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Introduction: Queer Utopias, Queer Futurity, and Potentiality in Quotidian Practice

Angela Jones

Queerness is not yet here. Queerness is an ideality. Put another way, we are not yet queer. We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality. We have never been queer, yet queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future. The future is queerness's domain. Queerness is a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present. There here and now is a prison house...we must dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds...Queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality for another world.

—José Esteban Muñoz

Introduction

This anthology is a symposium on the inchoate debates about queer futurity and queer utopias. Through the empirical work by contemporary queer theorists, this book aims to create a critical dialogue about the emergence of queer spaces and the ways in which these spaces aim to further queer futurity. This cutting-edge volume pushes current debates about the future of queer-identified individuals out of the purely theoretical realm, and demonstrates how queer futurity is currently being shaped by individual behavior in praxis; its focus is the quotidian practices that demonstrate the potential for queer futurity. This book brings academic rigor and empiricism to a field generally dominated by polemics and albeit intriguing but often less than rigorous cultural analysis, which is generally delivered in sesquipedalian loquaciousness that masquerades as academic nuance and complexity. This book makes a distinct and felicitous methodological contribution to the field; truly interdisciplinary, the chapters compiled in this text utilize archival research and
historiography, cultural analysis, discourse analysis, interview methods, ethnography, autoethnography, social cartographies, and reflective topical autobiography to explore the quotidian practices that buttress the promise of hope for queer futurity.

This text celebrates the possibility that individuals are in fact attempting to craft queer spaces where hegemonic heterosexist discourses cease to regulate bodies. This book rejects the notion that social and political organization cannot lead to emancipatory possibilities in the future, as found in Lee Edelman’s *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*; instead this text explores, as did José Esteban Muñoz in *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, the ways in which identifying the potential for crafting utopic spaces is not just intellectually rewarding, but can transform the lives of individuals and society at large.

A worthwhile read, *A Critical Inquiry into Queer Utopias* is a rejection of the antisocial turn in queer theory—an idea that has been widely contested by contemporary queer theorists. The authors do not offer a linear or predetermined program for the establishment of queer utopic spaces but rather focus on the everyday acts of resistance and affective forces that create the potentiality for pockets or cleavages of queer utopian spaces. As Muñoz suggests, these spaces then create the potential to “free” minoritarian individuals from the “here and now” of heteronormative space and time or from the “majoritarian public sphere.” These chapters provide glimpses into what is on the horizon.

As Lauren Berlant posits, we must abandon our obsession with and attachment to the “fantasy of the good life” or unachievable aspirations dictated by liberal democratic and capitalist visions of acquiring wealth and “becoming somebody.” Instead we must imagine how we might reconstitute the present by examining the events of ordinary life. Sara Ahmed has forced us to question either our compulsive need to find happiness, or the very notion that we need happiness at all. Drawing from Ahmed, we recognize that queer futurity is not so much about crafting prescriptions for a utopian society—in which everyone is happy and life is ideal—but by making life more bearable in the present because in doing so we create the potential for a better future. She astutely notes:

We need to think more about the relationship between the queer struggle for a bearable life and aspirational hopes for a good life. Maybe the point is that it is hard to struggle without aspirations, and aspirations are hard to have without giving them some form. We could remember that the Latin root of the word *aspiration* means “to breathe.” I think the struggle for a bearable life is the struggle for queers to have spaces to breathe... with breathe comes imagination. With breathe come possibility. If queer politics is about freedom, it might simply mean the freedom to breathe.
INTRODUCTION

For far too long, utopias have been understood as ideal or perfect places or societies—a telos. Traditionally, advocates of utopias have articulated a platform for societies, in which queers are not only free, but are also happy and living the “good life.” This is not the vision of queer utopias proposed in this volume. Rather, the authors examine the creation of spaces in the present that do not necessarily allow for complete emancipation or even happiness, but are suggestive of the potentiality for the future; they give hope. Given that happiness is a normative and regulatory construct, it seems fitting here that the construction of queer utopian spaces does not hinge upon happiness, but rather are simply autonomous spaces in which to breathe.

