Criminal Intimacy,” authored by ‘a gang of criminal queers’ and published in the anarchist journal *Total Destroy* in 2009:

The machinery of control has rendered our very existence illegal. We’ve endured the criminalization and crucifixion of our bodies, our sex, our unruly genders. Raids, witch-hunts, burnings at the stake. We’ve occupied the space of deviants, of whores, of perverts, and abominations. This culture has rendered us criminal, and of course, in turn, we’ve committed our lives to crime. In the criminalization of

our pleasures, we've found the pleasure to be had in crime! In being outlawed for who we are, we've discovered that we are indeed fucking outlaws! Many blame queers for the decline of this society—we take pride in this. Some believe that we intend to shred-to-bits this civilization and it's moral fabric—they couldn't be more accurate. We're often described as depraved, decadent and revolting—but oh, they ain't seen nothing yet.

This position of ownership of the negative means a liberatory conspiracy between the enemies of society. It allows us to escape the traps that lie in any attempt at affirming a positive counter-narrative. One cannot deny the destructive and anti-social potential of queerness without also affirming the social order. One cannot argue against the anti-queer paranoia which imagines us to be enemies of God and state and family without implicitly conceding the legitimacy of each. The hope for progressive notions of tolerance or combative activism to undo this fantasy is an expression of the desire for assimilation into society. Even 'radical' or 'anti-assimilationist' queer positions attempt to deny this negativity and to create space for queer representation in the State or queer belonging within capitalism.

We'll follow Edelman as he elaborates on this idea:

Rather than rejecting, with liberal discourse, the ascription of negativity to the queer, we might... do better to consider accepting and even embracing it. Not in the hope of forging thereby some more perfect social order—such a hope, after all, would only reproduce the constraining mandate of futurism, just as any such order would equally occasion the negativity of the queer—but rather to refuse the insistence of hope itself as affirmation, which is always affirmation of an order whose refusal will register as unthinkable, irresponsible, inhumane. And the trump card of affirmation? Always the question: If not this, what? Always the demand to translate the insistence, the pulsive force, or negativity into some determinate stance or “position” whose determination would thus negate it: always the imperative to immure it in some stable and positive form... I do not intend to propose some “good” that will thereby be assured. To the contrary, I mean to insist that nothing, and certainly not what we call “good,” can ever have any assurance at all in the order of the Symbolic... [W]e might rather, figuratively cast our vote for “none of the above,” for the primacy of a constant “no” in response to the law

of the symbolic, which would echo that law's foundational act, its self-constituting negation.

Again, a simple shift can apply this argument to the discursive and imaginary constructions of anarchists. Many anarchists find themselves compulsively responding to negative characterizations of our intentions and dispositions. In the face of an array of flattering accusations—we are criminal, nihilistic, violent, sowers of disorder—the proponents of a positive anarchism instinctively respond by insisting that we are motivated by the highest ideals (democracy, consensus, equality, justice), seek to create a better society, are non-violent, and believe anarchism to be the greatest order of all. Over and over again anarchists and other revolutionaries offer their allegiance to society by denying the reality or possibility of their enmity with the social order.

Leftist notions of reform, progress, tolerance, and social justice always come up against the harsh reality that any progressive development can only mean a more sophisticated system of misery and exploitation; that tolerance means nothing; that justice is an impossibility. Activists, progressive and revolutionary alike, will always respond to our critique of the social order with a demand that we articulate some sort of alternative. Let us say once and for all that we have none to offer. Faced with the system's seamless integration of all positive projects into itself, we can't afford to affirm or posit any more *alternatives* for it to consume. Rather we must realize that our task is infinite, not because we have so much to build but because we have an entire world to destroy. Our daily life is so saturated and structured by capital that it is impossible to imagine a life worth living, except one of revolt.

We understand destruction to be necessary, and we desire it in abundance. We have nothing to gain through shame or lack of confidence in these desires. There cannot be freedom in the shadow of prisons, there cannot be human community in the context of commodities, there cannot be self-determination under the reign of a state. This world—the police and armies that defend it, the institutions that constitute it, the architecture that gives it shape, the subjectivities that populate it, the apparatuses that administer its function, the schools that inscribe its ideology, the

activism that frantically responds to its crises, the arteries of its circulation and flows, the commodities that define life within it, the communication networks that proliferate it, the information technology that surveils and records it—must be annihilated in every instance, all at once. To shy away from this task, to assure our enemies of our good intentions, is the most crass dishonesty. Anarchy, as with queerness, is most powerful in its negative form. Positive conceptions of these, when they are not simply a quiet acquiescence in the face of a sophisticated and evolving totality of domination, are hopelessly trapped in combat with the details of this totality on its own terms.

In *No Future*, Edelman appropriates and privileges a particular psychoanalytic concept: the death drive. In elaborating the relationship of “queer theory and the death drive” (the subtitle of *No Future*), he deploys the concept in order to name a force that isn’t specifically tied to queer identity. He argues that the death drive is a constant eruption of disorder from within the symbolic order itself. It is an unnameable and inarticulable tendency for any society to produce the contradictions and forces which can tear that society apart.

To avoid getting trapped in Lacanian ideology, we should quickly depart from a purely psychoanalytic framework for understanding this drive. Marxism, to imagine it another way, assures us that a fundamental crisis within the capitalist mode of production guarantees that it will produce its own negation from within itself. Messianic traditions, likewise, hold fast to a faith that the messiah must emerge in the course of daily life to overthrow the horror of history. The most romantic elaborations of anarchism describe the inevitability that individuals will revolt against the banality and alienation of modern life. Cybernetic government operates on the understanding that the illusions of social peace contain a complex and unpredictable series of risks, catastrophes, contagions, events and upheavals to be managed. Each of these contains a kernel of truth, if perhaps in spite of their ideologies. The death drive names that permanent and irreducible element which has and will always produce revolt. *Species being, queerness, chaos, willful revolt, the commune, rupture, the Idea, the wild, oppositional defiance disorder*—we can give innumerable names to what escapes our ability to describe

it. Each of these attempts to term the erratic negation intrinsic to society. Each comes close to theorizing the universal tendency that any civilization will produce its own undoing.

Explosions of urban rioting, the prevalence of methods of piracy and expropriation, the hatred of work, gender dysphoria, the inexplicable rise in violent attacks against police officers, self-immolation, non-reproductive sexual practices, irrational sabotage, nihilistic hacker culture, lawless encampments which exist simply for themselves—the death drive is evidenced in each moment that exceeds the social order and begins to rip at its fabric.

The symbolic deployment of queerness by the social order is always an attempt to identify the negativity of the death drive, to lock this chaotic potential up in the confines of this or that subjectivity. Foucault's work is foundational to queer theory in part because of his argument that power must create and then classify antagonistic subjectivities so as to then annihilate any subversive potential within a social body. Homosexuals, gangsters, criminals, immigrants, welfare mothers, transsexuals, women, youth, terrorists, the black bloc, communists, extremists: power is always constructing and defining these antagonistic subjects which must be managed. When the smoke clears after a riot, the state and media apparatuses universally begin to locate such events within the logic of identity, freezing the fluidity of revolt into a handful of subject positions to be imprisoned, or, more sinisterly, *organized*. Progressivism, with its drive toward inclusion and assimilation, stakes its hope on the social viability of these subjects, on their ability to participate in the daily reproduction of society. In doing so, the ideology of progress functions to trap subversive potential within a particular subject, and then to solicit that subject's self-repudiation of the danger which they've been constructed to represent. This move for social peace fails to eliminate the drive, because despite a whole range of determinisms, there is no subject which can solely and perfectly contain the potential for revolt. The simultaneous attempt at justice must also fail, because the integration of each successive subject position into normative relations necessitates the construction of the next Other to be disciplined or destroyed.

Rather than a progressive project which aims to steadily eradicate an emergent chaos over time, our project, located at the threshold of Edelman's work, bases itself upon the persistent negativity of the death drive. We choose not to establish a place for queers, thereby shifting the structural position of queerness to some other population. We identify with the negativity of the drive, and thereby perform a disidentification away from any identity to be represented or which can beg for rights.

