

PROFIT AND  
PLEASURE

SEXUAL IDENTITIES IN  
LATE CAPITALISM

~

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Si te quiero es porque sos  
Mi amor, mi cómplice y todo,  
Y en la calle codo a codo  
Somos mucho más que dos.

—*Mario Benedetti*

lesbians to the prevailing patriarchal production of sex and affection has never been monolithic but rather differentially and hierarchically inflected by the social arrangements that divide the haves from the have-nots. In other words, lesbians are never simply women who desire other women; we are always much more. At stake in understanding that “more” is a feminist project Gayatri Spivak, speaking in an interview with Elizabeth Grosz, called “unlearning our privilege as our loss” (1990, 163).

If feminism is to offer an analysis of sexuality that does not “split the world,” we cannot simply appeal to the idealisms of lust, family romance, or nomad desire. We need to see sexuality, including lesbian sexualities, as part of a bigger picture. A politics built on abstracted desires may be the privilege of those for whom survival is not a pressing daily concern, but it also lures those whose struggle to survive is laced with sexual oppression into a collectivity that splits their sexuality from their survival needs. For some of us, unlearning the privilege of rallying around our sexual desires may indeed be a loss, but the loss of this privilege does not require that we forfeit critical attention to sexuality. On the contrary, developing critical knowledge of the *class* dimensions of (sexual) identity and desire could be one of the most fruitful contributions of a new generation of feminists to the collective global agenda for transformative change.

## IDENTITY, NEED, AND THE MAKING OF REVOLUTIONARY LOVE

*Déjeme decirle, a riesgo de parecer ridículo, que el revolucionario verdadero está guiado por grandes sentimientos de amor.*

At the risk of sounding ridiculous, let me say that the true revolutionary is moved by great feelings of love.

—Che Guevara

Shaking thoughts of her, I wonder — may be  
Life is finally simple: breathe in, breathe out.  
Wind biting at the mouth, hunger  
Gnawing in the gut, feet folding fast  
The furrowed snow, cold and weary,  
A body trudges home.  
And if no food nor drink await me,  
Would want grow monstrous, need demanding  
Nothing more than next week's meal?  
Scarcely living on the edge, might I  
Forget the face that stalks my day  
On this new year's fretted road:  
Woman who warms my spirit, fills me up,  
Steals my breath away . . . ?  
Perhaps. I do not think I would.

## NOT MEAT NOR DRINK

The first of these two epigraphs appears in bold script over an image of Che Guevara printed against a background of women, men, and children-in-motion on a poster made by Syracuse Cultural Workers. The poster hangs above my desk in the English Department at the State University of New York at Albany: Looking at it when I walk in the door or during a pause in conversation with a student always braces me because its message is such a contradiction to the academic environment my office is nestled in. Che's confession bristles against the grain of acceptable academic discourse I know so well in which words like "revolution" and "love" are never paired and where to talk of revolution is considered as old-fashioned, romantic, and even embarrassing as it is to claim that love is your motive for anything. His words inspire me for the possibility they hold out against these and other historical attainments. They remind me that the fight for social justice inside and outside the university is not just fired by rage and indignation but is also generated from this most complex of human capacities we call "love." Certainly, I can question what "love" meant as Che lived it, how it was compromised and hedged in by the movements he provoked, and how it may be dismissed, trivialized, or commodified by those who embrace his image or carry on his legacy. But at another level, taking the risk of admitting love's importance as he does urges me to take the leap of seeming ridiculous, too, by pursuing my conviction that indeed we do have to talk about love when we grapple with how to understand what motivates social movement. His words also remind me that for many people in the world outside of U.S. academia, some of them motivated by Che's life and commitments, revolution is still a word that rumbles with hope and promise.

The second epigraph to this chapter is a poem I wrote in January 1997. It was inspired by Edna St. Vincent Millay's beautiful sonnet "Love Is Not All: It Is Not Meat Nor Drink" and echoes the closing lines of her verse: "It may well be," she writes, "that in a difficult hour . . . I might be driven to sell your love for peace, Or trade the memory of this night for food." Walking home one shockingly bright snow-covered New Year's morning, I wondered about love and need, about the exchange Edna Millay considered, and the price of love's betrayal she imagined: trading the memory of just one night of love for the satisfaction of a more pressing human need. This was a time in my life when the long-term partnership I had with my

lover was coming undone, and the pain of that loss was much with me. The intensity of those feelings and the emotional work I was doing to come to terms with them haunted daily my other work of reading, writing, and teaching about theories of desire and need. I was often puzzled by the power of my grief to overwhelm me and astonished by its paralyzing grip. I knew that in the long history of my relationship my love and attachment often took forms in my imagination and actions that were modeled on the romances I had grown up on. I knew that the "subject-effects" I participated in and that shaped my actions and my feelings often conformed to ideologies of individualism and bourgeois couple-love that reify human desires and affections . . . and yet, knowing all of this could not keep me from feeling as I did. There was no way around it: the intimate bond I had formed with this one woman, the companionship and sense of family we had built, felt as vital for me as any need.

Placing this poem next to the words of Che as I have done here opens a wide chasm between two very different forms of love: the love for a collective people, *el amor por la gente*, and the love for one other person, a love of the being-in-love sort, committed couple-love. To say that one kind of love is less important or real than the other, or that one is purchased at the expense of the other, seems to me a foolish calculation. To endorse the first, collective love, without acknowledging other kinds of love that are more individual—the long-term commitment or the deep and lasting ties of affection between friends, the bond between a child and her caretaker, or any number of other loves that take even less conventional forms—loves that also have an intense hold on us, would be not just dishonest but a costly political mistake.

Perhaps an even wider chasm opens between these two versions of love along the boundary of heterogender difference. Che Guevara's face has become a commodified sign, appearing on posters and T-shirts, calendars and postcards, and it signifies a political identity that is implicitly dissociated from "queer" love. As an icon for revolutionary struggle, Che's image has come to stand for a political culture that is often explicitly heteronormative, masculinist, misogynist, and tacitly homophobic, a political culture associated with Latin American liberation movements. Any effort to claim Che's invocation of revolutionary love as a banner for collective identity that includes queers cannot help but confront the residue of these associations. José Muñoz addresses this problem when he reads a scene from the documentary *Cholo Joto* (1993) by Augie Robles. The scene Muñoz examines

treats the contradictions evoked by Che's image and his words for a young queer Chicano, Valentin, who grew up seeing them on a mural in his neighborhood park.