This book synthesizes the existing literature on queer space and queer futurity. There are exceptional accounts of the emergence of queer space such as *Queer Diasporas* (2000) edited by Cindy Patton and Benigno Sanchez-Eppler, and *Queers in Space: Communities, Public Places, and Sites of Resistance* (1997) edited by Gordon Brent Ingram, Anne-Marie Bouthillette, and Yolanda Retter. However, given that these books pre-date recent debates in queer theory, they do not grapple with issues of utopia and queer futurity. While also writing prior to the literature on queer futurity and queer utopia, scholars have sought to locate queer utopia in cyberspace, and have pinned their hopes for queer futurity on the hybridization of the body and technology.  

Attempting to escape the trap of utopia, or the negative connotations of utopia as naive and passé, I previously suggested that we perhaps not utilize the term queer utopia and instead utilize the Foucauldian term queer heterotopias.

Drawing from the work of Michel Foucault, I argue that queer heterotopias are places where individuals can challenge the heteronormative regime...; in “Of Other Spaces,” Foucault (1986) noted that in everyday life escaping repression requires the creation of heterotopic spaces, where individuals can celebrate their difference. Unlike utopias, heterotopic spaces can be created in reality... They are sites where actors, whether academics or activists, engage in what we might call a radical politics of subversion, where individuals attempt to dislocate the normative configurations of sex, gender, and sexuality through daily exploration and experimentation with crafting a queer identity.  

Here, we resist the desire to quibble over the appropriate terminology for these spaces and hope that the reader can move past the connotations of utopia as antiquated teleological naïveté. Here, taking our cue from the literature noted briefly above, our goal is to explore how individuals are attempting to queer space in emancipatory ways that do not necessarily realize a fixed utopia, but create potential for a queer future.
Finally, taking a cue from Judith Halberstam’s most recent book, *The Queer Art of Failure*, we also recognize that queerness requires failure. “To live is to fail, to bungle, to disappoint, and ultimately to die; rather than searching for ways around death and disappointment, the queer art of failure involves the acceptance of the finite . . . rather than resisting endings and limits, let us instead revel in and cleave to all of our own inevitable fantastic failures.” None of the queer spaces and temporalities examined in this book represents static spaces or times; they do not represent the realization of a complete fixed utopia in the here and now. We recognize that many of the queer spaces explored in this book may fail, perhaps even before the book is published. In fact, the more they fail, the more it pushes queer folk into collective action, to try again to create new spaces for themselves—spaces that represent the potentiality and hope for queer futurity.

**No Future**

Leo Bersani, particularly in *Homos*, laid the foundation for what is now commonly referred to as the antisocial turn in queer theory. Bersani asked, “Should the homosexual be a good citizen?” For Bersani, theories of sexuality must rebuke identity-based notions of community. According to Bersani, homosexuality threatens the social order because of homosexuals’ inability to literally reproduce that very social order; queers should embrace this space of abjection. Theories of sexuality tend to seek out redemptive possibilities by postulating formulas for collective action based in identity politics. For Bersani, concerns with queer futurity cannot be the basis of queer theory; the antisocial turn in queer theory was an antiutopian move away from idealism and humanistic notions of community. While he astutely critiques the teleological forces at work within redemptive theoretical projects, his focus on negativity ignores at worst and neglects at best the necessity of emancipatory politics for many queers whose material conditions make embracing the negative a political privilege or luxury. While it was in fact Bersani who originally sparked debates over antisociality or antirelationality and the embrace of the negative, one text, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* by Lee Edelman, caused these debates to explode.

Lee Edelman’s book *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* is an overtly polemical if not solipsistic critique of queer theory, Gay and Lesbian studies, and queer people’s political aims. Edelman asserts that queer activists and individuals have adopted a homonormative political platform that is plagued by the politics of respectability and that ultimately reproduces heteronormativity. In *The Twilight of Equality: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy*, Lisa
Duggan posited that lesbian and gay politics had succumbed to what she conceptualized as homonormativity. She said, “It is a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption.” In other words, gay and lesbian politics has been reduced to the struggle for marriage and custody rights, which are heteronormative goals. Gay and lesbian politics has become an occlusive regime that marginalizes queers not seeking political recognition, namely legal marriage.

Edelman’s critiques are incredibly reminiscent of Michael Warner’s arguments in *The Trouble With Normal*; the current dominant lesbian and gay political project bastardizes those queers with no interest in monogamy, marriage, and/or children. In fact, both Edelman and Warner posit that queers should celebrate and continue all of the behaviors that many conservative heterosexuals find deplorable, such as public sex with strangers. However, Warner imagines a future in which these “misbehaving” queers exist, and interrogate and reformulate the political policies meant to shame and stigmatize them; in Edelman’s phlegmatic critique there is no future.