Following Edelman further:

To figure the undoing of civil society, the death drive of the dominant order, is neither to be nor to become that drive; such a being is not the point. Rather, acceding to that figural position means recognizing and refusing the consequences of grounding reality in denial of that drive. As the death drive dissolves those congealments of identity that permit us to know and survive as ourselves, so the queer must insist on disturbing, on queering, social organization as such—on disturbing, and therefore on queering ourselves and our investment in such organization. For queerness can never define an identity; it can only ever disturb one. And so, when I argue, as I aim to do here, that the burden of queerness is to be located less in the assertion of an oppositional political identity than in opposition to politics as the governing fantasy of realizing identities, I am proposing no platform or position from which queer sexuality or any queer subject might finally and truly become itself, as if it could somehow manage thereby to achieve an essential queerness. I am suggesting instead that the efficacy of queerness, its real strategic value, lies in its resistance to a symbolic reality that only ever invests us as subjects insofar as we invest ourselves in it, clinging to its governing fictions, its persistent sublimations, as reality itself.

This negative queerness severs us from any simple understanding of ourselves. More so, it severs us from any formulaic or easily-represented notions of what we need, what we desire, or what is to be done. Our queerness does not imagine a coherent self, and thus cannot agitate for any selves to find their place within civilization. The only queerness that queer sexuality could ever hope to achieve would exist in a total refusal of attempts at the symbolic integration of our sexuality into governing and market structures. This refusal of representation forecloses on any hope that we ever have in identity politics or positive identity projects. We decline

the progressive faith in the ability for our bodies to be figured into the symbolic order. We decline the liberal assurance that everything will turn out right, if we just have faith.

No, instead we mean to “unleash negativity against the coherence of any self-image, subjecting us to a moral law that evacuates the subject so as to locate it through and in that very act of evacuation, permitting the realization, thereby, of a freedom beyond the boundaries of any image or representation, a freedom that ultimately resides in nothing more than the capacity to advance into emptiness.”

A non-identitarian, unrepresentable, unintelligible queer revolt will be purely negative, or it won't be at all. In the same way, an insurrectionary anarchy must embrace the death drive against all the positivisms afforded by the world it opposes. If we hope to interrupt the ceaseless forward motion of capital and its state, we cannot rely on failed methods. Identity politics, platforms, formal organizations, subcultures, activist campaigns (each being either queer or anarchist) will always arrive at the dead ends of identity and representation. We must flee from these positivities, these models, to instead experiment with the undying negativity of the death drive. Edelman again:

The death drive's immortality, then refers to a persistent negation that offers assurance of nothing at all: neither identity, nor survival, nor any promise of the future. Instead, it insists both on and as the impossibility of Symbolic closure, the absence of any Other to affirm the Symbolic order's truth and hence the illusory status of meaning as defense against the self-negating substance of *jouissance*... [Queerness] affirms a constant, eruptive *jouissance* that responds to the inarticulable real, to the impossibility of sexual rapport or of ever being able to signify the relation between the sexes. [Queerness] then, like the death drive, engages, by refusing, the normative stasis, the immobility, of sexuation... breaks down the mortifying structures that give us ourselves as selves and does so with all the force of the Real that such forms must fail to signify... the death drive both evades and undoes representation... the gravediggers of society [are] those who care nothing for the future.

We'll return soon to the concepts of futurity and of *jouissance*, but to conclude this point, we'll assert that an insurrectionary process can only be an explosion of negativity against everything that dominates and exploits us, but also against everything that produces us as we are.

Not for the Children

In an above passage, we cited a text by J. Halberstam in which they state their intention to re-work Edelman's theory into something more *explicitly political*. We share Halberstam's dissatisfaction with Edelman, for whom queer negativity amounts to little more than lecture circuits, circuit parties, hours at the gym, Botox, and the crass narcissism of gay life. As we will argue later, Edelman's theory is heavily indebted to the work of Guy Hocquenghem, but Edelman fails to apply Hocquenghem's critique of queer subculture to his own life, foolishly choosing to ignore what the latter warned in *The Screwball Asses*:

As long as we are not burned at the stake or locked up in asylums, we continue to flounder in the ghettos of nightclubs, public restrooms and sidelong glances, as if that misery had become the habit of our happiness. And so, with the help of the state, do we build our own prisons.

In order to flee the self-constituted prisons described by Hocquenghem, we must turn Edelman's own critique against him and the pathetic form of his life project. Our argument remains that his project must be taken beyond its own limits. In fact, it is the very detachment of this theory from any practice of revolt that weakens the potential power in *No Future*. To reach a conclusion of apolitical detachment through queer negativity is weak thinking. We are interested instead in a praxis through which queer theory and queer revolt are fused in an elaboration of active nihilism, of *anti*-politics.

To return to Halberstam for a moment:

No future for Edelman means routing our desires around the eternal sunshine of the spotless child and finding the shady side of political imaginaries in the proudly sterile and antireproductive logics of queer

relation. It also seems to mean something (too much) about Lacan's symbolic and not enough about the powerful negativity of punk politics.... Negativity might well constitute an anti-politics but it should not register as apolitical.

Halberstam is correct again to critique Edelman's over-reliance on psychoanalysis. In this regard, we can only really interpret his methodology as a cop-out, a way to elaborate queer negativity from the safe positions of the academic or the analyst. We'll further agree that negativity should be anti-political as opposed to apolitical. However, to be honest, we're not really sure what 'punk politics' might be, and fear that they'd probably be as terrible as any other politic. On this point, it is important that we define our anti-politics as refusing all political logic: representation, mediation, dialogue with power. And so, once again, we must abandon queer academics and their easy answers. We diverge from Halberstam in that we will not locate our anti-politics in any music genre or the subculture that accompanies it. Instead, we'll attempt to show that the lack in Edelman's thought would be completed by the anti-political tendencies of an insurrectionary anarchist practice of self-organized attack.

Edelman's critique of politics begins with the figure of the Child. All political positions, he argues, represent themselves as doing what is best *for the children*. Politicians, whatever their parties or leanings, universally frame their debates around the question of what policies are best for the children, who keeps the Child safest, or what type of world we want to be building for our children. The centrality of the Child in the field of the political is not limited to electoral politics or political parties. Nationalist groups organize themselves around a necessity to preserve a future *for their children*, while anarchist and communist revolutionaries concern themselves with revolutionary organizing meant to create a better world for future generations. Politicians concern themselves with different children depending on their varying from ideologies, but the Child stays constant as a universal Möbius strip, inverting itself and flipping so as to be the unquestioned and untouchable universal value of all politics. Politics, however supposedly radical, is simply the universal movement of submission to the ideal of the future—to preserve, maintain and upgrade the structures of

society and to proliferate them through time all for the sake of the children. The Child must always name the horizon and the beneficiary of every political project.

It is for this reason that Edelman contends that queerness finds itself missing from all political discourse:

For the liberal's view of society, which seems to accord the queer a place, endorses no more than the conservative right's the queerness of resistance to futurism and thus the queerness of the queer. While the right wing imagines the elimination of queers (or of the need to confront their existence), the left would eliminate queerness by shining the cool light of reason upon it, hoping thereby to expose it as merely a mode of sexual expression free of the all-pervasive coloring, the determining fantasy formation, by means of which it can seem to portend, and not for the right alone, the undoing of the social order and its cynosure, the Child. Queerness thus comes to mean nothing for both: for the right wing, the nothingness always at war with the positivity of civil society; for the left, nothing more than a sexual practice in need of demystification.

The Child, of course, has very little to do with real children. Like all people, children are enslaved under the political order of the state and capital, expected to bear the burden of being the innocent beneficiaries of political initiatives. No, rather the Child is the fantastic symbol for the eternal proliferation of class society. The Child represents the succession of generations and the continuation of this society beyond the lifespans of its living members. All politics, being concerned primarily with the Child, then reveal themselves to be only ever a process by which to manage and secure the continued existence of society. As enemies of society, we are also enemies of politics.

To quote Edelman:

The fantasy subtending the image of the child invariably shapes the logic within which the political itself must be thought. That logic compels us, to the extent that we would register as politically responsible, to submit to the framing of political debate—and, indeed of the political field—as defined by the terms of what this book describes as reproductive futurism: terms that impose an ideological limit on political discourse as such, preserving in the process the

absolute privilege of heteronormativity by rendering unthinkable, by casting outside the political domain, the possibility of a queer resistance to this organizing principle of communal relations.

If the varying discourses of politics are only ever about the Child (as society's future), queerness must be anti-political because it marks a fundamental interruption of the societal norms and apparatuses that exist to mandate the reproduction the Child. Yes, queer sex can be non-reproductive sex, but we cannot define queerness through such overly-simple and naturalistic logics. Queerness, beyond being the negation of the heteronormative family matrix, must also be practiced as a willful refusal of the political imperative to reproduce class society. In a world where all social relations are enchanted by our obligation to the Child as the future of the social order, we must break those communal relations and break the stranglehold of politics over our daily lives. Queerness must be an outside to politics, an antagonism against the political, or it isn't queer at all.

