

Why Aren't More Queers Buying Marxism?

by Margaret Robinson



An examination of what ignoring Marxist analysis has done to queer activism.

Introduction

Despite Marxist thought having been a cornerstone for the Mattachine Society (the first gay liberation organization in North America), queer activist discussion today rarely addresses issues of class, and queer theories make little, if any, use of Marxist analysis.¹ Most queer histories begin their stories with the Stonewall uprising. Sexual identity theory glosses over differences among queers, instead highlighting the difference between queers and straights.

My interest in Marxist analysis (and issues of class in general) stems from my experience growing up poor. Not having an understanding of class did not prevent me (or other children in poverty) from making a distinction between the way my family lived, and the way "regular" families were supposed to be living. Yet I did not consider leftist politics helpful.

Associated with trade unions, socialism was something espoused by people who already had a job. It was not a movement for the poor. Most poor people I knew were politically capitalist.²

My work as a queer activist has been primarily with reformist committees. I have been a member of gay, lesbian bisexual and transgender (GLBT) youth groups in Toronto and Halifax. Their focus was on supporting youth efforts to develop strong sexual identities in order to participate in the queer community. Activist work in these groups aimed at making established social structures (particularly schools) better for youth rather than challenging such structures or advocating their elimination. In my twenties I was a member of Pride Week organizing committees, first in Halifax, and then in Toronto, where I organized the

Toronto Dyke March. Pride Week events in Canada have been politically liberal, with concerns about presentation (e.g., nudity, or no nudity) taking precedence over concerns about mission or purpose.³ The political approach of Pride Week committees is reformist, advocating changes to law, employment and housing, or policing practices. Not only is "capitalism" not discussed as an issue, but these groups see themselves as capitalist projects, selling their event as a brand name, through t-shirts and other memorabilia, or acting as a conduit to the "gay market."

I will posit five reasons why mainstream queer activism has avoided the use of Marxist analysis: 1) the legacy of Communist, leftist and socialist homophobia; 2) gay male hegemony in queer communities; 3) the myth of queers affluence; 4) U.S.

anti-communism; and 5) the gay consumerism movement. I will argue that queer politics have suffered for a lack of class analysis, and suggest four ways that a Marxist analysis might improve queer politics.⁴

Politically radical, sexually conservative: Socialism's record on queers

Leftist organizations, economic revolutionary movements and communist countries have a legacy of sexual conservatism, which makes them politically suspect to queer activists. Even as socialist theory revealed the role of sexuality in supporting capitalism it has reinforced the values of monogamy, male supremacy and heterosexuality.⁵ Three problems with socialism's approach to sexuality stand out most clearly from a queer perspective: the abysmal history of communist countries in oppressing homosexuals, the failure of leftist organizations to adequately address women's issues, and the inconsistent and opportunistic support of the queer movement by organizations of the left.

Homosexuality is a bourgeois vice: Communism's record on queer sexuality

The issue of same-sex desire has been addressed by socialists since the 1860s. In 1863 German Worker's Association representative Ferdinand Lassalle encouraged J.B. von Schweitzer, a lawyer convicted for homosexual conduct, to join his group. "The Schweitzer incident" caused many socialist leaders to express their views on homosexuals (or "urnings," as they were being called by activists in Germany). At this time the conversations focussed exclusively on male homosexuality. Lesbianism was a concept limited to those familiar with pornography or medical journals. Eduard Bernstein in the German journal *Die Neue Zeit*, defended Oscar Wilde, arguing that both psychiatric and legalistic views of homosexuality were influenced by religious morality, and should not be

part of a socialist platform.⁶ Yet those who held the most authority within the movement were less tolerant. Frederick Engels, Karl Marx, and German Social Democratic (SPD) party leader, Auguste Bebel, viewed homosexuality as unnatural, and their association of it with psychological illness would strongly influence the later communist stance.⁷

The Bolshevik government initially repealed the Czarist laws, including those against homosexuality (called *muzhelozhstvo* in Russian, and referring only to anal penetration between men). Despite having been illegal, homosexuality was tolerated among the Russian aristocracy and intelligentsia, and some men, such as Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich, were open about their attractions.⁸ The new Soviet position of non-interference in most sexual matters drew heavily on Soviet medical opinion. Soviet doctor Mark Sereisky wrote that "Soviet legislation does not recognize so-called crimes against morality. Our laws proceed from the principle of protection of society and therefore countenance punishment only in those instances when juveniles and minors are the objects of homosexual interest."⁹ This position did not last. By 1928 homosexuality was described as a "social peril." In March of 1934 sexual activity between men was re-criminalized under section 121 of the criminal code, as part of Stalin's platform of "proletarian decency." Medical view on homosexuality shifted to reflect the political climate, describing homosexuality as "moral decadence." This law remained in effect until 1993.¹⁰

Things were not significantly different in communist states outside the Soviet Union. In Cuba, persecution of queers drew upon patriarchal, cultural and religious animosity, and associated it, through prostitution, with capitalist exploitation. Groups with gay members, such as the literary group, *El Puente*, were forced to disband. In the mid 1960s Cuba established UMAP detention and agricultural work camps.¹¹ Stephen O. Murray notes that "Rounding up "anti-social deviants" provided cheap labour for

state-run sugar plantations, isolated rebels (sexual and other kinds), and was rationalized as therapeutic...."¹² The UMAP camps were closed in 1967 in response to international pressure, although similar measures were taken in an attempt to contain persons infected with HIV.¹³

