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Disciplining Queer

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This article analyzes a particular set of disciplinings by students and colleagues that coalesced around my teaching of a university course in 'Queer Theory.' I use these regulatory discourses and practices as a springboard to investigate how academic and other disciplines (English, in particular) enable and reproduce certain stylizations, epistemologies, and methodologies, and what they implicitly and violently conceal and demonize; how style functions as politics and what the politics of style are; how queerness—queer inquiry and intervention, queer methodologies and epistemologies, queer activisms and insubordinations—might activate, exacerbate, and expose some of these questions and mechanisms. The form of the article enacts the (un)disciplinary politics that I advocate, juxtaposing anecdote, pedagogy and theory, and written in a style whose campiness and ellipticism flout prescriptions for conventional academic discourse. This style seeks to break down the borders between the rational and the irrational, between disciplines, and between the academic and the non-academic, and to interrogate the conventions that constitute the scholarly.

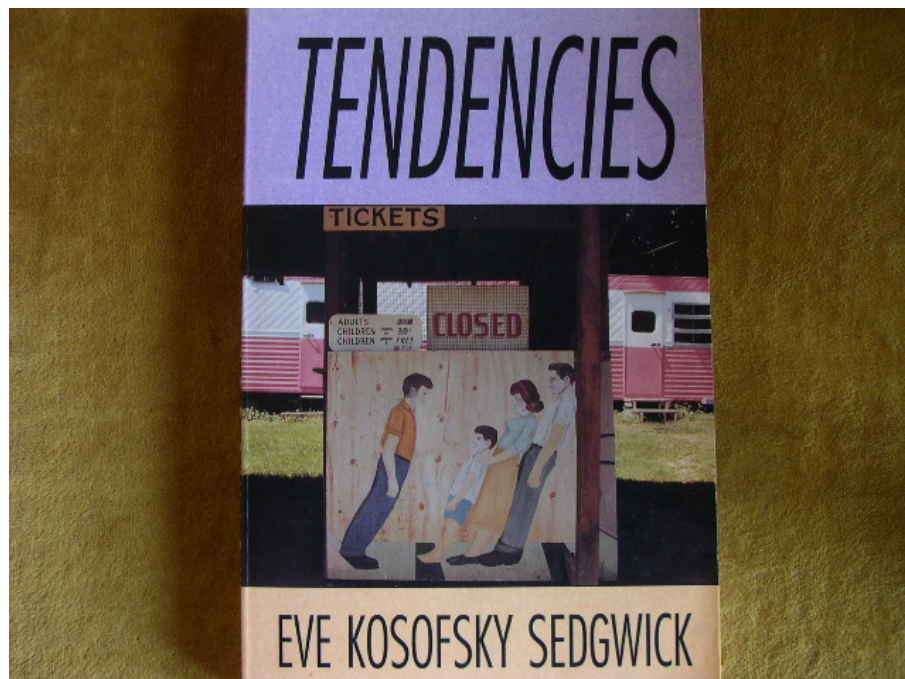
Frames

These are some of the things I want to discuss in this article:

- 1) how academic and other disciplines (English, in particular)—and the institutions and institutionalizations that authorize them and that they conjure—enable and reproduce certain stylizations, epistemologies, and methodologies, and what these stylizations/epistemologies/methodologies implicitly and violently conceal and demonize;
- 2) style as politics and the politics of style;

- 3) how queerness—queer inquiry and intervention, queer methodologies and epistemologies, queer activisms and acting up—might activate, exacerbate, and expose some of these topoi, questions and mechanisms.

