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Politics of Love Modeled on Queer: Cruising or Community as Method?❖

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ABSTRACT

This essay starts with Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's call for "politics of love" as the basis of their formulation of global resistance, which they intriguingly exemplify with gay cruising and anonymous sex. Picking up this interesting lead, the essay first seeks to substantiate their rather sketchy proposal with queer critic Leo Bersani's provocative theorization of those very forms of queer connecting, in order to interrogate the real compatibility between the two. While it is suggested that they are in effect not an easy fit but rather illustrating the romanticization of queer on Hardt and Negri's part, their proposal intent on conceptualizing new ways of "living together" is simply too inspiring to be given up. Therefore, in the second half of the essay, an alternative mode of substantiation is instead provided in the celebrated French debate on community between Jean-Luc Nancy, Georges Bataille (in absentia), and Maurice Blanchot, with special focus on the streak of "love" that runs through the original exchange but is largely overlooked. And also intriguingly enough, this line of thinking still ends with a rather queer tone, as Blanchot illustrates his most open formulation of love/community through Marguerite Duras's novella *The Malady of Death*, which in fact is also a queer story that happens between a homosexual man and a straight woman. By providing prominent real-life examples for it (Duras herself as well as Hannah Arendt and W. H. Auden), this essay concludes with arguing for this other mode of queer connecting as the more suitable exemplar of Hardt and Negri's project of politicizing love.

KEYWORDS: love, politics, queer, antisocial thesis, cruising, community

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In *Commonwealth* (2009), the concluding volume of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire* (2000) trilogy that maps out the rising global regime as well as the possible resistances to it, they pick up where they merely hint at near the end of the second volume, *Multitude* (2004), and eventually call for "love" as one of the means that could be mobilized for intervention in all this, mainly because of its ability to create "the common" (*Commonwealth* x-xi). But whereas the first time they mention it, "love" still appears a "premodern" concept in the Christian and Judaic tradition of "loving thy neighbor" (Hardt and Negri, *Multitude* 351), this time when it is brought up for a full elaboration, it is no longer the old religious tenet that may be difficult to be revamped for contemporary use, but replaced altogether by a certain version of the modern, romantic sentiment that we more commonly refer to when talking of love nowadays. I say "a certain version" because first, by distinguishing it from what they call the "corrupt forms"—namely "identitarian love" ("to love those most proximate, those most like you," such as "family love," "race love" or "nation love") and "communal love" (what "poses love as a process of unification, of becoming the same," such as "romantic love")—Hardt and Negri make it clear what they aim at is love "of the stranger, love of the farthest, and love of alterity" (*Commonwealth* 182). Second, more intriguingly, the illustration they choose for their ideal version of love is, first, "Walt Whitman's poetry, in which the love of the stranger continually reappears as an encounter characterized by wonder, growth, and discovery" (182-83). Then, after citing Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze's fable of orchids and wasps to further elucidate their ideal love for the Other,[1] they interpret it as "evok[ing] scenarios of cruising and serial sex common to some gay male communities, especially before the onslaught of the AIDS pandemic, like passages from the writings of Jean Genet, David Wojnarowicz, and Samuel Delany" (187).

Despite their hasty disclaimer that "[t]his is not saying that cruising and anonymous sex serve as a model of love . . . but rather that they provide an antidote to the corruptions of love in the couple and the family, opening love up to the encounter of singularities" (Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth* 187), this evocation of pre-AIDS gay culture as well as the trio of contemporary queer

[1] While the fable eventually appears in Guattari and Deleuze's *A Thousand Plateaus* (10 *passim*), Hardt and Negri take it instead from Guattari's working papers (*Anti-Oedipus Papers* 179), where its discussion, for still being experimented with and tried out in various ways, is far more interesting. Yet none of them (including Hardt and Negri) ever mention the fact that, of particular interest to the present essay, the fable originally comes from Marcel Proust's famous analogy for gay cruising; see below.

writers/artists, along with Whitman, no doubt amounts to an exemplification of certain characteristic forms of queer connecting as *the* illustration of their politics of love. In fact, in a recent interview, Hardt, after agreeing with the interviewer that their "politics of love" is related to the idea of "multitude" (Interview with Ceren Özselçuk 6-7), admits that "Toni [Antonio Negri] and I have found the queer theory is an important framework for thinking multitude . . . . The anti-identity vein of queer theory functions through disidentification—and even the construction of *community* through differences and not through sameness and identities" (my emphasis).[2]

This is indeed an intriguing development for the relationship between the dominant and the queer, which in such a short span of time (slightly more than a hundred years) has not only struggled out of the marginal darkness of the underworld but moved to stage center extolled as the exemplar of some major innovative political idea. As laudatory as this seems to be, this drastic change of situations should alert us to ask: Is the dominant truly ready to embrace queer as the harbinger of new forms of "living together" or is such an embrace in fact based on a romanticized valorization that is quite distant from the real? As Hardt and Negri say only this much about their politics of love and there is no way, in any one essay, of properly examining all their queer exemplars,[3] in what follows I will try to answer this question by turning to one particular queer critic's provocative theorization of gay cruising and anonymous sex, namely the "antisocial thesis" elaborated by Leo Bersani.[4] The reason I have chosen

[2] Hardt himself has also undertaken this exemplification of queer roughly at the same time as *Commonwealth*, in an essay titled "Pasolini Discovers Love Outside," which glorifies the leftist Italian film director's early (in the 1940s) cross-class homosexual love at a small village in Northeastern Italy that was in revolt at the time. Hardt praises Pasolini's love affair with local boys as "a political form of love" ("Pasolini" 125), both a "love outside" (113)—i.e. with people whose class background (farmer) is different from his (bourgeois)—and "a red love" (113)—as it is argued to be "inseparable" from and thus combined with Pasolini's commitment to communism. And he continues in this vein in another essay titled "Procedures of Love" to use Marcel Proust as well Jean Genet to further develop his idea of politics of love (albeit for aspects other than the one explained here).

[3] I have, therefore, also examined this polemic as part of my forthcoming essay on Walt Whitman.