Communism has generally conflated male homosexuality with effeminacy. Jeffrey Weeks notes that whereas Marxist writers elsewhere reject theories which appeal to natural instincts, they have adopted an ahistorical view of sexuality as naturally gendered into active/passive, masculine/feminine coupling.¹⁴ As effeminacy, homosexuality was viewed as a degeneration of natural manhood. This position was the one advocated by psychiatry at the time, and was also the basis (viewed as inversion) of early queer activism in Germany. Homosexuality soon came to be considered a "bourgeois vice and sign of decadence."¹⁵ The associations of male effeminacy with luxury, leisure, and the upper-classes made members reluctant to see same-sex attraction as possible in masculine revolutionaries. Stephen O. Murray notes that Cuban officials viewed the UMAP camps as therapeutic. Presumably physical labour would elicit the masculinity necessary to counter-act homosexuality. He notes that aversion therapy continued to be prescribed for effeminate boys, even after the UMAP camps were closed.¹⁶

Although the practices and attitudes of communist countries were frequently no different than that of capitalist ones, socialist groups and governments tended to embody their position in government documents and systems. Capitalist countries generally addressed homosexuality directly only through legislation aimed at acts. The issue of feelings, relationships, and other aspects of homosexuality were relegated to the sphere of medicine. In communist countries acts and identity were more closely linked, as were government and medicine. That which was illegal or disapproved was also considered unnatural or the product of sickness, and political dissidents frequently

found themselves under psychiatric care. Similarly, socialist groups in other countries held to Soviet party policy by excluding homosexuals. Those most interested in reforming the socialist policies could not join, and those who could join were reluctant to criticize the policies for fear of expulsion.

Women's issues in Marxist politics

In its early years, socialist movements attracted feminists. Friedrich Engels argued that women had historically been subordinated by men in order to obtain their free labour within the household. "The modern domestic family," he claimed, "is based on the overt and covert domestic slavery of women."¹⁷ He supported women's suffrage and equality. SDP leader, Auguste Bebel, held that collectivising domestic activity would free women. "There can be no emancipation of humanity," Bebel said, "without the social independence and equality of the sexes."¹⁸

Although Marxists supported feminism in theory, women's issues were continually marginalized as socialist groups focussed on economic oppression. Socialist women were told that sexual oppression was, at most, a secondary concern, and at worst a distraction from the real matter of class conflict. Lenin reproved German socialist Clara Zetkin for allowing the women's section of the SPD to give precedence to issues of sex and marriage, rather than class.¹⁹ In addition to subordinating women's issues to economics, socialism began to idealize visions of socialist motherhood. As mothers, women were assigned to raise and educate the next generation of socialists. Feminist issues such as birth control were frowned upon by socialists. Not only was advocating birth control seen as reinforcing bourgeois myths about the causes of poverty, but any measures which reduced the size of the proletariat were seen as strengthening the middle-class.

In its early stages, socialism had included some sexual radicals. Emma Goldman and Alexandra Kollontai

advocated free love as a communist principle, but like most writers on sex in her era, failed to address lesbianism.²⁰ Male leaders tended to be more sexually conservative, and it was their views which became party policy. Engels felt that communism would lead to a greater morality, idealizing monogamous heterosexual coupling. Lenin went further, asserting, "To be sure, thirst has to be quenched. But would a normal person lie down in the gutter and drink from a puddle? Or even from a glass whose edge has been greased by many lips?"²¹ The endorsement of procreative heterosexuality, as well as the subordination of women's issues made socialism less attractive as an organizing platform for lesbians. Lesbians found there was more acceptance for leftist politics within liberal feminist or lesbian groups than there was for feminism or lesbianism within the left. As a result, queer leftist groups tended to be populated almost exclusively by gay men.²²

Fancy footwork: leftist organizations and queer activism

Following the policy of the Soviet Union, leftist groups refused openly queer members. Harry Hay recalls that in response to McCarthyism the American Communist Party instituted a strict self-policing, insisting that party members maintain "moral purity," and forbidding admittance to queers on security grounds.²³ After Hay voluntarily left the communist party in order to devote himself openly to gay activism, rumours continued to circulate that he had not resigned, but had been "caught in the act" with a man and thrown out. Many of his communist associates refused to speak to him for years afterwards.²⁴

During the fifties and sixties many radicals used Marxist analysis to explain their social experience of oppression, and gay men were no exception. Harry Hay organized the Mattachine society around the Marxist concept of "cultural minority," taking the unusual step of applying it to homosexuals. Their manifesto named among their goals the achievement of "equality of security and

production."²⁵ Gay Liberation Fronts (GLFs) emerged in Britain and the U.S., both drawing a parallel between gay and racial oppression, rejecting psychiatry and identifying the source of gay oppression as the bourgeois family.²⁶

Despite the gay adoption of Marxist thought, Marxist organizations continued to hold queers at arms length. Gays were ousted from the Young Socialist Alliance.²⁷ The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) dismissed gay and women's movements as reformist, middle-class, or distracting, and prohibited homosexuals from membership until the 1970s.²⁸ Even when it began to look more favourably upon gay and lesbian activism the SWP encouraged individuals to join the class struggle rather than form autonomous cross-class movements.²⁹

The first socialist group to publically recognize the gay movement as a radical one was the Black Panthers.³⁰ In 1970 Black Panther leader Huey P. Newton published a letter endorsing ties with gay liberation and women's movements, and discouraging fellow Panthers from using slurs like "faggot" and "punk." Yet even the endorsement revealed the Panthers were not unified on the issue. Newton wrote: "Some people say that it's the decadence of capitalism. I don't know whether this is the case; I rather doubt it. But whatever the case is, we know that homosexuality is a fact that exists, and we must understand it in its purest form: That is, a person should have freedom to use his body in whatever way he wants to. That's not endorsing things in homosexuality that we wouldn't view as revolutionary. But there's nothing to say that a homosexual cannot also be a revolutionary."³¹

Those groups which recognized queers and their struggle relegated sexuality to the margins of their own platform, seeing freedom for queers as the natural result of dismantling the class system.³² The tendency of socialist groups to de-prioritize queer issues, to withdraw their support, and to refuse to see their own movement as potentially oppressive, has

prevented queers from embracing socialism as a key analytical tool. As more queer groups embraced

identity-based politics socialism began to appear (as homosexuality had to many socialists) as a secondary issue,

or as a distraction from the "real issue" of gay and lesbian equality.

