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# THE FORECLOSURE OF THE DRIVE

## Queer Theories, Gender, Sex, and the Politics of Recognition

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### **Abstract**

Following Leo Bersani and Lee Edelman, one might say that, by insisting on sexual minorities' quest for social recognition, Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity runs the risk of desexualizing sexuality. On the other hand, so-called antisocial queer theory, and Edelman in particular, could be held responsible for depoliticizing queer politics, by depriving its subject of political agency. Aim of this article is to mediate between these two positions in queer theory on the level of a theory of the subject, by means of Teresa de Lauretis' understanding of the concept of the drive.

### **Keywords**

Queer theory, antisocial theory, politics and psychoanalysis.

## Resumen

Siguiendo a Leo Bersani y a Lee Edelman, se podría sostener que, insistiendo en la búsqueda de reconocimiento social por parte de las minorías sexuales, la teoría de la performatividad de género de Judith Butler corre el riesgo de dessexualizar la sexualidad. Por otro lado, las así llamadas teorías *queer* antisociales, en particular las de Edelman, podrían ser consideradas como responsables de despolitizar la política *queer*, privando a su sujeto de la capacidad de actuar políticamente. El propósito de este artículo es mediar entre estas dos posiciones de la teoría *queer* sobre el plano de una teoría del sujeto, utilizando la interpretación que Teresa de Lauertis provee acerca del concepto de pulsión.

## Palabras clave

Teoría *queer*, teoría antisocial, política y psicoanálisis.

Since 1990, when *Gender Trouble*<sup>1</sup> was published, Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity has permanently reshaped the contours of feminism, and because of the way it challenges the subject of feminist politics, it constitutes today an unavoidable term for comparison also for sexual difference thought. Anyway, aim of this article is not to reconstruct the debate of the past thirty years or so around Butler's theory, nor it is to side either with Butler's queer feminism or with sexual difference feminism. Nor it is to assess whether Butler has contributed either to radicalize or to domesticate feminism. I will leave the task of these assessments to others; for my part, I am going to situate Butler's thought not so much within debates in feminism and gender studies, as within sexuality studies and queer theories. Her intervention in the latter fields has raised questions that are partly similar to, but also largely different from, those that emerge in the former arena.

Often considered as one of the founding texts of queer theories, *Gender Trouble* has contributed to the rediscovery of psychoanalysis within critical sexuality studies, after Foucault's attempt to depart from Reich's and Marcuse's Freudian-Marxism, and from the theories of sexual revolution it gave rise to. However, important critiques of Butler's works have been voiced exactly by other queer theorists who have played, like her, a crucial role in reviving psychoanalysis. In particular, some of them held Butler's theory of gender performativity responsible for saturating the sexual subject with politics, and for turning queer politics into a liberally-inspired claim for recognition. Drawing on Laplanche and Lacan, especially gay scholars such as Leo Bersani and Lee Edelman have reacted to Butler's notoriety by restaging the category of the drive –that is, “sex as such”, not as gender identity– to the very core of queer theories. Teresa de Lauretis, instead, interestingly attempted to mediate the subject consumed by the drive, as conceived of by these authors, and the subject shaped by biopolitical gender norms, as theorized by Butler.

In this article, I am going to account for this debate through the concept of foreclosure, which Butler adopts in her critique of Freud's and Lacan's heterosexism. Before delving into the issue at stake, I will define such concept and, concomitantly, illustrate the role I attach to the use of psychoanalysis in queer theories, and in theory in general.

*1. Not just a metaphor:* According to Freud's well-known definition, psychoanalysis is meant to treat neurosis, as it is able to interpret the conflicting demands of the

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1. J. Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge, London-New York, 1990, second edition, 1999.

