Introduction

Love and Money, Queerness and Class

Love and Money is a book of cultural critique and exploration at the crossroads of queerness and class in the United States. Through field studies and comparative criticism, it asks what difference social class makes to queer subjectivity and representation, and what difference queerness makes to class hierarchy and value. I argue that we cannot see queer cultures clearly enough when we ignore class, nor can we see contemporary class outside the production of sexual difference. Sometimes the object of this argument is commercial popular culture, long the measure of queer defilement by radical standards. Other times, its objects are the beloved texts and expressions—in film and literature—of queer independent producers and queer community audiences across class lines. Still other times, the object is radical queer critique itself, in the spirit of articulating a new critical vocabulary less bound than the ones we now use by familiar oppositions between markets and politics and thus less driven by the taste hierarchies that surface so easily in the name of commercial refusal. *Love and Money* argues that the rich soil of cultural production offers renewal—ways to imagine and practice solidarity that have long been present but undersung amid class antagonism in queerness and sexual-political antagonism from the American left. Class is not a purely cultural form, but culture is vital to queer class solidarity.

Love and Money starts from a romantic and by-now nostalgic view: in queerness exists the chance for social attachments and forms of belonging that might otherwise be impossible. That something about the alloy of erotic energy, social shame, new interiorities, the open smudging of private and public, shifts in psychic expectation at once gradual and dramatic, and the limits of family acceptance would impel us to social creativity. That we would find affection and strength in new places, inhabit the world across old divisions, be slow to judge and curious about modes of living beyond our own. That we would pool what few resources we had and circulate them in new ways. That we would live with new ambitions—our own but also ambitions in common, held together by the idea that any resource brings greater pleasure if it enriches the collective and doesn't come at someone else's expense.

That love as we knew it could be rerooted in depths of feeling and social possibility, not zip codes, alma maters, and routine proprieties.

For me, this was not a myth of the 1960s, except as it spilled over into that period—the 1980s—when I came queerly and intellectually of age in my mid-twenties, by then close to completing a PhD at the University of Pennsylvania. My education expressed my life as a running repository of privilege and opportunity, though it often didn't feel that way. I had come from a family of mixed economic position in Canada of the 1960s and 70s: broke, bohemian, parents divorced, borderline professional. I believed early on that I could go to school and become what I wanted. It wasn't true, exactly, but it was an encouraging story whose limits I would need to discover—quite a different thing than having to reverse that old class injury that tells people school is not for them, nor are they cut out for school. I was overworked but well endowed, a *jeune leftiste* with a plan, a citizen of federal laws and provincial governments that kept health care and a university education in reach.

A lot has changed since then, especially in the United States, to undermine anyone's belief in queer and other forms of social possibility. AIDS and criminal indifference to health and survival; war and occupation as national security; the political ascent of religious fundamentalism and the right wing; the retrenchment of civil liberty, social welfare, affirmative action, and support for public education; and the demonization of public cultures save those polished and packaged for family and professional-managerial consumption—such developments do not open the world to reimagining and *florissance* but compel us to survival and self-protection. Old divisions are rediscovered and naturalized, erotic energies attenuated, psychic expectations plucked from cultural possibility and framed instead by "destiny" and "evolution." Social curiosity becomes suspicion, and resource-pooling a form of mismanagement corrected by concentration and upward distribution.

By some analyses, contemporary neoliberalism killed queerness and with it the fantasy of queer transformation. But within the same period—roughly since 1980—other, more promising challenges have been wrought in intellectual and political practice, those that demand greater accountability than is communicated by a transcendent fantasy of social change. Racially, economically, and sexually, who was included in the "we" of gayness, especially as gay power left bathrooms for boardrooms, city streets for city halls, and political boycotts for party politics? Borders had been redrawn and old strategies of political respectability redeployed to enfranchise some and excise others from new discourses of policy, rights, and access, enough to imagine a new regime of *homo*normativity formed in cooperation with heterosexual privilege (Duggan 2003; Murphy, Ruiz, and Serlin 2008). If admission to

the club meant playing by the club's rules, then activism and critique meant being accountable to broader constituencies, those living on the nondominant side of gender, race, class, citizenship, ability, and sexual style.

Love and Money thus comes to the link between sexuality and social class to reinvigorate accountability to class hierarchy inside and outside of queerness. But it also seeks the idioms of a renewed affinity in hard times, a feeling of possibility rooted less in identity per se (though there are worse gestures) than in a form of recognition rooted simultaneously in social difference and shared cultural will. Such a move is both thorny and familiar. On its thorny side, any assertion of shared will raises the specter of suppression (of inequality) and the displacement of injustice onto cultural fantasies of integration. More familiarly, it speaks to a well-established but not easily practiced politics of coalition, best articulated by queer and feminist scholars of race, ethnicity, and diaspora (e.g., Ferguson 2004; Eng, Halberstram, and Muñoz 2005). As indebted as I am to those writers, I am also trying to animate new terms, and reanimate some old ones, to explore the cultural links between queerness and class, both in particular and in a way that might later be opened to other conjunctures of identification and alliance, harm and good.

Queer Cultural Production

Love and Money's empirical field is cultural production, referring to the making, circulation and reception of cultural forms and to cultural practices and processes in situ. It is in the making of culture—rather than the settled conventions of forms themselves—that contradiction and irresolution are revealed and thus where categories as dynamic, forceful, and incomplete as "queerness" and "class" can be explored as living categories, as resources and limiters in how we think and act.

Sometimes cultural production means processes whose outcomes or products are specialized and well defined. Filmmaking, popular music, and television production are easy examples, and a long history of studies in cultural production has addressed industrial contexts and professional routines to understand why films, television programs, and popular music genres are what they are. What, for example, in the organization of daytime "trash television" so reliably repeats "real-life" characters and conflicts at the very margins of taste and propriety? How are streams of otherwise average people recruited, cast, primed, and produced—by executives, creatives, and underlings—as the trash-talking, chair-throwing, gasp-inducing regulars on *The Jerry Springer Show* or the modest, thoughtful, and considered "experts" and "citizens" on *Phil Donahue* or *Oprah*? (Grindstaff 2002). What convergence, in other words,

of class fantasy in the culture and the industrial character and contingency of commercial television in the United States favors limited innovation in genres and narratives and thus reduced images of race, class, and queer difference?

