

The Disenchanted: Queer Theory Between Negativity and Flourishing

Mari Ruti

1. Why Is the World Not Enough?

21st-century queer theory speaks a language of disenchantment. It's grumpy, even cantankerous. It constantly complains about the state of the world. Like related progressive theoretical currents, such as critical theory, critical race theory, transnational feminism, and Marxist-Lacanian theory, it almost by definition falls under the rubric of what Eve Sedgwick labeled paranoid criticism: the kind of criticism that obstinately digs for the cause of evil, always expects the worst, and refuses to be caught by surprise by the ruses of normative society.

A less charged term than “paranoid” for this type of criticism is ideology critique: one of the many things that queer theory has inherited from 20th-century continental theory—from thinkers such as Althusser, Lacan, Deleuze, Derrida, Foucault, Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva, and Luce Irigaray—is its insistent deconstruction of the ideological structures that govern our society and shape the contours of our life, including our psychic and affective life. It is deeply attuned to the ways in which biopolitics—what Foucault described as a nebulous politics of *bios*, of life—reaches into the deepest recesses of our being, giving rise to our most basic understanding of what it means to be a human being. This means that queer theory, like continental theory, is suspicious of everything that we are taught to take for granted, everything that seems normal, ordinary, standard, or commonplace. Even at its most hopeful moments, it refuses to believe that the world we live in is the world that we *want* to live in. As Nadia Ellis,

echoing José Muñoz, states, (q) “queerness is that thing that lets us feel that the world is not enough” (e of q).

Why is the world not enough? Given recent political developments in this country, it’s hard to stop once you get started on this topic. But these developments are arguably merely the culmination of what has long been among queer theory’s main complaints about our society, namely its hardnosed neoliberal pragmatism. We live in a society that wants us to work harder, faster, longer, and better. This society valorizes efficiency, productivity, good performance, and voracious consumerism. And it actively obscures the ways in which the glossy surfaces of its department stores rely on both local and global networks of racial, gendered, and class-based exploitation. As Foucault already claimed, neoliberal capitalism transforms the human being into a miniature economic enterprise—what he called *homo economicus*—driven by a market-centered logic of input and output, effort and profit. Such utilitarianism characterizes life under neoliberalism to such a degree that people tend to measure their worth primarily by levelheaded criteria of accomplishment. Even those who fail to live up to the expectations of this system are impacted by it in the sense that the sparkly version of the good life it promises becomes a goal that they reach for even when it repeatedly eludes them.

Lauren Berlant calls this predicament—reaching for what repeatedly eludes us—“cruel optimism.” She defines cruel optimism as the stubborn belief that ways of life, ideological attachments, social arrangements, and relational entanglements that injure us will in due course, at some future point, pay off and make us happy. She specifies that we are caught up in cruel optimism when something we ardently desire is in reality an impediment to our flourishing; cruel optimism entails the hope that our efforts will eventually pay off, that things will eventually get better, even when they are extremely unlike to do so. And perhaps the most

insidious thing about cruel optimism is that the false hope it provides is in many instances the only thing that lends coherence to our lives, with the result that giving up this hope would be even more painful, even more unbearable, than being repeatedly defeated by it.

Sara Ahmed reasons along closely related lines when she observes that our investment in our society's dominant narratives of what it means to lead a happy life can be so strong that when a given narrative—say, the narrative that tells us that hard work and institutional loyalty will be rewarded—does not deliver what it promises, we do not question the narrative itself but instead assume that somehow we have failed to perform it correctly. As Ahmed notes, (q) “It is hard labor just to recognize sadness and disappointment, when you are living a life that is meant to be happy but just isn't, which is meant to be full, but feels empty” (e of q).

Directly related to neoliberal pragmatism, cruel optimism, and dominant happiness narratives is the quintessentially American ethos of positive thinking, which assures us that personal fulfillment is attainable through ambition, striving, and calculated risks; that there is no hindrance that cannot be overcome by perseverance; and that dissatisfaction is always a temporary state, a mere stepping stone to satisfaction. It's almost like the American dream doesn't quite count unless it is preceded by some hardship. Barbara Ehrenreich points out that many Americans are conditioned to be so optimistic that they have an almost boundless faith in their ability to achieve their goals and bring about miraculous reversals of fortune even when their chances of doing so are slim. This mentality dictates that success arises from having a positive attitude, which, unfortunately for those who fall short of success, implies that there is no excuse for failure: the flipside of positive thinking is a harsh insistence on personal responsibility. As Ehrenreich explains, while neoliberal capitalism (q) “produces some people's

success through other people's failures, the ideology of positive thinking insists that success depends upon working hard and failure is always your own doing" (e of q).

