Queer Theory Revisited

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QUEER THEORY AND ITS DISCONTENTS

The critical work most often cited in discussions of queer theory entered the academy around the same time I did. Judith Butler's *Bodies That Matter* (1993), Michael Warner's collection *Fear of a Queer Planet* (1993), and *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* (1993) were all published during my first year of graduate school. Most of what are now considered the foundational texts for queer theory appeared while I was an undergraduate: Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990), the Diana Fuss anthology *Inside/Out* (1991), and "Queer Theory," a special issue of *differences* edited by Teresa de Lauretis (1991). Others came out while I was still in high school: the first issue of the journal *Out/Look* (1988), Leo Bersani's "Is the Rectum a Grave?" (1987), and Sedgwick's *Between Men* (1985). Gayle Rubin's oft-cited essay "Thinking Sex" (1984) was written in 1982. When I was in junior high and had my first serious homosexual fantasies, the so-called sex wars in feminism were already raging, as was the AIDS epidemic. I was just getting the hang of tying my shoes when the first volume of Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality* was published in France as *La volonté de savoir* (1976), and I was born two years after the 1969 Stonewall Rebellion.

I begin this way to emphasize the context in which I first encountered queer theory. Rather than a corrective to my past experiences within the feminist and gay rights movements (since I had none), queer theory (along with ACT-UP and Queer Nation) comprised the milieu in(to) which I came out sexually, politically, and intellectually. *Queer* does not feel to me like a reclaimed term of derision, anymore than *gay* does. Having accepted my sexuality before I graduated from high school I found waiting for me in college and graduate school an exciting, sexy academic discourse for interpreting my sexual identity and desires and imagining their political significance. As a Chicano first-generation college graduate, however, I soon began to have questions about this new academic discourse, particularly in relation to race and class. Imagine my surprise when, as I began to voice these questions to professors and fellow graduate students, I

met with exasperated responses: "We haven't read anything talking about race because you haven't brought us anything yet"; "I don't think racism is as big a problem in the gay community as some people say"; and "Well, *I* don't go through authors' footnotes to see the race of the people they cite." Furthermore while there was often praise for my contribution of a (colored, classed) queer experience, it was always accompanied by dismissal of my attempts to theorize that experience for myself, especially when my theorization challenged dominant presuppositions in queer theory. The message seemed clear: people of color were to provide raw experience for white academics to theorize. (In reaction I spent the next several years eliminating anything personal from my writing.)

What did I want from queer theory anyway? I had hoped that queer theory would be able to make sexuality and desire central rather than peripheral to radical politics and would be unrelentingly *critical*, in Herbert Marcuse's sense of simultaneously negating society as a given and imagining what more liberatory possibilities are being blocked by that given state of affairs.[1] For me this had to include critical understandings of race, class, gender, and capitalism. Despite the promises of many of queer theory's early proponents and its development over the past two decades, I still find myself at a loss to locate in it the tools for understanding such complex relations of meaning. None of the works listed in my opening paragraph tells me how to understand the connections between white homosexuality and white supremacy implied by my anecdotes, between the experience of class and that of race for a queer subject, or between the racialized misogyny faced (differently) by all straight women and the racialized homophobia faced (differently) by all gay men and lesbians. Nor do they engage the issue of how both gay white and straight white spaces serve class interests and how queer people of color might perceive the varying class inflections of those spaces. Certainly very little in queer theory has sought to answer such questions as effectively or with as much political conviction as some older works by feminists that queer theorists so often define themselves against. Given queer theory's promise to integrate race, sexuality, gender, and class, how have texts that do not fulfill that promise emerged as the field's classics? How do queer theory and lesbian and gay studies answer their discontents, those of us who signed on to their projects in the late 1980s and early 1990s, spending student budgets on Routledge books and GLQ only to find ourselves eventually (re)turning elsewhere for answers? And finally, what might an alternative to queer theory as it has come to be known in the U.S. academy look like?

In this essay I explore the construction of the dominant self-narratives of

queer theory (queer genealogies) and some of their consequences. I then offer an alternative genealogy for critical thinking about sexuality in the United States, one that highlights the early emergence of intersectional thinking. This account is followed by an extended discussion of how some seminal texts in queer theory from the 1990s address (or fail to address) race, noting a consistent pattern of erasure, marginalization, and tokenization. I then explore a central claim to theoretical innovation within queer theory: the claim that the category of *queer* enables critique and transgression of boundaries, identities, and subject positions. Questioning some of the assumptions in this claim, I argue that it constitutes a form of ontological denial that enables queer theory to mask its own dependence on an unacknowledged white racial identity. The conclusion considers recent directions taken by activist-scholars who address the interrelations among race, gender, and sexuality. These include scholars who identify (often ambivalently) with queer theory and scholars who distance themselves from it. A closing look at recent work on the modern/colonial gender system points to some resources for thinking about sexuality outside the Eurocentric and colonial frameworks of queer theory.

Before continuing I want to separate my criticisms of broad tendencies (of which I see the texts and passages I discuss here as indicative) from a critique of individual theorists, their intentions, or the sum total of their ideas. For this reason I have chosen to engage with the projects of theorists whom I see as either especially prominent or generally sympathetic to my own positions. To see my position as one of rejection would be to participate in one of the things for which I criticize gay and lesbian studies and queer theory: the tendency to view criticism from people of color as external rather than internal to gay, lesbian, and queer debate. I hope that others will approach this essay as a productive engagement with queer theorists.[2]

QUEER GENEALOGIES

Genealogies of queer theory and gay and lesbian studies became something of a cottage industry in the 1990s. From these genealogies emerge two dominant narratives of the birth of queer theory, which I will call the *separatist* and *integrationist* accounts. Neither mutually exclusive nor solely identifiable with or identical to the positions of the authors with whom I associate them, these two accounts reflect differences in emphasis and strategy (for example, I see Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* as primarily separatist, but her later book, *Tendencies*, as primarily integrationist). Separatist and integrationist accounts

differ most in their narration of the institutionalization of the academic study of sexuality in the United States and of its relation to feminism.

The proponents of separatist accounts for queer theory focus on the articulation of sexuality (sometimes, but not always, understood as only lesbian and gay sexuality) as distinct from gender, race, and class. These narratives depend for their coherence, however, on the erasure or rejection of several decades of persistent calls within feminism, antiracist movements, and lesbian and gay of color theory and activism to understand how different aspects of identity interconnect and mutually constitute each other so as to make separation futile at best and mystifying at worst. In offering a genealogy for queer theory proponents of the separatist account generally begin with Rubin's "Thinking Sex," one of the first articles to stake out a postfeminist space for theorizing sexuality. The essay is often characterized as a sex-positive response to feminism: feminism of the 1970s, lesbian feminism, Catherine McKinnon's feminism, or the feminism of Rubin's own *The Traffic in Women* (1975). Rubin argues that one should not reduce the politics of sexuality to the politics of gender and that it is therefore a mistake to assume that feminism (understood as the politics of gender) should occupy a privileged site for understanding all the workings of sexuality in our society. For her the politics of sexuality include the demands of prostitutes, "boy-lovers," and s/m practitioners, as well as gay men and lesbians. She therefore advocates the creation of "an accurate, humane, and genuinely liberatory body of thought about sexuality." She claims that feminism has (or rather had) not (yet) done this. Rubin is aware of the multiplicity of approaches to sexuality within feminism from its earliest days to the present. However, she advocates for a separate theorizing of sexuality, "challeng[ing] the assumption that feminism is or should be the privileged site of a theory of sexuality," reducing feminism to "the theory of gender oppression." She goes on to argue, "It is essential to separate gender and sexuality analytically to more accurately reflect their separate social existence. This goes against the grain of much contemporary feminist thought, which treats sexuality as a derivation of gender."[3] By collapsing *feminism* into *gender* and then pointing out the lack of congruence between sexuality and gender, Rubin argues for the study of sexuality outside of a feminist context.

