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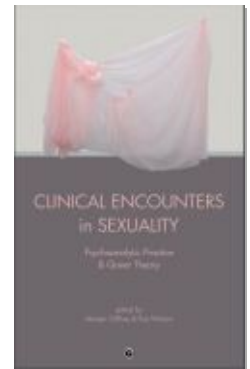
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SECTION 1

QUEER THEORIES

Precarious Sexualities:
Queer Challenges to Psychoanalytic and
Social Identity Categorization

Alice A. Kuzniar

In the essay “The Theory of Seduction and the Problem of the Other” (1997), Jean Laplanche writes of a concept that attractively resonates with the term queer, insofar as queer sexuality is quintessentially defined by its inexplicability, incoherence, volatility, and contingency in contradistinction to a sexuality whose owner would claim is stable, fixed, and identifiable as an integral part of the self. Destabilizing claims to an abiding, undisturbed notion of the self, Laplanche speaks of *das Andere* — the other-thing in us, the otherness of our unconscious — that all attempts at psychoanalytic interpretation cannot master. Laplanche posits that sexuality is an enigma, both for the child confronted with the riddle of sexuality that the adult represents and for the adult who can never master the uncanny as first encountered in childhood. The parent in turn unconsciously transmits an aura of sexual mystery to the child, perpetuating and completing the cycle. *Das Andere* is hence the internal otherness that we perpetually carry within us and that de-centers us, but that is founded by contact with an external otherness.

“Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. *There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers.* It is an identity without an essence”

(Halperin 1995, 62). As David Halperin here suggests, queer is “*das Andere*” and, as such, resists the very labeling that society demands. Indeed, queer theorists have time and again insisted on the necessity of rewriting “queer” anew so as to prevent it from becoming an identity marker that would become yet another category of the sort it opposes. As Judith Butler (1993) has written, “[i]f the term ‘queer’ is to be a site of collective contestation, the point of departure for a set of historical reflections and futural imaginings, it will have to remain that which is, in the present, never fully owned, but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage and in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes” (19). Or, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1993) has famously put it, “queer” is “a continuing moment, movement, motive—recurrent, eddying, *troublant*”; ideally it represents an “immemorial current” (xii). I want to propose in this chapter that the qualities of oddity, hybridity, and transgression that “queer” has captured can be reframed, recalled, and revitalized through reference to Laplanche and other similar accounts of psychic life that underscore the precariousness of any attempt to decipher oneself and to label one’s sexual identity. Such an approach refuses to ignore the insistence of *das Andere* in erotic magnetism. Insofar as “queer” can encapsulate or sum up the unfinishedness and perpetual enigma of sexuality that Laplanche speaks of—that sense of an internal otherness that we always carry within us and that comes as a gift from others—it promises to offer a unique approach to psychoanalytic inquiry. In conclusion, I want to push the envelope further to pursue how *das Andere* can even be embodied in the household companions whom we love—those whose strangeness comes from being of another species. The cost to psychoanalysis of seeing our erotic attractions as unidentifiable and perpetually enigmatic would be the abandonment of its classic attempt to narrativize psycho-sexual life. In other words, the analyst could venture neither to reconstruct the etiology of psychic development nor to offer closure to the narrative by assigning an identifiable label (for instance, heterosexual or homosexual) that would purport to erase the troubling, ongoing riddle of sexual-

ity. Or to put it yet another way, traditionally psychoanalysis has been quick to accept the pathologizing identity label of “homosexual” only to search for the developmental factors leading to that result. How, then, if at all, can we instrumentalize psychoanalysis to do the opposite?

Laplanche’s (1997) argument runs as follows: in the bodily care of the child, the parent transmits to the child various sensuous signals or messages (*Botschaften*) that the child cannot decipher. These pure perceptual indices (*Wahrnehmungszeichen*) are destined to remain ambiguous, leaving the child open and vulnerable to the Other. The origin of fantasy resides in the child’s trying to make sense of such perceptions, indeed to create a story around them. Meanwhile, the adult’s relation to his or her own sexual unconscious continues to be baffling. In fact, it is this mystery that is transmitted as a message or oracle, causing the child to sense that the parent addresses it: the parent is “the other who ‘wants’ something of me” (661). Laplanche thus speaks of the “[i]nternal alien-ness ‘held in place’ by external alien-ness; external alien-ness, in turn, held in place by the enigmatic relation of the other to his own internal alien” (661). It follows that all identity, seen as an attempt at self-centering, will necessarily be destabilized by the unconscious and the arcanum that sexuality always represents. Laplanche wishes to preserve this openness, this “relation of address to the other and of vulnerability to the inspiration of the other” (665) precisely because it can serve as the source of creativity in individuals.