ego that are at stake therein. Yet, it becomes helpless when confronted with psychosis, which cannot be deciphered because the relationship between the subject and the world is compromised. To understand the causes of psychosis and turn it into the object of psychoanalysis, Lacan draws on the concepts developed by Freud and builds up his own theory of psychosis. As Lacan points out in his 1956 seminar, while Freud deploys the term “Verdrängung” to refer to the psychic process leading to neurosis, commonly translated as “repression”, in the Wolfman case the word he uses to describe the path to neurosis is “Verwerfung”, which Lacan translates as “forclusion”, French for “foreclosure”.<sup>2</sup> Characteristic feature of neurotic repression is, for Lacan, the return of the repressed object. What is repressed comes back in the form of an enigmatic symbol to disturb the psychic life of the subject,<sup>3</sup> though with no consequences on its relationship with reality. With psychosis, instead, foreclosed traumas, desires and drives are blanked out to such an extent that the subject cannot recognize them as their own. Hence, they move not to the symbolic order, Lacan argues, but to the Real, and they return to the subject “from the outside”, that is, in the form of oppressive hallucinations that sink the subject into an “abyss” and provoke a “rupture”, or break, in its relationship with reality.<sup>4</sup>

In these pages, I will use the word “foreclosure” metaphorically, yet not quite so. In my understanding, Butler has employed the same usage. In her latest book, there is a much clearer interest in political philosophy than in psychoanalysis. The latter is crucial, instead, to *Gender Trouble*, *Bodies that Matter*<sup>5</sup> and *The Psychic Life of Power*.<sup>6</sup> There, Butler borrows conceptual tools from psychoanalysis to point out its complicity with what she names “heterosexual matrix”. In particular, she argues that Freud’s and Lacan’s theories on the incest taboo and the Oedipus complex are marked by the radical erasure of homosexual desire, which she refers to in terms of “foreclosure”. Through a similar kind of argument, I hold that Butler’s theory of gender performativity is also marked by a foreclosure: that of the sexual drive. Additionally, as much as the theory

2. In the Wolfman case (“Aus der Geschichte einer infantilen Neurose”, in *Sammlung kleiner Schriften zur Neurosenlehre*, 4, 1918), as the title (*From the History of an Infantile Neurosis*) reads, Freud relates the story of a neurotic. Subsequent literature, however, tends to conceive it as an instance of psychosis, on the basis of further testimonies on the analysand Sergej Costantinovič Pankëev, who was not healed by the psychoanalytic treatment, as Freud erroneously contends.

3. “What comes under the effect of repression returns, for repression and the return of the repressed are two sides of the same coin. The repressed is always there, expressed in a perfectly articulate manner in symptoms and a host of other phenomena” (J. Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book III, The Psychoses 1955-1966*, Routledge, London-New York, 1993, p. 12).

4. “Whatever is refused in the symbolic order, in the sense of *Verwerfung*, reappears in the real. [...] There is an abyss here, a temporal submersion, a rupture in experience. [...] The essential distinction is this –the origin of the neurotic repressed is not situated at the same level of history in the symbolic as that of the repressed involved in psychosis, even if there exists the closets of relations between their contents”, *ibid.*, p. 13.

5. J. Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”*, Routledge, London-New York, 1993.

6. J. Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1997.

of gender performativity can be interpreted as the return of the foreclosed heterosexual desire to haunt psychoanalysis, Bersani's and Edelman's so-called antisocial theories can be equally interpreted as the return of the foreclosed drive to haunt queer theory. A metaphor indeed, yet not quite so. Mine is a methodological choice too, aimed at understanding the subject of queer theories (and of theory in general) not only as rational, but also as emotional, sentimental, affective, and sexual: a subject whose theoretical production is involved in psychophysical processes.

2. *The foreclosure of homosexual desire*: The story I am about to tell unfolds dialectically, from one critique to another. It begins with the critique addressed by Lacan to Freud. Next to his deployment of Freudian categories to conceptualize a theory of psychosis that Freud never thought of, Lacan revisits the Oedipus complex in order to claim that the feminine and masculine positions do not directly proceed from biological differences between female and male bodies, but belong to the symbolic order. Judith Butler follows Lacan on this point, but raises two fundamental objections to both Freud and Lacan. First, Butler claims that the accounts of incest prohibition developed by the two psychoanalysts entail a foreclosure of homosexual desire. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler illustrates Freud's conception of primary bisexuality as a common trait of all human beings. As she recounts, in *The Ego and the Id*<sup>7</sup> Freud depicts primary bisexuality as including two coexisting heterosexual desires, thereby radically denying the very existence of homosexual desire. Additionally, she reminds us that homosexual desire, in Freud, is the negative outcome of the Oedipus complex, originating from the melancholic identification with the parent of the opposite sex, invested with love and subsequently lost. Consequently, Butler asserts that, following Freud, one shall admit that heterosexual desire is not the "normal" outcome of the Oedipus complex (as the Freudian view would hold), but it results from the melancholic identification with the parent of one's own sex, who is also invested with love and subsequently lost. Freud does not come as far as this conclusion precisely because of the foreclosure of homosexual desire. Such foreclosure constitutes, therefore, the implicit assumption of his theory of incest prohibition.

