

# Unidentified Remains: The Impolitics of Non-Identity

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## Abstract

For some time now, queer theory has uncritically assumed that identity politics should be rejected outright. Through a theoretical and biographical discussion of Michel Foucault's resistance against the subject—his attempts at subject effacement—this paper argues that resistance is not realized through non-identity politics alone. It addresses two main questions: does the practice of non-identity sufficiently resist knowledge that (re)presents subjects and what are the social and political possibilities or risks of subject effacement? In response to these questions, it argues that, although the queer politics of non-identity is a mode of resistance, it is not sufficient as resistance in all contexts or fields of knowledge. It suggests that in many contexts, what Foucault refers to as the “infinite possibility of self” or the interruption of the subject cannot be realized through invisibility politics: in many contexts this possibility can only be experienced if and when the subject comes face to face with the presence of an other-subject.

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## Résumé

Depuis un certain temps, la théorie queer suppose de façon incontestée que les politiques d'identité devraient

être rejetées d'emblée. Par une discussion théorique et biographique de la résistance de Michel Foucault à ce sujet – ses tentatives d'effacement du sujet – cet article fait valoir que la résistance n'est pas atteinte par des politiques de non-identité seulement. L'article aborde deux principales questions : est-ce que la pratique de la non-identité résiste suffisamment aux connaissances qui représentent les sujets, et quelles sont les possibilités sociales et politiques ou les risques de l'effacement du sujet? Pour répondre à ces questions, l'article fait valoir que bien que la politique queer de la non-identité est un mode de résistance, il ne s'agit pas d'une résistance suffisante dans tous les contextes ou les domaines de connaissance. L'article suggère que dans de nombreux contextes, ce que Foucault appelle la « possibilité infinie de l'être » ou l'interruption du sujet ne peut pas être atteinte par des politiques d'invisibilité; dans de nombreux contextes, le sujet peut uniquement faire l'expérience de cette possibilité s'il se retrouve face à face avec la présence d'un *autre* sujet.

“Between the affirmation, ‘I am a homosexual,’ and the refusal to say this, there lies a highly ambiguous dialectic,” Foucault remarked in a 1982 interview, scarcely veiling his exasperation over the unrelenting pressure to take a stand. “It is a necessary affirmation of a right, but at the same time a cage, a trap” (Miller 1993, 256).<sup>1</sup>

Identity politics, both a symptom of and a response to these networks of control capitulates once again to chasing the space of retribution for the subject. Control masks itself, or masks its effects, within the endless drive to recoup the resistant subject. We must instead advocate that resistance give way to delinquency (Puar 2007, 162).

Just like Michel Foucault, queer theory has always regarded identity with deep suspicion and it upholds this aversion as an antidote that redresses the constraints posed by the subject, ones that various feminist, critical race, and lesbian and gay identity politics are said to leave intact (Ryan 2001, 325-326; Ford 2007, 479-482).<sup>2</sup> Queer theory enlists Foucault’s politics of non-identity, and variations thereof, to ferret out and undo the limits of the subject so that you might “cease to be imprisoned in your own face, in your own past, in your own identity” (Miller 1993, 264). The distrust of identity that drives queer theory is so ingrained that it often turns its suspicion back in on itself in that even “queer anti-identity narratives” are now located, for instance by Jasbir Puar (2007), on the same “continuum that privileges the pole of identity as the evolved form of Western modernity” (222). Queer practices of non-identity, it turns out, are just as vulnerable to (re)presenting the subject through homonationalist re-territorializations that institute queer non-identity as an identity politic after all.<sup>3</sup> Turned back on itself, queer theory’s mistrust of identity politics has led it to take up the politics of assemblage and to pursue identity’s collapse: with a “cacophony of informational flows, energetic intensities, bodies, and practices that undermine coherent identity and even queer anti-identity narratives” (222), “to conceive the pure experience, event and dramatization of many sexes without falling back onto the ontological constitution of queer sexuality” (Parisi 2009, 72), by “opening up to the fantastical wonders of futurity” and affect to resist forces that rationalize identities into finite and narrow existence (Puar 2007, 222), and to evade “singularity” in favour of “collectivity, imagination and a kind of situationist commitment to surprise and shock” (Halberstam 2011, 29).<sup>4</sup> As a re-

sult, queer Deleuzian approaches also demonstrate the deep suspicion of identity that reverberates throughout queer theory and Foucauldian approaches; as Chrysanthi Nigianni and Merl Storr (2009) explain, Deleuzian approaches set out to “queer the queer” by circumventing the question of (non-)identity, because they are “not just against this or that particular identity as not being politically useful, but against the very concept of identity and the thinking it engenders” (5).<sup>5</sup>

Where queer theory more recently engages Gilles Deleuze to undercut the influence of Foucault’s politics of non-identity, as an identity politic, the similarity of purpose to which both philosophers have been put is uncanny, because it was always with “flows,” “intensities,” “bodies,” “practices,” and new “pleasures,” or affect, that queer theories set out, originally with Foucault, to disrupt the trap of identity. To this extent, the suspicion of identity with which queer theory, like a reflex, turns on itself again and again, must also demand, if it hasn’t already, this inevitable conclusion: the queer politics of assemblage recreates the same problems of (non-)identity that Deleuze is used to dodge, for instance, via the claim that queer non-identity is penetrated by the pole of identity.

To illustrate, consider for a moment that the opposition of queer assemblages against queer non-identity to reduce the latter to identity politics, by virtue of being a non-identity politics, really is a (queer) critique to which assemblage is susceptible too. Queer assemblage politics sets out to “escape[s] the traditional strategy of negation (queer as the non-, anti-, contra-)” and thereby avert the binary thought it locates in queer non-identity politics; it claims to do so because it avoids questions of (non-)identity altogether (Nigianni and Storr 2009, 2). This is the appeal of Deleuzian approaches to queer theory: they appear to avoid the binary thinking that *anti-identity* politics, as such, find unavoidable. The logic behind a queer move to avoidance, Margaret Shildrick (2009) explains, is that it is only when “queer theory *explicitly* intervenes in the parameters of social exclusion,” for instance, as anti-identity politics must, that queer theory “to an extent must always reiterate binary thinking in order to contest it” (129; emphasis added).<sup>6</sup>

However, the strategic *avoidance* of identity can be exposed as just as much of a negation as any explicit rejection of identity because queer theorists, like myself, are groomed from the outset to be on the lookout

for identity everywhere; the only difference between the two is that an avoidance is a covert mode of rejection that is implicit, subterranean, and passive—like centers and margins, the explicit and implicit are extant co-operatives in negation, even if they “cannot be naturalised as ‘having always existed’” (Deleuze qtd. in Conley 2009, 26). So regardless of the opacity of its anti-identity strategy, *queer* assemblage politics can also be placed on a continuum with queer non-identity politics; it is just as bugged by the pole of identity if and when queer theory renders it suspect, as I have here. Moreover, as long as the suspicion of identity is allowed to remain totalizing in queer theory, queer theory is going to eat its tail. All of which causes me to say that queer theory really needs to ask a different question: is identity precisely the problem that faces queer theory or is it the *rejection* of identity, as queer reflex, that poses today’s greatest threat to queers?