By Edelman's account:

Queerness names the side of those "not fighting for the children." The side outside the consensus by which all politics confirms the absolute value of reproductive futurism. The ups and downs of political fortune may measure the social order's pulse, but queerness, by contrast figures outside and beyond its political symptoms, the place of the social order's death drive: a place, to be sure, of abjection expressed in the stigma, sometimes fatal that follows from reading that figure literally... More radically, though, as I argue here, queerness attains its ethical value precisely insofar as it accedes to that place, accepting its figural status as resistance to the viability of the social while insisting on the inextricability of such resistance from every social structure.

Queerness, as we'll thus conceive it, is not locked in a dialectical battle of queer identity versus normative identities, nor of queer politics versus heteronormative politics. Rather our queer opposition is leveled against the false oppositions which politics always serves to represent. Queerness marks the space which is outside and against political logic. Insurrectionary anarchists are no strangers to this space. While leftist anarchists articulate their

activity as politics, insurrectionary anarchy doesn't concern itself with such abstractions. We flee from all political roles which we're called upon to symbolize, whether those constructed by the media or by those self-appointed leaders of struggles. Unlike most other self-declared revolutionaries, we are not fighting for a utopian future (communist, anarchist, cybernetic). We are not looking for victories that will be enjoyed by symbolic children in a future society. We are not fighting for an abstract ideal. We are not creating a world, and we are not motivated by anything outside of ourselves. Our anti-political practice, our attempts at insurrection, emerge purely from the context of an awareness of our daily lives. If we speak of social war, it is because we're experimenting with types of relationships and combat in order to attack the social order.

In order to genuinely break from politics, we must develop forms of struggle that shatter the illusions with which politics are made necessary. To quote Edelman again:

Politics names the social enactment of the subject's attempt to establish the conditions for [an] impossible consolidation by identifying with something outside itself... deferred perpetually of itself. Politics, that is, names the struggle to effect a fantasmatic order of reality in which the subject's alienation would vanish into the seamlessness of identity at the endpoint of the endless chain of signifiers lived as history.

Politics is such a sinister force because it is moved by an alienation and lack rooted in society's foundations. To remedy this ennui, individuals turn to politics to discover some universal truth to struggle for—a comfortable abstraction to fill the void in their experience. This is a paradox, of course, as this alienation is intrinsic to capitalist society, and politics can only ever reproduce that society, and therefore its concomitant misery. The fantasy of politics promises to suture one's empty subjectivity to some abstraction outside of oneself in an attempt to find some meaning, to situation oneself within history, to really do something. Like a form of performance art, politics acts as a great representation of resistance to society, yet as mere representation remains inseparable from the symbolic order. The reality of politics is that

it offers nothing; a nothingness that corresponds to the meaninglessness of social life.

An insurrectionary, queer anti-politics functions to interrupt the closed circuitry of emptiness-politics-emptiness. Halting the ceaseless pursuit of a better world for the Child, our project centers itself on immediate fulfillment, joy, conflict, vengeance, conspiracy and pleasure. Rather than politics, we engage in social war. Without demands, we expropriate what we desire. Instead of representation, we rely on autonomous self-organization. We do not protest, we attack. As with our queerness, our anti-politics strives to escape political identification or ideological attachment to this or that political subjectivity.

Acceding to this figural identification with the undoing of identity, which is also to say with the disarticulation of social and symbolic form, might well be described as politically self-destructive... but politics (as the social elaboration of reality) and the self (as mere prosthesis maintaining the future for the figural child), are what queerness, again as figure, necessarily destroys—necessarily insofar as this “self” is the agent of reproductive futurism and this “politics” the means of its promulgation as the order of social reality... Political self-destruction inheres in the only act that counts as one; the act of resisting enslavement to the future in the name of having a life.

Evading the Trap of the Future

It should be obvious through Edelman’s treatment of the relationship of politics to the Child that the cathexis which captures all political ambition is a drive toward the future. The social order must concern itself with the future so as to create the forward-moving infrastructure and discourse to proliferate itself. Edelman’s name for this insistence on the Child as the future is reproductive futurism. Reproductive futurism is the ideology which demands that all social relationships and communal life be structured in order to allow for the possibility of the future through the reproduction of the Child, and thus the reproduction of society. The ideology of reproductive futurism ensures the sacrifice of all vital energy for the pure abstraction of the idealized continuation of society. Edelman argues that “futuraity amounts to

a struggle for Life at the expense of life; for the Children at the expense of the lived experiences of actual children.”

If queerness is a refusal of the symbolic value of the Child as the horizon of the future, queerness must figure as being against the future itself. To be specific, our queer project must also pose itself as the denial of the future of civilization.

Edelman argues that “the queer comes to figure the bar to every realization of futurity, the resistance, internal to the social, to every social structure or form.” He locates this queer anti-futurity as being the primary fantastic justification for anti-queer violence: “If there is no baby and, in consequence, no future, then the blame must fall on the fatal lure of sterile, narcissistic enjoyments understood as inherently destructive of meaning and therefore as responsible for the undoing of social organization, collective reality, and, inevitably, life itself.” He invokes the anti-queer interpretations of the Biblical destruction of Sodom to describe the ways in which the collective imaginary is still haunted by the notion that a proliferation of queerness can only result in a persistent threat of societal apocalypse. Thus in the name of the Child and the future it represents, any repression, sexual or otherwise, can be justified.

The Child, immured in an innocence seen as continuously under siege, condenses a fantasy of vulnerability to the queerness of queer sexualities precisely insofar as that Child enshrines, in its form as sublimation, the very value for which queerness regularly find itself condemned: an insistence on sameness that intends to restore an Imaginary past. The Child, that is, marks the fetishistic fixation of heteronormativity: an erotically charged investment in the rigid sameness of identity that is central to the compulsory narrative of reproductive futurism. And so, as the radical right maintains, the battle against queers is a life-and-death struggle for the future of a Child whose ruin is pursued by queers. Indeed, as the Army of God made clear in the bomb-making guide it produces for the assistance of its militantly “pro-life” members, its purpose was wholly congruent with the logic of reproductive futurism: to “disrupt and ultimately destroy Satan’s power to kill our children, God’s children.”

Edelman goes on to cite the ways in which reproductive futurism is intrinsic to white supremacist ideology and white nationalism; bound as the Child is to notions of race and nation:

Let me end with a reference to the “fourteen words,” attributed to David Lane, by which members of various white separatist organizations throughout the United States affirm their collective commitment to the cause of racial hatred: “we must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children.” So long as “white” is the only word that makes this credo appalling, so long as the figural children continue to “secure our existence” through the fantasy that we survive in them, so long as the queer refutes that fantasy, effecting its derealization as surely an encounter with the Real, for just so long must [queerness] have a future after all.

To bolster his argument about the repressive nature of reproductive futurism, Edelman cites Walter Benjamin in describing the way in which the fantasy of the future was intrinsic to the spread of fascism in Europe. Edelman, via Benjamin, describes “the fascism of the baby’s face,” a phrase meant to illustrate the absolute power afforded to the ideology of reproductive futurism. This fascism of the baby’s face serves to reify difference and thus to secure the reproduction of the existent social order in the form of the future. No atrocity is out of the question if it is for the Child; no horrible project of industry should be precluded if it will serve to hasten the future of industrial civilization. Armies of men, imperial and revolutionary alike, have always lined up to the slaughter in the name of the Child.

But we needn’t look any further than today’s headlines to see the symbolic power the Child’s face deploys in the service of the social order. This year, the nation has been captivated by two horrific examples of the death-regime of white supremacy in the United States. Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Florida and Bo Morrison in Slinger, Wisconsin: two black youth murdered at the hands of racist vigilantes.

While the systematic murder and imprisonment of black people is so commonplace that it cannot make headlines, these stories have swept the nation particularly because of the way they intersect with the narratives of innocence and childhood. Specifically in the

case of Trayvon Martin, whose future was taken from him at the age of seventeen, a debate is raging centered around his character and his innocence with regard to his symbolic place as the Child.