The Male Gays: Male hegemony ignores the feminisations of poverty

It has long been considered a problem that many organizations which are "gay and lesbian" in name are male-dominated in practice. Early gay organizations, such as the Mattachine Society, had only token female participation. Women preferred to organize separately, in groups such as the Daughters of Bilitis. The situation is similar today. Pride Toronto went from September 1997 to February of 1998 without any women to organize the Dyke March, despite the event attracting (then) a crowd of over 1500 marchers.³³ The December 1998 issue of Xtra featured a photo of five male committee members with the caption, "What's wrong with this picture?" Only one woman volunteered.

One of the reasons predominantly male (though theoretically mixed) groups fail to attract women is that such groups are often experienced by queer women as sexist environments, rather than places of queer solidarity across gender lines. Queer women's organizations offer support on sexism as well as homophobia. Another significant factor is class. Volunteering requires more than willingness, it requires time and financial resources. Women tend to have less financial resources than men, and may have more claims upon

those resources, such as dependent children. One study suggested that lesbians earned from \$8,000 to \$11,000 less than gay men.³⁴ A study of gay and lesbian volunteers in the U.K. found that 83% of their female respondents named a lack of time as a barrier to volunteering (as opposed to 65% of men), and 33% of all respondents identified a lack of access (such as transportation).³⁵ The failure of a significant number of respondents to identify low income as a barrier may reflect the shame many people feel around poverty.

By drawing a parallel between the oppression of gay men and that of blacks, women, and the working class, fledgling gay groups attempted to claim legitimacy. Yet in doing so they made a distinction between such groups that defined "gay" as white, male and upper class. This definition remains in practice today. Those issues named as "gay" reflect the concerns of middle-class white gay men: police raids of sexualized leisure space, legal relationship recognition, access to equal financial benefits such as pensions. Issues not usually affecting this group of gay men (such as racial profiling, rape, or breast cancer) are re-defined as "race issues" or "women's issues," and considered external to gay politics. Gay men often assume their experience of gayness is the same as women's experience of lesbianism. This ignores the economic inequalities which make men more likely to hold full-time, higher paid employment than women. When couples

are of the same sex, the discrepancies between male and female households are magnified. The feminisations of poverty is often ignored by the gay activists as either not relevant, or not strategically useful to "gay and lesbian" politics.

The reality of male domination is reflected in the masculinization of gay villages. Census data from 1991 on the area of Toronto containing the gay village (known as Tract 63), reveals that the majority of residents are men between the ages of 20 and 39. The vast majority (90%) speak English as their first language and 98% identify as "white."³⁶ Although a significant portion of the areas residents are women (43%), the businesses reflect an almost exclusive focus on gay men. Some businesses, such as Body Body Wear, and Priape, market their products almost exclusively to men. There are no primarily lesbian bars in the gay village. The majority of bars, restaurants and coffee shops on this strip, although not excluding women, cater to specific segments of the gay male population (jocks, yuppies, bears, etc.) rather than being sex-specific. Of all the bar listings in the 2002 edition of The Pink Pages, a gay and lesbian directory of Toronto, only Pegasus indicated it was not primarily for men, promising a "friendly mix of men and women."³⁷

The Gay Dollar:

The myth that queers are predominantly wealthy creates a fear of looking at class.

Advertising aimed at "the gay market" reinforces the perception that gay men are white, affluent, and actively pursuing a life of cultured leisure. This image has been endorsed by many gay activists, who believe the image shows gays as successful participants in public life. One is frequently left with the impression that looking closely at class would not be to our benefit. Indeed, too close a focus on class is felt to hurt queer movements by making it difficult to assert ourselves as an oppressed population.

The myth of gay affluence is perpetuated by poor research methodology, which locates participants via gay magazine and catalogue subscriptions, records of donation to queer groups, and lists of niche-marketed accounts, such as Rainbow Visa card holders.³⁸ On the basis of this sample, agencies conclude that gays have a dramatically higher disposable income than heterosexuals. The most famous market study concluded that 28% of gay households earned over

\$50,000 a year, and 21% earned over \$100,000 a year.³⁹ Harold Buford notes that attempts to study gays and lesbians have thus far failed to consider the role economics play in enabling people to claim a gay or lesbian identity. He writes: "people who enjoy a measure of financial security and independence may be more likely to live openly gay lives than those for whom coming out could jeopardize their livelihood. At the very least, they may be more likely to confide to a survey taker that they're gay or lesbian."⁴⁰

Lee Badgett, a professor of economics at the University of Massachusetts and Director of the Institute for Gay and Lesbian Strategic Studies (IGLSS), argues the skewed statistics benefit the interests of marketing agencies and right-wing conservatives. She notes that marketers use the image of a vastly wealthy gay market to sell their services. She also argues that "the right wing political movement has cleverly capitalized on this image to claim that gay people do not need civil rights protection because they don't face discrimination." Gay journalist Mike Wilke writes that "Supreme Court Justices even cited high gay incomes in the crucial Amendment 2 civil rights case from Colorado."⁴¹ The image of

gay affluence corresponds well with right-wing conspiracy theories that wealthy gays control the media.