This paper responds to what I think is the largely uncritical belief that operates implicitly and explicitly throughout queer theory: it is the belief that identity politics must always be rejected. As Hiram Perez (2005) observes, “a great deal of queer theorizing has sought to displace identity politics with an alternative anti-identitarian model,” one he also challenges, because it conflates queerness uncritically and too often with a “race-neutral objectivity” (172). The central claim in this paper is that queer theory’s totalizing rejection of identity is socially and politically incautious; and since queer praxes of non-identity and assemblage are on a continuum in that both are suspicious of identity politics, this essay makes no attempt to differentiate between them—they are equally anti-identitarian.<sup>7</sup> It argues that it is a mistake to think that either identity or anti-identity politics, solely, is fitting in every context that demands a social-political response. It also demonstrates that a balance must be struck between identity politics and queer politics that intends to interrupt the subject and visibility politics.

In *Post-Queer Politics*, David Ruffolo (2009) remarks that “[t]he relationship between queer (theory) and Foucault is clearly immense” and arguably his influence is rivaled only by Judith Butler, whose own works are profoundly indebted nonetheless to Foucault (8). He is “the founding father of contemporary queer theory” and, as such, I return to his life, work, and practices as origins of queer theory’s suspicion of identity,

even as Foucault died prior to the treatment of his theories as queer (Cohen and Ramlow 2005/2006).<sup>8</sup> Indeed, Foucault’s use of the term “homosexual” is like that behind “queer”; he used the former to signal a politics of non-identity in the face of a “gay” (and primarily white) identity politics, and this is why the terms “homosexual” and “queer” are used one for another herein. It is also worth mentioning that “it is precisely in [his] refusal to see alternative sexual pleasures as repressive that Foucault prefigures the queering of desire that is associated with Deleuze” in queer theory today (Shildrick 2004, n.p.). As we will see, Foucault’s refusal—which initiated queer theory in praxes of flows, intensities, and bodies—culminated out of his interest in “what bodies can do, in how they are productive, rather than in how they respond to unconscious impulses, and in how the erotic can be redistributed to non-genital sites.” (n.p.)

Through a philosophical analysis of Foucault’s biography and theories, this paper treats Foucault as an occasion to demonstrate the social and political failures of queer and absolutist rejections of identity or visibility politics.<sup>9</sup> It critically examines his resistance to identity and his attempts to efface the discursive effects of power/knowledge that give rise to the subject as the limited and over-determined foundation for identity or identification. It reconsiders his sexual non-identity to show that queer practices of non-identity, on their own, are insufficient to resist the effects of heteronormativity and homonormativity; although queer praxes of non-identity are a mode of resistance, these praxes alone cannot enliven resistance in all contexts or fields of knowledge. It concludes that, in many contexts, resistance demands self-encounters with identity or *other*-subjects and not self-effacement.

The problems of identity that Foucault’s theories resist are manifest in the history of identity politics; the brief history of identity politics that follows clarifies two key reasons it is rejected by contemporary queer theory, as well as feminist poststructural and postcolonial theory.<sup>10</sup> Identity politics is the idea that one’s personal identity—as a person of colour, gay, lesbian, bisexual, disabled, Indigenous, or trans person—is the best basis for politics and action (Fuss 1989, 97). It became strongly influential in the late 1970s and early 80s, when U.S. Black lesbian feminists and, notably, the Combahee River Collective argued that “focusing upon our own oppression is embodied in the concept of identity

politics” and that “the most profound and potentially radical politics come directly out of our own identity” (Combahee River Collective 1982, 16). José Esteban Muñoz (1999) notes that “the idea of a radical feminist of color identity that shrewdly reconfigures identity for a progressive political agenda” was also developed by Chicana lesbian feminists Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga in the famous anthology, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Colour* (7). Identity politics, as Moraga proposed, meant that feminists must also address the implications of their own identities as both “oppressed” and “oppressor” (Fuss 1989, 99). It was also a radical response to the internal climates of Black nationalist and white feminist politics, climates illustrated by the powerful title *All the Women are White, All the Blacks are Men, But Some of Us are Brave*, another pivotal anthology edited by Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith.<sup>11</sup>

Given its origins in the politics of sex, race, class, and sexuality, identity politics did not remain solely a Black and Chicana lesbian feminist project. It was embraced by critical race theory, which developed in the U.S. in the 1970s out of a convergence of critical legal studies, (Black) radical feminisms, the radical politics of the civil rights movement, and the continental philosophies of “Antonio Gramsci, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida” (Delgado and Stefancic 2012, 4-5).<sup>12</sup> Identity politics also influenced the broader North American lesbian and gay movement, which promoted a politics of “gay activism; ‘gay pride,’ ‘gay culture,’ ‘gay sensibility’” to form the “cornerstones of the gay community” and liberate “a long-repressed collective identity” (Fuss 1989, 97).

In the 1980s and 90s, identity politics was challenged by poststructural and postcolonial feminism(s), developments in critical race theory, and queer theory as it emerged from lesbian and gay studies, for two main reasons.<sup>13</sup> The first is that identity politics is said to devolve into essentialism because it assumes “[t]he link between identity and politics is causally and teleologically defined” or that “identity necessarily determines a particular kind of politics” (Fuss 1989, 99). The second is that it is said to undermine “the task of constructing a tradition of unity between various groups,” because different identities and oppressions call for differentiated, not joint or universal, political strategies and goals (Harris 1999, 314). Moreover, identity politics became

suspect within poststructuralist and postcolonial feminisms and queer theories because these theories reject the idea of a stable, cohesive, or fixed identity; each proposes an arbitrary, limited, and determined discursive subject, a notion popularized by the transcontinental reach and interdisciplinary resonance of Michel Foucault’s works.<sup>14</sup> Although central to critical race theory, by the 1990s, identity politics also met with challenges here, too, challenges such as the “collapsing myth of ‘brown-black solidarity’” and “[t]he tragedy...that too little is done either by African American or Latino ‘mainstream’ leaders who practice racial identity politics to transcend their parochialism and to refine their agendas on common ground” (Marable 2000, 448, 450). For instance, critical race identity politics was taken “to task for being too focused on the ‘black-white paradigm’ and for failing to deal with the relationship between race and sexuality” (Harris 1999, 314). Feminist and queer critical race and *LaCrit* theorists, such as Angela P. Harris and Francisco Valdes, argued a “‘race-first principle’” sidelines the concerns of racialized women and queers (314).<sup>15</sup> In this light, identity politics was a threat to unified political movement.<sup>16</sup> While identity politics has been exhaustively critiqued, for these and other reasons (e.g., ones related to epistemology), its primary association with the finitude of essentialism and social and political immobilization is at the heart of Foucault’s rejection of visibility politics.

In a BBC documentary, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Good and Evil* (1993), Foucault’s positioning of himself in relation to San Francisco’s “gay” community is recounted: “There are so many gays, and I am a homosexual.” But Foucault was not asserting a “homosexual” identity. He was disassociating himself from the fixed terms and politics of “gay” identity, a strategy that set the stage for a queer politics of non-identity.<sup>17</sup> Just as queers today reject identity, Foucault resisted the association of his sexual practices with a name because it undermines the infinite possibility of self; his “misgivings ... around the public assertion of a putative sexual identity” belie his interest in subject effacement as resistance (Leo Bersani qtd. in Miller 1993, 254).