One side of this debate circulates a “angelic” picture of his face to assure society of his child-like nature. The other side circulates a doctored picture of him wearing a grill as a kind of racialized testament to his adulthood. Each side feverishly examines the ‘evidence’ to argue whether or not he had attacked his murderer before he died. What’s at stake in this debate is Trayvon’s symbolic position as the Child: if he represents the Child, his murder is the atrocious destruction of his future (and by extensions everyone’s). If he is not the Child, then his killer acted out of the need to protect the future of his own community (and the children within it) from a perceived (even if falsely) threat. While politicians as high-ranking as the President invest Trayvon with the burden of carrying the futurity of their own children, others continue to assert their second amendment right to own weapons so they may protect theirs.

Bo Morrison was also murdered by a racist homeowner, and his killer continues on with impunity because he can claim that he needed to eliminate any threat to his children. Young black men who figured, like the queer, as threats to the family were destroyed in the Child’s name. In each instance, the entire discourse is centered on the Child while entirely obscuring the reality of the actual young individuals executed in the Child’s name.

Pundits articulate the measures that could be taken by parents and the state to restore the promise of the future: a ban on guns, more responsible gun ownership, the removal of ‘hoodies’ from children’s wardrobes, neighborhood watch, more policing, “justice.” These horrific killings demonstrate that there truly is no future. It is this truth which young people everywhere are awakening to. They are swarming the streets *en masse*, hoods up, to outrun the police and snare the flows of the cities. They are walking out of school—that banal prison of futurity—in order to loot stores and be with their friends. They are preparing and coordinating, so that the next time one of them is burned at the stake for the sake of the Future, they’ll make the city burn in kind.

The fires of Greece, London and Bahrain hint toward the consequences of such an awakening.

To further ground Edelman's theory of the Child and contemporary debates around reproduction in the specific historical context which gave rise to Capitalism, we'll turn briefly to the work of Silvia Federici in her book *Caliban and the Witch*. In *Caliban*, Federici studies the rise of Capitalism in Europe through the process of primitive accumulation. For Federici, the shift from feudalism to capitalism was only possible through the accumulation of the bodies of women and consequently through the development of their bodily capacity into a site specifically for the reproduction of a proletarianized workforce. Her history illustrates that rather than a seamless transition, the period was marked by a constant oscillation between insurrection and counter-insurgency. She characterizes the peasants and proletarianized workers who rebelled against the State and in the wake of the black plague as having "no care for the future," severed as they were from any comfortable teleological fantasy. She argues that the autonomy and power which peasant women (and queers) held over their own bodies had to be destroyed in order for the nascent bourgeois class to turn them into machines of reproductive labor.

We'll quote her in elaborating the specific way in which the construction of the atomized unit of social reproduction—the family—was crucial in the process of putting down early medieval revolt against capitalism:

In the middle ages, migration, vagabondage, and the rise of crimes against property were part of the resistance to impoverishment and dispossession; these phenomena now took on massive proportions. Everywhere—if we give credit to the complaints of contemporary authorities—vagabonds were swarming, changing cities, crossing borders, sleeping in the haystacks or crowding at the gates of towns—a vast humanity involved in a diaspora of its own, that for decades escaped the authorities' control.... A massive reclamation and reappropriation of the stolen communal wealth was underway.... In pursuit of social discipline, an attack was launched against all forms of collective sociality and sexuality including sports, games, dances, ale-wakes, festivals, and other group-rituals that had been a source of

boding and solidarity among workers.... What was at stake was the desocialization or decollectivization of the reproduction of the workforce, as well as the attempt to impose a more productive use of leisure time.... The physical enclosure operated by land privatization and the hedging of the commons was amplified by a process of social enclosure, the reproduction of workers shifting from the open field to the home, from the community to the family, from the public space, to the private.

Through her argument, Federici consistently turns to the historical atrocity which was the witch hunts as the primary figure of the destruction of women's power and the subsequent accumulation of their bodies as womb-machines. She specifically argues that in the 16th and 17th centuries, a collective narrative circulated in attempt to foment anti-witch paranoia and fervor which charged witches as being child murderers. Common conceptions held that witches would, under the guise of being healers, enter the homes of their employers and sacrifice their children to the Devil. At a time when states and families were becoming largely concerned with population decline, this fear led to a tremendous hatred against those accused of witchcraft. Here, we see the emergence of the primacy of the Child as the governing symbol of the ideological and material reproduction of class society. Witches, and medieval women more broadly, can then be situated within the structural category of queerness laid out by Edelman: the category of those who refuse enslavement to the future in the form of the Child. It is also of note, though Federici only mentions it in an endnote, that there was a very strong association between witchcraft and queerness, and that countless queers met their deaths during the witch hunts.

Federici argues that with

...the enslavement of women to procreation... their wombs became public territory, controlled by men and the state, and procreation was directly placed at the service of capitalist accumulation... Marx never acknowledged that procreation could become a terrain of exploitation and by the same token a terrain of resistance. He never imagined that women could refuse to reproduce, or that such a refusal could become part of class struggle.... Women going on strike against child making.

This blind spot within Marx's thought must remain present in our critique of reproductive futurism and its social order. It is useful to examine the moments where people willfully resisted the reproduction of society through the subtraction of their bodies from the flows of futurity. It is readily apparent how, at the historic moment described in *Caliban*, the literal refusal to create children was a practice of resistance to the state's domination of their bodies. This bodily resistance and refusal is vital still today, but our contemporary struggle is not one solely waged against the requirement to produce actual children. We are confronted with the symbol of the Child whose interests and whose face governs the operations of politics and of all political subjects. A different kind of strike will be necessary to refuse the fantastic power of the Child.

Another useful critique which Federici levels against Marxism is that from the perspective of women, it is impossible to argue that capitalism has ever been progressive or liberating. She argues that if we recognize that class society emerged out of the massacre of thousands of women and the development of their bodies to suit the needs of industry, then we must acknowledge that capitalism has universally meant degradation and exploitation for women. While it isn't anything new to argue that capitalism means exploitation, this argument is linked to our analysis because it specifically indicts and refutes the teleology (specifically Marxist, but deployed by many other ideologies) which says that capitalism was a necessary step on the pathway toward utopia. By rejecting this progressive ideology, Federici fundamentally calls into question the narrative stability of reproductive futurism, which assures us that history moves us toward paradise, and that the present arrangement is but a step along the path.

If we're to fully understand why the complex of the Child, the political, and reproductive futurism have entwined into such repressive conditions, we would be well served to analyze the specific dynamics of capitalism as it evolved through the counter-revolution of the past several decades. Specifically, we'll need to look to capital itself as a force which colonizes life and re-makes it in its image. For this, we will turn to the work of Jacques Camatte in his essay "Against Domestication":

The future industry has come into its own and assumed an enormous scope. Capital enters this new field and begins to exploit it, which leads to further expropriation of people and a reinforcement of their domestication. This hold over the future is what distinguishes capital from all other modes of production. From its earliest origins capital's relationship to the past or present has always been of less importance than its relationship to the future. Capital's only lifeblood is in the exchange it conducts with labor power. Thus when surplus value is created, it is, in the immediate sense, only potential capital; it can become effective capital solely through an exchange against future labor. In other words, when surplus value is created in the present, it acquires reality only if labor power can appear to be already available in the future. If therefore this future isn't there, then the present (and henceforth the past) is abolished: this is devalorization through total loss of substance. Clearly, then, capital's first undertaking must be to dominate the future in order to be assured of accomplishing its production process. (This conquest is managed by the credit system). Thus capital has effectively appropriated time, which it molds in its own image as quantitative time. However, present surplus value was realized and valorized through exchange against future labor, but now, with the development of the future industry, present surplus value has itself become open to capitalization. This capitalization demands that time be programmed and this need expresses itself in a scientific fashion in futurology. Henceforth, capital produces time. From now on where may people situate their utopias?

In the course of Camatte's life, his work in "Against Domestication" marks a shift in his theory from left-communism to anti-civilization ideas. This piece would later inspire a tremendous amount of Anglophone anti-civ theory. His argument is that the specific future-oriented nature of capital—its tendency to accumulate the future—allowed capitalism to develop into the monstrosity that it is. Beyond just appropriating the living labor of human beings and commodifying it as dead labor, Camatte argues that capital has colonized human beings themselves, constituting their very being and re-creating human relations into communities of capital. He describes this process—the anthropomorphizing of capital—as domestication. In coming to colonize every aspect of life within industrial society, capital thus comes to dominate individuals' futures as much as their presents. Camatte continues:

The established societies that existed in previous times dominated the present and to a lesser extent the past, while the revolutionary movement had for itself the future. Bourgeois revolutions and the proletarian revolutions have had to guarantee progress, but this progress depended on the existence of a future valorized in relation to a present and a past that is to be abolished. In each case... the past is presented as shrouded in darkness, while the future is all shining light. Capital has conquered the future. Capital has no fear of utopias, since it even tends to produce them. The future is a field for the production of profit. In order to generate the future, to bring it into being, people must now be conditioned as a function of a strictly preconceived process of production: this is programming brought to its highest point....