In *Epistemology of the Closet* Eve Sedgwick takes her cue from Rubin. Defining *sexuality* more narrowly than Rubin does, Sedgwick provides a persuasive account of the uniqueness and importance of the binary division between homosexuality and heterosexuality in Western culture. Biddy Martin has carefully delineated Sedgwick's theoretical moves: the analytical separation of sexuality

from gender and from race and the consequent argument for disarticulating gay theory from feminism and antiracist theory.[4] Paradoxically Sedgwick's argument for separating sexuality from gender relies on Rubin's claim that the polymorphous quality of sexuality is lost when its forms that focus on gender relations are privileged. Sedgwick continues, however, to privilege that classification of sexuality that is made according to gender of sexual object choice (homo-hetero) and to privilege especially male homosexuality, making her project gender-specific while simultaneously claiming to investigate sexuality without viewing it in relation to gender.

Writing in 1996 Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner further develop a separatist account of queer theory, charting the contours of what they loosely characterize as "queer commentary," something that "cannot be assimilated to a single discourse, let alone a propositional program." They do, however, have a sense of how queer commentary differs from lesbian and gay studies:

> Queer commentary has refused to draw boundaries around its constituency. And without forgetting the importance of the hetero-homo distinction of object choice in modern culture, queer work wants to address the full range of power-ridden normativities of sex. . . . Queer commentary in this sense is not necessarily superior to or more inclusive than conventional lesbian and gay studies; the two have overlapping but different aims and therefore potentially different publics.[5]

Queer commentary thus promises a broad and expansive study of sexuality. In keeping with both Rubin and Sedgwick, however, Berlant and Warner do not see queer commentary as necessarily promising a greater attentiveness to race or class. Rather it simply offers a different kind of attentiveness to sexuality, although one might wonder how different, given that queer commentary still seeks to separate sexuality from race—or at least to leave the whiteness of its object of study unmarked. Warner has elsewhere charted a genealogy for "queer social theory," which he situates within a lineage of radical thought that includes Georges Bataille and Herbert Marcuse as well as white gay liberationists and white feminists. He notes that queer theories of sexuality have been unable to answer fundamental questions about "whether or in what context queers have political interests, *as queers*, that connect them to broader demands for justice and freedom." The emphasis he gives to "as queers" perhaps indicates why, for example, he does not imagine a queer political genealogy beginning with (or at least including) James Baldwin, Bayard Rustin, or Audre Lorde. Indeed, citing Sedgwick, Warner is at pains to separate sexuality as a political issue from

race and gender (which he associates with reproductive metaphors): "This very incommensurability between genetic and erotic logics suggests that queerness, race, and gender can never be brought into parallel alignment." Warner is aware of relations among these categories, but he argues that it is the unique task of queer social theory to "disarticulate" them as "styles of politics."[6]

Integrationist accounts of queer theory, on the other hand, attempt to respond to the challenges posed by the multiplicity of identity that separatist accounts avoid. While separatists attempt to distinguish or "disarticulate" sexuality from race and gender, integrationists advocate for queer theory as a way to address the multiple relations among race, gender, class, and sexuality better than how feminism or other progressive movements and theories have. Integrationists do so most often, however, by eschewing or bracketing identity questions and using the deliberately vague category *queer* to blur lines among different social locations. The most strident versions, drawing from postmodern critiques of the subject, see identity itself as oppressive and always or nearly always dangerous. They dismiss the concept of *identity*, writing instead of "discourses," "practices," "desires," and the "subjects" that they create. In her introduction to "Queer Theory," a special issue of *differences*, de Lauretis recounts the motivations behind a conference held in 1990, from which the special issue emerged:

> It was my hope that the conference would also problematize some of the discursive constructions and constructed silences in the emergent field of "gay and lesbian studies," and would further explore questions . . . such as the respective and/or common grounding of current discourses and practices of homo-sexualities in relation to gender and to race, with their attendant differences of class or ethnic culture, generational, geographical, and socio-political location.

As de Lauretis chronicles the emergence of lesbian and gay studies and theory she notes the separate trajectories of white gay studies and white feminism in the 1970s and 1980s. Next she introduces race, noting how little critical work has been produced by lesbians and gay men of color and suggesting that this may be due both to "restricted institutional access to publishing and higher education" and to "different choices, different work priorities, different constituencies and forms of address." She adds that the importance of race "urge[s] the reframing of the questions of queer theory from different perspectives, histories, experiences, and in different terms."[7] In her account gay liberationism

and lesbian feminism appear to have been developed by whites without significant participation from people of color, with the consequence that their histories can be told without reference to works by people of color. The issue of how race relates to sexuality is asked at a chronologically later time, and will now be addressed by queer theory.

In his contribution to *Fear of a Queer Planet* Steven Seidman also separates lesbians and gay men of color from gay liberation and lesbian feminist discourses, portraying them instead as external critics of those discourses and of identity politics more generally. For example, Seidman discusses the sex wars in feminism separately from (and prior to) the critical writings of gays and lesbians of color. He associates these debates on sex "with publications such as *Pleasure and Danger*, *The Powers of Desire*, *Heresies*, *On Our Backs*, and . . . the writings of Pat Califia, Gayle Rubin, Dorothy Allison, Amber Hollibaugh, [and] Susie Bright." In two footnotes on the sex wars he cites several volumes and journals and fourteen individual articles; none of the articles is by a person of color.[8] This account of the sex wars erases the contributions of Cherríe Moraga, hattie gossett, Hortense Spillers, Rennie Simson, Felicita García, Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, Barbara Omolade, and Jayne Cortez, among others, to *Pleasure and Danger*, *The Powers of Desire*, and the sex issue of *Heresies*. How can that many women of color be invisible? Why this rewriting of history? Both de Lauretis and Seidman erase people of color from the center of debate in order to reintroduce them later at the margins of gay and lesbian theory.

The key issue separating integrationist from separatist accounts is most sharply honed in the work of Judith Butler, for whom the very existence of identity is at least part of the problem.[9] For Butler the individual subject comes into existence as subjugated by identity. Since there is "no outside" to the constituted frame of domination, resistance lies in dismantling identity through parody and reiteration. Like de Lauretis and Seidman, Butler enlists antiracist critiques to fortify her anti-identitarian position, making them external rather than internal to feminism. She argues that a new discourse is necessary to "remain self-critical with respect to the totalizing gestures of feminism."[10] This new discourse will serve more adequately, one presumes, the political needs of women of color, among others.