Contrary to the image of gay affluence, some studies suggest that gay men may be making less than straight men. IGLSS research found that gay men earn less than straight men with the same qualifications. A study by John Blandford at the University of Chicago in May of 2000 revealed that gay and bisexual men earn 30-32% less than their straight peers. Although the gay and bisexual men often held jobs in professional sectors, Blandford remarked "they tend to take positions, which are classified as female and poorer paying, such as registered nurses and schoolteachers."⁴² Similar statistics have been found by studies of Toronto's gay village. Mark Lehman's 1991 study identified the area's Social Economic Status (SES) as "(high)low," due in part, he suggested to the effects of AIDS on income and living circumstances.⁴³

Red Ties:

U.S. anti-Communism and rampant homophobia make it difficult to know why people are persecuting you.

In 1915 Havelock Ellis wrote that the red tie functioned as a symbol of homosexuality in America. "It is notable," Havelock wrote, "that of recent years there has been a fashion for a red tie to be adopted by inverters as their badge."⁴⁴ The red tie reappears in a 1934 painting by artist Paul Cadmus, entitled "The Fleet's In!" In the painting of women cavorting with the navy, a lone male civilian offers a sailor a cigarette. Micha Ramaker writes that he "is elegantly dressed and wears a red tie, a then popular code among gay men, which Cadmus repeatedly used to indicate a character's homosexuality."⁴⁵ In this same time period the red tie also appears as a symbol of socialist politics. The Soviet youth organization, the Pioneers, sported a brown uniform with a red tie. Several socialist leaders appeared in public with red ties, and numerous film representations use the red tie as an indicator of socialism.⁴⁶ Tony Banks, the Labour MP for West Ham expresses the symbolism of the red tie in his remarks to Conservative MP, Derek Conway: "I am reassured to see the hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup attired in traditional Conservative suiting-that helps people like me who become confused

by all the new Members. It used to be that if someone walked by me wearing a red tie, I could safely say, if I did not know him, "Good morning, comrade." Equally, if someone came by in a suit like the hon. Gentleman's, I could hiss "Capitalist lackey" and know that the insult had been well directed. I am grateful to him for preserving that tradition."⁴⁷

The symbolism of the red tie begins to blur between communist and gay as anti-communist forces associate political and sexual deviancy. One of these moments where homosexuality and communism overlap is the case of "The Cambridge Spies." In discussing the life of former British-agent-turned-Russian-spy, Sir Anthony Blunt, Observer reporter Charles Saumarez Smith describes him as "a known Communist, always sporting a red tie and frequently drunk." The British spy circle of Blunt, Guy Burgess, Kim Philby and Donald MacLean is also identified as a homosexual ring. "Above all," Smith writes that the communist spy cell, "appealed to his desire to belong to the same club as his homosexual friends."⁴⁸

During the House Un-American Activities Committee hearings, led by senator Joseph McCarthy, communist groups began to expel even those closeted homosexuals they had formerly tolerated, this time naming them as a

security risk. Simultaneously, many queer groups avoided ties with communists. The development of a queer Marxist movement was effectively nipped before it bloomed by the suspicion and paranoia evoked by McCarthyism. The trust which was necessary to maintain leftist groups evaporated as people began to suspect their closest friends of being FBI infiltrators.

Assimilationist politics replaced socialism as the basis of gay organizing. These new groups focussed on proving that homosexuals were a loyal, ethical minority. Their emphasis was on securing equal rights within the system for gays and lesbians. Former platforms of general sexual liberation, linked with economic redistribution, were abandoned. Harry Hay was "kicked upstairs" by the Mattachine society he had formed because its membership feared his Marxism would hurt their (by then assimilationist) cause.⁴⁹ This shift to the middle continued even after McCarthyism, as the Cold War continued to raise suspicion about socialism. Pride parades, which had originally been created to commemorate the riots at Stonewall, became public relations events aimed at improving the image of gays and lesbians, and facilitating their quest for equal rights within the social system.

I can get it for you wholesale:

the co-opting of gay visibility into the capitalist consumerism movement.

The relation of gay identity with capitalism has much to do with the liberal distinction between the public and the private. Traditionally, legislation has viewed sexuality as a concern of the private. Only when it encroaches on public values, public space, or public institutions is it deemed problematic. Frank Mort writes that "the legal confinement of gay people to a privatised space may have done much to structure the person-focussed, pleasure-seeking and often apolitical nature of our present commercial culture."⁵⁰ Many queers see little connection between their private life as sexual persons and their public life as workers, employers, producers, or consumers.

One of the effects of the creation of "gay culture" is the increasingly intimate association of gay identity with consumerism, and therefore with public space. The "gay lifestyle" is strongly associated with consumer leisure-based activities. The images of The Advocate, or advertisements by Calvin Klein, Abercrombie & Fitch, or Dolce & Gabbana tell us what "gay" looks like, and encourages men to purchase and consume in imitation of this ideal. Such visibility creates and reinforces the impression that there are no poor queers, and no working-class queers. It even prevents some forms of same-sex desire from being able to be seen as gay.⁵¹

Gay male culture centres itself around consumer spaces, such as bars, theatres, coffee houses and clubs.⁵² The site often named as the beginning of the gay movement, the Stonewall tavern, is itself a commercial space.⁵³ Yet as Maskovsky notes, gay bars and other leisure spaces are also workplaces, where gays and lesbians of lower economic or racial status often work in poor conditions for sub-standard wages. The appeal to an all-class-encompassing "gay community" encourages employees of gay businesses to tolerate exploitation for benefit of "the community."⁵⁴

Critique of the employment practices of gay businesses, even by gay employees, is frequently portrayed by business owners and the gay press as an attack on the rights of gay business to exist as gay.