The emphasis in the cultural production tradition is on practice: what producers—as specialists and cultural citizens—do in the complex, regulated, uneven, routinized, and usually commercial contexts of culture-making. But culture is not only made there. It is made wherever people in groups create, adapt, and trade symbolic forms and live by the terms their practice enables. This introduces informal scenes and cultural practices at spatial, temporal, and political remove from the dominant commercial core—like underground music or 'zining—to the cultural production tradition, though historically such work has been written under the banner of subculture or the practice of everyday life.

Love and Money takes its questions about queerness and class to commercial, subcultural, and everyday contexts to ask about cultural forms and processes, but ultimately to think about the movement of cultural categories and citizens within and across sociocultural zones. I call this process "relay" (chapter 5) to clarify the mobile and uneven character of cultural production over time, space, and group, where outcomes are neither as concrete as objects nor as entrenched as systems and industries. Through fieldwork and criticism, my method is to untangle the threads of thought, action, and relation over space and time. The goals of such methods are not to hypothesize the cultural field but to map it, to gauge the cultural coordinates of power (as wealth, policy, and control, but also as autonomy, security, self-definition, and change), and thus to use criticism and cultural analysis as a way into political processes. Such an approach makes criticism itself a form of cultural production, though not the one I study in *Love and Money*, at least not formally.

Queer scholarship in cultural production takes place inside and outside the mantle of production studies, exploring corner pockets in mainstream contexts and flourishing—or surviving—subcultural scenes (see Henderson 2000). Queer cultural products are sometimes highly conventional and institutional, like series television (Gamson 1998), and other times more ephemeral, like performances (Muñoz 1999), or community-based, such as scenes and their archives of memory and affect (Cvetkovich 2003). Across such contexts questions are in play about definitions of queerness as antinormative sexual and gender variation and the production of queerness through racial, ethnic, gender, and, less frequently, class discourses and practices. Questions are also in play about subjectivity, community-making, and the viability and transformation of queer cultures, and about challenges to heteronormative business-as-usual through queer invention.

Such questions are a part of the broader approach to queer cultural production that I undertake in *Love and Money*, with an eye to cultural fields that are never only queer and to outcomes at once concrete and symbolic. Sometimes I study the independent production of queer short films (chapter 5) or readers' reception of queer fiction (chapter 4) to engage class questions, and other times I study how texts and genres frame queer, class, and race fantasy in the changing conditions of commercial television (chapter 2). In all cases, concrete practices and objects and more abstract values combine to enable and limit our everyday lives and how we can or might imagine the future. Relative concreteness or abstraction is not, in other words, a measure of whether things matter. As form and idea, culture is real in its effect.

Studies in cultural production also reveal class as a category that bears both concrete and abstract exploration. In *Love and Money*, class refers most broadly to the economic and cultural coproduction of social distinction and hierarchy. That is not a frame that will satisfy everyone, nor would I defend it as complete. But, even though class is traditionally an economic category, a lot of variation occurs within those stations of the cross of class historically defined through labor-capital analysis (in the Marxist tradition) or empirically defined by occupation, income, and formal education (in the liberal one), variation that cultural criticism can address. Workers, owners, professionals, incomes, and years in school do not evaporate in *Love and Money,* but nor is this a study of resource distribution per se, or one in which class is categorized, measured, and tested to determine what proportion of cultural variance we might attribute to independent class or socioeconomic variables. Here class categories work in vernacular and analytic ways to mark a cultural universe—ways recognized by their speakers to produce both openings and injuries. They do so anew in combination with vernacular queerness and with discourses of race as both the root and branch of class difference in the United States. *Love and Money* is, in other words, a cultural study of queer-class conjuncture, but that is an approach, not an argument for imagining class as fundamentally or primarily a cultural form. Culture is essential but partial in the definition and operation of social class, as it is in other human categories and endeavors. I thus intend *Love and Money* to be read alongside—not instead of—political economic analysis of social class.[1]

Queer Left Friendship

Love and Money begins with a story of queer class tragedy and ends with the plausibility of optimism rooted in *friendship*, a term universally familiar (if not transparent) and, with notable exceptions (e.g., Nardi 1999; Foucault

1981/1997), undersung in theory and social analysis. Friendship is a form of relating perhaps no less determined than other forms by *habitus* (Bourdieu 1984) or the deep tastes and dispositions of class fractions; no less psychically complicated than family attachments and romance; no less painful than those other forms when it ends badly or less nostalgic when it fades. But it is potentially a different kind of good than are other normative attachments, easier to come and go within, more responsive to circumstance, devoted and familiar but perhaps less burdened by obligation, trauma, sameness, the myth of fit or the deadening weight of *relationship work*, the mandate Laura Kipnis (2003) called domesticity's gulag. I work on relationships, but as a model for other social forms, friendship can buoy, de-dramatize, lighten things up.[2] Amid political heaviness, this is an affective and social virtue, which is why *Love and Money* ends with friendship's optimism. But one doesn't arrive there—at least I haven't—without hard thinking about failed relating and failed accountability, including across queer class lines.

What do such failures look like? They are the personal antagonisms of misrecognition, entitlement, and shame and the slights to subjectivity that leave us gasping. But they are also the organization of those affects and dispositions into social and political form, through cultural exclusion on a local level or political bottlenecking on the national—those occasions where questions of expendability are freely asked at the expense of outsiders or combatants without the political capital to prevail: the 2007 exclusion, for example, of transgender as a protected category in Human Rights Campaign efforts to pass the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, or political distancing from sex workers and undocumented immigrants in the formation of professional gay and lesbian lobbying organizations and national coalitions.[3]

Many radical observers would also include the gay and lesbian marriage-rights agenda as a class affront, since marriage assumes a normative social form and reserves for married people a range of essential resources, like health care, better distributed without regard to marriage or employment. Health care shouldn't depend on marriage. But any legal or policy measure that enables even partial redistributions in the present will count for people who don't have what they need, including where those measures may double back and limit future opportunities. Better to work for single-payer health care than marriage rights in the name of limited health provision (which only works if at least one spouse is employed, entitled to employee health benefits, and further entitled to spousal or family coverage, usually at great and increasing cost). But these are not either/or equations, and disgust with marriage activism as a homonormative and class sellout suppresses distributive urgency in many cases. A new political problem arises, however, when

distributive urgency (such as marriage as the route to health care or legal entry as immigrant) is dressed in the language of God and romance, money is poured into marriage rights, and health-care activism is left to health-care activists, few (but not none) of them working for queer health.