Queer theorists who favor the integrationist account tend to focus on the movement away from identity-based theorizing and politics toward analyses of power and desire as fundamental to the constitution of subjectivity. For the integrationist account queer theorizing will more adequately attend to nuances

of race, class, geography, and other aspects of social location than identity-based theories of sexual oppression. These narratives often depend for their coherence, however, on ignoring earlier calls for understanding interconnections among forms of identity or on mischaracterizing such calls as external rather than internal critiques of the identity-based projects of feminism, gay liberation, lesbian feminism, and antiracist and anticolonial theory and activism. One could make any number of criticisms of both separatist and integrationist genealogies and what they imply about the nature of queer theory. Among other things they render "theorists of color" two-dimensional by assuming that we all make the same critique with the same theoretical tools. We seem to be rarely, if ever, useful to white queer theorists, except insofar as our words can be tucked into footnotes to support their claims.

I would like to counter these genealogies of queer theory with an alternative timeline. Though it is necessarily incomplete, I believe it to be illuminating nonetheless:

1962 James Baldwin publishes *Another Country*, a complex novel that focuses on the impact of multiple, shifting gender, racial, class, and sexual identities on interpersonal relationships. He later publishes *Just above My Head* (1979), which returns to many of the same themes.

1977 Barbara Smith argues for an inseparable understanding of race, gender, and sexuality in "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism."

1978 Audre Lorde articulates a strategy for integrating the power of eroticism into all aspects of life, including work and politics, in *Uses of the Erotic*. Pat Parker publishes *Movement in Black*.

1978 Foucault's *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* is translated into English, bringing his account of the social construction and "implantation" of sexual identities to a U.S. readership.[11]

1979 The Combahee River Collective writes "A Black Feminist Statement," defending an identity politics based on the interrelations among race, class, gender, and sexuality.

1980 Adrienne Rich first publishes "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," arguing, among other things, that heterosexuality is enforced and reproduced through a complex series of erasures and injunctions and that it "needs to be recognized and studied as a *political institution*."[12]

1981 Cherríe Moraga and Amber Hollibaugh coauthor "What We're Rollin' Around in Bed With: Sexual Silences in Feminism." Published in the

sex issue of *Heresies*, it articulates a complex understanding of the interplay between masculinity, femininity, eroticism, fantasy, race, and class in lesbian desire.

1981 Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa co-edit *This Bridge Called My Back*, a collection of writings by women of color arguing for an identity-based politics (U.S. Third World feminism) that is attentive to multiplicity and the various contexts of economic exploitation.

1982 Gloria Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith publish *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave*, followed by Smith's *Home Girls* (1983), providing numerous arguments for interconnection and multiplicity.

1983 Moraga's *Loving in the War Years* expresses a keen understanding of the fundamental inseparability of race, class, gender, and sexuality.

1983 Marilyn Frye publishes *The Politics of Reality*, in which she argues for the need to understand sexual and gender identities as simultaneously racial and that gay men should embrace their marginality, demand citizenship "as women" instead of "as men," and invent new ways of enjoying the erotic possibilities of penises and male bodies.[13]

1983–84 The collections *Powers of Desire*, edited by Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson, and *Pleasure and Danger*, edited by Carole S. Vance, present challenges to restrictive notions of sexuality assumed by many in the feminist movement and strong statements about the mutual constitution of race and gender.

1984 Rubin argues in "Thinking Sex" that feminism has not and cannot articulate a radical theory of sexuality because it is only a theory of gender oppression.[14]

1986 Joseph Beam edits *In the Life: A Black Gay Anthology*, bringing a large number of out black gay male voices to the critical scene for the first time.

1987 Anzaldúa publishes *Borderlands/La Frontera*, relating the epistemological significance of being queer to being a woman of color and urging people to listen to their *jotería* (queer folk).[15]

1989 In *Essentially Speaking* Diana Fuss claims that black women theorists have shown a preference for essentialist modes of theorizing, rather than embracing poststructuralist critiques of identity.[16]

1990 Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* and Butler's *Gender Trouble* are published, the former arguing for an analytic separation of the "axis of sexuality" from other social axes of identity, the latter arguing for

the need to subvert identity and to move away from identity-based politics.[17]

1991 Fuss edits *Inside/Out* and de Lauretis edits a special issue of *differences*, titled "Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities," in which she coins the term *queer theory* and laments the fact that queers of color have not produced much theory.[18]

Most accounts of the origins of queer theory do not introduce these texts in this order. More often they list the texts by white authors first, followed by those by people of color—presumably because most queer theorists first read the texts in that order. However, the repetition of a false chronology cements a genealogy for queer theory that obscures the presence of queer people of color and thereby misrepresents the shortcomings and errors of many of the texts by white theorists.

In light of the actual publication of critical work on race and sexuality by queers of color, I would like to propose that we have been there all along, and that arguments for an analysis of race, gender, class, and sexuality as inseparable are nothing particularly new, while arguments for their separation should be viewed with some suspicion as to their political motivations. Most queer genealogies chart a movement away from feminism to a study of sexuality and then a later addition of the question of race by people of color and queer theorists. However, critiques of mainstream feminism by straight women of color, white lesbians, and lesbians of color in the late 1970s and early 1980s were often accompanied (sometimes ambivalently) by calls for more complicated analyses of sexuality and desire *as they relate to and complicate analyses of gender, race, and class*. Later many queer theorists moved to separate sexuality from gender, race, and class as a unique concern, justifying this move in part with the claim that sexuality is not *reducible* to the terms of the other categories. The move to isolate sexuality as a field of inquiry, however, simultaneously marginalizes the legacy of intersectional analysis and centers critical work that takes the whiteness of its objects of study for granted. In other words, theorists with an implicit commitment to maintaining the centrality of whiteness can claim to be doing the basic work of sexuality to which "race scholars" will add.

Queer theory and lesbian and gay studies have never adequately addressed the fact that they are founded on the erasure of a substantial body of critical literature by people of color at the same time that these bodies of work are *included* in queer genealogies for strategic purposes.[19] Queer genealogies are written so that theorists of color are simultaneously marginal and new; white

theorists provide insights into sexuality, and then theorists of color (and writings by working-class queers) show how sexuality varies in other contexts. I have argued elsewhere for an understanding of identity and oppression that is *always* attentive to the constant interrelations (rather than occasional "intersections") among race, gender, sexuality, and class, taking issue implicitly with what I have here called the "separatist" account.[20] I have also discussed elsewhere some of the problems with many attempts by gay liberation advocates and feminists in the 1970s to construct grand narratives.[21] These attempts frequently sought to locate the single historical foundation for all oppression and often resulted in gross reductions, like Shulamith Firestone's equation, "Racism is sexism extended."[22] Such reductionism was not the only way activist scholars in the 1970s attempted to understand the mutually constitutive nature of oppression. Others, predominantly women of color, sought to relate modes of oppression *without* simply reducing them to a single cause. Ironically many of these very calls against subsuming oppressions into one another were later cited as justification for separating them or for seeking to do away with the category of identity altogether.

