

Introduction

Left of Queer

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“Left of Queer” seeks to contextualize queer theoretical production since the 2005 publication of the *Social Text* special double issue “What’s Queer about Queer Studies Now?” In that issue, editors Jack Halberstam, José Esteban Muñoz, and David L. Eng sought to expand queer theory to address issues of US empire, race, immigration, diaspora, militarization, surveillance, and related concerns in the wake of 9/11 and its political aftermath. “A renewed queer studies,” the editors wrote, “insists on a broadened consideration of the late-twentieth-century global crises that have configured historical relations among political economies, the geopolitics of war and terror, and national manifestations of sexual, racial, and gendered hierarchies.”¹

“What’s Queer about Queer Studies Now?” focused, in no small part, on developing notions of “subjectless critique” with the purpose of destabilizing both proper subjects and subject matters of queer theoretical inquiry. “That queerness remains open to a continuing critique of its exclusionary operations has always been one of the field’s key theoretical and political promises,” the special issue editors argued. “What might be called the ‘subjectless’ critique of queer studies disallows any positing of a proper subject *of* or object *for* the field by insisting that queer has no fixed political referent.”² Indeed, the value of subjectless critique lay in situating queerness as something that “can neither be decided on in advance nor be depended on in the future.”³

As put forward by the editors of “What’s Queer about Queer Studies Now?,” subjectless critique thus opened up space for a multiplicity of subjects of and for queer representation and, equally important for the current special issue, their ongoing deconstruction. It insisted that queer-

ness is produced within numerous identitarian regimes that undercut any singular or cohesive notion of the subject, any positing of primary origins. At the same time, it drew heightened attention to geopolitical issues that were otherwise constituted as eccentric to the realm of queer theoretical inquiry. Subjectless critique provided a means to renew queer studies through a dislodging of its sanctioned subjects and critical assumptions in favor of a mobility of reference. Paradoxically, then, the 2005 special issue posited the reinvention of queerness as contingent on its potential obsolescence.

So what is left of queer now? In this special issue, we examine significant theoretical as well as historical developments since 2005. We focus on three broad themes, which we discuss in turn. First, we revisit the potential utility of an expanded subjectless critique by interrogating not only the formative exclusions of queer studies but also the contingent material conditions through which “proper” queer subjects and identities emerge in our contemporary landscape. Second, we return to long-standing debates on materialism concerning the incommensurability of queer studies and Marxism that arose in the early 1990s with the inception of the former field. Third, we trace strands of queer critique that lay bare the institutionalization of queer studies as its own particular brand of US area studies. Relatedly, we explore how emergent theoretical debates in debility, indigeneity, and trans revise and rework subjectless critique, histories of materialism, and queer studies as American exceptionalism, pushing their critical scope and effects in new and unexpected directions. Indeed, as we argue further below, it is the sublation of these key “third terms,” *debility*, *indigeneity*, and *trans*, that produce, manage, and animate new queer subjects for recognition in the political sphere today.

To begin, while the interventions of subjectless critique in 2005 focused predominantly on the evolving subject of liberal rights and representation, “Left of Queer” investigates a broader predication of the queer subject—the social structurations of queerness—to explore how subjects emerge and cohere through geopolitical exceptionalisms that render the material conditions of their production opaque. What populations, and what processes of relationality and sociality, are left out of this worlding? Although the field has not always deployed *queer* in an entirely nonreferential manner, the radical potential of queer critique has often turned on its analyses of gender and sex as “racial arrangements,” indexing complex histories and contingent futures of racial capitalism.⁴ “Left of Queer” continues these analyses by considering how the biopolitics of race and sex function on a global scale to securitize and even militarize bodies and borders while touting the proliferation of diverse subjects of recognition as liberal progress and advancement.

Since 2005, the United States has elected its first Black president in

what was naively proclaimed as a “postracial” America, followed by an openly white supremacist president; AIDS has gone from a death sentence to a manageable chronic disease in the global North (at least for those with health insurance) even as it continues unabated in the global South; the 2008 financial crisis has resulted in the mass disenfranchisement of the racialized poor while the wealthiest of the global elite have further elevated their fortunes under unyielding policies of structural adjustment; Black Lives Matter uprisings since 2014 have focused global attention on the centrality of anti-Blackness to police brutality, incarceration, and extrajudicial killings in the United States; far Right and ultranationalist governments have been (re)elected and/or strengthened in both democratic and authoritarian states; and humanitarian emergencies of unprecedented scale have resulted from the entwinement of war, violence, occupation, and environmental disaster, from Puerto Rico to Gaza, Myanmar, Syria, Yemen, and the southern US border, inciting numerous refugee and immigration crises.

In the meantime, normative LGBTQ subjects in the West, as elsewhere, have been further incorporated into (neo)liberal regimes of rights and recognition, of marriage and kinship, of markets and property, and as reproductive actors and agents of the state (in military service, for example), often at extreme peril to racialized, immigrant, undocumented, immiserated, and dispossessed communities. As homonormative and homonationalist subjects continue to be interpellated into the logics of queer liberalism and pinkwashing today, these precarious groups are further pathologized and abandoned.⁵ These inclusions and exclusions speak to the morphing capacities of queerness, demonstrating that LGBTQ alignments with nationalist and racist ideologies are in fact not aberrations but, rather, constitutive of a normative queer liberal rights project itself.

From this perspective, we offer the essays and roundtables comprising “Left of Queer” as detailed examinations of the undersides of queerness and its nearly three decades of institutionalization. Today, queer studies is part and parcel of numerous fields and disciplines in the US academy, most prominently queer literary studies, gay and lesbian history, and law and legal advocacy, among others. At the same time, this special issue is a sampling of compelling scholarship—by no means exhaustive—exploring the evolution of geopolitical polarities, their conditions of production, and their social and political effects.

