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In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives Judith Halberstam

## Judith Halberstam

# In a Queer Time and Place

Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives

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## **Queer Temporality and Postmodern Geographies**

How can a relational system be reached through sexual practices? Is it possible to create a homosexual mode of life? . . . To be "gay," I think, is not to identify with the psychological traits and the visible masks of the homosexual, but to try to define and develop a way of life.

-Michel Foucault, "Friendship as a Way of Life"

There is never one geography of authority and there is never one geography of resistance. Further, the map of resistance is not simply the underside of the map of domination—if only because each is a lie to the other, and each gives the lie to the other.

> ---Steve Pile, "Opposition, Political Identities, and Spaces of Resistance"

This book makes the perhaps overly ambitious claim that there is such a thing as "queer time" and "queer space." Queer uses of time and space develop, at least in part, in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosex- - Why uality, and reproduction. They also develop according to other logics of lo- necessarily opposition? cation, movement, and identification. If we try to think about queerness as an outcome of strange temporalities, imaginative life schedules, and eccentric economic practices, we detach queerness from sexual identity and come closer to understanding Foucault's comment in "Friendship as a Way of Life" that "homosexuality threatens people as a 'way of life' rather than as a way of having sex" (310). In Foucault's radical formulation, queer friendships, queer networks, and the existence of these relations in space and in relation to the use of time mark out the particularity and indeed the perceived menace of homosexual life. In this book, the queer "way of life" will encompass subcultural practices, alternative methods of alliance, forms of transgender embodiment, and those forms of representation dedicated to capturing these willfully eccentric modes of being. Obviously not all gay, lesbian, and transgender people live their lives in radically different ways from their heterosexual counterparts, but part of what has made queerness compelling as a

form of self-description in the past decade or so has to do with the way it has the potential to open up new life narratives and alternative relations to time and space.

Queer time perhaps emerges most spectacularly, at the end of the twentieth century, from within those gay communities whose horizons of possibility have been severely diminished by the AIDS epidemic. In his memoir of his lover's death from AIDS, poet Mark Doty writes: "All my life I've lived with a future which constantly diminishes but never vanishes" (Doty 1996, 4). The constantly diminishing future creates a new emphasis on the here, the present, the now, and while the threat of no future hovers overhead like a storm cloud, the urgency of being also expands the potential of the moment and, as Doty explores, squeezes new possibilities out of the time at hand. In his poem "In Time of Plague," Thom Gunn explores the erotics of compressed time and impending mortality: "My thoughts are crowded with death / and it draws so oddly on the sexual / that I am confused/confused to be attracted / by, in effect, my own annihilation" (Gunn 1993, 59). Queer time, as it flashes into view in the heart of a crisis, exploits the potential of what Charles-Pierre Baudelaire called in relation to modernism "The transient, the fleeting, the contingent." Some gay men have responded to the threat of AIDS, for example, by rethinking the conventional emphasis on longevity and futurity, and by making community in relation to risk, disease, infection, and death (Bersani 1996; Edelman 1998). And yet queer time, even as it emerges from the AIDS crisis, is not only about compression and annihilation; it is also about the potentiality of a life unscripted by the conventions of family, inheritance, and child rearing. In the sections on subcultures in this book, I will examine the queer temporalities that are proper to subcultural activities, and will propose that we rethink the adult/youth binary in relation to an "epistemology of youth" that disrupts conventional accounts of youth culture, adulthood, and maturity.<sup>1</sup> Queer subcultures produce alternative temporalities by allowing their participants to believe that their futures can be imagined according to logics that lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experience-namely, birth, marriage, reproduction, and death.