Effacement occurs if the self exceeds the subject (i.e., the *known* self as an ontological formation that is constituted by the limits of meaning *and* the bridled experiences these limits produce). It is a perpetual self-practice that undermines the advancement of the

“injustice proper to the will to knowledge” (Foucault 1984, 97). It turns on Foucault’s notion of the subject; the subject is “a sort of mirage in which we think we see ourselves reflected” and it forms the basis for identification (Foucault 1980, 157). It emerges from historical and contemporary modes of knowledge that associate particular truths or meanings with, among other things, human being, or the self, *as* mind, body, and experience; and these truths, although arbitrary, operate as though they are natural. The subject is a history of the human will to know the self: it is a manifestation of a “will to knowledge,” a knowledge that is arbitrary because it is willed at all (12-13). The subject (i.e., as self-mediated by such a will) poses human being in ways that render it knowable or intelligible. In relation to identity, the subject is the set of discursive forces that precede what can be made of any identity; it is like a plinth upon which identity is founded or a discursive accumulation out of which identity is forged (Miller 1993, 41, 48, 49).<sup>18</sup> The subject is the limit imposed on the possibility of identity and, thus, it is a limit on identity as resistance. As a result, Foucault’s aim in subject-effacement is a rejection of identity, even as “the subject” and not “identity” is the focus of so much of his work.

Foucault’s notion of the subject and its relationship to identity is clarified by Judith Butler (1990) in *Gender Trouble*: “Foucault points out that juridical systems of power *produce* the subjects they subsequently come to represent” (2). In a discussion of Butler’s application of Foucault to questions of gender identity, Brady and Schirato (2011) further explain that if one is “to have, gain, claim or be assigned an identity, one must be recognizable and explicable within a particular grid of intelligibility that makes subjects appear and authorizes the subject’s status as an identity-in-waiting” (6). The subject, therefore, is the discursive genera, if you will, that makes identity possible. As Foucault (1980) illustrates in *The History of Sexuality*, the homosexual subject is the prelude to homosexual identity—it makes this mode of identification possible as an effect of the proliferation of nineteenth and twentieth century medical and psychiatric sexual discourse, which newly named certain sexual practices “homosexual.” The subject is at the heart of the problem of identity as resistance for Foucault (and Butler); identity, as an offspring of the subject, is always already implicated in the processes of subjection that shape it and, therefore, it cannot resist

the juridical forces out of which it is formed.

Identity and its politics are dangerous. While the self exercises some choice with regard to identification, choices between possible subject positions do not entail more or less constraint. This idea underpins Foucault’s refusals to identify at all; choices between, rather than refusals of, identities impose a constraining “visibility” on the self (Miller 1993, 53).<sup>19</sup> Foucault intends to thwart the trap of being known. This is also at the heart of his notion of subject effacement, which is an ontological resistance against the knowledge that conceals the self’s infinite possibility of being; to say “I am” limits or constrains the self’s and the other’s sense of the self, so that the self is only ever encountered as a subject—it is an exercise of the self’s will to know (i.e., construct) itself as a subject. For Foucault (1984), “gay” or any other identity politics enlists the self in a “progressive enslavement,” the only escape from which entails “risking the destruction of the subject who seeks knowledge in the endless deployment of the will to knowledge” (97).

A *will to knowledge* manifests in, among other things, moments and durations in which the self actively knows (i.e., identifies) itself and others as subjects. It is deployed as and through interdependent modes of knowledge, such as reason, science, psychology, and medicine, which conjoin “the analyzable body to the manipulable body” (Foucault 1979, 136). Subjects, as analyzed and known bodies, are selves manipulated by modes of knowledge that are deployed in a given social, political, and historical context, often, but not solely, through processes of identification. To impede this manipulation, Foucault proposes the subject’s destruction, in part through refusals of identity, which enables the self to interrupt its subjection from within, without, and wherever knowledge is deployed *as* identity.

Subject effacement is momentary, “limited and determined” (Miller 1993, 283). It is that which allows the self to resituate itself in relation to a *will to knowledge* that constrains it as an identifiable subject.<sup>20</sup> To thwart a will to knowledge and retain a view onto its *other* possibilities as human being, the self must actively and repeatedly oppose the subject. To contradict *the will* to be a subject advances the self toward a fleeting, but nevertheless, powerful ontological possibility that human beings cannot experience as subjects or through identity politics. The only resistance against knowledge is a repeated undoing of the subject through attempts,

not to transcend, but to overspill the knowledge of the subject, albeit with a new will to knowledge that, until resisted, subjects the self to new constraints.<sup>21</sup>

Foucault's refusal to assert "I am 'gay'" was an exercise in subject effacement and it initiated queer praxes of non-identity. The philosophical significance of Foucault's fascination not with gay culture or identity, but with experiences of sex, sadomasochism, and drugs within a context known as "gay" is evident in his comments about San Francisco bathhouses:

"It is regrettable that such places for erotic experience—for limitless anonymous encounters—"do not yet exist for heterosexuals ... For would it not in effect be marvelous to have the power, at any hour of the day or night, to enter a place equipped with all the comforts and all the possibilities that one might imagine, and to meet there a body at once tangible and fugitive? There is an exceptional possibility in this context to desubjectify oneself, to desubjugate oneself," to "desexualize oneself" by affirming a "non-identity" through "a kind of plunge beneath the water sufficiently prolonged that one returns from it with none of this appetite, with none of this torment one still feels even after satisfying sexual relationships" (Miller 1993, 264).

Foucault's (1989) point is that subjugating knowledges can be averted when we "make ourselves infinitely more susceptible to pleasure," but not when we "liberate our desires" by invoking a right and, thereby, an identity (206). In an interview, Foucault suggests "the S&M phenomenon" entails a notable "effect of intensifying sexual relations by introducing a perpetual novelty, a perpetual tension and a perpetual uncertainty" (226). It allows for desubjectification insofar as it blurs the lines between known pains and pleasures; it introduces the self to its potential to transform known experiences of pain into pleasure; and it allows the self to experience the possibility of extracting itself from the subject position that constrains it through the body's prior knowledge of pain.

Foucault (1979) investigates the "docile" body as an effect of "[d]iscipline organizing an analytical space" and the ways knowledge is employed so that "one may have a hold over others' bodies" (143, 138). The com-

panion piece to his idea that a hold over others' bodies may be had is that a hold over one's own body can be had (i.e., knowledge is practiced upon the body from without and within). Where the self participates in the hold over the body as subject, Foucault understands it to deploy knowledge against itself. He also thinks the recognition of its role in this process affords the self an opportunity to resist that knowledge. This idea informs Foucault's intrigue with gay S&M contexts and drugs, as opposed to gay identities, as opportunities for subject effacement: to pursue an infinite possibility of pleasures enlists the body or sense experience against the subject (i.e., finite knowledge)—it temporarily loosens the subject's hold of the self via the body.

Foucault regarded "the human organism [to be] an intrinsically formless flux of impulses and energies" until it is contoured by a knowledge of "feelings" (Miller 1993, 273). The subject is deployed when the self and others exercise power/knowledge upon the self; the body's senses are ordered by discursive power, which gives rise to the meanings of sensation. Where subjects know sense experiences mutually, they do not do so essentially; when two bodies experience sensation to be the same, it only indicates a subject position is shared. Where subjects share consensus on a sensation's meaning, sensation also maintains the subject; the self-becoming subject knows what it feels in relation to what similar subjects know as sensations of pain or pleasure. This is why a continual attempt to disrupt known feelings with unknown or marginal feelings is a (momentary) mode of resistance.<sup>22</sup> Still, even when consensus on a sensation's meaning is lacking, knowledge remains at work on the body because a feeling experienced is increasingly known or subjugated as it is re-experienced. The subject is resisted if and when the self makes itself *susceptible* to "infinitely new" sensations and thoughts, but not if it remains susceptible to only the same sensations and thoughts, be they marginal or dominant.