To follow the literature and engage the politics of queer activism is to recognize these antagonisms, sometimes dismissively or with bewilderment, other times with the wish and energy to reorganize. And there is no guarantee that knowledge born of collective work across queer and class lines will mean the end of more personal or subjective antagonisms at other levels of ideology and cultural disposition. These are cultural levels less consciously acquired and practiced and the ones *Love and Money* addresses. Throughout, and especially in the penultimate chapter on optimism, I explore the relation of feeling and cultural form to social and political possibility, moved by the work of Lauren Berlant in *The Female Complaint* (2008).

Berlant is a cultural critic whose left, feminist, multiracial, and queer analyses cohabit and recombine in a sustained theorization of public culture and its political possibilities. This distinguishes her work in a Left intellectual field where, historically, queerness has been a brake on class thinking, a challenge to a Left intellectual history that is stymied by—and as often hostile to—the question of queer significance in class formation. Queerness, some have argued (Field; Morton), imagines continuities where none exist, since its distribution across class difference and conflict means that there is no meaningful possibility of queer recognition or collective interest. Where class interest is present, it will prevail, making the empathies and communities of queer sexual practice and exclusion the root of false consciousness, not social transformation.

In my experience as critic and citizen, however, wherever class primacy can be demonstrated it can also be undone, and wherever cultural identifications take root in everyday life, they will matter and will combine to overdetermine the effects of related structures and differences. In any general sense, one cannot prove the lesser social, individual, or subjective significance of queer in contrast to class harm or value, except in the abstract. This does not dismiss abstraction after all, since we quickly understand its material significance in such domains as law and policy, even when they bear only indirectly on community fortune. But the more familiar abstraction emerges not from policy or other forms of social enactment outside theorization. It emerges from intellectual history, from Left traditions of thought and politics committed to a foundational analysis of class rooted in economic production and distribution, even as the society in which it is written roots itself in consumption, including the consumer practices of critics and theorists.

For better and worse, this is a Left intellectual history and politics that I share. But it is possible to do so without the analytic chauvinism that treats other axes of social differentiation—like gender and sexuality—as satellites to economism or, worse, as expressions of self-interest and bad faith among reviled but otherwise privileged queers. *Love and Money* moves instead from the recognition that when social revulsion and privilege (rather than poverty) co-occur, they are strange bedfellows. Oscar Wilde and his heirs come to mind, though show trials and jail time are hard to swallow as evidence of privilege, and thus Wilde better illustrates a convergence of subculture, elite formation, and official degradation, where class privilege is withdrawn, not enhanced, by queerness. There are privileged queers, myself among them, but we are not to be confused with queer privilege outside the limited domain of subcultural capital.

In putting queerness and class together in this way, however, I am skating close to the edge of an old Left stereotype that imagines and distrusts queerness as itself an expression of elite derangement (or Nazi eroticism, or female double agency, or fascist impulse manifest in old-school sexual dominance and the mechanical invariance of disco music). As, in other words, an engine of strange power. Happily, however, disco rhythms vary after all, as those who lived by them and their queer solidarities in the 1970s remember well (Dyer 1979). And while the socioeconomic character of queer attachment in any broad sense has yet to be interrogated, least of all comparatively, reliable data in labor economics (e.g., Badgett 2003) demonstrate that in the present and recent past, gayness and lesbianism are suppressors, not enhancers, of household income, slightly less so for women than for men, who typically earn more and thus have more to lose.[4] Queerness *is* an engine of strange power, if you do it right, but not of class supremacy or ascendancy any more than the moderate and threatened postwar expansion of the U.S. black middle class is evidence of reverse discrimination.

In the Left stereotype of queerness as class threat, what is reviled is the sex of queerness, in contrast to the hegemonic virtues of work and family that mark some revisions and public enactments of leftism, particularly those that have sought to recapture political support from evangelical and right-wing populism since the 1960s. In that rhetoric, queerness becomes a "wedge issue." During John Kerry's candidacy in the U.S. presidential election of 2004, for example, especially in light of the Supreme Judicial Court's antidiscrimination decision on same-sex marriage in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts (Kerry's and my home state), queerness became political fodder for the antigay right wing and for trouble in the heartland, and thus an abrasion in efforts to elect a hawkish and lukewarm party Democrat. Like

Ralph Nader, queerness was framed as a spoiler—the target of Left and liberal political hostility stoked by a long history of righteous enforcement of the closet. *Why now?* complained even putatively solidary, nonqueer Kerry supporters, and a few queer ones, too. It didn't matter that queers have never controlled the timing of intervention, legislation, or backlash, however hard queer activists in Massachusetts and elsewhere may try.

I, too, wanted an end to the Reagan-Bush-Clinton-Bush era in the name of peaceability and public culture and a reduction of the chasms between the elite owners of private jets, the debt financers of middle-class health care, and the uninsured earners of minimum wage, who are made to work harder (and die younger) by being paid less, not more. But it was hardly clear that Kerry would be or would provoke those conditions, and any campaign support dependent on the renunciation of the most limited expression of equality—the equality of kinship (Tucker 1997) rooted in the Massachusetts marriage decision—revealed the limits of liberal, progressive, sometimes even lesbian or gay (non)support for the political recognition of queerness. Those who refused either/or politics (gay marriage *or* an end to the war in Iraq; repealing the Defense of Marriage Act *or* Supreme Court protection of abortion rights) were, in a word that exquisitely rehearsed the old charge of gay narcissism,"selfish." The politics that had heightened my attention to social transformation were now held responsible for blocking a historic opportunity for change.