These new temporal logics, again, have emerged most obviously in the literatures produced in relation to the AIDS epidemic. For example, in *The Hours*, Michael Cunningham's beautiful rewriting of Virginia Woolf's Mrs. *Dalloway*, Cunningham takes the temporal frame of Woolf's novel (life in a day) and emphasizes its new, but also queer rendering of time and space. Indeed, Cunningham rationalizes Woolf's authorial decision to have the young Clarissa Dalloway "love another girl" in terms of queer temporality. He explains: "Clarissa Dalloway in her first youth, will love another girl, Virginia thinks; Clarissa will believe that a rich, riotous future is opening before her, but eventually (how, exactly, will the change be accomplished?) she will come to her senses, as young women do and marry a suitable man" (Cunningham 1998, 81-82). The "riotous future," which emerges in Woolf's novel from a lesbian kiss in Clarissa's youth, becomes, in Cunningham's skillful rewrite, a queer time that is both realized and ultimately disappointing in its own narrative arc. Cunningham tracks Woolf's autobiographical story of a descent into madness and suicide alongside a contemporary narrative of Clarissa Vaughn, who has refused to "come to her senses" and lives with a woman named Sally while caring for her best friend, Richard, a writer dying of AIDS. Cunningham's elegant formulation of queer temporality opens up the possibility of a "rich, riotous future" and closes it down in the same aesthetic gesture. While Woolf, following Sigmund Freud, knows that Clarissa must come to her senses (and like Freud, Woolf cannot imagine "how the change [will] be accomplished"), Cunningham turns Clarissa away from the seemingly inexorable march of narrative time toward marriage (death) and uses not consummation but the kiss as the gateway to alternative outcomes. For Woolf, the kiss constituted one of those "moments of being" that her writing struggled to encounter and inhabit; for Cunningham, the kiss is a place where, as Carolyn Dinshaw terms it in Getting Medieval, different histories "touch" or brush up against each other, creating temporal havoc in the key of desire (Dinshaw 1999).

While there is now a wealth of excellent work focused on the temporality of lives lived in direct relation to the HIV virus (Edelman 1998), we find far less work on the other part of Cunningham's equation: those lives lived in the "shadow of an epidemic," the lives of women, transgenders, and queers who partake of this temporal shift in less obvious ways. Furthermore, the experience of HIV for heterosexual and queer people of color does not necessarily offer the same kind of hopeful reinvention of conventional understandings of time. As Cathy Cohen's work in *The Boundaries of Blackness: AIDS and the Breakdown of Black Politics* shows, some bodies are simply considered "expendable," both in mainstream and marginal communities, and the abbreviated life spans of black queers or poor drug users, say, does not inspire the same kind of metaphysical speculation on curtailed futures, intensified presents, or reformulated histories; rather, the premature deaths of

poor people and people of color in a nation that pumps drugs into impoverished urban communities and withholds basic health care privileges, is simply business as usual (Cohen 1999). Samuel Delany articulates beautifully the difficulty in connecting radical political practice to exploited populations when he claims, "We must remember that it is only those workers-usually urban artists (a realization Marx did come to)-whose money comes from several different social class sources, up and down the social ladder, who can afford to entertain a truly radical political practice" (Reid-Pharr 2001, xii). And yet, as Robert Reid-Pharr argues in Black Gay Man, the book that Delany's essay introduces, the relation between the universal and the particular that allows for the elevation of white male experience (gay or straight) to the level of generality and the reduction of, say, black gay experience to the status of the individual, can only come undone through a consideration of the counterlogics that emerge from "the humdrum perversities of our existence" (12). In a Queer Time and Place seeks to unravel precisely those claims made on the universal from and on behalf of white male subjects theorizing postmodern temporality and geography.