Edelman argues that queer politics has fallen victim to “reproductive futurism.” This suggests that these political campaigns are driven by the compulsion to make our world better for future generations of innocent children. If you want people to donate money to homeless shelters, tell them that children are dying and sprawl pictures of emaciated children across posters and television ads. If you want marriage equality, focus on how the legal protections afforded by a legally legitimized marriage will protect children. For Edelman, this focus on children reproduces heteronormative logic. According to Edelman, this strategic turn undermines the subversive quality of queer identity. In order to elucidate his arguments, Edelman turns to Charles Dickens.

In *A Christmas Carol*, the villain-turned-hero, Ebenezer Scrooge, is visited by his deceased business partner Jacob Marley, who warns him—a cold-hearted and avarice-driven bachelor—to change his ways. In order to facilitate this change, Scrooge is visited by three other ghosts. The ghost of Christmas past takes Scrooge back to his youth to remind him of the innocent child he once was. The ghost of Christmas present takes him to the home of his employee, Bob Cratchit. There Scrooge sees Tiny Tim, Cratchit’s youngest son, who is sick. Tiny Tim will succumb to his illness because his family lives in poverty due to Scrooge’s refusal to pay Cratchit a living wage. The ghost of Christmas future shows Scrooge that Tiny Tim dies and that Scrooge will be left in abjection and lowliness. When Scrooge awakes, he has changed; he is now kind, generous, and
compassionate. Most importantly, for Edelman’s analysis, his transformation saves the child. This classic story forces the reader to empathize with Tiny Tim and despise Scrooge. Edelman analyzes Dickens’s plot; the life and future of the child hinges upon the miser’s great awakening.

Make no mistake, then: Tiny Tim survives at our expense in a culture that always sustains itself on the threat that he might die. And we, the *sinthomosexuals* who, however often we try to assert that we’re “more” than what we do with our genitals, are nonetheless convicted from the outset of stealing his childhood, endangering his welfare, and, ultimately, destroying his life, must respond by insisting that Tiny Tim is always already dead, mortified into a fetish animated only by the collective fantasy wherein he *doesn’t* rise up and ask in reproach, “Father, don’t you see I’m burning?” Because there isn’t now, and never has been, much doubt about who killed him, because his death can always be traced to the *sinthomosexual*’s jouissance, why not acknowledge our kinship at last with the Scrooge who, unregenerate, refuses the social imperative to grasp futurity in the form of the Child, for the sake of whom, as the token of accession to imaginary wholeness, everything else in the world, by force if needed, must give way?  

This is queer politics; we must make the world a kinder, safer, and more just place for future queer children. By saving a child you are granted a future. Edelman says we identify with Tim and not Scrooge, but why? Scrooge represents the self-centered Id, which we gladly agree to sublimate in the best interests of humanity. Edelman says the politically incorrect: screw the dying child.

For Edelman, the problem is that queer politics draws from what he calls reproductive futurism. As the Dickens example suggests, reproductive futurism refers to the Enlightenment-inspired ideal that there is a future that can be achieved—a telos. Moreover, the primary goal of such efforts is to make a better future for children. The late Whitney Houston’s classic, *I Believe the Children Are the Future*, is an exemplar of reproductive futurism. Think of Daddy Warbucks in the classic *Annie*, making a better life for a little orphan girl. Worse yet, think of the song, *We Are the World*; Michael Jackson released this song featuring many American music artists to raise money for children in Africa. The video showed American artists with compassion in their eyes singing about how the Western world must help the children of the non-Western world and make them have better days. This song is ostensibly about helping others, but it reveals human narcissism, which for Edelman is part of the human condition. The video for this song is absent of the hungry Black bodies that these philanthropists aim to save and make a better world for. Race, which is completely and unjustifiably ignored in Edelman’s book, then also shapes reproductive futurism. The song and video contained
a chorus of American celebrities chanting “we” are the world; the song was plagued by both racism and colonialism. The song suggests there is a choice to be made, to sacrifice for those less fortunate children.