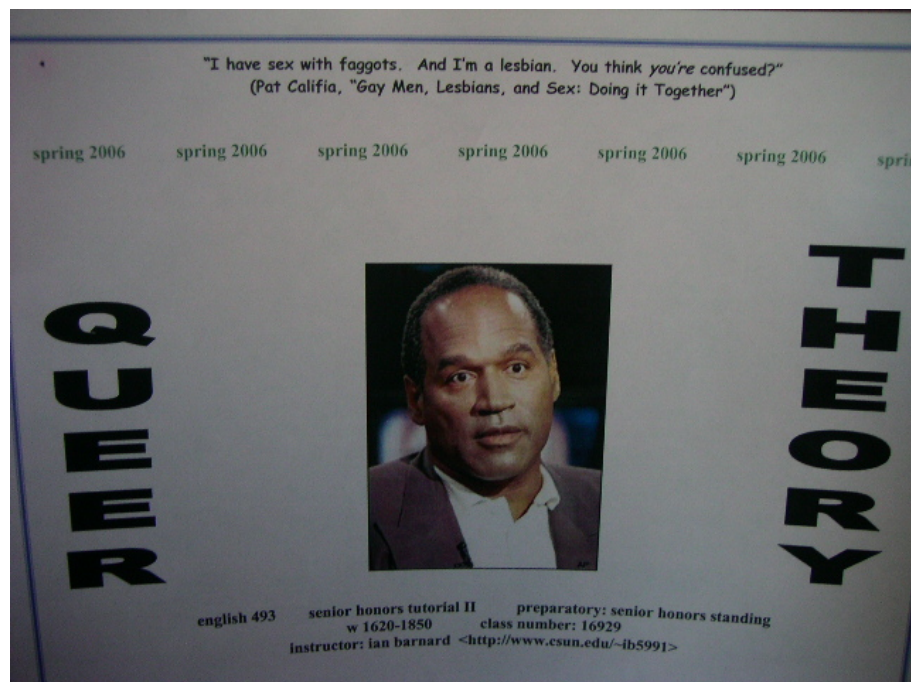
But I should begin with a definitional qualification: to quote the zine *Rant and Rave*, 'queer is not a substitute for gay' ('Queer', 1993: 15). In fact, my interest in and use of 'queer' is not as a substitute for 'lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender' either. If 'queer' meant only these things or if I only deployed 'queer' in this way, not only would I be forfeiting the possibilities of queer by using it merely redundantly, but my opening questions wouldn't be at issue. For the liberal pluralism of 'gay' is not necessarily at odds with dominant styles and politics. The meanings of 'queer' that I find most productive are those that understand sexuality as fluid, open-ended and constructed. They see in queer a resistance to the gender binaries implied in 'gay and lesbian.' These meanings also resist the gay/straight binary—queer is not the other of straight. They deploy 'queer' as a political term as much as a 'lifestyle' description and identify queerness with anti-assimilationism and radical politics—in the US, Andrew Parker (1994) has jokingly postulated that 'There are no queer Republicans' (55). They don't demand reactive positivity ('gay is good'). They emphasize difference among queers, fracturing community rather than tracing stable, trans-historical, cross-cultural identities. Queer is elusive and contradictory. Sometimes queer might include all gay people, but in other contexts all gay people might not be queer. And while queer cannot—and should not—be uncoupled from anti-homophobic / anti-transphobic / anti-biphobic politics, it nevertheless means different things at different times and for different people. (For a fuller elaboration of these definitions of 'queer,' see Barnard, 2004b: 10-13.)



I'll use two anecdotes to open up the three points with which I framed this essay, in the context of these understandings of queer. I'll open up these three points obliquely, at a slant, in the spirit of displacement and for the pleasures of delay, *pace* Eve Sedgwick's (1993) brilliant Foreword and Introduction to and cover picture for *Tendencies*. (In the context of an academic essay, anecdote and slant could both be kinds of queer interventions.)

Anecdote #1

A few years ago the then-director of the English Honours program at the state university in the US where I teach in the English Department asked me to create an English Honours course in Queer Theory. The Honours director was herself an avid proponent and practitioner of Queer Theory, though, as far as I knew, no-one had taught a Queer Theory course in my department before. I agreed to teach the course, and created a flyer to publicize it.



The Honours director approached me shortly thereafter. The flyer was too minimalist, she complained. She said I should give a more detailed description of the course so that students would know what to expect. I didn't want one of those off-putting flyers that are covered with text on top of a bland background image, but obliged by creating a backside to the flyer that gave a more expository description of the course, and that explained that the course grade would be constituted in part by 'a final critical or creative project.'