[4] Although some (including Bersani himself, see Tuhkanen, "Rigorously" 279-80) have disputed the label "queer" as the right tag for him, I still describe him as such for no other characterization suits him better—Mikko Tuhkanen argues the same after raising the problem in his introduction to the first collection of essays on Bersani that is edited by him. As to "antisocial," although the idea is there, it is not really a term used by Bersani himself, but an umbrella designation that has been popularized since the 2005 MLA panel "The Antisocial Thesis in Queer Theory" (see *PMLA* 121.3 [May 2006]: 819-28), which was organized by Robert L. Caserio as a debate between the "antisocial" proponents (Edelman; Dean, "Antisocial") and their critiquing opponents (Halberstam; Muñoz, "Thinking"). The term that is closest to a label used by Bersani to describe his own stance is "anticommunitarian" (*Homos* 7, 53), which conveniently pits his stance against the substitution proposed in the second half of this essay, though it is actually not as radical as it looks. Also, it is argued by some (e.g. Weiner

Bersani over others whose theorizations of those very practices of queer connecting seem to chime perfectly well with Hardt and Negri's proposal—most notably Samuel Delany, whose conceptualization of casual (sexual) "contact" (vs. "networking") as crisscrossing class barriers (123 *passim*) may be the very basis for their politicization of love, or Tim Dean, who closely follows Delany on this and eulogizes (barebacking) cruising, *à la* Foucault ("Friendship"), as "a way of life" that is "exemplary" for a "relational ethic" exhibiting "a remarkably hospitable disposition toward strangers" and an "openness to alterity" (Dean, *Unlimited* 176)—is to avoid tautological confirmation and enable critical interrogations,[5] because only such a daring provocative stance as Bersani's can wedge apart some interstitial space for cross-examinations.[6]

While in the end cruising may not seem to be an easy fit with Hardt and Negri's repoliticization of love, this project of theirs is simply too inspirational to be given up *tout court*. That is why, in the second half of this essay, I will seek to substantiate their proposal by bringing in another line of thinking which does not look relevant at first but is actually more akin to it, namely the renowned French theoretical debate on community that is started by Jean-Luc Nancy (with Georges Bataille *in absentia*) and soon joined by, among others, Bataille's friend Maurice Blanchot.[7] Rather than engaging with the debate up

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and Young 224) that Bersani's antisocial thesis is actually preceded by the French gay liberationist Guy Hocquenghem's position, who voiced in the 1970s: "Homosexual desire is a group desire; it groups the anus by restoring its functions as a desiring bond, and by collectively reinvesting it *against* a society which has reduced it to the state of a shameful little secret" (111; my emphasis). However, this early articulation is quite scant, leaving little for further theorization other than that homosexuality forms a libidinal, anal sociality of its own against the dominant one of hypocrisy. For Hocquenghem the person and his historical context, see Marshall or, more detail, Idier.

[5] As far as I know, the only critic who ever brings Hardt and Negri's politics of love together (tangentially though) with Bersani is Tom Roach (118-22). Yet Roach does not really take Hardt and Negri's queer exemplification seriously but dismisses it as nothing but expedient tokenism; nor does he draw in Bersani's antisocial thesis here except for his view on gay anal sex in the legendary "Rectum" essay, used to question "the gendered and heteronormative realities of their idealized political project" (121). However, his overall framework of "friendship" may be another way of approaching the problematics here.

[6] This, of course, does not foreclose the future usefulness or necessity of engaging with other theorizations of cruising that may extend, transform, or even challenge the arguments here. For example, the recent, interesting work *The Logic of the Lure* by John Paul Ricco, which seems to run parallel with this essay on many accounts, may be one such possibility; or the late José Esteban Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia*, which, despite its title, does not really focus on cruising as a sex act *per se*, but only within a bigger historical context (18).

[7] The only critics, as far as I know, who ever suggest the possibility of articulating the French debate on community with queer are Joshua J. Weiner and Damon Young in their introduction to the "Queer Bonds" special issue of *GLQ* (17.2-3, 2011). However, they do not really venture much further than mentioning this possibility (238n8).

front, however, I will approach it in a slightly oblique way by focusing on a particular streak that runs through the debate but is largely neglected in secondary literature, namely the subject of love, which not only provides a quick access to the core differences between the three thinkers in debate but also renders the debate into a more useful resource for Hardt and Negri's proposed politics of love. And even more interestingly, this alternative substantiation, though seeming to be as mainstream as it can be, in effect also turns out to quite queer, as the narrative that Blanchot chooses to illustrate his stance with—namely Marguerite Duras's novella *The Malady of Death*—features none other than a form of queer connecting, only probably not as radical or progressive as cruising is deemed to be in the current theorization.

I. Cruising Strangers: Queer Antisociality

Bersani first articulates his purposely provocative stance in the now legendary essay "Is the Rectum a Grave?" (1987), in which he proposes to take the homophobic imaginations of homosexuality seriously for they may contain "truths" about the latter (as least as the latter is formed under the homophobic regime).[8] After nearly a decade of preparation,[9] he eventually comes back with a fully developed articulation of this stance in *Homos* (1995), by putting forth a series of counterintuitive and even counter-homonormative theorizations, with the so-called "antisocial thesis" being the paramount one among them.[10] Typical of the above provocation, Bersani thus declares about the latter right at the beginning:

> Although there are valid grounds for questioning the assumption that desire between men, or between women, is desire for "the same," it is also true that because our apprenticeship in desiring takes place within that assumption, homosexuality can become a privileged model of sameness . . . . Perhaps inherent in gay desire is a *revolutionary inaptitude for heteroized sociality*. This of course

[8] Besides certain "unpleasant" truths about homosexuality in particular, the article also puts forth one about sex in general that is related to the present discussion, namely: sex in effect is "anticommunal, antiegalitarian, antinurturing, antiloving" (Bersani, "Is the Rectum a Grave?" 22).

[9] For a brief discussion of his writing career, see Tuhkanen, Introduction 2-21.

[10] The stance is also reiterated in several essays of Part 1 of the collection *Is the Rectum a Grave? And Other Essays*.

> means sociality as we know it, and the most politically disruptive aspect of the homo-ness I will be exploring in gay desire is a redefinition of sociality so radical that it may appear to require a provisional withdrawal from relationality itself.
> (*Homos* 6-7; my emphasis)

While gay-affirmative critics used to painstakingly dispute such a disparaging link between homosexuality and love of the same (read: narcissism),[11] Bersani instead sees in it a political potential for radical alternatives to the existing sociality which he laments as deeply entrenched in "difference" (more on this later). However, though he calls this potential "anticommunitarian," what he actually means is not really the cancelling-out of all communities, but an "anticommunal mode of connectedness we might all share, or a new way of coming together," with the "anti-" meaning just the refusal of "assimilation into already constituted communities" (10), mainstream or gay.[12]

Bersani's transvaluative conceptualization of homosexuality as alternative sociality is not just an abstraction, but one based on the real-life experience of gay cruising and anonymous sex, which he seeks to articulate indirectly through three literary texts, namely André Gide's *The Immoralist* (1902), Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Times* (1913-27), and Jean Genet's *Funeral Rites* (1948).[13] As they appear in this chronological order in Bersani's exposition, in what follows I will shift the first two for a better rendering of his arguments.