In her later *Bodies that Matter*, Butler discusses Lacan's *The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I*<sup>8</sup> and *The Signification of the Phallus*,<sup>9</sup> where the French

7. S. Freud, *Das Ich und das Es*, Internationaler Psycho-analytischer Verlag, Leipzig-Wien-Zürich, 1923.

8. J. Lacan, *Le stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je telle qu'elle nous est révélée dans l'expérience psychanalytique*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1949.

9. J. Lacan, "La signification du phallus" (1958), in Id. *Écrits*, Les Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1966.

psychoanalyst distances himself from Freud. Sexual identification, in Freud, is the immediate result of either the presence or the absence of the penis, and corresponds to one's desire for the parent of her or his own sex. Lacan, instead, argues that corporeal morphology is imaginary, sex is a symbolic position, and the Oedipus complex is brought about by the need to regain the fusional relationship with the mother. This need makes little boys and girls long for what their father has and their mother lacks, namely, the phallus, conceived of as the privileged signifier of the Law.<sup>10</sup> Because of their penis, boys identify themselves as carriers of the phallus and acquire male identity, while girls, lacking the penis, identify themselves as the phallus itself, thereby acquiring female identity. According to Butler, this theory of sexual identification is also marked by the foreclosure of homosexuality, because Lacan makes room for two sexual positions only: either to carry or to be the phallus. Such positions correspond, respectively, to the male and female roles in the heterosexual relation, and exclude all other relationships of the subject to the phallus, as those which might be possible in homosexuality.

Additionally –this is the second fundamental critique addressed by Butler to the psychoanalytical canon– the privileging of the phallus as the signifier of the Law and its structural identification with the penis lead Lacan to reify a contingent product of the imaginary, and stabilize the phallus by inscribing it within the symbolic realm. In other words, Butler argues that Lacan does not conceive of the symbolic order as, actually, a social and political order, which does not transcend culture because it is itself cultural. In line with Foucault's genealogical method, she interprets those identities associated with sexual binarism not as unchanging realities, but as contingent effects of a biopolitical apparatus. Thus, Butler counters both Freud and Lacan with a highly counterintuitive thesis: that gender difference is not so much the product of a cultural elaboration of bodily differences or symbolic positions, as a set of biopolitical norms that shape bodily differences, symbolic positions and gender identities. Drawing on Adrienne Rich's concept of compulsory heterosexuality, Butler calls this set of norms "heterosexual matrix". To her, the foreclosure of homosexuality in Freud and Lacan is rooted in the binary and heterosexist apparatus of power, which regulates sexuality in our societies and is strengthened by both authors.

3. *The foreclosure of the sexual drive*: In her dialogue with Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Žižek included in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*, Butler clarifies that, in her view,

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10. According to Lacan, the phallus, as privileged signifier, originates the subject's ability to signify.

foreclosure is not just a psychic mechanism producing psychosis, but also a political one producing the subject by means of radical exclusions: “a way in which variable social prohibitions work”.<sup>11</sup> In *The Psychic Life of Power*, she claims: “A repressed desire might once have lived apart from its prohibition, but [a] foreclosed desire is rigorously barred, constituting the subject through a certain kind of preemptive loss”.<sup>12</sup>

