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Is There a Queer Marxism?

Missed Encounter

It's been over 20 years now since Teresa de Lauretis chose to give the title *Queer Theory* to a special issue of the journal *differences* on poststructuralist approaches to sexuality studies. A quarter century has passed since the publication of the book that in many ways started the whole thing, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet*.

What has happened since then? Quite a bit. By now, there are numerous book-length introductions to queer theory addressed primarily to undergraduates; a panoply of popular trade paperbacks on queer culture featuring watered-down paraphrases of the major theorists; and regular conferences around the Euro-American world that call for papers on queer theory or from a queer theory perspective. From time to time, you may even find the occasional advertisement that will name queer theory as a desirable field of competence for permanent positions in the academy – almost always, however, alongside a more general (literary theory or cultural theory, social or political theory) or traditionally defined (eighteenth-century English literature, the sociology of sexuality) subfield. Indeed, most humanities and social science clusters in major Anglo-American universities today feature at least one faculty member on whose webpage an interest in queer theory will be proclaimed.

In short, what's happened in the past quarter century is that queer theory has become institutionalised. Especially remarkable, despite its no doubt imperfect and scattered qualities, is the fact that this institutionalisation has occurred in tandem with a widespread, and much lamented, decline of the humanities and social science disciplines

in the university writ large. These disciplines carry negligible institutional weight in comparison to other, more pragmatic and economically justifiable units, which bring in significant revenue from the private sector.

Viewed in this light, the queer theory phenomenon poses intriguing questions. Why now? Or, more precisely: why have queer theory and queer scholarship in general gained ascendancy in the university at the present historical moment? Or again, posed in a more materialist way: what features of university life today – its various social, economic and political determinants – have allowed for the entrance of this seemingly untoward object of study into the hallowed halls of the academy? After all, this academy historically has defined itself as the preserver of cultural tradition and defender of the social status quo. Further, this tradition has never, until very recently, thought of organising the study of culture and society from the point of view of sexuality.

Beginning in the 1960s with the birth of cultural studies in the Birmingham school, and the publication of the first French texts that would be grouped under the post/structuralism rubric, cultural studies rebelled against a past it newly conceived as staid, stuffy and conservative – in short, as resistant to the very social and political realities that created, in the form of feminism and the gay movement, the conditions of possibility for the vulnerable emergence of women's, gender and sexuality studies.

Less commonly acknowledged in such exercises in casual historicisation, however, are the voices of dissidence and resistance. These voices tried to make themselves heard in a context dominated by the mutually reinforcing influence of, on the one hand, the New Left social movements that accompanied the unprecedented expansion of the university sector in the 1960s and 1970s, and, on the other, elite theoretical and philosophical discourses, in particular Derrida's deconstruction and Foucault's new historicism, which provided theoretical frameworks for the new scholarly approaches. These latter discourses were the ones that most directly fed into the queer theory project. Like the figures who inspired it, queer scholars sought to break with the more directly politicised sociohistorical approaches characteristic of the work of numerous gay and lesbian studies pioneers of the 1970s and 1980s.¹

Viewed in this light, it's impossible to deny that queer theory played a major role in the emergence of the ludic motif in postmodernity that Teresa Ebert mercilessly criticised in the mid-1990s from her historical materialist perspective. For Ebert, the poststructuralist feminist current with which dominant queer theory was allied participated in a general theoretical regression away from concrete socioeconomic analysis, and towards a politically retrograde concern for the vagaries of language, discourse or signification.²

The significance of Ebert's book for my purposes is that it reminds us how mature queer studies – by which I simply mean to signal the body of work that has placed itself under this rubric over the last couple of decades – has repressed the historical memory of the inaugural break with the Marxist tradition, by means of which the discourses from which it draws came into being. The difficulty of linking queer theory up with the Marxist tradition is the direct result of this phenomenon; it's to Ebert's tremendous credit that her work brings this repression to our attention.

In general terms, queer theory has shown reluctance to historicise itself. More precisely, it has failed to question retrospectively the political stakes involved in the game-changing theoretical move away from Marxism and materialist analysis that accounts for its very existence. In other words, queer theory's paradigmatic interest in the link between sexuality and questions of identity and meaning not only displaced the previous generation's tendency to consider sexuality in the same context as the social organisation of production. Additionally, it worked to erase the very traces of this move, in some cases going so far as to portray materialist methods as detrimental to the expression of its own, more properly cultural, concerns.

Even in the best cases, for instance in Judith Butler's influential analysis of drag performance among poor African-American youth, interest in the impact of socioeconomic determinants is characteristically reduced to the occasional mention of class.³ Indeed, as is the case in poststructuralism more generally, class in queer studies is routinely refigured as merely another aspect of the cultural work effected by the play of signification and power. Such a gesture leaves the material determinants of culture, that is to say culture's production in and by a properly capitalist system, entirely out of the equation.

To be sure, there are very few places one can go in the repertoire of queer discourse to find critical assessments of this unspoken shift from economics to discourse, from history to performativity. Even more egregiously, queer theory has failed to entertain the possibility that its appearance at the present historical moment is a symptom of capitalist social relations in their most recent, supermobile and globalised phase. This phase is characterised by the shift of material production from the historical locations of industrial production in Europe, North America and Japan, to the global South. Concurrently, the forms of labour in the global North have become increasingly virtual-immaterial, 'cognitive', transient and precarious.

In such a context, it becomes positively crucial to examine the few key exceptions to the non-engagement of queer theory, including its pre-queer antecedents, with the Marxist tradition. Through such an initiative, we can gain a broader perspective on the political significance of the transformations of sexuality studies over the past half-century than can be established from within the horizons of dominant queer discourse itself.

Foremost among these transformations, in fact the very hallmark of queer theory, is surely the undermining of the long-standing premise that sexuality has been liberated through (at least the appearance of) the relaxation of taboos and prejudices against the expression of feminine and non-heterosexual sexualities. If my own classroom experience with young students in Canada is any indication, this smugly unhistorical premise is shared virtually universally by today's generation of university-age youth. The later work of Michel Foucault was instrumental in calling into question the assumption that we've emancipated sexuality from repression. Much less commonly acknowledged, however, is the fact that Foucault's decisive turn away from the Marxist tradition before he undertook his *History of Sexuality* project is significantly responsible for queer theory's general allergy to materialist analysis. Indeed, I would suggest that Foucault's conception of sexuality as discourse/power in that book assumes a rejection of influential Marxian theories of ideology, in particular Althusser's, which had previously had tremendous impact on that generation of thinkers. For these reasons, it will be helpful now to consider exactly how the massive impact of Foucault's work on sexuality has rendered

the prospects of a contemporary queer Marxism remarkably, even irremediably, dim.

Few today would dare to question that Foucault was correct to argue in the late 1970s that sexuality is an invention of late modernity – the mid-nineteenth to late nineteenth century, to be precise. This was the time when sexuality became an object for science. The purpose of this shift was to inaugurate a form of knowledge of a properly sexual kind, and to tie this new quest for knowledge to an ambition of truth which, for Foucault, shifted the agency of power from its previously constricting and repressive force to a new, productive logic of biopower.

In light of this thesis, it would appear uncontroversial to claim that the queer theory phenomenon brings to its logical conclusion the ‘incitement to discourse’ that Foucault brilliantly traced back to the birth of sexology and, even further, to the institution of the confession in Christianity.⁴ Queer theory brings this logic to its endpoint with the argument that sexuality discourse is a productive and disciplinary instrument of biopower. Indeed, if the ‘old’, sovereign form of power gained ascendancy by virtue of the crown or the state’s authority to mete out the death penalty, then sexuality is the emblem of Foucaultian biopower – that is to say, the very incarnation of its authority to regulate not the destruction, but rather the production, of human life as such. For Foucault, modern science’s epistemological thrust into sexuality was a fundamental component of the shift towards a new social logic of bureaucracy and management. This new logic functions by instrumentalising the forms of knowledge as a means of producing and disciplining human life.

Rereading *The History of Sexuality’s* introductory volume today, at a time when its main theses have already completed their drip through the grains of elite queer theory, I’m left with an indelible sense of Foucault’s dismay at what we can retrospectively call the sexological turn: that epochal shift that transformed sex from a matter of acts and behaviours to a question of desires and identities, of what Foucault called the truth of the self.

If we accept Foucault’s premise that sexuality discourse is essentially an elaborate ruse designed to have us chatter endlessly about sex, all the while further tethering ourselves to the omnipotent forces of power, then clearly the conclusion is warranted that the very existence of queer theory can be read as a demonstration of this ruse’s spectacular success.

No doubt there is a cutting irony here, and it comes at queer theory's expense. That elite queer theory has shown itself to be hyperaware of the trap to which the coupling of sex and truth inevitably leads, has not evidently led it to abandon the project of a discourse about sex.

This is indeed the inescapable paradox of the sex-as-discourse premise common to later-period Foucault and the mainstream of elite queer theory. If sex is coterminous with a discourse/power tandem complicit with a disciplinary regime of truth, then one can only succeed in furthering one's disciplinary subjection as one tries to expose the effects of the discourse, the workings of the regime. Those who depart from Foucault's enigmatic reference to 'the claims of bodies, pleasures, and knowledges, in their multiplicity and their possibility of resistance' (157) at *The History of Sexuality's* conclusion, fare little better. Inevitably, they can only produce yet another discourse on the body, another discourse on pleasure, which inevitably will be subject to the same old accusations with respect to their hopeless complicity with power. The concept of power attains such grandiose heights of abstraction in late-period Foucault that any neo-materialist attempt to reconnect power with capital becomes the very emblem of retrograde theoretical naïvety.