In 2008, Barack Obama's campaign, in contrast, was bracingly cautious in its recognition of some civil rights for gays and lesbians, though Obama himself was forthright in declaring that he did not support same-sex marriage (despite the contempt he expressed in 2005 for the federal Defense of Marriage Act, a contempt that has since been revealed to have more than one side in Obama's political practice, and despite his late affirmation of same-sex marriage in the run-up to the 2012 election). When Obama won in 2008 (before the midterm "shellacking" in 2010), we knew historic significance when we saw it and our exuberance was palpable. Many, though, watched the election returns torn by disappointment as Arkansas passed an initiative to prohibit unmarried cohabitants (read: queers) to foster or adopt children, and California upheld Proposition 8, the same-sex marriage ban that overruled California's State Supreme Court decision five months earlier that the prohibition against same-sex marriage was unconstitutional. Pundits were quick to declare that it was precisely those voters who elected Obama in California—70 percent of African Americans and 52 percent of Latinos—who had also passed Prop 8. The queer organizers against Prop 8, however (among them the National Center for Lesbian Rights), thanked

their multi-ethnic, multi-racial, and multi-income coalition of supporters and activists and reminded the nation that the 52 percent of white voters in California who supported Prop 8 (and some seventy million Mormon dollars) went further toward putting it in place than black and Latino voters combined. The attempt to recirculate an electoral logic of black vs. gay and Latino vs. gay was especially nauseating for black and Latino gay Californians who had worked, watched, and hoped for an election outcome of multifaceted enfranchisement. The postelection task, alongside renewed opposition to the ballot initiative, would become how to oppose the "black/Latino vs. gay" split and its narrow, antigay class implications in a universe where nonwhite is likely to mean working class or poor.[5]

But I am not expert enough in the deal making or machination of the 2004 or 2008 federal elections to answer more precisely "What went wrong?" Nor is that my question. In 2008, some things went right in a constrained political universe and the future remained to be known and created.[6] (That is still true, despite frustrations and disappointments with the administration of Barack Obama, who is nothing if not a party Democrat.) I recall these occasions to frame the political stance I bring to a critique of queer/class encounter and to remind myself of the importance of not surrendering queer commitments as a demonstration of political maturity. In the queer/class case, this means not trading denunciations of queerness in class, Left or other progressive terms, nor queer denunciations of Left politics, but asking, more expansively and in the spirit of a class-conscious and multiracial queer critique, where and how queerness and class hierarchy produce each other and, better, how queer/class inversions of all kinds make culture richer. How is each category brought into the same frame of cultural articulation to imagine, limit, reconfigure, devalue, or enfranchise the other? The historical persistence of sexual practice and character as the domains of judgment and social (de)legitimacy (e.g., Warner 1999) is a transparent reminder that queerness, like other sexual and gender forms, *will encounter* changing class configurations as queers enter and navigate the slipstreams of social and cultural life. Thus, my intention in *Love and Money* is to develop a language of queer class engagement that makes itself available to other expressions of the sex–gender–class chain and other convergences in social form and possibility.

Queer Class Repair

Several linkages give this study its shape: queerness, class, and trauma; the class markers of queer worth; queerness as a question of *how to be*; class

recognition in queerness; queer *relay* as a form of social creativity; and plausible optimism as political affect. From trauma to creativity, the arc they trace expresses what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003) movingly called a reparative mode of reading. Sedgwick defines reparative reading in contrast to the more familiar "paranoid" mode. Paranoid reading embodies a critic's anxiety that because there can be no bad surprises, there can be no surprises at all. Here a critic is anticipatory: she knows before she starts what bad news she'll find. A paranoid critic is mimetic: she practices what she may diagnose in the text—the rigidity and violence of categorization, say—in the spirit of not being caught unaware of precisely the violence she suspects is there. Paranoid reading is strong in everywhere finding evidence of its suppositions, and it disavows its persistently negative affect and force. In its disavowal, it offers negativity as truth and the exposure of textual or social violence as grail.

Anticipatory, mimetic, strong, negative, and exposing (Sedgwick 2003, 130): paranoid reading is near-ubiquitous in queer and cultural studies, familiar to me in my own writing and teaching. Expertise in negative detection in advance of another critic, or of being trumped, somehow, by precisely the negative effects one detects, emerges as a kind of proliferative tautology, a gesture ceaselessly reproducible in each new critique of each new bit of anticipated bad news on the social and cultural horizon. As Sedgwick points out, paranoid reading starts with the claim that "things are bad and getting worse" (142), a proposition at once irrefutable and so general as to be fallow; culture becomes a salt flat where little that is oppositional or that recognizes and enables survival can grow. Enfranchised critics working in the paranoid tradition do survive, but it is more likely that we are sustained by our enfranchisement and reparative underside than by our paranoia.

I encountered Sedgwick's essay on paranoid and reparative reading in the course of researching and writing chapter 4, on class recognition in queerness. At the time, debates were under way in social theory about recognition and redistribution as differential forms of social remedy. Some argued that recognition—the social and policy acknowledgment and inclusion of historically marginalized groups—was a value best attached to cultural identity (gender, ethnicity, sexuality) and inert in the domain of class, here imagined as not "merely cultural" (Butler 1997) but something deeper in the infrastructure. Recognition could not remedy class inequality; only the erasure or limiting of class hierarchy through economic redistribution could do that (e.g., Skeggs 2000).

The most persuasive versions of such theorizing argued for interdependency rather than opposition between recognition and redistribution.[7] In

Nancy Fraser's terms (1996), social collectivities are defined both symbolically through cultural identification and economically through resource distribution, and thus social theory and policy must work at the level of bivalence rather than embattle itself with questions of political primacy. "Recognition or redistribution?" became a descriptive question, not an ethical one.

In 1997, Judith Butler published a compelling argument about the *distributive* consequences of *cultural* misrecognition, drawing on socialist feminism's early analyses of the economic consequences of gender difference and extending feminist insight to sexuality and sexual difference. It did not come as news to queers that the economic resources of employment, inheritance, immigration, and other entitlements distributed through such family ties as marriage were withheld from them *as a class* (with variable outcomes predicted by wealth, race, and citizenship). But this was not commonplace in arguments about the primacy of redistribution as social remedy, rooted as those arguments were in older political and intellectual divisions. Butler convinced some that the misrecognition of queerness had distributive consequence after all, that identitarian collectivities like queers routinely bear the burden of maldistribution *and* misrecognition, and thus that recognition could not be sequestered and dismissed as the nuisance politics of identity, in contrast to a Left universe of rigorous class struggle.