Domination of the past, the present and the future, gives rise to a structural representation, where everything is reduced to a [combination] of social relations, productive forces, or mythmemes, etc, arranged in such a way as to cohere as a totality.

This totality is our situation. History is only the record of centuries of defeat and the triumph of capital over the dead. The future is a horizon dominated by its representation as the sphere of expansion possibilities and new technologies. And around us are the innumerable institutions, technologies and processes that would use us as the submissive tools for this process of domination. This is what it means to describe capitalism as a totality. This is why we don't simply argue against a specific economic system, but against industrial society itself; not for a particular management of the means of production, but against them altogether.

That capital now forms the horizon of our lives is evident. To say "no future" means to say that we have no future except for one drifting at sea, blown at all times by the winds of the unfolding crisis of the capitalist mode of production. Precarious employment, lifetimes of debt, the impossibility of retirement, the need to constantly remake oneself through countless techniques-of-the-self in order to bring oneself to market as a pretty new commodity, rent, bills, credit: the facts of our own daily reproduction force us to continually sell, not just our bodily capacity, but our futures as well. Every time we offer up our body

in a medical study, or turn a trick, or run a scam, we are wagering our futures against the daunting task of surviving another month in hell.

The editors of the anti-state communist journal *Endnotes* write in their second issue:

Capitalist self-perpetuation presents itself as eternalization it appears infinite, without a beyond. Since this relation projects itself into an infinite future, revolutionary theory necessarily concerns itself with rupture, with an interruption in the very temporality of the relation.

What could such an interruption look like? How can we imagine a force capable of blockading the ceaseless flow of time into the future? Let's return to Edelman. He cites a passage from a campaign for a 'parents bill of right' (a political campaign aimed a 'strengthening the family'):

It is time to join together and acknowledge that the work that parents do is indispensable—that by nourishing those small bodies and growing those small souls, they create the store of social and human capital that is so essential to the health and wealth of our nation. Simply put, by creating the conditions that allow parents to cherish their children, we will ensure our collective future.

Edelman continues by analyzing the campaign:

Ignore for a moment what demands to be called the transparency of this appeal. Ignore, that is, how quickly the spiritualizing vision of parents “nourishing and growing... small bodies... small souls” gives way to a rhetoric offering instead the far more pragmatic (and politically imperative) investment in the “human capital... essential to the health and wealth of our nation.” Ignore, by so doing, how the passage renominates those human “souls” as “capital” [and] prompts us to “cherish” these “capitalized” humans precisely insofar as they come to embody this thereby humanized “capital.” Ignore all this and one's eyes might still pop to discover that only political intervention will “allow... parents to cherish their children” so as to “ensure our collective future”—or ensure... that our present will always be mortgaged to a fantasmatic future in the name of the political “capital” that those children will thus have become.

And thus the ideology of reproductive futurism comes full circuit within the context of future-oriented capitalism. The full force of the political and symbolic orders is put into the thrust to reproduce—to reproduce the Child. But here we see that capital's ever-expanding reach claims the future and even the souls of not-yet-born children. Capital must continue to expand, and can only do so by appropriating each of our futures, and even those of the children we could someday have. And the forward-thrust of reproductive futurism must serve its purpose, to continually procure sacrifices to the unending process of domestication where capital comes to possess all life. Capital is our future; and yet there is no future. It is within this contradiction—the expansion of capital into all areas of life versus the impossibility of living a life within capitalism—that we must orient our study and theorize how we might interrupt the endless perpetuation of the present order.

To do so, of course, requires an acute skepticism toward the fantasy of the future. Edelman:

We might like to believe that with patience, with work, with generous contributions to lobbying groups or generous participation in activist groups or generous doses of legal savvy and electoral sophistication, the future will hold a place for us—a place at the political table that won't have to come at the cost of the places we seek in the bed or the bar or the baths. But there are no queers in that future as there can be no future for queers, chosen as they are to bear the bad tidings that there can be no future at all... That future is nothing but kid stuff, reborn each day to screen out the grave that gapes from within the lifeless letter, luring us into, ensnaring us in, reality's gossamer web.

This belief in a future for queers that Edelman points to is most recently demonstrated by the “It Gets Better” campaign, a series of viral YouTube videos directed at queer youth which promise them that life must get better if only they're patient enough. Celebrities, politicians and people of all walks of life joined together to champion the beautiful inevitability of a better future. In the campaign's response to the very real atrocity of queer teen suicide, it only pushes the atrocity away and encourages its audience to submit patiently to continued misery. In trying to

drive death off, they drive off life, replacing it with sacrifice and waiting for a better future. The campaign promises a fulfilling world which exists beyond the nightmare of high school, yet somehow fails to mention the waking nightmares of debt, work, family, disease, depression and anxiety which the future must surely deliver.

Of these videos the most vile and perhaps the most telling is a recent release by the San Francisco Police Department depicting queer police officers telling their coming-out stories and assuring the viewers of the better future to come. Along with these assurances, they further implore queer youth to call on the police department if in need, declaring “it will get better, and until it does, we’ll be here for you.”

The future will continue its mirage-like spectacle, promising redemption yet continually deferring its delivery. The further we progress down its path, the farther we’ll be from the utopia it teases us with. We’ll consistently arrive where we imagined the future would take us, only to find that the desert of modern life continues to stretch out in every direction—that the passage of time has continued to deliver us up anew for pure repetition of the same: the same exploitation, alienation, depression, meaninglessness. If queerness is to be our weapon, we must fanatically avoid any tendency toward reproductive futurism that would dull our daggers. We must refuse the institutions of the future, whether high schools or police departments, that eternally immiserate our present. If we are to cease the skyward growth of the pile of queer bodies sacrificed at the feet of the future, we must silence the chorus of *it-gets-betters* and attack, here and now, at whatever is making it unbearable.

If it is our intention to participate in insurrection against domestication and capital’s futurity, we mustn’t be deceived by the fleeing utopias of reproductive futurism. Instead we must situate ourselves within our present, and studiously explore the methods of sabotage, interruption, expropriation and destruction that refuse futurity’s domination. Or, as Edelman puts it:

If the fate of the queer is to figure the fate that cuts the thread of futurity... then the only oppositional status to which our queerness could ever lead would depend on our taking seriously the place of the death drive we're called on to figure and insisting, against the cult of the Child and the political order it reinforces, that we, as Guy Hocquenghem made clear, are "not the signifier of what might become a new form of 'social organization,'" that we do not intend a new politics, a better society, a brighter tomorrow, since all of these fantasies reproduce the past, through displacement, in the form of the future. We choose instead not to choose the Child, as disciplinary image of the Imaginary past or as site of a projective identification with an always impossible future. The queerness we propose, in Hocquenghem's words, "is unaware of the passing of generations as stages on the road to better living. It knows nothing about 'sacrifice now for the sake of future generations... it knows that civilization alone is mortal.'" Even more: it delights in that mortality as the negation of everything that would define itself, moralistically, as pro-life. It is we who must bury the subject in the tomb-like hollow of the signifier, pronouncing at last the words for which we're condemned should we speak them or not: that we are the advocates of abortion; that the Child as futurity's emblem must die; that the future is mere repetition and just as lethal as the past. Our queerness has nothing to offer a symbolic that lives by denying that nothingness except an insistence on the haunting excess that this nothingness entails, an insistence of the negativity that pierces the fantasy screen of futurity, shattering narrative temporality with irony's always explosive force. And so what is queerest about us, queerest within us, and queerest despite us is this willingness to insist intransitively—to insist that the future stops here.