Beyond subjectless critique, “Left of Queer” also revisits longstanding impasses between queer studies and Marxism concerning questions of materiality. To be clear, as Jordy Rosenberg and Amy Villarejo note in a special *GLQ* issue on “Queer Studies and the Crises of Capitalism,” Marxism and political-economic analysis have long been deployed in the foundational texts of the study of sexuality. Moreover, queer of

color critique “ups the ante on traditional approaches to economic questions.”⁶ Despite this, how have such impasses between queer studies and Marxist theory come to be, and how have these impasses effectively truncated potential claims for alternative conceptualizations of materialism, whether in terms of the economic, empirical, or corporeal?

How, for example, does queer studies rethink traditional divisions between labor and care, and public and private, under neoliberal pressures and regimes of austerity? This question necessitates a turn to the global in order to consider how queer studies and area studies might supplement each other.⁷ Moreover, the emergence of new materialisms, object-oriented ontology, and affect studies has reinvigorated debates about which materialities matter and how they matter under biopolitical regimes of discipline and control. In turn, what do these bodies of scholarship bring to queer studies today, and how do they rework our understandings of value, epistemology, and ontology—of subject/object distinctions themselves?

Finally, to the extent that queer studies has become its own particular form of US area studies—one that takes American exceptionalism, its political economy and popular culture, as its unspoken premise—it is necessary to expand our queer archive to consider historical experiences outside the global North written in languages other than English. As an uninterrogated and unmarked version of American studies, queer studies determines what archives in the global South are legible and, indeed, matter. For instance, what are the recognizable forms of sexual injury and wounded attachments that animate normative politics of queer resistance distinct from the endemic sexual violence of what scholars such as Puar and Maya Mikdash have labeled “permanent war” in the Middle East?⁸ How do we interrupt conventional debates in queer theory as well as disrupt area studies as fetishized knowledge?

Since 2005, numerous collections and special issues have broadened the sustained exploration of the operations of *queer* as well as *trans* in a global frame and, in particular, from the perspective of the global South: “Queer Politics and the Question of Palestine/Israel” (2010); “Sexuality, Nationality, Indigeneity” (2010); “Black Queer Diaspora” (2012); “Decolonizing the Transgender Imaginary” (2014); “Area Impossible: The Geopolitics of Queer Studies” (2016); “Queer Inhumanisms” (2015); and “Trans Studies in las Americas” (2019), to name just a few prominent examples.⁹ Taking stock of this trajectory of publications, queer studies has already been implicitly “provincializing” itself over the past decade.¹⁰ As such, “Left of Queer” not only indexes the remainders of queer theory that mark the threshold of institutionalized knowledge production but also highlights the material conditions of production under which such remains are animated through empire, globalization, neoliberalism, and biopolitics today. By identifying the field’s geographical and episte-

mological specificities and by questioning the circulation and portability of its axioms, we highlight circuits of US empire that form the geopolitical conditions of possibility for knowledge production and political representation.

In this regard, this special issue also provincializes queer studies by extending critical conversations initiated in the 1990s on queer diasporas, transnational sexualities, and queer of color critique that sparked critical debates on the naturalizing assumptions of the nation-state.¹¹ “Left of Queer” emphasizes recent trajectories in the field that continue to insist on the radical potential of queer critique beyond the politics of normalization: on specters of materialism (Liu), geographies of safe space and securitization (Hanhardt and Puar), the biopolitics of global labor and care work in disability studies (Crosby and Jakobsen), the grounding of the Indigenous body as (im)materiality (Byrd), and the groundlessness of trans sex (Aizura). We bring heightened attention to geopolitical circuits of empire that form the conditions of possibility for queer theories to travel, more often than not as privileged vehicles for teleological histories of liberal progress and human freedom, and for the biopolitical sorting of livable, grievable, and precarious lives. Politically left of the current mainstreaming and institutionalization of queer studies—as well as the universalizing impulses of (neo)liberal recognition, representation, and rights for queer subjects on the global stage—the contributors in this volume examine what is left of queer outside the political, economic, and cultural mandates of the sovereign nation-state and the liberal individual as its prized citizen-subject.

Subjectless/Materialist/Exceptionalist

One of queer studies’ key theoretical possibilities lies in the continuing interrogation of its exclusionary operations. The politics of subjectless critique today demands an explicit acknowledgment of how the political referent of queer studies has often presumed an ever-expanding sphere of identifiable subjects laying claim to liberal rights, recognition, normalization, and inclusion. The decriminalization of sodomy, the ability to serve openly in the military, same-sex marriage, issues of bathroom access—the continuing expansion of LGBTQ+ is predicated on a signifying chain of identity as analogy and the awarding of legal rights and entitlements through a politics of incremental recognition. In the context of US exceptionalism in the postwar period, identity politics is said to begin with race and civil rights, wending its way through gender and (second-wave) feminism and then through sexuality, starting with lesbians, gays, and bisexuals; moving onto queer and trans subjects; and now working its way through the intersexed (I), asexuals (A), and beyond (+). While exclusions

and injuries come in numerous forms, the US legal system recognizes only intentional discrimination that causes demonstrable harm to an identifiable individual. It is not designed to address intersectional identities and group injury nor is it capable of redressing material inequalities such as the maldistribution of life chances and the ethical conditions by which life might be livable.