"There was a mural of Che Guevara," Valentin recounts, "that is still there, with the quote 'A true rebel is guided by deep feelings of love.' I remember reading that as a little kid and thinking, what the fuck does that mean? Then I realized, yeah, that's right. That I'm not going to fight out of anger but because I love myself and my community." (14)

For Muñoz, Valentin's memory is a striking reinvention of Che because it "unearths a powerful yet elusive queer kernel in revolutionary liberationist identity;" (14) a queer kernel of suppressed desire for Che that undoes identification with him and his message. Muñoz reads this renarration of Che's image as a "queering" that takes the now recognizable form of opening up the possibility of homoerotic desire within heteronormative discourse, a reading strategy that has become the signature claim of queer studies. Queer critiques do disclose the suppressed homoerotic other side of heteronormative formulations of desire; they reveal the ways a certain "disidentification" with the prescribed heteroscript traverses cultural texts and cultural politics. Desire here is historicized, but only so far as to reveal its heteronormative dimensions and its suppressed homoerotic other side. The "disidentification" that Muñoz describes and promotes involves assent to and renunciation of the normative invitations that solicit the subject. Disidentification in this sense results in a new formulation that is the epitome of the postmodern hybrid identity. It involves the characteristic postmodern double move of simultaneous identification with (or desire for) and renunciation of the normative axes of race, gender, and sexual identity. Queer disidentifications for Muñoz are "improper" in that they may "desire the white ideal but with a difference." But they are also "proper" in that desire remains caught within the very terms of normative thinking. That is, the rules circumscribing identity become the sole stake in social struggle. Moreover, the non-normative alternative values and desires that are generated by the disidentification are directed toward a movement leader. Whether it subscribes to the straight norm or shimmers beneath the surface as a more forbidden homoerotic desire, this sort of (dis)identification marshals desire in its most familiar form, toward an eroticized individual.

It seems to me that in fostering a queer reading that transposes communal identification with El Che into desire for El Che, Muñoz closes down the potential implied in Robles's alternative formulation of identification and desire, an alternative that connects his renunciation of self-shame with love for his community. In this chapter I am interested in considering how we might return the concept of "disidentification" to this terrain that Robles hints at and that is in fact much closer to the grounds for disidentification as Michel Pecheux first proposed it. I will come back to Pecheux's notion of disidentification and its uses for explaining collective forms of political agency that are not trapped in normative compliance or transfigured hero worship. The concept of disidentification deserves further consideration both for its political usefulness and because it is being embraced quite problematically by other culture theorists now.<sup>1</sup>

If the challenge for social movement lies in getting out of the cul-de-sac of identity politics, it certainly also lies in not dismissing the persistent historical pressures exerted by identity categories, including the exclusions that occur when sexual identity and desire are set within the terms of heteronormativity. I have been arguing that promoting queer desire — desire with a difference — however, may not finally make very much difference at all. The more politically needed and more difficult task lies in tapping contradictory forms of identification and the affective force they rely on in order to make visible the fundamental social (not just cultural) structures identities are part of. This is a disidentification of a different order than Muñoz's — a disidentification that shifts the ground for knowing our desires and identifications, and the horizon for revamping them for collective struggle, from capitalism's inside to its outside — the space of unmet needs. I opened this chapter by offering two different versions of love because they raise the question of how we deal with the disjuncture between our efforts to forge collective political agency and everyday lives that are propelled by other kinds of attachments and identifications. I do think that the tension between them is an important political issue. But I do not know that trying to resolve that tension is the most fruitful political path to pursue. In fact, it might be best to approach the problem of love's relation to political agency from another place. I chose these texts because both place the human capacity for love up against the insistent pressure of human survival needs, and it is with questions of need that I think considerations of love and political agency might more productively begin. How might needs serve as the basis for forging political agency in a way that

would not foreclose from critical intervention and agendas for social change our human capacities for affective bonds and the sensations and the identities formed around them?

Of course, Edna Millay had it right: the desire to give love and be loved intimately in return—and the fantasies and identifications this loving breeds in memory and desire—are not meat nor drink. But are they necessary nourishment all the same? How indeed are we to understand the ties that bind this human capacity to love (and the desires that often fuel and shape it) to human survival needs? Are love and the larger domain of human affect it is part of ever at one remove from a more basic set of vital human needs? If the equation that sets human affect against need is somehow wrong, must we not then find ways to understand not only how this realm of who we are as humans is folded into the ways we socially meet—or do not meet—our other human needs, but also figure out how to marshal our human affective capacities in the struggle to redress the inequitable meeting of other human needs? If we no longer ignore affect in the calculus of human needs, then in forging a collective standpoint for opposition—even revolutionary—forms of consciousness we will need to acknowledge how political agency, practice, and commitment are motivated, complicated, and undermined by our human capacity for affect, perhaps especially the emotion Che names “love.” What relationship would this revolutionary love have to the prevailing ways love and desire are sutured into sexual identities, and how love is practiced—and experienced—in individual terms? What would it mean to redirect the problem of identity that has so preoccupied cultural politics to this relation between affect and need?

Well, these are only some of the knotty questions the space between these two texts provokes for me. References to the relationship between desire and need have punctuated my discussion of sexual identity in the previous chapters. These references have been fairly oblique and have not broached at all the topic of love. So it is in order to explore more fully the relations among sexual identity, desire, and need and to bring this inquiry around to the question of love that I offer the following discussion. Finally, there is little that is final about this last chapter. In fact, it is more an opening than a summary or last word. While I only begin to address here the many implications of the questions I have raised above, I remain convinced that these questions are important to ask now, mostly because they presume a new ground for thinking and practicing a sexual politics whose implications spill beyond the boundaries of sexual identity. I hope that the

arguments I make—in all of their provisionality—will provoke others to pursue further and more rigorously some of the questions I lay out here.

#### RELINKING: NEED, AFFECT, SEXUAL IDENTITY

In discussions of sexual identity over the past decade or so, two major preoccupations have organized debate. One is the concern to rethink identity in ways that would open up identity categories—man, woman, white, black, straight, gay—to the difference within them. Queer theory and politics have been inspired by this effort in that “queer”ing sexual identity has meant refusing the presumed difference between hetero- and homosexuality as a place to begin. This refusal involved disclosing the forms of sexual identity that the categories hetero- and homosexual do not include—for example, transsexual, bisexual, transgendered identities—as well as non-normative sexual practices or “perversions” that are not necessarily included under the sign “homosexual”: sex work, S/M, pederasty. Queer critiques have also emphasized that sexual identities do not function independently of other forms of racial, gendered, or national difference, and they have explored some of the ways these differences have been articulated with one another. This effort to rethink sexual identity has also prompted considerations of new forms of political agency.

Many of these discussions cast the stakes for political agency in terms of citizenship, and much of this work is offered as a way to bring sexual identity more fully into the public sphere. However, even when these new formulations recast citizenship from traditional liberal and neoliberal models of individual rights, the paradigm for agency remains circumscribed by a political imagination, often couched in terms of “radical democracy,” that takes little or no notice of capitalism. I have suggested throughout the previous chapters that the disappearance of capitalism in cultural and social theory is not an oversight but is itself the mark of certain affiliations between a new bourgeois ruling bloc and the emergence of new forms of consciousness for late capitalism. The preoccupation with identity politics during the 1980s was one way this new consciousness was played out. In the nineties, a general consensus began to form that identity politics is a dead end, or at the very least has its limits, and many of the more recent discussions of citizenship and radical democracy have been efforts to go beyond it. It seems to me, however, that these debates suffer from the same shortcomings that identity politics does: in both cases,

change is only being imagined and discussed in terms of cultural transformation or rights to representation within the existing state, with little or no consideration of the relationship of cultural forms and state formations to the structures of capitalism. However, while the academic left ignores capital, its systematic accumulation nonetheless proceeds at great human cost. There is no question that how we know and live identities and how political agency is exercised remain pressing, even urgent, concerns. But in order to develop a political platform that addresses them in such a way that their operation in and against the accumulation of capital is made visible, I suggest that we need to radically reorient the discussion and begin in a different place. The new ground for beginning I offer is the arena of social needs.