Yet, it can't be denied that Foucault's association of sexuality discourse with the design of power effected a paradigm shift that changed the very nature of the inquiry into sex. The difficult but necessary '*what is sexuality, and how does it intersect with politics?*' questions gave way to the more manageable, but less consequential, '*why have we now decided to pose that question?*' Foucault's work provided, or at least appeared to provide, a persuasive answer: power made us ask it. That this answer was ever deemed capable of explaining much of anything is the aspect of queer theory's history that remains difficult to explain.

In retrospect, it's now possible to say that this answer provided a reactionary alibi for the treasonous abandonment of the Marxist tradition of ideology critique. As I've argued elsewhere, what is so undesirable about Foucault's idea of power is that it prevents us from linking its exercise to concrete sociopolitical and economic interests, however conscious or unconscious these might be.⁵ There can be little doubt that for the queer theory generation, Foucault's strange and paranoid notion of power effectively replaced the old Marxist idea of ideology, going so far as to imply that all the crucial work the latter

concept made possible relied on an obsolete, sovereign understanding of the exercise of social control. In my view, cultural theory has yet to come to grips fully with the complicity of, on the one hand, this wide-scale retreat from ideological analysis and, on the other, the collapse of not only so-called actually existing socialism, but also (and more importantly) the very credibility of the idea of communism and the entire anti-capitalist project.

The dominant narrative of socialism's collapse in the last decades of the twentieth century forgets what was perhaps Marx's most basic lesson: people make history. To which a Freudian is obliged to add: *but they don't know what they're doing*. The now-familiar complaint on the left is that this dominant narrative assumes that we moved away from ideology critique in response to, and in order better to take account of, the putatively objective failure of socialism during the final decades of the last century. As if, that is to say, we had no role to play in that failure, as if we didn't sabotage the project ourselves.

Cultural theory has failed to come to terms with the extraordinary convenience of the fact that, at the precise moment when power was being reconceptualised as diffuse and all-pervasive, as *intentional* but *non-subjective*, the political and economic mechanisms that used to provide some protection from the unshackled ravages of capital were being systematically dismantled in front of our very eyes. Even the old-fashioned idealist assumptions of intellectual history are more instructive here: the material structures inspired by socialism collapsed for no other reason than because we chose to discredit the idea; because we agreed to allow the master signifier 'capitalism', with its indelible tie to Marxist economic historicisation, to be replaced by another, insidiously naturalising, term: 'the market'. We have allowed this signifier to impose itself as an objective description of a natural law, one that conveys a direct knowledge of the economic real as such.

Certainly, there's nothing novel today in asserting a link between the proliferation of sexual identities during the twentieth century and the expansion and globalisation of capitalist relations. Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari did precisely this when they wrote their magnum opus *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* in the early 1970s, not coincidentally the time that brought the period of creative and experimental efflorescence of the last century to a dramatic close. I'll have much more to say about Deleuze and Guattari, and more specifically their important

proto-queer disciple Guy Hocquenghem, in the following chapter. However, here I'll simply remark that the anti-oedipal argument, as Deleuze and Guattari develop it, forms, disciplinarily speaking, a kind of underground current in queer theory. Since the heady early days of this discourse, numerous critics have come to the conclusion that this current provides a preferable alternative to what they consider the residual, difference-eradicating and perniciously universalising Hegelianism of Judith Butler's work, for instance.⁶

In contrast to Foucault, whose late work severs any link his thought may once have had to the Marxist tradition, Deleuze and Guattari, on the level of their enunciation at any rate, retain a properly Marxian ambition to develop tools for the undoing of the repressive or exploitative side of capital, even if capital *as such* for them remains an immanently utopian deterritorialising force. Too infrequently acknowledged in the ever-expanding 'D and G universe', however, is the fact that even their thesis was hardly a new one.

As they well knew, Marxist thinkers before them, not to mention Marx himself, had already linked capitalism's obliteration of old social forms – not only the rigid systems of obligation in feudalism, but also the bourgeois world of industrial production and the nuclear family – to what Herbert Marcuse, for one, previously and famously referred to as the 'repressive desublimation' of sexuality – that is to say, the absorption by consumer society or fascist ideology of libidinal satisfaction.⁷ Indeed, fascism for the Frankfurt School was a paradigmatic example of the way in which enjoyment on a general social scale can work in tandem not with emancipation, but rather with ideologies of domination and oppression.

Lacan's intervention into the complicated legacy of Freud's superego concept has led to the relatively recent development of a Lacanian version of the repressive desublimation argument, which runs roughly as follows. In bourgeois Vienna at the dawn of the last century, the price paid for the stability of the social link was the proliferation of what Freud in 1908 called 'modern nervous illness', which in his view resulted from the imposition of the constraints of 'sexual morality'.⁸ Although it's also possible to find in Freud's texts the grounds for a more structural version of this argument, according to which the neurotic symptom would rather be an inevitable facet of psychic life

as such, it remains the case that Freud explicitly argued for the more sociological version on more than one occasion.

By the time he addressed the crypto-Maoist student rebels who made their disruptive presence felt in his seminar around 1969–1970, however, Lacan was arguing that a new, superegoic injunction to enjoy had begun to permeate social life. Further, the predominant affect of shame, which had previously accompanied the experience of enjoyment, had now been replaced, in the context of the ‘sexual revolution’, by a generalised ethos of impudence. Whereas previously, in other words, social shame accompanied the admission in polite company of an inappropriate sexual dalliance, today shame accrues if one admits to *not* being interested in sexual (and back then, political) transgression; if one confesses that one’s sexual experience has never quite extended to flavours beyond vanilla.

The shift from the old to the new politics – from the politics of sovereign power to biopower, to refer to Foucault’s original idea, later influentially taken up by Giorgio Agamben as well as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri – emerges when we consider that for both the Frankfurt School and Lacan, desublimation and the injunction to enjoy are properly critical concepts. Marcuse thought that desublimation worked hand in hand with the fascist phenomenon; Lacan chastised the crypto-Maoists for playing into the hands of the decrepit French educational bureaucracy.

For Deleuze and Guattari, in contrast, the de-Oedipalisation resulting from late capitalism’s dissolution of the old feudal, bourgeois and nuclear-familial ties that bind is desirable because it creates possibilities for new ‘deterritorialised intensities’, ‘bodies without organs’, ‘lines of flight’ and other such themes, the concrete political implications of which have never to my mind been made clear. What separates Deleuze and Guattari from what I would call the mainstream of the Marxian tradition is their profound belief that what requires liberation is not human labour from capitalism, but rather capitalism from its own external hindrances – that is, the forces of stasis or immobility that prevent it from reaching its full transformative potential. That such a theory should come to prominence at a time when the obscenely destructive forces of capitalism have been allowed to appear in ways unseen since the industrial revolution is surely a sign

that the fashions of cultural theory are as beholden to ideology as any other aspect of human activity.

With the benefit of hindsight, the Deleuzo-Guattarian anti-oedipal thesis appears as perhaps the most wildly and naïvely utopian gesture of the poststructuralist moment; the strongest, least ambivalent statement in support of the claim that there need not be a contradiction between, on the one hand, emancipation from the constraints of gender and sexuality and, on the other, the de-alienation of human labour. The deep *simpatico* between Deleuze and Guattari's desiring-productive utopianism, and the sexual vanguardism that queer theory inherited from the 1960s sexual liberation ethos and the Stonewall moment, seems clear enough when viewed in this light. The agency of capital in all this sexual deregulation is rarely discussed in queer appropriations of *Anti-Oedipus*.

Instead, queer theory tends to enlist Deleuze and Guattari in support of the argument that a defining feature of the contemporary period is a perhaps unprecedented opportunity to supplant all existing impediments to the full expression of sexuality and gender identities. Or rather, perhaps more accurately, what is unprecedented is the investment in, or aspiration towards, such a liberation – in other words, the articulation in thought of the notion that sexuality's entanglement with what Lacan calls 'the defiles of the signifier' is merely a historical contingency.

For other, 'stodgier', writers on the cultural-theoretical left, however, the new sexual utopianism went hand in hand with a large-scale retreat from reformist and revolutionary ideologies, which were sharply critical of the neoliberal impetus to unshackle the forces of capital from the tenuous mid-century constraints that held it back. Today, any critical intersection between this tradition, which maintains its fidelity to the original Frankfurt School insight about the complicity of libidinal spontaneity with ideology or political domination, and the various queer developments in sexuality theory of the last two decades, is decidedly difficult to discern. Examples of such work, therefore, are of paramount interest.

The remainder of this chapter (and the following one as well) will explore the work of the few writers who have bravely engaged in this obscure project of talking about politics and sexuality, sexuality and politics, from within the Marxian horizon. Is there, then, a *queer*

Marxism? The answer, disappointing in its vagueness, can only be: 'sort of, not really'.

In their attempts to shift the course of queer theory in a more politically radical direction, the authors of concern have been required to forget about sex, to occlude desire. In so doing, they've committed the fateful error of heeding the bad advice Jung famously offered to Freud on their 1912 sea voyage to the United States. They've had to gloss over the importance of sexuality as psychoanalysis theorises it in order to secure its compatibility with hegemonic understandings of culture, politics and history.

Varieties of Totality

Among the few recent attempts to develop a Marxist alternative for queer theory, Kevin Floyd's *The Reification of Desire* stands out for its scope, novelty and theoretical rigour. Drawing on the writing of strange bedfellows Georg Lukács and Michel Foucault, Floyd bases his argument on the notion that both queer theory and Marxism are forms of what he calls totality thinking. Despite the tremendous contribution Floyd's book makes to the project of connecting queer theory to Marxism, however, its main premise errs where it mistakenly reads as potentially complementary two distinct ideas of totality based on vastly different assumptions about political power.