Therefore first enters Proust. At the end of the short Part One (which acts as a prologue or introduction) of *Sodom and Gomorrah*, the fourth volume of Proust's *In Search of Lost Times*, the authorial narrator famously (or rather notoriously) puts forth the sarcastic observation that "inverts"—that is how some sexologists conceptualized homosexuals at that time, e.g. male homosexuals as really women in the inside desiring men, see Carlston—will never form a community of their own if given other choices, that is, only when out of desperation (Proust 36-38). Taking cue from this (self-)deprecatory

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[11] See, for example, Michael Warner's "Homo-Narcissism."

[12] For Bersani's commitment to exploring the Foucauldian "new relational modes" ("Social Triumph") through such theorization, see his later admission in *Is the Rectum* ix-x and Tuhkanen, "Rigorously" 280. I will come back to Foucault on this at the end of the essay.

[13] For those texts mentioned in the essay whose original language is not English, the dates noted in parentheses are of their original publications rather than those of their translations. For the latter, see Works Cited.

assertion, Bersani nevertheless sees in it "the necessary basis for a new community of inversion" which would lead to "a redefinition of community itself, one that would be considerably less indebted than we now are to the communal virtues elaborated by those [i.e. the dominant] who want us to disappear" (*Homos* 131). And he goes back to the opening scene of the comic cruising between Charlus and Jupien that precedes this rant to demonstrate how.

Bersani first finds faults with Proust's inversion model by seeing its convoluted gender scheme as the prime example of "the heterosexual project par excellence," which thinks that "homosexuality is nothing but disguised or mistaken heterosexuality" (*Homos* 134). For him, the problem with all this is not the erasure of homosexuality *per se*, but the detrimental effects of double self-othering, not only in the sense that one's interiority becomes an internalized otherness (140) but that we eroticize and desire only "that which we are not" (141), thus making both doomed for "permanent self-alienation." This is what Bersani attacks as "psychology of desire" throughout the book, for its valorization of difference and emphasis on intersubjectivity (124) will always be traumatizing and self-defeating in its "hopeless dream of eliminating difference entirely" (146). Yet this constitutes the dominant, "universal heterosexual—or heteroized" relationality, or "sociality" as we know it (142).

Bersani, however, sees a way out of this elsewhere in the same episode, in the rather peculiar analogy of comparing the cruising of two men (which happens right in a garden) to the proximate scene of an orchid enticing a bee for fertilization.[14] Although the narrator's original point clearly lies in the singularity and difficulty of gay matching,[15] Bersani reads it as allegorizing cross-species *identification*, namely, showing that all creatures actually exist "in a vast network of *near-sameness*, a network characterized by relations of inaccurate replication" (*Homos* 146)—which is greatly laudable because "[t]o recognize universal homo-ness can allay the terror of difference." When even the cross-species gap is leveled, we can then "depersonalize the pickup scene between these two men-women, to remove from that scene psychologically recognizable individuals" (147). That is, the cruising scene of Charlus and

[14] This should be the original source for the Guattari and Deleuze fable that Hardt and Negri refer to above (see note 1).

[15] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick says, before showing how the text deconstructs itself on this point: "The point continually emphasized in the analogy between Charlus's situation and that of the orchid is simply the pathos of how unlikely fulfillment is, of how absurdly, impossibly specialized and difficult is the need of each" (220).

Jupien analogized as bee and orchid can thus provide the model for conceptualizing a thoroughly *homo*-sexualized version of queer connecting. Bersani spells it out directly: "When a man recognizes another man's desire [in cruising], he is also learning something about the other's identity, not exactly what kind of person he is, but what kind of group he belongs to. In short, he both knows him and doesn't know him" (147).

Bersani sees great political potential in this "knowing ignorance that brings two strangers' bodies together" (*Homos* 149), as it demands no real intimacy from the other (151) and is thus devoid of the problematic "psychology of desire." And this is also what Bersani reads into the French protagonist Michel's encounters with Arab boys in the colonial Maghreb in which Gide's novella *The Immoralist* culminates. In what looks like a vampiric, imperialist sexploitation of those boys—Michel recovers his health through them but none of whom matters much in the narrative—Bersani once again finds "a precondition for a potentially revolutionary eroticism" instead (122). As astounding as this may sound, it is actually based on the fact that, in the process of his recovery, Michel has also divested himself of all "the layers of 'acquired knowledge'" (119) and thus become "a bodily ego" whose boundary has disappeared, or more accurately, "a *desiring skin*" whose "narcissistic expansion . . . is also the renunciation of narcissistic self-containment" (120). With himself devoid of ego or subjectivity, Bersani argues, Michel's contacts with local boys are "nothing more than to touch inaccurate replications of himself, extensions of himself" (124). And his dis-interest and indifference to them as well as the "superficiality of their contacts"—while indeed "reflect[ing] a more or less conscious conviction of the inherent inferiority of these sexual partners" (122) as any postcolonial critique would reckon it—hence strike Bersani as potentially revolutionary because they are "[u]ntroubled and unconcerned by difference" (124) and therefore "nonrelational" (123).

If Michel's de-subjectivizing process, crucial in this syllogism, sounds sophistic, that is because Bersani is probably thinking about (but does not say out loud) the experience of "losing oneself" in sex and particularly in anonymous sex.[16] Similarly, while analyzing an encounter that looks like sex

[16] See, for example, the testimony by another of Hardt and Negri's queer exempla, namely the American artist David Wojnarowicz, whose experience of cruising is acutely summarized by Kevin Floyd: "Wojnarowicz depicts the pursuit of sex [along the Hudson river piers] as the pursuit of an orgasmic overcoming of the socially engineered privacy that others him, a disintegration of the isolate self that is simultaneous with an integration of bodies. In a ceaseless collective search, discrete bodies give

tourism today, he is actually describing the (non)relationality underlying the anonymous sexual encounters of gay cruising:

> Michel's pederasty is the model for intimacies devoid of intimacy. It proposes that we move irresponsibly among other bodies, somewhat indifferent to them, demanding nothing more than that they be as available to contact as we are, and that, no longer owned by others, they also renounce self-ownership and agree to that loss of boundaries which will allow them to be, with us, shifting points of rest in a universal and mobile communication of being.
> (*Homos* 128)

Therefore the (non)relationality constituted by cruising is not only devoid of the will to knowing that characterizes the ordinary relationship but also enacts a particular mode of intimacy, "in which the other, no longer respected or violated as a person, would merely be cruised as another opportunity, at once insignificant and precious, for narcissistic pleasures" (129). In other words, if this constitutes a community of a different kind, it is indeed an anti-community, that is, a community unlike any other, that functions with indifference to rather than valorization of the other.[17]

If compared with other theorizations of cruising (for example, that of Delany's and Dean's as mentioned at the beginning of this essay), it is clear that Bersani is being consistent with his anti-"redemptive" stance—i.e. what he calls the tendency to "pastoralize" sex as "less disturbing, less socially abrasive, less violent" than it actually is ("Is the Rectum" 22)—in theorizing about cruising much more frankly and crudely. While Delany emphasizes its cross-class potential that may lead to sexual or "nonsexual friendships and/or acquaintances lasting for decades or a lifetime" (123), Dean glorifies it further with a Whitmanian rhetoric by calling it "stranger loving" (*Unlimited* 177), even though he is actually closer to Bersani in being adamant against "networking" of any kind and insists that strangers should remain as such both

way to physical commingling and 'the subtle water movements of shadows,' to body parts and motion, alternately vivid and vague, luminous and shadowy images of arms, backs, necks" (217).