Reproductive futurism underpins both conservative movements and modern gay and lesbian movements. Conservatives remind us that to be right-to-life is to protect children; to oppose gay marriage is also to protect children. Interestingly, the same logic is followed by gay and lesbian activists. Access to birth control and abortion helps women refrain from having unwanted children, in turn protecting unborn children. Legalized marriage for gays and lesbians means custody rights and benefits, which will protect children. Either way, for Edelman, both reproduce heteronormativity.

Edelman questions the utility of campaigns that propose to make a better future. Edelman draws from other classics, namely Alfred Hitchcock films. In his assessment of *North by Northwest*, he posits that the future relies heavily upon the idea that individuals must have compassion for others—that we can sympathize with others and feel their pain. It is this empathy that springs individuals into collective action. In this Hitchcock masterpiece, an advertising executive named Roger Thornhill is mistaken for George Kaplan (who we find out later does not exist). He is chased across the United States by a spy named Philip Vandamm and his murderous henchman named Leonard. The spies are not able to kill Thornhill and instead he is framed for murder. Thornhill now finds himself running from the police. He meets Eve with whom he escapes and later learns is a spy who is also in danger. The film culminates in a shocking scene on Mount Rushmore that is the focal point of Edelman’s analysis. This chase sequence leaves Eve hanging from the side of mountain. Thornhill grabs Eve by one hand and, not able to hold on to her, desperately calls out to Leonard (who has now arrived on the side of the mountain) for help. Rather than aiding in their rescue and pulling them both up to safety, Leonard steps on Thornhill’s hand.

[Thornhill] calls upon Leonard, *sinthomosexual* and director surrogate, to step right up to the challenge and answer Thornhill’s call for compassion by putting his best foot forward and helping Thornhill learn to let go…Thornhill’s initial entreaty, “Help,” becomes, almost at once, “Help me,” suggests neither lack of commitment to Eve nor the limits of his compassion. Thornhill’s anguished suspense, after all, like that of the spectator as well, speaks to his identification with Eve, suspended as she is from the face of the cliff and pulling him into danger as he tries to pull her out…Leonard, the *sinthomosexual*, by pressing his foot onto Thornhill’s hand, attempts to impress upon Thornhill the fact that by breaking his hold on the cliff Leonard gives him the break for which he’s been asking: the neighborly love sufficient to break him open with jouissance and launch him into the void around and against which the subject congeals.
In earnestness of Thornhill’s cry, Leonard hears... a request, beyond what the subject knows, for something beyond his desire... But Leonard, by going beyond transgression and so beyond the law, engages jouissance that is unconstrained by fantasy or desire.¹⁴

Edelman reads Leonard’s act as radical; he is able to do what Thornhill—who is too socialized within society’s morality and gendered norms regarding women (who, of course, are the fragile carriers of children)—cannot do. Leonard allows his “pure” naked desires to guide his behavior.

Lee Edelman’s problem with reproductive futurism and queer futurity is that all political movements require compassion for others. It requires that we feel the pain of others, that we are both sympathetic and empathetic. Edelman suggests that Leonard reveals a secret as he stomps his foot on Thornhill’s hand; humans do not and should not be forced to have compassion for one another. Here, we can begin to unpack Edelman’s main arguments.

Here, drawing astutely from Freud’s *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Edelman argues that mandating compassion acts as tyrannical force. Queer theory commands that we align ourselves with other queers. If I am a queer woman of color, I must empathize with Bears,¹⁵ and Sadomasochistic Leatherdykes alike. Edelman says Thornhill’s machinations demonstrate that this ostensible unity is an illusion. This is also the basis of Edelman’s vitriolic critiques of Judith Butler. While agency in Butler is constrained by her devotion to poststructuralism, Butler still sees hope for the future in the subversive behaviors of queers.¹⁶

This is the primary foundation or criticism of the antirelational school of queer theory as found in Leo Bersani’s *Hosos* and “Is the Rectum a Grave?” The antirelational strain of queer theory condemns relatedness and the idea that individuals—who are driven by empathy—will come together in collective action. To insist on a queer future is to force a community of resistance to emerge, one that becomes homogenous and is buttressed by an imaginary collectivity. It is imaginary because you cannot force people to align themselves with others. This future does not meet the needs of the individual; it does not allow individuals to experience Lacanian jouissance, or pure enjoyment and pleasure. Edelman seems to suggest that to experience jouissance—particularly sexual pleasure—we must throw people off cliffs or must nurture every self-centered whim of the Id.