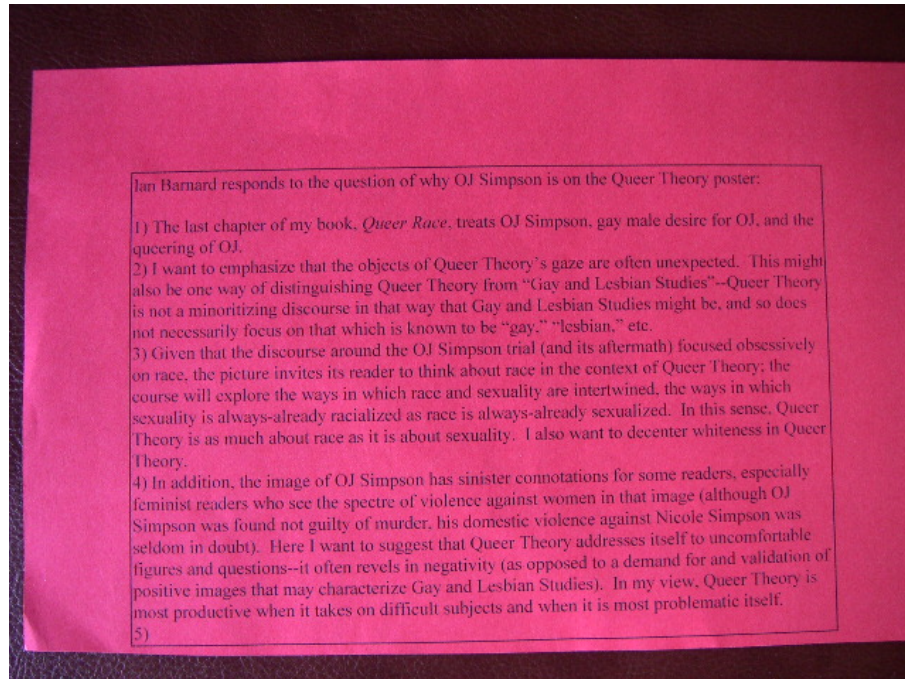
A little while later, the Honours advisor contacted me again: she advised me that I should not allow students to produce a 'creative' project in the course. Creative projects were apparently not

appropriately rigorous or scholarly for our literature Honours students. And then I discovered that she had gone around the English Department whiting out the words 'or creative' in my course description.

The flyer generated more heat, of a different kind. A few days after the whiting out, a senior colleague approached me to tell me that my original flyer depicting OJ Simpson was racist, and advised me to change it. Ironically, I'd just written a book on the intrication of race with sexuality, and what I saw as the folly of thinking of race and sexuality as separate axes of identity. When one does this, I had argued, in the now familiar model of the accretion of identities (Chicana lesbian as triply oppressed; Chicana lesbian equaling Chicano plus woman plus homosexual), one normalizes whiteness, since the unracialized woman or homosexual is the default whiteness that so often gets assumed but goes unnamed in white supremacist cultures. I suspect that my colleague would not have found the flyer offensive if I'd illustrated it with the image of a white person, no matter who that white person might be, and despite the concomitant equation of queerness with whiteness and the (re)erasure of queers of color implied by that equation. And no doubt my colleague would have been quite happy with the flyer if it has been coherently complemented by the image of someone he recognized as gay—nothing very queer about that. I had to point out to my senior colleague that the offense taken at the implication that OJ Simpson was queer or was in some way associated with queerness or was homoerotically desirable, was in itself deeply homophobic.

Other members of my department—students, staff, and faculty—were also upset about the image of OJ Simpson on my course flyer, but for different reasons. These were the people who saw OJ Simpson as a murderer, who equated queer with gay, and who assumed that my job was to react against hegemonic homophobia by promoting positive images of gayness. (Their simmering racial resentment was enacted a few years later when in 2008 Simpson was sentenced to an impossibly long jail sentence by an all-white jury for a Las Vegas robbery.)