The cleaving of Marxism from queer studies—indeed, the atomization of sexuality, race, and class as antagonistic and incompatible identities separated by distinct politics and platforms—returns in an especially lethal form with the contemporary rise of right-wing nationalisms and call-out cultures across the political spectrum. These movements pit white, black, brown, and yellow as well as straight, gay, and trans against one another, undoing long histories of political coalition building, trenchant critical analyses of racial capitalism, and influential theories of intersectionality and assemblage that have emerged from fields as diverse as Black feminisms and decolonial theory. Insofar as poststructuralist Marxisms also have critiques of identity and identity politics that exceed the primacy of the classed subject, the impasse between queer studies and Marxism is less about which identities matter and more about the divergent ways in which the fields interrogate relations of social structuration.

In his opening contribution to this special issue, “Queer Theory and the Specter of Materialism,” Petrus Liu turns a fresh eye to this problem. He insists that the sexual subject of queer studies and the class subject of Marxism are not distinct entities. Both must relinquish their proprietary relationship over these categories. Instead, Liu conceives both queer theory and Marxism as materialist theories foregrounding the constitutive sociality of the self. Liu’s approach to subjectless critique as one grounded in processes of social structuration that cut across the two fields allows him to bring together Judith Butler’s “view of gender as the constitutive sociality of the self” and Marx’s “labor theory of value as the ethical imbrication of self and Other.” Refusing to reduce queer theory to the primacy of sexuality and Marxism to the primacy of the economic and the material, Liu observes that the ascription of positivistic content, political priority, or moral urgency to the laboring subject in the latter field is predicated on forgetting the fact that “Marx is interested not in the standpoint of the immediate producer but in the fact that under capitalism labor becomes both a commodity (that one can sell) and a social relation.” Both Marxism and queer studies underscore the fact that the subject is necessarily opaque to itself and eminently imbricated in a web of social relations and responsibilities, a self with primary ties to unknown and unknowable others. As such, Marxism and queer theory are better approached not as oppositional but as dialectical.

In effect, disavowals of Marxist analyses as hostile toward sexuality,

and repudiations of sexuality as “merely cultural” from a Marxian point of view prevent us from understanding the production and reproduction of subjects precisely *as* recognizable identities. Indeed, Liu’s turn to “queer Marxism” as a common ground for examining materialist predications of the subject focuses our attention away from the reproduction of the means of production and toward the reproduction of the relations of production, to borrow a critical concept from Louis Althusser.¹² This move allows us to index multiple approaches to materialism in global Marxisms and connect them to the predication, history, and relations of the subject in ways that pose significant geopolitical implications for what’s “left of queer.”

For example, the evolution of LGBTQ+ in US identity politics finds its global corollary today in a discourse of international human rights in which sexuality becomes a privileged metric to assess “civilized” and “barbaric” cultures. The “woman question” (how illiberal nations and peoples in the Third World treat their women) in prior decades has now evolved into the “homosexual question” (how illiberal nations and peoples in the global South treat their LGBTQ communities). This developmentalist narrative presumes a universal subject and history, not only of queerness but also and notably of capitalism, as scholars such as Rosemary Hennessy, Miranda Joseph, and Kevin Floyd underscore.¹³ Through the maintenance of a reductive opposition between global North and global South, the developmentalist use of *queer* as identity thus becomes an important foil for the globalization of capital in its imperial travels, fostering the production as well as erasure of particular queer subjects and subjectivities.

In the age of neoliberalism and human rights, the colonial dynamic of white men saving brown women from brown men has been reconditioned as white folks (straight and gay) saving brown homosexuals from brown heterosexuals.¹⁴ As sexuality becomes a primary language—perhaps *the* primary language—of modern citizenship, a model of queer rights and representation in the West assumes an ever-expanding ambit in a global politics of recognition. Focusing on the predication of the queer subject of geopolitics exposes a problematic and antagonistic relationship between sexuality and class that denies histories of coevalness. This relationship underwrites particular parochialisms as universal discourses of neoliberal development on both the individual and the structural level.

In sum, returning subjectless critique to the geopolitical field allows us to apprehend both US queer studies and area studies as particular forms of specialized, regional knowledge, with specific histories of social production beyond the subject of the Western gay consumer-tourist or the queer native informant. It allows us to apprehend the emergence of both a universal queer subject of rights and recognition and a particular queer native informant consigned to the waiting room of history as two

sides of the same representational coin. The Western queer and the post-colonial queer—including the “transnational activist” that sutures them together—are neither developmental nor oppositional categories. Rather, they must be approached as dialectic counterparts created through the same social relations of production that expose the capitalist (economic), nationalist (political), and liberal individualist (cultural) assumptions foreclosing other histories of materiality and other social relations and relationalities. Therefore, to reframe these debates, we must expand our queer archives and attend to the complexity and porosity of what is signaled by *materiality* in the first instance.

How, then, are materialities of gender, sexuality, religion, region, race, and caste concealed by the apotheosis of the global queer subject under neoliberal development rather than seen as the precipitate of these social relations? In the roundtable “Beyond Trigger Warnings: Safety, Securitization, and Queer Left Critique,” conveners Christina B. Hanhardt and Jasbir K. Puar extend subjectless critique by connecting domestic and global histories of security and securitization—by which they mean “geopolitically inflected contextualization of the debate on safe space”—with a familiar subject of queer studies: sexual precarity on campus, as well as vulnerable student populations in need of protection through trigger warnings, campus alert systems, and Title IX safeguards.