Queer time and space are useful frameworks for assessing political and cultural change in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (both what has changed and what must change). The critical languages that we have developed to try to assess the obstacles to social change have a way of both stymieing our political agendas and alienating nonacademic constituencies. I try here to make queer time and queer space into useful terms for academic and nonacademic considerations of life, location, and transformation. To give an example of the way in which critical languages can sometimes weigh us down, consider the fact that we have become adept within postmodernism at talking about "normativity," but far less adept at describing in rich detail the practices and structures that both oppose and sustain conventional forms of association, belonging, and identification. I try to use the concept of queer time to make clear how respectability, and notions of the normal on which it depends, may be upheld by a middle-class logic of reproductive temporality. And so, in Western cultures, we chart the emergence of the adult from the dangerous and unruly period of adolescence as a desired process of maturation; and we create longevity as the most desirable future, applaud the pursuit of long life (under any circumstances), and pathologize modes of living that show little or no concern for longevity. Within the life cycle of the Western human subject, long periods of stability are considered to be desirable, and people who live in rapid bursts (drug addicts, for example) are characterized as immature and even dangerous. But the ludic temporality created by drugs (captured by Salvador Dalí as a melting clock and by William Burroughs as "junk time") reveals the artificiality of our privileged constructions of time and activity. In the works of queer postmodern writers like Lynn Breedlove (*Godspeed*), Eileen Myles (*Chelsea Girls*), and others, speed itself (the drug as well as the motion) becomes the motor of an alternative history as their queer heroes rewrite completely narratives of female rebellion (Myles 1994; Breedlove 2002).

The time of reproduction is ruled by a biological clock for women and by strict bourgeois rules of respectability and scheduling for married couples. Obviously, not all people who have children keep or even are able to keep reproductive time, but many and possibly most people believe that the scheduling of repro-time is natural and desirable. Family time refers to the normative scheduling of daily life (early to bed, early to rise) that accompanies the practice of child rearing. This timetable is governed by an imagined set of children's needs, and it relates to beliefs about children's health and healthful environments for child rearing. The time of inheritance refers to an overview of generational time within which values, wealth, goods, and morals are passed through family ties from one generation to the next. It also connects the family to the historical past of the nation, and glances ahead to connect the family to the future of both familial and national stability. In this category we can include the kinds of hypothetical temporality-the time of "what if"-that demands protection in the way of insurance policies, health care, and wills.

In queer renderings of postmodern geography, the notion of a body-centered identity gives way to a model that locates sexual subjectivities within and between embodiment, place, and practice. But queer work on sexuality and space, like queer work on sexuality and time, has had to respond to canonical work on "postmodern geography" by Edward Soja, Fredric Jameson, David Harvey, and others that has actively excluded sexuality as a category for analysis precisely because desire has been cast by neo-Marxists as part of a ludic body politics that obstructs the "real" work of activism (Soja 1989; Harvey 1990; Jameson 1997). This foundational exclusion, which assigned sexuality to body/local/personal and took class/global/political as its proper frame of reference, has made it difficult to introduce questions of sexuality and space into the more general conversations about globalization and transnational capitalism. Both Anna Tsing and Steve Pile refer this problem as the issue of "scale." Pile, for example, rejects the notion that certain political arenas of struggle (say, class) are more important than others (say, sexuality), and instead he offers that we rethink these seemingly competing struggles in terms of scale by recognizing that while we tend to view local struggles as less significant than global ones, ultimately "the local and the global are not natural scales, but formed precisely out of the struggles that seemingly they only contain" (Pile 1997, 13).

A "queer" adjustment in the way in which we think about time, in fact, requires and produces new conceptions of space. And in fact, much of the contemporary theory seeking to disconnect queerness from an essential definition of homosexual embodiment has focused on queer space and queer practices. By articulating and elaborating a concept of queer time, I suggest new ways of understanding the nonnormative behaviors that have clear but not essential relations to gay and lesbian subjects. For the purpose of this book, "queer" refers to nonnormative logics and organizations of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time. "Queer time" is a term for those specific models of temporality that emerge within postmodernism once one leaves the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance. "Queer space" refers to the place-making practices within postmodernism in which queer people engage and it also describes the new understandings of space enabled by the production of queer counterpublics. Meanwhile, "postmodernism" in this project takes on meaning in relation to new forms of cultural production that emerge both in sync with and running counter to what Jameson has called the "logic" of late capitalism in his book Postmodernism (1997). I see postmodernism as simultaneously a crisis and an opportunity—a crisis in the stability of form and meaning, and an opportunity to rethink the practice of cultural production, its hierarchies and power dynamics, its tendency to resist or capitulate. In his work on postmodern geography, Pile also locates postmodernism in terms of the changing relationship between opposition and authority; he reminds us, crucially, that "the map of resistance is not simply the underside of the map of domination" (6).