Naming the Unnameable

A crucial concept in Edelman's project is the term catachresis. Catachresis can be defined as either the use of a term to name something which cannot be named, or the misuse of a word to describe something. For Edelman, any use of the word queer must always be a catachresis, as it mistakenly gives a name to the unnameable. This concept is a tool to critique all of the political and theoretical processes that affirm an identity category in the place of our unnameable project. For Edelman, the fundamental unnameable is the death drive: the undoing of civilization, and our own undoing, pulsing within the existent. He says that "it is in fact

because it is unnameable with all the resonances you can give to this name, that it is akin to the quintessential unnameable, that is to say death.” While we might locate our unnameable drives and projects differently, we are forced to come up against the political logic of catachresis and confront the urge to give a name—and therefore a representation and a politics—to what is essentially ineffable in our lives.

Edelman’s argument is specifically leveled against Judith Butler and her project for radical inclusivity. Against Butler he argues that attempts at legitimizing and including any subject into politics must always fail. While one might agitate for the inclusion of a particular catachresis which names the anti-social void, that void remains untouched, and another name must be given to it. The social order’s necessary Other cannot be abolished through the reform-oriented integration of each successive other into the project of representative politics. Another Other must rise to fill the void. Society will locate another enemy subject to discipline and to destroy.

Against Butler and her conceptions of social justice, Edelman argues:

Committed as she is to intelligibility as the expanding horizon of social justice, Butler would affirm “our own power” to re-articulate by means of catachresis, the laws responsible for what she aptly calls our “moralized sexual horror.” Such a re-articulation, she claims, would proceed through the repeated scandal by which the unspeakable nevertheless makes itself heard through borrowing and exploiting the very terms that are meant to enforce its silence. This, of course, assumes that the unspeakable intends, above all else to speak, whereas Lacan maintains ... something radically different: that sex, as the “structural incompleteness of language is that which does not communicate itself, that which marks the subject as unknowable.” No doubt, as Butler helps us to see, the norms of the social order do, in fact, change through catachresis, and those who once were persecuted as figures of moralized sexual horror may trade their chill and silent tombs for a place on the public stage. But that redistribution of social roles doesn’t stop the cultural production of figures... to bear the burden of embodying such a moralized sexual horror. For that horror itself survives the fungible figures that flesh it

out insofar as it responds to something in sex that's inherently unspeakable: the Real of sexual difference.

For Edelman, queerness is the ineffable which escapes the ability to be named: "queerness as name may well reinforce the symbolic order of naming, but it names what resists, as signifier, absorption into the Imaginary identity of the name." And so this critique of the naming and subsequent inclusion of deviant subjects must call into question the structures which produce normative and deviant subjects from the beginning. Our struggle cannot be one for this or that identity, but rather against the representative politics of Identity altogether.

Edelman:

The agent responsible for effecting their destruction has been given many names:... global extermination of meaning... gravediggers of society... whatever refuses to allow parents to cherish their children... homosexuals... the death drive and the Real of *jouissance*.... So [queerness] knots together these threats to reproductive futurism. No political catachresis, such as Butler proposes, could forestall the need to constitute, then, such a category of [queerness]. For even though, as Butler suggests, political catachresis may change over time the occupants of that category, the category itself... continues to mark the place of whatever refuses intelligibility.

And so the question that is posed concerns the refusal of intelligibility. Contemporary arrangements of power have abolished the silence that once accompanied the dark ineffable desires of queerness and destruction. Rather than an injunction against speech, the power of biopolitical democracy is specifically to make us speak. Cybernetic relationships ensure that each of us as a speaking subject has the ability to name ourselves, aestheticize ourselves, deploy blogs and social networks and avatars to represent ourselves. The contemporary function of power can be understood as one unending move toward intelligibility—one of moving what had been blind spots into new subjects to be marketed; new identities to be surveilled.

We are captured by the state every time we make ourselves intelligible. Whether demand, political subject, or formal

organization, each intelligible form can be recuperated, represented, or annihilated.

Our project then must proceed in the recognition of the paradox that its being made truly intelligible—even by us, even *to us*—would be its defeat. We must seize the possibility of a life neither constrained by nor produced through the omnipresence of capital and state. It is precisely by the fact that words fail to describe it and programs fail to bring it about that we can know this life. As such, any imperative to put this ineffable project into words must be understood as a compromise of what must be an uncompromising project. There is no language which can make our intentions comprehensible to the social order. Any move toward such comprehensibility would be a betrayal of the specific antagonistic character of our project against that social order.

Camatte elaborates on this point:

This is a revolution of life itself, a search for another way of living. Dialogue should be concerned only with the plans and ideas for realizing this desire. No dialogue can take place between the social order and those who are to overthrow it. If dialogue is still seen as a possibility, then this would be an indication that the movement is faltering. Underlying all this is a profoundly important phenomenon: all human life from the very beginning of its development within capitalist society, has undergone an impoverishment. More than this, capitalist society is death organized with all the appearances of life. Here it is not a question of death as the extinction of life, but death-in-life, death with all the substance and power of life. The human being is dead and is no more than a ritual of capital ... but to those great number of smugly complacent people, who live on empty dramas and fantasies, this demand, this passionate need, just seems irrational, or, at best, a paradise that is by definition inaccessible.

And so a queerness which opposes society must embody the death drive of what has become death-in-life, the intrinsic negation of a social order predicated on the use of life for its ends. In this project, we have nothing to gain by speaking the language of, or making demands to, the existent power structures. It is specifically these structures' ability to comprehend antagonism that makes intelligibility synonymous with recuperation.

Edelman returns to Butler:

Small wonder then that her subversive act, her re-articulation of the norm, while promising to open what Butler calls a radical new field of the human, returns us, instead, to familiar forms of a durable liberal humanism whose rallying cry has always been, and here remains “the future.”

But what if it didn't? What if ... all those doomed to ontological suspension on account of their unrecognizable and, in consequence, unlivable loves, declined intelligibility, declined to bring [themselves], catachrestically, into the gambit of future meaning—or declined, more exactly, to cast off the meaning that clings to those social identities that intelligibility abjects...

Such [queers] would insist on the unintelligible's unintelligibility, on the internal limit to signification and the impossibility of turning Real loss to meaningful profit in the Symbolic without its persistent remainder: the inescapable Real of the death drive. As embodiments of unintelligibility, of course, they must veil what they expose, becoming, as figures for it, the means of its apparent subjection to meaning. But where Butler... conduces to futurism's logic of intelligibility by seeking no more than to widen the reach of what it allows us to grasp, where she moves, by way of the future, toward the ongoing legitimation of social form through the recognition that is said to afford “ontological certainty and durability” [queerness], though destined, of course, to be claimed for intelligibility, consents to the logic that makes it a figure for what meaning can never grasp. Demeaned, it embraces de-meaning as the endless insistence of the real that the symbolic can never master for meaning now or in the future.

Here Edelman invokes the Lacanian concept of the Real, or that which escapes articulation through symbolic structures. The Real is the indescribable and unnameable characteristic of our lived experience. The Real is the irreducible essence of revolt, pleasure, conspiracy and joy which comprises our project and which continually evades representation by politicians or surveillance by police apparatuses. To the contrary, Intelligibility offers two options: legitimization and democratic inclusion, or delegitimization and repression.

Jouissance

Having sketched out the critical components of Edelman's thought, it's time to turn to the question of our lived experience. If we refuse politics (with its positive projects, reproductive futurity and drive toward intelligibility) we are left with the question of what means of enjoyment immediately exceeds it. How to constitute the purely negative project that is called for by such a rigorously critical conception of queerness?

To articulate such an escape, we must look outside the framework of the teleologies which promise progressive paths toward utopia, outside the abstract symbolic world where politics and identity function. Edelman would urge us to look to the psychoanalytic realm of the Real: the material and affective facts of our existence which escape representation and signification. For Edelman, the real of queerness—which cuts through the positivist baggage of identity—is *jouissance*. He writes:

Queerness undoes the identities through which we experience ourselves as subjects, insisting on the Real of a *jouissance* that social reality and the futurism on which it relies have already foreclosed. Queerness, therefore is never a matter of being or becoming but, rather, of embodying the remainder of the real internal to the symbolic order. One name for this unnameable remainder as Lacan describes it, is *jouissance*, sometimes translated as “enjoyment”: a movement beyond the pleasure principle, beyond the distinctions of pleasure and pain, a violent passage beyond the bounds of identity, meaning and law.

It is useful, in understanding this concept of *jouissance*, to follow Edelman in thinking the elements of queer reality which escape representation: the remainders, as he'd term them. These remainders are what is left over after capital colonizes the positivities of queerness—its fashions, parties, academic pursuits, aesthetics, labors, social networks—and after politics integrates intelligible queerness into its symbolic order. And so what is this remainder? What remains after one subtracts the progressive ideology of inclusion, the humble victim, the upstanding citizens,

the eccentric selling points, the fluid permutations of Identity, the volumes of theory? What remains is *jouissance*.