Historical materialism begins with the premise that meeting human needs is the baseline of history. Needs are corporeal—because they involve keeping the body alive—but they are not “natural,” because meeting these corporeal needs always takes place through social relationships. In this sense social interaction itself translates into a vital need. As people produce the means to meet their needs, they also produce new needs. Vital human needs are those that are necessary to species life and include the requirement for food, clothing, and shelter. Because human needs are themselves historically produced, the parameters constituting what counts as a vital need are varied and changing. Sanitation and health care, for example, are vital needs in the sense that not having access to them can put the survival of individuals or groups at risk, but the acknowledgment of these as vital needs, as well as the standards for what qualifies as adequate means and technologies to meet them, has varied throughout history and has been widely contested. No matter how they are historically met, however, human needs have an individual corporeal dimension and a social one in that meeting them is always a historical, collective practice.

Human needs also include the ability to exercise certain human potentials. As a species, humans have many capacities—for intellect, invention, communication; the capacity for sensation and affect and for affective social relations is another. In the research done on infants who have not been touched and fail to thrive there is some evidence that satisfaction of the human capacity for sensation and affect is a vital need. Moreover, many human affective capacities are integrated in the satisfaction of vital human needs in that they mediate the social relations through which these needs are provided. Affective needs are inseparable from the social component of most need satisfaction, then, but they also constitute human needs in

themselves in the sense that all people deserve to have the conditions available that will allow them to exercise and develop their affective capacities.

Some recent work in contemporary culture theory has begun to call attention to affect as a vital social medium, but it remains an undeveloped area in culture critique. Most of this work pays little attention to the archive of research on affect in the social sciences, and because of their different disciplinary histories, the two lines of inquiry tend to approach affect and the related field of emotion from different premises. Work in the sociology of emotion falls into two at times overlapping orientations: the organicist tradition (that traces its genealogy through Darwin, Freud, James) that focuses on linking emotive expressions to visible gestures, on instincts and their conscious and unconscious channeling through the libido or the brain's reaction to stimuli; and the interactionist tradition (Dewey, Mills, Goffman) that stresses the social factors that organize the expression of emotion in a social context (Hochschild 210–22). More recent research in the sociology of emotion has developed new conceptual vocabularies for the social dimensions of emotion, stressing the function of “naming” in the historical and cultural construction of emotion, and opening up new areas of analysis, in particular emotional labor, for critical consideration.

Arlie Hochschild has been a pioneer in this area, one of the first feminist sociologists to develop the concept of emotional labor and to analyze its commodification as a basic component of the gendered division of labor in the service industry.<sup>2</sup> Hochschild distinguishes between feeling and the naming of feeling that is directed by the culture, and her interest lies in exposing how the naming of feeling and its management have alienated workers in the service industry from their affective capacities as it turns these capacities into capital. She examines the ways emotional exchanges—a smile, a greeting—that were once privately negotiated become regulated by a company's personnel standards, how they are subordinated to a commercial logic and changed by it. As Hochschild points out, it doesn't take capitalism to turn feeling into a commodity, but capitalism has pushed the process further and organized emotion management more efficiently. One consequence of the pervasiveness of the corporate management of human emotion is the compensatory emphasis in the culture on “unmanaged feelings,” on authentic, “natural,” or spontaneous feeling, especially as it is popularized in a wide array of self-help therapies (Hochschild 190). While this longing for an artless natural self may not in fact “capture” that integrity, it at least points to a gap between the ways of

managing affect provided by commercial and corporate structures and workers' actual feelings. This is a gap that many service workers recognize as they joke about or try to separate their feelings from the company's naming and management of them.

In contrast to the sociology of emotion, culture theory in the humanities has emphasized the language-based construction of consciousness. This work has been shaped by the presuppositions of poststructuralism, which stresses the radical loss of authenticity (a true or coherent self), not as an effect of capitalism's alienating management and commodification of human capacities but of the subject's entry into a symbolic system of representation where the subject of language is always so to speak "at a loss" because the subject of the enunciation ("I") is always split from the "self" it refers to. This view dismisses a concept like "alienation" because it connotes either a true "self" somewhere "behind" language, or suggests a utopian vision for overcoming losses that for the poststructuralist are irreparable. In the postmodern frame of reference, the subject's coherence is mitigated by the radical difference (the loss of self-presence or a splitting of the self) that is the condition for taking up a position in a symbolic order where the instability of cultural signifiers will always undo any provisional or projected self-coherence. It is clear by now that I see these postmodern formulations as extremely limited and actually quite conservative, because they foreclose ways of knowing the world that connect the symbolic order (culture) to material social relations that are not symbolic. My point here is that while postmodern theories have developed a vocabulary for addressing the construction of the subject, however problematic it may be, most of this work has largely ignored emotion and affect.

Brian Massumi rightly contends that we have very little critical vocabulary specific to affect (88), but he also reminds us that there is an archive—though marginal in culture theory—that does address the affective, a tradition he traces through Benedetto Spinoza, Henri Bergson, and Gilles Deleuze. Massumi's work is unusual because it draws upon (post)modern cultural theories as well as empirical research in the field of communications on the physiology of affect as it operates in the reception and processing of images. As I indicated in chapter 2, there are problems with Deleuze's concept of desire as productive energy, and to the extent that Massumi's analysis finally leads to the conclusion that "affect is the whole world," a similar reduction of the material to matter undercuts his insights. Massumi's ideas are suggestive, however, because of his insistence

that human affect is an area of life that culture study should attend to and for his effort to conceptualize its corporeal and social dimensions.

In "The Autonomy of Affect" Massumi argues that image reception—how people read images—takes place on at least two levels. One is a level of what he calls "intensity," the other is a semiotic order of signification. Both register in the body: semiotic ordering registers in modulations of heartbeat and breathing as we follow and anticipate the sequencing of images; intensity registers on the surface of the skin. While the more linear processing of images dips into the autonomic register, intensity remains outside that loop, disconnected from meaningful sequencing. Language is not opposed to intensity but can resonate, interfere with, dampen, or amplify it (87). Every event takes place on both levels and between them as they resonate together. Massumi equates intensity with affect. Drawing on Spinoza, however, he clarifies that emotion and affect are not the same. An emotion is the

social-linguistic fixing of the quality of an experience which is from that point onward defined as personal. Emotion is qualified intensity, the conventional, consensual point of intersection of intensity into semantically and sensorially formed progressions, into narrativizable action-reaction circuits, into function and meaning. It is intensity owned and recognized. (88)

But even once intensity enters conscious thought it still "doubles like a shadow that is always almost perceived, and cannot but be perceived, in effect" (89). The result is that "intensity and experience accompany one another, like two mutually presupposing dimensions, or like two sides of a coin" (94). Intensity is asocial but not presocial in that it includes social elements. Traces of past actions as well as traces of their contexts are conserved in the brain and the flesh and incorporated into intensity as an incipient action and expression, as tendencies, or potential pathways of action and expression (85)

While Deleuze and Massumi stress the *frict* of intensity that is unassimilable to consciousness and symbolic ordering, and they value it as a radically productive desire, I find the more fruitful aspect of their thinking to lie in the insight that there is an interface between affect and social elements. It is here in this interface that ideology—but also education for social movement and class consciousness—can intervene. Massumi's analysis opens up

ways to begin to conceptualize the relationship between affective intensities and consciousness. He invites us to consider how powerful this dimension of “experience” is in a society where the media is being used so pervasively in information-based economics and where we are bombarded with images “at every step of our daily rounds” (104). However, he does not give us a way to work with its effects nor a way to understand how they are linked to capital in what he calls a “post-ideological world.” The forms in which power operates do indeed make use of affect, and they do so most intensely through media technology. But calling them “post-ideological” as he does implies that they are beyond the reach of social intervention, and I think this presumption can lead to a very dangerous political quietism. Instead, I suggest that we need to develop ways to understand how affect accompanies and is organized through its interface with social relationships through the ruling bloc narratives and the counter-narratives to them that people live by. For it is in this “space” of what we call “experience” that desire, fear, anger, and resistance might also be marshaled for social movement.