There are three moments in this description that I wish to draw out with the purpose of aligning it with the anti-identitarian thrust of queer theory. First, Laplanche never specifies the gender of either parents or child, moving his discussion away from the gendered Oedipal scenario that dominates psychoanalytic discourse. He thus deliberately leaves open to gender variation the fantasies that arise in the child’s imagination in response to the enigma. What this absence suggests is that Laplanche discounts the possibility of the development of a concrete, fixed sexual orientation in the individual or that the sexuality of the parents would predetermine the eventual sexual ori-

entation of the child, since, regardless, sexuality is inherently an enigma. Secondly, Laplanche further queers sexual self-identity by stressing that the “adult’s relation to his own unconscious, by unconscious sexual fantasies” (661) is not transparent. Moreover, this lack of intelligibility is why the child senses that it is addressed to begin with. Laplanche thus can be aligned with queer theorists such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick who wish to break away from a minoritizing view of homosexuality, which is to say, from it as a category restricted to a sexual minority. Although he does not say so explicitly, Laplanche implies that for all individuals, at the very least in their fantasy, there resides the potential for same-sex attraction or erotic excitability. The queerness of these fantasies — above all, the fantasy of seduction that the child harbors — is precisely why sexuality remains perplexing to the adult. Queer, in this case, cannot be limited to homosexuality or bisexuality but, in Ellis Hanson’s (1993) words, is “wonderfully suggestive of a whole range of sexual possibilities (deemed perverse or deviant in classical psychoanalysis) that challenge the familiar distinctions between normal and pathological, straight and gay” (137–38). Or, as Alexander Doty (1995) has put it, queer “marks a flexible space for the expression of all aspects of non (anti-, contra-) straight production and reception. As such, this cultural ‘queer space’ recognizes the possibility that various and fluctuating queer positions might be occupied [...] within the nonqueer” (73). Thirdly and finally, Laplanche’s essay stresses the importance of the Other in the seduction of the child, moving the focus away from a settled sexual identity unique to the individual; in fact, by virtue of this preeminence of the Other, his theory could be said to be anti-identitarian at its very base. In other words, Laplanche reminds us that it is something off, oblique, ambiguous, or “*verquer*” — *das Andere* in the Other that is at the source of the child’s attraction. What seduces the child is a certain queerness.

A few years before queer theory hit the academic scene in the early 1990s, as a scholar in German and comparative literature I had become enamored with psychoanalysis. It tantalizingly investigated those “deviant” and “perverse” possibilities that Han-

son later referred to as “queer.” Above all, I found in psychoanalysis the appealing exploration of the inherently pathological dimensions to the normative heterosexual family romance with which I could not begin to identify. But in the years since queer theory’s genesis, although there have been challenges to the traditional psychoanalytic explanation of homosexuality as failed Oedipal development (as I shall rehearse later in reference to the writings of Martin Frommer, Noreen O’Connor, Joanna Ryan, and Teresa de Lauretis), these criticisms have not come from a self-consciously queer theoretical camp. Queer theory’s most momentous work has been that of Judith Butler’s (1990, 1993, 1997) Freudian-inspired challenge to heterosexual ego formation. But there are very few psychoanalytically-informed theories of queer sexuality, indicating that queer theory has not explored the full potential psychoanalysis has to offer it, such as Laplanche’s recognition of the incoherence, inexplicability, and precariousness in sexuality. Nor has psychoanalysis benefited from the potential insights offered by definitions of queer as a sexuality deviating from a simplistic homosexual-heterosexual binary. I want to discuss other recent models (put forward by Leo Bersani, Tim Dean, and Lisa Diamond) that rethink sexuality outside of identity labels, followed by a consideration of pet love. But first I want to review briefly how psychoanalysis has classically examined the “homosexual” as an object of study in the very terms of “identity” that queer has called into question.

Psychoanalytic Identifications

The Oedipal structure of psychosexual development presumes as its telos a stable, fixed identity of personhood that rests solidly within a unitary gender role and unwavering sexual object choice based on the opposite of one’s own gender. At the heart of the problem with the Oedipal narrative of identity formation — together with its pathologized deviations for homosexuals as well as for women in general — is that it assumes closure: In the end the individual has arrived at a fixed sexual identity in accordance with a categorizable gender identity. It is incon-

ceivable that developmental models of psychoanalysis, given their mission of archeologically excavating and reconstructing psychic *Bildung*, would even approach sexuality as queerly incoherent — unless from the outset, as with Laplanche, sexuality is conceived as being mystifying and unexplainable. The classic, prescriptive course of maturation (parenthetically aside let it be noted that belief in this prescription is widely adopted by society despite its general scorn for Freudian concepts) calls for the child to identify with the parent of the same gender, with this identification then facilitating or grounding the desire for the opposite sex (see Fuss 1995). Identification and desire are thus 1) set up as binary, mutually exclusive opposites from each other and 2) seen to be determined exclusively by genital anatomy. In homosexuals, so the argument goes, the proper identifications are not lined up, resulting in a botched or counterfeit man or woman. Homosexuality thus becomes pathologized as a deviation from this identity formation and is considered to be a type of arrested development resulting in sexual immaturity. But when a failed Oedipal trajectory is claimed to be at the root of pathological resistance to heterosexuality, what is not recognized is that this trajectory itself is highly problematic. As Nancy Chodorow (1992) has pointed out, heterosexuality itself is a compromise formation. She suggests that psychoanalysts treat “all sexuality as problematic and to be accounted for” (104), not just homosexuality. All erotic passions, involving such characteristics as compulsiveness, addictiveness, humiliation, and so forth, apply to both sexual orientations. Moreover, she asks the striking question: “How do we reconcile a complex and varied view of the multiplicity of sexualities and of the problematic nature of conceptions of normality and abnormality with a dichotomous, unreflected upon, traditional view of gender and gender role or an appeal to an undefined ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity?’” (97).