QUEER DISCONTENT

Many insightful critiques exist of queer theory's engagement with race. Most of the canonical works of queer theory portray people of color as adding colorful, additional considerations to central questions about sexuality, without ever completely integrating an analysis of race into their primary frameworks. Biddy Martin, for example, has written about tendencies in some queer theory to cast "sexuality as that which exceeds, transgresses, or supersedes gender [and race.]" Gender and race, in turn, are then "construed as stagnant and ensnaring."[23] She has most notably directed her critiques at Sedgwick's axioms in *Epistemology of the Closet* and what Martin describes as an occasional overemphasis in Butler's work on "sexual differences and defiances of norms" that make invisible the "difference that it makes to be a women."[24] Evelynn Hammonds has further argued, "While it has been acknowledged that race is not simply additive to, or derivative of sexual difference, few white feminists have attempted to move beyond simply stating this point to describe the powerful effect that race has on the construction and representation of gender and sexuality." In her detailed reading of de Lauretis's introduction to "Queer Theory," a special issue of *differences*, Hammonds notes that de Lauretis includes in queer theory's goals the theorization of the complex interrelations of race, ethnicity,

and class. Hammonds demonstrates that the special issue "fail[s] to theorize the very questions de Lauretis announces that the term 'queer' will address."[25] We can see how queer theory, following an integrationist account, has treated race by looking at three influential texts: *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, Sedgwick's *Tendencies*, and Butler's *Bodies That Matter*. (Rather than treating the ideas of all these works in their entirety, I hope to provide illustrations that can contribute to a picture of certain general directions in queer theory.)

Abelove, Barale, and Halperin's *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* is racially diverse in subject matter and contributors, although many of the contributions to this and other queer collections that deal with race function according to a logic of tokenism, made to bear the burden of representing "difference." In *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* contributions by theorists of color are not shunted off into a special section on race and ethnicity but integrated into "central" categories of analysis; however, in the anthology's "User's Guide," out of forty-two essays in the volume only two pieces by white theorists (Biddy Martin and Cindy Patton) are listed under "African American Studies" or "Ethnic Studies." One therefore wants to ask what function the essays by people of color serve in the context of the whole. Each category within the anthology seems to demarcate a particular field of inquiry within lesbian and gay studies, and most of the essays in that category offer theorization of and investigation into that topic. Contributions by people of color usually serve to provide a look into how that topic relates to race. Tomás Almaguer's "Chicano Men" is a useful example. The function of that essay in the collection is largely to present another, different construction of sexuality. This presentation throws Anglo gay male desire into relief, but simultaneously reaffirms it as the central construction of sexuality. A false sense of homogeneity within the group of Chicano gay men is implied, while Anglo gay male sexuality, treated diversely throughout the anthology, is allowed to float free of the fixed otherness to which Chicano gay sexuality has been tethered. Chicano gay sexuality is presented as a colorful addition to the anthology, while the category of Anglo gay sexuality is never named as a racial or ethnic identity and never questioned as such. Contributions to Fuss's *Inside/Out*, Warner's *Fear of a Queer Planet*, and Elizabeth Weed's and Naomi Schor's *Feminism Meets Queer Theory* that deal with race function similarly. In *Fear of a Queer Planet*, for example, the definitional centrality of white queerness is unquestioned (with the possible exception of Jonathan Goldberg's "Sodomy in the New World"). The two essays focusing on contemporary articulations of race fall largely into the pattern I have already noted. They analyze specific manifestations of homophobia in black communities, while the remaining essays in

the volume do not present themselves as analyses of white communities, but as analyses of sexual politics, heteronormativity, and homophobia in general. Like salsa at a Thanksgiving dinner, contributions by queers of color remain zesty outsiders as long as the normative centrality assumed by white queer sexualities goes unquestioned.[26]

In *Tendencies* Sedgwick pushes further the theses of *Epistemology of the Closet*, although she pulls back from the separatist emphasis of the earlier book, embracing at times an integrationist queer theoretical approach with regard to race. In the first chapter of *Tendencies* she writes that one of the advantages of the term *queer* is its ability to refer to such a wide variety of things. However, for political reasons, she also wants to retain a connection between *queer* and gay and lesbian sexualities. She visualizes the relation of *queer* to gay and lesbian identities through a spatial metaphor of center and periphery: "To displace [same-sex sexual object choice] from the term's definitional center, would be to dematerialize any possibility of queerness itself." Thus Sedgwick, fearing the possibly apolitical nature of a queer theory without homosexuals, positions homosexuality as central to the project of queer theory and politics. "At the same time," she writes, "a lot of the most exciting recent work around 'queer' spins the term outward along dimensions that can't be subsumed under gender and sexuality at all." Once again "intellectuals and artists of color" are positioned chronologically later ("recent work") and spatially outside, on the margins ("outward along [nonsexual] dimensions"). While it is true that Sedgwick considers this work to be some of the "most exciting" and that she believes it deepens and shifts the meaning and the "center of gravity" of the term *queer*, one must consider what her positioning of work on sexuality and race, ethnicity, and postcolonial identity does.[27] Work like her own, which addresses white, Western homosexuality but does not necessarily frame itself as *particular*, can pose as both the center and the point of origin. Work by theorists of color is positioned as derivative, even if interesting, because it takes something already developed by white theorists and adds to it.

Butler's *Bodies That Matter* makes the promising claim that "the symbolic . . . is also and always a racial industry, indeed, the reiterated practice of *racializing* interpellations."[28] Given this claim, one might reasonably expect her discussions in "The Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary" and "Critically Queer" to analyze the role of racial discourses in shaping the histories of psychoanalysis, radical democratic theory, and poststructuralism. One might expect to glean from her book an understanding of how dominant Western theoretical discourses are "also and always" inflected by race, perhaps espe-

cially when that inflection is unacknowledged and taken for granted, that is, *white*. One would be disappointed, however. In *Bodies That Matter* race surfaces on two pages of the book's introduction (where the claim is made that race needs to always be taken into account) and in the two chapters of the book dealing with black and Latina and Latino subjects. Race, in other words, as figured in *Bodies That Matter* is *only* and always present in the presence of nonwhite bodies.[29] Without the presence of a black author or a Latina drag queen bearing the bodily stigmata of race and dragging them into the theorist's field of vision, the "discursive limits of 'sex'" become falsely universalized into a deracinated whiteness. In the presence of such bodily stigmata race plays an interesting role. In the chapters on Nella Larsen's novel *Passing* and Jennie Livingston's film *Paris Is Burning* race becomes a limit, the limit to the mobility of bodies and desires. It is fixed and corporeal. In both chapters raced (black and Latina and Latino) subjects who attempt to exercise the fluid mobility promised by postmodern theories of identity find death (Clare Kendry and Venus Xtravaganza). Through what chain of events does race (supposedly always present) come to equal black or Latina and Latino, and then come to equal limit, limitation, and fixedness, and then further come to equal death? What is the relationship between this chain of signification and the fact that the other, sometimes more optimistic chapters are articulated around genders, sexualities, and desires apparently understood as *free* of race (that is, *white*)? Butler makes that relationship clear in her chapter on the documentary *Paris Is Burning*, where she deflects her discussion from race to a consideration of the mobility of the film's white director, whose desire and gender ultimately prove to be the transgressive center of the chapter. The white director and the white theorist prove to be capable of performing the subversion of identity that their black and Latina and Latino subjects could not. Given the structure of the chapter, however, this transgression is visible only against the backdrop of the failed "performances" of the black and Latina/o gay men and transsexuals depicted in the film. Within the terms of Butler's analysis their failure—and death—is a prerequisite for the intelligibility of Livingston's and Butler's successful transgressions.[30]

