Body Politics and 21st Century Taboo

Zachary Herrmann

University of Puget Sound

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Forward

The following literature review has been compiled as part of a hypothetical thesis regarding body politics and 21st century taboos. The concept of body politics builds on personal reflection regarding the ways in which one chooses to interact with different aspects of one’s own body and investigating the meaning evoked by one’s relationship with one’s own body parts. The broad basis established for body politics leaves a range of meaning, from debates over modesty to the way in which one may physically move their body as a political statement. This research instead turns attention to the aspects of the body which seem to remain intentionally outcast in the name of preserving the body’s conventional hierarchy of power. An investigation of taboo classification reveals how objects (even objects which appear as part of the subject) are outlawed to preserve sacred order and hierarchy, leaving transgression as the only means of reformation of the politically ousted. When looking at the forms of modern individuals, whose bodies have been perfected as machines coded for labor and accordance with the normative expectation of one’s political relationship with one’s body, even one’s sexual organs have become commodified and are expected to have a purpose. While seemingly no aspect of the female body remains unsavory for outward portrayal in the male-dominated western hegemony, the male anus has been preserved as a sublimated orifice ripe for transgression.

Acknowledgement of the male anus’s simultaneous political and erotic possibilities, remain cast off from the idealized masculine body in heteronormative spaces due to the paranoid fear of its potential. While a taboo against anal eroticism has stood for centuries of civilization, evidence supports that passive-sodomy
(understood as the act of being penetrated) was not prohibited merely for its output of fecal matter, but rather, its capability to produce an excess of pleasure without fruitful reproductive qualities (in short, satisfaction without labor). As enlightenment era thinkers disputed the repressed nature of anal eroticism which they believed to be fueled by infantile relationships with parents, sexuality, and toilet training, the anus became further understood as site of significant meaning for establishing the way in which one perceives the world. The anus has grown into the role of the achilles heel for patriarchal society becoming further concealed and privatized through the upsurge of rampant homophobia as the historically inflated nature of gender and sexuality started becoming unraveled.

The following literature review presents a selection of works which shed insight into various aspects of the anus's sublimation as well as the opportunities that could arise from the transgression of current anal taboos. In postmodern academia, the formation of queer theory and a reconsideration of freudian principles has brought attention back to male anal-eroticism as a recurring point of abjection in those who identify as heterosexual amongst both men and women. Having been reclaimed as an element of identity rather than shame amongst queer-marxist scholarly circles, the anus and its desiring functions hold greater meaning than ever. At its least significant, the anus holds capabilities of reorienting one towards pleasure and reevaluations of one's perception. In contrast, if the transgression of male-anal taboo were to be wildly successful, the eroticism's embrace could lead to the rupturing of paternal hierarchies built upon the coattails of a historically narrowed definition of masculinity which remains seemingly unphased by each social revolution it has survived. Decoding the anus's
forbidden nature at any degree has always seemed to bring one closer to a collapse of symbolic order, but as the near completely symbolic nature of civilization becomes fully recognized, the anus assumes its role as the gateway into a state of anarchy.

**Literature Review**

*Homosexual Desire*

Hocquenghem’s *Homosexual Desire* stands as one of the first wildly successful attempts to analyze a series of factors which contribute to homosexual identity and desire. Through the integration of Freud’s discussions on sexuality and Lacan’s expansions on desire, Hocquenghem exposes the variety of subjective experiences sublimated as homosexual desire. He discusses how these attributes should be embraced and deconstructed within the gay community. In the introduction to *Homosexual Desire*, Michael Moon voices how Hocquenghem wrote to reveal the misinterpretations caused by the poor choice of language surrounding homosexuality clarifying that “the object of a given desire does not determine the nature of that desire”. Hocquenghem works throughout the book not only to deconstruct the conventional understanding of homosexual desires, but to show how normative understandings of society have become contingent on their treatment of these misunderstood desires.