In what follows, I'll also suggest that whatever value the Lukácsian reference might have in promoting the reintroduction of historicised class analysis, or an updated version of it, to the study of sexuality, Floyd's discussion falls prey to a paradigmatic, and ultimately self-defeating, assumption about the purchase of 'heteronormativity'. As we've seen in previous chapters, this assumption creates a false enemy, one that, in this context, a considerable theoretical artillery is deployed in order to destroy. For psychoanalysis, desire can hardly be described as heteronormative. Yet, this statement doesn't imply that there's no such thing as homophobia. Despite its professed queerness, in the final analysis Floyd's challenging discussion is conspicuously devoid of sex. It will be necessary, however, to delve into certain of its details in order to discern not only where exactly sex is missed, but also the consequences of this miss for how we think about the problematic (non-)relation of queer theory to Marxism.

Floyd's discussion fails adequately to address the fact that its Lukácsian, and properly Marxist, investment in the idea of a totality of social relations determined by capital can't be reconciled with the Foucault-derived notion of knowledge as power, by means of which Floyd conceptualises the process of social differentiation. The hallmark of Lukács's work, for Floyd, is the way it insists on considering society as a historical whole, every part of which is shaped by the social organisation of production. The consequence of this is that no social phenomenon can be legitimately considered in isolation from any other. Further, capitalist relations leave their mark on every one.

For its part, the queer studies discipline distinguishes itself by what Floyd calls 'a refusal of sexual particularization, a refusal of sexuality's routine epistemological dissociation from other horizons of social reality'.⁹ The slippage in Floyd's totality thinking emerges here. As far as the force of determination goes, we move from a properly materialist concept of social production in the Lukácsian version of totality, to a politicised (implicitly Foucaultian) epistemological framework in queer theory. From the Marxist perspective, the imperative isn't simply to avoid considering homophobia, let's say, in isolation from evangelical Christianity. Rather, the methodological obligation is to consider both as part and parcel of a social totality, of which the capitalist mode of production is the dominant organising principle. Going missing in the transition from Lukács to queer studies is the classical Marxist conviction that knowledge of social reality is deeply connected not to an abstract discourse/power tandem, but rather to the position in the mode of production from which one sets out to know. Left to its own devices, for example, as a tenured professor my knowledge of the conditions of academic labour will be very different from that of the precariously employed contract instructor. The whole point of Marxist education, of course, is precisely to eliminate this difference.

This same point can be made in a more contextually salient way by examining how Floyd's queer Marxism approaches the specific problem of sexuality. Succinctly put, sexuality features in Floyd's argument as one among many 'social and historical horizons' (8), which together make up his particular understanding of the social totality. With this gesture, Floyd effectively places sexuality on the same level as all the 'other axes of hierarchized social differentiation'

(8), by which he understands the familiar left cultural-theoretical list including race, gender, nation and of course class.

Under these parameters, the task of queer Marxism becomes the 'critique of various forms of heteronormative assumption' embedded within these various knowledge systems. Importantly, for Floyd, this critique can then annex itself to the critique of capital, since all of these critical initiatives converge on the level of their 'common critique of epistemological particularization', which in turn is based on an 'impulse of generalization' shared by all (9). In simpler terms, Floyd wants to update Lukács's insistence that no social phenomenon can be isolated from the shaping influence of capital. He does this by adding to 'class' more recently acknowledged categories of social difference, most importantly sexuality.

Considered in these terms, the strategy of queer Marxism must be to introduce the critique of heteronormativity, alongside the other pernicious flatteners of difference targeted since the advent of the New Left, into the critique of capital. Because, under the assumptions of Floyd's totality thinking, every social difference is horizontally connected to all the others in a sort of rhizomatic whole, the critic can, and therefore must, move freely from one to the other without concerning herself with the outmoded orthodox methodological question of the primacy of determination.

Some examples: Floyd's queer Marxist might choose to link HIV policy in India to the struggle against so-called Islamic fundamentalism; or else, the death sentences issued against homosexuals in Iran to this nation's position in the global petroleum market. (These are my examples, by the way, deliberately chosen to contrast against Floyd's decidedly US-centric ones.) Epistemologically speaking, the enemy for Floyd is 'particularisation', by which he means the consideration of any axis of social difference – class let's say – in isolation from any other: here, sexuality. As a self-professed Marxist, Floyd places the emphasis on global relations of capital. Under the general assumption of a social totality, these relations have an effect of determination on all the other forms of social difference, which themselves then impact back upon capitalist relations, forming a complex network of multidirectional influence and impact.

It must be said, however, that no major Marxist current before the 1960s, even and including the work of Gramsci, ever indulged in such

a thoroughgoing relativisation of social determination. Clearly, Floyd shares with Gramsci a desire to loosen the causal knot with which orthodox Marxism ties economic production to social and cultural phenomena. Unlike Floyd, however, Gramsci never questioned the assumption that social production lay at the base, as it were, of the ideological struggle for hegemony. The Gramscian totality remains divided, although less distinctly than in classical Marxism, between economic and cultural factors in such a way that the former retains a modicum of priority over the latter. In Floyd, however, the relations of production threaten to become merely another form of social 'knowledge', like Danish neo-fascism or lipstick lesbianism. In stark contrast, classical Marxism disparages as revisionism, reformism, or social democracy any concession to methods of analysis that deprioritise the power of the mode of production (capitalism) to create a form of social differentiation (class) which overdetermines, or transects, all the others in however complex a fashion.

To his credit, Floyd shows an awareness of this issue from the outset. Indeed, he introduces his book with an anecdote about the apparently infamous 1996 appearance of Judith Butler at a *Rethinking Marxism* conference – the most significant multidisciplinary gathering of Marxist scholars in the United States. At this conference, Butler delivered her noteworthy 'Merely Cultural' paper¹⁰ which, unsurprisingly, was attacked by the more orthodox (or faithful) attendees for effecting precisely the move of epistemological relativisation that Floyd wants to set alongside Marxism under the premise that both traditions, the queer-theoretical and the Marxist, base themselves on the idea of a social totality of seamless interconnection.

As Floyd acknowledges, this 'Butler among the Marxists' affair made manifest 'a schism between Marxism and queer theory' (2) at its own mid-1990s theoretical moment. On his reading of the development of queer theory since that time, however, this schism has become less pronounced, and Floyd clearly wants to position his project as one that aims to bring the two camps even closer together.

In my view, however, Floyd aims to effect this reconciliation of queer theory and Marxism with a gesture that merely reiterates the standard feminist, gay and postcolonial objections to Marxist discourse already fully articulated in New Left doctrine almost a half-century ago. To summarise what I've paraphrased of his discussion thus far,

the relation between Marxism and queer theory for Floyd features points of divergence and convergence. They converge in their common ambition to analyse social relations as a field in which every phenomenon permeates every other. But they diverge in the particular way they conceptualise that totality, with Marxism, of course, classically positing the mode of economic production as the ‘ultimately determining instance’ of social phenomena.

On this basis, Floyd frames his contribution to the debate as an exploration of how it becomes possible to ‘see this divergence’ between Marxism and queer theory ‘in a different light’ – that is, to depart from queer theory’s alternative conception of totality to identify ‘the limitations of Marxian categories’ (9). Here he provides his own illuminating specification of what this might mean for the study of sexuality. ‘What if’, Floyd asks, Marxism ‘tried to account for insights produced within queer theory rather than always framing sexual questions in classically Marxian terms, assuming that capital mediates sexuality in terms of traditional understandings of privatization and commodification, for example?’ (9). Floyd’s mediating response to the dispute between Butler and the ‘non-cultural’ Marxists is ultimately a rather banal ‘you’re both right!’, which glosses over an underlying theoretical incompatibility. How, we might ask, could Marxism itself be asked to account for sexuality other than in ‘classically Marxian terms’ without betraying its methodological commitment to the determining power of the social organisation of production? Even more importantly, from the psychoanalytic perspective, Floyd’s argument fails to consider how Freud’s idea of the unconscious throws a wrench in the theoretical machine that isolates economics from sexuality in the first place.¹¹

Floyd also draws from Lukács’s work a further basic strategy for realigning queer studies with Marxism. *The Reification of Desire* takes not only the aspiration to an understanding of social relations as a unique totality, but also the key notion of epistemological privilege, from Lukács’s 1923 classic *History and Class Consciousness*. Floyd conveys the idea’s significance with a reference to Fredric Jameson’s influential endorsement of the centrality of Lukács’s text to the Marxist tradition of cultural analysis. According to Floyd’s paraphrase of Jameson, this centrality consists in how it creates a new way to think about ‘the epistemological priority of the experience of various groups or collectivities’ (10), specifically those that Marxism has associated

in a variety of internally controversial ways with the working class or proletariat. As might be expected, Floyd aims to position heteronormativity's victims among those groups. That is, he claims that by virtue of their socially marginal position, non-heterosexuals acquire a variety of social knowledge that will deliver potentially subversive insights about the mechanisms of domination in society as a whole.

As we've already considered, Foucault strongly argued in the 1970s that the creation of sexological science in the nineteenth century helped to consolidate a sort of paradigm shift by means of which non-heterosexual erotic activity was transformed from a set of performable actions into a panoply of psychological identities. The act of sodomy, for instance, previously performable by anyone succumbing to temptation, became embodied in the person of the sodomite. To be sure, it's impossible to overstate the formidable extent to which elite queer theory, with respect to what it has argued concerning both gender and sexuality, has defined itself, through the enlistment of such notions as the performative, for example, as the attempt to subvert the relation of both terms to notions of psychological identity – to what Foucault called the 'truth of the self'.

In light of the historical invention of the homosexual, then, Floyd's argument implies that the sexological turn initiated a form of epistemological *deprivileging*, which Lukácsian methodology can then reprivilege. It's easy to see how the notion of a homosexual knowledge, for instance, is only conceivable once there's an identifiable group of persons in whom that knowledge might be embodied. According to Floyd, homosexual knowledge, privileged by virtue of its subaltern position in the social totality, can then be articulated, presumably in tandem with sexuality's other non-heterosexual forms, in a way that calls into question the social order as such.