Although Massumi does not elaborate very far the relationship of affect to the social organization of affective intensities, his discussion suggests that that we might develop this corporeal-social aspect of experience in terms of human needs. Affective capacities are tied to cognition and to the traces of social contexts that register in them. But as only one of a host of human potentials, they also have a relationship to the body’s other material needs—its dependence on sustenance, shelter, recovery from illness or injury—all of which require some form of social cooperation in order to be met. Ann Ferguson’s marxist feminist perspective has stressed this social dimension of affect, highlighting not so much its corporeal excess as the social contexts that organize it. For Ferguson, the human capacity for sensation and affect, like other material needs (i.e., hunger or the need for shelter), is one aspect of social being that is always historically produced. It is disciplined in the organization of labor, monitored by the state, expressed and made meaningful through culture-ideology. What Marx said of hunger is also applicable to the human capacity for sensation and affect: “Hunger is hunger, but the hunger gratified by cooked meat eaten with a knife and fork is a different hunger from that which bolts down raw meat with the aid of hand, nail, and tooth. Production thus produces not only the object but also the manner of consumption.” In a similar way, the satisfaction of the need for sensation and affect is historically produced and takes different forms in various social formations. What Ferguson has

called “sex-affective energy” is a key component of all human social relations. Sex-affective energy has no natural objects or bodily functions; it is a social product that is variously organized into social relations and identities—into friendship, maternal and paternal bonds, affective communities, reproductive-sex relations, romantic love, and multiple forms of sexual desire (Ferguson 1989, 78). Sex-affective energy is historically produced as social relations and bodily feelings.

Unlike the psychoanalytic model of desire, which generalizes from the vantage point of the bourgeois kinship alliance and highlights sexual desire as erotogenic drives, the concept of sex-affective production allows us to consider sexual desire as only one form of sex-affective production and to see the intersection of the symbolic or cultural dimension of sex-affective relations with the political economy of labor and the formation of the state. The social organization of affect is not just a tool to meet other needs, as some functionalist marxists have assumed, nor is it a corporeal energy autonomous from the division of labor. We might even say affective potential is included in what Marx means by labor—that is, the capacity to satisfy and freely develop vital human needs, a capacity that is always socially exercised. Though he does not explicitly name them as such, affective needs are part of the human potential for “self-realization” that Marx often refers to when he contends that the development of needs is historically contingent on the development of human potential.

Under capitalism, workers do not retain control of very much of their human potential, and the outlawing of so much human potential is, in fact, one of the sites of struggle between capital and labor. Under capitalism’s wage-labor system, the worker trades away the positive potential for self-realization inherent within his or her labor power when he or she commodifies it on the wage market. During the working day, labor power becomes detached from the individual’s full range of human needs and potentials, and it is in this sense that capitalism is an impoverished mode of social organization. We might even say that outlawing the development of full human potential comprises the very scaffolding of human relations in commodity exchange. This outlawing takes place at several material levels. In the encounter between the worker and the capitalist, the worker exchanges his labor for a wage, but the capitalist has the power to decide what counts as the value of this labor based on the minimum he decides is needed for the worker’s survival measured against the maximum surplus labor the capitalist wants to extract for profit. In other words, it is the capitalist (as a member of a class that works in conjunction with the

state) who estimates and decides on the minimum wage that is necessary to maintain the worker as a laboring individual. He decides the amount in wages that will allow the worker to meet his survival needs sufficiently in order to be able to return to work the next day. In this exchange of labor power for wages several things occur. First of all, the worker's "species life," to use Marx's phrase, is taken from him. What this amounts to is that the worker is forced to forfeit certain needs— aspects of his human potential—embodied in what Marx calls labor. In order to survive within the minimum standard, the worker is forced to give up "time for education, for intellectual development, for the fulfilling of social functions and for social intercourse, for the free play of his bodily and mental activity, even the rest time of Sunday" (*Capital*, vol. 1, 264).

The companion to the production of surplus value, then, is the production of "outlawed need." Outlawed need is a very useful concept that Deborah Kelsh has proposed as a way of understanding an important consequence of the commodification of labor under capitalism. When the worker meets the capitalist in the marketplace and exchanges his labor power for a wage many of his human potentials and needs are excluded as the unnamed price of the exchange. One portion of these outlawed needs is encoded in the calculation of the minimum wage. The minimum wage is of course invariably not the same as a living wage. Because the minimum wage cannot cover even the most basic needs for living—food and clothing and housing and health care, no less education and time for intellectual and creative development—many unmet needs for living a full human life are virtually "outlawed." Another area of outlawed need is embedded in the production of labor power outside the workplace. Because the need to reproduce labor power is not part of the calculus of socially necessary labor covered by wages, the domestic labor of feeding and clothing and caring constitutes an outlawed set of needs. The labor to satisfy these needs is either underpaid or not paid, invariably not valued, and often made invisible *as labor* by being understood as a woman's natural role.

Another way that needs are outlawed is in the commodification of consciousness that occurs as a necessary accompaniment to the production of commodities: the process that Marx describes in his section of *Capital* on the commodity fetish. Within capitalist production, sensation and affect often get separated from the meeting of human needs, sometimes directly, as workers' bodies and minds are abused in the interests of profitable production, and sometimes indirectly through forms of consciousness that ab-

stract mind from body, public from private, ways of knowing from their historical material conditions. In commodity capitalism, not only do people lose sight of the social relationships that make possible the marketable goods they consume, but this process also requires a fracturing of our objective human capacities as sensuous, social beings. Alienation from sensation and affect underpins the organization of commodity production and consumption and the logic of exchange value. In capitalist divisions of labor, the extraction of surplus value requires that workers alienate themselves from their human potentials, including their sex-affective potentials. It is only by severing her human potential to labor from her needs that the worker can present herself as "owner" of her labor power. It is only in this way that she can commodify her capacities and even her personality into a thing that she can sell.