In *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Harvey demonstrates that our conceptions of space and time are social constructions forged out of vibrant and volatile social relations (Harvey 1990). Harvey's analysis of postmodern time and space is worth examining in detail both because he energetically deconstructs the naturalization of modes of temporality and because he does so with no awareness of having instituted and presumed a normative framework for his alternative understanding of time. Furthermore, Harvey's concept of "time/space compression" and his accounts of the role of culture in late capitalism have become hegemonic in academic contexts. Harvey asserts that because we experience time as some form of natural progression, we fail to realize or notice its construction. Accordingly, we have concepts like "industrial" time and "family" time, time of "progress," "austerity" versus "instant" gratification, "postponement" versus "immediacy." And to all of these different kinds of temporality, we assign value and meaning. Time, Harvey explains, is organized according to the logic of capital accumulation, but those who benefit from capitalism in particular experience this logic as inevitable, and they are therefore able to ignore, repress, or erase the demands made on them and others by an unjust system. We like to imagine, Harvey implies, both that our time is our own and, as the cliché goes, "there is a time and a place for everything." These formulaic responses to time and temporal logics produce emotional and even physical responses to different kinds of time: thus people feel guilty about leisure, frustrated by waiting, satisfied by punctuality, and so on. These emotional responses add to our sense of time as "natural."

Samuel Beckett's famous play *Waiting for Godot* can be read, for example, as a defamiliarization of time spent: a treatise on the feeling of time wasted, of inertia or time outside of capitalist propulsion. Waiting, in this play, seems to be a form of postponement until it becomes clear that nothing has been postponed and nothing will be resumed. In Beckett's play, the future does not simply become diminished, it actually begins to weigh on the present as a burden. If poetry, according to W. H. Auden, "makes nothing happen," the absurdist drama makes the audience wait for nothing to happen, and the experience of duration makes visible the formlessness of time. Since Beckett's clowns go nowhere while waiting, we also see the usually invisible fault lines between time and space as temporal stasis is figured as immobility.

The different forms of time management that Harvey mentions and highlights are all adjusted to the schedule of normativity without ever being discussed as such. In fact, we could say that normativity, as it has been defined and theorized within queer studies, is the big word missing from almost all the discussions of postmodern geography within a Marxist tradition. Since most of these discussions are dependent on the work of Foucault and since normativity was Foucault's primary understanding of the function of modern power, this is a huge oversight, and one with consequences for the discussion of sexuality in relation to time and space. Harvey's concept of time/space compressions, for instance, explains that all of the time cycles

that we have naturalized and internalized (leisure, inertia, recreation, work/industrial, family/domesticity) are also spatial practices, but again, Harvey misses the opportunity to deconstruct the meaning of naturalization with regard to specific normalized ways of being. The meaning of space, Harvey asserts, undergoes a double process of naturalization: first, it is naturalized in relation to use values (we presume that our use of space is the only and inevitable use of space—private property, for example); but second, we naturalize space by subordinating it to time. The construction of spatial practices, in other words, is obscured by the naturalization of both time and space. Harvey argues for multiple conceptions of time and space, but he does not adequately describe how time/space becomes naturalized, on the one hand, and how hegemonic constructions of time and space are uniquely gendered and sexualized, on the other. His is an avowedly materialist analysis of time/space dedicated understandably to uncovering the processes of capitalism, but it lacks a simultaneous desire to uncover the processes of heteronormativity, racism, and sexism.