One such case is typical: in 1980 employees of a gay bar in San Francisco complained they had been denied breaks and overtime pay. Socialist Reporter, Liz Ross writes that the management, "also gay, responded by bringing in a union-busting firm. Within a fortnight, five pro-union activists were fired for anonymous "customer complaints" and so on. The Tavern Guild, the association of gay bar owners which was a powerful force in the gay community, blacklisted pro-union activists from working in their bars."⁵⁵

The history of urban gentrification reveals that gay property owners more often than not place class interests above gay identity in business decisions.⁵⁶ This is perhaps aided by creating a distinction between gay issues as private and business issues as public. The creation of San Francisco's gay village in the Castro district was itself a form of gentrification, according to University of California sociologist, Manuel Castells. Young men, many of them single with surplus income, supplanted the urban poor from Victorian properties. These homes had become devalued on the real estate market as more people purchased cheaper suburban property, in what urban planners call the "rent-gap effect."⁵⁷ Several studies suggest that gay gentrification is a reaction against oppression, and an attempt to create safer, gay-owned space.⁵⁸ Concentrated communities in the city are thought to offer greater personal freedom and autonomy than small towns or suburban communities, which tend to be family-focussed. Large populations, with their attendant crowding are expected to force groups to mix, creating a tolerance of diversity unique to urban dwellers.

Tom Slater objects to claims that gentrification creates tolerance or supports liberation. Such a perspective,

he argues, "is greatly to undermine the ruthlessness of the consequences of gentrification, such as race, class and income polarisation, social exclusion and displacement." Slater argues that an emphasis on the intent of developers, rather than on the effects of their actions, is research "through the eyes of the gentrifiers themselves, to the exclusion of those people who are unwilling participants in neighbourhood change - the poor, the working-class, the marginalised and so on."⁵⁹

This distinction between gays and the poor is common in gay circles, even among activists. The idea that the poor pose a danger to gay and lesbian safety is widespread, as evidenced by the argument that squeegee kids and the homeless make the gay village less safe simply by being present.⁶⁰ This view also has a racial component in which people of colour are associated with poverty and then automatically assumed to be criminal. The reality of economic oppression of people of colour is used as a way of excluding them from the queer community and viewing them as a potential danger to be controlled. The image of the black male as a danger to women and queers rejects the idea that black men could be queer, and in many cases prevents black men from seeing gay identity as relevant to their own sexuality.⁶¹

Gay reporter, Craig Willse, notes that racialized gay imagery has been co-opted by consumer culture, and re-packaged as American: "the poster-boying of "Matthew Shepard" displaces the murdered bodies of queer and trans people of color from the center of our politics, instating instead a gay yearning for the heartland, for an image of homegrown, educated, white america around which we are asked to organize our collective selves. What is the cost of romancing the past? What violence is done, what

histories dis(re)membred, what "non-citizens" disappeared?"62

The commercialization of "gay" images, in addition to reinforcing

white gay male hegemony, further marginalizes the victims of violence, as those who don't fit are increasingly depicted as outsiders to both gay communities (and their support) and

wholesome Americana. As such, their vulnerability to violence actually increases.

What Queer activism is losing out on by ignoring Marxist analysis

Queer activism has suffered for its suspicion of socialist organizations, its hesitancy to examine class, and its avoidance of Marxist tools of analysis. I argue that Marxist analysis can improve queer activist theory and practice in four specific ways. First, it can offer a critique of compulsory heterosexuality by revealing the function it plays in the economy. Second, it can provide an insight into some of the elements at work in the production of sexual subjects, such as the distribution of a non-material wage. Third, it can place the experience and identity of poor queers, rather than white affluent male and their female equivalent, at the centre of its analysis. Finally, it can make a connection between cultural and material capital, which reveals some of the economic power dynamics behind the creation of gay villages.

1) Critique of compulsory heterosexuality

Postmodern analysis has helped queer theorists to formulate theories about the ways that social forces create gendered, sexed and sexual subjects. Judith Butler's concept of performativity has changed the way many feminists define the category of "woman," and as her theories have been taken up by many lesbian, bisexual, transsexual and transgender activists. Michel Foucault's analysis of how power enables the creation, regulation and normalization of sexual subjects has changed the way many historians and theorists write about "gays." As postmodernism challenges the easy distinctions and cohesion of categories, it has been largely blind to either the construction or deconstruction of class categories. Economics remains largely ignored by activism, queer theory, women's studies, or gay and lesbian studies.

Marxist analysis could benefit both activist and theoretical movements by revealing the economic benefits produced by compulsory heterosexuality. Early on Marxists

described what we would now call "heterosexual normativity," and gendered sex roles as techniques of control aimed at reproducing a labour force. Sex which was not reproductive was stigmatized, just as labour which is not productive (play, leisure) was subordinated to work. This analysis could reveal heterosexual privilege as a non-material wage given in exchange for submission to Capitalist values.⁶³ Such a development must not be overly simplistic. Early Marxist views of capitalist ideology as fully conscious, or as intentionally controlled by the ruling classes is out of step with post-modern approaches to power and knowledge. Yet the ability to see economics at work in sexuality could do much to reveal links between oppressions of sex, class and gender, and the forces at work in valuing or devaluing identities and acts.