In a chapter specifically directed at the relationship between “capitalism, the family, and the anus”, Hocquenghem argues that anal desire and pleasure are intentionally repressed through intentional associations with scatological desire, privatization of the anus, shame, and abjection. He implies a direct relationship between the phallus as “social” and the anus as “private”. Inadvertently, Hocquenghem
finds this act of the anus’s sublimation further bound to the core of one’s identity by building on the idea of Freud’s anal phase and formation of child-narcicism. As one’s relationship with one’s anus is established from the earliest ages of development, the anus becomes crucial for the decoding of societal structures and disrupting symbolic order. Throughout the book, Hocquenghem traces the points which shed light on how the classification of the homosexual shifted from a capability of all humans to a sickness or degeneration which requires sever sanctions in order not to spread. While deconstructing the arbitrary nature of classifications regarding homosexual desires, Hocquenghem identifies a core theme of the sublimated desires as rejections of norms within relationship and identities constructed by Freud’s oedipus complex.

**The Screwball Asses**

*The Screwball Asses* serves as an opportunity for Hocquenghem to elaborate his meditations on homosexual desire to a receptive audience. In this pamphlet, he discusses his belief that members of the gay community are misguided into performing in heteronormative ways and risk becoming caricatures of the sublimated gay identity in society, or parodies of the ideal masculine figure. He expands on his idea that any attitude towards homosexuality consists of a homosexual attitude, and explains how desire is coded as desire-fear in order to perpetuate abjection. Hocquenghem also elaborates his theory that anal-prohibitions enable the prioritization of labor, profit, and salary, as opposed to jouissance and comradery. For Hocquenghem, if all of society were to engage in breaking down anal-prohibitions by penetrating ones own anus as well as a partner’s anus, the phallic signifier which perpetuates patriarchal hierarchy would be extinguished.
While Hocquenghem sees anal penetration as the only way for man to explore his sexuality, he believes capitalism has taken control over our bodies and repossessed its desires in order to restrict the working class from any pleasure which could be evoked without labor. To Hocquenghem, the disruption of symbolic order caused by seemingly libidinal desire, is instead a desire for revolution which has been bound to homosexuality to ensure its sublimation. The truly bisexual nature of every individual can only be unlocked through an embrace of constructed homosexual desires under a heterosexual system of order. For this reason, Hocquenghem suggests a revolutionaries focus ought to be catalyzing the homosexuality of the majority remaining hidden beneath “anti-homosexual paranoia”. To those who have not engaged in anal activity, the act is perceived as passive in relation to the phallus, thus further emphasizing the need to engage for one to decrease phallic significance.

For Hocquenghem, the use of one’s body is the only way to spread desires which dismantle pleasure’s negation. He sees homosexuality as something much greater than the sublimated category of desires constructed by society and attempts to empower those who identify with homosexuality to rethink their actions and shift away from any resemblance of heteronormative equity. In the final pages of his pamphlet, he writes “Desire has become God but has remained blind and mechanical, true to its construction by the capitalist apparatus and family history.” For Hocquenghem, only by acknowledging the range of forms which desire takes and actively decoding the root of the desire, will one be able to embrace all forms of desire which affect them rather than responding with abjection to some of them.

_Erotism: Death & Sensuality_
In Erotism, Bataille writes to expand on the nature of taboo and transgressions in relation to sexual desires. Throughout the book, he unveils the close relationship between objects considered Taboo and death. Bataille discusses the ways in which eroticism breaks down patterns of “regulated social order” which uphold our existence as discontinuous individuals within civilization. In death, Bataille sees continuity of existence to be proven and thus implies eroticism entails a way to evoke the same understandings of continuity due to its association with death.

Unlike animalistic sexuality, Bataille sees eroticism as an experience unique to humans which brings “inner life” into play. He then concludes that as labor constructed one’s attitude towards death, taboo which regulates sexuality inevitably follows suit. As forms of sexuality adopted shame, eroticism was formed. While Bataille acknowledges the range of stances between religion and eroticism, he focuses on christianity as the predominant religion which sets itself against eroticism and thus condemns faiths which stand in opposition.

Bataille suggests that the individual must reestablish the to upheld taboo’s significance or transgress the act and determine if the law of exclusion is justified or merely pathologically enforced by our surroundings. By confronting taboos and achieving an understanding of one’s inner experience, one is able to reevaluate his “original mode of being”. Bataille argues that Taboos equate death to violence and thus disorder in contrast to work which leads to the perpetuation of order. As man identifies with the work of upholding order, he begins abjecting any violence which he believes to threaten order.
Bataille integrates Freud’s concept of a death drive to explain why we continue to return to objects which we know to signify death and destruction and why taboo is upheld to keep us from its destructive nature. Bataille explains that because sexual activity is equated to violence in contrast to labor, restrictions on sexual liberty are universal, while specific prohibitions are set in response to significant threats to religious ideology. It is clear to Bataille that taboos exist to banish violence from everyday life, and this suggests that the recurring trends of various aspects of different taboos such as those against incest and orgy prove their true nature.