WHITENESS, QUEERNESS, AND ONTOLOGICAL DENIAL

Despite the failure of so many canonical works in queer theory to live up to their own promises to address race complexly and fully, queer theory clearly offers something useful to theorists, as it has continued to entrench itself in the academy. I suspect that the success of queer theory actually has much to

do with that failure. Its disavowal of race (in the separatist guise) and its disavowal of identity (in either guise), in other words, offer theorists of sexuality a means whereby they might disavow whiteness. Among theorists who have championed queer theory in opposition to gay and lesbian studies there has been particular enthusiasm for the claim that the term *queer* "does not designate an ontological category or substantive entity."[31] Annamarie Jagose, for example, claims that "the delegitimation of liberal, liberationist, ethnic and even separatist notions of identity generated the cultural space necessary for the emergence of the term 'queer'; its non-specificity guarantees it against recent criticisms made of the exclusionist tendencies of 'lesbian' and 'gay' as identity categories." She elaborates this claim as follows:

> Queer may be thought of as activating an identity politics so attuned to the constraining effects of naming, of delineating a foundational category which precedes and underwrites political intervention, that it may better be understood as promoting a non-identity—or even anti-identity—politics. . . . The discursive proliferation of queer has been enabled in part by the knowledge that identities are fictitious—that is, produced by and productive of material effects but nevertheless arbitrary, contingent and ideologically motivated.[32]

Jagose thus summarizes the most strident argument for the uniqueness of queer theory.

According to theorists like Jagose, *queer* may be related to other identities, such as gay and lesbian, but it is not a normal kind of identity because its deliberately imprecise reference to any ontological substance, category, or state of being helps queer theorists to avoid the pitfalls of essentialism and exclusion. As the literary critic Colleen Lamos writes, a queer "subject does not possess an authentic, inner self waiting to be set free but is constructed by means of acts that, tentatively and provisionally, presuppose it. Thus, 'we' queers act as if 'we' are what 'we' will only have become by acting now as if 'we' already were queer. Because the *as if* is always a *not yet*, we do not know where we will end up."[33] It is possible that Lamos means only that queer identity is not an a priori, natural essence. It is difficult, however, to imagine how this claim differs significantly from the kinds of claims that most critical race theorists would today make about blackness or a Latina or Latino identity, or the way that most feminists and other scholars would view *woman*—or *gay* or *lesbian*, for that matter. Most scholars today agree that *no* identities are a priori, natural essences. Why should this revelation be particularly queer? To put the question differently, what is *queer* about queer theory? As Jagose suggests, many queer theorists are

interested in something specific to *queerness* that makes queer identity (or anti-identity) more flexible and less ontologically bound than other identities. It is at this level that Lamos's claim makes sense as a claim about queer theory's uniqueness. Both Lamos and Jagose cite Butler's discussion of the term *queer* in *Bodies That Matter*. Butler, however, does not argue that queer is a nonidentity or that it is somehow different from other identities. Her concern is that the term's history of derogatory usage might prevent reinterpretation as a positive articulation of identity. She therefore *advocates for* a consistently self-critical and open use of the term (as well as such a use of *lesbian* and *gay*) rather than *describing* its use as in fact being consistently self-critical and open.

Butler's call, however, assumes a more general view of "the subject" that rejects the notion of a preexisting ontological substance as a referent for any identity whatsoever. Butler claims that one comes into existence as a given identity through performative speech acts (speech acts that bring something into being rather than describing something that already exists). A performative cannot succeed, however, without the authority lent it by a history of prior invocations: "If a performative provisionally succeeds . . . then it is not because an intention successfully governs the action of speech, but only because that action echoes prior actions, and *accumulates the force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior, authoritative set of practices*."[34] There is, then, never intention, but only repetition—no "doer behind the deed." Based on this model one can see why Lamos would describe the queer subject as posited in advance of its existence. The performative act of identity takes place in the present, constituting the subject, but that subject, which comes into being after the act, is assumed to exist first—before the performative act brings it into being—as the author or intention behind the act that will constitute it.[35] The philosophical core of queer theory's anti-identitarian argument in its most strident form thus runs as follows. There is no subject before its constitution by discourse because discursive acts create the subject along with the invocation of an identity. Identity therefore defines a person in a limited, arbitrary, and fictitious way, but also allows that person to exist as a subject with some kind of agency. Although identities are thus necessary (according to some) and enabling (in a limited way), one must subvert them in order to undo the exclusions performed by their limited and arbitrary nature. Queer anti-identitarianism furthermore *sometimes* contends that something specific to *queer* allows for this subversion. Through deliberate imprecision or lack of an ontological referent, *queer* is assumed to avoid the fixed exclusions of other identity labels.

However, enough evidence exists to find this ostensibly profound claim pro-

foundly objectionable. In fact one might ask whether *queer* always subverts other identities, or whether it sometimes just hides them. For the history of the term's use is not the only history that one must take into account. In keeping with the idea that the queer subject does not preexist its performative invocation, Sedgwick suggests (albeit coyly and perhaps with tongue in cheek) that "what it takes—all it takes—to make the description 'queer' a true one is the impulsion *to* use it in the first person."[36] Yet I wonder whether, to the contrary, one must already be recognized by others as in some way queer in order to use the term in the first person successfully. For example, if I call myself *queer*, my use of that term will be successful partly because a sufficient number of other people accept that my new identity makes sense (since identities are social). That success will have a lot to do with the already established fact of my identity as a gay man. By contrast, if my heterosexual friend begins to call herself *queer*, many people (not least of all her husband) will have many questions for her about what she means by that, questions that no one would ever ask about *my* queer identity. My point is not that my heterosexual friend cannot be or become queer, but that the possibilities for her success in being recognized as queer are different from my own. This has less to do with her practices and sense of self than with the facts of her social identity as they have taken shape over the course of her life. In other words, the kinds of identities that she and I already have determine differently the possibilities for our inhabiting a socially intelligible queer identity.

Furthermore queer, as an identity, is dependent upon *certain* other kinds of identities and histories—identities and histories that can be successfully (re) described as queer in an intersubjective way. Butler concedes that one cannot simply make *queer* mean whatever one wants it to mean; its use is constrained by the history of previous uses. According to Butler the term has a history, but the subject using the term does not. However, as my example shows, subjects always do have their own history, a history that includes an identity. Something about a queer subject's history and identity has moved it to take up the term *queer* and to use it in the first person. Since the subject is inseparable from its identity (although both might change over time), that identity and its historical construction are part of the context for using the term *queer*. In addition, since one's preexisting identity is social, a public sense of that identity is necessary for success in calling oneself queer. The questions posed to my heterosexual friend about her queerness are a case in point, seeking to establish intersubjectively a sense of whether and how her preexisting identity was or was not queer, and if it was not, then how it may or may not have become queer. (This process might include a renegotiation of the definition of *queer*.) The preexisting iden-

tity that motivates one to call oneself queer is thus *always* part of the context in which one can become queer at all. In other words, there would appear to be both always *and already* a potentially queer doer behind the queer deed.