I want to single out two challenges that have been mounted to the simplistic binary juxtaposition of identification and desire and what its implications have been for gay and lesbian life — by Noreen O’Connor and Joanna Ryan in their book with the telling title *Wild Desires and Mistaken Identities* (1993) and

by Martin Steven Frommer in his essay “Offending Gender Being and Wanting in Male Same-Sex Desire” (2000). Frommer criticizes the binary because of the stereotypes it creates about homosexuality as well as heterosexuality. The heterosexist normative assumption about love is that opposites attract (masculine men desire feminine women), with the correlative supposition being that gay male desire, which is to say the desire for likeness, must be aberrant and narcissistic. Frommer argues that “identity categories impose commonality and coherence by ignoring the actual diversity and ambiguity of lived life” (192). He intends to complicate these identity categories by adopting a “postmodern perspective regarding gender and sexuality which challenges the heterosexual–homosexual binary and the resulting discourse that has been used to define two different kinds of men: those who are straight and those who are gay” (192). He observes that the pursuit of likeness *and* difference are common to gays and straights and that the pull toward difference is not invariably benign or natural, for it can be an expression of defensive, rigid complementarity that reifies one’s narcissism. To give an example of how the latter works, he refers to an article by J. Hansell who suggests that underlying male heterosexuality is the anxiety of being too much like women, a fear that can be allayed by underscoring the *gender* difference by having *sex* with them instead. In other words, any feminine identification or homosexual feelings must be disavowed via reconsolidation of one’s biological gender, facilitated by espousing desire exclusively for the opposite sex. Women can be the object of sexual desire provided they are considered to be inferior and hence nonthreatening to masculinity. Frommer then gives an equivalent example of a gay male patient who sought out sexual relations with men he could regard as inferior to himself, in other words, by reifying difference: “Since with these men he most often played the role of the top sexually, he maintained a sense of himself that was protected from feelings of humiliation. Stuart’s ability to objectify hustlers allowed him to fend off anxiety and humiliation. He could ask for what he wanted sexually without fearing that he would be thought of as ‘a little girl’” (200). In

other words, anxiety about being identified with women could be equally present in both gay and straight men — as well as the capacity to pursue difference to shore up one's narcissism.

What Frommer does not address in this essay is that psychoanalysis itself has traditionally propagated the notion that gay men are feminized — a stereotype that Stuart himself fears and that likewise fuels straight male homophobia, as Hansell indicates. Frommer points out only one negative implication for gay men of the identification-desire or being-wanting dyad, namely that to desire someone of the same sex (with whom you identify) means you must be narcissistic. The converse model is to say that to desire someone of the same sex, you must therefore identify with the opposite sex: lesbians are masculinized women, while gays are feminized men. Same-sex object choice hereby becomes tethered to the overriding binaries of masculinity and femininity as well as activity and passivity. As Stephen Frosh (2006) summarizes in *For and Against Psychoanalysis*: “This line of thought, that sexual object choice is an aspect of gender identity, has been swallowed by most post-Freudian analysts, despite the obvious category confusions it involves and the everyday evidence that there is no necessary connection between object choice and gender identity” (236).

Successive generations of psychoanalysts (Karen Horney, Ernest Jones, Jeanne Lampl de Groot, Joan Rivière, and Joyce McDougall) have generated competing narratives about psychosexual development in order to invent explanations for this cross-gender identity. In fact, in so doing they hark back to gender inversion theories put forward by such pre-Freudian German sexologists as Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, Carl Westphal, and Magnus Hirschfeld, who in the latter half of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century described and classified various sexual and gender orientations. Westphal, in fact, coined the word “homosexuality” in 1869, whereas Hirschfeld can be called the first homosexual rights activist (see Bland and Doan 1998). Previously I referred to Frommer's clinical investigation of gay men; now I would like to turn to studies by Noreen O'Connor/Joanna Ryan and Teresa de Lauretis for their trench-

ant criticism of these post-Freudian psychoanalytic hypotheses regarding gender inversion that purport to structure lesbian identity.

In her influential study on the castration complex in female homosexuality, Karen Horney (1924) surmises that, on having to abandon the father as love-object, the young girl substitutes the object-relation to him with identification instead, replacing the earlier bond with the mother. To play the father's part consequently means to desire the mother (in a strange reversal of the notion that what prompted her desire for him and to have a child by him in the first place was envy of the mother). Similarly, Lampi de Groot in 1928 sees the young girl as going through the Oedipal renunciation of the mother in loving the father. Only when she is rejected by him does she regress to her previous love for the mother: female homosexuality is thus seen as a regression to an earlier state. Ernest Jones's contribution in 1927 to this masculinity complex thesis is his explicit phallocentrism: lesbians have "penis identification," while their "interest in women is a vicarious way of enjoying femininity; they merely employ other women to exhibit it for them" (cited in O'Connor and Ryan 1993, 52–53).

