



PANIC AT THE DISCOURSE

An Interdisciplinary Journal

Foreword: Creative Representations and Fucking Possibilities

Morgan Oddie and Michelle Smith

Panic at the Discourse: An Interdisciplinary Journal, Volume 2, Issue 1, February 2022, pp. 1-3.

Published by Panic at the Discourse.
ISSN 2562-542X(Online)

© The Author(s) and Panic at the Discourse, 2022.

For additional information, reprints and permission:
www.panicdiscourse.com

Foreword: Creative Representations and Fucking Possibilities

Morgan Oddie and Michelle Smith

Fucking up oppressions *through fucking* is truly a radical act. By examining representations of non-normative sexuality with particular attention to popular culture, this issue examines challenges to entrenched systems that circumscribe possibilities of pleasure and dictate a regime of privileged access to sexuality. Normative sexuality and its expressions are rooted in the forces of cisheteropatriarchy, reinforced by settler colonialism and white supremacy. These systems buttress the violence of racism, misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, and ableism, and the ways that violence is lived out in the politics of desire and the organization of sex and bodies. Representations of non-normative sexualities purposefully push back against these very systems of power and oppression. And the greater creative and queer potential for pleasure and erotic joy help us imagine and discover more avenues for bodies and their expressions.

The COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally changed the way we engage in labour, sex, and almost all aspects of life. Some established communities of sexual practitioners turned online, changing the inherent expression of sexual embodiment. In 2021, we saw online kink conferences, Zoom leatherdyke meetings, the expansion of online sex toy sales, and other creative outputs as we reimagined the implications of safety for safer sex. It also seems that many, vanilla mainstream or otherwise, turned to popular culture for distraction, entertainment and escape, solidifying it as an even more important representation of the worlds we exist in because of limitations to other access and interactions. Representation has always been essential in how those who encounter it are able to imagine themselves in worldbuilding and are sometimes even exposed to the language they might use to express themselves.

In this issue, the authors have taken up the representations of non-normative sexuality in a wide variety of ways. There are definite tensions to mainstream representations of topics that challenge cultural norms. “Reconciling Identities in HBO’s Room 104” reminds us that religiosity is another force that may impact sexualities. In a discussion of the HBO anthology’s exploration of Mormon missionaries, Chris Miller unpacks how cultural tropes of Mormon sexuality are reinscribed through the sensationalist representations of polygamy and repression. But Miller goes on to complicate the depictions of the missionary young men’s exploration of sexual taboos by centring the discussion on the real-life Church’s reactions to “same sex attraction.”

Like the critiques of failures in representing non-normative culture that Miller makes about Mormonism, Liz Borden’s “On Baring One’s Breasts” tackles popular culture

representations of non-monogamies and the systems of privilege that reinforce sexual and relational normativity. Settler colonialism and racism have shaped the moral acceptability of non-normative relationships and by extension the way they are presented and engaged with in public discourse. Borden begins with an autoethnographic account of their own interactions with non-monogamy in popular culture as a polyamorous academic. Importantly, Borden asks who is represented in the evolving framework and how do these representations maintain and legitimize social privileges and inequalities along the lines of race, gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, and nationality to form a new kind of polynormativity that is the least threatening to dominant culture?

Theorizing representation through re-reading previous texts is another strategy undertaken to disrupt conventions of bodies, identities, and desires. A postmodern reading of the Dinosaur as the principal heroic figure in *Jurassic Park* (1993), is undertaken by Alex Ventimilla in “Becoming-Dinosaur.” By disrupting and resisting facets of binary biopower, argues Ventimilla, the Dinosaur becomes the hero of the entire film. As such, it moves away from normative heterosexism and anthropocentrism towards a reimagining of what may be, or rather become.

Turning towards queer identity formations, authors also took up subversive elements of desire and political needs. The do-it-yourself (D.I.Y.) necessity of non-normative sexuality has bred countercultural belongings that disrupt normative expectations of sexuality under late capitalism. Borrowing from Elizabeth Freeman’s notion of chrononormativity, Amy Keating’s “Taking a Moment” provides an autoethnographic and affective reflection on a personal encounter with the band *Hunx and His Punx*. Reflecting on this multifaceted “queercore concert,” Keating argues that ‘a queer sense of belonging’ was fostered within the temporal space through a combination of elements, such as the D.I.Y. punk aesthetics. Specifically, it created a queer timeline outside of chrononormativity that allowed all those in the moment to share in a sense of relief of the capitalist and heteronormative time.

“Micro-activist Affordances meets Disidentification” theorizes the disruptive potential of crip sex. Disabled bodies are degendered and desexualized, so the very acts of sex, masturbation, and participation in kink could be recognized as micro-activist affordances by merit of their discursive disruption. As Quinn Valencourt goes on to point out, this political power has the potential to force ableist confrontation with the sexuality of functional diversity. The D.I.Y. queering of everyday objects has long been a strategy in kink that takes on new forms when considering crip potentials.

In “‘Playing’ With Race: BDSM, Race Play, and Whiteness in Kink,” Morgan Oddie takes up race play as a BDSM to discuss racial privilege in kink spaces. While BDSM is often assumed to be automatically subversive of cultural norms, they examine how race play forces a confrontation because it disallows the concealment of the presence of unequal racialized

relations in BDSM practices precisely because it draws on real historical and contemporary relations of racism as a tool for constructing power dynamics.

Queer pleasure is radical. It creates possibilities that confront normative limitations and provides wider alternatives, which means that fewer bodies are denied pleasure. This is not to solely equate pleasure with only sex, as there are other-than-sex potentials that should not be ignored, at the risk of reinforcing conventional hierarchies.¹ As Michel Foucault concluded in the first volume of the *History of Sexuality*,

It is the agency of sex that we must break away from if we aim—through a tactical reversal of the various mechanisms of sexuality—to counter the grips of power with the claims of bodies, pleasers, and knowledges in their multiplicity and their possibility of resistance. The rallying point for the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality ought not to be sex-desire, but bodies and pleasures.²

Creative reimagination turns pleasure away from the oppressive structures of heteronormative patriarchy and disrupts investments in colonialism, white supremacy, and ableism that restrict the expressions of sexuality. How non-normative sexuality is represented and experienced in and through popular culture is an important area of analysis because “[culture is a] critical site of social action and intervention, where power relations are both established and potentially unsettled.”³ And therefore, it unsettles the established structures as it reimagines the cultural lens to be more representative of the world it reflects.

Notes

¹ Morgan Oddie, “BDSM and Women’s Gendered Embodiment: Other-Than-Sex Pleasure, Pain, and Power,” PhD Diss. (Kingston, ON: Queen’s University, 2020).

² Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume One: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1990), 157.

³ James Procter, *Stuart Hall* (London: Routledge, 2004), 2.