Yet, we've seen on a number of occasions already in this book that queer effects a decisive and universalising exit from the regime of sexual identity. In this perspective, the link to epistemological privilege then becomes illegitimate, seeing as we've assumed that everyone is (potentially) queer. As a result, queer knowledge becomes indistinct from any other variety of social knowledge. Floyd's idea of queer epistemological privilege therefore rests on an underlying ambivalence concerning the relation of this knowledge to the historicity of the homosexual identity.

This insight brings to bear a related, but more concrete, question. Above and beyond the problem of sexuality's historicity, to what extent is it even legitimate to characterise queer knowledge today as an example of what Lukács calls the proletarian standpoint? Lukács assumes that the subordinated social position of the proletarian determines a perception of the social world fundamentally different from the perception held by its more privileged counterparts. In short, the proletarian's knowledge is more likely to generate accurate ideas about the social totality's organisation, simply because its subordinate position *in the mode of production* means that it directly confronts the concrete effects of capitalist social relations. That is, the proletariat has a vested interest in learning how the system works simply because the system mercilessly exploits it. By contrast, it's in the interests of the bourgeoisie to dream up inspirational odes to rights and freedoms as a means of masking that same exploitation from both the workers and itself.

The difficulty with the place of sexuality in this logic now, quite glaringly, appears: how exactly does sexuality correlate to social position in the organisation of production? Short answer: it doesn't. Longer answer: this correlation, especially in the indigenous geopolitical locale of queer theory, varies tremendously. At any rate, as we've already seen, the correlation doesn't even apply to the period before the modern invention of sexual categorisations and the identities they produced. Before this invention took place, it simply wouldn't have been possible to think about how social privilege might vary in accordance with a sexual identity that had yet to see the light of day.

Further, Floyd's Luckácsian argument hardly becomes more convincing even once we acknowledge the appearance of the modern homosexual on the historical scene. Is there any consistent empirical evidence to show that self-identified homosexuals have been concretely marginalised in properly socioeconomic terms? How, in any case, would we figure into the equation all those extremely numerous persons widely scattered across the globe who engage in same-sex activity, but who, for whatever reason, don't identify as homosexual, let alone as queer? Even today, many of these persons live in cultural contexts in which such an identification is either discursively or socially impossible. The entire set of assumptions concerning how

homophobia maintains a regime of the closet is simply ethnocentric, not to mention unhistorical. Indeed, 'coming out of the closet' requires acceptance of a narrative of sexuality that is both culturally and historically specific. In my view, it also implies tacit acceptance of the mainstream commercial gay-queer culture to which any queer Marxism worthy of the name should stand opposed. Quite literally, not everyone can afford to come out.

Without question, the liberal and post-industrial global North is the habitus of queer studies. Far from being subjected to systematic socioeconomic disadvantage, the evidence suggests that self-identified homosexuals and queers in these regions demonstrate average earnings significantly above the norm. Indeed, it's hardly possible to consider the queer phenomenon broadly understood without taking into account how capital has increasingly, over the last few decades, identified the various non-heterosexual communities in the 'advanced economies' as privileged markets for the most highly profit-generating commodities.

Moreover, at least on the level of its cultural visibility, homosexuality prior to its late modern forms shows a strong link with the aristocracy and, later, the upper bourgeoisie. Think, for instance, of the numerous European royals known to have been homosexually inclined; or Proust at the moment of the European aristocracy's historical collapse. In this light, it hardly makes sense to link homosexuals or homosexuality in any general way with the Marxian notion of the proletariat. Further, there's every reason to think that the appeal of Western queer discourse in the global South would largely be limited to groups already thoroughly 'Westernised', or at least favourably positioned with respect to the international relations of capital.

To summarise, Floyd's analysis makes two main errors. First, the analogy it formulates between, on the one hand, the mode of production or structure of social relations and, on the other, the realm of sexuality, is a false one from Marxism's perspective. The analogy is false because it obfuscates, or simply discards, the causal relation between the two. It's hardly necessary to defend the ultraorthodox view that the economy single-handedly determines everything in the social and cultural spheres to recognise that Floyd's analogy de-emphasises the epistemological or methodological centrality of economic organisation in a way that only reiterates the signature

post-Marxist move that the Gramscian work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, for example, accomplished in the 1980s.¹² In short, there's nothing more 'Marxist' about Floyd's set of assumptions than those that have generally informed the work of the left-liberal post-structuralist contingent of cultural theorists since that time.

Second, Floyd's contention that queer critique is universal or totalising because 'heteronormativity' shares these characteristics is indefensible in the most basic logical terms. Indeed, if heterosexism totally saturated the social field with its normative command, there would be no queer perspective from which this heterosexism might be questioned. As the more convincing psychoanalytic accounts consistently stress, what lies at the root of heteronormative power – or more properly of the resistance to homosexuality, of *homophobia* – is already a displaced, repressed form of homosexual desire itself.

Finally, there's a glaring lack of evidence to show that the queer phenomenon, in concrete class terms, is anything but bourgeois. The fact that there's no direct correlation between sexuality and social privilege should force us to admit that whatever social knowledge we might consider to result from the homosexual or queer experience isn't likely to deliver helpful general insights about how the workings of global capital enforce relations of domination and exploitation.

Queer Historical Materialism, Actually Existing!

Readers who go along with my argument that Floyd's work fails to provide an alternative to the reformist or left-liberal tenets of the 'post-Marxism' of the past few decades might be interested to know, if they don't already, that an alternative queer Marxism exists: one whose main purpose, it's not an exaggeration to say, is precisely to return the analysis of sexuality to the orthodox – or vulgar, some will say – Marxist emphasis on the mode of production's primacy.

One of the few places to go to find such a classically Marxist alternative in queer theory and sexuality studies is to the work of Donald Morton, comrade-in-arms of the previously mentioned Teresa Ebert. In 1996, Morton published an invaluable anthology entitled *The Material Queer*, for which he wrote an uncompromising introductory essay. This invaluable piece systematically denounces the wide panoply of post-Saussurean semiotic or semiological paradigms in cultural

theory. These are the methods that substitute language-premised methods of cultural study for traditional materialist approaches, which work with a Marxian understanding of the underlying socioeconomic organisation of production.

Morton and his allies offered their refreshing (and under-read) anthology as a self-consciously historical materialist alternative to the anthologies on poststructuralist sexuality studies then proliferating, such as Routledge's *The Gay and Lesbian Studies Reader*, published three years earlier in 1993.¹³ The underlying premise of Morton's argument is that the political inadequacy of the contemporary study of sexuality can be boiled down to two main incorrect assumptions: first, that sexuality should be methodologically 'primary' in cultural analysis; and second, that desire is 'autonomous', that is 'unregulated and unencumbered'.¹⁴

My own argument in this section will be that although Morton's first criticism is justified, the second is well intentioned but unfortunately faulty, although for decidedly unpostmodernist reasons for which he might have some sympathy. To set up my intervention, it will be necessary first to bring out the details of Morton's against-the-grain discussion.

For Morton, queer theory is a fundamentally flawed subspecies of postmodernism, that goes off the rails where it gives sexuality methodological primacy and adopts a faulty, that is to say bourgeois, understanding of desire. Let's take the former point first. In his presentation of the postmodernist current for which he wishes to offer an alternative, Morton names some of the central figures of late twentieth-century cultural theory – Eve Sedgwick, Deleuze and Guattari, Roland Barthes. Taking it as one of the foundational texts of queer theory, Morton attacks Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* for setting the stage not only for queer theory's monumental overvaluation of the general political significance of sex, but also for the way it transforms sexuality into a methodological fetish in cultural analysis. 'An understanding of virtually any aspect of modern Western culture must be, not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance', Sedgwick memorably wrote on *Epistemology's* first page, 'to the degree that it does not incorporate a critical analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition'.¹⁵

Although this statement was declaimed well before queer theory or sexuality studies had accumulated any significant amount of academic capital, it's difficult not to read it with the benefit of hindsight as a hubristic instance of disciplinary self-privileging; as a performative utterance designed to secure a position within the academy for a particular kind of cultural study. More significantly, however, this institutional ambition was shot through with a particular ideological conception of sexuality, premised on a suturing of sexual knowledge to identity. In other words, the goal of Sedgwick's project wasn't to explore in general terms the possibility or nature of sexual knowledge, but rather to inaugurate, and effectively sanctify, a new form of homosexual knowledge for which the homosexual identity, however (ambivalently) problematised, could serve as the ground.

In Morton's view, Sedgwick's manifesto-like introduction to the book mistakenly singles sexuality out, thereby isolating it from other methodological concerns – most especially those, like the 'old-fashioned' idea of class, that relate directly to the socioeconomic realm. To be sure, this feature of Morton's discussion anticipates Floyd's argument against epistemological particularisation in *The Reification of Desire*. Sedgwick's work continues in the long feminist tradition of politicising sexuality when, as I argue in a variety of ways throughout this book, we should rather move to sexualise the political – that is, inquire into the ways in which political questions and controversies are shot through with libidinal interest and the vicissitudes of unconscious desire. In this precise sense, Morton's argument against Sedgwick that *Epistemology's* political error lies in its foregrounding of sexuality as *such* misses the point.

I based my major criticisms of Floyd's project on the tenets of Marxism itself, concluding that it remains complicit with the general culturalising reaction against Marxism, which took place during the last few decades of the past century. By contrast, my concerns with Morton's argument aren't political in nature. They stem, rather, from my investment in psychoanalysis. Ultimately, we disagree about what we might call the nature of the human predicament.