To Bataille, any repugnance or disgust we face in response to corpses, decay, excrement, or sexuality are inevitable responses as horror causes one’s feeling of the death-drive. He presents this reasoning in order to question if we would experience such desires as horrors if we had not been conditioned to see such objects as taboo. Since Bataille sees death as a necessary aspect of nature, he concludes that human acknowledgment of taboo exists as a rejection of nature’s impermanence which can only be resolved through transgression evoked through realizations of “inner life” within moments of “bursting” eroticism. Bataille concludes that erotic activity continues to evolve and shift over time because transgressions act as actions fighting against the sole underlying theme of taboo which bars the individual from “primitive freedom” which Bataille believes one to consciously pursue at varying degrees.

*No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*

Edelman’s book, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* synthesizes ideas from Hocquenghem, Sedgwick, Bersani, Freud, and other authors considered fundamental to the formation of queer theory. He analyzes the perceived threat of
homosexuality's spread as addressed by the conservative right, highlighting a fear for the future if homosexuality is embraced. He breaks down the logic used in such arguments by showing how futurism is characterized by children and thus, reproduction. He then re-establishes the villainized attributes of homosexuality in the form of the lacanian term “sinthomosexuality” as an identity which embraces a rejection of society’s future through non reproductive sexual orientation. To Edelman, this explains the association with queerness as an embrace of the death drive due to its lack of investment in the future.

Edelman argues for an embrace of the negativity implied by the sinthomosexual branding of the queer community, rather than attempting to fight for a status of positivity in order to not be vilified. By championing the identity against futurism, edelman envisions the queer community as radicals who are no longer concerned with making a better life for successive generations, instead they are fighting to achieve a better life for everyone immediately without the paranoia of what liberation could lead to. He sees all of these actions as a contribution to the sexual desire’s liberation from reproduction. Rather than seeking to reproduce lived experience for others, He argues that we should act in pursuit of jouissance. For Edelman, embracing the negativity cast upon homosexuality is a stance against a symbolic duty to transmit the lived experience of discourse into another by means of reproduction in order to relieve oneself of oedipal tension. By separating pleasure from progress, Edelman hopes to show how the teleological nature of society’s perpetuation for the sake of children repeatedly leaves no room to prioritize one’s own satisfaction. He portrays the death drive as inevitable due to its surplus of unaccounted jouissance, the queer embrace of such attributes of
identity allow for the death drive to be reintegrated as a valid outlook rather than being sublimated as something to fear.

_Beyond the Pleasure Principle_

In the essay, _Beyond the Pleasure Principle_, Freud discusses the economy of pleasure and introduces the concept of drives to psychoanalytic theory. He explains that pleasure leads to excitation and anything that could over excite the mind is felt adversely and thus, seemingly unpleasurable. To Freud, pleasure is repeatedly catalyzed by instincts, but as certain instincts are realized to be incompatible with the aims of other instincts, the former are separated from one’s sense of self and consequently repressed. He then concludes that most unpleasantness is merely perceptual based on the initial repression from the ego.

Freud’s observations of patient’s fixations in relation to trauma led him to believe the ego possessed masochistic tendencies. In contrast to the pleasure principle which pushes one away from the unpleasurable, Freud proposes developing a toleration of the displeasure or unpleasurable through the reality principle. Feud believes that because the body prioritizes protection from stimuli closely behind reception of stimuli, it makes sense that the ego takes damage to preserve the unconscious behavior, fears, and desires. He sees all of these unconscious attitudes evoked in dreams as wish-fulfillments which shed insight into which agitations will cause excitation in the form of trauma.

Freud suggests that living things die due to internal reasons, and concludes that the only goal of life is death. Building on this point, he hypothesizes self-preservation instincts are the only instincts which ward off death rather than pull one towards it. While
sexual instincts seemingly compel one towards an earlier state, Freud sees no clear
instinct towards societal progress and development suggesting that progress is instead
a consequence of adaptation to the pressure of external forces. To Freud, ego instincts
push us towards death, while sexual instincts push us towards renewal of life. He
assumes that within the ego instinct, exists a libidinal instinct and within the sexual
instinct exists a component of sadistic nature. In the same way that the locus of
pleasure in the form of orgasm is achieved through the momentary extinction of a highly
intensified excitation, Freud sees the associations of instincts with excitation as
necessary in order to evoke pleasure from the discharge.

*Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*

In these *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, Freud contributes his thoughts
on the origins or sexuality and desire. Freud’s first essay discusses objects of desire
and specific acts sought after as the sexual aim. He acknowledges homosexuality in a
discussion on symptoms of inversion in relation to sexual objects. He acknowledges
various forms of inverts as well as bisexuality in the form of hermaphrodites. He
acknowledges the difficulty in parsing whether these inversions are caused by nature or
nurture and makes note to emphasize the risk of implying degeneracy. He
contdiscusses other forms of perverse eroticism such as beastiality and pedophilia as
violent ends of spectrum and controversaly insists that observation of these sexual-
object desires holds merit for the normative human mind. He also suggests that many
who are abnormal mentally also tend to be abnormal in their sexual life.

Freud explains conventional sexual aims in relation to the release of built up
tension and temporary extinction achieved in orgasm. He surmises that conventional
sex is determined by interaction between genitals, other mucous membranes can be suitable to for penetration without classification as a perversion. Freud also directly addresses “sexual use of the anal orifice”, paying close attention to the experience of disgust evoked in many by the mere contemplation of the act. However, he insists that this recoil goes beyond one’s awareness of the anus’ function of excretion. He discusses the emergence of new aims catalyzed by touching and repetition in erotogenic zones of the body. Freud is particularly focused on the relationship between sexual objects and sado-masochism through the contrast between activity and passivity depicted within the spectrum of desire.

Regardless of their irregularity, Freud insists that all variations, like inversion are special conditions but in no way promote evidence of degeneration. He acknowledges however, the crucial role of the mental factor in all aforementioned sexual instincts. Also introducing the concept of infantile sexuality, discussing different psychoanalytic stages as well as infantile amnesia which has enabled the neglect of the significance of such early lived experiences. He discusses the forming of reactions and sublimation which emerge at the cost of infantile sexual impulses before addressing various manifestations of infantile sexuality. He first discusses thumb-sucking as an early development of infant sexuality, which is followed by pleasure from contraction and release of muscles in the anus allowing for defecation. To Freud, the infantile sexual aim is focused on acquiring satisfaction from appropriate stimulation and repetition. Freud also touches on his theory of the castration complex and penis envy along with mechanical excitations and affective processes.

*Halo in the Sky: Observations on Anality and Defense*
In Halo in the Sky, Shengold reflects on his experiences with various patients in his therapy sessions. He discusses and observes recurring themes of ego defense mechanisms taking place around various topics that result in a patient’s abjection from the subject matter. He brings in various elements from Freud’s discussions on sexuality, ego development, and greater civilization.

Shengold entertains the idea of how Freud’s oedipus complex and observations of repressed anal eroticism reflects the emergence of civilization. He expresses a devotion to the applicability of Freud’s theory of internal drives and the body ego. Shengold explains anality as a psychological, biological, and interpersonal phenomena happening in early childhood and attributes significant human development to Freud’s anal phase. Shengold deconstructs various anal-narcissitic defense structures within his patients and applies them to his own understanding of Freud’s theory. Shengold first identifies theoretical underpinnings of the anal-narcissistic defensive apparatus, then applies case abstracts which support his claims and concludes with a selection of literary classics which advance theoretical arguments surrounding anality.

Reading from Behind

In Reading from Behind, Allan attempts to construct an anal theory to be used for literary analysis. Based on his awareness of the discomfort felt by the general populace surrounding the anus, alongside the female bottom’s dominant role in current media, Allan concludes that the anus possesses captivating qualities. He considers both the orifice and the language when discussing the anus as a governing symbol which explains using a wide range of literary and media examples. Allan takes interest in the
dual-meaning evoked by the anus as both a site of humiliation and disgust as well as fascination and desire.

Allan acknowledges the necessity to discuss the anus alongside homosexuality due to its embrace as an attribute of gay identity. He presents discussions surrounding relevant song lyrics relating to the anus, as well as popular television characters with “anal” personalities. Through reading from behind, Allan hopes to explore what happens to masculinity when the anal consideration is applied to textual analysis. He addresses the problematic nature of reducing sexuality to a preference for certain bodies the according sex organ as well as the elusive “male G spot” found within the anus. To Allan it makes sense that masculinity is threatened by anality because the act of being penetrated is predisposed to associations with femininity in relation to masculinity.