Because bodily senses cannot speak for themselves—they have to be *made* "sensible"—the human capacity for sensation and affect is inevitably organized by the discourses of culture-ideology. Under capitalism, sensation and affect have been produced historically such that some ways of meeting these needs have been consolidated into legitimate "experiences" and social relations while others have been outlawed. In chapter 3 I address some of the ways we might think of sexual identities as forms of consciousness that emerged out of the history of commodification. I argued that during the late nineteenth century, as commodity capitalism inaugurated a new culture of mass consumption, the organization of desire shifted, and along with this shift emerged new categories of identity, of allowed and outlawed human needs. My contention was that we need to consider the historical relation between the emergence of new "desiring subjects" of consumer culture and the ways in which the consolidation of heteronormativity, and the accompanying formation of hetero- and homosexual identities, reified the human potential for sensation and affect. Reification is a process whereby the history of social relationships underlying identities becomes occluded or made invisible, and identities come to be seen as natural "things in themselves." In the process of reifying consciousness into forms of identity, whole areas of human affective potential are effectively outlawed. In constructing sexual identity, for example, the discourses of sexuality provide the social contexts whereby sensations and affects are made intelligible in terms of normative and perverse sexual identifications and desires. "Outlawed needs," however, are not just those sensations and affects that the normative discourses shame—by naming them "gay," "lesbian," "perverse," or any other legitimizing name. They

are also those unspeakable sensations and affects that do not fall easily into any prescribed categories. In other words, the interface between the available modes of intelligibility and human affective and erotic capacity is never complete. Massumi's conception of affect is helpful here for his suggestion that the relationship between affect and the "social context" that organizes it and makes it intelligible is always incoherent. The human potential for sensation and affect that comprises "experience" is always much richer than sanctioned identity categories capture. What is left over are "tendencies" or human potentials for action that normative discourses cannot name.

Critical psychology has developed a conceptual discourse for addressing the relationship between human potential and its restriction under capitalism that I think provides a useful contribution to rethinking sexual identity in these terms. Critical psychology emerged in Europe in the early seventies as a marxist protest against mainstream bourgeois psychology and was led by the work of the West German Klaus Holzkamp. It puts forward a paradigm for scientific psychology that would serve the genuine interests of working people and also take the side of the individual human subject (Tolman 3, 5). At the philosophical level, critical psychology is historical materialist in that it views human phenomena historically as the outcome of material processes of development (Tolman 7–8). This means that psychological phenomena as well as scientific theory and practice are seen as historically embedded, and so-called psychic processes are understood to be thoroughly penetrated by societal existence. For the critical psychologist, what is specific to human existence is its societal nature; individual human needs are not satisfied directly or even individually but are governed by the society we are born into and the places we occupy in it (Tolman 14). Between human need—the need for food, say—and the satisfaction of this need lies a complex set of societal relations, among them divisions of labor. For instance, in the case of hunger, this human need is mediated by the conditions and human relationships in place for production and distribution of food, as well as a host of cultural practices and attitudes attached to them (Tolman 15–16). For the critical psychologist, human needs do not refer directly to their objects but to our capacity to participate in the mediating societal arrangements by which the objects of need are produced and distributed. Critical psychologists call this capacity "having control over the conditions of production" (Tolman 16).

One of critical psychology's main concepts is the notion of "action potency." Action potency refers to the individual's ability to do things that she feels are necessary to satisfy her needs and assure an acceptable quality of life. My interest in this concept is that it mediates individual reproduction with societal reproduction by linking consciousness and agency (how one feels about oneself) with "the actual possibilities for need satisfaction through cooperative effort with other members of society" (17). Action potency in capitalist societies is organized by class divisions in that possibilities for fulfilling needs of all sorts are less restricted for those who own and control resources. Critical psychologists use the concept of action potency to address the ways individuals relate to the possibilities available for fulfilling their needs—whether by making the best of the options at hand or by going beyond the limits and extending existing possibilities. These two options they designate *restricted action potency* and *generalized action potency* (Tolman 18). The restrictive strategies are often the easiest to adopt in the short run—getting along and receiving the benefits of the good or accommodating subject. But no matter how understandable or "ideologically available" the restrictive framework is, in the end by exercising this option "people become their own enemies" because restrictive forms of action are characterized by modes of thinking that fail to reflect the social mediatedness of existence, including the option to extend existing possibilities. Restrictions are taken to be the effects of one's immediate environment. Unhappiness is blamed on one's family, partner, workers, or oneself. Social conditions are personalized and psychologized. This sort of interpretive thinking is widespread and encouraged in capitalist society. It makes good consumers and docile subjects. It also makes reified identities. In contrast, comprehensive thinking does not transcend, replace, or move beyond interpretive thinking so much as it sublates it (Tolman 19). The point here is to comprehend our immediate life situation, including the attraction of restrictive ways of thinking, within its social and historical context and in so doing devise generalized or more comprehensive strategies for action.

I want to propose that sexual identities—indeed, all reified identity categories—might be thought of as forms of restrictive action potency. Sexual identity categories restrict the power to act to the extent that they atomize human potential and social relationships. By this I do not only mean that the organization of gender and desire into the heteropolar norm is an example of restrictive action potency. To the extent that the

queering of this binary has tended to close off more comprehensive ways of thinking about sexual identification and desire; it also restricts our ability to understand the history of social relationships that identity formation depends on. Sometimes these restrictions take the form of individualizing, as critical psychology notes, but they also take more postmodern forms where identity is rescripted as a complex of culturally constructed positions. When a way of thinking about identity that promotes restrictive action potency is the starting point for social movement, the consequence is that the power to collectively change existing possibilities and structures becomes restricted as well. The challenge for social movement committed to addressing forms of oppression that target sexual identity is to fold those ways of thinking that encourage restrictive action potency into those that foster more comprehensive action potency. In the next section I look at some of the ways academic social theorists have proposed we might get out of the restrictive action potency of identity politics and redirect social movement by making use of appeals to social justice and democracy. The reorientation I am proposing endorses the aim of full democracy, but from a different starting place: a deeply democratic because fundamentally anticapitalist project. Rooted in the reality of collective human needs, it displaces identity politics with a practice of disidentification that draws attention to the role of human affect in social life and in social movement through the cultivation of what I would call the more comprehensive action potency of "revolutionary love."

#### REVOLUTIONARY LOVE

As we enter the new millennium, organized oppositional social movement in the United States is stymied by the lack of viable forms of political agency; the absence of any credible vision of an alternative to the present order; the failure to connect a politics of identity to a politics of equality, and what is really the context for these developments—a resurgence of economic *laissez-faire*. This situation is both an effect of the hegemony of two decades of neoliberalism and the legacy of the New Left. By the nineties, both in the academy and in community activism, various versions of postmodern identity politics had become the reigning paradigm, sometimes understood in terms of a logic of intersecting class, race, gender, and sexual oppressions. One consequence of the installation of the conservative bourgeois ruling bloc in the eighties has been the privatizing not only of

the welfare state but also of citizenship. In the previous chapters I have tried to show how this conservative, privatizing turn is evident in the discourses of postmodern identity politics that relinquish the fight against structural inequalities for local strategies and a more flexible cultural politics. Now, at century's end, critical examination of the left's political failures is beginning to call attention to their class dimensions and the role of identity politics in them.