2) Insight into the production of sexual subjects

Althusser argued that education prepares children for their roles as wage-earners in capitalist production.⁶⁴ By using pre-existing socialist theories as a lens for sexuality, we might reveal parallels in the creation of economic and sexual subjectivities. We might examine more fully how economic hierarchies are sexualized, and how sexual subject positions are established and maintained during the education process. Of course this could not be done in a simplistic fashion. No longer is the ideology of the ruling classes seen as something consciously produced by the ruling classes as a group, explicitly with the purpose of subjugating others. Post-modern views of power would be useful in troubling simple cause-and-effect explanations of class power and subject-identification. Yet post-modern explorations of the creation of sexual subjectivity generally ignore the economics at work. Judith Butler's concept of performativity goes a long way to explain how individuals participate in making themselves into men and women.⁶⁵ Yet the extent to which material participation (as opposed to the participation of the will, or even the unconscious) is possible, is largely determined by economics. The

ways in which we understand gender normativity and gender expectations are highly influenced by status positions of class and race. The ways in which some gender expressions, or the labels of "masculine" or "feminine" might function similarly to heterosexuality, as a non-material wage could be useful for queer activists (particularly gender activists) if explored.

3) Centring the experience of poor queers

Queer theory and activism has too often used commercialized middle-class identities as its starting point. Where the experience of poor queers is taken up, it is in relation to a central gay and lesbian identity. By starting from the experience of poor queers we might be able to challenge the normativity of consumption-class gay male experience. Marxist analysis would suggest that poor queers cannot be elevated or idealized as sources of revolutionary enthusiasm or ideals. Just as all queers internalize heterosexual judgements on sexuality, lower classes imbibe the class values of the dominant.

The ways in which queer life and identity have economic ramification (which are assuredly not affluence) could form a strong basis for an analysis of the relation between economic class and sexuality. The effect of gender presentation (e.g., butch lesbians, transfolk) on perceived "employability" and the accompanying evaluations of social worth would do much to reveal the construction of status within queer communities, as well as those in operation when queers encounter "helping" agencies.

Much of the existing lesbian economic analysis has been done by black lesbians, whose existence at the intersection of sexual and racial politics have provided them with a more sophisticated analysis of their material oppression. They in turn have been marginalized within reformist lesbian movements, whose

mandate of legislation reform meant placing more "presentable" (usually meaning white business-class lesbians) in positions of authority. If the experience of poor queers (especially poor queers of colour) is taken as both the starting point and the focus of theory and activism, then not only can new work emerge which is relevant to poor queers, but the deposit of black lesbian economic writing can be recognized for its importance.

4) Connection between cultural and material capital

Studying the connection between cultural and material capital means highlighting the economic dimensions of masculinity, heterosexuality, morality, and even gay identity. This work entails asking such questions as "Who benefits from queer visibility? Who profits from gay culture? In the

words of Watergate informer, Deep Throat, "Follow the money." Where does "the pink dollar" go once it is spent? Are gay villages made up of straight-owned bars and businesses?⁶⁶ Do men own the lesbian bars? Who profits from the sale of alcohol, water, food, or memorabilia at Pride Week events? Do mainstream newspapers also publish queer or "alternative" press magazines? Who profits from the booming business of online or telephone gay personals? What economic interests are served by promoting particular expressions of queer identity and rejecting others? Answering these questions requires research, and a theoretical framework that can make connections between the "private" arena of personal identity politics and the "public" arena of economics.

Are Our Queer Roots Red?

Queer history indicates that far from being a foreign import, Marxist thought has been intimately connected to queer organizing from the beginning. While reformist groups may view leftist radicals as being out of touch with the values of gays and lesbians, this is partly because the values of gay and lesbian identity have been defined by reformist organizations which had expelled more radical members. As I have argued, this loss has been detrimental to queer politics, effectively placing blinders on queer political analysis which prevent the concerns of the poor (especially poor women and people of colour) from being seen as "gay" issues. The popularity of queer as an identity term, while not unproblematic, may offer more leeway in terms of choosing tools of political analysis since it has not yet been fully defined by reformist politics.

Notes:

1. Throughout this paper I use the term "queer" to refer to gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, transgender and other similar movements. Where my point is specific to sexual orientation, to gay or lesbian activism, or to bisexual organizing I have been more precise.
2. Although Marxism explains this as an effect of ideological alienation I am concerned about such claims fostering a sense of intellectual elitism.
3. The Toronto Dyke March began in 1995. It was only in December of 2002 that a mandate was written describing the purpose of the Dyke March Committee.
4. In this work "communism" refers to governments or parties, "socialism" to movements which make use of several schools of leftist analysis, and "Marxism" to describe the theory and practices which stem from the wide dissemination of the work of Marx and Engels.
5. Jeffrey Weeks, "Capitalism and the organization of sex," in *Homosexuality: Power and Politics*, Gay Left Collective, ed (London: Allison and Busby, 1980), 12.
6. John Lauritsen and David Thorstad, *The Early Homosexual Rights Movement (1864-1935)*, Ojai, California: Times Change Press, (1974) Revised Edition, 1995, 65-67.
7. See, for example the anti-gay socialist site Neue Einheit's collection of documents on the labour movement's rejection of homosexuality. Online at <http://www.neue-einheit.com/frame/engindex1.htm>. Also, see Lauritsen and Thorstad, *The Early Homosexual Rights Movement*, 57; Irina Aristarkhova, "Women and Government in Bolshevik Russia," Working Papers no. 4, Centre for Comparative Labour Studies, University of Warwick (August 1995). Online at <http://www.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/complabstuds/russia/irawp.doc>
8. Igor Kon, "Moonlight Love: Historical Prelude," Gay.RU, (1998). Online at <http://www.gay.ru/english/history/kon/prelude.htm>. Despite this tolerance among the wealthy, Czarist Russia was not above blackmailing homosexuals, as evidenced by their use of Austrian Intelligence operative Alfred Redl.
9. Kon, "Moonlight Love: Soviet Homophobia," Gay.Ru. Online at <http://www.gay.ru/english/history/kon/soviet.htm>. He cites Mark Sereisky in the 1930 edition of the Great Soviet Encyclopedia, 593.
10. Ibid., citing a 1936 statement by Nikolai Krylenko, People's Commissar for Justice. See also Stuart Timmons, *The Trouble With Harry Hay: Founder of the Modern Gay Movement* (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1990), 96; Lauritsen and Thorstad, *The Early Homosexual Rights Movement*, 71, 78; US Immigration and Naturalization Services, "Russia" Online at <http://www.ins.usdoj.gov/graphics/services/asylum/ric/documentation/Russia1.htm> Country Information and Policy Unit, "Russian Federation: Country Assessment, G: Homosexuals," Version 4 (September 1999). Online at <http://www.asylumlaw.org/docs/russia/ind99brussia.ca.htm#Homosexuals>.