In texts with opportunities for anal reading, Allan finds that past textual analyses have focused predominantly on the phallus. He believes in these texts the anus could be seen as a space of inclusion rather than a site of indifference, in short, he sees the anus as a sign of rich and complex meaning. Allan’s method for reparative reading is seemingly built from the criticisms Eve Sedgwick places upon the generally paranoid nature of reading in academia. Suggesting that rather than frantically hypothesizing conclusions, reparative reading enables a contemplation of vast possible opportunities for development and interpretation. Allan later emphasizes the necessity for masculinity to be observed and critiqued through a pro-feminist agenda in order for it to be refined and widened. He states that any active rejection of anal eroticism occurs as an impulse response due to homohysteric culture.
To Allan, Male femininity is as much about homophobia as it is about misogyny. He connects anal characteristics to the idea of excessiveness and acknowledges an implication that those who are not anal have a better awareness of their limits. Allan also further identifies a necessity for versatility in relation to anal eroticism which remains unevoked by heterosexual intercourse. He also suggests that men experience the feminine perspective of virginity loss through anal intercourse as well. Allan brings together all these points amongst various others in a final return to the problematic nature of orientation, and proposes value in the open fluid nature of queerness.

**Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection**

In her essay, *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva explains her understanding of the term “abjection” within the human experience and a selection of literary analyses. She explains abjection as a response felt by the subject when encountering an object that dissolves the boundaries between object and subject leading to disgust and recoil. Kristeva addresses common sources of abjection within corpses, decay, feces, and various other objects which evoke discomfort within the subject. She builds on both freudian and lacanian understandings of the ego body as well as the symbolic body established within their work.

She connects the experience of abjection to the conventional understanding of cleanliness assacred and dirt as defilement. She finds moments of abjection evoked by the mechanisms of both the death and life drives within one’s unconscious and are observed on the conscious level as desire and exclusions which construct one’s understanding of life. Kristeva finds moments of abjection to be distinguished by subject responses of negation, transgression, denial, and repudiation. She observes a learned
aspect of abjection in connection to discussions of the freudian anal phase, explaining how objects of fascination and expression such as feces become viewed as shameful.

To Kristeva, the subjective homogeneity of the Other leads to the formation of the Other as a form of the Real which becomes inaccessible by any route other than jouissance. She expresses that there is nothing objective about the abject and describes it instead as a frontier for the subject to find existence in its alienation from the Other. She discusses how the abject relates to primal repression as well as signs and separation. To Kristeva, abjection represents a narcissistic crisis, as it upholds the “I” within The Other. She believes that the abject represents the violent mourning of a hypothetical object which has always already been lost.

Kristeva believes the abject experience to pull the ego back to its initial separation from oneness and reestablishes a non-ego death drive. She finds value in this experience conveying that engaging with the abject response leads to new significance within the death drive and the ego. She traces abjection to the idea of phobic desire concluding that the focus on symbolicity as the sole realm of drive and desire allow for preservation of the subject. To Kristeva, this reduction of discourse to the concepts of drives and desires as merely signifiers, ensures the disconnection between verbal signs and drive representations.

Is the Rectum a Grave?

In Is the Rectum a Grave, Bersani tackles the problematic nature of the weaponization of the AIDS virus against the gay community. He puts forth questions about the association between forms of eroticism and gay identity and argues that they limit the spectrum of understanding within one’s sexuality. He addresses the
homophobic nature of the way news about HIV and AIDS were shared outwardly as a disease being spread by homosexuals to attack heterosexual families. For Bersani, the media’s representation of HIV/AIDS further vilified the gay community and created the illusion of legitimacy behind homophobic behavior. Surprisingly, in the language used, He finds greater aversion to the idea of polysexuality and multiple sex partners than homosexual community.

Bersani presents a series of disheartening misunderstandings surrounding the HIV virus which led to unfair court rulings against openly gay individuals. He believed that the portrayal of gay identity in the media led to an exclusion of homosexuals from the traditional American family structure. While other marginalized groups were pandered to by the American government and media, the lack of political unity amongst the gay community led to a lack of tactical utility in supporting the American gay identity.