In her book *Justice Interruptus* Nancy Fraser addresses this transformation in the grammar of political claims-making that has taken place in the United States over the past two decades. She sees it as a shift from a socialist political imaginary that is primarily concerned with the problem of redistribution of wealth and resources to a politics of identity in which the central problem of justice is cultural recognition (2). I want to take some time to review her position, as I think there are many who find her diagnosis of the split within the left apt. Yet it seems to me that her arguments also have a certain affiliation with the identity politics she wants to go beyond. While she sees the mobilizing of social movements around various categories of cultural identity to be an unfortunate result of the decentering of class, Fraser does not explain why class is not a viable starting point for social theory, what the relationship is between the concept of political economy that she uses and class, or for that matter between the politics of redistribution and class. The frame for her understanding of socioeconomic injustice is "a rough and general" one, loosely referring to exploitation, economic marginalization, and deprivation (13), and informed by a commitment to egalitarianism. One of the consequences of this general model of economic injustice is that her concept of "redistribution" can actually obscure the basis for socioeconomic inequities under capitalism (the fact that the unpaid labor of many is the source of profits for the few). At worst, the concept of redistribution can be taken to imply that social welfare programs rather than fundamental structural changes are the way to remedy economic inequities. Most of all, conceptualizing political economy in terms of distribution forfeits the opportunity to acknowledge that under capitalism there are and historically have always been uneven, complex material connections between the unequal relations of production (another way of understanding class) and the production of identities, knowledges, and culture. That Fraser relinquishes a systemic understanding of social life premised on the human requirement to produce what is needed to survive also points to her ambivalent relationship to socialist feminism—a tradition she

draws on and was herself part of but that her own postsocialism seems to have disowned.

Fraser is certainly alert to the inequity that capitalism as a social system has wrought and its damaging effects on people's lives, and her references to contemporary neoliberalism detail the global dimension of this violent social system. But she does not explain what it is about late capitalism and neoliberalism that has provoked the interruption of justice that is her subject. My concern is that Fraser's reluctance to spell out the class character of capitalism's deep structures finally undermines the adequacy of her conceptual maps to the emancipatory project she espouses. Nonetheless, Fraser's core argument that "the project of transforming the deep structures of both political economy and culture appears to be the one overarching, programmatic orientation capable of doing justice to *all* current struggles" (32) is a statement worth highlighting and embracing. Despite the ways her analysis might strain against it, this call for attention to deep structures is exactly what has been so absent on the left.

In the chapter "From Redistribution to Recognition?" Fraser distinguishes two different kinds of claims for justice. Recognition claims understand justice as cultural or symbolic, and they tend to reinforce group specificity and differentiation (affirmative action programs would be one classic example). Redistribution claims understand justice as socioeconomic and aim to abolish the political economic arrangements that underpin group identity as well as the group differentiation they effect (e.g., feminist demands to abolish the gendered division of labor). Fraser contends that the two can be merely two different sorts of claims, or they can interfere with and undermine each other. In treating some of the complex relationships between competing claims for justice, Fraser complicates the "intersecting oppressions" approach to difference and identity that is so pervasive in U.S. feminism now. She argues that different conceptions of injustice and possible remedies to them can be situated within a four-celled matrix. Groups whose claims of injustice she sees as primarily rooted in cultural misrecognition (lesbians and gay men) are positioned at one end, and groups whose claims of social injustice are primarily rooted in economic injustice are positioned at the other (the exploited working class). As Fraser sees it, lesbians and gay men suffer from injustices that are rooted in cultural misrecognition, and any economic injustice they suffer is attendant on that. Consequently, the solutions to the injustices against them will need to be cultural. Between the two extremes of sexuality and class are bivalent groups whose claims for social justice derive

from roots in both economic inequity and cultural misrecognition (groups organized or identified by gender and race). In addition, she outlines two broad categories for remedying injustice that traverse these options—affirmative remedies that do not change basic social structures and transformative ones that do. While her heuristic is basically descriptive, Fraser does end by recommending that for all bivalent collectivities transformative economics and a "deconstructive" as opposed to an "identity" cultural politics work best.

There are a number of problems with this schema, and most pertain to the groups at the two extremes. One problem, which Fraser herself acknowledges, is that this heuristic tends to reinforce the fallacy that individuals occupy only one group. Some lesbians, however, might well be unjustly treated in all four respects. In addition, class becomes merely another cultural category commensurate with race, gender, and sexuality rather than being the social condition that a transformative economics would be aimed at undoing. Furthermore, by beginning with the assumption that claims for social justice organized around sexuality are rooted in cultural misrecognition, Fraser participates in the very logic her argument sets out to dispel—that is, the separation of culture from political economy.

Some thorny implications for how we formulate a radical sexual politics follow from this vexed starting point. First of all, Fraser's heuristic presents a historical effect—the emergence of sexual identities—as an ontological given. Furthermore, even though she acknowledges the transformative value of "deconstructing" the binary distinction between hetero- and homosexuality, nonetheless, her heuristic is premised on this binary. Consequently, a whole host of questions—including how sexual identity historically has been "interimbricated" in the (gendered) division of labor, in the accumulation of surplus value, and in the advancing processes of commodification—is bracketed off.

Fraser is absolutely right that a split between cultural and economic assessments continues to govern the prevailing ways of understanding social injustice and much of the political strategizing to change it; this is the line that has hamstringed progressive politics and theory. Her recommendations for how to heal this rift are passionately visionary and problematically pluralist. She pragmatically suggests we look for solutions that try to soften the conflict between recognition and redistribution, and yet she also promotes the transformation of capitalist political economy and what she calls a cultural "deconstruction" of cultural identities. A more fully socialist

vision might emphasize the reasons why economic inequities and social identities are historically related under capitalism and stress ways of disidentifying with the refined forms of “cognition” and identity on which a politics of recognition is often premised. Fraser makes the important point that both deconstructing identities and socialist feminist politics can seem “far removed from the immediate interests and identities of most women, as these are currently constructed” (30). The challenge for knowledge workers both inside and outside of the academy is to provide the concepts that will reconstruct those interests by helping to translate the collective, lived experience of social injustice into ways of knowing that are emotionally, politically, and structurally transformative.

I am suggesting that one way to do this is to reorient the politicizing of identities to begin with human needs and in the process politicize capitalism. In order to politicize capitalism we need to make visible the strategies of displacement that have helped remove class from view and that have abstracted identities from their social conditions of existence. In *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City*, Lauren Berlant looks at some of the ways capitalism has been depoliticized through the disappearance of the public sphere in the United States.<sup>3</sup> When Berlant asserts that the public sphere has disappeared, she means that there are almost no contexts for communication that allow ordinary citizens to feel that they have influence on the state. She addresses how this has been achieved in part because citizenship has been privatized in the wake of Reaganomics and examines many of the technologies used by conservative ideologues to convince citizens that the core of politics should be the sphere of private life. Chief among them is the use of intimacy rhetoric that “helps displace from sustained public scrutiny the relations between congealed corporate wealth and the shifting conditions of labor” (8). The rhetorics of intimacy have become one means whereby “the causes of income inequality and job instability in all sectors of the U.S. economy can be personalized, rephrased in terms of individuals’ power to act and capacity to respond flexibly to the ‘new opportunities’ presented to them within an increasingly volatile global economy” (8). She looks at how advertising, film, television, and political campaigns make explicit the routes by which persons might give a name to their desires. Among them are sentimental notions of nationality that draw fragments of identity into an imaginary whole.