As I'll develop in detail, the weakness of Morton's approach lies in its assumption that politics can be separated out from sexuality. However counterintuitive it may sound, however, Morton is justified in arguing against Sedgwick that to take sexuality as the primary and exclusive

focus of cultural analysis is already to depoliticise it. This is so because the gesture of directly politicising sexuality has the paradoxical effect of desexualising politics, of effectively reneging on our responsibility to consider the impact of the unconscious on the negotiation of political antagonisms; to consider, that is, the unconscious of the social formation as such. Again, the mistaken assumption is that politics and sexuality are separable; that the very arena of politics itself is not already shot through with sexuality.

To do the argument justice, however, we'll need to consider in detail how Morton qualifies his position against the prioritisation of sexuality in cultural studies. Morton cites Deleuze and Guattari as the main proponents in postmodernity of what he calls the 'deregulation of desire', a thematic that assumes, he specifies, that sexual desire is 'autonomous, unregulated, and unencumbered' (1), particularly in relation to the material constraints imposed by labour time and the radically unequal quality of its remuneration. Morton's historical materialism stands opposed to the structuralist-poststructuralist paradigm according to which it's the signifier, not the mode of production, that shapes, distorts or represses sexual desire. In this vein, Morton goes on to condemn the later work of Roland Barthes for introducing into the study of culture a preoccupation with *jouissance* or enjoyment – that is, with the way in which sexuality's excessive stimulation of the body disrupts the stability or coherence of meaning in language, in the texts of culture.

To support his contention, Morton cites *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973), a book widely read by first-generation Anglo-American post-structuralists. In this book, Barthes influentially evokes what he calls the 'grain' of the voice in cinema by referring to 'the fleshiness', 'the breath, the gutturals' of the lips 'in their materiality, their sensuality', for example (2). This Barthesian concern for the body, this ambition to capture the experience of embodied being in thought, in language, is without question one of the central preoccupations of cultural theory in the twentieth century's last few decades – the same ones that witnessed the emergence of queer theory. The philosophy of Descartes, or rather a simplified and misleading obfuscation of the Cartesian project (see the notorious 'mind/body split'), was, for this tremendously broad current, enemy number one. The resurgence of phenomenology, as well as the continued impact of the work of Deleuze, are surely symptoms of this

effort – not only anti-Cartesian, but surely also anti-Marxist – to ‘think through the body’, as Jane Gallop influentially put it at the time.

Now, we should acknowledge that the Marxist tradition is not without its puritanical aspect. Indeed, a deep suspicion of embodied experience can from time to time be found there insofar as it might compromise, or so it was feared, those (allegedly) supreme Marxian values of productivity and utility. As Julia Kristeva was prone to point out in the 1980s, the resurgence of psychoanalysis and the body in French thought was in many ways an attack on a (perceived) hyper-rationalism in the Marxist tradition.

To be sure, Marx and Engels engaged in decidedly unscientific commentary on the topic of homosexuality in their correspondence, and both were arguably also guilty of an idealisation of the heterosexual bond in post-revolutionary society. Still, I want to argue that it’s a mistake to associate Morton’s invective against *jouissance* with the Marxian neurosis. Morton’s discussion makes clear that it isn’t concerned with pleasure or desire as such (leaving aside for now the complication of these terms in psychoanalysis), but rather with the particular conceptualisation of these ideas in postmodernity as he construes it. In his own words, Morton’s target is ‘the primariness of sexuality/libidinality, the autonomy of desire, and the freedom of the sexual subject from all constraints’ (2).

Indeed, it’s easy to imagine how the argument against Morton’s opposition to postmodernity’s concern with *jouissance* might proceed by dismissing it as mere envy or *ressentiment*. From this point of view, for which psychoanalysis could certainly be enlisted for support, Morton’s commitment to historical materialism does indeed require a sacrifice – a renunciation – of enjoyment, and the truth of this commitment would be the condition that everyone else must do the same. Hence, the story might continue, the inability to tolerate the obscene pleasure Barthes, for instance, takes in his text. Morton’s reader might sense that there is indeed, for him, something obscene about the idea of so many young, carefree, Ivy League-educated bourgeois American academics sitting back in their comfortable office chairs, gazing out at bucolic campus surroundings, sipping their organic green tea, taking a break for a few yoga poses, and musing irresponsibly about sex in a way that has nothing to do with the world’s more unpleasant realities.

However problematic the psychodynamic determination of this sort of fantasy may be, it carries a core political salience nonetheless. To an alarmingly significant extent, queer theory is a symptom of the radical disjunction that separates the (relatively) comfortable material conditions of academic life in the industrialised world from the very different conditions that define the lives of the vast majority of the world's population. Sex is surely a universal concern: no subject, no matter how materially deprived, can truthfully profess to be unperturbed by the conundrum it poses. Yet, it's doubtful that one tends actually to worry much about its concept if one isn't sure where one's next meal is coming from. It's in this precise sense that the methodological foregrounding of sexuality is objectively bourgeois.

The second theoretical objection Morton raises against postmodern theories of sexuality targets the notion that desire is, or can be, free of constraint; that it carries an irreducible autonomy with respect to all those extraneous forces that would determine it. Against the idealism inherent in such accounts of desire, Morton invokes a contrasting materialist interest in how desire is conditioned; how it emerges, that is, as a properly historical phenomenon shaped by social, political and economic forces.

In accordance with this contextualist definition of desire, Morton limits the formulation of his anthology's project to his own American context. As he puts it, the book aims

to place these two traditions [the idealist and the materialist] against one another in order to reveal that the social injustices that persist today are not due to the moral failures resulting from 'bad attitudes' or 'prejudicial opinions' but are related to the operations of ideology in U.S. society that occlude questions of *need* by promoting an obsession with *desire*. (3, my emphasis)

In other words, sexuality must be recontextualised not as a utopian instrument of subjective liberation or deterritorialisation – as the royal road to a non-complicit or revolutionary psychic structure – but rather as yet another vehicle of ideology, a further ideological state apparatus, to use the now old-fashioned expression of Althusser. The ideology of desire dissimulates the deep connection between the way we experience our sexual needs and the social organisation of production.

To demonstrate how foreign this argument is to contemporary queer theory, we can cite as an example the Marxian theory of Victorian homophobia outlined in a Canadian-authored collective pamphlet featured in *The Material Queer*.¹⁶ British industrial-age homophobia emerged not as a symptom of the generalised prudishness Foucault famously debunked in *The History of Sexuality*, but rather from purely material concerns.

In short, homosexuality threatened the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie because the prospect of sexual enjoyment outside the confines of the heterosexual family unit threatened to sabotage the bourgeois state's project to assign responsibility for the provision of social services to the private sphere, organised around the unstable institution of the patriarchal nuclear family. The Victorian working-class man had no choice but to adopt the protestant work ethic because he had a wife and family to take care of at home, knowing full well that the state would decline to take over responsibility for the family should he prove unwilling or unable to do so himself. Bluntly, if the father is busy cruising men at the public toilets, it's not clear who's going to be bringing home the bacon. Properly socialist pressure on the state to provide public services then threatens to emerge.

Despite his concern for tying sexuality to what, in his view, are its exclusively material conditions, Morton shares not only with psychoanalysis, but also with the anti-Marxist work of the later Foucault, the ambition to wrest sex from psychology. Both Morton and Foucault reject as a bourgeois illusion the claim that there's any truth of the self to be discovered in sex. But, there's a fundamental difference distinguishing their arguments from one another. Whereas Foucault relegates sex to the abstractly conceived productive forces of discourse and power, Morton instead wants to show how the convoluted and intellectualist musings of queer theory are significantly conditioned by the comfortable material circumstances of its proponents. He goes on to argue, for example, that queer discourse's 1990s move towards themes such as the virtual and the technological (cyborgs and cybersex) only underscores its constitutional aversion to the nitty-gritty of material life, in particular as it features in such contexts where its necessities are in penury.

Judith Butler, say, can view desire as something more, or other, than what is contained at the level of basest material need, only because the

conditions of her own existence ensure that her material necessities are already properly taken care of. For Morton, all the essential tenets of queer theory are based on specific assumptions about sexuality, which only those persons with the required leisure time and income level will develop. Later, I'll argue that this view is incorrect. It's impossible to deny, however, that there's a substantial grain of truth in Morton's discussion, however glibly it might come across. For this reason, it will prove helpful to delve into its theoretical substance as a means of leading up to my own critique of Morton's position.

The work of two icons of 1970s- and 1980s-era French theory, Jean Baudrillard and Jean-François Lyotard, emblematises for Morton a turn in the Marxian tradition that effectively betrayed its political project. This betrayal, writes Morton, put into place 'the displacement of the economic account of need by the linguistic account of desire' (4). This concise formulation encapsulates the immanent antagonism that any theoretical project working in the wake of Marx and Freud must inevitably confront. Morton's reading of Baudrillard and Lyotard targets the analogy their work develops between the Marxist realm of political economy and the structuralist-cum-poststructuralist, semiotic-linguistic terrain of the *sciences humaines*. The classical Marxist distinction between exchange value and use value is famously compared to Saussure's differentiation of the signifier from the signified: exchange value is to the signifier as use value is to the signified. A detailed look at a substantial chunk of Morton's text, which quotes from Baudrillard's influential *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (1972), is in order:

Capitalism, which needs exchangeability or equivalence between commodities, is founded on exchange value and is driven by the need to produce from exchange value a surplus value that is itself responsible for the difference of class. Overcoming capitalism would involve a return to the more fundamental level of addressing human need, represented by use value, and a consequent cancellation of all those (needless) desires produced by capitalist commodity fetishism at the level of exchange-become-surplus-value. But, against Marx, Baudrillard argues that 'use value is [also] an abstraction. It is an abstraction of the system of needs cloaked in the false evidence of a concrete destination and purpose, an intrinsic finality of goods

and products' and thus that both 'use value and exchange value' are 'regulated by an identical abstract logic of equivalence'. (4)

In short, the so-called linguistic turn of semiotics and structuralism, for Morton, is a symptom of critical theory's regression back from historical materialist analysis. The growing emphasis on language in twentieth-century thought, on the construction and deconstruction of signification or meaning, is to be understood as part and parcel of the increasing hegemony and widening globalisation of capitalist logic. Capital superimposes an obfuscating but profit-generating cloak of empty value on the material conditions of production. Analogously, linguistic, textual and discursive modes of analysis introduce a distracting emphasis on rhetoric and representation into the more concrete political and historical problem of human need's satisfaction.