To Bersani, this is what led to the construction of homosexuality as a political-sexual identity which he believed to be de-homosexualized and socialized with a sexual essence. Bersani brings these critiques forward primarily to showcase his belief that a direct relationship exists through the way in which sexual pleasure influences politics. Bersani expresses a concern that gay men run the risk of idealizing a feeling of inferiority to the constructed form of masculinity which seemingly rejects them. He feels the object of desire cannot be merely innate and must necessarily include socially determined and socially pervasive definitions of male identity. He breaks down the ideology constructed around the denial of homosexual desire and argues that the sexist power of maleness which survives social revolutions is threatened by homosexuality and thus responds as though the male identity is being violated.
Even in the face of facts regarding the means of contracting HIV/AIDS, Bersani observes media which continues to push for the ousting of homosexuals from one’s community. He also acknowledges a widespread misunderstanding of heterosexual intercourse as vaginal and homosexual intercourse as anal, simultaneously exposing innately sexist portrayals of feminine sexuality as diseased and promiscuous. Bersani then takes his conversation to the observations of Greece by Foucault to address their standards of male beauty and taboo against passive anal eroticism. He also finds ways that male supremacy prevails through the roles portrayed in pornography. He concludes that investigations must take place in the margins of the perceived understanding to identify falsity in order to address the tangled core of sexuality misrepresentation.

**The Weather in Proust**

*The Weather in Proust* displays a collection of Sedgwick’s writing surrounding Marcel Proust. She integrates aspects of queer theory previously established in her writings and emphasizes her defense against reactionary rejections to Guy Hocquenghem’s writing. She touches on aspects of neo-platonic thought and buddhism while identifying intersections between various pieces of literature. In a discussion on affect theory, Sedgwick challenges approaches with single normative outcomes, and pushes her peers to explore the variety of potential outcomes rather than teleological conclusions that reject any upheaval of pre-established fact. She encourages questioning the deep-rooted nature of perceived qualitative differences and promotes an embrace of theories, placing value in the feedback which allows these theories to be refined and developed.
The second segment of Sedgwick’s book is directly related to the concept of anality, emphasizing the necessity to bring attention to the repressed bodily zone of the anus as well the pleasure that might ensue as the anus is thought to catalyze social breakdown and reconstruction. She sees interaction with one’s anal eroticism as inextricable from the undoing of patriarchy, homophobia, and racist colonialism. She sees the anus as a place where gender binaries are sustained or overthrown. Sedgwick acknowledges one’s abject response to anal eroticism and questions what sort of drive would compel one to engage with a site of debasing identity. She questions the embrace of “outsider status” which appears as a resounding theme of anal eroticism but clearly doesn't reflect the predominant nature of the homosexual community.

Sedgwick expresses a direct relationship between phallic hegemony and the sublimated anus as the guarantor of masculinity. In her view, masculinity is limited by the phallic hegemony and ought to be broadened until it can achieve an all encompassing definition. She then transitions to investigating the minorification of homosexuality alongside the universalization of bisexuality expressed in psychoanalysis. She expands on her list of traits which are overlooked by the binary understanding of sexual orientation.

To Sedgwick, the terminology of the queer classification expresses the possibilities of gaps, overlaps, dissonances, and resonances which one sexuality cannot be seen to recognize appropriately. She concludes her book with an essay on the idea of reality, correcting it’s conventional understanding as truth, to rather merely what has been realized. Unlike truth which Sedgwick connects to Buddhist understandings of existence, the order of reality is spatial and temporal. She expresses
that there is significance in redefining this term to correct one's relationship between knowing, and realizing what they believe as truth.

**Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity.**

In *Touching Feeling*, Sedgwick presents a selection of her essays which she believes to be promising tools and techniques for non-dualistic thought and pedagogy. She breaks up the book into fragments, each providing insight into the project's means of deconstructing linear argument frequently found in academia. She identifies various contrivances throughout pre-existing literature on sexuality by focusing predominantly on a small selection of theoretical texts which she believes establish the framework for much of current queer theory and critical theory.

In a specific essay discussing the outcomes of paranoid reading, Sedgwick addresses academia’s tendency to view writings with a persistently teleological nature and questions the legitimacy of such linear outcomes. She critiques the need to look for something specific within a text or searching for points which support the claim one is attempting to make about the text. Sedgwick finds this approach to literary analysis to be increasingly problematic for proposing new interpretations or discovering understandings outside of one’s limited range of focus. She proceeds to further question the linear nature of the fixated questions provided by the pursuit of knowledge, suggesting that there are ways in which knowledge is solely performative and the way in which one moves amongst its causes and effects.