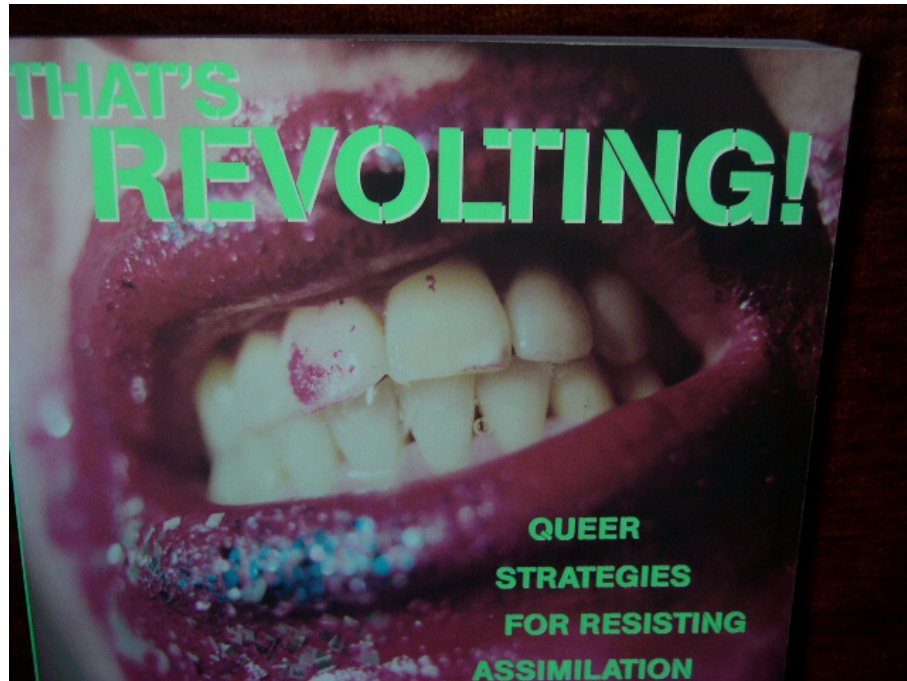
All in all, I decided that some re-education was in order, so I produced a red pedagogical pamphlet that I passed out to colleagues and others at Department meetings and miscellaneous official gatherings, giving multiple rationales for my inclusion of the image of OJ Simpson on the course flyer.



Anecdote #2

My second anecdote revolves around the students who signed up for my already embattled course in Queer Theory. Narratives about trashing and pogroms in queer studies courses are so common, and were especially so in the early days of gay and lesbian studies, that they have almost become their own genre. These are familiar stories of the few well-meaning homophobes in the class who were totally unprepared to meet their comeuppance at the hands of peers and instructors; of the gay students who believed they were the native informants, that they were the experts on the course subject matter, and that they deserved the 'A's in the class; of the attacks on the teacher who didn't merely validate them, who suggested that sexuality might be constructed, who rewarded the smart straight student; and so on. However, my story takes a different turn, perhaps because Honours students in my Department were required to enroll in seminars such as mine, and so the class was comprised of a group of students whose commitment-affect to the seminar topic ranged from terror to interest to indifference to ignorance, rather than a group of predominantly queer students desperate for intellectual, political, and personal affirmation. But the saga of my course certainly had some connections to those notorious trashings and pogroms, and the often shockingly unexpected conflicts that they ignited among class participants--the conflicts in my class were equally surprising and the binaries they created not easy to categorize and deconstruct.

The first reading that I assigned in my honours course in Queer Theory was the book *That's Revolting! Queer Strategies for Resisting Assimilation*, a heterogeneous collection of activist and theoretical texts edited by Matt Bernstein Sycamore, aka Mattilda (2004).



This anthology includes work in a variety of genres addressing multiple queer issues and multiply inscribed queer issues from progressive and radical perspectives. I wanted to break down the theory / not-theory binary and suggest how Queer Theory itself embodies such a destabilization. I wanted to argue for 'queer' as a critique of assimilationist identity politics. I wanted to suggest that its intrication in gendered, classed, able-bodied/disabled, and racialized identities made queerness always already a multiple issue, indeed made it difficult to pinpoint exactly what constituted queerness. If race was or should be as central to queer work as sexuality is, what distinguished queer work from other kinds of anti-racist work? I wanted to do damage to the monarchy of sex (Foucault, 1989). I wanted to give students a sense of the political, activist, community and other contexts that have variously enabled and critiqued the work currently taking place under the auspices of 'Queer Theory.' Further, my naive reasoning went, the students would be thrilled to read something that isn't written in the dry academic prose that they complain about all the time; they'll be satisfied that we're reading work that connects theory with politics so explicitly; and this is fun to read!

But my students were appalled. The students complained that the pieces in the book were poorly written—that they didn't take opposing arguments into account, weren't written in measured tones, were too angry, didn't present any evidence to support their arguments, weren't well-researched, relied on personal experience, were too biased. When I teach composition classes, I'm usually perceived as the enforcer of restrictive conventions of language and writing. In this Queer Theory class, the policing function seemed to have reversed. I found myself in the odd position of the English professor whose students were the guardians of good writing, whose students were

upholding canonical standards against the professor who was suddenly on the side of bad writing.