In its origins, the calling for a queer subject was supposed to disrupt stable categories, namely the binary constructions of sex, gender, and sexuality. However, Edelman posits that in calling for a queer future—particularly the assimilationist homonormative gay rights projects of the modern period—we attempt to create stability. Originally, the power of queer theory was that it fostered instability. Edelman insists that queers
should embrace negativity and instability. He promulgates that it is the *sinthomosexual* who accomplishes this.

[T]he defining mark of futurism, [is] inscribing the faith that temporal duration will result in the realization of meaning by way of a “final signifier” that will make meaning whole at last. *Sinthomosexuality*, by contrast, scorns such belief in a final signifier, reducing every signifier to the status of the letter and insisting on access to jouissance in place of access to sense, on identification with one’s sinthome instead of belief in its meaning… I am calling *sinthomosexuality*, then, the site where the fantasy of futurism confronts the insistence of a jouissance that renders it precisely by rendering it in relation to that drive.17

Edelman posits that queer futurity hopefuls, like brainwashed cult members, believe that salvation is imminent. Leonard from *North by Northwest* is a *sinthomosexual*. He eschews that which is ostensibly right, and does what is right for him. The future is not the answer. There need be no future. Who needs a future if we can stay here, fuck, screw people, and cater to our carnal desires right here and right now? Queers can escape the banality that has come to dominate their lives by embracing negativity.

Homosexuality has been equated with death; it is not procreative, and as Edelman documents, reporters have even noted that there is a correlation between homosexuality and death. For example, in the 1980s HIV/AIDS became a plague. Moreover, homosexuality is linked to death because queer sex acts do not ensure genetic fitness and ergo are unnecessary. Edelman says embrace this death! The *sinthomosexual* rejects reproductive futurism, has no political program, and is both resolved and quite happy to live in abjection. The *sinthomosexual* has no interest in recognition and/or what we may call *heterosexual-mimesis*—integration into the heteronormative social order.

In order for a political movement to gain its objectives, it must be visible, recognized, and legitimized. Therefore, a queer political platform then forces queers to be signified, recognized, and queer subjectivity becomes ossified as an identity. By asserting that queers are normal, too, queers seek to be marked within the symbolic order, which seems to be antithetical to queer theory’s original goals. Recognition in the symbolic order requires acquiescence to its logic and ideals. Edelman says that modern queer politics asks queers to reject what is primal or what is negative. This requirement assuages if not completely negates the subversive quality of queerness.

My polemic thus stakes its fortunes on a truly hopeless wager: that the Symbolic’s negativity to the very letter of the law, that attending to the
persistence of something internal to reason that reason refutes, that turning the force of queerness against all subjects, however queer, can afford an access to the jouissance that at once defines and negates us. Or better: can expose the constancy, the inescapability, of such access to jouissance in the social order itself, even if that order can access its constant access to jouissance only in the process of abjecting that constancy onto the queer.  

To be clear, Edelman imagines no future, no ethics, no justice, no compassion, and certainly no hope. The authors in this text do not welcome Edelman’s vision.

There are many problems with Edelman’s polemic. Perhaps it was his intention, but Edelman does not make any meaningful connection between the *sinthomo*sexual and gendered or sexualized subjectivities. Edelman’s examples from Dickens’s books to Hitchcock’s films *North by Northwest* and the *Birds* are culled from the world of fiction; who are these *sinthomo*sexuals in the “real world”? I suppose the lack of empiricism here may have been intentional as to render any political utility of text impossible. Tim Dean has offered an instructive critique of Edelman that mirrors the critiques and goals of this text:

According to this argument, queerness is structurally antisocial, not empirically so. By construing the sociopolitical order primarily in imaginary and symbolic terms, while simultaneously invoking the queer as real to undermine that order, Edelman’s account offers a too monochromatic a vision of the symbolic; it furnishes too narrow a conception of the social; and it paints an unimaginative picture of the future.

Tim Dean cautions us that Edelman misses the ways in which culture opens up spaces for new forms of relationality that create potential for queer futures.  