We need, for example, a much more rigorous understanding of the gendering of domestic space. Harvey could have pointed to the work within feminist history on the creation of separate spheres, for one, to show where and how the time/space continuum breaks down under the weight of critical scrutiny (Cott 1977; Smith-Rosenberg 1985). Feminist historians have claimed for some thirty years that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as the European bourgeoisie assumed class dominance over the aristocracy and proletariat, a separation of spheres graphically represented the gendered logic of the public/private binary and annexed middle-class women to the home, leaving the realm of politics and commerce to white men (McHugh 1999; Duggan 2000). Furthermore, as work by Paul Gilroy and Joseph Roach has shown, histories of racialization cannot avoid spatial conceptions of time, conflict, or political economy (Gilroy 1993; Roach 1996). Indeed, the histories of racialized peoples have been histories of immigration, diaspora, and forced migration. Only a single-minded focus on the history of the white working class and an abstract concept of capital can give rise to the kind of neat scheme that Harvey establishes whereby time dominates critical consciousness and suppresses an understanding of spatiality.

Lindon Barrett's *Blackness and Value: Seeing Double* provides one good antidote to Harvey's clean rendering of Enlightenment divisions of space and time (Barrett 1999). According to the account that Barrett gives in his book, Western philosophy can be historically located as a discourse that accompanies capitalism, and works to justify and rationalize a patently brutal and unjust system as inevitably scientific and organic. So seamlessly has capitalism been rationalized over the last two hundred years, in fact, that we no longer see the fault lines that divide black from white, work from play, subject from object. In true deconstructive form and with painstaking care, Barrett restores the original foundations of Western thought that were used to designate black as inhuman and white as human, black in association with idleness, perverse sexuality, and lack of self-consciousness, and white in association with diligence, legibility, the normal, the domestic, restraint, and self-awareness. By tracing this philosophical history, Barrett is able to explain the meaning of blackness in different historical periods in opposition to the seemingly inevitable, transparent, and neutral rhetorics of time and space that govern those periods.

Tsing also criticizes Harvey for making the breaks between space and time, modern and postmodern, economics and culture so clean and so distinct. She theorizes global capitalism much more precisely in relation to new eras of speed and connection, travel, movement, and communication; she lays out the contradictory results of global capitalism in terms of what it enables as well as what forms of oppression it enacts: Tsing reminds us that globalization makes a transnational politics (environmentalism, human rights, feminism) possible even as it consolidates U.S. hegemony. Harvey can only describe the condition of postmodernism in terms of new forms of domination and, like Jameson, can only think about cultural production as a channel for U.S. hegemony. Tsing, an anthropologist, is in many ways an unlikely defender of the nonsymmetrical relationship of cultural production to economic production, but her most important critique of Harvey concerns his characterization of postmodern culture as "a mirror of economic realities" (Tsing 2002, 466). Harvey's analysis, according to Tsing, suffers first from a simplistic mode of taking cultural shifts and then mapping them onto economic shifts; second, she claims that Harvey makes all of his assumptions about globalization without using an ethnographic research base. Finally, he overgeneralizes the "postmodern condition" on the basis of a flawed understanding of the role of culture, and then allows culture to stand in for all kinds of other evidence of the effects of globalization.