For a critic of my generation unsatisfyingly acculturated into the postmodern academy, at a time when historical materialist analysis was an activity performed only by those hopelessly out of touch, Morton's argument is a seductive one. Undeniably, for the majority of the human population today, and even for many in the most 'advanced' post-industrial societies, the satisfaction of basic needs is still *the* primary problem of day-to-day life. And generally speaking, the cultural theory of the last few decades is not the sort of place where one might expect to be confronted with this difficult truth. Morton's theory communicates the noble wish to theorise away our ridiculous fascination with impossible desires and ineffable exchange values, finally focusing squarely on the satisfaction of our most basic species needs.

But there's a problem. As much as I want to agree with Morton, I have to grant Baudrillard his argument, albeit while distancing myself from the consequences he draws from it. Over a century of psychoanalytic experience provides inconvenient but overwhelming evidence that even at its basest or barest, human life can only fail to limit itself to the dimension of biological or physiological need. The argument that psychoanalytic experience shows this because it's only the bourgeoisie who ever get analysed fails, unfortunately, to convince.

Here is the basic lesson of Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1922): the essence of human life is its own excess over itself; an inhuman and immortal drive which, zombie-like, persists beyond mere biological

death.¹⁷ Similarly, as Lacan argued in the aftermath of the sociopolitical tumult of the late 1960s, surplus value, which he translated into the neologism *plus-de-jouir* (surplus enjoyment), survives the socialist revolution. As impractical and politically irritating as the statement surely is, Baudrillard is entirely correct to argue that use value is an abstraction. Objects of experience never appear to the sexuate human subject in purely practical or utilitarian terms, unsullied by a stain of excessive and unconscious libidinal interest. Use value can never be reconciled with the immaterial vicissitudes of human desire.

For psychoanalysis, desire is indeed useless and pointless. Utopian socialism – that is, the socialism that posits a return to a natural balance of need after capitalism’s fall – would be a feasible project only if we, as speaking human subjects, were satisfied by the satisfaction of our needs. As everyone knows, the infant can go on wailing even after he’s changed and fed. The sobering psychoanalytic lesson is that the baby’s cry indexes every human’s constitutively denatured essence, or being-towards-death. In fact, there’s something in the prospect of satisfaction that repels us. This is the sense in which desire is essentially perverse: constitutively out of balance with both the environment and the organism itself. What we desire, in fact, is *non-satisfaction*; satisfaction’s indefinite postponement. Simply put, the purpose of desire is to ensure that we are never definitively satisfied; that every object presented to us to satisfy our needs is finally deemed insufficient, unsatisfactory.

To the psychoanalytic claim about desire, which we could call a truth of human nature if desire wasn’t precisely what separates us off from nature, the historical materialist will offer the rejoinder that Freud only made it because he was a product of the Viennese bourgeoisie, of European capitalism at the height of its imperialist phase. Yet, the psychoanalytic claim about desire isn’t historical. Because it’s ultimately devoid of content, because its essence is in effect correlative to every object’s failure to extinguish it, desire as such can’t be historicised. As far as queer theory is concerned, the necessary corollary of this is the truth that homosexual desire can manifest itself when there is no discourse to support it; nothing on the level of concrete historical actuality – social formations, institutions, identities, writings – through which it might, as it were, be given body.

With respect to Marxism's political ambitions, the claim that the essence of desire isn't historical shouldn't be taken to mean that the implementation of a social alternative to capitalism is impossible in any a priori way. It only indicates that if we were someday to eradicate capitalism, whatever that might mean exactly, it doesn't follow that we would suddenly cease to be creatures of desire. Again, the human subject will always remain unreconciled with its basic animal needs.

This being said, Morton is correct to argue that the paradigmatic shift Baudrillard's work helped to effect in cultural theory – from mode of production to mode of signification – is politically unfortunate, by virtue of its participation in the disturbingly wide-ranging abandonment of the critique of surplus value in the post-1968 period. It's one thing to claim that desire is inextinguishable; it's quite another to conclude from this that nothing can be done about the tyranny of exchange value.

Who could deny that we've allowed increasingly complex and speculative systems of value not only to obfuscate, and therefore legitimate, ever more scandalous social inequalities, but also to determine our very collective material destinies? Even the day-to-day realities of university life in both the private *and* public sectors – student loans and faculty research funds; student–instructor ratios; the availability of digital and paper-based forums for publication, 'research dissemination' and 'knowledge mobilisation'; even, and especially, course content – are in the most intimate way intertwined with the wildly unpredictable vicissitudes of global capital. It's almost superfluous to add that the increasingly stressful world of academia, or at least those parts of it that show resistance to its instrumentalisation by the demands of capital, is the very same environment that right-wing pundits routinely lambaste as hopelessly out of touch with real-world economic 'realities'.

Who's Afraid of Transsexual Marxism?

Both Floyd's uncomfortably poststructuralist Lukácsian Marxism and Morton's orthodox historical materialism suffer from their unwillingness, or inability, to take account of the contribution of psychoanalysis to our appreciation of human desire. Indeed, from the psychoanalytic perspective, there's nothing at all queer in either

theory, if we understand by that term how Lacan described the sexual drive as irreconcilable with discourse and meaning.

It's probably not coincidental that we must step outside the Anglo-American world to find examples of anti-homophobic Marxian theoretical initiatives that find in psychoanalysis not an obstacle, but rather a tool. The two most important such examples are the writings of Guy Hocquenghem (to whom the next chapter is dedicated), and Mario Mieli. Intriguingly, these remarkable, and certainly under-read, efforts to acquaint Marxism with an anti-homophobic critical project date back to a time well before queer theory's pioneers even appeared on the scene.

A central figure of Italian gay politics in the 1970s and self-described 'outrageous queen', Mieli founded the *Fronte Unitario Omosessuale Rivoluzionario Italiano* (United Italian Revolutionary Homosexual Front) in 1972. In 1977, he published an important book adapted from a dissertation he wrote for a doctorate in moral philosophy (of all things), translated into English in 1980 as *Homosexuality and Liberation: Elements of a Gay Critique*. Ignored even by most self-professed queer Marxist critics writing in English, this text without doubt figures among the most important works ever to address either the significance of homosexuality for Marxism, or the implications of Marxism for the gay movement and its subsequent offshoots.

The Mieli story is a heroic but tragic one. He committed suicide in 1983 at the young age of 30, apparently unsettled by the negative reception he anticipated for the autobiographical work, *Il risveglio dei faraoni*, he had just finished writing. We can reasonably speculate that the reactionary Stalinist 'family values' ethos of post-war European institutional communism played a significant role in Mieli's demise. More certain is that no work on queer Marxism can afford either to ignore the immense contribution of Mieli's singular text, or to wonder about, and speculate on, the future directions his work might have taken had his provocative writing career not come to such a premature end.

Because the text is too long and significant to broach in general terms in the present context, I've chosen to focus on the element that most directly invokes Marxism and the Marxist tradition. From this angle, the most important aspect of *Homosexuality and Liberation* is its insistence on linking homophobia to the relations of capital. Therein lies Mieli's undeniable significance for my own project. Read retrospec-

tively from over three decades on, his book glaringly exposes dominant queer theory's failure to establish this link, or even to acknowledge that it had ever previously been made. Even worse, in this perspective the queer project gains the patina of a patent regression, for homophobia's implication in the logic of capital is already the starting point of Mieli's discussion – indeed, its most central framing assumption.

To be sure, we should take this fact today as evidence of the remarkable extent to which Marxist critical assumptions have disappeared from the discourse on sexuality since Mieli wrote his text. Although *Homosexuality and Liberation* puts forth arguments both explicit and implicit to support the capital–homophobia link, the text's mode of address and ensemble of references together convey a reality that has become decidedly unfamiliar. At the time of the book's publication, there existed a group of activist and academic readers in Italy and the UK (Mieli was also active in London's revolutionary left gay scene), however small or marginal, for whom it went without saying that the liberation of homosexual desire must necessarily go hand in hand with a radical transformation of the capitalist status quo.

In the contemporary situation of queer studies, Mieli's text gains even further in value by virtue of its extraordinarily prescient acknowledgment of the startling efficiency with which capital capitalises (there is no more perfect word) on the new sexual phenomena that came into increasing visibility in a newly sexually permissive society. By the mid-1970s, it had already become abundantly clear to Mieli's keen critical eye that this society 'makes very good use of the "perversions"' which, he affirms, are 'sold both wholesale and retail'; are 'studied, classified, valued, marketed, accepted, discussed'.¹⁸

Knowingly, Mieli writes in the wake of both the naïve sexual liberationism of Norman O. Brown and the more politicised doctrine of repressive desublimation influentially advanced by Herbert Marcuse, whose work *Homosexuality and Liberation* quotes in some detail. The reference to Marcuse's book makes abundantly clear that Mieli had already gained the famous insight that Michel Foucault would much more conspicuously develop in *The History of Sexuality*, the first volume of which was published the very same year as *Homosexuality and Liberation*. Be it by virtue of the material effects of capital or the amorphous forces of power, both texts posit the same result: the impulse behind sexual liberationism had been decisively

deformed and co-opted, and its effects of disalienation or subjective emancipation fully attenuated and renormalised. For both Mieli and Foucault, the rhetoric of sexuality's liberation had, by the late 1970s, become a tired and toothless cliché.