The problem with Edelman is that in all of his nihilism he is optimistic. Drawing from Michel Foucault, who is curiously absent from Edelman’s text, we can understand that what we might call the “hope for resistance” is an inevitable part of the human condition. Foucault said, “There are no societies which do not regulate sex, and thus all societies create the hope of escaping from such regulations.” The idea that you can get human beings, queers specifically (in all of their variance), to abandon the hope of a future that ceases to marginalize their bodies and desires is downright naive. Edelman ignores that, for many—such as queers of color or poor queers of color—their current material conditions make the potential for the experience of jouissance harder to achieve. Diana Fuss’s words are insightful: “Any misplaced nostalgia for or romantization of the outside as a privileged site of radicality immediately gives us away, for in order to idealize the outside we must already be, to some degree, comfortably
entrenched on the inside.” For many people, particularly the queer futurity hopefuls in this text, we have no desire to throw people off cliffs (metaphorically or literally), let poor children die, live in a void as a parasitic element of society, or worse, die Antigone’s death. While some, including Edelman and his followers, may find this embrace of the negative empowering, we hold tight to the idea that most will not and cannot!

Queer Futurity: What’s on the Horizon?

In Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity, José Esteban Muñoz draws primarily from Ernst Bloch in his analysis of queer aesthetics. Muñoz examines the poems of James Schulyer and Elizabeth Bishop to showcase the potential for queer futurity. He explores the autobiographical texts of John Giorno and Samuel Delany in order to utilize queer utopian memory of public sex to locate the utopian. He does the same with the play The Toilet by Amiri Baraka, the artwork of Kevin McCarty and Andy Warhol, the choreography and performances of Fred Herko, and the performance art and drag performances of Kevin Aviance, Kalup Linzy, and Dynasty Handbag. Muñoz also reflects on his own autobiographical experiences as a queer kid of color attending bars and clubs such as Magic Touch and Club Fire and Ice. These examples represent utopian aesthetics; Muñoz explores how acts in the “no longer conscious” (the past) can be read now in the present and utilized to depict the potential of queer futurity, or in the “not yet here” (the future).

This book aims to study in depth what Muñoz calls “queer-world-making.” “I see world-making here as functioning and coming into play through the performance of queer utopian memory, that is, a utopia that understands its time as reaching beyond some nostalgic past that perhaps never was or some future whose arrival is continuously belated—a utopia in the present.” We locate queer-world-making at the theater, in political activism, in sexual subcultures such as Barebacking and BDSM, in schools, in queer communities, and in queer families.

A Critical Inquiry into Queer Utopias examines the quotidian ways that individuals interrupt straight time. We examine what Muñoz calls “an anticipatory illumination of a queer world.” We are committed to envisaging the vicissitudes of quotidian queer world-making. We see “a sign of an actually existing queer reality, a kernel of political possibility within a stultifying heterosexual present.” We assent with Muñoz; what we describe are “not an end but an opening or horizon. Queer utopia is a modality of critique that speaks to quotidian gestures as laden with potentiality.” Our goal is not teleological; we offer no prescriptive for a queer planet. What we offer is a glimpse into what might be; we offer hope to minoritarian people, who are marginalized because of their racial, ethnic, class, sex, gender, sexuality, and/or ability status.
The queer utopic spaces crafted here suggest there is reason to hope for a better future, a future not constructed by the dictates of American neoliberalism, but by the needs and desires of queer people.

Here, we aim to see potentiality for the future. Muñoz makes an astute distinction between possibilities and potentialities. “Possibilities exist, or more nearly, they exist within a logical real, the possible, which is within the present and is linked to presence. Potentialities are different in that although they are present, they do not exist in present things. Thus, potentialities have a temporality that is not in the present but, more nearly, in the horizon, which we can understand as futurity.”

Thus, in this anthology, the contributors do not posit that they have located fully functioning utopias, nor do they offer a roadmap for queers seeking utopic space.

Muñoz draws from Marcuse and Bloch in order to explore the utopian power of aesthetics. These German idealists utilize utopia not to refer to a predetermined and/or prescribed vision of a telos, but as critique of the here and now. To refuse to acquiesce to the heterosexist and racist hegemonic discourses that buttress the status quo is to signal utopia. As with queerness, queerness is not limited to the domain of sexual orientation or gender subversion. Queerness is a refusal; it is a dismissal of binaries, categorical, and essentialist modalities of thought and living. Queerness is always being made, remade, being done, being redone, and being undone. It is the quotidian refusal to play by the rules, if those rules stifle the spirit of queers who, like caged birds, cannot sing.