In these texts, such preemptive loss is that of homosexual desire, and Butler’s main interest is to account for the subject who emerges within the heterosexual matrix. But one might question whether her understanding of sexuality under the categories of gender and desire runs the risk to enact another fundamental foreclosure. In *Homos*, Leo Bersani implicitly objects to Butler what, in *Is the Rectum a Grave?*,<sup>13</sup> he explicitly objects to Foucault, namely, the desexualisation of sexuality operated by its politicization, that is, by the translation of sexual identity and desire into a dialectics of power (norms) and resistance, which in Butler is mostly conceived as a struggle for recognition<sup>14</sup>. According to Bersani, Foucault and Butler overlook a fundamental component of sexuality, which psychoanalysis terms “the drive” (“Trieb” in German, “pulsion” in French). Indeed, the subject of the foreclosed homosexual desire as conceptualized by Butler is one that aims to displace the heterosexual matrix: they challenge the normative system that foreclosed them, in order to change the system and find inclusion in it. Although Butler, following Emmanuel Lévinas,<sup>15</sup> theorizes the ethical primacy of the other over the self, similarly to the Foucauldian subject who resists the *dispositif* of sexuality, the Butlerian subject committed to the subversion of gender roles is ultimately activated by an individualistic quest for pleasure – a quest for cultural and physical survival, for a liveable life, for societal recognition, and for full belonging to the human community.

11. J. Butler, E. Laclau, S. Žižek *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*, Verso, London-New York, 2000, p. 149.

12. J. Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, p. 23.

13. L. Bersani, 2010, “Is the Rectum a Grave?”, in *October*, 43, 1987; second edition in Id., *Is the Rectum a Grave? And Other Essays*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago-London, 2010.

14. “But if the kind of investigation I have in mind brings us up against some politically unpleasant facts, we may discover, within the very ambiguities of being gay, a path of resistance far more threatening to dominant social orders than vestimentary blurrings of sexual difference and possibly subversive separations of sex from gender”. “I referred earlier to an important project in recent queer theories, especially as formulated by Judith Butler: that of citing heterosexual (and heterosexist) norms in ways that mark their weakness in them – ways that will at once expose all the discursive sites of homophobia and recast certain values and institutions like the family as, this time around, authentically caring and enabling communities. Genet can perhaps contribute to the critical rigor of this project by providing a perversely alien perspective”, L. Bersani, *Homos*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.)-London, 1996, pp. 76 and 152.

15. E. Lévinas, *Totalité et Infini*, Martinus Nijhoff, La Haye, 1961; Id. *Autrement qu’être ou au-delà de l’essence*, Martinus Nijhoff, La Haye, 1974.

Instead, in the wake of Freud's *Three Essays on Sexual Theory*,<sup>16</sup> and of Laplanche's interpretation particularly,<sup>17</sup> Bersani contends that the sexual subject is governed by a drive that segregates them from human society. This produces a perverted pleasure, which undermines both the instinct of procreation and that of self-preservation. Therefore, the sexual drive comes to coincide with the death drive—the latter understood not as the search for physical pain and suicidal tendencies, but mainly as an enjoyment produced by the symbolic dissolution of identity, by self-shattering, and by the erasure of the boundaries that separate the subject and the world. That is to say, the subject governed by the drive does not seek pleasure or societal recognition. On the contrary, they are masochist and caught up in a drive that makes them drip with a kind of *jouissance* far beyond the pleasure principle.

For Bersani, but also for Edelman, who reinterprets Bersani's thought within a Lacanian framework in *No Future*,<sup>18</sup> the drive is what most sharply defines both straight and queer sexual experiences. However, within the heterosexist symbolic order—the only one available, for both Lacan and Edelman—the negativity of the drive is transferred onto homosexual intercourse only, which cannot be rescued by reproductive ends. This way, heterosexual sex is invested with the political meaning of perpetuating society and the human species, hence is perceived as “natural”, whereas homosexual sex constitutes a threat to meaning itself because of its infertility, and as such becomes “unnatural”, “abnormal”. Following Julia Kristeva,<sup>19</sup> Butler would say “abject”; and Butler would partake in the struggle of sexual minorities for the recognition of their gender identity and affective relationships, and for the re-definition of kinship. In *Antigone's Claim*,<sup>20</sup> for instance, she turns Antigone into the symbol of sexual minorities' aspirations to become intelligible as humans and subvert the heterosexual matrix. In *No Future*, Edelman engages in polemics with Butler on this, and urges queer subjects to stay outside signification and intelligibility. He invites them to keep occupying the dark space of negativity as they always did, with no hope that any form of social recognition, and laws on same-sex marriage, surrogacy and adoption suffice to do away with it:

So Antigone may well depart from her tomb at the end of Butler's argument, returning to life in the political sphere from which she was excluded, but she does so while

16. S. Freud, *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie*, Deuticke, Leipzig-Wien, 1905.

17. J. Laplanche, *Vie et mort en psychanalyse*, Flammarion, Paris, 1970; Id., *La révolution copernicienne inachevée (Travaux 1967-1992)*, Aubier, Paris, 1992.