To begin to flesh out the relations between materialism, subjectless critique, and geopolitical exceptionalism in the context of safe space across local, national, and international scales, we bring together interdisciplinary thinkers who may or may not consider queer studies a primary or organizing rubric for their scholarship. For example, Paul Amar’s comparative work on the logics of sexual securitization in nation-states in the global South is often relegated by queer studies scholars to area studies scholarship, while it is seen by regional specialists as unable to represent a proper area studies method, not only because it moves across and connects different areas of the global South but also because of its insistent focus on gender and sexuality. Other roundtable contributors such as Neel Ahuja, Kwame Holmes, and Sherene Seikaly work on securitization of bodies in relation to the biopolitics of settler colonialism, anti-Blackness and state violence, and technologies of surveillance and control. In this context, Aniruddha Dutta and Fatima El-Tayeb might be considered the only two “proper” scholars of queer studies. Yet, we argue that such cross-pollinations of disparate bodies and fields of scholarship advance the future of queer theory in necessary and important directions.¹⁵

This group of interdisciplinary scholars challenges the US exceptionalist model embedded in debates about safety and securitization on campus by asking for whom is space safe, and how is that safety secured through the production and control of other bodies constituted as unsafe?

Furthermore, in what ways are the classroom and campus life in US universities intrinsically embedded in global relations of militarization, securitization, risk management, and dispossession that connect them, for instance, not only to (gay) urban gentrification but also to border walls and checkpoints dividing nation-states and occupied territories? De-exceptionalizing queer studies entails de-exceptionalizing scenes of sexual violence as the privileged form of social violation on our campuses and the “neoliberal (white) student consumer-subject” as the central victim in need of protection in debates about campus safety and sexual assault.¹⁶ As Holmes incisively reminds us in the context of now-ubiquitous use of cell phone alert warnings systems on US campuses, it “goes without saying that a campus of powerfully activated and anxious white people does not and cannot represent a safe space for people of color.” Equally so, campus alert systems “undercut feminist authority by simplifying the terms of safety, leaving us safe from the more complicated discomfort we experience when asked to interrogate our personal relationship to rape culture.” In this regard, the turn to subjectless critique in queer theory has been crucial not only in problematizing the unitary subject of queer studies but also in excavating the manifest relations of affect and bodies—indeed, in analyzing the emotional austerity that these automatic alert systems seek to impose as a kind of affective biopolitics.

In moving (around) the concept of safe and unsafe space to the scales of biopolitics and geopolitics, this roundtable seeks to materialize the relations of safety to security and consider the varied material, administrative, and pragmatic methods deployed to craft campuses into what Amar terms “security labs.” That is, universities now function as security laboratories for the deployment and honing of technologies of surveillance and control that all too eerily resonate with the constant invocation of locations such as Gaza as laboratories for testing new weaponry and policies, and stretch the imagination of what might register as inhabitable and livable life. In the case of Palestine, how do homonationalist discourses of pinkwashing that instrumentalize the persecution of queers—fundamentally related to the developmental narrative of democracy and liberal rights in Israel as elsewhere—function as political alibis for the assertion of safe space? In this context, Seikaly notes that in her research “safety and security are mottos of dispossession. In Palestine, the Israeli state’s mobilization of security and safety work to dispossess the Palestinian. The Palestinian stands as a threat to security, not a subject who may desire security.”

Safe space thereby takes on global dimensions, forcing us to trouble it as a universal ideal while acknowledging the US university as one primary site for the production and reproduction of sexual, racial, and economic stratification, as well as scientific knowledge for the advancement and proliferation of precarity. Modes of controlling bodies and affects are

connected through the replication of these labs and the repetition of their forms across wildly different contexts, as well as through the transnational circulation of technologies of surveillance and control. Security walls, checkpoints, and occupations thus become legible, necessary components in any serious debates about trigger warnings, which could as easily refer to difficult or disturbing course content as to the pulling of a trigger on a gun at an open-carry campus or the firing of bullets into unarmed civilian populations protesting government violence and suppression. Expanding subjectless critique to account for geopolitics does not mean a privileging of the global South or any one particular region. Rather, it demands that we see the social relations and connections between and among these regions differently. The notion of safe space interrogates geopolitical exceptionalism—especially that of US queer studies and its sanctioned subjects—while simultaneously contextualizing the varying material conditions that create specters of safety and regimes of security in specific locales and for specific populations.

Christina Crosby and Janet R. Jakobsen's article "Disability, Debility, and Caring Queerly" examines the material conditions and the occluded economies of care, labor, and care work that are necessary for the disabled subject of rights discourse to cohere and be recognizable as a political actor. By drawing explicit attention to these material and affective assemblages of precarity and care, Crosby and Jakobsen reveal otherwise hidden interfaces between disability and debility—that is, between disabled subjects and debilitated populations who come together in an economy of care, to allow, in this case, Crosby to appear "to be functioning as an independent and autonomous individual." Like the "Beyond Trigger Warnings" roundtable, Crosby and Jakobsen elaborate the otherwise submerged "chains of caring labor" in a global geography that allow (or disallow) the disabled subject to cohere as such, noting that denaturalizing the Marxian chain of value offers "many possible points of rupture. Each transition point, whether from use value to exchange value, good to commodity, labor to labor power, or labor power to exchange value, might be otherwise."

Crosby and Jakobsen's exploration of the social contours of value at every stage of production lead them to argue that "a queer reading of value challenges any idea of a natural sociality or of a naturalized use value and instead seeks to build a more just conceptualization of need and its relations." In addition, they note that while all of these stages necessitate the collectivization of a social body, the privatization of care work and its occlusion in the private space of the home transform what should necessarily be a collective movement into an individual transaction. For this reason, they emphasize, "one important move in shifting the condi-

tions of domestic work is to ensure that the value of the work is inscribed not in individual affect but, rather, in widespread social acknowledgment of the need for caring labor.”