This system exploits human adaptability: the ability to survive repeated disappointment. It is not for nothing that one of the most enduring elements of American cultural mythology is the idea that Americans are a robust and resilient people, capable of bouncing back from any obstacle, setback, or defeat. Like Jack Bauer (of the TV show *24*), Americans are supposed to get the job done even when they're limping, bleeding, and out of bullets.

Consider what happens when a catastrophe strikes, either on the collective or personal level. We are encouraged to mourn our losses as quickly as possible, to get back on our feet, to brush ourselves off, and to get "back to business." While ostentatious demonstrations of grief may at times be actively elicited as proof of our enduring humanness—of the basic goodness of our souls and the generosity of our spirits—prolonged grief is unacceptable because it renders us incapable of participating in the life of the economy, either as producers or consumers. The kind of depression that drives you to the mall may be worth something; but the kind of paralyzing sadness that drives you to your darkened bedroom is not.

2. Three Levels of Queer Disenchantment

It is to this neoliberal, pragmatic, and sugarcoated state of affairs that 21-century queer theory has uttered its resounding and rebellious *No!* On my handout, I've noted three levels of queer theory's disenchantment: its discontent with neoliberalism, homonormativity, and homonationalism. I'll touch on all three levels, in the process references some of the main forms taken by queer negativity, starting with its most extreme incarnation, namely its call to opt out of the system altogether through radical acts of self-annihilation. The most well known

of these calls is Lee Edelman's provocative alignment of queerness with the Lacanian death drive in his 2004 *No Future* as well as in his 2014 exchange with Berlant in *Sex, or the Unbearable*. Edelman argues that our society is governed by what he calls "heteronormative reproductivity": a mentality centered on the nuclear family and the reification of icon of the innocent child as the depository of the cruelly optimistic hope that the future will redeem the failings of the present. In the context of this mentality, the queer represents a threat, a force of destruction. Edelman's counterintuitive response is to say, "So be it. Let's celebrate the self-shattering force of the death drive."

Those of you who are familiar with queer theory know that Edelman's *No Future* was met with considerable opposition from within the field, that many critics, myself included, were disturbed by his alignment of the queer with the death drive. But looking back, what strikes me most forcefully is the degree to which much of queer theory has since then shifted toward Edelman's version of queer negativity. While most critics have not adopted his controversial antirelational stance, destructiveness has been in vogue. For instance, even though Lynne Huffer explicitly condemns Edelman's Lacanian approach in her 2010 *Mad for Foucault*, she follows the early Foucault—the Foucault of *Madness and Civilization*—to a very similar place of "desubjectivation," advocating, in some parts of her argument at least, the utter pulverization of the subject. Likewise, Jasbir Puar's 2007 *Terrorist Assemblages* leans on an extreme version of Deleuze and Guattari to "queer" the suicide bomber, so that queerness, metaphorically speaking, becomes equated with the blood, flesh, and bone fragments that follow from the detonation of the bomb. Even Jack Halberstam, who initially was among the most vocal of Edelman's critics, arguably ends up in a conceptually related spot in his 2011 *The Queer Art of Failure*, which, like Edelman, rejects the idea of trying to work with the neoliberal system,

instead promoting various forms of “failure” as a way out of it. Halberstam’s response to our society’s ideals of high performance and relentless cheerfulness is to say that we should listen to hiphop instead of going to school, relish ignorance, stupidity, and unemployment, and recast self-cutting as a feminist practice.