[17] Compare with Michael Warner's communitarian description of cruising: "Contrary to myth, what one relishes in loving strangers is not mere anonymity, nor meaningless release. It is the pleasure of belonging to a sexual world, in which one's sexuality finds an answering resonance not just in one other, but in a world of others. Strangers have an ability to represent a world of others in a way that one sustained intimacy cannot" (*Trouble* 179).

before and after hooking up (211-12).[18] In contrast, Bersani not only refrains from ever using the word "love" in his discussion of cruising, but he actually theorizes it as nonrelational or even "antirelational" (*Homos* 169) throughout—a stance he makes most clear in his subsequent reading of Jean Genet's *Funeral Rites*. In this purposely outrageous novel of betrayal and Naziphilia, he chooses to focus on one particular homosex act—namely "*coitus a tergo*" (Genet 164), i.e. anal sex from behind—and reads it as "sex without exchanges" and "sexual pleasure . . . distinct from sexual intimacy" (165), i.e. anything but what is implied by the colloquial expression "making love":

> Our culture tells us to think of sex as the ultimate privacy, as that intimate knowledge of the other on which the familial cell is built. Enjoy the rapture that will never be made public, that will also (though this is not said) keep you safely, docilely out of the public realm, that will make you content to allow others to make history while you perfect the oval of a merely copulative or familial intimacy. The sodomist, the public enemy, the traitor, the murderer . . . are ideally unsuited for such intimacies. Excluded from all triumphant communities . . . they are reduced, or elevated, to a kind of objectless or generalized ejaculation, a fucking of the world rather than each other. (165-66)

In other words, Bersani once again picks up a homophobic formulation—the traditional demonization of sodomy (and later homosexuality) in this case (see Bray 19-30)—and reorients it as a purposely queer "pursuit of evil" (*Homos* 159), intended "not as a crime against socially defined good, but as a turning away from the entire theater of good" (163). That is why, in this final reading of *Funeral Rites*, Bersani not only proclaims "betrayal" as "congenial to homosexuality" (153)—for the novel starts as a memorial for a lover who, as a resistance fighter against occupation, dies in the hands of the Nazis but soon turns to idolize the collaborator who is responsible for his death—but even goes so far as affirming Genet's fantasization of the Nazis (including the Führer), for that would stand as "the betrayal of all human ties, the attempted murder of

[18] Dean says at the end of *Unlimited Intimacy*: "Throughout this book, I have tried to explore how we may relate to others and even become intimately engaged with them without needing to know or identify with them" (212).

humanity itself" (167).

This is certainly as provocative as the queer antisocial thesis could go. Yet, given Bersani's declared commitment to exploring "[a]n anticommunal mode of connectedness we might all share, or a new way of coming together" (*Homos* 10), it should be safe to argue that the aim of Bersani's radical theorization is not really the destruction of relationship, community, or even humanity, but more likely a gesture of radical anti-assimilation in the face of growing normalcy of homosexuality that is most evident in the global trend of legalizing same-sex marriage.[19] Nevertheless, his insistently radical formulation of an alternative community based on cruising no doubt not only makes it difficult to accommodate itself with Hardt and Negri's conspicuously phil-anthropic project, but also reveals the latter's exemplification of queer as highly idealizing, romanticizing and even sanitizing. Although I do not quite agree with James R. Martel's analysis and critique of Bersani's theorization as "a politics of indifference" ("States" 625)—which he regards as advocating that "we should live amongst others *as if* we were alone, as if the other did not matter to us"—this labelling and the genealogy he traces of an alternative stance based on it (Rousseau-Whitman-Bersani) are still useful.[20] For it foregrounds a line of thinking as different from the mainstream as well as the latter's uncomfortableness with it, even though this alternative, at least as far as Bersani is concerned, still proclaims itself as directed at "work[ing] out how we can learn to live and be with each other politically."

Martel and the mainstream political theory clearly would have troubles accepting Bersani's "indifference" to and even "instrumentalization" of others by treating them as transitory sex objects (even though there is no "subject" as such in Bersani's theorization). Yet even if it is possible to suspend this commonsensical understanding, how would Bersani's line of thinking be

[19] As Caserio, the organizer of the 2005 MLA "antisocial" panel, points out: "Bersani's formulation and others like it have inspired a decade of explorations of queer unbelonging. Meanwhile, *pace* scholarship, gay rage for normalizing sociability—to judge by the gay-marriage boom alone—has intensified. Given such divergent developments, I suggested . . . that stocktaking of the antisocial thesis might be in order. . . . It might consider whether arguments such as *Homos*'s justly connect suspicion of gay-rights politics with subversion of 'sociality as it is known'" (819-20). Or as Mari Ruti more tellingly puts it, many queer theorists have simply chosen to resist this global trend by "opting out."

[20] I do not quite agree with Martel because, among other things, he sees the concern motivating this line of thinking as regarding *eros* as "the source of dependence," which therefore calls for "a kind of public *eros* as a substitute for the myriad and troubling entanglements of social life" ("States" 626). At least as Bersani and Whitman are concerned, I do not really think this is the case; see also my forthcoming essay on Whitman.

extrapolated into a general (i.e. not just queer) community-making is still open to conjecture. It certainly would propose a sexualization or at least eroticization of human interaction, similar to what Warner describes: "When gay men or lesbian cruise, when they develop a love of strangers, they directly eroticize participation in the public world of their privacy. . . . This pleasure, a direct cathexis of the publicness of sexual culture, is by and large unavailable in dominant culture" (*Trouble* 179). But given the will to not knowing, not forming any relation after the erotic/sexual contact, and hence the proscribed transitoriness of any such encounters, would it actually be much different from the post-Enlightenment liberal conceptualization of civil society that becomes a constitutive part of modernity and is still very much with us today, in which people do not need to be either friends or enemies (i.e. involved in personal relationships) as in pre-modern times but are capable of living peacefully together as "indifferent strangers" (Silver 1482)?[21] For if it is not, then this "anti-community" based on strangers' cruising would not really meet the programmatic demands of Hardt and Negri's "politics of love," as the latter clearly arises from what they see as the insufficiency of commonality—that is, too much "indifference"—in our dominant modern mode of sociality.[22]

II. Community of Lovers (or of Those Who Have No Community)

While Hardt and Negri's proclaimed queer examples may have thus proved to be too radical (or, on the contrary, too status quo) for their politics of love, this proposition is simply too significant to let it fail just like that. For before them, the mainstream political theory is actually not very comfortable with bringing politics and personal love (in contradistinction to the religious tenet of loving thy neighbor) together. As James Martel astutely puts it at the beginning of his monograph *Love Is a Sweet Chain*, which aims at rearticulating

[21] For this understanding of modernity, see Allan Silver's significant essay "Friendship in Commercial Society," which is actually based on the early assertion (or promotion) of the emerging civil society by such eighteenth-century classical liberal thinkers as Adam Smith, David Hume, Francis Hutcheson, and Adam Ferguson.