More specifically—and this is crucial—identities such as gay and lesbian have a privileged position in relation to queer identification. While the possibilities for identifying as queer may be *relatively* open, some identities have a closer relationship to the term than others do, as Sedgwick reminds us. Furthermore those relationships and identities continue to function within queer identification rather than simply being replaced or subverted. Anti-identitarian uses of *queer* like those of Jagose and Lamos, however, perform an erasure of the queer subject after the fact. They imply that queer acts and identifications have taken place without a queer (or lesbian or gay) agent—a sleight of hand that renders the theorist (seemingly) invisible and irrelevant. This erasure allows queer theorists to suggest that *queer* enacts a subject posited in advance rather than simply renaming an already existing subject. The ontological denial that queer theory performs in order to erase the presence of the (surprisingly stable) identities behind *queer* can do more harm than good to the project of creating new possibilities for queer subjects. Too often the turn from *gay and lesbian* to the purportedly less identity-bound *queer* allows theorists to duck responsibility for thinking about how more traditional identities function in their work, that is, how *queer* can all too easily and without notice simply stand in for "white gay men and lesbians." It is as if once one makes the disclaimer ("I am talking about *queer*, not *gay* or *lesbian*—sex and desire, not identity"), one no longer needs to critically question the white identities hiding behind the queer curtain.[37] As Dorothy and company discovered in Oz, however, there is always a body behind the curtain, and it rarely appears as ethereal or impressive as the smoke and mirrors.

BEYOND QUEER THEORY? SEXUALITY, EUROCENTRISM, AND THE COLONIAL DIFFERENCE

The version of this essay that I published in 2001 concluded with some brief considerations of the then current state of queer theory, suggesting that some newer work on queerness, gender, race, and class was beginning to emerge.[38] I argued that it was vital to understand how sexuality and other aspects of identity are interrelated and how their apparent separateness is created by and facilitates domination and exploitation. I suggested that a "critical" queer theory might explore how expressions of homosexuality in Europe, North America, and Australia depend for their positive articulation on the imperially established posi-

tion of power of the so-called West over the so-called non-West as well as how that very articulation of a gay or lesbian identity might enable some forms of resistance in Africa, the Americas, Asia, and the Pacific that may ultimately prove anticapitalist and anti-imperialist. One should not assume in advance that the point of origin of modern gay and lesbian identities will give them an essentially imperialist character, anymore than that their originally resistant character will remain unchanged across time and cultures. I argued that such an approach to sexuality would need to draw from activist scholars who have been theorizing at the intersections of race, gender, class, and sexuality for decades: from earlier theorists like Audre Lorde, Cherríe Moraga, Gloria Anzaldúa, Joan Nestle, Pat Parker, Barbara Smith, Bernice Johnson Reagon, and Marilyn Frye, to recent scholars like Jackie Goldsby, Deena González, Coco Fusco, Deborah McDowell, Essex Hemphill, Kobena Mercer, Paula Moya, Cindy Patton, Ramón Gutiérrez, Alan Bérubé, and Mab Segrest, to name but a few.

Since that time a virtual renaissance of what Roderick Ferguson calls "queer of color critique" has emerged. Any list would inevitably be incomplete but would likely include José Esteban Muñoz's *Disidentifications* (1999), José Quiroga's *Tropics of Desire* (2000), David Eng's *Racial Castration* (2001), Linda Garber's *Identity Poetics* (2001), Robert Reid-Pharr's *Black Gay Man* (2001), Ann Stoler's *Carnal Knowledge* (2002), María Lugones's *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes* (2003), Martin Manalansan's *Global Divas* (2003), Juana María Rodríguez's *Queer Latinidad* (2003), Ferguson's *Aberrations in Black* (2004), M. Jacqui Alexander's *Pedagogies of Crossing* (2005), Gayatri Gopinath's *Impossible Desires* (2005), Dwight McBride's *Why I Hate Abercrombie and Fitch* (2005), Catriona Rueda Esquibel's *With Her Machete in Her Hand* (2006), and collections like David Eng's and Alice Hom's Q & A: *Queer in Asian America* (1998), Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé's and Martin Manalansan's *Queer Globalizations* (2002), and E. Patrick Johnson's and Mae G. Henderson's *Black Queer Studies* (2005).

While far from univocal, this scholarship has fundamentally transformed the landscape of gay, lesbian, and queer studies. Furthermore many, although not all, of these authors demonstrate ambivalence about the formal body of scholarship known as "queer theory." Ferguson, for example, grounds his book in citations to Karl Marx and to women of color feminists, eschewing the canonical texts of queer theory. Rather than explicitly marking a break, however, he scrupulously avoids any engagement, critical or otherwise, instead carving out an alternative scholarly tradition, not unlike the one I outlined above. Lugones's *Pilgrimages* similarly avoids direct engagement with most scholars identified with queer theory, instead drawing from lesbian feminists, women of

color feminists, and radical philosophers. Alexander, while not naming queer theory specifically, delineates significant lines of political and epistemological incompatibility between white feminist theory, based in "hegemonic European thought," and "social thought emerging from communities and geographies of color."[39] While Garber often sees more compatibility than difference between queer theory and women of color and lesbian feminisms, she makes queer theorists' erasure of intersectional analyses of race, class, and gender the central thesis of her book.[40]

The tensions among scholars of race and sexuality over the legacy of queer theory emerges most pointedly in the special issue of *Social Text* published in 2005, titled "What's Queer about Queer Studies Now?" The introduction, by David Eng, with Judith Halberstam and José Muñoz, opens by repeating the more dominant genealogy that I examined earlier, dating the emergence of *queer* "around 1990," defining *queer* as "a political metaphor without a fixed referent," and calling for a "renewed queer studies" in the present moment. It may or may not be noteworthy that the editors prefer *queer studies* and *queer critique* to *queer theory*, but the introduction seems to ground its understanding of the term in the dominant theoretical assumptions of the field:

> That queerness remains open to a continuing critique of its exclusionary operations has always been one of the field's key theoretical and political promises. What might be called the "subjectless" critique of queer studies disallows any positing of a proper subject *of* or object *for* the field by insisting that queer has no fixed political referent. Such an understanding orients queer epistemology, despite the historical necessities of "strategic essentialism" . . . , as a continuous deconstruction of the tenets of positivism at the heart of identity politics. Attention to queer epistemology also insists that sexuality—the organizing rubric of lesbian and gay studies—must be rethought for its positivist assumption. A subjectless critique establishes, in Michael Warner's phrase, a focus on "a wide field of normalization" as the site of social violence.

While slyly and strategically using the rhetoric of queer ontological denial to move race to the center of queer theoretical debate (since sexuality cannot assume a privileged place as the subject of *queer*), the introduction risks an endorsement of some of queer theory's most problematic theoretical baggage. The editors acknowledge, however, that "queer studies" may not be the most important disciplinary framework or theoretical legacy for all of the contributors to the volume (alternatives include women of color and transnational femi-

nisms, critical race theory, queer of color critique, or queer diaspora studies). They also note the limitations of much "mainstream queer studies," noting, "Much of queer theory nowadays sounds like a metanarrative about the domestic affairs of white homosexuals."[41]