Mieli's deft handling of the classic Freudo-Marxist problem of the relation between, on the one hand, the demands of a civilisation that must organise production in order to survive and, on the other, the realities of a disruptive and impractical human sexuality, displays a remarkable subtlety. To be sure, Mieli's approach puts paid to the hopeful notion that impactful social change can result from the expression of taboo sexualities. Nonetheless, Mieli consistently resists proceeding to the resigned conclusion that no form of sexual advocacy or practice will ever have any effect on the negotiation of sex roles and social relations.

Central to Mieli's take on the tricky Marx-Freud conundrum is the notion of labour which, to risk an understatement, has failed to figure prominently in academic queer discourse. In essence, Mieli cleverly adds to the doctrine of commodity fetishism famously developed by Marx in the first volume of *Capital* the idea that it's not just labour which is alienated in the commodity, but sexuality as well. Or rather, it's more accurate perhaps to say that Mieli, clearly under the influence of Freud here, implicitly reformulates Marx's complex understanding of labour to foreground the agency of Eros in it. For Mieli, that is to say, the specifically human energy or life force that goes into any process of social production is the very same energy at work in sexuality. More concretely, the worker on that Fiat assembly line makes the same sort of expenditure of effort attaching a part to his car engine that he would make making love to his partner. And for Mieli at least (psychoanalysis isn't so sure), it's clear that this worker would much rather engage in the latter form of expenditure than the former.

In Mieli's view, the liberation of homosexual desire requires the emancipation of sexuality from both patriarchal sex roles and capital. This liberation depends first and foremost on our recognition of the fact that capitalism has already learned how to prey upon dissident desires, transforming them into what he calls 'the squalid fetishes of sex marketed by the system' (209). The enemy constituency here for Mieli includes all those reactionary souls who derive apparent satisfaction from the mediocre titillations such fetishes provide. It's

quite clear from Mieli's discussion that numerous gay men and other sexual dissidents figure prominently among them.

Mieli's argument draws on Marx's *Grundrisse* (1858, published 1939) to make two main assertions. First, humanity will not be emancipated until human labour, and therefore sexuality for Mieli, ceases to be alienated in the production of falsely liberated perverse commodities. Second, technological advancements have created a historically unprecedented opportunity for emancipation.

This last point is explained through reference to two phenomena. What Marx called the 'surplus labour of the mass' is no longer needed for general human well-being; and intellectual labour, heretofore restricted to the privileged classes, has made itself available to the worker, whose time is no longer monopolised by the exigencies of the (manual) working day. For Mieli, this means that the many revolutions in production that had taken place since Marx's day only underscore how 'it is even less necessary to channel all libidinal energies into reproduction' (211) and, indeed, how 'sexual repression is obsolete' (212).

For Marx, the dramatic reduction in socially necessary labour already discernible when he wrote – the time, that is, we collectively spend making what we need to survive – frees us up to pursue scientific and artistic endeavours, freely associating with one another to achieve our full collective creative potential. For Mieli, by contrast, these same improvements emancipate us from all sexual constraints: everything from reproduction to conventional gender roles; from patriarchy to the exhausting demands of the working day.

All of this suggests an immensely preferable alternative to contemporary hegemonic queer theory. But as a product of its time, Mieli's argument is marred by several significant limitations. In particular, Mieli's fidelity to the classical Marxist line sees him fail to address certain key problems, which have only become more urgent in the decades since he wrote. The most obvious of these can be formulated as a question. Despite the emancipation from conventional industrial material production of a wide swathe of humanity across the global North and South, why do we remain basically as chained in our labour to our computers and wireless devices as any worker ever was to the production line? In many ways, the Blackberry-iPhone invasion

of non-labour time is as insidious as the pre-trade union extended work day.

To give him due credit, Mieli provides an answer to this question, and here again he remains faithful to the Marxist view. For Mieli as for Marx, the alienation and exploitation of labour continue long after humanity has ceased being obliged to work all day to ensure its survival. This can be explained by capital's dependence on the surplus value extracted from surplus labour, which is another way of saying that the relations of capital are based on human desires, not human needs. Hence Mieli's focus on perverse commodity fetishism and the Marcusean critique of desublimation, but also his cutting invective against the 'homocops': all those reactionary queers 'who are better adapted to the [capitalist] system', and 'who find ideological arguments to justify their position as contented slaves' (194). Being faithful to Mieli's line of argument requires us to align most of mainstream queer theory with these homocops.

These details highlight how Mieli's discussion hinges on a crucial distinction he outlines between, first, those expressions of non-normative sexuality that remain complicit with capitalism's colonisation of the perverse libido, and second, an alternative expression of homosexual desire, which would undo in a liberating way sexuality's repressive sublimations in commodities. More simply, Mieli distinguishes between 'the reified pages of *Vogue*' (198) and what he calls the transsexual potential of human sexuality. In his invaluable introduction to an Italian-language edition of *Homosexuality and Liberation*, Christopher Lane helpfully summarises the salience of Mieli's notion. His 'transsexual aesthetic doesn't enable men to pass unnoticed among women, leaving heterosexuality untouched', Lane writes. Rather, 'it defamiliarizes all social understanding of gender, destroying heterosexuality's status, leaving us all to begin, as it were, from scratch'.¹⁹

In this way, Mieli's idiosyncratic understanding of transsexuality fully anticipates the 'deconstruction' of the gender binary and the critique of the 'heterosexual matrix' in queer theory. The crucial difference, however, is that Mieli traces a direct path from the work of deconstruction and critique to the subversion of not only patriarchy and heterosexism, but capitalism as well. In this sense, Mieli's work could serve as a crucial missing link which, in today's context, could

potentially connect poststructuralist feminism and queer theory with the critique of capitalist social relations. As you may recall, this was precisely Floyd's ambition, and one senses that Mieli would have proven more valuable than Lukács to his project.

But how exactly does Mieli support his point concerning the properly material implications of a 'queering' of gender and sexuality, a trope which today has become entirely familiar? Shouldn't poststructuralist queer theory's failure to engage with Marxian concerns inspire sharp scepticism about Mieli's thesis? In my own view, these material implications are inadequately developed in *Homosexuality and Liberation*. What Mieli does indeed say, however, is that the liberation of non-normative sexuality can be complicit with capitalism because the sexuality concerned remains in a repressed and sublimated form, which reinforces the ethos of discipline and productivity upon which capital depends. But the discussion is based on vague understandings of repression and sublimation, and fails to delve into the complexities and ambiguities of these concepts as developed originally in Freud's writing.²⁰ Further, it's not at all clear that the relations of capital today depend on a prohibition of enjoyment. On the contrary, the paradox of contemporary capitalism is the apparent symbiosis of a hypercompetitive and individualistic work ethic with a hedonistic and consumerist injunction to 'enjoy!'²¹

Read with the benefit of hindsight, Mieli's discussion leaves today's readership with two options. First, we can congratulate Mieli, as well we should, for his awesomely prescient diagnosis of capitalism's spectacular colonisation of the gains of feminism and the gay movements, all the while insisting that it still makes sense to claim that certain non-reified expressions of homosexual desire offer 'a fertile potential for revolutionary subversion' (212). Alternatively, we can take the contemporaneity of gay liberation and the queer phenomenon with the neoliberal era's unprecedented unshackling of capital as evidence that, *pace* Mieli, the whole notion of a specifically sexual emancipation in all its possible forms is simply incompatible with anti-capitalist politics, that is to say with politics properly speaking.

Leaving aside for a moment the complicated question, pregnant with significance for theory, of how we understand the term in Freud's wake, we might unabashedly and in a spirit of realism acknowledge that a certain degree of sexual repression is a precondition of radical

political organisation and action. If an ethos of hyperpermissiveness does indeed characterise contemporary capitalism, then a certain degree of old-fashioned inhibition or self-abnegation might in fact carry forward new initiatives for politics, including even those that fight against homophobia. Despite the weighty historical evidence to the contrary, we might add that there is nothing *necessarily* homophobic, patriarchal or even ‘sex-negative’ about the thematics of discipline and auto-critique in the tradition. In any case, if, as I argue in detail in the following chapter, Lacan’s Freud is right, and repression results from language rather than ‘civilisation’, no social transformation, no matter how radical or anti-capitalist, will ever succeed in undoing it.

In the end, the most salient feature of Mieli’s work for the contemporary critique of queer theory is its conviction that being or identifying as homosexual doesn’t in itself pose any necessary challenge to the ideological status quo. By insisting on inserting class conflict among the queers, Mieli implicitly upholds the fundamental Marxian principle that the capitalist mode of production creates a *diagonal* social difference – one that cuts across all the other, less materially significant, differences of race, religion and ethnicity, for instance (with the exception of sexual difference which, for psychoanalysis at least, is a diagonal difference of a precisely analogous kind). Like the symptom which, according to Freud, takes advantage of pre-existing physical problems to express itself in its encoded way, class antagonism colonises other varieties of difference in a manner that obfuscates how religious and racial conflicts, for example, are often subtly displaced socioeconomic conflicts at the same time.