One effect of this rhetoric of intimacy and sentimentality is that discussions of the politics of sex and bodily identity have become absorbing at

the same time that “a concern with the outrages of American class relations has been made to seem trite and unsexy” (8). Berlant highlights the effects of Reaganite conservatism on the left in the upsurge of identity movements that “celebrate the ways U.S. subalterns develop tactics for survival from within capitalist culture: forms of activity like gay marriage, critically motivated acts of commodity consumption, and identity based economic investment zones” that are supposed to make marginalized groups more powerful (9). One of the suggestions of Berlant’s strongest readings is that the task of culture analysis now is not to pit the “merely personal” against the “profoundly structural” or vice versa but to attend to the ways intimacy, sexuality, the personal—that is, the realm of the “private”—are being used in the formation of a new bourgeois hegemonic bloc that is the outcome of late capitalism’s structural changes

One of the ways the left is being incorporated into the formation of a new ruling bloc has been through a substitution of the politicizing of identities for the politicizing of capitalism. This process is in fact a basic tactic of liberalism. Wendy Brown has traced the disappearance of capitalism in contemporary theory and the accompanying resurgence of identity politics through the history of liberalism that has dominated the formation of politicized identity in the United States and the West generally. Within the longstanding liberal understanding of the individual’s relation to the state there is a latent conflict between a universal “we” and particular “I”s, between the state’s profession that it guarantees freedom and equality to “the people” and a civil society where differences and inequities among individuals remain. Liberalism succeeds so long as the “I”s are willing to subordinate or abstract their needs in order to remain part of the “we”—even if it means accepting a status as supplementary, tolerable, different, or in any of a variety of ways partly outside national identity.

In “On the Jewish Question” Marx addresses the ways the liberal formulation of the national subject—the “we”—separates the rights and identities honored by the state from the real lived conditions of people’s lives and prevents recognition of the persistent differences of inequality as political differences. He argues that encoded in the requirements for membership in the liberal state is the necessity to abstract from one’s social being. In other words, Marx shows that accepting the terms of liberalism’s politicized identity as it is offered by the state entails outlawing social differences and unmet human needs. The liberal state serves capitalism by smoothing over the enduring unmet human needs capitalism requires

through invitations to identify politically with a democratic project that guarantees freedom and equality for an imaginary "all."

The fantasy of a collective "we" offered by the liberal state is an abstract, universal identity that is empty of content, and in this sense we might call it a "dead identity."<sup>4</sup> At the same time the liberal state promotes identification with this universal dead identity; it has to avert social crisis by responding to the unmet needs in civil society. In late capitalism the state has done this through measures that actually increase individualization through the disciplinary production of a wide array of behavior-based identities. The welfare state, for example, attends to the needs arising from civil society by producing subjects who are themselves subdivided into categories according to motherhood, disability, age, and so on (Wendy Brown 53). In this way the state contradictorily helps produce these categories — rather than the universal "we" — as the basis for political identities.

In considering the occlusion of class effected by identity politics, Wendy Brown has astutely argued that politics organized around individualized identities was purchased at the cost of naturalizing capitalism. But she also observes that identity politics is in fact bound to capitalist class relations through a disguised form of class resentment, a resentment that is displaced onto forms of social injustice other than class. Using Nietzsche's concept of *resentiment*, she explains that resentment is a way of marshaling affect into rage or righteousness around a history of injuries. Resentment takes suffering as the measure of social virtue and points to "privilege" as the self-recriminating luxury of those who have not suffered. She contends that identities structured around a history of group suffering can also tend to become invested in their own subjection. This investment is evident in practices like placing blame and seeking revenge. Both are "reverse discourses" that turn the tables of power without subverting or getting beyond the structure of "us vs. them" (70). As a reactive position, identity politics can take the form of moral reproach and punishment ("I Hate Strangers" or "Get Whitey"). As a result, the self-affirmation of identity politics often stops short of developing a critique of liberal universalism's economy of inclusion and exclusion that identity politics protests so vigorously against.

One of Brown's most incisive arguments is that an identity politics structured out of resentment retains a real or imagined bond to the reviled subject that constitutes its suppressed object of desire. Politicized identities of race, gender, and sexuality participate in this structure of resent-

ment in the following way: even though they abjure a critique of class power, they require a limited identification *through class* "precisely insofar as these identities are established vis-à-vis a bourgeois norm of class acceptance, legal protection, and relative material comfort" (60). Brown contends that the point is not to dismiss the needs that identity politics can speak to but rather to recognize that its claims often rest on "an unspoken appeal to a standard internal to existing society — the white masculine middle-class ideal — which preserves capitalism from critique and sustains the invisibility and inarticulateness of class" (61). In fact, she speculates that this class bond is one reason why class is often named but rarely theorized or developed in multicultural invocations of "race, class, and gender" (61).

If identity politics emerges in this analysis as in fact an unspeakable class position, Brown takes care not to name this a "middle-class" stance. Instead she encourages us to consider "middle class" as an articulation that depends on naturalizing rather than politicizing capitalism. The "phantasmic middle-class" is a conservative entity insofar as it refers to an idyllic, uncorrupted time in the past when life was good. It is not a reactionary ideal (like stronger versions of white supremacy); rather, it is the figure of the nonclass ideal many nonclass identities refer to (Brown 61). I would suggest that we consider the phantasmic middle class as one of the organizing structures of a postmodern bourgeois ruling bloc that depends on naturalizing or denying capitalism's systematic outlawing of human needs. As ideology, it is also a representation that is endorsed by many people whose material needs are not represented by that bloc.

As class ideology, identity politics suppresses the potential to name and know capitalism's deprivations:

When not only economic stratification but other injuries to the human body and psyche enacted by capitalism — alienation, commodification, exploitation, displacement, disintegration of sustaining albeit contradictory social forms such as families and neighborhoods — when these are discursively normalized and thus politicized, other markers of social difference may come to bear an inordinate weight; indeed they may bear all the weight of the sufferings produced by capitalism. (Brown 60)

This evaluation of identity politics as ideology invites consideration of it as one way class struggle under late capitalism is being displaced.

At the heart of the process of displacement that identity politics entails lies the emotional field Brown has called resentment. Resentment entails a way of knowing that overwhelms and channels the affective, physical, and material pain of unmet needs. The identities that are articulated through this organization of experience are, to some degree, like the identity “middle-class,” “dead” identities in that they restrict the potential (action-potential) to change the structures of power in order to meet human needs more adequately, and they hamper the ability to imagine and enact a more comprehensive vision of the future. Dead identities reify human experience and potential.

Lauren Berlant has used the term “dead citizenship” to epitomize the equation of identity with iconicity—what I have called the reification of identity: Dead identities are not open to history, or they admit only a very narrow history. They are fixed or frozen, presented as natural or restricted to being understood as merely cultural constructs. Dead identities accept that limiting the range of human potential into categories of identity is natural or pragmatic. They may take the form of sexual or gender or race or any other identity complex that narrows the field of possible action and accepts the outlawing of certain human needs.

Outlawed needs are “an unassimilable outside of capitalism” (Kelsch). They are a radical outside because they cannot be brought back into capitalism without abolishing the very terms of the extraction of surplus value. And yet it is this same domain of outlawed need that must be continually reckoned with “because to leave it out there is to leave out there a constant and growing threat to capitalist interests”; it is the “monstrous necessity” to capitalism that haunts it (Kelsch 76–77). Claiming outlawed needs as the ground for politicizing can reorient social movement onto the new ground of this monstrous necessity. I mentioned in chapter 1 that if we approach a politics of sexuality from the vantage point of capitalism’s continual construction of allowed and illegitimate needs, we find that human capacities for sensation and affect are only one domain of outlawed needs. One way oppositional political movement might demystify the dead identity of the middle class and forge coalition among workers and the unemployed is by addressing how capitalism has outlawed the meeting of so many basic human needs: for food, housing, health care, and also for love and affection, education, leisure time.