In their review of the psychoanalytic literature on homosexuality, O'Connor and Ryan report on how pervasive this theory of conflicted gender identity has been. Even as late as 1979, more than one hundred years after Ulrichs began writing on gender inversion, Joyce McDougall (1989) writes that the homosexual version of the Oedipal complex involves "*having* exclusive possession of the same-sex parent and [...] *being* the parent of the opposite sex" (206). O'Connor and Ryan (1993) trenchantly criticize the inflexibility and persistence of this gender bifurcation:

[...] there is no other alternative, no other way in which difficulties with femininity can be seen, except as a recourse to masculinity. Furthermore, to be like a man in these respects means that desire will inevitably be for a woman, if only unconsciously; there is no possibility of desiring a man from this position, or of desiring a woman from a "feminine" iden-

tification. The homosexual position is cast as an inevitably masculine one, involving a repudiation of femininity. (51)

Highly suspicious of the problematic concept of “gender identity” they observe that this formulation of “deviant” identity “blocks the exploration of what it means to desire another woman from the position of being a woman, what the nature of this desire could be” (120). Moreover it ignores the “huge range and diversity of conflicts that lesbian patients may have in relation to themselves as women, or about their bodies [...] [which] do not invariably amount to serious gender identity conflicts, and [...] are not necessarily specific to lesbians; they may also be experienced in various ways by some heterosexual women” (124).

Both O'Connor/Ryan and Teresa de Lauretis find more congenial the work by Helene Deutsch for her move away from the masculinity complex as well as her rejection of the notion that masculine and feminine roles govern lesbian relations. Equally troubling for them, however, is the centrality of motherhood in Deutsch's (1933) focus on the mother/child dyad. They do perceive, though, a note that points beyond infantile oral attachments: Deutsch observes in mature interactions of one of her patients “no sign of a ‘masculine-feminine’ opposition of roles,” but a vivacious oscillation between active and passive antitheses in her sexual relationships: “One received the impression that what made the situation so happy was precisely the possibility of playing *both* parts” (40). Deutsch here hints at a flexible adoption and reversal of mother-child re-enactments, a playful taking on of various roles that suggest that ego formation is not a matter of simplistic identification with one, immovable gendered position. De Lauretis (1994) also finds suggestive in Deutsch the notion of “consent to activity” offered by the mother/female partner: “encouragement given by a partner's physical participation in the sexual activity itself would then provide a knowledge of the body,” contributing “to the effective reorganization of the drives” (75). In the rest of *The Practice of Love*, de Lauretis goes on to argue that what is required are a proliferation of visual, verbal and gestural representations and fantasies

that “may serve as an authorizing social force” for lesbian sexual practices (76). To summarize O’Connor/Ryan and de Laurotis, then: what they seek is a move away from the constricting, Oedipally determined, dual-gendered identity configurations that have defined much psychoanalytic thought on homosexuality and that see it as re-enacting primitive or infantile attachments. Instead they envision a discovery of a variety and coexistence of positive identifications that would explore shifting erotic desires and fantasies.

The Need for Dis-identification

It is this line of reasoning that I wish to develop in the remainder of this chapter. What other ways do we have of conceiving identity formation for GLBTIQA+¹ persons outside of traditional psychoanalytic Oedipal accounts? And what models does psychoanalysis provide in order to think through these alternative imaginaries? As we have seen, queer thought resists the notion of a predictable narrative of psychogenesis that can be generalized to fit all homosexuals. But it cannot, of course, abandon the psychoanalytic notion of ego formation in the process. This being the case, is it not possible to loosen the constraining, self-assertive demands of the ego in order to respond more spontaneously — more queerly — to *das Andere*? Judith Butler (1993) has adopted Freudian tenets to outline the melancholic heterosexual ego formation, establishing how normative identity arises out of the reiteration or what she terms performativity of societal gender norms. However much she complicates and adds to the Oedipal trajectory toward heterosexuality, though, it could be argued that she also maps out a predictable path of development based on disavowal of love for the same-sex parent (71–72). Would it not be possible, by contrast, to wish a utopically queer ego formation for purported heterosexuals as well

1 GLBTIQA+ is an acronym that stands for gay–lesbian–bisexual–transgender–intersex–queer–asexual and allies. Plus (+) indicates adding such sexual orientations as pansexual or polysexual.

as for queers? Is there evidence of a queer potential in heterosexuality, so as to recognize how all intense, passionate sexual experiences and fantasies transcend ego boundaries that cling to social norms? Is not all sexuality, to speak with Laplanche, an ongoing enigma? Without denying in the least the social stigmatization of homosexuality and the lack of entitlement that queers face that straights can take for granted, can it not be said that the process of ego formation is a difficult, compromised journey for all?