It is this acknowledgment and denaturalization of use value that underpins several concrete examples they raise of how both caring queerly and a queerer Marxist approach supplement each other. For instance, referencing Crosby’s own reliance on racialized, immigrant, and feminized laborers who assist her with what are routinely posited as the natural bodily habits of shitting and pissing, they note that

queer, trans, feminist, and disabled people all have to care about bathrooms—whether they will be harassed in using a public bathroom, whether bathrooms are in fact the private, safe spaces that they are normatively claimed to be, who cleans those bathrooms, and whether the facilities are accessible to all. Thinking about—caring about—bodily waste as fundamental to human well-being is to make a very queer claim about the use value of the work required to ensure the flourishing of all.

Foregrounding the processes of defecating and urinating is a queer chain of value indeed. This chain elucidates a “geopolitical model of disability” that accounts for the distributed and repressed modes of debilitation at all points of value production that inform a political dialectic between recognizably abled and disabled subjects. Like Liu, the coauthors index subjectless critique in queer studies by drawing our focus, paraphrasing Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, on “the production of the worker rather than with the work’s production.”

Caring queerly thus underscores that “not all labor that keeps up everyday life is reproductive, nor is it all functionally supportive of capitalism.” Tracing the global economic networks that make care workers available for the “proper” subjects of care and unequal distributions of agency, Crosby and Jakobsen call for a politics of justice that does not reproduce such social relations, that acknowledges the multiple ways in which dependency does not automatically disqualify a disabled person from being a liberal, rights-bearing subject. What’s “left of queer” might take into account such assemblages of care work and caring that underwrite the supplementary relations of disability and debility, recognizing their political value as they shift “both individual and social futures out of the linear progression from one generation to the next, meaning that not all futures are reproductive futures.”

Notably, Crosby and Jakobsen’s analysis illustrates that there is no proper subject of debility. In fact, debility does not presume a subject.¹⁷ Instead, it exposes the material and affective processes that operate within social relations of labor and care across different spaces and regions that

work to interrogate various exceptionalisms. As such, debility functions as the sublated third term that secures the binary of nondisabled/disabled, the latter being the traditional liberal model that produces the recognizable disabled subject of political rights and representation. (This dynamic is not dissimilar to how *indigeneity* and *trans* might also be resignified in queer theory through an expanded subjectless critique, as we elaborate below.) At the same time, Crosby and Jakobsen are queer Marxist theorists who are rarely if ever are interpellated as such. Their trenchant analyses of political economy are often subsumed in queer studies, subjected to the false dichotomy analyzed by Liu. In this regard, we might characterize both Liu's and Crosby and Jakobsen's contributions as expanding approaches to queer theory and Marxism: for both, queer Marxism is not just a possibility but a necessity.¹⁸

In her contribution to this special issue, "What's Normative Got to Do with It? Toward Indigenous Queer Relationality," Jodi A. Byrd brings yet another valence to subjectless critique by drawing attention to the paradoxical (im)materiality of the ground—the dispossession of land that facilitates not only the emergence of the settler colonial state but also the grounds for the figuration of political subjects of representation. For Indigenous studies, subjectless critique is not a form of speculative theorization. The erasure of indigeneity is the condition of possibility for the nation-state and liberal representation to emerge, pointing to the limits of subjectless critique as traditionally understood in queer studies and its politics of normalization. On the one hand, "a globally situated subjectless queer studies . . . could offer sustained engagements with gender and sexuality, as both are constituted intersectionally at the site of race, empire, diaspora, militarism, and colonialism." On the other hand, that lack of fixity is "still and importantly grounded through the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous lands." Indeed, Byrd observes, "multiplicity in the nonalignment of bodies, anatomy, desire, pleasure, and identity runs the risk of asserting Indigenous difference as the very ground that both reproduces and then defies the binaries of settler genders." The queer subject needs not only its non-Western others (as Liu argues), but also its Indigenous others within to maintain the cultural variability that makes possible the "repetition with a difference" that has come to define gender performativity.

Like debility, indigeneity can be approached not as a subject or object at all. Rather, it can be seen as an occluded third term haunting the process and production of Native-settler identities, a binary that presumes the annihilation of Native populations while securing more recognizable racial dichotomies such as Black-white and gendered dichotomies such as heterosexual-homosexual. Simultaneously, it also erases histories of Black-Native relations and commingling.¹⁹ Indigenous alterity, Byrd

writes, “does not and is not matter precisely because colonization stripped the ground from beneath our feet.” Whether construed as land, as base, as territory, as wellness, or as center, the curious object of ground “persists as a guiding principle for decolonization, but it also becomes the locating authorization for claims, for meaning, for rightness, and for identity, subjectless or not.”

Insofar as subjectless critique in Indigenous studies falls outside the representational orbit of individual rights or the normative pull of state sovereignty, insofar as it is precisely the stolen ground on which settler subjects appear as Native objects disappear, Byrd demonstrates that ground itself operates as a complex actor, an amalgamation of agency, materiality, and metaphor in a biopolitics of dispossession. Hence, Indigenous bodies are best understood, borrowing from Audra Simpson, as “political orders,” rather than capitalist orders embodying labor, or the gendered logics that secure them.²⁰ The materiality of Indigenous bodies “is not individual, or necessarily even gendered. Instead, it is relationally collective; what matters are the land and the alternative governance structures that the Indigenous collectivity signifies.”