In *The Ethics of Opting Out: Queer Theory’s Defiant Subjects*, which was released in the spring of 2017, I put pressure on these theories on several levels, of which I’ll merely mention one, namely that I think that something essential gets lost in translation when American queer theorists appropriate 20th-century French critiques of the so-called humanist subject. It is true that Lacan, Foucault, and Deleuze and Guattari were all highly critical of the notion of the sovereign, autonomous, and agentic subject that we have inherited from Western philosophy in part because they, like earlier thinkers such as Adorno and Levinas, saw the connection between this subject and violence; they understood that this subject’s quest for self-mastery was linked to its quest to master the world, and that the results were disastrous, ranging from slavery and colonialism to Nazi Germany. However, I do not think that continental theorists, generally speaking, sought to destroy the subject as such. Instead, they were interested in what subjectivity might look like after the collapse of the arrogant humanist subject. They wanted to destabilize this subject, to undermine its sovereignty, challenge its autonomy, and dilute its agency. Yes, there was much talk about the subversion of the subject, desubjectivation, and even, in the case of Deleuze and Guattari, of pulverizing the subject. But, ultimately, there was also an idealistic reaching for an alternative, for a subjectivity that would be less sure of itself and therefore more capacious, creative, and open to otherness.

Undoubtedly, some of this idealism persists in even the most negative of queer theories in the sense that their negativity usually contains utopian longings. However, I think that queer

theory's flagellation of the sovereign, autonomous, and agentic subject is by now so ritualistic, undertaken in such a habitual manner, that it has become too predictable to be genuinely critical. I of course understand why it is happening. Particularly now that we are watching President Trump and his corporate allies parade on the political stage, it is easy to recognize the figure of the white-straight-masculinist, self-contained, self-satisfied, and self-confident subject that posthumanist theorists have criticized for decades. But I think that a distinction needs to be drawn between the Trumps of the world and the vast majority of the world's population. In other words, I think that the call to annihilate (q uq) "the subject" misfires when it is indiscriminate, for when it is generalized, it becomes aimed at individuals who have never come anywhere near to approximating the sovereign subject. That is, it seems to me that the last thing that those who have been dispossessed by social inequalities such as homophobia, sexism, racism, poverty, or neocolonialism need is further dispossession; self-annihilation cannot possibly be a goal for those who already feel annihilated by structural violence, who already lead precarious lives. Likewise, I have a hard time imagining that those who have experienced various forms of Halberstamian failure, for instance those who are unemployed or cutting themselves, view these experiences as sexy forms of political rebellion.

Halberstam's queer art of failure is arguably written from the perspective of those who have already succeeded. Likewise, queer theory's calls for self-annihilation assume that there is a self to annihilate to begin with. Against this backdrop, Darieck Scott's *Extravagant Abjection: Blackness, Power, and Sexuality in the African American Literary Imagination* is an important corrective. I admit that I initially approached this text with a degree of suspicion because I knew from Scott's title that he, like so many other queer theorists, was going to try to claim "abjection"—sexual humiliation and mortification—as a resistant queer practice. I had

had a fairly allergic reaction to Halberstam's attempt to do the same in the context of female masochism—masochism here understood not only in the sexual but also in a more general sense—in *The Queer Art of Failure*, for it seems to me that the minute masochism becomes the new feminism, as it does for Halberstam, heteropatriarchy has truly triumphed. I had also not been terribly convinced by David Halperin's earlier attempt to locate subversion in “abject” gay male sexuality. So when Scott proposed to focus on the queer potential in the sexual degradation of black men, traversing a terrain from slavery and its persistent aftermath to contemporary literary representations of black male sexual humiliation, such as the rape of Paul D in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, I honestly just didn't want to keep reading.

But I'm glad I did, for Scott managed to convince me of at least one thing, namely that there may be something to be said for the ways in which sexual humiliation functions as a mark of failed masculinity in relation to dominant, heroic ideals of masculinity. Scott asks, (q) “If we are racialized (in part) through domination and abjection and humiliation, is there anything of value or to be learned from the experience of being defeated, humiliated, abjected?” (e of q) He answers in the affirmative, arguing that black male sexual abjection can be understood as a resource for the political present because it (q) “broadens and even enriches the expanse of what is human being” (e of q).

For Scott, the history of black male abjection can potentially facilitate the reconfiguration of the subject because it leads to a less ego-centric, less cocky understanding of what it means to be a human being. Unlike Edelman, Scott does not want to annihilate the subject. But he does want to see something different from President Trump's version of white masculinity; he wants an alternative to the subject whose agency rests on the oppression and

exploitation of others. As he explains, he is looking for “less-defended modes of being male in the world.”