[22] Contrary to my extrapolation here, Cesare Casarino suggests a "communist" reading of Bersani's anticommunitarian project based on the latter's speculation of "a community . . . in which it would no longer seem natural to define all relations as property relations (not only my money or my land, but also my country, my wife, my lover)" (*Homos* 128), and further links it to the French debate on community that is going to be discussed in the next section, even back to Hardt and Negri themselves (Casarino 145-46). Although I tend to read this aspect of Bersani's as more Sadean than communist, Casarino's ambitious articulation of almost all the parts constitutive of the present essay still would form an interesting object of dialogue, should it venture beyond a "*potentia*" devoid of full elaboration.

the two through a historical account of modern political thought, "[nowadays] the term 'politics of love' sounds funny to one's ears, seeking to link two unrelatable terms" (2). Almost as a perfect example of this, Hannah Arendt—who probably knows about the subject more than anyone else since her doctoral thesis *Love and Saint Augustine* (1929) examines precisely the political dimensions of love (albeit in the traditional, religious sense)—vehemently refutes the mingling of love and politics in her summa philosophica, *The Human Condition* (1958). She warns in very strong words: "love, in distinction from friendship, is killed, or rather extinguished, the moment it is displayed in public. . . . Because of its inherent worldlessness, love can only become false and perverted when it is used for political purposes such as the change or salvation of the world" (Arendt, *Human Condition* 51-52); and later again: "Love, by its very nature, is unworldly, and it is for this reason rather than its rarity that it is not only *a*political but *anti*political, perhaps the most powerful of all antipolitical human forces" (242; my emphasis).[23]

While Arendt's determined segregation of the personal from the political may be viewed as a corollary of the totalitarian nightmare that was not only in the recent past but still very much in the air at that time, the situation certainly has changed a lot with the 1960s' rise of such minority movements as feminism, for which "the personal is the political" became the revolutionary new tenet.[24] However, as recently as 2008, French theorist Alain Badiou, who has a whole chapter on "Love and Politics" in his dialogue book *In Praise of Love* that talks diffusely about the *parallels* between love and politics (mainly communism), still insists the two should not mix and, despite flirting with the possibility,

[23] Also relevant is Arendt's response, a few years later, to James Baldwin's article published in *The New Yorker*—on 17 November 1962, titled "Letter from a Region of My Mind," then to be collected in *The Fire Next Time* with the additional title "Down at the Cross"—that proposes, in the face of rising racial tension in the U.S. (those were the early days of the Black Civil Rights Movement), "the relatively conscious whites and the relatively conscious blacks. . . must, like *lovers*, insist on, or create, the consciousness of the others. . . to end the racial nightmare" (104-05; my emphasis). Impressed but disturbed by this, Arendt wrote to Baldwin personally, protesting: "What frightened me in your essay was the *gospel of love* which you begin to preach at the end. In politics, love is a stranger, and when it intrudes upon it nothing is being achieved except hypocrisy. . . . Hatred and love belong together, and they are both destructive; you can afford them only in the private and, as a people, only so long as you are not free" ("Meaning"; my emphasis). Besides the extremely helpful note by the editor of the internet journal from which I cite the letter, see also Campbell 162 for a short account of this exchange, which is strangely missing from Young-Bruehl's authoritative biography of Arendt. For a succinct account of Arendt's complicated stance on the subject of "love" throughout her life, see Chiba.

[24] That is why it is such minority movements as black feminism that first mobilized love for political purposes; see Nash. As to Baldwin's similar stance noted above, it no doubt can be regarded as a precursor.

refuses to follow the example of Jacques Derrida's "politics of friendship" to envision a "politics of love," which he declares "a meaningless expression" (Badiou and Truong 37). Even Jean-Luc Nancy, whose discussion of love and community will be the focus of this essay in a moment, also proclaims: "I think there cannot be a politics of love, because if love is what I tried to say [i.e. 'impossible'], it excludes a certain fulfillment that politics implies" ("Love and Community").[25] Although Nancy makes a point of distinguishing community from politics, in what follows I want to demonstrate that the theoretical debate on community started by Nancy himself and joined by others is actually a much more suitable resource for substantiating Hardt and Negri's politics of love. Nancy's reminder that community cannot be reduced to politics is well taken, but the communitarian aspect of love as discussed in the debate is nothing but political.

The much celebrated French debate on community started with Jean-Luc Nancy's 1983 essay "The Inoperative Community,"[26] to which was responded almost immediately by Maurice Blanchot's little book *The Unavowable Community* (1983). Although other Continental responses appeared—Giorgio Agamben's *The Coming Community* (1990) and Roberto Esposito's *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community* (1998) as well as *Terms of the Political: Community, Immunity, Biopolitics* (2008)—it had taken almost two decades before Nancy wrote about Blanchot's book (by using the opportunity of prefacing its Italian translation with "The Confronted Community" [2001]),[27] and still another for his direct confrontation with it in *The Disavowed Community* (2014). Yet in what follows I will discuss only the earliest exchange—as it is the most focused—between Nancy and Blanchot by also bringing in the real origin of the debate, namely Georges Bataille, on whom Nancy relies heavily in his thinking on community because Bataille "has gone

[25] Besides Nancy's special views on love (see below), another basis for this proclamation is his distinction between community and politics, and here is where the same worry as Arendt's lingers. In the same roundtable Nancy explains: "Of course politics belongs to community, but politics is not everything. If politics is taken as equally co-extensive and homogeneous to community, we are very quickly in totalitarianism" ("Love and Community").

[26] Nancy's essay was later revised and included with two others—"Myth Interrupted" and "'Literary Communism'"—into a book published in 1986 with the same title, on which the English translation is based but includes two more essays. Yet in the subsequent French editions of the book (1990, 1999, 2004), Nancy further changed the essays included, which, according to Philip Armstrong (xxii), thus constitutes a progression of responses on their own to Blanchot before the "direct" one was penned.