Institutional Apparatuses

I want to draw out some broader implications for queer and for institutional disciplinarity from these two anecdotes. Remember that this was an English honours class, so the students in it were, in Miss Jean Brody's infamous phrase, the *crème de la crème* (Spark, 1964). But rather than demonize my students for their rather unqueer dismissal of my queer text, I want to hypothesize that as the *crème de la crème* of the English department, they were doing what they had been trained to do very well, that now, at the pinnacle of their illustrious undergraduate careers, in this senior honours tutorial, they were demonstrating how well they had been socialized by my colleagues, the English Department faculty, by the larger discipline of English, and by the academic institution as a whole. And in some ways this socialization is profoundly antithetical to queer, if we take *That's Revolting*, the text that activated my students' resentment, to be queer, as I would argue it is. What I hope is apparent by now is that it's not so much the content of this text that outraged my students (though I have no doubt that some of their anxiety about the content was displaced onto their criticism of the 'bad writing' in it) as its style. In fact, had the same ideas been presented in the canonical academic style that students love to complain about, I suspect that my students would have had fewer problems with the text.

I suggest two things. First, my students' response to *That's Revolting* might be taken as corroboration of the assertion (or indictment, depending on one's perspective—e.g., Harris (1991)) that queer is as much about style as it is about substance, and that style is not mere adornment but is political and essential. This is an enthymeme that in the US we have learnt from postmodern activist groups like Transgender Menace, Queer Nation, ACT UP, and The Lesbian Avengers, but one which most critical theorists outside of queer studies remain symptomatically ignorant of and which some Marxist queer theorists—e.g., Morton (1996)—continue to dispute. My second hypothesis is that this incident might be read as a manifestation of the ways in which the discipline of English is fundamentally unqueer. My students were merely upholding the disciplinary values and traditions they had been taught and rewarded for upholding over many English courses over many years. I'm sure that my first year composition students, not yet successfully socialized into academia and into the coercive protocols of student academic writing (which often bear no resemblance to professional writing), would not have had these problems with *That's Revolting*. And perhaps less high achieving English majors might not have either. So we have the paradoxical situation that the more successful the student is, the more likely the student is to be inimical to queer.

If my proposition that my institution's English Department is not atypical in this regard is sound, on the one hand this is not such a bad thing: it could be seen as a hopeful sign for those who worry about queerness being co-opted and contained by the academic institution; it shows that queerness still has the power to derail at the same time that it shows that the academy has not really undergone the transformation that many proponents of queer studies and other revolutionary discourses had hoped for. On the other hand, this is a stunning indictment of the residual queerphobia of academia and of English as a discipline, an exposé of the fundamentally incompatible relationship between queer and this discipline, and of the delusion that queer studies has somehow been successfully or seamlessly integrated into academia in the US, Australia, and elsewhere. Priya Kandaswamy (2007) and others have made similar arguments about multiculturalism and diversity in general: ethnic studies are often marginalized at academic institutions and faculty are called upon to teach courses about race in order to fulfill university mandates for 'diversity' education (Kandaswamy, 2007: 7); however, these 'diversity' mandates frequently signal a self-congratulatory smugness about the university's liberal tolerance rather than a critical interrogation of the institution itself. And much scholarship has commented on the ways in which academic institutions want desperately to show their hipness by offering the Other for display, but then incorporate and appropriate the Other by requiring that it be presented only on their terms (e.g., Aneja, 2005; Rallin, 2005).

I want to evoke in my students' revolt the echo of my colleagues' complaints about the course flyer and description. If we juxtapose my students' outrage with the Honours director's efforts to discipline my course flyer and description, we can trace some continuities between my two anecdotes in the irony that a course in Queer Theory, the very subject that should be committed to contesting boundaries such as those between the 'creative' and the 'non-creative,' was subjected to these kinds of attempts to normalize it. In fact, what struck me was that the Honours director and my students seemed to want me to teach a Queer Theory course that was anything but queer.