In relation to gender, race, and alternative or subcultural production, therefore, Harvey's grand theory of "the experience of space and time" in postmodernity leaves the power structures of biased differentiation intact, and presumes that, in Pile's formulation, opposition can only be an "echo of domination" (Pile 1997, 13). But while Harvey, like Soja and Jameson, can be counted on at least to nod to the racialization and gendering of postmodern space, also like Soja and Jameson, he has nothing to say about sexuality and space. Both Soja and Harvey claim that it was Foucault's interviews on space and published lecture notes on "heterotopia" that, as Soja puts it, created the conditions for a postmodern geography. The Foucault who inspires the postmodern Marxist geographers is clearly the Foucault of Discipline and Punish, but not that of The History of Sexuality. Indeed, Harvey misses several obvious opportunities to discuss the naturalization of time and space in relation to sexuality. Reproductive time and family time are, above all, heteronormative time/space constructs. But while Harvey hints at the gender politics of these forms of time/space, he does not mention the possibility that all kinds of people, especially in postmodernity, will and do opt to live outside of reproductive and familial time as well as on the edges of logics of labor and production. By doing so, they also often live outside the logic of capital accumulation: here we could consider ravers, club kids, HIV-positive barebackers, rent boys, sex workers, homeless people, drug dealers, and the unemployed. Perhaps such people could productively be called "queer subjects" in terms of the ways they live (deliberately, accidentally, or of necessity) during the hours when others sleep and in the spaces (physical, metaphysical, and economic) that others have abandoned, and in terms of the ways they might work in the domains that other people assign to privacy and family. Finally, as I will trace in this book, for some queer subjects, time and space are limned by risks they are willing to take: the transgender person who risks his life by passing in a small town, the subcultural musicians who risk their livelihoods by immersing themselves in nonlucrative practices, the queer performers who destabilize the normative values that make everyone else feel safe and secure; but also those people who live without financial safety nets, without homes, without steady jobs, outside the organizations of time and space that have been established for the purposes of protecting the rich few from everyone else.

Using the Foucault of *The History of Sexuality*, we can return to the concepts of time that Harvey takes for granted and expose their hidden but implicit logics (Foucault 1986). Stephen M. Barber and David L. Clark, in their introduction to a book of essays on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, present perhaps the most compelling reading to date of a queer temporality that emerges from Foucault's formulation of modernity as "an attitude rather than as a period of history" (Barber 2002, 304). Barber and Clark locate Foucault's com-

ments on modernity alongside Sedgwick's comments on queerness in order to define queerness as a temporality—"a 'moment,' it is also then a force; or rather it is a crossing of temporality with force" (8). In Sedgwick, Barber and Clark identify an elaboration of the relation between temporality and writing; in Foucault, they find a model for the relation between temporality and ways of being. They summarize these currents in terms of a "moment," a "persistent present," or "a queer temporality that is at once indefinite and virtual but also forceful, resilient, and undeniable" (2). It is this model of time, the model that emerges between Foucault and Sedgwick, that is lost to and overlooked by Marxist geographers for whom the past represents the logic for the present, and the future represents the fruition of this logic.

Postmodern geography, indeed, has built on Foucault's speculative but powerful essay on heterotopia and on Foucault's claim in this essay that "the present epoch will be above all an epoch of space" (Foucault 1986, 22). Based on this insight, Soja and Harvey argue that critical theory has privileged time/history over space/geography with many different implications. But for both Harvey in The Condition of Postmodernity and Jameson in "The Cultural Logic of Postmodernism," postmodernism is a strange and even bewildering confusion of time and space where history has lost its (materialist) meaning, time has become a perpetual present, and space has flattened out in the face of creeping globalization. Both theorists evince a palpable nostalgia for modernism with its apparent oppositional logics and its clear articulations of both alienation and revolution; and both theorists oppose the politics of the local within "an epoch of space" to the politics of the global-a global capitalism opposed by some kind of utopian global socialism, and no politics outside this framework registers as meaningful. Predictably, then, the "local" for postmodern geographers becomes the debased term in the binary, and their focus on the global, the abstract, and even the universal is opposed to the local with its associations with the concrete, the specific, the narrow, the empirical, and even the bodily. As Tsing puts it, the local becomes just a "stopping place for the global" in Marxist accounts, and all too often the local represents place, while the global represents circulation, travel, and migration. By refusing to set local/global up in a dialectical relation, Tsing allows for a logic of diversity: diverse locals, globals, capitalisms, temporalities (Tsing 2002).

Stuart Hall also reminds us in his essay on "The Global and the Local" that "the more we understand about the development of Capital itself, the more we understand that it is only part of the story" (Hall 1997). And as Doreen