Here, the materiality of the Indigenous body as political *différance* to settler colonial governance also threatens to ground a Native identity politics as a “pure decolonial and antiracist alternative.” Rather than this purity of political positioning, “what is left of queer,” Byrd asks, “if the normative is no longer something to critique but to champion?” The (im)materiality of the Indigenous body as the ground through which belonging and being are rendered, critiqued, and transformed must be sustained with continued vigilance, returning us to Liu’s insight about queer Marxism: “If the concept of the material has once provided the negative space against which queer theory developed its most influential arguments, this dialectical relation also means that material has functioned as queer theory’s constitutive outside, a sign of its incompleteness that preserves its radically anticipatory and anti-identitarian nature.” If Indigenous bodies matter as the embodiment of land, Byrd asks, then “how might we understand gender and sexuality, property and territoriality, consent and freedom differently if the land itself is the source of fluidity, authority, and groundedness outside the means of (re)production?” Byrd’s article reminds us that precarious populations in the global South are not the only foils for the rights-bearing liberal subject. Rather, histories of settler colonialism in the United States and other nation-states of the global North are critical to the proliferation of rights discourses on the global stage.

Our final contribution to this special issue, the “Thinking with Trans Now” roundtable convened by Aren Z. Aizura, brings us to our third key term of investigation, *trans*, and its politics and processes of triangulation and precarity. The roundtable includes trans studies scholars from a

broad range of institutions and locations: Marquis Bey, Toby Beauchamp, Treva Ellison, Jules Gill-Peterson, and Eliza Steinbock.²¹ Opening with an acknowledgment of “the frankly brutal conditions of trans intellectual production,” Aizura observes that “some of the most important trans and nonbinary thinkers right now are contingently employed or unemployed,” flagging the material conditions and possibilities for knowledge production.

In these uneven conditions, subjectless critique is central to a trans studies project that does not so much presume as produce a subject of and for trans. This subject is constituted through heightened attention to a corporeality that has brought new vectors of materialism and matters of gender and sex to queer studies, without reducing trans to essentialized bodies. As Gill-Peterson notes, “One of the important differences between queer and trans studies has been around the insistence of the material.” Yet it is also the case that “the field of the material has widened to include a rich scale of matter in recent years.” The production of normative gender not only presumes a transgendered body with a material specificity that marks it as different from a normatively gendered body, it also, as Gayle Salamon has suggested, “relies on a disjunction between the ‘felt sense’ of the body and the body’s corporeal contours”—a turn to the biopolitics of feeling that marks a historical shift from identity to assemblage, whole to part, from passing to piecing.²² Gill-Peterson observes in the same vein,

It is tempting to construe trans studies’ preoccupation with materiality—especially bodily materiality—as a corrective to queer theory’s abstractions. That would overread the separateness of the two fields, including a misrecognition of their entangled histories. At the same time, though, queer theory’s long-standing figuration of transness and trans people as the apotheosis of gender’s internal trouble has reenacted that corrective narrative within queer theory itself.

Here, it is important to note that the assumed fissures between Marxism and queer theory problematized by Liu and by Crosby and Jakobsen also contribute to this perception of queer theory’s absent materialities.

The roundtable discussants observe that trans discourages any particular alignment of sex-as-anatomy and gender-as-role, any predetermined relationship between orientation and object, any reduction of pleasure to genitalia as the primary site of erogenous activity and reproduction, allowing more nuanced conversations regarding the specificities and proliferation of trans materialities that both contribute to and depart from queer theory. Trans refuses the thought that genitalia, or “legible” bodily components, are what defines one’s gender, or that normative state

definitions can enforce or erase one's sense of self. Instead, trans is a "red-hot zone of ontological uncertainty," in Steinbock's description. The body possesses an irreducible material existence that cannot be explained away as a construction of discourse, a view that has marked many if not most poststructuralist approaches in queer theory.

Trans from this perspective might be characterized as the "return of the real" in relation to the (Lacanian) dialectics of symbolic imaginary, a shift from linguistic and cultural norms (discourse) that are said to animate the emergence and evolution of queer theory. Yet it simultaneously engenders a sustained critical interrogation of which materialities matter, the shifting status of the phenomenological body, insistent questions of being and becoming—indeed, the breakdown of gender binaries altogether. From this perspective, like *indigeneity* and *debility*, *trans* is an occluded third term that lends discursive consistency to politicized binaries of identity and recognition. In Bey's account, trans should be less invested in "tarrying with the debates around antinormativity that have taken place in queer theory and more with elaborating nonnormativity: a 'decline to state,' a sliding away from determinacy that many of us are familiar with in daily life." This trans reformulation of materiality moves us beyond skin and bones, beyond abstracted notions of trans ideality to questions of lived experience, a "processual materialization that displaces lived experience for livability."

That said, we also note that, akin to disability advocacy in some policy arenas, trans politics can also produce essentialized identities and regnant identity politics in our contemporary moment, including debates about transitioning and detransitioning and, perhaps most significant, calling out of cisgender identity without sufficient recognition of its racial valences, its proprietary white, middle-class privileges, or its relation to histories and futures of racial capitalism.²³ For instance, trans medicine and law in the twentieth century has, as Aizura argues, "produced a transgender whiteness we contend with now as a racialized biopolitical sorting of populations into recognizable and invisible, life to be fostered and life that is disposable."

Here, it seems especially important to highlight how trans is the very contestation of these sortings through the field's embracing of biopolitical thought to deconstruct trans corporealities in terms of in/dividual capacities. Systematically exploring how bodies and body parts are broken down, pieced together, and reanimated for labor under neoliberal mandates, trans studies allows us to apprehend how bodies are inserted into national economies in the service of maximizing production. How might we extend trans as a normative discourse of identity and identity politics to analyze sociolegal mandates of transitional justice and transitional economies accompanying decolonization and globalization in the

global South? How might we understand the politics of visibility and transition on both the scale of the sovereign individual and that of the sovereign nation-state?²⁴ In short, in its heightened attention to the politics of materiality on various scales, *trans* can also be the most deconstructive and the most resistant to identity claims, making way for a host of radical possibilities of sex to transform assumed relations to gender, the matter of the sexed body, sexual orientation, and political economies of North and South.