18. L. Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theories and the Death Drive*, Duke University Press, Durham-London, 2004.

19. J. Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'horreur: Essai sur l'abjection*, Édition du Seuil, Paris, 1980.

20. J. Butler, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship between Life and Death*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2000.

preserving the tomb itself as the burial place for whatever *continues* to insist outside of meaning, immune to intelligibility now or in any future yet to come. She emerges from her tomb, that is, only to claim, for those condemned to unlivable lives on account of unintelligible loves. [...] Ironically, Butler's reading thus buries Antigone once more –or buries in her the *sinthomosexual* [the queer] who refuses intelligibility's mandate and the correlative economy that regulates what is "legitimate and recognizable."<sup>21</sup>

Since the beginning, Butler herself was well aware that an understanding of political action as the claiming of rights is limited. In her latest work, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*<sup>22</sup>, she contrasts the juridical sovereignty of the state with street politics, that is, with the corporeal politics of assembly. Nevertheless, according to Bersani and Edelman, despite her focus on vulnerability and her will to challenge the heterosexual matrix, the reason why her understanding of political agency as struggle for recognition forecloses the drive lies in her partial incapacity to take distance from a liberal framework. Within this framework, the subject is ultimately pushed by the quest for utility and personal pleasure –quite similarly to the individual theorized in contractualism, who sets up sovereign power to live in peace and prosperity. However, Bersani's and Edelman's attempts to rethink the subject through the concept of drive challenge the conceptualization of political action within the liberal framework which, willing or not, shapes our understanding of the political. Edelman, indeed, does not complement his polemics against Butler's theory of recognition with an alternative, and abandons queer subjects to their own negativity and solitude, which prevent them from political action.

6. *A neurotic theory of the subject*: One might say, with a metaphor (but not just a metaphor), that Butler's critique of Freud and Lacan returns the foreclosed homosexual desire to psychoanalysis. Similarly, the so-called antisocial turn in queer theory inaugurated by Edelman's book returns the foreclosed drive to queer theories. And while Foucault's and Butler's politicization of sexuality runs the risk to desexualize sexuality, antisocial theories, and Edelman in particular, are liable to depoliticize queer politics by depriving its subject of political agency. In Edelman, the uncanny force of the foreclosed drive comes back, but it makes queer subjects incapable of political action, thereby haunting the possibility of queer politics itself. What lesson shall we draw from this sequential series of critiques? Are we to give in to the psychotic (or better, schizophrenic)

21. L. Edelman, *No Future*, p. 105.

22. J. Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge-London, 2015.

split between the subject of politics and the subject of sexuality? Maybe a different conclusion is possible, at least on the terrain of a theory of the subject: a neurotic solution, so to say, where the drive is not foreclosed but repressed, hence returns to the subject and disturbs, but does not impede, political action. In partial disagreement with both Bersani and Edelman, I would like to make the following point: that it is possible to reinstate sex as the core of queer theories without necessarily dismissing the constructivist paradigm initiated by Foucault's research on sexuality and later developed by Butler's research on gender performativity. It is therefore not my task to partake in the struggle of antisociality against relationality and recognition, of the apolitical *jouissance* of the drive against the political subversion of gender roles. In my opinion, it is much more interesting to detect the points these different politico-philosophical stances have in common than to focus on their frictions, which make the contrast too simplistic.<sup>23</sup>