I admit that I’m not as convinced as Scott is that the flinch of the black body that anticipates violence gives rise to what he describes a (q) “churning, as-yet-unshaped resistance that is characterized by intense, even extravagant meaning-making” (e of q). However, the reason I did not have the same aversive reaction to his text as I did to Halberstam’s advocacy of female masochism is that he does not *prescribe* abjection. Unlike Halberstam, who dislikes the notion of agency so much that he ends up implying that abjection as the antithesis of agency is the only legitimate way to be a feminist in today’s world, Scott merely says, “Look, now that it has happened, now that this history of black male defeat cannot be undone, can we think of it as something other than a pure loss? Can something alternative, even creative, come out of it? Can a damaged form of subjectivity, a compromised form of agency, give rise to a more humane kind of humanity?

I wish there were easier ways to get there. But what Scott’s text enables us to see is that queer theory is almost by definition antinormative, and that this antinormativity often takes the form of what Patrick Johnson, in his introduction to the 2016 volume, *No Tea, No Shade: New Writings in Black Queer Studies*, describes as a “disavowal of respectability politics.” In other words, this theory goes to the most extreme places conceivable in order to flee the taint of what it considers worse than abjection, namely neoliberal normativity. In *The Ethics of Opting Out*, I caution queer theory against turning antinormativity into a new norm, arguing that the moment we want to make a value judgment of any kind—the moment we, for instance, want to say that homophobia is wrong—we have already entered the realm of normative thinking; in this sense, every antinormative stance contains a clandestine normative streak. However, the

fact remains that queer theory views queerness as more or less synonymous with antinormativity—with the rejection of the basic contours of our political establishment and its unjust systems of justice—and that it is this fact that explains why this theory clashes so strongly with the more conciliatory tone of mainstream lgbtq activism: simply put, most queer theorists believe that the system that lgbtq activists are seeking entry into through devices such as gay marriage, cultural assimilation, and social recognition is the devil.

This is why the second level of queer theoretical disenchantment that I want to flag for you is aimed at gay and lesbian mainstreaming—or what has become known as “homonormativity.” Homonormativity can be loosely defined as the attempt of lgbtq subjects to abide by the basic principles of heteronormativity, such as successful careers, monogamy, marriage, family, and children. In their critiques of homonormativity, queer theorists accuse lgbtq activists of pandering to the desires of the most domesticated—and usually the most privileged—members of lgbtq community. From their perspective, relatively affluent, mostly white gays and lesbians are using marriage and other signifiers of middle-class respectability as a means of purchasing their way into “normalcy” at the expense of those who cannot be so easily assimilated, such as poor, racialized, immigrant, or gendervariant queers. As David Eng, Tim Dean, and Heather Love, among many others, have argued, well-healed gays and lesbians can enter the mainstream only by breaking ties with those who cannot make it. This process sanitizes the lgbtq community, making gays and lesbians seem “just like” straight people, with the result that distinctively queer modes of life and communities are being destroyed, washed away by the impure waters of neoliberal conformity.

The standoff between mainstream lgbtq activists and queer theorists is a classic one between liberal thinkers who believe that the existing system is more or less valid, and that we

merely need to make it more inclusive, on the one hand, and, on the other, progressive thinkers who believe that the system is so thoroughly corrupt, so rotten to the core, that the only thing to do is the tear it down and build a new one. On one side of this divide stand lgbtq activists who are trying to escape painful histories of pathologization, who want to be considered “normal,” and who are demanding the equal civil rights that such normalcy, in their view, entails. On the other side stand queer critics who, in the spirit of Michael Warner’s *The Trouble with Normal*, are asking: Why would we want to be normal? Isn’t the normal what has always oppressed us?

From queer theory’s critique of homonormativity, there is but a short step to the critique of homonationalism, of the efforts of mainstream gays and lesbians to align themselves with the state’s security systems against the onslaught of undesirable “outsiders,” particularly Muslim immigrants. Puar was among the first to articulate the insidious ways in which gay patriotism is used to differentiate between upright homosexuals and “perverse” Muslims, to essentially recodify the age-old distinction between civilization and barbarism. More recently, many queer critics have combined Puar’s insights about homonationalism with Achille Mbembe’s analysis of necropolitics to express their disillusionment with the manner in which mainstream lgbtq subjects and political organizations in the West participate in the destruction of both non-Western populations and people of color—queer or not—in the West. That is, if queerness was historically, and particularly during the AIDS crisis, affiliated with death, homonationalism implies that these days some queers participate in the dealing of death.