In today's society, identity functions to provide coherence to the subject for the purpose of self-presentation to others. In consumerist culture, identity serves the purpose of controlling, commodifying, and marketing the subject; it is assumed like a menu of options chosen in a Facebook profile. In being, as they must, adopted and acquired through imitation, all identities will fail to satisfy and will be constituted by loss, hallmarked by their fragility, and segregate the individual into discrete categories. As Jacqueline Rose (1986) poignantly observes:

The unconscious constantly reveals the "failure" of identity. Because there is no continuity of psychic life, so there is no stability of sexual identity, no position for women (or for men) which is ever simply achieved. Nor does psycho-analysis see such "failure" as a special-case inability or an individual deviancy from the norm. "Failure" is not a moment to be regretted in a process of adaptation, or development into normality [...] "failure" is something endlessly repeated and relived moment by moment throughout our individual histories [...] there is a resistance to identity at the very heart of psychic life. (90–91)

Yet, despite such inevitable "failure," is it not possible to speak positively of identification and identity formation as adaptation — as harboring the potential for a productive resistance to the very norms that determine restrictive ego boundaries? For if our identities are the repository of abandoned ego cathexes, it does mean that various *Ichideale* can be introjected and as-

simulated over time, and that these must be welcomed and they will be multiple and contradictory. To give an example, to do so would be to take up Teresa de Lauretis's encouragement to artists to produce counter-hegemonic images of lesbian identity that will deviate from those that circulate in mass media and thereby provide alternative imaginaries for women. Identity in this case could mean the embrace of forms of difference rather than similarity and sameness. Yet, also, insofar as such images can never overlap with the self and will be rejected and abandoned, so too will they leave behind traces of loss and mourning.

What models do we have, then, of identification based on desire and love that are open to ambiguity and change — that take into account unpredictability and incoherence? Could it be that the queerly self-identified individual has less defensive ego boundaries open to such possibilities? To return to Laplanche's notion of enigmatic sexuality: sensitivity alone to this enigma means the recognition of an irreparable misfit. Dis-identification from heterosexuality and the constraints it imposes is important because it entails retaining a sense of openness to *das Andere*. Thus, rather than seeing, in the classical psychoanalytic interpretation, the homosexual as someone who has failed to adopt a heterosexual identity, I would argue that s/he productively dis-identifies with heterosexuality and the coerciveness and predictability of the Oedipal ego formation, all while acknowledging the pain it produces. This dis-identification would pave the way for more gender-variable identifications and introjections that occur queerly or *verquert* across any clear dividing line between homosexuality and heterosexuality or female and male. Openness to the incomprehensibility and enigma of sexuality is, to recall Laplanche, the source of creativity.

Judith Butler (1997) has theorized the repudiation of identification with homosexuality, followed by overcompensation by a masquerading of gender-normative behavior (132–66). Clearly, *queer* dis-identification likewise cannot arise as well without ambivalence and defensiveness, the anguish of having to forfeit and not be able to assimilate standardized, heteronormative

identities. One needs to stress here that insofar as psychoanalysis forthrightly acknowledges the pain resulting from the abandonment of former ego cathexes — as Rose puts it the “failure” of identity — it challenges those theories by Gilles Deleuze, Rosi Braidotti, Donna Haraway, and Elizabeth Grosz that celebrate the volatile, deterritorialized, nomadic subject whose mobility occurs largely without the trace of trauma, loss, and resistance. At the root of this ambivalence is the contradictory coexistence of diverse identifications within the ego. Yet it is this multiplicity, incoherence, transitoriness, and impossibility that make the term “queer” helpful for those individuals trying to find a language to reflect their disjointedness. The task of current psychoanalysis would be not simply to acknowledge the failure of previous conceptual psychic models but to adopt or develop hypotheses such as Laplanche’s that would help articulate why one feels queer. Here it is crucial to keep in mind the uniqueness of every individual’s circuitous path, which resists generalization into a theorem. As Eve Sedgwick (1993) notes: “‘Queer’ seems to hinge much more radically and explicitly on a person’s undertaking particular, performative acts of experimental self-perception and filiation [...] there are important senses in which ‘queer’ can signify only *when attached to the first person*” (9). I want to examine now a few recent forays that take as their starting point queer resistance to identity labels and to the impervious ego that clings to them. They then offer models for rethinking desire. In conclusion I want to contribute my own response to what these models imply, namely a queerly theorized pet love.

A Singular Love

In his contributions to *Intimacies*, co-written with Adam Phillips, Leo Bersani (2008) formulates what he calls “virtual being,” a part of ourselves that is psychically anterior to “the quotidian manifestations of our individual egos” and that is “unmappable as a distinct entity” (86). He claims that it is this virtual being that is in ourselves that responds in love to the same quality in others. This love replies to the “universal singular-

ity” in the beloved (“and not his psychological particularities, his personal difference”), as a potentiality of his own being (86). The emblematic advocate of such a love is Socrates. The sameness to which the lover reacts designates not a narcissistic love that bolsters the ego’s boundaries and would be “driven by the need to appropriate the other’s desire.” (29) Instead it signifies “the experience of belonging to a family of singularity without national, ethnic, racial, or gendered bodies” (86) or, as Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit (1999) state elsewhere, “a perceived solidarity of being in the universe” (80). What is crucial about Bersani’s formulations in terms of my previous discussion is his effort to frame this love for another person not based on particularities that would comprise his/her identity. He redefines this different sort of subjecthood as “a hypothetical subjectivity,” in other words not a self that would be defined, constrained in terms of its identity, desires, or its acts (2008, 29). The words “hypothetical,” “virtual,” and “unmappable” indicate that this love is unmoored from both gender and sexual identity. At the same time, they also resonate with the “enigma” that Laplanche sees the Other representing. Love can be defined as the open, non-defensive, vulnerable response to this enigma, to *das Andere*, or, cast differently, to the ideal possibility that another person in their very being represents. And, likewise importantly, despite its resistance to identity labels, Bersani’s “virtual being” characterizes what is quintessentially singular and unique in each and every individual, a point to which I want to return in discussing the work of Lisa Diamond.