Two implications of these concatenations are important here, one a matter of generalizing my argument, the other the contextual specificity that reigns it in. First, I see these stories as not just about the Honours director's misguided understanding of queerness or my students and their unqueer alliance with a particular disciplinary formation of English literary studies or with English in general as an academic discipline. They are also metaphors for the larger ways in which queerness and queer style challenge academic and other conventions and institutional structures. We might want to think, for instance, about disciplinary protocols of inquiry, about campus bathrooms, about grades and grading, about the kinds of assignments students do, about relationships between professors and students, about styles and customs and relationships and coercions outside the academy, about what is or isn't queer about these rituals and spaces, about how queerness might be foreclosed or resisted by them. As

Donald Hall (2007) puts it, 'Not only the cultural critical, but also the pedagogical project of queer studies ... is a continuous and insistent interrogation of notions of the normal' (186).

Second, recall that I am making a distinction between queer and gay, and between queer and lgbt, and would be the first to concede that there are plenty of gay and lesbian studies classes that are fitting quite nicely into the academy. They aren't causing any trouble. They aren't disrupting accepted protocols. They are happily reproducing conventional constructions of canonicity, value, culture, legibility, and legitimacy. They've been co-opted into a liberal pluralist potpourri of mixed metaphors where diversity can be self-righteously paraded as a sign of liberal tolerance, when, on the contrary, it is deployed precisely in order to permanently defer any real change (Gómez-Peña, 1989; Dev, 1990-1991; Barnard, 2005; Kandaswamy, 2007; Buras, 2008; Lee, 2008; Nguyen, 2008). These are the gay marriages of academia which are often as eager to denounce the bad writing, gender transgressions, and promiscuous sexuality of queerness as the conservative gay and other students in my honours seminar were quick to distance themselves from the unruly text with which I presented them.

Queer Style

But things change. Remember that Miss Jean Brodie said, 'All my pupils are the crème de la crème. . . . Give me a girl at an impressionable age, and she is mine for life' (Spark, 1964: 15-16). While I would not want to ally myself with Miss Brodie's fascism, and am not ambitious or presumptuous enough to claim that any student is mine for life—change, thank goodness, is recursive—, my students' impressionableness meant that by the middle of the semester of their English honours course in Queer Theory they were making zines and dvds, even if somewhat nervously, were queering popular culture, and were appropriately punctuating their work with explicit and even colloquial sexual references, albeit sometimes only after asking permission to do so. These were smart and politically sophisticated students who were able to read texts skillfully, including, once our course was under way, Midi Onodera's film *Ten Cents a Dance* and Matthew Bourne's queer take on *Swan Lake*. In this sense, their talents and training in English served them well. These were, after all, Honours students, and they produced brilliant work. Or perhaps, I should say, 'These were, after all, Honours students, so they were quickly socialized'? As they worked on projects to be submitted for possible presentation at the annual Honours Colloquium, they asked me anxiously if it was ok if they worked with non-literary texts; they worried about not having enough scholarly sources in their projects, about their projects not being appropriately academic. One student's mid-semester evaluation read, 'To be completely honest, the problem I have with the course is that I don't know what's appropriate ... I don't know what the standards are anymore ...' I encouraged and reassured and supported. And despite their misgivings, the students thrived.

My point here is not so much that my students changed, or that queerness can be taught and even believed in by the learners, but that my students, despite overcoming their initial outrage, continued to face multiple disciplinary obstacles in their attempts to engage with and produce queer epistemologies. They were still faced with the disciplining apparatuses of the institution and the discipline and of those who stoically or unwittingly guarded its integrity. When my students were ready to present their work at the annual Honours Colloquium, they were faced with a call for abstracts for 10-12 page papers that successful applicants would be expected to read at the colloquium. How would they read a dvd? How could they format their disruptions to fit fully written out sentences and one inch margins? How would they present their work at a conference with no media equipment and no technology, that could only imagine students reading conventional 20 minute academic papers from a stack of pages neatly typed in MLA format? And further down the line, how would they write an Honours thesis whose guidelines specified a focus on literature with a capital 'L'? While the colloquium's call for papers invitingly welcomed 'investigations of the political and/or ideological,' its assurance that 'we invite papers from all periods and genres' throws us back to the presumptively axiomatic of Literature, as if the failure to imagine anything else isn't itself a political and ideological delimitation, and as if that limitation doesn't also define itself against so much of the intellectual, political, and other thinking, imagining, acting, working, and playing that happens under the sign of queer. This is about the privileging of Literature, but also the privileging of other things.