What Muñoz understands that Edelman clearly does not is that while much of lesbian and gay politics has been overrun by homonormativity, it does not mean that all queer politics and relational behavior is assimilationist. Clearly answering Edelman, Muñoz says, “Queer futurity does not underplay desire. In fact it is all about desire, desire for both larger semiabstractions such as a better world or freedom but also more immediately, better relations within the social that include sex and more pleasure.” He agrees that homonormativity has impacted LGBTQ politics, in ways that has diminished its earlier subversive quality. However, to dismiss all relational collective action that might improve queers’ lives is problematic. Edelman’s conclusions probably result largely from his treatment of LGBTQ politics as a white middle-class project. He neglects to acknowledge that there are queer bodies of color, poor queers, disabled bodies, and other marginalized queers, who still fuck in bushes, who still live in abjection—who are either marginalized or intentionally refuse membership in the system to which he objects.

While we take our cue directly from Muñoz, our method is quite different. First, Muñoz’s project was centered on the examination of the furtive no longer conscious. In the past he finds moments of jouissance
hidden in queer aesthetics. Here, the authors are more focused on the here and now and what the present can reveal to us about the future. Second, Muñoz offers analysis by way of cultural analysis, which at present dominates queer theory. In recent years, queer theorists have been able to postulate grandiose claims with little to no evidence to support their claims. We are attempting to inoculate the queer body of scholarship with a dose of empiricism.

A Critical Inquiry into Queer Utopias contains five sections: Theater and Performance, Eroticized Spaces, Queer Counterpublics, Queer Political Activism, and Family. Part I of the book examines the theater. The spirit of this section, as in the entire book, is much like Jill Dolan’s in Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theatre. Dolan explores what she calls utopian performatives, or small spaces and moments when theater performances can allow an audience, even if for only a moment, to imagine a better world. Dolan, like the authors in this anthology, agree that individuals can create temporal nonfixed utopian spaces. Dolan astutely demonstrates through careful analysis of solo performances, monologues performance poetry, and dance how audiences actualize feelings of hope and promise through the consumption of these performances. This book will expand on Dolan’s work, hence contributing to the field. In chapter 1, David Gorshein examines the Israeli film The Bubble and the strategic depiction of the play Bent within the film. Gorshein utilizes archival research, cultural analysis, and interviews with the directors of the play Bent to analyze how the film constructs queer utopia in ways that reify homonormativity. He pays acute attention to the ways in which Tel Aviv itself has been positioned as utopia both for Jews and queers. In chapter 2, Stephen Farrier analyzes theater performances, specifically Dickie Beau’s Blackout (Twilight of the Idols) and Front Room. He explores the ways in which these performances create the potentiality for queer futurity and disrupt straight time.

Part II explores eroticized spaces as sites of resistance that indicate the potential for queer futurity. In chapter 3, Brandy L. Simula’s rich ethnography explores the world of BDSM. With precision she notes the intricate ways that participants queer gender, and in turn craft spaces in which her respondents attempt to disrupt heteronormativity and the binary sex/gender system, and in turn are attempting to craft utopic space. In chapter 4, Brandon Andrew Robinson researches the subcultural lives of “Barebackers,” or men who consciously have unprotected sex with other men. Through his careful discourse analysis of online barebacking communities, he finds that these men are guided by a desire for jouissance that for them is found in the danger of unprotected sex. Their rejection of AIDS discourse and other hegemonic discourses that seek to control their bodies and sex lives signals a queer utopian potentiality.
Part III examines the emergence of queer counterpublics. In chapter 5, Sarah M. Steele utilizes ethnography to document and analyze the contribution of a non-for-profit organization called Southerners on New Ground (SONG). She places specific emphasis on an event they organize called Campouts. Steele posits that these events are strategic and conscious efforts to craft queer utopian space. In chapter 6, Kat Rands, Jess McDonald, and Lauren Clapp study the way in which the pedagogical practice of queer landscaping in classrooms are attempts at crafting queer counterpublics that seek to challenge the hegemonic style of classroom design. They utilize Geertzian thick description to create social cartographies that demonstrate the ways in which students and faculty at the University of Focus are attempting to craft queer space; these attempts are glimpses at what may be on the horizon.