Foucault's resistance against "coming out" and "gay" identity endeavoured to realize his possibilities for infinite susceptibilities that might destroy "gay" and "straight" subjects. And while he did think coming out allowed the self to reclaim and modify the meanings by which it was marginalized and pathologized, he also thought it merely replaced one subject with a new one that is no less fixed or trapped. This is why Foucault regards historical and on-going demands for gay and les-

bian recognition and rights as beside the point: "I am 'gay'" merely (re)institutes the self within mechanisms of power and subjectivity that the assertion intends to resist.<sup>23</sup> So, although defiant "gay" assertions might transform power (e.g., as a refusal of shame or demand for rights), Foucault still thought the self that consents *to be a* (marginal) "gay" subject is dominated by what becomes merely a "gay" mode of power/knowledge. To be "gay," therefore, is as dangerous as being "heterosexual," because gay identity acts only as a new disciplinary knowledge, a critical point that likely predicts Lisa Duggan and Jasbir Puar's respective notions of "homonormative" and "homonationalist" subjectivity (Duggan 2003, 50; Puar 2007, 4).<sup>24</sup>

The rejection of "gay" identity and his intrigue with sadomasochistic, male-to-male sexual practice are facets of Foucault's philosophical "search for styles of existence [that are] as different as possible from each other" (Foucault 1989, 330). His idea of styles aims at the de-subjectification and de-sexualization of the self and body that, as a subject, achieves "only one of the given possibilities of organizing a consciousness of self" (330). Although he affirms the search for different styles of existence, he also assumes that each style is befallen by subjects because human being repeatedly fails to "think that what exists is far from filling all possible spaces" (209). Where Foucault rejects "gay" identity, he refuses a style already befallen by subjection, a move that informs contemporary, anti-identitarian queer politics: these refusals and style searches are signaled today by *queer*, wherein, queer theory "describes a horizon of possibility whose precise extent and heterogeneous scope cannot in principle be delimited in advance" (Halperin 1995, 62). Thus, Foucault accomplishes for queer theory the "informational flows, energetic intensities, bodies, and practices that undermine coherent identity," as well as the "[o]pening up to the fantastical wonders of futurity" (Puar 2007, 222) that Puar claims queer theory, as a non-identity politic, has historically failed to do. Ironically, the striking parallels between Foucauldian approaches and Deleuzean approaches like Puar's to queer theory is that both are open to the same critique: a totalizing rejection of identity politics is a recipe for theory, not the world, because the subject is as likely to be reinforced as resisted if flows and futurities are the central aim of queer theory and politics.<sup>25</sup>

Consider Foucault's practices against identi-

ty. He returned repeatedly to gay S&M spaces, in part to practice different styles of existence, to experience the infinite possibility of self, and/or to resist his own subjection. But, it is precisely the *return* that creates a problem for queer theory's rejection of identity politics. Foucault never identified as "gay" or "straight." He also intended to depart the field of heterosexual subjectivity through a return to gay spaces. By virtue of his own perspective, however, *returns* will not enable the self to repeatedly discover different as possible lifestyles, at least, not for very long. To seasoned "gay," "lesbian," "bisexual," "trans," and queer people, the marginal spaces they frequent *are* normal, and increasingly so with each return; in contrast, "heterosexual" and perhaps mixed spaces, precisely because they continue to be alienating, *are* as different as possible. This does not mean the de-subjectifying destiny of gays, lesbians, bisexual, trans people, and queers *should* lie in a return to heterosexual practice and contexts (although it could). It means returns to such spaces, in conjunction with a non-identity, function no more or less as resistance against constraining identities that are "gay" or "heterosexual."

Foucault's returns, therefore, might only signal that he could not disassociate himself, for any duration, from the heterosexual context in which he lived more or at least as much of his life as an intellectual. In addition, his return to gay spaces, in light of his desire, might not enact different as possible styles of existence; it might only reflect an increasing *bodily* knowledge of (or subjection to) being "gay." While Foucault would reject his biography being used as a principle that unifies him with his works, the focus on facts, such as his razor blade exploits, his lack of heterosexual practice, his interest in de Sade, his practice in the French homosexual "underground fraternity" prior to "gay" liberation, his time spent in North American, gay, S&M communities, and all that he wrote or said about these experiences, does not in fact solely and simply reduce his biography to a unifying principle (Foucault 1984, 111; Eribon 1991, 26; Miller 1993, 53, 45, 56, 254).<sup>26</sup> It also reflects a history that inscribed his body with a knowledge. His biography of *returns* suggests his desire was practiced entirely in white, male, gay, and S&M contexts, which raises the question of whether or not the *return* to this or any site makes the self "infinitely more susceptible" to its possibility or *infinitely* more inscribed in the pleasures it knows. This question has implications for the

scope of Foucault's non-identity politics as a queer politics that serves up resistance across varied contexts and times.

Given his fascination with *askesis*—"the work that one performs on oneself in order to transform oneself or make the *self* appear that happily one never attains"—perhaps Foucault's S&M practice of pleasure in pain was a work toward an unattainable self (Foucault 1989, 206). Indeed, his *returns* might have facilitated a progression one-way along a continuum in a happily unanswered search for self (206). So why do Foucault and queer theorists who practice his ideas not propose *askesis* (i.e., the unattainable recreation of self through its infinite susceptibility) as resistance within a variety of marginalized contexts, rather than the *same* queer contexts?

Foucault died in 1984, and he only spoke of his sexual and S&M practice in his latter years, sometimes anonymously, usually in interviews with the gay press, and always in the third person. This implies he had an association with, even if he did not directly link his body to, gay practices. Conversely, his refusals to identify also imply a certain subjection to heterosexuality as a context in which he lived as a popular French "intellectual" and from which he did not want to be excluded as a "gay" man (Miller 1993, 256). Yet, as Foucault brought gay practice into public view and implicated himself in these practices, he did not entirely fear the repercussions of being *associated* with the gay community.<sup>27</sup> Still, to the extent that he admittedly was an "intellectual," he also preferred to be a gay affiliate whose ties could be cut, because "an intellectual, for [Foucault], is a guy hooked into the system of information" who is "able to make himself heard" (Eribon 1991, 253). Moreover, Foucault was insistent that his work not be "taken as talk about a potentially sequesterable minority," a possibility that illuminates his double-edged observation regarding the danger of identity as "the necessary affirmation of a right, but at the same time a cage, a trap" (Miller 1993, 256). All of which is to say that the queer practice of Foucault's non-identity politics can reinforce the subject even as it may intend to interrupt it: insofar as a non-identity leaves unidentifiable remains, it fails to resist the (heterosexual) subject in important ways.