One of the most articulate scholars forging new paths in the area of queer theory via psychoanalysis has been Tim Dean (2000). His research is significant because, via reference to Jacques Lacan, he more directly than Bersani casts desire as largely unbound by the gender of one’s object choice. Because he dares to conclude that desire can be neither homosexual nor heterosexual—that it is “beyond sexuality,” as the title of his book indicates—his work has been highly controversial especially among gay scholars. He writes: “By describing sexuality in terms of unconscious desire, I wish to separate sexual orienta-

tion from questions of identity and of gender roles, practices, and performances, since it is by conceiving sexuality outside the terms of gender *and* identity that we can most thoroughly de-heterosexualize desire” (222). As this excerpt indicates, desire would be fundamentally anti-identitarian and anti-normative, rendering, to quote Jacques Lacan (2001), the “‘normality’ of the genital relation” is “delusional” (187). The Lacanian psychoanalytic categories that Dean (2000) finds productive for understanding desire outside socially rigid identitarian categories are the “real” and “*objet a.*” As “a conceptual category intended to designate everything that *resists* adaptation” (230), the real moves our understanding of sexuality outside the framework of the imaginary and symbolic, hence outside the realm of “images and discourses that construct sex, sexuality, and desirability in our culture” (231). In a passage that echoes Laplanche on the child’s sexual incomprehension, Dean explains how the real arises and why it is linked to an enigmatic sexuality:

Freud’s claims on behalf of infantile sexuality entail recognizing that sex comes before one is ready for it — either physically or psychically. In the case of children it seems relatively clear what being physically unprepared for sex means: psychically it means that the human infant encounters sexual impulses — its own as well as other people’s — as alien, unmasterable, unassimilable to its fledgling ego, and hence ultimately traumatic. As a consequence of this capacity to disorganize the ego or coherent self, sexuality becomes part of the unconscious; and it is owing to this subjectively traumatic origin that Lacan aligns sex with the order of the real. The real — like trauma — is what resists assimilation to any imaginary or symbolic universe. [...] [H]uman sexuality is constituted as irremediably perverse. (232)

Following the same reasoning, Dean (2001) concludes that “in the unconscious heterosexuality does not exist” (138) and that “[o]ur identities, including sexual identity, invariably conflict with our unconscious” (133).

Dean (2000) then finds in Lacan's notion of the "*objet a*" a means to articulate how this unconscious, enigmatic desire finds representation. *Objet a* is "a term intended to designate the remainder or excess that keeps self-identity forever out of reach, thus maintaining desire" (250). It is associated with various, multiple erogenous zones on the surface of the body that displace and substitute for the original erogenous focus on the mouth. In the very multiplicity, excess, or polymorphous perversity that it comes to signify, *objet a* becomes decoupled from any gender bias or organization and thus is instrumental for a queer, anti-heteronormative reassessment of sexuality. But it also queers any domestication of homosexuality. Dean summarizes thus: "what psychoanalysis considers essential to desire is precisely that it obtains no essential object: *desire's objects remain essentially contingent*" (239).

Dean's statement is both confirmed and challenged by a fascinating study outside the arena of psychoanalysis that nonetheless has strong repercussions for its clinical practice — Lisa Diamond's (2008) book *Sexual Fluidity: Understanding Women's Love and Desire*. A professor of psychology and gender studies, Diamond interviewed numerous women belonging to a sexual minority (lesbian, bisexual, and nonspecific) and found that the persons to whom they were attracted depended on circumstance and varied over time: in other words, their objects of desire were radically contingent. They were also largely independent of gender. But these desires were not so conditional as to be independent of specific persons, suggesting that Dean's (2000) conclusion on the "impersonality of desire" (240) is male-oriented and untrue to women's experiences. Nonetheless, Diamond's research on female sexual fluidity has vast implications for a queer theorization of desire and substantiates the anti-identitarian, queer academic scholarship of Bersani and Dean.