Despite this criticism of mainstream queer studies and the acknowledgment that not all critical work on race and sexuality comes out of queer studies, the commitment to a form of queer ontological denial and the dating of queer studies at 1990 lies in tension with efforts by several contributors to distance themselves from dominant narratives of queer theory. Ferguson, for example, while characterizing his contribution to the special issue as an attempt to "intervene in queer studies," specifically distinguishes his work (and queer of color critique) from queer studies. Noting that "women of color feminism has the longest engagement with racialized sexuality," he argues that queer studies has understood itself as "the only and most significant" field of sexual inquiry by taking Foucault's *History of Sexuality* "as the principal engagement with the question of sexuality." He adds, "Doing so has meant occluding critical sexual formations that preceded queer studies and Foucault's wonderful intervention, formations such as women of color feminism."[42] Similarly Halberstam argues that "the future of queer studies . . . depends absolutely on moving away from white gay male identity politics and learning from the radical critiques offered by a younger generation of queer scholars who draw their intellectual inspiration from feminism and ethnic studies rather than white queer studies."[43] Most strongly in tension with the invocation of ontological denial is Hiram Pérez's contribution, which begins by noting, "Queer theorists who can invoke that transparent [white] subject, and choose to do so, reap the dividends of whiteness." He goes on to connect this transparent white subject to the subjectless queer of queer studies, in a way similar to what I have done above. He writes, "A great deal of queer theorizing has sought to displace identity politics with an alternative anti-identitarian model. . . . It is not surprising then to find buried underneath the boots of this establishmentarian anti-identity all sorts of dissident bodies."[44] I would ask the authors of the issue's introduction: If a "subjectless" queer critique continues to hide the significant differentiation still necessary between *queers of color* and *white queers*, *queer women*, *queer men*, and *trans queers*, *rich queers* and *poor queers*, *first-world queers* and *third-world queers*, then which "identity politics" precisely has "queer epistemology" successfully "deconstructed"?

Despite moments of convergence with queer theory, one might conceive a distinction between much of the new work on race and sexuality and main-

stream queer studies along the lines of what Walter Mignolo calls "the colonial difference."[45] In other words, queer theorists tend to understand the history of sexuality from within a Eurocentric frame. "Modern sexuality" therefore emerges in the eighteenth or nineteenth century alongside the emergence of industrial capitalism, liberalism, and the nation-state. By contrast, for scholars studying race and sexuality modern sexuality emerges alongside the violence of European colonialism and indigenous resistance in the sixteenth century, the transatlantic slave trade in the seventeenth century, the imperialist wars and expansion of Europe and its former settler colonies in the Americas, southern Africa, and the Pacific in the nineteenth century, and the waves of postcolonial independence in the twentieth century. Sexuality looks dramatically different emerging from the first, Eurocentric narrative than from the second narrative. Furthermore these different points of origin for theorizing sexuality—these different loci of enunciation—have profound consequences for the relative identity attachments of queer theory and queer of color critique.

If class, gender, race, and sexuality are mutually constitutive, then they have given shape to one another over many centuries.[46] Following through with a similar claim, the philosopher María Lugones argues that the elaboration of racial hierarchies and Eurocentrism occurred coextensively with a reorganization of gender roles and the elaboration of two sides to what she dubs the "colonial/modern gender system." That is to say that its emergence resulted in two distinct ways of understanding gender. Both emerge interdependently and are thoroughly both modern and colonial insofar as the colonial relations constitutive of the modern era brought them together into being. This system made gender intelligible for Europeans by conceiving of white men and women as biologically dimorphic and adhering, respectively, to conceptions of activity and passivity, reason and emotion, publicity and privacy, and so on. By contrast the other side of the gender system imposed a different gendering on colonized peoples. For example, Europeans did not always think of colonized peoples as biologically dimorphic and did not necessarily even accord them genders, the violence of colonialism having constructed them as bestial and outside of modernity, civilization, and *human* gender:

> Females excluded from [the category of women] were . . . understood to be animals in a sense that went further than the identification of white women with nature, infants, and small animals. They were understood as animals in the deep sense of "without gender," sexually marked as female, but without the characteristics of femininity. Women racialized as inferior were turned

> from animals into various modified versions of "women" as it fit the processes of global, Eurocentered capitalism. Thus heterosexual rape of Indian or African slave women coexisted with concubinage, as well as with the imposition of the heterosexual understanding of gender relations among the colonized—when and as it suited global, Eurocentered capitalism, and heterosexual domination of white women.[47]

In other words, the elaboration of a modern and colonial world system entailed violent processes that sought to devalue and disenfranchise colonized women. This necessitated the wholesale redrawing of traditional gender roles in many cultures across Africa, the Americas, Asia, and the Pacific through "slow, discontinuous, and heterogeneous processes that violently inferiorized colonized women." The dismantling of gender relations among colonized peoples and the imposition of new gender relations were central, according to Lugones and many other scholars, to "disintegrating" the relations, rituals, local economic structures, and forms of decision making that nourished resistance to European domination.[48]

Within the emerging colonial/modern gender system sexual difference from Europeans became simultaneously a justification for imperial subjection and an explanation for the economic and political inferiority brought on by colonialism. The processes of establishing military and economic dominance in a region and of elaborating beliefs about racial supremacy, in other words, entailed the European colonizers' construal of the colonized as sexually deviant. They subsequently required the newly colonized peoples to model European ideals of sex and gender relations, often encouraging conformity by force. However, this system remained highly flexible, so that Europeans could envision colonial others as possessors of violent and barbaric sexualities or as developers of mysterious and libertine erotic arts, as hypersexual beasts in a state of nature or as asexual prudes caught up in overly repressive moral traditions. It all depended on who had the power to elaborate or to contest the rhetoric of gender, race, and sexuality in play and what they deemed necessary in a given time and place. Teresia K. Teaiwa, for example, has studied how missionaries to the Pacific islands violently sought to convert the indigenous inhabitants, imposing "civilization" and modesty on people seen to be too naked and sexually libertine. However, the Pacific has more recently become a destination for Europeans, North Americans, and Australians seeking a savage state of relaxation, and "Islanders are increasingly exposed to sun-seeking and seminude 'First-Worlders.'"[49] This pattern took on different details in different parts of

the world but retained remarkable similarities in each instance. In an irony of history the eventual success of many colonized people in conforming to Eurocentric ideals of gender and sexual morality would eventually become a justification for additional imperial interventions, this time in the name of liberating "their" women and defending freedom for sexual minorities.

Elsewhere modern gay and lesbian identities began to emerge in resistance to homophobia in the twentieth century in Europe and North America, but the sexual and gender relations of heterosexuality and homosexuality that gave birth to them arose as part of the colonial/modern gender system. The model of heterosexuality that crystallized in nineteenth-century Europe and North America was but one stage in the long development of one side of that system. It came into existence alongside other, sometimes violently coerced, sometimes resistant understandings of gender and sexuality. As part of the *other* side of gender in colonial modernity, these alternative understandings continue to shape both colonial representations and postcolonial self-understandings of Africans, Asians, and indigenous peoples of the Americas and the Pacific, giving rise to several questions: Are gay and lesbian identities simply complicit with the coloniality of power, or do they demonstrate a strategy of resistance to it, parallel to other strategies enacted by colonized and formerly colonized peoples? Is the question too complex for an either/or? And what are the possibilities for developing sexual identities that reject not only homophobia, but also the racism and Eurocentrism of the colonial/modern gender system?

I ended the earlier version of this essay with a call for a critical queer theory and practice in which the multiplicity of subjectivity and the interconnection of oppressions within a context of capitalist exploitation are not blind spots to be pointed out, but rather matters of common sense. While I see no reason not to reiterate that call here, I would like to add two qualifications based on the foregoing discussion. Most obviously scholar-activist work doing precisely this has emerged over the past decade. I do not think that one should necessarily expect the ongoing development of this work to see itself in relation to queer theory at all. Indeed transformative understandings of the relationships among race, capitalism, gender, and sexuality are probably stronger precisely when elaborated from outside of Eurocentric frameworks and intellectual genealogies, rather than from within them. To *add* race and colonialism to queer theory is to overlook the formation of queer theory as thoroughly grounded in the Eurocentric narratives of the coloniality of power. It is to take European thought as a starting point rather than to begin with practices of resistance to the sexual violence of colonialism.