The Queer Art of Not Being Governed: Toward an Objectless Critique

In loosening queer theory's attachment to the sexual subject, we are not dismissing the subject or its variations. Rather, we hope to ask what sublated, repressed, or otherwise disappeared material conditions and terms are necessary to produce subjects for and states of political representation. To bring "Left of Queer" more fully into conversation with biopolitical materialisms on populations and in/dividuals that many of these essays explore, we propose that subjectless critique, which continues to rely on traditional subject-object distinctions, might be expanded to encompass what we are calling an emergent "objectless critique."

By objectless critique we mean to consider the parallel ways that queer theory has often posited a number of not just "proper" subjects but "proper" objects of study for the field. For example, the nation-state, sexuality, the sexed body, race and sex, and liberal governance also need to be interrogated for their various exceptionalisms as well as presumed methods. What constitutes a proper object or method for the field, therefore, cannot be taken for granted. Here, we heed Rosenberg's compelling account of the fetishization of objects prevalent in the recent literature arguing for a formulation of "new materialisms."²⁵ Rosenberg argues that the recent uptake of object-oriented ontology, speculative realism, and variants of affect theory fetishize and transform nonhuman objects into new subject positions. For instance, are algorithms that drive racial profiling, machine learning, campus alert systems, and armed responses under regimes of security and securitization objects or subjects of the state and corporation? Where do we place action and agency in such formulations?

Objectless critique thus focuses on the biopolitics of objects, objects that may also complicate life and death binaries by asking, as Elizabeth Povinelli does in *Geontologies: A Requiem to Late Liberalism*, what is life in relation not to death but rather to nonlife?²⁶ This shift from life/death to life/nonlife problematizes human/inhuman assumptions that are prevalent in the field of queer studies as elsewhere. It turns our critical attention to the problem of "animacy" that Mel Chen has provocatively explored.²⁷ How do comparative states of animation adhere to both subjects and

objects not as dead or alive but rather in relative states of life and nonlife, of animation and de-animation? How do they underpin the biopolitical sorting of populations and problems of life and existence?

More specifically, Povinelli, from the vantage of Aboriginal communities in Australia, schematizes Indigenous cosmologies that do not produce sovereign subjects or states but rather illuminate the erasures that make biopolitics available as a liberal, humanist mechanism of governance. Without denying the global span of Indigenous difference, her provocation leads us to pose our concluding thoughts in this speculative manner: Which queer subjects are being deployed for the biopolitics of not just life and death but of life and nonlife? And inversely, which queer objects are being deployed for biopolitics of not just life and death but of life and nonlife? The shift to a life/nonlife investigation forces a reconsideration of reproductive futurisms in relation to capacities of regeneration: how are objects that are designated nonlife reappropriated, reanimated, and recalibrated as new subjects for surveillance and governance?

To return to Byrd's insights on "ground" as one material object for a biopolitical ordering, how might we rethink how objects come to be recognized? How might we understand the status of animated objects such as the ground and their proximities to life and nonlife? How, as Byrd asks, "might we understand gender and sexuality, property and territoriality, consent and freedom differently if the land itself is the source of fluidity, authority, and groundedness outside the means of (re)production?" Alternately, she ponders,

What if, instead of normalizing the queer within recovered Indigenous grounded normativities as a sign of Indigenous liberalism, Indigenous studies followed radical queer strategies to refuse legibility outright through the matrices of sovereignty and its norms, statehood and its recognitions, subjectivity and its rights, gender and its performances to assert instead the possibilities that emerge when the normative is resisted in each and all of those vectors?

From another perspective, this special issue highlights the (sublated) "object"—the occluded third term—that is productively effaced, at the threshold of what can be known, but one that produces a legible subject and identity for political rights and representation. The production of binary subjects and identities through third terms such as *trans*, *debility*, *indigeneity*, and *animacy* foreground the reproduction of the relations of production over the traditional focus on social inclusion and exclusion that constitutes political subject formation under liberalism. While these third terms are not elided in an equivalent manner, they do operate in supplementary ways and through relations crucial to the production of proper subjects and objects of liberal politics. Stated differently, it may

be that queer and trans populations cannot not want formal legal equality and that they adamantly oppose the administration of gender in all its binary forms deployed in the service of security and empire. Nonetheless, we might consider Bey's provocative recommendation that a new trans studies—and, we would add, objectless critique—assert “the imperative to consider the impossible possibility of inhabiting sociality, of relating to others, on nonsubjective grounds, on grounds that allow for subjectivity without being subjected—in other words, transsubjectivity, parasubjectivity, being and becoming that arise precisely in the extent to which we elude tenets of subjective legibility.”

Finally, the occlusions of homonationalism in the name of rights and representation compel us to ask whether the nation-state—and attendant notions of democracy, citizenship, and capital—provides the most appropriate frame for queer theory and queer self-narration today. In an early critique of homonationalism, Scott Morgensen noted that any engagement with its problematic and its terms participates in the production of queer settler subjectivities that debate with-or-against investments in state sovereignty, thus highlighting the need for subjectless critique specifically on Indigenous terms.²⁸ Putting queer theory together with geopolitics draws attention to the exhaustion of the (democratic) state, the impossibility of (nonviolent) sovereignty, and the ruse of the (liberal) individual. These are the political impasses of identity and identity politics, and the critical opportunities of left of queer on the global stage today.