If queer theory has been accused of erasing and marginalizing female specificity, for instance, in its focus on "camp, traditionally a gay men's paradigm" (Wilton 1995, 7), then Diamond rewrites a queer component back into women's sexuality, albeit exclusively cis-gender women. She deliberately maintains how

female sexuality differs from male sexuality, with the implicit critique that female same-sex desire has been cast according to a male-centered model that strictly divides same-sex from opposite-sex orientation. She also notes how the label queer feels comfortable for many women who wish to eschew sexual identity labels and to better account for the fluidity of their desires. But the terms Diamond (2008) uses herself are quite unique and specific to her study. Her findings are nothing short of astonishing: after interviewing over the course of ten years close to ninety women belonging to a sexual minority (along with a smaller heterosexual comparison group), she discovered that more than two thirds had changed their identity labels from the time of the first interview (65). Diamond prefers her term “nonexclusivity” to bisexual to characterize this fluctuation in attraction to or relationships with both sexes, because the bisexual label presumes a significant, steady, and equal degree of interest in both men and women rather than the openness to the option or prospect of a relationship with someone of either sex. Not only did the women she interviewed acknowledge this flexibility but they also “underwent identity changes (such as adopting bisexual or unlabeled identities) specifically to accommodate such possibilities” (83). The heterosexual comparison group also demonstrated similar results: “fluidity appears to manifest itself similarly in both heterosexual and sexual-minority respondents, the primary difference being that heterosexual women take the gap between their physical and emotional attractions more seriously than do sexual-minority women: in their estimation, if their attractions to women are exclusively emotional, then they are probably not gay” (79). Indeed, Diamond later notes, physiological studies done on women’s sexual arousability indicate that women regardless of their acknowledged orientation unconsciously respond to erotic images of both men and women.

Diamond’s study is fascinating for its other results as well. First, she found that early experiences do not predict later ones: being in a heterosexual or homosexual relationship earlier in life is no guarantee of gender attraction at a different stage in life, nor can either be regarded as a transient phase towards a more

stable sexual orientation. Though not random, a woman's sexual desires remained fluid over her lifetime. Although she could not intentionally change her orientation, her desires would be sensitive to situation and context. Secondly, Diamond came to the conclusion that the majority of her interviewees were attracted to a person independent of that person's gender. In fact, she proposes that "the capacity for person-based attractions might actually be an independent form of sexual orientation" (186) or adopted as an additional aspect of sexual variability.

How, then, do these findings line up with the various queer psychoanalytic theories discussed previously? Diamond's deduction that women fall in love with the person rather than gender contradicts Dean's claim about the "impersonality of desire," indicating that his Lacanian model might not be adequate for describing female desire. One can conceivably attribute this difference to how men and women are socialized: women are taught to be more attentive to others and consequently less inclined to claim the prerogative of the impersonal. Be that as it may, Diamond's theories do align with Lacan's (1975[1972-73]) notion that "*quand on aime il ne s'agit pas de sexe*" (27) in both meanings of the term "*sexe*"; the phrase could be translated as either "when one loves it's not about having sex" or "when one loves, the sex of the person one loves is immaterial." Furthermore, Diamond's work confirms Dean's emphasis on the contingency of desire. She also substantiates Bersani's notion that one falls in love with another person for the possibility, virtuality, and singularity that he or she represents regardless of and in the face of the particularities of that person's identity, whether these are related to gender, sexuality, nationality, and so on. Diamond's claim that women's sexuality and arousability are variable, unpredictable, and gender-indeterminate likewise overlaps with various aspects to the enigma of sexuality that Laplanche addresses. Above all, women's preference for de-labelling along with the realization that to assume a sexual identity would be to compromise a sense of self-integrity ring true to the anti-identitarian tenets of queer theory.

Other questions arise, however, for practicing psychoanalytic clinicians on the basis of Diamond's work. What new vocabulary does psychoanalysis need to adopt to adequately help either cisgender or transgender individuals organize fluid sexual desires? How would one, for instance, begin to reconstruct an etiology of a patient's variable desire given that there is no obvious developmental path to chart? If a woman can switch affections at any point in her life and this fluidity is regarded as normal and pervasive, to what extent are foundationalist narratives of psychosexual life, especially the Freudian or Lacanian psychogenesis of hysteria, misleading if not downright harmful? Butler, too, has formulated a hegemonic, normalizing narrative for the development of gender and sexual identity: how would her narrative of ego formation accommodate Diamond's findings? Or would Diamond corroborate Butler's (1993) finding that the ego can be an ongoing, volatile, fragile composite, especially across gender boundaries? Butler moreover has similarly challenged the notion of lesbian sexuality as "an impossible monolith" (85). Finally, to what extent would Diamond concur with Helene Deutsch's study of one female patient that indicated she derived pleasure from adopting various role-playing with her lovers, in other words, that she found happiness in escaping the pre-patterning of identity strictures? Diamond seems to indicate that risking the incoherence of identity is liberating for the women she interviewed, insofar as they are involved in an ongoing process of acknowledging and affirming their fluctuating desires. Her findings indicate that queer love is actually the norm of sexuality for sexual-minority women — even possibly for those with a heterosexual orientation. "Queer," "person-based attraction," and "nonexclusivity" as anti-identitarian categories offer these women the possibility for better grasping the intricacies and vitalism of their psychic life. Would individuals who self-identify as asexual then also find such anti-identitarian categories attractive and appropriate? Why or why not? The larger issue at stake here is that, if psychoanalytic theory and practice cannot offer GLBTIQA+ individuals flexible, enriching

support, simplifying identitarian categories will step in to normalize, regulate, supervise, and police.