An interesting attempt to keep the Freudian concept of the drive and the Foucauldian category of biopolitics together is carried out, for instance, by Teresa de Lauretis. In *Freud's Drive*,<sup>24</sup> de Lauretis explains that, in Laplanche's and Bersani's interpretation of Freud, the sexual drive does not coincide with the sexual instinct, for it is a perversion of it. Indeed, in his *Three Essays*, Freud contends that, despite surfacing at an early stage, sexual drives do not emerge directly from the infant's biological needs, as from the arousal that the infant experiences while being fed, washed and touched by caregivers.<sup>25</sup> The drive does not originate from the body, Laplanche and de Lauretis conclude, but "sticks onto" the bodily surface, thereby configuring an intermediate region between the inside and the outside, the somatic and the psychic. This region does not properly belong to the subject: the subject rather loses itself through it into the other and the world. Whereas Bersani and Edelman confront psychoanalysis with Foucault's constructivism, de Lauretis argues that precisely in this middle region do psychoanalysis and constructivism meet. Indeed, the subject's exposure to the manipulation of the other is the condition of possibility, not only for the installation of the drive, but also for the production of biopolitical identities.

23. L. Bernini, *Apocalissi queer: Elementi di teoria antisociale*, Edizioni ETS, Pisa, 2013; Id., *Le teorie queer: Un'introduzione*, Mimesis, Milano-Udine, 2017.

24. T. D. Lauretis, *Freud's Drive: Psychoanalysis, Literature and Film*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2008.

25. To provide an example: according to Freud, "sucking with delight" is a masturbatory activity of the infant, which reactivates the arousal of the oral area initially stimulated by the mother's breast and/or bottle. The oral drive, therefore, leans onto the feeding instinct, not on that sexual instinct which Freud deems "natural". To him, the latter surfaces only in puberty and aims at the heterosexual coitus for procreative purposes; but it does not erase once and for all other perverse (hence non-productive) drives.

7. *Being fair with Foucault*: In the wake of de Lauretis, my claim is that Bersani has pointed too hastily to Foucault, in his *Homos*, as the one responsible to desexualize constructivist queer theories' understanding of sexuality<sup>26</sup>. For Bersani, Foucault was unable to conceptualize the disturbing obscenity of the drive when he came to reject the use of psychoanalysis in political theory. But actually, in *The Will to Knowledge*<sup>27</sup> Foucault did not criticize Reich and Marcuse's Freudo-Marxism<sup>28</sup> for its disturbing obscenity; on the contrary, he held this theory responsible for using psychoanalysis in order to provide an over-reassuring understanding of power and desire: to promise a final liberation of the human from negativity and their complete subsumption into the social order<sup>29</sup> (or into humanity, as Butler would say). Elsewhere, Foucault himself shows that psychoanalysis can be used differently. In *The History of Madness*,<sup>30</sup> he invites to "be fair with Freud", and to recognize his pivotal contribution to the dialogue over the obscure and apocalyptic "unreasoning" that positivist psychology has been trying to silence. Additionally, in *The Order of Things*, Foucault considers (Lacanian) psychoanalysis an ally when he carries out an archaeological critique of the modern dream to turn "man" into an object for science. Psychoanalysis, he holds, is not a general theory about the human, but an investigation of its external boundaries. It is not a human science, therefore, but a counter-science that dissolves the human into that "region where death prowls, where thought is extinguished, where the promise of the origin interminably recedes"<sup>31</sup>. In contrast with Bersani, my claim is that these passages from Foucault are telling of Foucault's very exploration of the region theorized by de Lauretis as the region of the drive. In this region, subjects are exposed to the intervention, not only of the powers that shape their identities, but also of the drives that make their identities explode with excitement. In this region, sexual minorities have been relegated to for a long

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26. Foucault's constructivist theory of sexuality constitutes the background not only of Butler's theory of gender performativity, but also –to make just other three examples– of Jasbir Puar's research on homonationalism (*Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, Duke University Press, Durham-London, 2007), Joseph A. Massad's research on gay imperialism (*Desiring Arabs*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2007), Paul Preciado's research on farmacopornographic regime (P. B. Preciado, *Testo Yonqui*, Espasa Calpe, Madrid, 2008; B. Preciado, *Pornotopía: Arquitectura y sexualidad en "Playboy" durante la guerra fría*, Editorial Anagrama, Barcelona, 2010).