Butler's analysis, however, left open the relevance of recognition to class difference. Were there such things as class identity and (mis)recognition and, if so, did they matter? Were class identity and attachment negative traps in the long revolution toward classlessness? As I spoke with a range of interlocutors about their class locations (including those who described themselves as class "escapees," people from working-class backgrounds who had "gotten out," but at the cost of family disavowal and paralyzing ambivalence), class identity didn't seem so distant or irrelevant, to them any more than to me, with my mix of genteel poverty, patrician bohemianism, and educational privilege born of family possibility and state enablement. Thus finding a place for the language of class recognition became a matter of social and ethical value, a reparative gesture that I had not understood in those terms as I undertook fieldwork. At that moment, and in the most fortuitous way, Sedgwick's (2003) ideas authorized a move in a new and more generous direction, one that echoed the survival value of class recognition, as those I'd interviewed told it.

Colleagues and critics in many places have distrusted that move as I have presented work on class recognition, but not persuasively enough—however richly argued—to abandon the impulse to listen or to imagine

without already knowing what role class recognition might play in queer transformation. I do believe that class recognition matters, but that is not a quasi-religious belief; it is inductive, an interpretation derived from ranging and pointed conversation, including with those quoted in chapter 4. And although that belief departs from the most refined and demanding qualities of Sedgwick's (2003) account of reparative critique, it shares with Sedgwick's account a political and ethical regard for survival as the first condition of thriving. Class recognition need not be a threat to redistribution. It neither entrenches class hostility nor disables a politics of class abolition. It strikes me as dishonest, then, and politically unfair, to withhold such recognition and its value while a distant revolution is engineered.

Thus in its opening chapters, *Love and Money* moves from engagement with familiar forms of criticism that anticipate—and indeed find—bad news in the class character of queerness, especially its most visible expressions in commercial popular culture. It then turns to writer-director-actor Miranda July's 2005 film *Me and You and Everyone We Know* as a kind of boundary or liminal text, a work whose story and aesthetic suspend pronouncement long enough to imagine the everyday social calculations of vulnerable people and to reimagine queerness as a question of *how to be*. July's work is a good place to shift gears, a cultural switching system that redirects me toward softness without disavowing insights from the route taken through negative or even paranoid critique. Paranoid critique is not enough, in other words, but nor does a reparative disposition claim that social damage or threat isn't occurring all around us. Rather, it claims that stepping into the critical cycle of threat and defense disables other forms of reading, other insights, and, ultimately, other forms of living. *Love and Money* thus leads with cases where familiar ideas about class pathology structure images and narratives of queer trauma, and where class, race, and value combine to condition queer visibility in some of the harshest ways. From there it moves in a different and hopefully not naive direction, to recognition, relay, and optimism.

The Chapters

As a project that seeks to capture the multiform relationship between queerness and class, *Love and Money* offers different points of entry, an elastic method that I hope creates a mirror image of cultural development itself. The analysis is thus not linear (if A, then B; if B, then C), though it is cumulative. It is also not centripetal, all energy moving to a theoretical center. Better to read it as a faceted sphere; as you turn the sphere over to land on a new facet, the light is refracted differently. In cultural studies, this analytic form

is usually called "articulation," where new social possibilities arise out of historical (not necessary) linkages between groups and ideas.

Chapter 1, "The Class Character of *Boys Don't Cry*," is my opening gambit for queer class critique. *Boys Don't Cry* (1999) is a film recognized as a narrative of transgender trauma and transphobic murder, one based on the true story of Brandon Teena. Teena was a Midwestern, transgender teenager killed alongside his friends Lisa Lambert and Phillip DeVine by John Lotter and Tom Nissen in Humboldt, Nebraska, in 1993. Teena had befriended Lotter and Nissen in his relocation to the nearby Nebraska town of Falls City. As Judith Halberstam (2005) has written, Teena's "true story" emerges in retrospect from the cultural archive of Teena's life and death, an archive that is ranging, uneven, and revealing of the interests and dispositions of those who have produced it. By "archive," Halberstam refers not simply to a collection of documents or data but to a "discursive field and a structure of thinking" (32–33), a repertoire of frames, images, narratives, and judgments, in Teena's case about gender ambiguity, rural life, and the desires of young people in scenes of need and aspiration.

Boys Don't Cry is an important signifier in the Brandon Teena archive, the one best known to those least connected to transgender scenes and to many transgender people. Popularly received as the occasion of Hilary Swank's Oscar-winning performance as Brandon, and thus as literal evidence of the performability of gender from the outside in, *Boys* was rarely addressed as a class text. But what does it tell us if we make a point of reading it that way, if we ask how its story of rural, white, working-class abjection structures transgender representation, in a world where class and gender nonconformity are rooted in hierarchy and exclusion? In *Boys Don't Cry*, class marks gender trauma, and gender variance is both the hope and denial of class transcendence—hope in Brandon and Lana's romance, denial in Brandon's exposure and murder. Such dramatic images of class failure are cautionary, not just an expression but an enactment of bourgeois white supremacy. Trace feelings of recognition may connect moments in the film to gestures and practices in everyday life, but they also attach to the shame historically embedded in the relationship between modes of living and self-defeat, a shame at the root of class injury (Sennett and Cobb 1972). In *Boys*, trauma and shame are a queer class affair, and the category of class itself is queered (Kaplan 2000), its historical certainties shaken down and reconstructed through new modes of longing and expression.

"Queer Visibility and Social Class," chapter 2, moves from the question of stakes to a structural analysis of the symbolic engines of queer/class articulation. What, I ask, are the class markers of queer worth in that other archive,

Scotty kisses Kevin, *Brothers and Sisters*, "Date Night," Season 1, Episode 5 © 2006 Touchstone Television.

both celebrated and distrusted in the 1990s and early 2000s as the "new queer visibility"?