Beyond Sexual Identification: Pet Love

In concluding I briefly want to draw out the queer implications of Bersani's, Dean's, and Diamond's work but move in a different direction; I want to propose that one's sensual and emotional life is non-exclusionary in other ways that dualistic identity categories do not grasp. In thinking over the last several years about how my life has been enriched by my canine companions, I have frequently wondered about the queer consequences of that attachment. To queerly embrace dog love means exploring a sensuality, pleasure, comfort, and commitment consciously outside the norms of heterosexual cohabitation. Put differently, dog love has the potential of continuing and furthering the work of queer studies that interrogates the binaries — you are either masculine or feminine, gay or straight — that arise from inflexible gender and sexual identity categories. Our life with its fluctuating sensual needs, devotions, and obsessions can be complex and inconsistent in ways that call into question self-definitions based primarily on sexual preference. When the object of affection is a pet, male–female or hetero–homosexual binaries used to define one's intimate self become less relevant. In other words, to admit that one's object choice might not always be human diminishes the power of sexual identity categories that socially regulate the individual. As Kathryn Bond Stockton has written, “[t]he family pet swerves around the Freudian Oedipus in order to offer an interval of animal and thus a figure of sideways growth” (113).

To cast the matter in another light, perhaps the reassurance and calm a canine companion brings arise precisely because transspecies love rises above the constrictions that gender and sexuality place upon the human body. Pet devotion has the potential to question the regulating strictures and categories by which we define sexuality, eroticism, family, and love, though not in the banal sense that it offers different forms of genital stimulation, indeed quite the opposite. Dog love corroborates

Lacan's dictum: "*quand on aime, il ne s'agit pas de sexe.*" Those who have an ardor for dogs know that their passion is unavailable and inaccessible elsewhere. Being independent of gender and sexuality, which is to say freed from either loving or being loved in terms of identity, this affection is cathartic. Because in one's emotional life the dog plays out various "roles" — friend, parent, child, lover, sibling (think pack member) — it cannot be restricted to any one of these. Hence the companion species is more than just a substitute, for it transcends these very categorizations. Even over the course of a day, the role the human being assumes in the relationship varies and mutates. Moreover, for the pet devotee the singularity or uniqueness of that one specific animal is what constitutes the bond as one of love, recalling Diamond's theory that attraction is individual-based not gender-based. Yet despite such particularity, insofar as this love betokens a profound kinship between species, in Bersani's words, it is founded on the consciousness of shared being in the world.

"O Lord, let me be the person my dog thinks I am." This popular bumper sticker expresses the unconditional nature of the dog's affection for its human companion. In other words, the dog loves us apart from our identity — whether this is defined by gender, race, class, or age. To be so loved also means we are loved, in Bersani's terms, for our virtual, ideal self that the dog perceives, responds to, indeed creates in us, freeing us from arbitrary social identities. Pet love can also be liberating because it redefines what we usually understand by the term "intimacy." Clearly, to love one's dog means to enjoy the sensuality of stroking and petting it. But this closeness means something far more profound. By virtue of its companionship, the pet offers nearness to one's very self, a certain calmness or equilibrium. This private, quiet, deep-seated familiarity and co-situatedness indicate a type of "intimacy." Synonyms for intimate include not only "close" and "dear" but also "innermost" and "intrinsic." Intimacy allows the bond with the animal to be affirmed. It entails a self-exploration whereby one opens oneself to life with a wholly different species. Not only is this other species ultimately foreign to us, but the *connection*, however quotidian, is mysteri-

ous too insofar as it miraculously arises between species. It is an intimacy that is also an “extimacy” (Lacan 1999[1959–60], 139), an openness to *das Andere*.

I have deliberately used the word “pet” here as opposed to the rather ungainly term “companion species.” “Pet” evokes the gentleness and soft sensation of stroking fur, but more importantly it is a term of endearment and affection. We often give the people we love pet names, and frequently these will be those of smaller animals, such as “mouse.” Paradoxically, pet names seem somehow to signal the singularity of the beloved one, more so even than his or her personal name. They represent the attempt to get away from social regulations and the constraining roles that stifle the expression of feeling. Pet names thus raise the question of whether people can have pet love for each other! Could it be that human relations are happiest when people reach the stage of viewing each other as beloved animals? An example of such intimacy would be when one does things together without feeling the need to converse.² Whatever form, then, “pet” love assumes, be it for a human or nonhuman being, and as long as the term “pet” does not imply a structure of domination and control, it has the potential of freeing one from identity strictures.

Although one of the most beautiful and sensitive dog stories, *Topsy*, was written by Marie Bonaparte (1940) and translated into German by Sigmund and Anna Freud while they were awaiting their exit visas to England, not one of these psychoanalysts delved in any great detail into the theoretical implications of their love for chows. Although animals have famously played a role in Freud’s case studies of the Wolfman and the Rat Man, psychoanalysis has been oddly quiet on the topic of pet love. A queer perspective, however, offers an illuminating angle from which to consider the psychic complexities of pet love, above all its capacity to loosen the “regulatory regime” of identity categorizations (although one must avoid reducing this love to something therapeutic).

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