A uniform application of non-identity across contexts, as Foucault and queer theory propose, is as dangerous as it is productive because it undermines the

subject in some contexts, but not in all. Foucault (1989) imagined gay S&M spaces to be *the* contemporary "historic occasion to re-open affective and relational virtualities," or as a site to pursue subject effacement (207). But does the affirmation of sexual *practices* over sexual identities really undermine as much as it reiterates the extant meanings of sexual excess that heteronormativity has already set up as the essence of gay, lesbian, trans, and queer identity? For instance, a heterosexual acquaintance loves queer spaces because in them she experiences a sexual freedom she does not in heteronormative contexts. The question is why? One answer is that heterosexuals often perceive gay, lesbian, trans, and queer spaces to have no or few rules, which leaves one sexually free to do as they choose. Nevertheless, queer space does have rules: "its own norms, and its own ways of keeping people in line" (Warner 1999, 35). Heterosexuals who are not queer, or queer enough, therefore, are often suspect, even unwelcome, in these spaces whether they realize it or not. Even more significant is the fact that my acquaintance practices the possibility of being sexually free *solely* in queer spaces; she does not practice in contexts that would elicit a genuine resistance against the direct constraints her body knows within heteronormative contexts. In other words, if and when one does not practice (heterosexual) subject-effacement *in* heterosexual contexts, or at the source of heterosexual subjectivity, does one meaningfully resist heteronormativity? The experience of sexual freedom that queer space offers is impractical as resistance if, in heterosexual contexts, one continues to be unable to stop the domination and circumscription of desire by a collective consciousness that is "heterosexual." Arguably, a fuller experience of the infinite possibility of being *should* entail a willingness to practice sexual resistance in heterosexual contexts, at least as much as in queer ones.

This is a central problem with the sexual politics of non-identity. In heterosexual contexts, the non-identity of the self whose practice, as opposed to identity, is queer is really a comfort to heterosexuals because invisible queer beings leave heteronormativity uninterrupted in the places it is most in need of resistance.

Conversely, the heterosexual subject is interrupted when heterosexuals are forced to acknowledge the possibility of contrary knowledge that is reflected



by overt claims of *queer* identity, even as queer is purported not to be an identity. The “gay,” “lesbian,” “trans,” or “queer” identified subject, even if s/he is such momentarily or strategically, is a powerful strategy against heteronormativity; the political possibility of this kind of interruption, versus the practice of non-identity, is that it resists the self’s and others’ subject positions.<sup>28</sup> So, although queer *practice* may disrupt the self’s subject, which is valuable as one kind of resistance, it does not disrupt *other* subjects. For instance, when “gay,” “lesbian,” “trans,” or “queer” identities are consistently refused, while practices are not, the normative heterosexual subject remains intact because, apart from encountering *other* sexual identities, this subject is just less likely to find itself in sexual contexts that elicit queer and contrary sexual knowledges. The self may disrupt its own subjectivity by means of non-identity, but its ability to disrupt the *other’s* subjectivity demands that it face the other as an *other*-subject or *other*-knowledge.

The idea that gay or queer contexts stimulate de-subjectifying experiences solely through practice, as opposed to practice and identity, creates other problems. For instance, the politics of non-identity does not encourage heterosexual subjects to initiate an infinitely different or effectively de-subjectifying resistance at all. To reject a “queer” subject in favour of queer practice undercuts the “queer” subject’s possibility *as* an impetus that inspires heterosexual subjects to resist hetero-domination. More often than not, heterosexual subjects appear in heterosexual contexts, both by choice and because their heterosexual subject positions locate them outside the queer contexts in which the possibility of self-effacement is supposed to occur. As a result, queer practice offers heterosexuals little to no opportunity for effacement because heterosexuals *practice* heterosexuality in heterosexual contexts. This lack of opportunity is compounded further by the earlier observation that heterosexuals, *as such*, are not generally welcome in queer contexts; queers mainly accept heterosexuals who are willing to efface their subjects, but only if that effacement is a step toward repetitively queer practices that, let’s face it, are read and policed as “queer” identity.<sup>29</sup> Insofar as queers that invoke Foucault’s theories locate the possibility of effacement in queer practice, heterosexual subjects who do not, or cannot, practice within these contexts are either discouraged or absolved from pursuing the social and political aims of subject effacement.

Unidentified queers render invisible the possibilities that are queer. As unknown possibilities, unidentified queers reinforce, rather than interrupt, the boundaries of heterosexuality. Moreover, as heterosexuality operates *outside* as much or more than it does inside queer spaces, a consistent refusal to identify as “queer” is a lost opportunity to resist heterosexuality within its own fields of operation; in contexts that are not queer, heterosexual subjectivity is presumed in the absence of some *other* identification. Therefore, if queer practice does not exceed queer contexts *and* the self refuses *to be* “gay,” “lesbian,” “bisexual,” “trans,” or “queer” in heterosexual contexts, heterosexuality simply *knows* no resistance. Obviously, the enactment of queer practices in heterosexual spaces (e.g., S&M or fisting in the boardroom) is as impractical as it is politically dangerous, but this is just another reason the affirmation of identity is more effective as resistance in so many contexts.

Foucault and, all too often, queer theory treats the politics of non-identity as uniformly accessible, an uncritical assumption for which both are taken to task. Foucault is reproached for the “sexist focus in his work [that] cannot be solved simply by adding women to his analysis” and this exposes the need “to fundamentally reconsider the way in which his focus on men alone skews some of [his] insights,” a need queer theory also frequently ignores (Mills 2003, 7). For similar sorts of reasons, queer theory is said by David M. Halperin and Valerie Traub (2009) to “despecify the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or transgressive content of queerness, thereby abstracting ‘queer’ and turning it into a generic badge of subversiveness, a more trendy, non-normative version of ‘liberal’ or ‘oppositional’” practice (17); this observation also has implications for queerness as an unconscious mode of whiteness. Indeed, there is some “alarm over queer theory’s wholesale transition from gender to sexuality as the proper object of its analysis,” as Perez (2005) has noted while drawing on Judith Butler, because queer theory’s increasing neglect of women and gender is not irrelevant to its neglect of race and *vice versa* (173). In part, these effects are due to the ways Foucault’s theories, as queer theories, have almost completely enframed contemporary queer thought and being.

Another problem queer non-identity politics obfuscates is its role in the maintenance of whiteness

as a pre-condition for subject effacement: it entails a *de facto* colour-blind liberalism or racism. On the one hand, “queering’ ... is both a protest against foreclosure of possible inclusion and a demand that the liberal (white, yuppified, Western) gay and lesbian establishment recognize the ‘subalterns’ in its midst” (Hawley 2001, 6). On the other, it “colludes with institutionalized racism in vanishing, hence retrenching, white privilege” simply because it “has exchanged too hastily the politics of identity for the politics of difference” (Perez 2005, 187). Like Foucault, “[q]ueer theory’ has promised to complicate assumptions about routes of identification and desire” (Butler and Martin 1994, 3). In practice, however, the idea that queerness presents those who enter its spaces with the same opportunity for “limitless anonymous encounters” and subject effacement, belies a liberal, colour-blind assumption that people who enter queer spaces are equally welcomed, desired, and entitled to act on desire: this is the paradoxical, invisible foundation of queerness—it too readily refuses interruptions of whiteness at the same time that it opens onto the possibility of (white) sexual de-subjectification. Where queer anti-identity politics may afford white queers an opportunity at effacement, it may not so readily do so for queers of colour when whiteness dominates queer space. And in unique instances where queer space is not predominantly white, but racialized, it can still fail to do so for Indigenous queers, because queer spaces are just as likely to be dominated by the broad unconsciousness of settlers. As Andrea Smith (2011) argues, what can also “disappear within queer theory’s subjectless critique [is] settler colonialism and the ongoing genocide of Native peoples ... queer theory (even queer of color critique), then, rests on the presumption of the U.S. settler colonial state” (47).