The most forceful critics of contemporary queer media images describe the 1990s as the decade of the lesbian and gay media extravaganza (Gross 2001; Walters 2001). It is true: proportionate increases are impressive—easy, when you start from nothing—with a few regular characters and dozens of walk-ons per season of broadcast television, and designated series like *Queer as Folk* and *The L Word* arriving on cable in the new millennium. But the terms of entry have been constrained by heteronormative and consumer expectation and by cautious commercial investment, each next possibility conditioned by the fortunes of the last. It took micro-generations of commercial cultural advance and retreat to ensure a biweekly screen kiss for Kevin Walker (Matthew Rhys), for example, the gay lawyer sibling on the prime-time family melodrama *Brothers and Sisters,* which entered the program schedule in 2006.

Those chaste and sincere kisses were preceded by long histories of desexualization and the most plodding forms of positive imaging. Where boutique dramas like *NYPD Blue* could risk a nude, average, and married male backside to heighten its realist style, the sprinkling of gay characters was fully costumed, and queer kisses remained the last frontier in drama and situation comedy for almost two decades. But, since television had provoked a flagging film industry to specialize in sex and violence in the 1960s, escalating

competition between cable and broadcast programming in the late 1990s and early 2000s meant strategic shifts toward a new edge in queer characterization on broadcast television, enough so that by 2006, *not* letting healthy, well-attired, white gay male lawyers from dynastic families kiss would be a joke (how long could they go?), but in the wrong genre. Thus buried in the amber of Kevin's on-screen kisses were the fossils of television's past, reconfigured by what many describe as the most powerful and limiting appropriation of the fruits of gay political activism: niche marketing (see Sender 2004).

Up-marketeering, however, is not the only class story in queer visibility. Market-authored media images also borrow liberally from the class fantasies of everyday life, especially fantasies of mobility and having. Although class and consumption have been attached in different ways for a century and a half (Williams 1961), in the contemporary period it is important to untangle commercial imperatives, industry practices, and popular fantasy in accounting for that attachment. Such an untangling exposes the continuity of queer class fantasy inside the media and out, and thus the roots of class injury as in the culture rather than in the media system as separately conceived. This requires both an examination across genres, looking to noncommercial narrative examples to discover whether they share anything with *Will & Grace* (they do), and whether the critical shorthand that says contemporary media queers are uniformly rich, white, healthy, and male holds up (it doesn't). The repertoire of queer characters and gestures is more varied, and the variants are judged according to fairly stable premises rooted in comportment, familialism, and modes of acquisition (or how we get what we have). Across forms, genres, and nonmedia cultural practice, such premises exceed *Ellen* or *Will & Grace* by a long and wide margin.

In chapter 3, I shift gears, making criticism itself a class project (Ortner 2003) in the reparative mode. In my response to Miranda July's *Me and You and Everyone We Know* (2005) and to her story collection, *No One Belongs Here More Than You* (2007), I move away from ideological critique and the generative rules of queer/class articulation, instead to be guided by the work itself in new forms of queer reading. July's work is not obviously queer in the usual senses; it is not marked by antinormative gender variance or same-sex eroticism, though normative categories are sexually troubled by venturesome teenage girls in the film and, in one of the stories, by tensely related sisters. Overall, however, *Me and You and Everyone We Know* and July's stories invite a calm uncertainty about how to be, in a narrative context that represents the socioeconomic home of so many people: the frayed and insecure conditions of lower-middle-class life, of make-work, underemployment, and retail labor in the bleak territories of suburban Los Angeles. As is also true

in *Boys Don't Cry,* in *Me and You* insecurity conditions longing, which makes its gentle posing of the question of how to be the insight of getting by, not of confidence or pensive leisure.

My response to this insight is not to romanticize deprivation but to pay attention, rather than using these texts or any other to restate what is already understood by those inside and outside deprived conditions: that deprivation in the context of great wealth is unjust. This is undeniable but banal: in and of itself, it neither reveals nor changes anything. I don't anticipate change from a film or story collection, exactly, but receive *Me and You and Everyone We Know* (2005) and *No One Belongs Here More Than You* (2007) as early counsel toward new ways of thinking about relations among culture, feeling, and social possibility, about cultural forms as affective resources in the project of queer class solidarity (Berlant 2008).

Tellingly, among the near-lost souls in *Me and You and Everyone We Know* (2005), better found by the end of the film, is Christine Jesperson, a young video artist (played by July herself) with a day job chauffeuring elderly people. Thus one of the film's messages is that art makes a way to cut through misery and alienation: not so surprising from a filmmaker long working in the hallowed trenches of the underfunded avant-garde. But July's trench work includes creative communal endeavors, like her Big Miss Moviola Video Chainletter, a pre-MySpace postal distribution system for outsider video, particularly work by girls and old women, many of whom July never met (Bryan-Wilson 2004). Likewise, the use of Christine's art making in *Me and You* to ask "how to be?" is neither solipsistic nor rarefied but, rather, social and quiet, unmarked by liberal melodramas (such as crime-as-the-economy-of-last-resort in any number of gangster youth vehicles set in Los Angeles, or self-destruction-as-girls'-destiny in *Thirteen* [2003], also a contemporary suburban L.A. story). The film's message to critics such as myself is to watch and learn, which spoke to the reparative shift in my thinking under way when I first saw *Me and You*.

Reparative openness marks chapter 4 as well, perhaps better described as a reopening of the recognition question debated in Left social theory, a reopening pursued through the queering of class identification among readers of American writer Dorothy Allison.

I chose Allison readers because I knew, as a reader myself, that in their responses to Allison's work, including her first novel, *Bastard Out of Carolina* (1993), her second, *Cavedweller* (1998), her memoir, *Two or Three Things I Know for Sure* (1994b), and her several collections of stories, essays, and poetry, class questions and insights would surface unprovoked by research queries. They would arise in conversation and in the public, mixed-class

settings in which Allison regularly speaks and performs as an openly feminist, lesbian author and as a sexual radical from a traumatized, working-class past in the South Carolina Piedmont. From 2001 to 2003, I took my project on the road, traveling to California, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania for Allison's talks, readings, and public conversations with other writers and interviewing Allison readers whom I located through her public events. I would introduce myself and my project in the autograph line after a reading, where people would talk with me while they waited for the chance to speak with Allison herself.