Edelman describes *jouissance* as a supersession of the boundaries of pleasure and pain, a shattering of identity and law. We should analyze this distinction between pleasure and pain as being an inscription of the social order into our bodies. And in the same way, it is the mundane and miniscule pleasures produced through contemporary power arrangements which keep us dependent on those arrangements for our well-being. *Jouissance*, in abolishing both sides of this distinction, severs us from pain as a self-preservation instinct and from pleasure as the society's alluring bribe. It is the process that momentarily sets us free from our fear of death (literal or figurative) which is such a powerful inhibitor.

We can locate this *jouissance* in the historic moments of queer riot: Compton's cafeteria, Dewey's, the White Night, Stonewall, and countless other moments where queer bodies participated in rupture—throwing bricks, setting fires, smashing windows, rejoicing in the streets. But more to the point, *jouissance* is located in precisely the aspects of these moments (and of others unknown to us) which elude historians, the ones which cannot be captured in a textbook or situated neatly within narratives of progress for queer people, or of rational political struggle for a better future. *Jouissance* is the rage which boils over in the first queen to set a fire; the hatred of an entire social order which flows through one's veins while they set a dozen San Francisco police vehicles on fire. It is the ecstatic bliss that must have shivered its way through the spines of any blessed enough to hear the siren songs of those police cruisers wailing in flames. *Jouissance* is the way that the sexual encounters immediately following such riots were totally incommensurable to the mundane sex of daily life. *Jouissance* is the driving *élan* of queer sex culture, and yet it is precisely that element of queer sex which still cannot be locked up in an industry, sold as a commodity or scheduled at some mass commercialized ritual. While each element of the sex industry attempts to resolve some fundamental lack and to integrate one's desires into a coherent subjective experience, *jouissance* is specifically that element of sexual desire which makes such a union impossible. It is a desire for *jouissance* which sends us into

the night seeking to overwhelm our bodily capacity, to disintegrate the corporeal limits of ourselves, to truly flee from what and who we are. It is specifically this remainder, which defines the unbridgeable chasm between the public sex culture of New York and San Francisco in the seventies (massive squatted sex warehouses, perpetual orgies, a culture of cruising which entirely dissolved the distinction between sex and the rest of life) and the so-called cruising of the cybernetic era (Grindr, craigslist, sparsely attended and overpriced parties at failing sex clubs). This distance might also be understood as what separates the anarchy of an orgy from the democratic ideology of purist polyamory. *Jouissance* is the unnameable desire that one hopelessly attempts to summarize before giving one's body to another: "I want to be negated." *Jouissance* is that essence of queer criminality which cannot be reduced to any vulgar determinism. It is the joy found in the retribution of robbing some bourgeois john, the thrill of theft, the satisfaction of destruction. It is because we are addicted to the intertwining pleasure and pain which brings us again and again into the streets: seeking to riot or fight or fuck. It is specifically the pursuit of the unnameable *jouissance* which causes, without fail, to risk everything in sacrifice to some more grand chaos. This *aufheben* of the categories of pain and pleasure is also the overthrowing of our attachments and investments in political activism, stable identity, and reason. The negativity of *jouissance* is the same that drives us away from obligations to the economy, the family, the law, and, above all, the Future.

Edelman:

This *jouissance* dissolves such fetishistic investments, undoing the consistency of a social reality that relies on Imaginary identifications, on the structures of Symbolic law, and on the paternal metaphor of the name. Hence, there is another name that designates the unnameability to which *jouissance* would give us access: Behind what is named, there is the unnameable. It is in fact because it is unnameable with all the resonances you can give to this name, that it is akin to the quintessential unnameable, that is to say death. The death drive, therefore manifests itself though in radically different guises, in... *jouissance*....

To the extent that it tears the fabric of symbolic reality as we know it, unravelling the solidity of every object, including the object as which the subject necessarily takes itself, *jouissance* evokes the death drive that always insists as the void in and of the subject, beyond its fantasy of self-realization, beyond the pleasure principle.

It is worth following Edelman in cautioning against the ways in which *jouissance*, or more specifically, futile attempts to identify with or name *jouissance*, can lead to a reification of the categories which we'd call upon *jouissance* to abolish:

To the extent that *jouissance*, as fantasmatic escape from the alienation intrinsic to meaning, lodges itself in a given object on which identity come to depend, it produces identity as mortification, reenacting the very constraint of meaning it was intended to help us escape.

Any attempt to situate *jouissance* as a positive project can only ever be a step away from it. Circuit parties, pornography, social networking applications, political demonstrations, activist organizations, art: all of these strive to recuperate *jouissance* into some alternative structure, and yet must always fail because *jouissance* is inherently that which evades capture and ruptures the coherent narratives which justify such structures. This critique is particularly ironic coming from Edelman, whose own practice as a '*jouisseur*' never seems to exceed participation in those same circuit parties, academic conferences, senseless hours at the gym and lavish shopping sprees. He specifically advocates "the meaningless eruption of *jouissance* associated with the 'circuit parties' that gesture toward the circuit of the drive." In his affirmation of this or that element of contemporary gay culture, he fails do the work of locating *jouissance* within the actual subversive histories of queerness (compared to which, gay culture can only be just a pathetic substitute). It's important here to reassert that our conception and praxis of *jouissance* absolutely must go beyond the limitations of Edelman's work.

Queerness, conceived entirely in the negative, names the *jouissance* forbidden by, but permeating the social order itself. It is the specific reason why we can say that behind the facade of the normal operations of life within capital, there is a subversive

current which infallibly and irrationally lashes out against the conditions of the existent. This is why we can also say that in moments of widespread rupture and revolt, there exists a powerful and sinister drive to assimilate revolt back into the circuits of politics, identity, and the economy itself. This tension explains why urban revolt, as witnessed in London or Oakland, must be rationalized by activists, politicians and police agencies as the expression of finite grievances by coherent communities. And yet this contradiction is also why routine traffic stops or raids by police officers have triggered pain and death for those officers at the hands of those they are accustomed to governing.

Returning to Edelman once more:

This I suggest is the ethical burden to which queerness must accede in a social order intent on misrecognizing its own investment in morbidity, fetishization, and repetition: to inhabit the place of a meaninglessness associated with the sinthome; to figure an unregenerate, and unregenerating, sexuality whose singular insistence on *jouissance*, rejecting every constraint imposed by sentimental futurism, exposes aesthetic culture—the culture of forms and their reproduction, the culture of Imaginary lures—as always already a “culture of death” intent on abjecting the force of a death drive that shatters the tomb we call life.

The negativity of *jouissance*, which we understand to be the vital characteristic of our queerness, is the methods by which we expose the banality and horror of contemporary life. If the social order consistently produces moments of rupture and anti-social violence—expropriation, riot, looting, street fights, sexual depravity, spree arson, hacking—these moments expose society for what it is: hell on earth. Our acquiescence to the pull of *jouissance* functions as a mirror into which society must gaze and recognize its decadence, the impending actualization of its undoing. In the context of such horror, our task is then to “materialize the force of negation, the derealizing insistence of *jouissance*.”

This material force of negation must be one that goes on, not only to disrupt the daily circulation of society, but also to sabotage the apparatuses which function to reproduce us as subjects within those flows. We must, as Edelman says, “break open with *jouissance*

and launch [ourselves] into the void around and against which the subject congeals.”

Jouissance must be the attack on those all the subjective apparatuses that entrench us into Identity at every turn: education, careers, identity politics, political identity, bank accounts, biometric surveillance technologies, internet avatars, communication infrastructure, *ad nauseam*. Capitalist subjects are formed through the perpetual war between living beings and these technics, and so any project to abolish capital and its subjects must study and liquidate these apparatuses. An insistence on *jouissance* is to consistently intervene in this war against symbols on the part of the unsymbolized remainder which is exploited in the game of subjectivity. *Jouissance* is the range of deviant and subversive practices which connect our struggle against society to our refusal to be its subjects.