[27] There are two English translations of this preface. I have cited the one that is more complete; the other, translated by Jason Kemp Winfree with the same title, can be found in Mitchell and Winfree, *Obsessions* 19-30 (no separate citation lest causing confusion).

farthest into the crucial experience of the modern destiny of community" ("Inoperative" 16),[28] and on whose behalf Blanchot's response to Nancy consists mainly in a defense. And I will concentrate solely on the discussion on love in their debate not just because it is directly related to the concern of this essay, but because it is an aspect of the debate that, though most revealing about the core differences of the three thinkers, is generally neglected or sidelined in secondary literature.

According to Nancy, the figure of lovers is pivotal to Bataille's thinking on community, for they are sovereign in being "isolated" from "the community into which they nonetheless had to be woven, arealized, or inscribed" ("Inoperative" 20, 24).[29] Nancy summarizes this paradoxical conceptualization in greater detail in a later passage:

> For Bataille, community was first and finally the community of lovers. . . . [I]n the face of society, Bataille's lovers present in many respects the figure of a communion, or of a subject that, if not precisely Sadian, nonetheless ends up being engulfed alone in its own ecstasy.[30] To this extent, Bataille's celebration of lovers, or what one might call his passion for lovers, reveals the inaccessible character both of their own community and of another community, one shared not by one couple, but by all couples and all the love in a society. As either one of these figures, lovers in Bataille thus represent, aside from themselves and their joy, the despair of "the" community and of the political. (36)

That is, seemingly following the long tradition of idealizing love as communion, Bataille also invests in couples' love as such, but he deems it as what he has despaired of achieving in his previous (pre-war) political efforts at constructing communities the way he would like them to be, that is, "a society of festival, of expenditure, one of sacrifice and glory," and everything the existing

[28] For a more detailed account of why Nancy resorts to Bataille for this project and how he evaluates his work eventually, see Nancy's recapitulation at the beginning of "The Confronted Community."

[29] "Arealize" comes from "areality," a new coinage by which Nancy means the "nature [of something] as area, as formed space" ("Inoperative" 20).

[30] (Note not in the original:) What Nancy means by "Sadian" is, simply put, the "unleashing of passions" without any limits, which is akin to Nancy's idea of "the sacred" and "the inoperative community" but also different from them because the latter still has to recognize the "presence of the other," whereas the former does not ("Inoperative" 32).

communities of "acquisition" are not (37).[31] Thus for Bataille: "love seems to expose, in the end, the whole truth of community, but only by opposing it to every other plural, social, or collective relation" (36)—which means Bataille's idea for community is that it should be one of communion as that of lovers (but it regularly fails to be so). In this sense, "love [becomes] as a refuge or substitute for lost community" (37).[32]

Peeling carefully Nancy's comments from a summary of Bataille's stance, we can see clearly that Nancy in effect harbors rather different ideas on almost all accounts. First of all, Nancy denies Bataille's fundamental dismissal of existing community as "lost" ("Inoperative" 37) as well as his positing lovers as the ideal community outside it. Second, he does not endorse Bataille's view of love as "communion," even though there is a long tradition—"perhaps the entire Western tradition"—behind it. However, he does not thereby give up the articulation of love and community altogether but offers an alternative version (38). He says: "If lovers harbor a truth of the social relation, it is neither at a distance from nor above society, but rather in that, as lovers, they are exposed *in* the community. They are not the communion that is refused to or purloined from society; on the contrary, they expose the fact that communication is not communion" (37; my emphasis).

Nancy actually has his own unique way of conceptualizing love, which he sees as revealed *in* community as well as revealing the core truth—or what he calls the "limit" ("Inoperative" 38)—of it. For both love and community entails the "sharing" of us as "singular beings" (as opposed to "individuals" who think they are "infinite") and the exposure thereby of our "finitude" (26)—that is, being put together with another, one realizes not only one's own limit but also that of this coming-together, because "their singularities share and split them, or share and split each other, in the instant of their coupling" (38). To put in simpler and more experiential terms, being with the other either in a

[31] The groups which Bataille formed or participated in with this purpose in mind before the war included Contre-Attaque, Acéphale, and the College of Sociology; for a diachronic account of this period, see Irwin 1-40. However, Bataille did not continue his praxis of communitarian pursuits after the war.

[32] Nancy's summary of this part of Bataille's ideas is based mainly on his *The History of Eroticism*, Part Six, Sec. I, in which he opposes the "lovers' society" not only to the State but also to the married couple (159-64). However, it should be noted that, as Andrew J. Mitchell and Jason Kemp Winfree remind us: "Community names not so much a unified field or concept for Bataille as it does an obsession, one he pursues in multiple ways, addressing differences that can hardly be said to constitute the same phenomenon" ("Editor's Introduction" 2). That is why Nancy's enlistment and synthesis of Bataille's thinking on community is rather useful for our grasp of this aspect of Bataille's. For an introductory account that is nonetheless illuminating, see Hegarty 88-157.

community or in love makes one truly face up to the limitedness of oneself (there is not just me but other people, all different); however, one also realizes the limitation of this act of sharing, for even after repeated endeavors of being with the other, deep down we still remain different even though we are also changed by the experience. Condensing all this, Nancy says:

> Lovers form the extreme though not external limit of community. They are poised at the extremity of sharing . . . . The "unleashing of passions" confronts lovers with community . . . because lovers expose to the community, in its midst, and in sum even unto it, the extremity of compearance . . . . Lovers know joy in drowning in the instant of intimacy, but because this foundering is also their sharing and dividing since it is neither death nor communion—but joy—*even this in its turn is a singularity that exposes itself to the outside*. In the instant, the loves are shared, their singular beings . . . share each other, and the singularity of their love is exposed to community. Community in turn compears. (38-39)[33]

Obviously learning from the past lessons of fusional love as well as "sublative" (in the Hegelian sense) community which aims at somewhere higher by suppressing contradictions and singularities, Nancy determinedly opts for a "weak" stance concerning either, emphasizing their limitation and incapability while still affirming the reward and necessity of being together. And this in a way sums up the gist of his central conceptualization of community: as unworking (*désoeuvrement*, which is also translated as "inoperative"). He says: "Love does not *complete* community . . . : in that case it would be its work, or it would put it to work. On the contrary, love, provided it is not itself conceived on the basis of the politico-subjective model of communion in one, exposes the unworking and therefore the incessant *incompletion* of community. It exposes community *at its limit*" ("Inoperative" 38). That is, although Nancy distinguishes his ideas from Bataille's either on love (*compearance* vs. *communion*) or the relationship between love and community (*in* vs. *against*),

[33] The concepts of "singularity," "compearance," as well as "being-in-common" are all very central ones in Nancy's thinking and are repeatedly explored in his other works, such as "*La Comparution*/The Compearance," *Being Singular Plural*, and "Of Being-in-Common." As to Nancy's view on love, a concentrated elaboration can be found in his "Shattered Love" (1986), which is one of the two essays added in the English translation of *Inoperative Community* (as ch. 4).

he still concurs with him in setting lovers as the *exemplar* for community in general, only Bataille eventually despairs of community ever achieving it, whereas Nancy still positively urges community to learn from it.