Sedgwick finds root causes of knowledge’s flaws within the necessity for historicization and the hermeneutics of suspicion in order to possess legitimacy. She introduces Hocquenghem’s discussion on homosexual paranoia, arguing that paranoia
became the object of homophobic theory and consequently became treated as a methodology for drawing conclusions. She addresses both structural and historical reasons for this outcome to understand how paranoia became an epistemological practice while actively seeking possible alternatives. Repeatedly, Sedgwick attempts to hypothetically disentangle the question of truth value from the question of performative effect. To Sedgwick, paranoid conclusions are anticipatory, reflexive, negative, rooted in exposure, and dwell amongst competing theories which constitute one's mental ecology. She finds paranoid theory to be normative and emphasizes a necessity for questioning and resistance to invasive mentality.

The Freudian Body: Psychoanalysis and Art

In The Freudian Body, Leo Bersani wrestles with a series of freudian concepts in relation to a series of works of modern art. Bersani addresses the ebbs and flows of Freud's legitimacy in various academic fields while questioning whether Freud's reputation has benefited or suffered from the critical analysis of his writing. He discusses Freud's application in literary studies as well as his renewed conceptual embrace in modern psychoanalysis. Bersani looks at Freud's concepts of the ego and id as well as the pleasure principle, death drive, and his theory of sexuality while integrating refinements of the theory supplemented by Lacan. He points out the contradiction between Freud's conceptual models, and the freudian body he has depicted in his theorization surrounding the oedipus complex.

Bersani acknowledges where Freud mis-steps by assuming certain understandings of the human body to be “common knowledge” and presents various situations where Freud addresses what he believes to be the clearly phallic nature of
human society. Bersani synthesizes Freud’s essay to address how civilization utilizes symbolic sexuality as a crux which upholds the system of heteronormative beliefs. Bersani continues his deconstruction of sexuality in relation to society by observing the anatomy of sexual desire. He integrates elements of the oceanic feeling, and questions the experiences relationship to the sexual function itself. Bersani finds examples of Freud’s concepts throughout various classical literature and art to convey the impact of Freud’s observations while posing new questions about the meaning which can be found at sites of contradiction within Freudian concepts.

**Epistemology of the Closet**

In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick observes the outcomes of limiting understandings of sexuality and desire into the binary of heterosexuality and homosexuality. She questions how the difference in gender has become the defining feature for the categorization of vast sexual desires while appearing to be the least sexual feature of an individual’s eroticism. In accordance with the title of her book, she discusses the language of “closetedness” and observes the performance as a “speech act of silence”. Through historical cases and postmodern critical theorists, she examines the epistemology of homosexual classification as it divided humans into nearly separate species due to their sexual orientation.

To Sedgwick, deconstructing these binaries exposes the lasting impact and manipulation enabled by these sites of understanding. Rather than building on an established definition of homosexuality and heterosexuality, Sedgwick wishes to resist “pretended knowingness” established by the diction’s history and acknowledge a lack of knowledge as to the ends of which her insights are generalizable or abstract. She
observes the desire unveiled through the dichotomy of homophobic and homosocial relationships from nineteenth-century English literature and fights to show how these observations apply to the greater whole of humanity rather than a niche demographic based on sexual identity. She questions the legitimacy of "homosexual panic" and reduces historical disputes over gay bashing to violent portrayal of homosexuals attempting to infect heterosexuals with their desires.

Although she attempts to universalize the value of understanding regarding sexuality, Sedgwick clearly states that people are in fact different from each other. Sedgwick understands that sexuality can be reduced for some to merely genital acts while it can be an all encompassing identity for others. Furthermore, the same genital act can have significant and diverse symbolic meanings for different individuals. Although intersections between sexuality and gender are common, Sedgwick also makes clear that the studies are not coextensive and should be explored in different directions from each other as they develop. She further explores the binary between biological sex and gender identity, as well as relationships between sexuality and reproduction. Sedgwick mentions that one cannot know the ends to which lesbian and gay identities can be conceptualized together or separately. Sedgwick concludes by discussing the falsities which debates of nature versus nurture are constructed on while likewise suggesting that searching for significant ideological shifts around homosexuality in the past may obstruct making progress.
Works Cited