Although I wasn't surprised that many readers would volunteer to be interviewed at a later time, I was struck that no one found my interest in "queer class identification" to be the least confusing. They didn't interpret the phrase uniformly, but they received it transparently, as relevant to their own reading, whether or not they would describe themselves as queer or as marked by their class location and history. As readers and viewers, we commonly use emotional, ethical, and poetic means to find an unself-conscious connection to characters and scenarios that bear little empirical resemblance to the worlds we know; how else would historical or fantasy genres work? But readers' responses to Allison through the lenses of family trauma, queer identification, and class escape were especially sensitive to class difference, expressing a quasi-conscious working out of ways to think about class location and survival in the United States. In chapter 4, then, several values of studying class in terms of recognition arise: one finds a conversation and a will to speak that so many critics miss, blinded as we can be by the near-mythical assertion that there is no popular language of class in the United States. One sees the ways class moves through social and cognitive space, through time and narration, as a dominant category at some moments and a more oblique one at others, but at all times in relations that are neither scattershot nor fixed, but patterned and creative. Class, again, is queered by recognition in this form, revealing the political potential of culture made public.

Queer class projects are everywhere, taking shape through discourse and social relations, sometimes challenging and rarely overturning familiar forms of distinction and hierarchy. One of those projects comes from the anticommercial politics of cultural production, those the analysis in chapter 3 would predict: if commercial culture recombines the most limited versions of queer-class possibility, look elsewhere for transformative expression. Broadly, I agree, except when anticommercial resistance produces a reactionary critique through historical standards of taste. Put more plainly, resistance to commerce easily morphs into cultural judgment, superiority, and

contempt for popular pleasure, its producers, and its audiences. We reproduce that move at the expense of recognition and solidarity.

Such a move has its roots in periods and contexts quite apart from queer ones, most vociferously in the mass culture debates of the mid-twentieth century, authored by critics like Dwight MacDonald (e.g., 1957) and such theoretical arbiters as Theodor Adorno of the Frankfurt School of cultural theory and criticism. In a phrase, commercial production as a system is bad for civilization and democracy. I *still* agree at some level, except when the flattest interpretations of such a standard extend into contempt not only for systems but also for the people who occupy them. Thus my question, in the contemporary queer class case, is how to move away from imagining a cultural scene in terms that entrench and rank social distinctions and moralisms among commerce, anticommerce, and the supposed denizens of each camp. My interest is in freeing up other terms of critique and engagement and other subject positions not so bound by deadening judgment and opposition.

My response is chapter 5, "Queer Relay." This chapter continues social exploration through fieldwork to examine actually existing market conditions of queer cultural production at the crossroads of industrial and queer independent sectors—that figurative port of entry for much queer work that is later taken up in mainstream form and whose mainstream expressions flow back to queer cultures with each new half-generation of producers and audiences. The chapter narrates a field study designed to work against what I call the "commercial repressive hypothesis," the idea that the history of commerce in queer cultural production is a history of repression. My analysis comes from Foucault's (1986) writing on the sexual repressive hypothesis (SRH), the name Foucault gives to familiar accounts of the history of sexuality in the West: that it is a history of sexual repression with cumulative nods toward liberation, as liberationists have undone, first, the religious, then the carceral, and finally the medical ties that have bound us sexually in the Modern period. In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (1986), Foucault argues, contrary to the SRH, that modern Western sexuality is in fact a history of the proliferation of sexual discourses, including liberationist ones. A historian or philosopher is hard-pressed to find evidence of an overall pattern of repression or silencing, and more likely—much more likely—to find an expanding repertoire of ideas, languages, social rules, institutional practices, fantasies, and sexual identities in modernity, repertoires geared toward sexual control and management, not repression.

Foucault's displacement of repression in favor of proliferation as a model of Western sexual historiography does not deny histories of sexual injustice.

Instead, it frames repression and liberation as ideas within the same regulatory economy. In his analysis, jail time for public indecency, new diagnostic categories like gender-identity disorder, and the inclusion of same-sex couples as joint filers of income tax returns are not equivalent gestures merely *imagined* to be repressive (jail time) or liberatory (joint filing). Some may indeed heighten sexual autonomy or diminish repression for some of the people some of the time (or even many people much of the time). But all are part of a history of sexual regulation through the near-limitless production of discourses for naming and colonizing sex and gender, including those that liberationists may work for and welcome. This is why, for example, many activists were less than relieved by what others celebrated as the liberatory defeat of *Bowers v. Hardwick* (1986) by *Lawrence v. Texas* (2003).[8] Both are U.S. Supreme Court decisions, the first denying a right of privacy to same-sex practice, the second overturning the first but with a majority opinion whose language celebrated gay domesticity and sexual intimacy. The abolition of *Bowers v. Hardwick* is welcome, but the terms of *Lawrence v. Texas* are most promising for those prepared to keep their sex behind closed doors and who can count on private resources, like jobs, incomes, and property. Those same terms are mixed for those unwilling or unable to play by the rules of privacy—people committed to public sexual cultures, to having access to public resources regardless of sexual style and practice, and to elective privacy but not legislated secrecy in the name of "home," an effect that has condemned so many to entrapment, violence, and domestic control (Willse and Spade 2005).

My critique of the commercial repressive hypothesis (CRH) uses Foucault's insights in an attempt to partially escape the commerce-versus-liberation logic that entraps queer cultural politics, and thus to slow down the queer-class taste hierarchy that such a politics can deliver. *Relay* is a term designed to capture the movement of cultural producers and production practices across such zones of imagined and theorized opposition and, from there, recalibrate cultural political possibility beyond the claims and counterclaims of the queer mass-culture critique. My argument is not that those oppositions don't exist after all, but that their compulsive rearticulation within and beyond queer contexts is not self-evident but a form of theorizing at once formal and practical (see Williams 1961, Gibson-Graham 2006) and that a theoretical shake-up out of the impasse of such queer cultural politics is due. But, rooted in July's soft aesthetic and Sedgwick's weak theory (formed less to colonize theoretical possibility than recognize and enable survival and change), relay aims small, at grounded contexts of queer cultural practice, in this instance illustrated by the making and festival release of writer-director

Liza Johnson's queer short film, *Desert Motel* (2005). What difference, I ask, would it make to read culture and cultural production for its relay effects and to imagine *class* relay in queer culture?