Foucault theorized biopolitics as a tool for fashioning subjects for a certain kind of life. Mbembe in turn theorized necropolitics as a means of designating racialized, particularly black, populations and individuals for death, destruction, and disposal. The 2014 anthology *Queer Necropolitics* includes essays on how some lgbtq subjects continue to be the targets of

necropolitics, how, for instance, trans subjects both on the streets and within the confines of the prison system, are especially vulnerable to premature death. However, many of essays in this volume also consider the manner in which lgbtq subjects contribute to the social or literal deaths of others. For example, lgbtq activists who turn to the police and the legal system for protection may inadvertently strengthen the very institutions that target black American men—queer or not—for incarceration and death. More generally speaking, many queer critics are recognizing that it is no longer possible to ignore the ways in which, as Hiram Pérez argues, gay modernity is coterminous with the rise and continued power of U.S. Empire.

There are thus many reasons for queer theory's resistance to the idea that becoming a happy, well-adjusted queer should be a goal for any of us. One of the latest incarnations of this resistance has been queer affect theory, the kind of theory that investigates in the ways in which negative affects—bad feelings as well as visceral reactions of recoil—are not merely individual states but also socially generated, collective phenomena. This theory, which is associated with thinkers such as Berlant, Ahmed, Sianne Ngai, and Ann Cvetkovich, repeatedly asks whether there might be some political value, some antinormative purchase, in refusing to be happy, in dwelling in bad feelings such as envy, anxiety, depression, resentment, and loneliness. This idea is yet another version of queer negativity. It's yet another way of resisting normalization, the performance principle, ideals of neoliberal thriving, and the hollow promise that the future will make up the anguish of the present.

3. What Is (Queer) Flourishing?

I mentioned earlier that even robustly negative queer theories tend to contain a kernel of utopianism. But it is in queer affect theories and related theoretical currents that this kernel—

—a glimmer of enchantment within queer disenchantment—is most readily discernible, for despite their emphasis on bad feelings, they usually aim at flourishing. It’s just that what this flourishing consists of is rarely explicitly defined; it is usually defined purely negativity, as what we do *not* have. The reader of progressive theory of course does have an intuitive sense of what queer critics mean by flourishing: it usually entails a mixture of romantic Marxism, the vision of the Renaissance man promoted by early Marx, and sexual emancipation. This is why, when I was drafting this talk, I pulled out Herbert Marcuse’s *An Essay on Liberation* from my bookshelf. I suspected that Marcuse, who theorized before the invention of deconstruction, when it was still acceptable for progressive critics to define such things, would define flourishing for me.

He does. According to Marcuse, flourishing means the abolition of poverty on the global level, absolute equality of all people; an aesthetic rather than a pragmatic sensibility; purposeful rather than alienating work; solidarity across differences; cooperation, sensuousness, spontaneity, playfulness, and creativity; allergy toward domination; parks and gardens rather than highways and parking lots; and what he calls “the turn from quantity to quality.”

There you have it. I’ll take it. Marcuse locates the revolutionary potential to make flourishing a reality in two places: the subjugated populations of the non-Western world and poor American innercity dwellers, specifying that the Western working classes—which were the revolutionary base of more traditional Marxism—have been so thoroughly coopted by the creature comforts and entertainment systems provided by capitalism that they are unlikely to rise up and resist. But Marcuse admits that precisely because of the extreme disenfranchisement of his new revolutionary base, what he calls the Great Refusal is unlikely to come any time

soon. And indeed, reading his 1969 text is dispiriting because it shows how very little has changed during the last 50 years. He in fact begins his text by talking about the domination of global capitalism and neoliberal empire in terms that could have been lifted out of 21st-century queer theory.

Like Derrida's "democracy-to-come"—by which Derrida means genuine democracy as opposed to our pseudo-democracy—Marcuse's Great Refusal is a refusal-to-come. And it never did come. This is what is so frustrating about reading radical revolutionary theory: its ideals seem completely unattainable in part because the neoliberal subject just doesn't give a damn. This frustration is one reason that queer affect theorists and others in the field who lean toward utopianism have tried to conceptualize more quotidian, less muscular theories of resistance. In a book manuscript I've just finalized entitled *Distillations* that, among other things, deals with the differences between Lacanian theories of revolutionary change and affect theory, I express the matter as follows: where leading Lacanians, such as Alain Badiou, Slavoj Žižek, Paul Eisenstein, Todd McGowan, and Edelman, are looking for a radical rupture in the status quo, for a transvaluation of all values, affect theorists are interested in how deprivileged subjects get through the day.