What has changed significantly since Mieli’s historical moment is the fact that capitalism’s colonisation of homosexuality now extends well beyond the conformist, ‘straight-acting’ constituencies he identifies as the enemies of his transsexual aesthetic (although these of course continue, problematically to be sure, to exist). On the contrary, it would seem today that the most cutting-edge queers – those who refuse sexual identification and monogamy; those who dismiss ‘vanilla’ sexual activity and marriage as hopelessly complicit – are the ones best adapted, with their transient lifestyles and antipathy for attachment, to capital in its current, hypermobile phase. Surely it has become impossible to pretend that unfettered capital and ‘traditional family values’ are mutually enforcing social forces, even if populist

conservative ideology functions to prevent this antagonism from manifesting itself politically – that is, as an explicit and self-conscious contestation of dominant social and economic models. The radical queer millionaire Internet pornographer who organises ‘sex-positive’ sex toy parties in his spare time (the new Tupperware?) has become one of the best emblems of contemporary capitalism.

Capital Enjoyments

So, then, what are the consequences of all of this for the search for a Marxist alternative to queer theory? To get us started, we can return to Morton’s critique of Baudrillard, more specifically to his dismissal of postmodernism’s reinterpretation of exchange value as the hegemony of the signifier’s subversive play over the concrete meaning of the signified. I claimed that Baudrillard was correct, and in agreement with psychoanalysis, to deny the possibility that the human subject can content itself with the satisfaction of need. Need, like use value, is in this specific sense an illusory abstraction. What the postmodernist analysis lacks, however, is the fundamental psychoanalytic corollary that the impossible excess of desire, and by extension the sexy phantom of exchange value, is a mechanism of defence designed to shield the subject’s ego from the dangerous eruption of enjoyment.

In other words, psychoanalysis adds to the classic Marxist analysis of the commodity form the key notion that exchange value is correlative to the defence against, the repression of, enjoyment. Where enjoyment is concerned, there is no surplus value, no Lacanian *plus-de-jouir*. And yet, by this last statement I would appear to contradict myself. After all, did I not claim just a few paragraphs back that Lacan articulates his criticism of utopian Marxism by denying that any manner of social transformation, no matter how radical, can succeed in extinguishing surplus enjoyment, in reconciling the human subject’s desire to the object of need?

For Lacan, we attribute surplus value to an object – we perceive in the object an ineffable ‘x’ that can potentially extinguish desire – as a result of our unwillingness, buttressed by our ego investments, to derive libidinal satisfaction from it. Although psychoanalysis argues that neurosis – the defence against *jouissance* – can never be eliminated in any final, once-and-for-all fashion, clinical practice is premised on

the notion, properly utopian in this precise sense, that by confronting our dissimulated enjoyment we can attenuate the seductive and inhibiting power of the ideals that prop up our self-image. In this way, it's possible at least to begin to see through the false promise of the idealised, full satisfaction issued by the surplus value of exchange. This unlimited, perfect satisfaction, psychoanalysis teaches us, is one we desire to experience simultaneously with our self-apprehension; without the expropriation of selfhood, the subjective destitution, to use Lacan's suggestive phrase, that inevitably accompanies authentic drive satisfaction.

In this precise sense, then, the commodity form in Marx's political economy is structurally correlative to the ideals (ideal ego and ego ideal) of which Freud speaks in the presentation of his concept of narcissism. The commodity's seductions are premised on the idealisation, and therefore the repression, of the enjoyment against which they defend the ego's investments. As Lacan argued relentlessly in his early teaching, these investments always adapt with supreme efficiency to the demands of the 'American way of life' and 'the service of goods' – the smooth functioning, to Marxianise Lacan's idiom, of capitalist social relations. Despite the changes in emphasis that modulate his teaching over time, Lacan was unwavering in imparting the lesson, initially targeted at the ideology of ego psychology, that the aim of analysis must be to attenuate the lure of the ego so as to make manifest the enjoyment dissimulated by the symptom. If this is indeed the ultimate kernel of truth in the Freudian project writ large, then psychoanalysis should make a similar promise, however impossible or 'interminable', as concerns the enticing lure that surplus value and the commodity form unfurl.

On this assumption, Marx's critique of surplus value does precisely the same work as Freud's critique of the ego on the level of what we might call the structure of their respective speculative systems. Marx's critique uncovers the obfuscating idealisation of exploitative production relations, which make up the disavowed truth of surplus value (i.e. *reification*: commodities in capitalism make nasty qualitative relations between persons appear as innocuous quantitative relations between sexified things). Analogously, Freudianism unearths the enjoyments that, dissimulated by identification, hold together our

alluring ego structure, the very same structure that provides the commodity with its enticing libidinal appeal.

If the point of psychoanalysis is to teach us to wrest ourselves from the force of the inhibitory ideals through which we develop a sense of ourselves, then the goal of ideological critique is an uncannily similar one: to diminish our dependence on those social forms that dissimulate the bitter truth of unjust relations of production. Psychoanalytically put, Marxist critique decodes the unconscious satisfactions, the multiple forms of consumerist *jouissance*, that bind us to market ideology. These are the formidable forces that see us purchase that bottle of perfume or cologne despite the fact that we know better, that we're not quite sure we even enjoy the scent. If the old project of so-called Freudo-Marxism ever had a point to make, it was perhaps that the two agendas, viewed on this level, are one and the same.

Taking the literary cue from Freud, Lacan tied the destiny of the desiring subject to the vicissitudes of the tragic genre, from the desire of the destitute Oedipus 'never to have been born', through Antigone's uncompromising perseverance at the limits of *atè*, to Sygne de Coûfontaine's pathetic and suicidal facial tic. This tic indexes a pure negativity, an absolute 'no', whose possibility is carved out by the signifier, according to Lacan, in Paul Claudel's dramaturgical trilogy. But, as Alenka Zupančič insightfully argues, desire also belongs to the realm of comedy, here understood as the generic mode that exposes the difference between the lofty and otherworldly ambitions of desire and the inadequate objects that fail to satisfy it.²² This is the desire not to desire; the desire whose aim is to sabotage its own realisation, whose *modus operandi* is precisely to repress the knowledge of its own impossibility.

This desire is to be distinguished from what Lacan called desire's real – the drive, that is – which does in fact deliver satisfaction. But we can only experience this satisfaction at the ego's expense, as a consequence of the ego's fleeting collapse. This explains why we must distinguish the play of desire, its endless substitution of inadequate objects, from enjoyment or *jouissance* which, despite its impossibility, happens nonetheless, whether we care to know about it or not. Desire is to the play of signifying substitutions as *jouissance* is to a resolutely non-signifying, meaningless satisfaction. With unrelenting seriousness, this satisfaction remains in unconscious form as the

neurotic symptom, banished from conscious knowledge to allow for the ego's construction. Similarly, the pleasure we derive from our ego structure is to be contrasted with the Freudian 'beyond' of pleasure, the traumatic satisfaction we derive, as it were, from the drive.

Lacan's notion of enjoyment, as the beyond of the pleasure principle, also allows for a psychoanalytic reformulation of Marx's old concept of use value. Earlier, I agreed with Baudrillard's qualification of use value as an abstraction, as a Marxist illusion. But this agreement holds only to the extent that use value is held to be separable from its coupling with the ideal of exchange value; to the doubtless debatable extent, in other words, that the Marxist critique of the commodity form ultimately leads towards a sort of egalitarian utilitarianism, that it is held to insinuate that the utopian defeat of capitalism will reconcile humanity with the value of use as a realisable *summum bonum* or general social good.

But what if we posit instead that it's really Marx's idea of *use value* that should be connected to Lacan's concept of enjoyment – that self-expropriating experience of embodiment which dispenses, for a time at least, with the protective barrier the ego erects in defence against it? That is, should we not hold that when Lacan coined the term *plus-de-jouir* to connect psychoanalysis to Marx's discourse on the commodity form, he really meant to say that it's use value, not exchange value, that corresponds to the always imperfect and fleeting satisfactions the castrated subject of the unconscious is only able to access? This compromised satisfaction must then be distinguished from the phantom promise of 'more!' enjoyment. This is the excessive enjoyment that both fascinates and repels us in the Other; the surplus jouissance we can never manage to experience for ourselves.

Psychoanalysis surely argues that there can be no definitive exorcism of exchange value, no once-and-for-all cure for our chronic collective overvaluation of the commodity-objects that capitalism displays to lure the insatiable appetites of desire. But psychoanalysis can also teach Marxism the lesson that the resistance-breaking assumption of our imperfect and shameful enjoyments, on the one hand, and the desire-causing power of the commodity, on the other, are inversely proportional. The more we acknowledge our jouissance – the more bravely we come to terms with its 'base', and properly perverse, libidinal origins – the more independence we gain with respect to

the dictates of commodity relations. In short, tarrying with the drive and its inhuman insistence can insulate us from the temptations of sacrifice, postponement and compromise by which we tether our destinies to the imperatives of capital. Freud rigorously defined the analyst's task as impossible, its practice interminable. Yet, he doggedly persisted in its performance, with obviously remarkable results. No doubt we must conclude that, in conformity with Lacanian ethics, the impossibility of the ultimate completion of the critique of the commodity form is the very reason for which its practice presents itself to us as an absolute duty.

It's probably no coincidence that in these last considerations of Lacan's intervention in Marx's labour theory of value, queer theory has seemingly disappeared from view. What does this mean? As I argue in detail in the next chapter, Freud's definition of sexuality, or more precisely of the drive, paradoxically implies that sexuality is *asexual*. Indifferent to gender, it remains unmoved by every positive quality of the object.

To the extent, then, that we identify queer theory with the thematics of endless discursive production concerning the construction and undoing of gender and sexual identities in and through the multiform and conflicting forces of power, this theory is simply irrelevant to the psychoanalytic critique of capital whose very general parameters I've just sketched out. What happens to queer theory, by contrast, when it confronts *jouissance* and its constitutive deadlock, the dogged persistence of Lacan's *plus-de-jouir*? The critical project that targets and demystifies the lure of surplus value is indifferent to sexual categorisations, and in this sense carries a universal relevance and address. Everyone is queer, therefore no one is queer, let's move on.