"Plausible Optimism," chapter 6, returns to criticism for an exposing comparison of two recent films in the queer canon—*Brokeback Mountain* (2005) and *By Hook or By Crook* (2001). Both can be read as queer class texts. Adapted from Annie Proulx's story of the same title, *Brokeback Mountain* was heralded as the watershed entry of queer material into a classic commercial genre, the Western or cowboy movie, with the vital result of revealing that genre's homoerotic roots and creating space for the public memorializing of prices paid, in the 1960s and since, by men finding same-sex love in the expansive but harsh world of the American West.

By Hook or By Crook is smaller, grainier, artier, cheaper, and consciously more alternative than *Brokeback Mountain*. Cowritten and codirected by its two leads, Silas Howard and Harry Dodge, *By Hook or By Crook* tells a contemporary story of butch friendship against the odds in the day-at-a-time world of poor, queer San Francisco. It is an exhilarating film, an opinion I share with adoring fans on and off line. Where *Brokeback Mountain* celebrates the entry of queerness into the grandeur of Hollywood romantic melodrama (its other genre), *By Hook or By Crook* is a work whose do-it-yourself aesthetic, brilliant performances, and characters off the radar of central casting hail viewers into a universe of subcultural aliveness and possibility.

My choice of these two films for *Love and Money*'s closing chapter may appear to throw into question my critique of the commercial repressive hypothesis, by reaffirming the liberatory character of subcultural production. In response, I would offer that the critique is not intended to suggest that there is no such value in queer independence, nor to wave away the differences between industrial and queer sectors. Instead, it enables us to read against the grain of that opposition in the spirit of more cultural political room to move. Relay thinking is intended to provoke questions of border crossing and boundary change in both dominant and nondominant spheres of cultural production, to better describe how queer cultural producers and citizens actually live and work, and thus to better imagine a cultural future at least partly unbound by political habit in the present. Relay questions can be asked, in other words, of *By Hook or By Crook* and *Brokeback Mountain*, both of which introduce changes to genre, the former borrowing from the canon of Hollywood independents like *Midnight Cowboy* (1969), the latter reflecting the changing status of a director like Ang Lee and a producer like James Schamus, who were finally able to green-light a historically unproducible script like *Brokeback Mountain*.

My reading of *Brokeback Mountain* and *By Hook or By Crook* does, finally, argue in favor of the politics and energies of communal art-making in this instance. But it argues more strongly in favor of the optimism of friendship in contrast to the romantic but ultimately suffocating losses and bad attachments in *Brokeback Mountain.* The critical question, then, is not whether all subcultural films promise release and all Hollywood coproductions promise death. It is whether queer critics and citizens might question collective fantasies about romance as love's best form, to reinvent a queer history of social organization through multiple expressions of love and solidarity, where romance is neither demeaned nor promoted but takes its place among other forms of attachment in a hopefully more sustaining array.

As queer *class* texts, moreover, both of which feature strapped or poor characters and one of which—*Brokeback Mountain*—features social bargains made in the name of economic survival and mobility, the comparison of *Brokeback Mountain* and *By Hook or By Crook* speaks to the terms and limits of creativity in deprived contexts. This is not to imagine the category of "class" as signifying working class while unmarking everything else, but to look to work that troubles the relation between optimism and resources. *Brokeback Mountain* is fairly traditional in that equation, projecting its lead characters' abjection in large part through a story of exploited cowboy labor. *By Hook or By Crook* treats it differently, neither ignoring deprivation nor exploiting its image for narrative foreclosure, whether as "poor means noble survival" or "poor means death." Instead, it opens up the relationship, respecting its characters and aerating its narrative through contingency and insecurity in everyday life. In combination with its style, and drawing on Lauren Berlant's work in *The Female Complaint* (2008) and the critical disposition first arising (in this volume) in response to *Me and You an Everyone We Know*, I use *By Hook or By Crook*'s images and story to steer myself toward optimism as plausible political affect. As Berlant writes, not all practices bearing upon political futures are themselves politics. Some are what she calls *juxtapolitical* (8), running parallel to politics or even as relief from the antagonism and loss that official political worlds impose, but still essential to political futures as a source of collective sensibility and feeling. I offer my comparison of *Brokeback Mountain* and *By Hook or By Crook* to arrive at optimism as a critical, collective, and juxtapolitical affect, rooted in friendship, not only in market-authored narratives of individual survival and transcendence.

Love and Money concludes with reflections on criticism as itself a form of cultural production and political intervention. This is not an unfamiliar claim; most queer scholarship shares some stake in imagining how the world might be, beyond our inventories and diagnoses of how it is. In my scholarly

corner, however, studies in cultural production are still imagined to be "out there," as accounts of worlds in which critics and fieldworkers are guests, not locals. We may become locals, honorary ones anyway, when we commit the dubious gesture of going native, dubious despite it being our native status as queers that leads us to those contexts in the first place. But *as* queers, we are not so practiced at recognizing our native lives in class terms, a boundary *Love and Money* wants to break.

In a more fully throated cultural political voice, I also want a research practice designed less to keep me apart from the worlds I study than to let them unfold, first, in some of their own terms. If I do that, when my terms consciously intervene, I may have reasonable (not ideal) knowledge of how things happen elsewhere, enough that I am open to new modes of thinking and living, guided by others' cultural work rather than perpetually returning to my own authority. Such a return strikes me as less paranoid than flat (though it can be both), since the variations are so familiar, so easy to repeat. Imagining criticism as cultural production rather than as about it puts me in creative company among other critics and fieldworkers, and among artists, citizens, media, genres, languages, affects, and cultural political possibilities I do not already know. In queer class terms, that strikes me as a critical resource for discovery and solidarity, in a relay world never structured in queerness alone, nor structured apart from the density of class relation.

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