As Nancy gets the term "*désoeuvrement*" originally from Maurice Blanchot ("Absence" 424),[34] interestingly it is also Blanchot who publishes the first response to Nancy's essay, in the form of a small book titled *The Unavowable Community*. The book is divided into two parts, with the first (titled "The Negative Community") being mainly a defense of Bataille's thinking on community, and the second ("The Community of Lovers") the exposition of his own ideas on the matter illustrated through a reading of Margueritte Duras's novella *The Malady of Death* (1982).[35] Disagreeing with Nancy's claims about Bataille, Blanchot's defense consists in first declaring that the latter is actually "deeply averse to" and therefore would never consider "communion" or the "ecstatic fusion" of lovers as the ideal state of community (*Unavowable* 7), and then foregrounding Bataille's stance instead as the espousal of "the absence of community" (3-4), or "the negative community: the community of those who do not have a community" (24),[36] a stance that is also shared by Blanchot himself. As this is no place for adjudicating who gets the right Bataille (or is there a right Bataille?), in the following I will explore only Blanchot's own position on the issue as presented in the second part of his book, which also picks up "love"—not just in the title but in contents as well—as the focus of his critical intervention.

Blanchot begins the second part ("The Community of Lovers") by naming the legendary French May 1968 as the perfect example for his idea of community because he sees there "'people' in their limitless power which, in order not to limit itself, accepts *doing nothing*" (*Unavowable* 32). While at first he declares a rift between such "impotent power" of the "people" and "the strangeness of that antisocial society or association always ready to dissolve itself, formed by *friends* or *couples*" (33), he soon (rather bizarrely) cancels it out by pointing at the similarity between "the always imminent dispersal" of

[34] Of course, Blanchot originally does not coin the term in relation to a conceptualization of community. For the differences between Nancy's and Blanchot's uses of the term, see Fynsk 154n23 for a succinct explanation. As to how the term should and is translated, see the translator's note to Nancy's Preface in *The Inoperative Community* (156n1).

[35] It turns out that this part is taken directly from a book review of Duras's novella that has been penned before reading Nancy's seminal essay; see Armstrong xix and Nancy's own discussion of this intriguing fact (*Disavowed* 26-29).

[36] Both quotes are from Bataille, *Inner Experience* 281.

people (this time exemplified by the Jewish people gathered for the Exodus but "forgetting to leave") and "the sly loosening of the social bond" as well as "the oblivion of the world" entailed by "the true world of lovers" (34). Now that the analogy between the two is established despite the rift (whose recognition at the beginning probably acts more like a disclaimer), Blanchot spells out a re-vision of community through his own idea on love, namely: "the affirmation of a relationship so singular between beings that love is not necessary for it, as love, which by the way is never a certainty, may impose its requirements on a circle where its obsessions can go so far as taking on the form of the impossibility of loving" (34).

As Blanchot proceeds to illustrate this stance of his through a reading of Marguerite Duras's *The Malady of Death*, a synopsis of the novella is in order here. Set out as an unusual second-person narrative, the story's protagonist "you" is a man who contracts a woman to be with him for a period of time, with the intention of trying something that he has never done before—presumably having sex with a *woman*. "You say you want to try, try it, try to know, to get used to that body, those breasts, . . . to the risk of having children implicit in that body, to that hairless unmuscular body" (Duras, *Malady* 2). After their experimental relation begins, while the woman often enjoys having sex with the man (9, 37), the man does not reciprocate the feeling, even after repetitive trying: "you should feel like . . . taking pleasure in her again. But only with a pleasure, as always, blinded by tears" (14, 51). Very early on, the woman tells the man that she can see that he has got an illness he is not aware of and it is getting worse and worse (13). She later names it as "the malady of death" and confesses that it is actually the reason why she has accepted his offer in the first place (18).[37] She explains the illness thus: "whoever has it doesn't know he's a carrier, of death," and he is going "to die without any life to die to, and without even knowing that's what he's doing" (19). In the end, the woman leaves the man suddenly, without notice.

Rejecting some of the most readily available interpretations (such as Marxist or feminist ones which would read the relation between the man and the woman as exploitative), Blanchot opts for an ethical reading in the Levinasian sense—which is concerned with the deeply "dissymmetrical" and "irreciprocal" relationship between self and other (*Unavowable* 40)—but maintains the concrete settings of an amorous relationship. Speaking of how

[37] She also denies being a prostitute (Duras, *Malady* 18).

love comes into being, he philosophizes thus, a bit esoterically:

> in the homogeneity—the affirmation of the Same—understanding demands that the heterogeneous appear suddenly, i.e., the absolute Other in terms of which any relationship signifies: no relationship, the impossibility that willing and perhaps even desire ever cross the uncrossable, in the sudden clandestine meeting (outside of time) that annuls itself with the devastating feeling that is never certain to be experienced by the one whom this movement consigns to the other perhaps by depriving him of his "self." (41)

Which indeed is a rather dismal picture of love, as there is always something other that not only cannot be dissolved but also unsettles the self deeply. Or more clearly by referring to the ending of the novella:

> A conclusion which in its admirable density may state, not the failure of love in a singular case, but the fulfillment of all veritable love which would consist in realizing itself exclusively according to the mode of loss, that is to say realizing itself by losing not what has belonged to you but what one has never had, for the "I" and the "other" do not live in the same time, are never together (synchronously), can therefore not be contemporary, but separated (even when united) by a "not yet" which goes hand in hand with an "already no longer." (42)

That is, Blanchot thinks that ultimately love is the (un)meeting of self with other that is always already lost as they do not even exist in the same time zone; in other words, following Jacques Lacan's famous declaration, we can say that there is in fact no such thing as an amorous relationship. However, it is on this rather dismal vision of love which Blanchot builds his own idea of community. Speaking of the relation between the man and the woman in *The Malady of Death*, he says:

> Here in the room . . . two beings try to unite only to live (and in a certain way to celebrate) the failure that constitutes the truth of what would be their perfect union, the *lie* of that union which

> always takes place by not taking place. Do they, in spite of all that, form some kind of community? It is rather *because* of that that they form a community. They are side by side, and that contiguity, passing through every form of empty intimacy, preserves them from playing the comedy of a "fusional or communional" understanding. (*Unavowable* 49)

That is, Blanchot believes, although in the story "there is neither a shared relationship nor definite lovers" (46), the man and the woman nevertheless have a certain kind of relation, "only a *relation* of apparent insensibility that is not indifference" (52). This is a strange relation no doubt, but a relation all the same. Blanchot says: "the strangeness of what could not be common is what founds that community, eternally temporary and always already deserted" (54). By thus sharing their "common solitude," the two characters thus constitute what Blanchot means by "the negative community: the community of those who have no community" (50).