I am suggesting that many things that might not appear to be about queerness are about queerness, though I'm not sure exactly where to stop. In her justly celebrated opening to *Epistemology of the Closet*, Eve Sedgwick wrote that the book proposed 'that many of the major modes of thought and knowledge in twentieth-century Western thought as a whole are structured—indeed, fractured—by a chronic, now endemic crisis of homo/heterosexual definition' (1990: 1). Sedgwick went on to list some of the oppositions that might not appear to be shaped by the binary of sexual identity, but that on deeper analysis can be read as formatively constructed by it:

secrecy/disclosure, knowledge/ignorance, private/public, masculine /feminine, majority/minority, innocence/initiation, natural/artificial, new/old, discipline/terrorism, canonic/noncanonic, wholeness/decadence, urbane/provincial, domestic/foreign, health/illness, same /different, active/passive, in/out, cognition/paranoia, art/kitsch, utopia/apocalypse, sincerity/sentimentality, and voluntariness /addiction. (11)

Although Sedgwick begins her book with a gendered homo/hetero divide, whereas my enabling figure is what I am calling 'queer,' I want to think of her wonderfully ambitious and productive articulation of the project of *Epistemology* as also helping us to think about form and style, matters Sedgwick herself touches on only obliquely in this list

and in her analyses of canonical literature in the remainder of her book.

Donald Hall (2007) and others have written about how apparently common-sense, even liberatory, pedagogies can encode and enforce anti-queer values and modes of being (e.g., Barnard, 2004a). In their article, 'What does queer theory teach us about x?,' Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner (1995) proposed that queer style not only serves to expose the values and assumptions underlying its object of critique, but also that it opens up the possibilities of different kinds of analysis and different objects of analysis:

Queer commentary has involved a certain amount of experimenting, of prancing and squatting on the academic stage. This is partly to remind people that there is an academic stage and that its protocols and proprieties have maintained an invisible heteronormativity, one that infiltrates our profession, our knowledge, and this editorial. This does not mean we embrace, or disavow, the indecorous per se. Indecorum can be a way of bringing some dignity to the abject. But it is also a way of changing the public for academic work, of keeping the door ajar. ... Queer commentary has also distinguished itself through experiments in critical voice and in the genre of the critical essay. Along with queer experiments in pedagogy and classroom practice, it marks a transformation of both the object and the practice of criticism. (348, 349)

This transformation implies that certain ways of thinking, certain ways of doing, and certain objects of attention are literally impossible in the world view of certain disciplinary styles. Style is productive as well as reactive.

Queer (Im)Mobility

And, of course, style is about class and race, too (hooks, 1994). This is also a story about class, in both senses of the word. On the one hand, it's about the function of academic classes in socializing students into accepting, functioning within, and even enforcing particular political, social, and economic ideologies now and once they leave the academy. In the US and, increasingly, other nations across the globe, this includes, in Slavoj Žižek's (2007) concise formulation, 'the hegemony of global capitalism and its political supplement, liberal democracy.' Now much has been written about the ways in which various academic fields and disciplines, from first year composition courses to degrees in anthropology, collude in this project. In addition, Vershawn Young (2007), Joan Wynne (2002), and many other critics have analyzed the ways in which language use in the academy and writing genres function to entrench sexist, racist, and classist political, social, and economic inequities. University academic apparatuses also teach and enforce heteronormativity, gender conformity, and the other formations, identifications, and politics to which queerness might

speak, not only in terms of free-floating ideas, but also and inevitably in terms of form and style.

But the other class story tells of mainly working class students who have already been recreated in the image of their mainly bourgeois professors. After all, my students were in some ways very unlike Miss Jean Brodie's students, since my mainly working class students were the 'creme-de-la-crème' only in the very limited sense in that they were Honours students at a not very prestigious State institution. But their transformation into pampered Honours students with a sense of entitlement seemed amazingly aporia-less. They already appeared quite used to the special small Honours class size. No-one in the class blinked an eye when they heard that the course would include free tickets and transportation to see Matthew Bourne's queer revision of *Swan Lake* at the Ahmanson Theatre in downtown Los Angeles, thanks to funds from the California Lottery. As Honours students, they expected to get goodies. And they were quick to recognize that they are the creme-de-la-creme of the English Department when I challenged them about their antipathy to *That's Revolting*. One student wrote in their mid-semester evaluation of the course, 'I have to admit that I was a little less than enthusiastic about the class the first couple weeks. I am definitely one of those Honors students who has been thoroughly inculcated with the notions of the "traditional canon."' Another wrote, 'You are right about being socialized as the "cream of the crop" here at CSUN and scaring us (me) into always being uptight and formal and academic.' My students are not the villains here. The scary specter is the effectiveness and speed with which an academic program can brainwash an ethnically diverse group of smart mainly working class mainly young people to believe in and enforce its values.