11. UMAP was a Spanish acronym. The English translation is "Military Units for the Aid of Production." Lourdes Arguelles and B. Ruby Rich, "Homosexuality, homophobia and revolution: notes toward an understanding of the Cuban lesbian and gay male experience, Part 1," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 9, no. 4 (Summer 1984): 691-692.
12. Stephen O. Murray, "Disingenuous apology for Castro's persecution of homosexuals," Review of Ian Lumsden's book, *Machos, Maricones and Gays: Cuba and Homosexuality* (Philadelphia: Temple University press, 1995), June 19, 2001. Online at <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/156639371X/002-6040134-6588063?vi=glance>.
13. Ibid.
14. Weeks, "Capitalism and the organization of sex," 12-13.
15. Didier Eribon, Michel Foucault, (Paris, Flammarion, 1989; Harvard University Press, 1991), 56.
16. Murray, "Disingenuous apology for Castro's persecution of homosexuals."
17. Susan Alice Watkins, Marisa Rueda and Marta Rodriguez, ed., *Feminism for Beginners* (Cambridge: Icon Books, 1992), 82-83.
18. Valerie Bryson, *Feminist Political Theory: An Introduction* (New York: Paragon House, 1992), 121, citing Auguste Bebel, *Woman Under Socialism* (1878), 6.
19. Ibid., 125; Clara Zetkin, "My recollections of Lenin," *My Memoranda Book*. Online at <http://www.maoism.org/misc/women/Zetkin.htm> .
20. Lesbians, as single women exclusively interested in other women, were not yet well organized. Women generally married since they had fewer options for self-sufficiency than men, and more social stigma attached itself to their remaining single. Lesbian circles of this time period were generally social circles of married women (sometimes married to gay men).
21. Ibid., 139.
22. Gay Left Collective, "Introduction," in *Homosexuality: Power and Politics*, 7.
23. Timmons, *The Trouble With Harry Hay*, 96, 159,-160; Arguelles and Rich, "Homosexuality, Homophobia, and Revolution," 692-693.
24. Timmons, *The Trouble With Harry Hay*, 159.
25. Ibid., 136, 151-155.
26. Simon Watney, "The ideology of GLF" in *Homosexuality, Power and Politics*, 64-67; Timmons, *The Trouble With Harry Hay*, 230.
27. Toby Marotta, *The Politics of Homosexuality* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981), 89.
28. Bob Nowlan, "Marxist Theory of Homosexuality: Past, Present and Future. Part I: The Past," *The Alternative Orange*, Volume 2 archive (November 1992). Online at http://www.etext.org/Politics/AlternativeOrange/2/v2n2_mth1.html.
29. Keith Birch, "The politics of autonomy," in *Homosexuality, Power and Politics*, 89-90; Philip Derbyshire, "Sects and sexuality: Trotskyism and the politics of homosexuality," *Idem.*, 105.
30. Although the Black Panthers were a black revolutionary group, their analysis of black economic oppression used Marxist analysis.
31. Originally published in *The Black Panther* 5.8 (August 21, 1970):5; Reprinted in Donn Teal, *The Gay Militants* (New York: Stein and Day, 1971), 170-171.
32. Merle Woo, "Lesbian and Gay Liberation: A Trotskyist Analysis," Speech to Freedom Socialist Party Delegates to the Trotskyist and Revolutionary Socialist Conference, San Francisco November, 1985. Online at <http://www.socialism.com/library/perm1.html> .
33. For six months the Dyke March was, by default, organized by men. The event, then in its third year, would have been cancelled had Toronto planning department employee and Pride Toronto member Kyle Knoeck not filed the permit applications himself.
34. Mike Wilke, "Commercial coset: Are all gays rich?" *Gay Financial Network* (August 21, 2000). Online at <http://www.gfn.com/archives/story.phtml?sid=7173>. Citing Lee Badgett, "Income Inflation," Policy Institute of the National Lesbian & Gay Task Force and the Institute for Gay & Lesbian Strategic Studies (1998).
35. *Gay and Lesbian Arts and Media*, "Research Project: Volunteering Among the LGBT Community in Brighton and Hove Full Research Findings," (March 2002): 32. GLAM notes that a second study found that "people from the highest socio-economic groups are almost twice as likely to volunteer as those from the lowest." Those who were under-represented in volunteering included people who were out of work, the young, and members of visible minority groups. See Institute for Volunteering Research, <http://www.ivr.org.uk>.