Of course, this task of reorienting would also have to address the persistence and even short-term political uses of identities with all of their affective baggage. If it is not to be utopian, social movement must begin

with the existing realities and devise levels of organizing that can demystify them so that their reasons for being can be brought to light and connected to “the big picture.” The reorientation I am suggesting does not deny the ways capitalism exercises its violence through state-supported institutions that regulate and discipline identities. Heterosexual marriage and the gendered division of labor remain the prevailing, pervasively naturalized organization of human sensation and affect whose coherence is assured and legitimized in law and common sense by reference to an absent homosexual other. Just as social movement cannot dismiss but has to work on the ways people’s experiences are organized through reified categories, this work and the new consciousness it produces arise out of people’s collective activity as they measure their outlawed needs against the ways of making sense offered by the dominant culture.

The process of organizing collective subjects for social change does indeed involve “movement” on many levels, and one of them undoubtedly entails forging forms of collective consciousness. This process is not merely cognitive and rational—though it is that, too; it also works on the affective investments people have in the identities they claim. One of the steps in forming collective agency entails “disidentification.”<sup>5</sup> Disidentification is a practice of working on existing ways of identifying that we embrace and live by: This “work” is a process of unlearning that opens up the identities we take for granted to the historical conditions that make them possible. It involves uprooting these identities not just from ways of thinking that invite us to construe them as natural but also from a history of suffering—the fertile ground for resentment to grow—and resituating how we know them in a different historical frame, a frame that allows us to see how this suffering is the product of a mode of production that outlaws a whole array of human needs. The disidentifying subject taps into the ways her outlawed needs, including her affective needs, are channeled by culture-ideology. She replaces the narrow resentment of identity politics with the potentially much more powerful and monstrous collective opposition of all of capitalism’s disenfranchised subjects.

I have referred to disidentification as a form of “work” because it involves the critical e-laboration or working over of normative identities. This process is a discomfiting one because it literally shakes the ground we are used to standing on. When the forms of identity we have been invited to inhabit are called into question, the effect is not just a cognitive shock but also an affective one. A range of affects may be provoked at the prospect of losing firm footing within identity categories we may not have

been entirely comfortable with but that we had at least been able to take for granted. Destabilizing this familiar ground can provoke fear, anger, and frustration. But this discomfort can also be the groundbreaking inauguration of a new standpoint of critical mindfulness that can fold deeply held forms of identity into a new way of seeing.

Michel Pecheux used the term “disidentification” to distinguish a critical relation to subjectivity distinct from the stance of the good or the bad subject. The good subject is the one who conforms to the prevailing norms, the subject who at least tries to accommodate and abide by prescribed expectations. The bad subject, on the other hand, is the rebel who rejects convention, but her rebellion does little to change the existing social system. We might even say bad subjects actually reinforce normative identities by providing the “other” against whom the norm constructs itself. Identity politics can work like the “bad subject” offering a story of suffering, resentment, and rebellion against the limited possibilities offered by capitalism’s ruling bloc. But doing so in these terms promotes forms of political agency that themselves offer only restricted action potency.

In contrast, disidentification is not a refusal of the normative forms of identification that summon us or that we may more or less inhabit but rather a critical “working” on them. I am suggesting that this work arises from a standpoint or position that indeed counters the dominant knowledges, a position whose empirical reality lies in the monstrous outside of capitalism’s unmet needs. It is a standpoint that does not claim any single group identity but rather the collectivity of those whose surplus human needs capitalism has outlawed. Disidentification is a critical practice that de-rifts identity by opening the identity form “I am” to history. This does not mean a simple renunciation of identities—gay, straight, man, woman—but a critical working on them to make visible their historical and material conditions of possibility. The process of disidentification entails a continual effort to sublimate rather negate what is into what can be. This means that the process of working on the subject transforms even as it preserves parts of the existing historical reality. This critical work does not replace the prevailing identities offered us by capitalist culture but takes them as the place to begin to provoke the formation of a more comprehensive, collective agency.

One of the ways to make use of existing identity forms is to highlight the gap between identities promoted by the dominant culture and the lived “experience” of social relations that is not summoned by these terms.

This is the “excess” that is often “experienced” as an inchoate affect of not belonging, of not fitting in or not feeling at home within the terms that are offered for identity. The process of disidentification can zero in on the affective component of this misrecognition and invite consideration of the ways it is named and routed into emotions (of shame, denial, resentment, etc.) that can naturalize the existing categories. Disidentification invites the renarration of this affective excess in relation to capitalism’s systemic production of unmet need. At the same time it works on forms of misrecognition, disidentification also makes visible the ways the dominant organizations of sexual desires and identities are real sites of affective investment, and through this critical awareness invites a process of unlearning. Unlearning these investments is always an incomplete, unfinished business, and recognizing this is an important lesson on the limits of one’s historical position. But this ongoing lesson in historical limits does not have to be dismissive or belittling; it can also fold the forms of affective identification we historically and critically inhabit into a more ambitious political project that claims the radical outside of unmet human needs as the starting point for a much needed anti-capitalist project.

It is this dialectical relation between forms of love, between what is and what can be, that I find so beautifully conveyed in the song “Te Quiero” by Mario Benedetti:

*Si te quiero es porque sois  
Mi amor, mi cómplice, mi todo  
Y en la calle todo a codo  
Somos mucho más que dos:  
Somos mucho más que dos:*

“If I love you,” it begins, “it is because you are my love, my accomplice, my everything. And on the street, shoulder to shoulder, we are more than two. We are more than two.”

Disidentification is a historically necessary strategic step right now in the United States, especially where a sedimented history of identity politics and the operation of an imaginary middle class have worked very successfully to eclipse the persistence of class structures. Considering the formation of sexual identities in relation to human need as I am suggesting we might do opens a way to imagine and form collective class agency that does not rely “the proletariat,” foreclose sexuality, or relegate it to a secondary status. Resituating sexual politics on the ground of human

needs links the human potential for sensation and affect that the discourses of sexual identity organize to the meeting of other vital human needs and calls for a movement for full democracy to begin there. Above all, this reorientation is an argument that full democracy cannot be achieved within capitalism. This means that eliminating the social structures of exploitation that capitalism absolutely requires and so violently enacts at the expense of human needs must be on the political agenda, at the very least as the horizon that sets the terms for imagining change.

## NOTES

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### CHAPTER 1

1. John D'Emilio's excellent but brief essay "Capitalism and Gay Identity," written in 1979–80, remains the primary source that directly addresses this history. See also D'Emilio (1989); Field; Gluckman and Reed; and Ingraham (1999).
2. My objective is an effort to elaborate and develop John D'Emilio's thesis in "Capitalism and Gay Identity" as he states it in the preface to the reprint of the essay: "I argued that two aspects of capitalism—wage labor and commodity production—created the social conditions that made possible the emergence of a distinctive gay and lesbian identity" (3).
3. Several accounts of late capitalism are especially useful, among them Dirlík; Harvey; Myoshi. I am especially indebted to Arif Dirlík for the following outline.
4. For summary overviews of marxist feminism see Gimenez and "Introduction" in Hennessy and Ingraham (1997).
5. For examples of various positions on these debates from neo- to classical to post-marxist see Resnick and Wolff; Zavarzadeh and Morton; Laclau and Mouffe.