In a recent essay on the connections between Ferguson and Gaza, Fred Moten hails the exhaustion of the state solution as the binding materiality of solidarity. The “new, co-constituting assemblage of Ferguson, Gaza,” Moten asserts, “requires us to ask what it would mean to recognize, but also to embrace and enact, the exhaustion of the state solution. We give life to the state solution when we breathe air into the dead language of lives and bodies.”²⁹ What leads to this exhaustion of the state solution, what are the conditions of possibility and impasse that give rise, support, and afford what J. Kehaulani Kauanui and other Indigenous scholars and activists term the “no-state solution”?³⁰ In the context of occupation, Palestinian scholar and activist Rana Barakat asks, “What nation-state has the right to exist?”³¹ We note that this is *the* question that orients Indigenous studies, and it is one that has been haunting queerness for some time. If fully hailed, it can fruitfully guide the next iterations of queer theorizing—orienting new approaches to what's left of queer.³² We might consider a form of queer studies that, in embracing subjectless and objectless critique, materialisms, and challenges to geopolitical exceptionalisms, is the kernel of an antinational, nonnational, and no-state queer theory oriented to the art, to borrow a concept from James C. Scott, “of not being governed.”³³

Notes

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1. Eng, "What's Queer about Queer Studies Now?," 1.
2. Eng, "What's Queer about Queer Studies Now?," 3.
3. Eng, "What's Queer about Queer Studies Now?," 3.
4. We borrow this particular formulation from Snorton, *Black on Both Sides*, and note that Black queer and feminist elaborations of these myriad arrangements of race and sex have been pivotal to formulations of subjectless critique, for example Hortense Spillers's discussion of "ungendering" in "Mama's Baby and Papa's Maybe," which is the basis of Snorton's discussion of fungibility and fugitivity. In addition, Sylvia Wynter's taking up of the parameters of the human in "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom" is another crucial contribution to subjectless critique.
5. On homonormativity, see Duggan, *Twilight of Equality?*; on queer liberalism, see Eng, *Feeling of Kinship*; on homonationalism and pinkwashing, see Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*.
6. Rosenberg and Villarejo, "Queerness, Norms, Utopia," 3.
7. For a sampling of relevant queer area studies scholarship, see Liu, *Queer Marxism in Two Chinas*; Kong, *Chinese Male Homosexualities*; Tang, *Conditional Spaces*; Arondekar, *For the Record*; Hoad, *African Intimacies*; and Massad, *Desiring Arabs*.
8. Mikdashi and Puar, "Queer Theory and Permanent War." See also Coates, "Collateral Damage"; and Kohl, "Tensions in Movement Building."
9. See Hochberg, "Queer Politics and the Question of Palestine/Israel"; Justice, Rifkin, and Schneider, "Sexuality, Nationality, Indigeneity"; Allen, "Black Queer Diaspora"; Aizura et al., "Decolonizing the Transgender Imaginary"; Arondekar and Patel, "Area Impossible"; Luciano and Chen, "Queer Inhumanisms"; and Garriga-López et al., "Trans Studies in las Americas."
10. We follow Dipesh Chakrabarty in *Provincializing Europe*, where he questions the centrality, indeed, the exceptionalizing, of Europe to the construction of modernity. For a project similar in intent that provincializes US queer theories on temporality from the vantage of the postcolony, see Rao, *Out of Time*.
11. See, e.g., Manalansan, *Global Divas*; Gopinath, *Impossible Desires*; Eng, *Racial Castration*; and Shah, *Contagious Divides*.
12. See Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses."
13. See Hennessy, *Profit and Pleasure*; Joseph, *Against the Romance of Community*; and Floyd, *Reification of Desire*.
14. See Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, postscript.
15. Work from these scholars includes Amar, *Security Archipelago*; Ahuja, *Bioinsecurities*; Seikaly, *Men of Capital*; and El-Tayeb, *European Others*.
16. See Doyle, *Campus Sex, Campus Security*.
17. See Puar, *Right to Maim*.
18. See also Day, *Alien Capital*, for a succinct formulation of a field and approach called "queer Marxism."

19. See, most recently, King, *The Black Shoals*; see also Forbes, *Africans and Native Americans*; Jackson, *Creole Indigeneity*; and Miles and Holland, *Crossing Waters, Crossing Worlds*.
20. See Simpson, “The State Is a Man.”
21. Work from these scholars includes Aizura, *Mobile Subjects*; Bey, *Anarcho-Blackness*; Beauchamp, *Going Stealth*; Gill-Peterson, *Histories of the Transgender Child*; Steinbock, *Shimmering Images*; Ellison, “Black Trans Reproductive Labor.”
22. See Salamon, *Assuming a Body*, 2; on trans and disability, and piecing and passing, see Puar, *Right to Maim*.
23. For discussions on gender as racial privilege, see Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe” as well as Snorton’s reworking of Spillers’ argument in *Black on Both Sides*.
24. Ava L. J. Kim is currently writing a dissertation on this topic; see Kim, “How to Grieve, How to Be.”
25. See Rosenberg, “Molecularization of Sexuality.”
26. See Povinelli, *Geontologies*.
27. See Chen, *Animacies*.
28. In *Spaces between Us*, Morgensen argues that the biopolitics of settler colonialism conditions the possibility for modern queer subjectivity and politics.
29. Moten, “blackpalestinian breath.”
30. Kauanui, “Decolonial Self-Determination.”
31. Barakat, “On Comparative Settler Colonialisms.”
32. See Puar, “No-State ‘Solution.’”
33. See Scott, *Art of Not Being Governed*.

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