36. Rick Bébout, "More on Church & Wellesley" Addendum to *Time and Place*: Toronto, 1971, Canadian Gay and Lesbian Archives, (July 1997). Citing Mark Lehman: *The Church- Wellesley Area: Community, Unity and Neighbourhood*, 1994. Online at <http://www.clqa.ca/Material/Records/docs/toronto/morecw.htm>.
37. "Pegasus," *The Pink Pages Gay and Lesbian Directory* (Toronto: POWERarts Publishing, 2002), 53.
38. Ken Cimino, "Unraveling the gay influence income myth," *Gay Financial Network* (January 17, 201). Online at <http://www.gfn.com/archives/story.phtml?sid=8355>.
39. Howard Buford, "Understanding Gay Consumers," *Harvard Gay and Lesbian Review* 2000. Online at <http://www.primeaccess.net/Press/Harvard.pdf>. "Affluence of gay market confirmed," (February 3, 1998). Online at <http://www.rainbowreferrals.com/sponsors/marketstudy.asp>. This survey received widespread attention when it was featured in the July 19, 1991 edition of the *Wall St. Journal*.
40. Buford, "Understanding Gay Consumers."
41. Wilke, "Commercial coset: Are all gays rich?"
42. Cimino, "Unraveling the gay influence income myth." See also, Jeff Maskovsky, "Do we all 'reek of the commodity'? Consumption and the erasure of poverty in lesbian and gay studies," in *Out In Theory: The Emergence of Lesbian and Gay Anthropology*, Ellen Lewin and William L. Leap, ed. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 283, n. 2.
43. Bébout, "More on Church & Wellesley." Citing Mark Lehman: *The Church- Wellesley Area: Community, Unity and Neighbourhood*, 1994. Online at <http://www.clqa.ca/Material/Records/docs/toronto/morecw.htm>.
44. Havelock Ellis, *Sexual Inversion*, 3d ed. (Philadelphia: F. A. Davis 1915), 350-351. See also George Chauncey, *Gay New York 1890-1940* (Basic Books, NY, 1994), 55.
45. Excerpt from Micha Ramaker's *Dirty Pictures: Tom of Finland, Masculinity and Homosexuality* (2000) Online at <http://www.stonewallinn.com/Features/DirtyEx4.html>; The painting was confiscated from Washington's Corcoran Gallery by the navy that same year. See also Tim Miller, "Outlaw art: A interview with Richard Meyer," *Out In The Mountains: Vermont's Voice for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Issues* (March 3, 2002) Online at <http://www.mountainpridemedia.org/oitm/issues/2002/03MAR2002/ae01outlaw.htm>.
46. See, for example, *Death On The Nile* (1978), in which Marxist Jim Ferguson sports a red tie.
47. Tony Banks (West Ham) Commons Hansard (8 Mar 2002) United Kingdom Parliament. Online at <http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/cm200102/cmhansrd/vo020308/debtext/20308-13.htm>
48. Charles Saumarez Smith, "Scholar, gentleman, prig, spy," *The Observer* (Sunday November 11, 2001). Online at <http://books.guardian.co.uk/whitbread2002/story/0,12605,842777,00.html>.
49. Timmons, *The Trouble With Harry Hay*, 174-178, 183-185.
50. Frank Mort, "Sexuality: Regulation and Contestation," in *Homosexuality, Power and Politics*, 43.
51. See for example the opposition to black men developing a non-gay "down-low" sexuality. Keith Boykin, "Anatomy of a media frenzy," *Keith Boykin's 411*, *Gay.com Network* (2002). Online at <http://content.gay.com/channels/news/boykin/boykin36.html>.
52. Maskovsky, "Do we all 'reek of the commodity'?" 267. This is similar to Angela McRobbie's findings about young working-class women in 1978 Britain. See "Working class girls and the culture of femininity," in *Women Take Issue: Aspects of Women's Subordination*, Bland and , ed. (Women's Studies Group, CCCS, University of Birmingham) London: Hutchinson & Co., 1978.
53. Dennis Altman, "What changed in the seventies?" in *Homosexuality, Power and Politics*, 58.
54. Maskovsky, "Do we all 'reek of the commodity'?" 268, 273.
55. Liz Ross, "Gay Liberation: Pink triangles, red banners," *Socialist Action* 13 (October 1986). Online at <http://www.anu.edu.au/polsci/marx/gayleft/pink.htm>.
56. *Ibid.*, 271.
57. Tom Slater, "What is Gentrification?" 2002. Citing Manuel Castells, "Cultural identity, sexual liberation and urban structure: the gay community in San Francisco" in *The City and the Grassroots: A Cross-Cultural Theory of Urban Social Movements*, Manuel Castells, ed. (London: Edward Arnold, 1983), 160.
58. *Ibid.*, Citing Larry Knopp, "Sexuality and urban space: a framework for analysis," in *Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexualities*, D. Bell and G. Valentine, ed. (London: Routledge, 1995), p.152.

59. Ibid., Citing Jon Caulfield, "Gentrification and desire", *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 26, no. 4 (1989): 617-632; Jon Caulfield, *City Form and Everyday Life: Toronto's gentrification and critical social practice* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994).
60. This has been an ongoing issue in Toronto's Gay village. Julia Garro, "Kyle's all over the place," *Xtra!* (July 1, 1999). Online at <http://www.xtra.ca/site/toronto2/arch/body223.shtm> ; Eleanor Brown, Editorial: "Squeezed in by squeegees: Who owns the neighbourhood?" *Xtra!* (August 12, 1999). Online at <http://www.xtra.ca/site/toronto2/arch/body252.shtm> ;
61. See Keith Boykin, "Anatomy of a media frenzy."
62. Craig Willse, "National sexualities, homosexual citizens." Online at <http://www.makezine.org/homos.html> .
63. This might be similar to works which see whiteness as a non-material compensation for class identification. See, for example, Mary Hobgood. "Dismantling Whiteness." In *Dismantling Privilege: An Ethics of Accountability*. Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2000, 40.
64. Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" in *Lenin and Philosophy* (London: New Left Books, 1969), 133.
65. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).
66. Timmons, *The Trouble With Harry Hay*, 83.