For instance, in the face of Edelman's radical rhetoric of queer self-shattering, Berlant calls for "dedramatization," specifying that many marginalized subjects are so exhausted by the demands of daily life, so shattered by everyday struggles, that it is our theoretical responsibility to try to understand how they manage to keep going at all. This is how Berlant comes to argue that mundane practices such as overeating, and by implication, various forms of addiction, and even bad feelings such as depression or paralyzing disillusionment, provide the kinds of small (q uq) "vacations from the will," from the pressure to stay responsible, that make the rest of life

tolerable. She calls this type of agency lateral agency: not agency in the usual active sense of the word, but the compromised, obstructed, and bruised agency of those who have been stripped of the dignities of sovereignty.

Along related lines, Ahmed argues that for many people of color, the sheer act of surviving yet another day can constitute a revolutionary act, as can various gestures of self-care—gestures that are not a matter of self-indulgence but of refusing defeat. In *Willful Subjects*, Ahmed also talks about “passive” forms of willfulness, such as the unwillingness to work fast and efficiently in soul-slaying jobs. As Marcuse also notes, slowing down has traditionally been a form of resistance from slave plantations to the industrial conveyor belt. In queer theoretical terms, it can be thought of as a way of undermining what Barbara Freeman labels chrononormativity or chronobiopolitics, meaning the ability of the neoliberal establishment to use time to prod human beings toward maximum productivity and the schedules of the nuclear family.

Freeman explains that even the most basic things about life, such as when we sleep, work, eat, and play are not random but culturally calculated to create normative lifestyles, to (q) “shape flesh into legible, acceptable embodiment” (e of q). In such a context, seemingly useless acts, such as the depressive’s refusal to get out of bed in the morning, the alcoholic’s refusal to stop at two drinks, or the post office worker’s refusal to speed up when the line is out the door can be conceptualized as tiny acts of rebellion.

We are quite far from Marcusian flourishing. Undoubtedly, within much of queer theory, it is suffering rather than flourishing that seems theoretically and politically generative. Even its explicitly utopian, relational articulations are laced with yearning, dislocation, and histories of conquest. For instance, Muñoz’s utopianism scrutinizes painful queer histories for

glimpses of future possibility—for what he calls “anticipatory illuminations”—in a decidedly nostalgic tone, a tone that can only approach the future through the losses of the past. Ellis describes queer belonging in the black diaspora as a failed affinity or suspended potential, as a longing for attachment or community that is best characterized by its failure to arrive at its aim. And while Juana Rodrígues celebrates what she calls “the flaming gestures of queer fabulousness” in Latina sexual communities, she is also attuned to the “disheartening breakdowns” that often occur in the context of attempts to transcend the confines of what our society deems possible. This is to say that if queer theory takes place between negativity and flourishing, its loyalty to the negative is notable. The glimmer of enchantment within its disenchantment remains faint at best.

Let me finish with a text where this glimmer, while still elusive, shines through with a degree of conviction. This is Stefano Harney and Fred Moten’s *The Undercommons*, which challenges the naturalization of misery in progressive scholarship, which challenges the idea that pleasure is invariably an illegitimate privilege of those who refuse (q) “to look squarely into the fucked-up face of things” (e of q). To be sure, Harney and Moten, like most of the thinkers I have mentioned tonight, begin with what they call “the brokenness of being.” Like so many others, they ache for a better edition of the world. But they also express a cautious faith in the already existing world by positing that life, life worth living, is already happening, taking place, in the folds of what they call the undercommons, the commons that is “under,” that exists in the interstices of normativity, in spaces of possibility and creativity that cannot be fully contained by capitalism, neoliberalism, or heteronormativity.

Like the Lacanian real that always to some extent overflows the efforts of the dominant symbolic order to discipline it, something about the undercommons escapes, in acts

of everyday life of working, studying, talking, plotting, loving, sharing meals, walking with others, consoling, and dancing—in what Harney and Moten call “the fugitive art of social life.” Those who participate in this art may not always flourish. But they arguably capture something about Marcuse’s ideal of privileging quality over quantity, of recognizing that sometimes, however fleetingly, the world actually *is* enough.