Sara Ahmed (2010) writes that “[y]ou learn to see yourself as you are seen by those who can inhabit the familiar, because they can recede into its form” (86). Where the queer familiar is white and/or settled, queers who are of colour or Indigenous are less likely to be seen or allowed to see themselves as equally susceptible to the infinite possibility of self; their difference as racialized and Indigenous subjects in a queer, white, and settled familiar will not be read or operate as non-identity, because racialized and Indigenous queerness is visibly qualified in ways that queerness unqualified (i.e., as invisible whiteness) is not. In other words, the queer con-

demnation of visibility politics fails to recognize that invisibility politics is still a privilege afforded primarily to white queers.

Let’s assume that Foucault and queer theory’s failures to combat the largely male, white, and settler queer unconscious is not an essential outcome of non-identity politics: does this allow us to better justify the rejection of identity politics? The answer to this question requires a return to Foucault. He recognized the aftermath of each exposure to the infinite possibility of self is that every *exposure* also leaves an identifiable mark. So, regardless of context, even new experiences mark the mind and body; experience *becomes* new knowledge that is yet to be effaced by another moment *in between* the experience you knew and the experience you will know. This suggests that queer contexts, as sites for initiating subject effacing resistances, entail no more or less possibility than other contexts. At best, they allow for the idea that queer virtualities are singular (or at least one of a very few) sites in which experiences of desexualization are possible, but not the broader conclusion that they are the only sites for any and all experiences of desubjectification, which might also explain how queerness can fail to interrupt the unconsciousness of whiteness, sex, gender, and the settler. Queer sites are like all sites, in that no matter your *experience*, they too are quick to restrain experience as knowledge; therefore, the pursuit of *experience* over identity, however it is proposed by queer theory, does not necessarily offer more opportunity for resistance.

When conjoined with the idea that all contexts can present the possibility of subject-effacement, the strategic utility of being a self-identified “queer” challenges the assumption that queer contexts are *singular* sites through which to “re-open affective and relational virtualities” (Foucault 1989, 207). To be clear, the problem with this assumption is simply that it marginalizes the political aims of desubjectification to a single context, one that is framed, ordered, and regulated by rules akin to a “queer” subject position, even as the inhabitants of queer space may wish or claim to reject identity.<sup>30</sup>

This raises two final questions: is self-effacement really dependent on never naming your self in relation to your practices, and is effacement possible if it is repeatedly pursued in one as opposed to many subjects’ contexts?

Insofar as it is true that “gay” identity is as constraining as heterosexual identity, the idea that constraint is enough of a reason to utterly reject identity overlooks how assertive “out” or visible gay, lesbian, trans, or queer subjects also facilitate subject-effacement. For instance, consider that the effacing “desire-in-uneasiness” of the “heterosexual” can be initiated when she is faced with her own difference and similarity as a “queer” that is also manifested as *human being* (Foucault 1989, 207). Where the “heterosexual” encounters queer subjects, the self parading as a “heterosexual” can exceed the confines of heterosexual knowledge that otherwise obfuscates her infinite possibility. The self can free itself from heterosexual knowledge if and when it understands that selves, albeit *other* selves, exist in relation to other knowledges, such as queerness. The simple juxtaposition of the “queer” against the “heterosexual” is enough to convey to a self its possibility to know itself in a manner that is new and unlike its present self-knowledge. Of course, if the “queer” is going to successfully challenge “heterosexual” self-knowledge, the *willingness* on the part of the “heterosexual” to attempt to understand other-subjects is paramount. Luckily, many different subjects, moved by self, are willing to understand other-subjects.

To clarify the possibility of the *other*-subject as a means of effacement, consider this anecdote. A former coworker once told me that, although he did “not want to understand” my queerness, he “liked me anyway.” Struck by his choice of words, I asked, “Do you mean you *don’t* understand or you don’t *want to* understand?” Indeed, he said he did not *want* to understand queerness. What is interesting about this exchange is how conscious and determined he was about not understanding queerness. The question is why, why was he so extremely uncomfortable with the idea of understanding me *as* a “queer?” Perhaps the answer is that he knew all too well that to *understand* a queer subject might mean he would have to face his own infinite possibility insofar as the one thing that is recognizable between other-subjects is *self*. In effect, the other-subject is also a self. Thus, if my coworker were to recognize the self in the other-subject that is me, he might also realize that his self is not necessarily constrained by his current relation and commitment to heterosexual knowledge. In other words, to acknowledge that a self is what other-subjects do have in common is to acknowledge that

one’s self can or could be that *other*-subject; the self, like the self of the other-subject, can also partake in new, albeit limited and determined, possibilities that are realized through the grasp of the knowledge of any other-subject the self wills itself to understand. Perhaps this is precisely why my coworker refused to understand me as a “queer.”

To clarify, I am not suggesting my former coworker is or is not a latent queer. I am suggesting he is aware that the act of understanding an other-subject that is queer poses a threat to his own heterosexual subjectivity: effacement *can* be the result of the juxtaposition of subjected-self to other-subject. The possibility of effacement in this instance, however, will only occur when one subject is faced with a contrary and self-affirmed identity (i.e., “I am queer”). Without the contrariness of other-subjects, therefore, too many subjects have no opportunity to brush up against the self’s possibility insofar as it is clearly reflected in the (*re*)presence of other-subjects. So even as Foucault and queer theory may locate effacement in practices of non-identity, there are instances wherein the willingness of a subjected-self to comprehend an other-subject serves powerfully to illustrate the self’s possibility to itself, and even if that possibility appears to be finite or restricted to a few new subject positions. Perhaps a willingness to comprehend the infinite possibility of one’s own self is dependent, at least initially, upon the contradistinction between subjected-self and other-subject. For example, maybe the self must encounter other-subjects *as* other possibilities concerning the self-subject relationship, however finite and constraining those other-subject positions are, before the self can even pursue effacement.

This paper does not question the significance of Foucault and queer theory as inducements to explore the infinite possibility of self or the value of non-identity politics. What it does question are the implications of a queer practice of invisibility that utterly rejects identity politics. It has expounded on the political dangers of an uncritical practice that never dares to say “I am,” although it accepts the political possibility and resistance to which a practice of refusal can give rise, even if only in some contexts. It asserts that the balance between risk and possibility is best achieved when the politics of subject-effacement or non-identity is treated as one mode of resistance that is inter-dependent with the resistance elicited by a politics of visibility; both are

distinct modes that can realize resistance in different contexts. Its final contention is that the queer politics of non-identity resists the constraints of sexual subjectivity in queer space and time. Whereas the politics of identity shakes the foundations of whiteness and heteronormativity, as well as white homonormativity, not only within the latter's field of operation, but in intrepid ways that are impossible for non-identity.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> For the original interview, see Joecker, Oerd, and Sanzio 1982.