Part IV analyzes queer political activism. In chapter 7, Pawel Leszkowicz and Tomasz Kitlinski explore the ways in which LGBTQ visibility campaigns in Europe have been constrained by homonormativity while simultaneously seeking to challenge heteronormativity in ways that provide hope for queer futurity. In chapter 8, Hilary Malatino utilizes historiographical methods and a textual analysis of *Queer UltraViolence* to study the contribution of Bash Back!, a network for queer activists that formed to challenge the homonormativity and subsequent secondary marginalization experienced by queers within the larger LGBTQ movement.

Finally, in Part V, Family, Jane Ward and Laura V. Heston have the arduous task of exploring queer futurity and the family. In chapter 9, Ward utilizes archival methods, particularly books written for parents of gender fluid children, television news specials, and print media. In addition, Ward, draws from interviews with parents, and (auto)ethnographic material from experiences in a genderqueer parenting group. In this data, Ward astutely finds a place for children in queer futurity. In chapter 10, Heston utilizes interviews and participant observations with queer families in Massachusetts to document the ways in which parents engaged in queer parenting are simultaneously involved in queer-world-making.

This section on family hopes to disrupt and complicate the far too often myopic critiques of gay marriage and homonormativity. Edelman and Muñoz, along with other queer theorists such as Lisa Duggan, critique queers whose ostensible aim is assimilation into heteronormative institutions such as family and the military. But we would ask, in what ways does a black trans single parent upset and not conform to a heteronormative mode of doing family? To hear modern queer scholars tell it, one cannot be radical and desire marriage. While the leatherdyke anal fisting her life-size doll might be far sexier than two genderqueer adults raising a child, why does this render all queer parents liberal assimilationists? As Michael
Warner originally suggested, queer politics must come to celebrate and allow space for those who desire to live on the fringe engaged in the most “diabolical” and “esoteric” sexual desires documented and those who chose a more so-called vanilla path. In response to the conservative logic of assimilationist LGBT organizations, many queers have adopted a reactionary and exclusionary stance whereby to live in negativity is the only path to queerness. Warner wrote, “In too many ways, it [Lesbian and Gay movements] has chosen to articulate the politics of identity rather than to become a broader movement targeting the politics of shame.”

Should heteronormative society have the right to shame those who desire that which does not fit into their narrow worldview? But conversely, should ostensibly radical queers have the right to shame those queers who do not fit their vision of radical sex?

On the horizon are an infinite amount of queer possibilities; unfortunately, some visions are currently marginalized. This book aims to begin to give insight into the quotidian ways in which a diverse range of queer utopic visions are emerging without casting judgment or launching a pseudo-scientific evaluation aimed at qualifying, categorizing, judging, and/or punishing those who do not measure up to our own desires and choices. We resist the temptation to normalize one vision of queer utopic potentiality over another. We hope that the diversity that springs from this text provides hope for the many queers who have not abandoned the promise of queer futurity.

Notes

2. A reviewer suggested that I clarify my aims here; to be clear, the use of language here was intended to be ironic.

Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham wrote about what she conceptualized as the politics of respectability. Higginbotham examined the role that black Baptist women played in black liberation struggles and women’s rights activism. She posited that these black women’s strategic approach to gaining equality was conservative; they advanced the idea that, in order to foster equality, black people needed to adhere to Victorian, middle-class, and white cultural values. These churchwomen denounced patronizing dance halls and the consumption of popular music such as jazz. These black churchwomen insisted that women refrain from wearing modern revealing fashions and strongly advocated the adoption of a conservative aesthetic. Their strategic approach was this: through moral reform, cultural reform, and a refinement of aesthetics, black people would demonstrate to whites and those in power that black people, particularly black women, were worthy of rights. Here, many have argued that lesbian and gay political reform has adopted a similar strategy. If gays and lesbians can show that they are respectable, monogamous, and just like “straight” people, homophobic people will begin to be more acceptable, and society will grant Gays and Lesbians legitimacy through the acquisition of civil rights.

11. For an additional discussion of homonormativity, politics, and utopia see Jones 2009.
13. Due to the prohibitive costs of acquiring copyright permissions for the chorus of the song, it has not been reprinted here. However, the whole video is available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M9BNoNFKCBI
15. Bears are gay men who adopt a hypermasculine aesthetic and have formalized a subculture that rejects feminized notions of gay subjectivity. See Peter Hennen, “Bear Bodies, Bear Masculinity: Recuperation, Resistance, or Retreat?” *Gender and Society* 19, no. 1 (2005): 25–43.
24. Muñoz, 49.
27. Muñoz, 30.