We must ask, though, how robust my students' class mobility is, their ascension to the position of 'cream of the crop,' and if these students aren't doomed to suffer the fate of Senghor's generation of deluded Francophone Africans, who learnt French and studied in France with the promise of becoming full French gentlemen (the gender order was not up for grabs), only to find themselves still treated as second-class citizens of the colonial pecking order. And we must also ask how class in this second sense affiliates with queer. While queer theory's ascendance can be seen as coterminous with and even as formatively instigated by queer activism, despite initial denials by Teresa de Lauretis and others that academic queer work was related to queer activism (De Lauretis, 1991: xvii, note 2), it then came to be associated with elite academic institutions and rarified scholarly production, even though many queer theorists in English studies were working with non-canonical texts and even with non-literary texts, and were often themselves activists. In the story of my Honours class, though, the opposite trajectory seemed to be in operation, one that perhaps corroborates queer's activist affiliations: the more advanced you are on the academic totem pole, the more distant you are from queer.

We must also ask about agency, though: should I be less generous about my students' roles in the story of their collusion with the disciplinarity they seek to master? to what extent can we demand that students resist the socializations of academia? how does resistance manifest itself? to what extent is resistance possible? And I must ask about my students' apparently quick and successful conversion to queer's cause, what this says about change and malleability, sincerity and cynicism, commitment and utilitarianism. Since queer itself is committed to resisting conventional dismissals of style and surface, it also invites us to see the terms in these dualisms as fluid and to refuse the binary moralizing tags that are conventionally attached to them. These dualisms also speak to our desire for ends, a desire that queer frustrates in its dispersions and recursivities.

A Happy Ending?

Conclusions, wrappings up, cohesions, coherencies, unities evoke the violences of happy endings, those sine qua nons of self-promotion in resumes, in Hollywood, in political campaigns, in academic institutions ever-eager to move up the status ladder. Marriage till death us do part. Happy endings enforce their own particular kinds of styles, of closures, of foreclosures, of normalizations, of homogenizations. When I was recently reviewed by the Personnel Committee in my department, I was asked about the Honours seminar in Queer Theory that I had taught. I related to the Committee Members a somewhat expurgated version of the story I have told here. 'And then?' my reviewers asked expectantly, 'What did you do? How did it end?' I felt that I was supposed to have a triumphant ending. The students see the errors of their ways, my dedicated teaching wins them over, the institution is transformed. Or, I see the error of my ways, vow to improve, and offer a repentant version of the course in the near future. But as we know from queer, from queer negativity, positive images are not necessarily realistic or desirable or always that pleasurable. They have their own toxicity. So in the spirit of the tone and style and understanding of argument of *That's Revolting*, I must resist a certain kind of happy ending. I can neither confirm that my Department is queerer than before nor that my erstwhile students were truly transformed by my course. Perhaps they were astute fakers? Or perhaps I was merely as successful at indoctrinating them as their previous professors? Maybe that's not such a bad thing--the ease of queer's transmissibility? Or maybe something queer really did stir in them? This proliferation of questions seems to me to be more important and productive than zeroing in on one answer.

My students often complain that the texts we read 'don't offer solutions' or criticize me for not providing answers to difficult questions. I try to show them the value of dissidence in and of itself, and especially of the significance of queer critique: to offer solutions might be akin to stabilizing and domesticating queer, and would implicitly deny what is productive—what opens up—in the process of such critique. Keeping in mind, then, the political necessity of

negativity, as well as the simultaneous pleasures and constraints of academia, the stimulations propelled by disciplines of various kinds, and the profound duality of revolt, I'll evoke instead of a happy ending the multivalent satisfactions of abnegation. That abnegation in itself has come to be associated with queerness (Bersani, 1988; Nunokawa, 1996; Edelman, 2004) and signals a style that refuses teleology at the same time that it is open to unnamable possibilities.

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