<sup>2</sup> Barbara Ryan (2001) encapsulates the fundamental divide between identity politics and queer theory: “[q]ueer theory is a rebellion from separatism because it calls into question all categories upon which conventional notions of identity rely. It is opposed to identity politics ‘as a form of expressive pluralism where identity is reified—that is, understood to be represented in a self-evident and authentic way through one’s body—and collectivity is reduced to group affiliation defined according to the standard of authentic embodiment’” or essentialism. She goes on to say that, “[i]dentify politics assumes a conforming identity, and queer theory explicitly critiques normativity, monolithic identities, and assimilationist policies... ‘queer’ is used to signify diverse inclusive politics within the gay and lesbian community” (325-26).

Richard Thomson Ford (2007) also clarifies queer anti-identitarianism as a response to the essentialist constraints of identity politics; he writes that “queer denotes not an identity but instead a political and existential stance, an ideological commitment, a decision to live outside some social norm or other. At the risk (the certainty) of oversimplification, one could say that even if one is born straight or gay, one must decide to be queer” (479). He further argues that “[q]ueer theory’s anti-identitarianism is key to its portability...” in that “the queer critique of (nominally) gay identity politics would seem to apply to identity politics generally” (479). To illustrate his point, Ford explains that this element of portability, which enables queer theory to be applied as critique in relation to any identity politics, was instrumental in relation to his (prior) book *Racial Culture*, in which “[q]ueer theory’s destabilizing agenda offered [him] a way to resist the super-sizing of identity politics at a moment when it seemed at its most preeminent”; it allowed him to “advance[d] an attack from the Left on racial identity politics in legal theory” (481) and it “not only offered a new theoretical frame within which to understand and analyze the often severely coercive aspects of Left liberal racial identity politics..., it also offered an alternative attitude, tone, or ‘stance’ to occupy in relation to it” (482).

Conversely, there are many “commonly voiced anxieties” that surround queer too, ones that pertain to: “whether a generic masculinity may be reinstalled at the heart of an ostensibly gender-neutral queer; whether queer’s transcendent disregard for dominant systems of gender fails to consider the material conditions of the west in the late twentieth century; whether queer simply replicates, with a kind of historical amnesia, the stances and

demands of an earlier gay liberation; and whether, because its constituency is almost unlimited, queer includes identificatory categories whose politics are less progressive than those of the lesbian and gay populations with which they are aligned” (Jagose 1996, n.p.). Like Jasbir K. Puar, postcolonial theorists, such as José Esteban Muñoz (2009), speak further to these anxieties because of promises broken by “white neoliberal queers who studiously avoid the question of ethnic, racial, class, ability, or gender difference” (31), an avoidance that may or may not suggest queer theory *per se* (i.e., as opposed to the queer’s that apply it) is as portable as Ford argues.

<sup>3</sup> Presentment is a continental philosophical notion that fundamentally conveys what is at issue in relation to temporal-ontological questions of identity as essence, or as that which is stable, unified, coherent, and authentic. As Calvin O. Schrag (2004) explains, “[t]heories of meaning based on a doctrine of essence make purchases on the universalizability of meaning through a procedure of *representation*. A doctrine of essence travels hand in glove with a claim that a meaning that was present in a given context can be *re-presented* in another context. But that which remains problematic in such a putative state of affairs is not only the possibility of retrieving or repeating a presentation that is no longer present in its presentational immediacy, but indeed the sense of what it means to experience ‘presence’ in its alleged original presentment” (4).

<sup>4</sup> Halberstam’s discussion is not focused particularly on assemblages so much as it relies on the concept to analytically characterize animated characters in contemporary children’s film; although “Judith” is cited as Halberstam’s first name in *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011), Halberstam (2012) has since changed it to Jack and indicated on his website that he is inclined toward a “floating pronoun” for a number of reasons: “first, I have not transitioned in any formal sense and there [sic] certainly many differences between my gender and those of transgender men on hormones. Second, the back and forth between he and she sort of captures the form that my gender takes nowadays. Not that I am often an unambiguous “she” but nor am I often an unambiguous he. Third, I think my floating gender pronouns capture well the refusal to resolve my gender ambiguity that has become a kind of identity for me” (n.p.).

<sup>5</sup> In many respects, it is also a response to what it fears is the monolithic influence of Judith Butler and performativity—it intends to shift the Butlerian paradigm that it suspects has dominated queer theory for too long now (Nigianni and Storr 2009, 2).

<sup>6</sup> Although Shildrick (2009) makes this observation in a discussion that focuses on disabled bodies, queer theory, and Deleuze, it is pertinent to queer theory, broadly speaking, as theory that targets or resists the politics of social exclusion; Shildrick also observes that this creates a “conundrum” for queer theorists “willing to deploy a Deleuzian rather than more generalised queer approach to the problematic of bodies that matter” or don’t matter, because social exclusions are central to this problematic (129).

<sup>7</sup> Puar (2011) also appears to acknowledge something like this insight insofar as newer work explores “becoming-intersectional assemblage[s]” (n.p.); her return to “intersectionality,” which signifies identity politics to an important degree, suggests her position may have shifted somewhat since the publication of her book *Terrrorist Assemblages* (2007).

<sup>8</sup> In part, Cohen and Ramlow’s (2005/2006) article is a genealogy of Deleuze and Guattari’s (invisible) influence in queer theory from

its inception. They read, and reread, Deleuze and Guattari *into* some of queer theories' early texts, even as the theorists responsible for them are obvious Foucauldians, such as David Halperin and Michael Warner. In a footnote, they go so far as to suggest that Halperin's *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* "seem[s] to us to deploy (whether wittingly or not) a specifically deleuzo-guattarian molecular politics in the elaboration of queer theory" (n.13). Although they were friends, and in active philosophical dialogue between 1962 and 1977, at which point "the dialogue is interrupted" and "Foucault will never see Deleuze again" (Ewald n.d., n.p.), the fact that Deleuze can be read into queer analyses that are manifestly Foucauldian with such ease, I think, speaks less to the idea that Deleuze's influence within the context of queer theory, as opposed to other contexts, is contemporaneous with Foucault's. Instead, it belies the fact that Foucault and Deleuze really do share very similar perspectives on human being, desire and the problem of identity, even as they fundamentally diverge on very important questions about the nature and relationships of ontology and discourse. Thus, if one were to perform a genealogy of the witting-becoming-Deleuze of queer theory, if you will, it is probably more accurate to locate the onset of his influence, in the sense of a trend, in the early to mid-2000s, which is not to say that no queer theorists ever work with his ideas prior to this.

<sup>9</sup> The origin of queer theory is often associated with the works of Judith Butler, but Foucault's role in its initiation and his influence in the emergent field are undeniably prior to Butler's work.

<sup>10</sup> Due to the limits of space, this discussion of identity politics provides only a context to clarify how and why Foucault's theories ultimately treated identity as something that is at odds with politics and resistance.

<sup>11</sup> Barbara Smith was also a founding member of the Combahee River Collective.

<sup>12</sup> As Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (2012) note, the radical politics of the civil rights movement drew the insights of figures, such as "Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglas, W. E. Du Bois, César Chávez, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Black Power and Chicano movements" (5).

<sup>13</sup> Diana Fuss (1989) astutely observes that there is "a tendency in current theory to conflate 'identity' with 'essence' as if they were mirror images of each other," a tendency that is misguided because it ignores the fact that "identity, of course, has a philosophical and intellectual history of its own, which though it frequently dovetails with the history of the Western understanding of essence, nonetheless just as frequently trajects in quite different directions" (98). Although Fuss wrote this in 1989, this uncritical belief, arguably, is as or more widely held than it was before.