That we pursue *jouissance* does not make us queers. Our queerness isn't that reified identity but is rather “a mode of enjoyment at the social order's expense.” (Edelman). And in doing this, we must resist any recuperative tendency to identify *jouissance* with any identity or grouping of identities. Jack Halberstam critiques Edelman on this point:

The gay male archive, because it is limited to a short list of favored canonical writers is also bound by a particular range of affective responses. And so, fatigue, ennui, boredom, indifference, ironic distancing, indirectness, arch dismissal, insincerity and camp make up...“an archive of feelings” associated with this form of anti-social theory. But, this canon occludes another suite of affectivities associated, again, with another kind of politics and a different form of negativity. In this other archive, we can identify, for example: rage, rudeness, anger, spite, impatience, intensity, mania, sincerity, earnestness, over-investment, incivility, brutal honesty and so on. The first archive is a camp archive, a repertoire of formalized and often formulaic responses to the banality of straight culture and the repetitiveness and unimaginativeness of heteronormativity. The second archive, however, is far more in keeping with the undisciplined kinds of responses that Bersani at least seems to associate with sex and queer culture and it is here that the promise of self-shattering, loss of mastery and meaning, unregulated speech and

desire are unloosed. Dyke anger, anti-colonial despair, racial rage, counter-hegemonic violences, punk pugilism, these are the bleak and angry territories of the anti-social turn; these are the jagged zones within which not only self-shattering (the opposite of narcissism in a way) but other-shattering occurs.

We again find it useful to follow Halberstam's criticism, and we'll happily appropriate the negative affects named above. And yet we must constantly repeat the importance of severing these affects from belonging to any subject. Edelman may be wrong for focusing on the gay male subject, but then so too would Halberstam's more inclusive project fail by focusing on others. Edelman fails for exploring *jouissance* only within the fields of literature and film, and this failure wouldn't be fixed (as Halberstam argues) by widening the canon of artwork to explore. No, we must experience queer theories limits here, in its attachment to identity and to art altogether. Specifically because we want to engage with *jouissance*, that unnameable remainder, we must avoid the positivities to be named in literature and identity. Our project of negativity and *jouissance* will be one that is located in the subversive potential hidden by daily life—a potential which cannot be trapped in subjectivity, but instead possesses subjects and turns them against themselves.

We'll conclude our attempts to articulate *jouissance* by returning to Jacques Camatte in his essay "This World We Must Leave," written by the time he'd already concluded that any struggle against capital must seek to destroy domestication, and by extension civilization itself:

The crisis postulates a choice, a decision, and thus enforces itself because there is a difficult and unusual situation. This is true both for the Capitalist Mode of Production and for humans, without forgetting the interference between the two.... There is a rigorous determinism that leads to a certain realization, a determinism that can only be put in question again if humans become capable of breaking their domestication. The choice for [humans] appears as the acceptance of [their] destructive multiplication of life or the domination = restriction of its inhuman quantitative multiplication, which would allow its continuance. To abandon a certain fear of death which forces it to look for life in the extension of life,

multiplication and progression of life. Reproduction is a certain fear of death and [humans] live it in its extension and not in the intensity of living; that translates the uncertainty in the world as if the species was not yet sure of its existence on the planet. The intensity of living implies a reflection of life on itself, then there is enjoyment by the resorption of life inside the living [being] and not delegated to another generation.

The capitalist mode of production must respond to the situation which throws its very future into crisis. It will respond, in part, by proliferating a wide array of alternatives and measures (austerity, re-adjustment, sustainability) which might ensure its continued viability. For all of us implicated in the 'interference' between capitalism and humans, these measures will confront us as the new conditions of our own immiseration and survival. All of the options presented for us are always already held hostage by the specter of reproductive futurism. In each case we are forced to identify the extension of our own lives with the extension of the capitalist social order eternally into the future. Austerity confronts us a new ethics to be integrated into our own being if we are to ever be assured a future within this failing civilization. We will be expected to work and suffer, and to be paid solely in the assurance that the future will continue its death-like march through time. The economists and politicians will offer a plethora of false options and will foreclose on the possibility of a real break.

While the statist managers of capital must globally enforce a regime of austerity and structural re-adjustment in order to maintain their future (by whatever means possible), a new social movement has emerged which figures the future another way. In the United States, the Occupy movement can be understood as a form by which anti-austerity struggles could take shape and agitate for a *different* future. For some within the movement, this means arguing for a return to a failed Keynesianism, a structural investment in a future for the welfare state. They argue that they are not anti-capitalist but that they are specifically trying to 'save capitalism' from the fundamental contradictions which ensure its failure. Against this reformist position, the radicals within the Occupy movement argue instead for a *prefigurative* politics, through which activists and other radicals demonstrate that

‘another world is possible.’ This position focuses on experimenting with and perfecting forms of struggle and organization which they imagine to be blueprints for a utopia to come. Prefigurative politics, as with all politics, invests its energy and faith into the hope that if we only do the hard work now, our efforts will be redeemed in a future society.

And so the dialectic of reproductive futurism continues to unfold in the context of a deepening crisis. Whether arguing for the defeated project of social democracy, the reactionary strategy of a militarized privatization and re-structuring, or the prefigurative politics of the new encampments, each position re-asserts the ideology of reproductive futurism, which demands a lifetime of immiseration and sacrifice for the possibility of a better world for our children. And yet each option delivers us, again and again, to deathly repetition. We are asked to choose between the concentration camps of a neo-fascist austerity on the one hand and the self-managed poverty of the urban occupation encampment on the other, between an emaciated means of reproduction in the home or a ‘collectivized’ means to reproduce ourselves in the plazas. One option expects us to sacrifice so that the economy might survive and the other so that we might be redeemed by a constantly deferred utopia. Regardless, the Camp, as central figure of contemporary reproductive ideology, is situated at the horizon, eclipsing that unspoken option which would shatter the double-bind of futurity and austerity.

This unstated option, the one laid out by Camatte and in a different way by Edelman, is that intensity of living which would break our domestication and end our investment in civilization’s future. This intensity of enjoyment (the literal translation of *jouissance* from the French) must be the same *jouissance* which shatters our subjective enslavement to capitalist civilization. It is that exact current which permeates all of society and delivers to the necessity of insurrection against all that exists and for a joy which we cannot name. This *jouissance* is the resistance which is hidden by, and yet integral to every social structure. Within the spectacles of the anti-austerity demonstrations and the plaza occupations lies the unnameable remainder which does not promise a better future. It is the unassimilable and ineffable

tendency for people to self-sabotage any efforts at political organization. It is the darkness so feared by the right and so denied by the left. It is what the police must be called on to repress and the organizer to assimilate.

If the activist milieu and the Left had staked their entire future on Occupy Wall Street (OWS), it is because it represented a desperate gesture of a social order whose future is falling away. The global capitalist media has been quick to compare and contrast the supposedly peaceful, democratic movement of the plazas with the violent irruption of the lumpenproletarian youth in London. What separates one body of dispossessed youth from another is specifically their disposition to the question of futurity. For the indignant occupiers, their future is something gambled away by financial institutions, to be won back through righteous struggle. For London's riotous scum, a future is something they've never been promised, save for one of poverty, boredom, police violence or prison. Behind the hopeful facade that was OWS, a thousand Londons lay concealed. Our insurrectional project is the erosion of that hope and the insistence against the possibility of the future.

This insurrection cannot be understood as another event deferred to the future, but rather a possibility to seize life in spite of and against the social order. The promise of *jouissance* is not to deliver a more revolutionary futurity, but an irruption of irreducible negativity. While the activists sacrifice themselves at the police lines, the youngsters and ne'er-do-wells smash the unguarded windows of police cruisers and help one another through the shattered plate glass doors of cafes in order help themselves to the sweets within. While the assemblies determine how to articulate reproductive futurism 'from below,' the *jouissieurs* fuck, vandalize, expropriate, and conspire. Flash mobs in Milwaukee and Philly, demonstrations turned to looting, churches set alight, irresponsible sexual adventures, shipments blockaded, explosions of the gender distinction, street parties turned street fights, jail escapes, boulder-traps set for police officers, infrastructural sabotage: countless moments where the ideologies and structures which ensure the self-reproduction of the social order are destroyed at the expense of an irrational enjoyment; an enjoyment fixed in the present without a care for the future. What we term

the commune is not a model for another evasive utopia, but rather the process which intertwines these diffuse moments of pleasure, pain, and joyous attack.

“But another way, we are not interested in a social project of queerness, in queer contributions to society, in carving out our own ghettos within the material and symbolic structures of capitalist life. Rather, our engagement with queer theory must be attuned to locating the moments which reveal the potential undoing of society, its structures and its relations.”

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