27. M. Foucault, *La Volonté de savoir: Histoire de la sexualité I*, Gallimard, Paris, 1976.

28. W. Reich, *Die Sexualität im Kulturkampf*, Sexpol Verlag, Kopenhagen, 1936; H. Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, Vintage Books, New York, 1955; Id., *One Dimensional Man*, Routledge, London, 1964.

29. Foucault contrasts a repressive conception of power that he attributes to Reich and Marcuse, with a productive conception of power. According to the latter, power constitutes the subject as well as their own sexual identity –therefore, the subject cannot get rid of power once and for all. This is the constructivist hypothesis that Butler herself borrowed, and has inspired many subsequent queer reflections.

30. M. Foucault, *Folie et déraison: Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*, Plon, Paris, 1961.

31. M. Foucault, *Les Mots et le choses: Une archéologie des sciences humaines*, Gallimard, Paris, 1966; English translation, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, Vintage Books Edition, New York, 1994, p. 382.

time, and from there they have never been ultimately rescued, either by equal marriage and social recognition or by neoliberal hyper-hedonism. There, the corpse of Antigone still lies, but not as far from the political sphere as one might deduce from Edelman's polemics against Butler.

In *Homos*, Bersani himself, while tracing back the origin of the sexual drive to "the biologically dysfunctional process of maturation in human beings", seems to suggest that the *jouissance* connected to the drive does not threaten the affiliation of the subject to the political sphere "from the outside", for it is a psychic process, if not "internal", at least "liminal" to politics itself:

Overwhelmed by stimuli in excess of the ego structures capable of resisting or binding them, the infant may survive that imbalance only by finding it exciting. So the masochistic thrill of being invaded by a world we have not yet learned to master might be an inherited disposition, the result of an evolutionary conquest. This, in any case, is what Freud appears to be moving toward as a definition of the *sexual*: an aptitude for the defeat of power by pleasure, the human subject's potential for *jouissance* in which the subject is momentarily undone.<sup>32</sup>

The *sexual*, therefore, is bound to go back to politics in spite of all our efforts to do away with it. As Adriana Cavarero has recently reminded us drawing from the thought of sexual difference, every human comes to the world unarmed, defenseless, and totally dependent on the "inclination" of the other (traditionally their mother) upon them.<sup>33</sup> This original exposure to the other's care, power and eventually violence, is what endows biopolitics (or more precisely, the biopolitical apparatus that Foucault calls *dispositif* of sexuality) with the capacity to discipline the subject's gender identity according to historically determined criteria for normalization that guide caregivers. Hence, this original exposure makes possible a collective action geared toward the subversion of the normative system from which subjects emerged. Additionally, it enables the displacement of the symbolic order which, *pace* Lacan and Edelman, is contingent, as Butler rightly contends. The sexual drive, as it is interpreted by psychoanalysis, represents the obscene double of maternal care, and as such it is perversely involved in all the above mentioned biopolitical processes. Certainly one cannot claim for a social and juridical recognition of it, but queer thinkers and movements should at least acknowledge its presence at the borders of the political sphere, as what is repressed and returns to disturb the access of the sexual subject to the social order. Bersani and Edelman are right in

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32. L. Bersani, *Homos*, p. 100.

33. A. Cavarero, *Inclinazioni: Critica della rettitudine*, Raffaello Cortina Editore, Milano, 2014.

claiming that the drive is antisocial; but at the same time the drive is enmeshed with the social, and interferes with the biopolitical production of sexual subjects whose struggle for recognition cannot but lead to misrecognitions –whose belonging to the human community cannot but be unfull. “Sex as such” is, and simultaneously is not, a political factor.<sup>34</sup> It is one of the causes of the discontents of society, one might say once again in Freudian terms.<sup>35</sup> But this does not imply that the subject is irredeemably split between sexuality and politics: the foreclosure of the drive is rather an outcome of the paranoid liberal attempt to domesticate humans by isolating them from the relationships to the others on whom they depend –both for their survival and for their *jouissance*.

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34. S. Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor*, Verso, London-New York, 2007.

35. S. Freud, *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*, Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag, Leipzig-Wien-Zürich, 1929.