<sup>14</sup> Collin Davis (2004) clarifies a nuanced difference between post-structuralism and queer and postcolonial perspectives on the question of identity. He writes, "[w]hereas poststructuralism broadly rejects stable identities, subject areas such as queer theory and postcolonial studies respond to the fact that in many circumstances we do identify ourselves as situated, embodied, gendered, sexual, and racial beings. This is not necessarily in blunt denial of poststructuralism, even if it is sometimes presented and perceived as such" (169). It is not a denial, because these perspectives agree that the subject, and thus the identities to which it may give rise, are inessential, constructed, or discursive formations. On another note, cri-

tique surrounding identity politics as essentialism has implications for feminist epistemologies too. The necessary link between identity and politics implies a necessary link between identity and access to knowledge (i.e., the identification of social and political truth, epistemological authority, and voice as each relates to questions of sex, race, class, sexuality, and so on); this speaks also to the problem of identity politics as a foundation for unifying a movement.

<sup>15</sup> Harris (1999) identifies Valdes as one of the most significant *LaCrit* theorists of the 1990s; Valdes is also influential in the context of queer legal studies.

<sup>16</sup> Harris (1999) suggests an over-emphasis on "intellectual work" at the expense of sustained "internal community building and maintenance" is also part of the problem (314).

<sup>17</sup> David Halperin (1995) claims Foucault used "homosexual" strategically as "an identity without essence" because of the opposing opportunity it created to resist heterosexuality (61). However, when Foucault discusses the historically opportune position the homosexual occupies, he does not identify as "homosexual" and refers only to "the homosexual" when engaged in interviews on this topic. As a result, he maintains a personal distance between himself and the identity category "homosexual" (Halperin, 61); see also *Foucault Live*, particularly interviews 17, 18, 20, and 24 (Foucault 1989).

<sup>18</sup> According to James Miller's (1993) biography, Foucault first came upon the idea of "systematically effacing...subjectivity" in Hegel's works, but later found it was also central in Heidegger's and Nietzsche's thought (41).

<sup>19</sup> To enact this idea, and the critical ontological question behind it—"what difference does it make who is speaking?"—Foucault chose to be interviewed anonymously by *Le Monde* on the topic of the "author" (Foucault 1984, 120; 1989, 192); *Le Monde* is a French daily evening newspaper. He did so to address the violent paradox of the "author's" visibility as such. He contends that the famous "author" acquires power through visibility in that he enjoys social position and fortune, and yet this visibility also thwarts his power; the "author's" success erases the unique power and possibility of a "time when, being completely unknown, what [he] said had some chance of being heard" (1989, 193). Foucault's point is that the knowledge of who is speaking or writing becomes the lens through which subsequent speech, works, and acts are known—new speech, works and acts are known only as echoes of those prior and, thus, the self is never heard again. This is why Foucault's anonymous interviews (he also wrote anonymous articles) are tantamount to his refusal to say "I am 'gay.'" His use of anonymity is akin to his refusal to identify as gay. Foucault intends both moves to thwart the trap of *being known*.

<sup>20</sup> Subject effacement resists a *will to knowledge*, which is not entirely unlike the "[w]ill to truth" that Nietzsche (1954) argues is an uninterrupted echo of an "ancient will to power"—it is akin to Nietzsche's *will to power*, wherein, the self that would ward off the ego is "that which must always overcome itself" (225). For Nietzsche and Foucault, the potency of echoes (as a will to power or will to knowledge) is their presence as "mob" or discursive knowledge respectively; both persuade the self to enact only one possibility among many, and one that is a particular ego or subject (Nietzsche 1954, 480). This is at the core of the Nietzschean and, ultimately, Foucauldian awareness that "[w]hatever I create and however much I

love it—soon I must oppose it and my love” in that it reflects the intensity of the resistance the self must exercise if it is to resist the advances made upon it by the ego or the subject (227).

<sup>21</sup> For Nietzsche, this repeated transcendent movement is the *eternal return*; unlike Nietzsche, Foucault rejects any idea of “transcendence” because it implies a “*residuum*” of ontology, wherein a transcendent self reflects a structuralist or universal sense of self. This rejection was also a reaction to the thought of existentialist philosophers such as de Beauvoir and Sartre who characterized freedom as a kind of transcendence of the subject (Foucault 1989, 79).

<sup>22</sup> A marginal knowledge of sensation that permanently replaces a dominant one still serves subject formation, albeit a marginal or new subject.

<sup>23</sup> The idea of reclaimed meaning or terminology is at the heart of Foucault’s notion of “‘reverse’ discourse” (Foucault 1980, 101). It is also noteworthy that Foucault would not necessarily be against the content of all gay rights, although he would not be willing to affirm an identity in order to get them.

<sup>24</sup> Although Lisa Duggan is attributed with coining the term “homonormativity,” Susan Stryker (2008) argues there is “an older formulation of homonormativity,” one which was in use in the context of transgender theory, particularly, (Judith) Jack Halberstam’s work in the 1990s. This formulation occurs before Duggan takes it up as an aspect of neoliberalism (145).

<sup>25</sup> Another interpretation of these striking parallels is that Puar’s political project is more Foucauldian than it is Deleuzian, as Terry Goldie (2010) observes: “the politics of the book [*Terrorist Assemblages*] are more informed by Foucault’s theories of power and knowledge, but the mode of the book is Deleuzian”—it is Deleuzian only in rhetorical style and flourish (n.p.). Either way, Foucault, Deleuze, and Puar are alike in their suspicion of identity.

<sup>26</sup> Foucault (1984) rejects the use of biography as evidence for or against theory insofar as doing so illustrates something like the demand that the “author,” as such, not only reiterate, but embody “the principle of a certain unity of writing” (111; Eribon 1991, 26). The documentary *Michel Foucault: Beyond Good and Evil* (1993) also details the razor blade incident.

<sup>27</sup> Miller (1993) writes that, “Foucault was understandably wary about becoming too closely linked in the popular mind with gay subculture he was part of” (256).

<sup>28</sup> Gayatri Spivak (1988), the postcolonial feminist, proposed one of the earliest versions of this idea wherein she characterizes one “effect of the subject as subaltern...as the strategic use of a positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest,” also referred to as “strategic essentialism” (205). Spivak would later reconsider the political worth of this idea and retract it. The problem, however, is not the strategy, but the essentialism that typically and uncritically is conflated with contemporary notions of identity and, therefore, any strategic use of it. The idea that identity has not always been understood to entail and, therefore, need not always and only be reduced to essentialism is an insight that I think Diana Fuss (1989) gets right.

<sup>29</sup> During a discussion of Michael Warner’s *The Trouble with Normal* (1999), an undergraduate in one of my classes, Rebekka Zolnierczyk, humourously characterized this as a “queerer than thou” attitude that circulates within many queer spaces to keep other queers in line.

<sup>30</sup> The problem with this wish is that it cannot combat the fact that some compulsory identification always results from the self’s *personally* unnamed practices that, nonetheless, are or will be named socially. I cannot repeatedly engage in queer sex and not be “queer,” even if I refuse the identity, because my practices ensure I will be *known*, at least by one or more people with whom I practice, as a “queer”—a self-hating queer it might be assumed, but a “queer” nonetheless.

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