This is not to say that I find nothing useful (say, for a gay Chicano) in queer theory. However, the most prominent queer theorists have too often justified their scholarship and argued for its originality based on claims that it could link sexuality, power, and desire to considerations of race, gender, and society better than other, competing approaches. This is not merely an act of theoretical overreaching, but a strategic (if not cynical and opportunistic) *justification* for political relevance and theoretical originality based on the legitimizing force of antiracist politics in the U.S. academy of the 1990s. At the same time most queer theorists have systematically sought to define the newness and uniqueness of their scholarship through a denial of past and ongoing efforts to integrate considerations of class, gender, race, and sexuality, the origins of which predate queer theory. In addition many queer theorists have consistently resisted the consequences of a truly substantive, thorough, and ongoing engagement with theories that are centrally concerned with race and class from the other side of a deep epistemological divide. When queer theorists have included considerations of race it has frequently been through gestures of marginalization, paternalism, or tokenism. Scholarship like that of Alexander, Ferguson, and Lugones shows us that complex, subtle, and expansive theories of queer sexuality and even liberation need not originate from within the terms of queer theory. Those of us who share their interest in radical social transformation would do well to look to convergences of women of color feminisms, transnational feminisms, and anticolonial theorists. There we might find new and better understandings of the interrelation of race, sexuality, gender, and capitalism and new ways to think outside of the historical frameworks and intellectual legacies of Eurocentrism.

NOTES

1. Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, 3–4.

2. One reader has suggested that my own critique of queer theory is in fact enabled by queer theory, insofar as "queer theory . . . incites precisely the kind of intervention [I am] making," and that this intervention "would not have been possible if not for queer theory." On one level, of course, this is true; I would not be critiquing queer theory if it did not exist. On another level, however, I fear that this suggestion repeats one of the things for which I take queer theorists to task: namely a conflation of *complex* with *queer*, as if any attempt at complex, intersectional, or multivalent critique is necessarily queer theory (or necessarily postmodern or poststructuralist theory). This conflation overlooks (as queer theory tends to do) the fact that the origins of complex, intersectional thinking about sexuality (and race and gender and class) lie not in the work of

canonical queer theorists in the 1990s, but in the work of feminists, predominantly of women of color, in the 1970s and 1980s. I try to trace in this essay the ways queer theory has, in fact, simplified our understanding of sexuality rather than added complexity to it.

3. Rubin, "Thinking Sex," 274–75, 307, 308.

4. Martin, *Femininity Played Straight*, 75–79; Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 16, 27–39, 75–82.

5. Berlant and Warner, "What Does Queer Theory Teach Us about X?" 343, 345–46.

6. Warner, *Fear of a Queer Planet*, vii, xi, xviii, xix.

7. De Lauretis, "Queer Theory," iii–iv, viii, ix, x.

8. Seidman, "Identity and Politics," 124, 140–41 nn. 44–45.

9. Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 16; Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 16–17.

10. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 148, 3–4, 13.

11. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 42–44, 47–48.

12. Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality," 232.

13. Frye, *The Politics of Reality*, 125, 132, 148.

14. Rubin, "Thinking Sex," 307–308.

15. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 38–39, 85.

16. Fuss, *Essentially Speaking*, 94–95.

17. Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 33, 75; Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 13–16, 142–49.

18. De Lauretis, "Queer Theory," viii–ix.

19. A similar point is made by Linda Garber in *Identity Poetics*.

20. See Hames-García, "Who Are Our Own People?"

21. See, for example, my article on the history of European and North American theories of sexual liberation: Hames-Garcia, "Between Repression and Liberation."

22. Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, 108.

23. Martin, *Femininity Played Straight*, 46.

24. I once made a similar observation to Martin (see Martin, *Femininity Played Straight*, 82). I would add to Martin's recapitulation of my observation that the difference that it makes to be nonwhite is equally occluded. In Butler's interpretation of the death of Venus Xtravaganza (a Latina, preoperative transsexual), she assumes her murder to be a result of her failure to completely pass as a woman (Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 129–30). Martin writes that it is just as possible that she was murdered *as a woman*. I want to stress that she may also have been murdered for being Latina (most likely in combination with her gender, perceived gender, class, and occupation as a sex worker).

25. Hammonds, "Black (W)holes," 137, 140.

26. Two early exceptions to this pattern are the issue of *diacritics* edited by Biddy Martin and Judith Butler in 1994 and the issue of *College Literature* edited by Donald Hall, Jean Walton, and Garry Leonard in 1997.

27. Sedgwick, *Tendencies*, 8, 8–9, 9.

28. Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 18.

29. Garber makes a similar observation in *Identity Poetics*, 195–97.

30. Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 134–37.

31. Lamos, "The Ethics of Queer Theory," 144.

32. Jagose, *Queer Theory*, 76, 130.

33. Lamos, "The Ethics of Queer Theory," 146.

34. Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 226–27.

35. Butler extends her critique of identity in later work, although the general argument remains unchanged. See, for example, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 92–105. For another articulation and my response to it, see Brown, *States of Injury*; Hames-García, "How Real Is Race?"

36. Sedgwick, *Tendencies*, 9.

37. Similarly *queer* is often used in relation to past and to non-European and non-Euro-American cultures in an attempt to not project a modern or Western identity where it does not belong. The very decision to carve out nonnormative sexualities and to analyze them in these contexts, however, frequently finds motivation in a concern for lesbian and gay identities in the present or the home culture. The best queer work, of course, makes this explicit and traces connections between immediate and more distant contexts. For an early example, see Goldberg, *Sodometries*.

38. These included Case, "Toward a Butch-Feminist Retro Future"; Gluckman and Reed, *Homo Economics*; D. Morton, "Birth of the Cyberqueer"; Ongiri, "We Are Family"; Povinelli, "Sexual Savages/Sexual Sovereignty."

39. Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 172.

40. See especially Garber, *Identity Poetics*, 176–208.

41. Eng, Halberstam, and Muñoz, "Introduction," 1, 3, 12.

42. Ferguson, "Of Our Normative Strivings," 85.

43. Halberstam, "Shame and White Gay Masculinity," 220.

44. Pérez, "You Can Have My Brown Body," 171, 172.

45. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*, 3.

46. The following three paragraphs, with some changes, are part of a much longer discussion of the colonial/modern gender system in my forthcoming book, *Identity Complex*.

47. Lugones, "Heterosexualism," 202–3. Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley observes a similar point in "Black Atlantic," 109.

48. Lugones, "Heterosexualism," 201, 202. See also Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*; Marcos, *Taken from the Lips*; Massad, *Desiring Arabs*; McClintock, *Imperial Leather*; C. T. Mohanty, Russo, and Torres, *Third World Women*; Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches*; Sigal, *Infamous Desire*; Sigal and Chuchiak, *Sexual Encounters/Sexual Collisions*; A. Smith, *Conquest* and "Heteropatriarchy"; Trask, *From a Native Daughter*.

49. Teaiwa, "Bikinis." See also Aiavao, "Who's Playing Naked Now?"; Trask, *From a Native Daughter*.