The three French theorists discussed above—Bataille, Nancy, and Blanchot—all have different ideas about love on which they base their idea of community. Except for (Nancy's) Bataille who seemingly subscribes to a certain holistic and atavistic view on love and community (while aware of its impossibility), both Nancy and Blanchot (as well as Bataille if according to Blanchot) entertain views that acknowledge and accept the inherent limitation or doomed failure of either love or community, while determined not to give up on either. As I have said above about Nancy, these can be regarded as "weak" conceptualizations that are astute responses to the evident pitfalls of stronger ones in the past that prove to be problematic. And some of their insights indeed open up space and possibilities for reenvisioning "how to live together," a subject that actually has preoccupied people for some time. As old (or in fact rather modern) ways of living together—such as nationalism, fascism, and communism—have all turned out disastrous (with segregation, war, genocide, etc.), no doubt new ways are urgently needed. Taken from the title of Roland Barthes's rather early (i.e. in 1977) Collège de France course (though the lecture notes have been published only recently),[38] the phrase in fact highlights

[38] These lectures of Barthes are indeed pioneering in this respect, though it is not easy to distill palpable theses from the episodic and often fragmentary notes. However, the conclusion (if there is one) or pivotal concern of Barthes's lecture is interestingly not very different from some of the positions presented here: "Fantasmatically speaking, there's nothing contradictory about wanting to live alone

a constellation of thinkers devoting their attention to it, including—besides Barthes, those involved in the community debate, as well as Hardt and Negri—Tzvetan Todorov with his *Life in Common: An Essay in General Anthropology* (1995) and Alain Touraine with the more sociological *Can We Live Together?* (1997), to name just some of the most notable ones. It is both within this genealogy of thinking and their common focus on love that I regard the earliest exchange of the French community debate as providing a more useful resource to Hardt and Negri's interesting proposal of politicizing love, even though it does not seem to be what is originally on their mind. Or maybe it does in another certain sense after all.

III. The Queer Experiments on "How to Live Together"

Blanchot's conceptualization of love and community, as a certain kind of ultimate insight on the issue due to its not easily surpassable openness to negativity, though ingenious, may still strike us as extremely theoretical, especially given his philosophical reading of Duras's illustrative narrative. But in fact it may not be so, I want to argue, if only the story can be read as it is and accompanied with the real-life one that lies behind it as well as some others similar to it. Therefore it is first necessary to literalize *The Malady of Death* by pointing out that it is really a story about a gay man and a straight woman, which anyone reading the above synopsis may have already guessed as much. The evidence is in effect so strewn over the whole text that it is almost impossible to read it otherwise.[39] Even Blanchot, who denies outright that "[h]omosexuality, to come to that name which is never pronounced, is not 'the malady of death'" (*Unavowable* 51), has to bring up the subject just in order to kill it.

For one thing, the male protagonist, who is not blind, confesses that he cannot tell whether the woman is beautiful, which would be rather odd for a heterosexual man. He says to the woman: "You must be very beautiful. / She says: I'm here right in front of you. Look for yourself. / You say: I can't see anything" ((Duras, Malady 16-17; see also 31, 35-36). And speaking of having sex with the woman, the man also says: "I want to penetrate there too, and with

and wanting to live together" (4-5). For discussions, see the several essays taking it as their subject in Pieters and Pint, also published as a special issue (31.1) of the journal *Paragraph* (2008).

[39] For more than those listed below, see Crowley 216, 220-21.

my usual force. They say it offers more resistance, it's smooth but it offers more resistance than emptiness does" (4). Although it could be argued that the man's usual sex activity implied here is masturbation, it is still more likely to be with other men.[40] But most decisively is how the man's "malady of death" is attributed to his failure to desire a woman:

> She asks: Haven't you ever loved a woman? You say no, never.
> She asks: Haven't you ever desired a woman? You say no, never.
> She asks: Not once, not for a single moment? You say no, never.
> She says: Never? Ever? You repeat: Never.
> She smiles, says: A dead man's a strange thing. (30-31)

And even while the woman seems to accuse the man of a general inability to love, she still zooms in onto sexual difference: "You don't love anything or anyone, you don't even love the difference you think you embody. All you know is the grace of the bodies of the dead, the grace of *those like yourself*. Suddenly you see the difference between the grace of the bodies of the dead and this grace here [the woman]" (33-34; my emphasis).

Rather surprised by certain prominent male readers' blindness to or disavowal of homosexuality as the core truth of the story,[41] Duras herself clearly declares as such on several occasions by pointing out that she had put a lot of coded passages in it.[42] In another section of the long interview that is titled "Men" and devoted to *The Malady of Death* and its later, more fleshed out (though slightly changed) version *Blue Eyes, Black Hair* (1987), Duras says about this and more:

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[40] In fact, for Duras, male homosexuality means masturbation; see her expressed attitude on the subject in those pieces listed in note 46.

[41] Besides Blanchot, there was German director Peter Handke, who at that time was adapting the novella into both a play and a film (*Das Mal des Todes*, 1985). See Duras's interview, "In the Gardens" 184. After hearing this episode from Duras, the *Cahiers du Cinéma* interviewer interestingly intercepts, "Like Blanchot," to which Duras acquiesces silently. In contrast, female director Catherine Breillat's much later *de facto*, rather than *de jure*, adaptation of the novella (for she failed to get the rights), *Anatomy of Hell* (2004), nominally based on her own novella *Pornocracy* (published one year later than the film), has no problems grasping this basic point; for a brief critical discussion, see Ricco, *Decision* 112-17 (this most recent book of Ricco's also discusses Duras's novella and Nancy's thinking on community, but separately and predisposed rather differently from the present essay).

[42] For example, Duras reminds us that "there is at least one passage that is explicit on the subject. When it talks about 'loving the bodies of those like you'" ("In the Gardens" 184; Duras's original appears in *Malady* 34)—which confirms the reading above.

> Other people, from Peter Handke to Maurice Blanchot, have seen *The Malady of Death* as being against men in their relationship with women.[43] If you like. . . . But it's also extraordinary that some of them haven't seen that in *The Malady of Death*, as well as a man in relation to women, and seen through that, there's a man in relation to men.
>
> The men are homosexuals. All men are potentially homosexuals—all that's missing is awareness of the fact . . . . The covert queer—loud, intrusive, delightful, a favourite everywhere—bears witness at the very centre of both his body and his mind to the *death* of the organic, fraternal contradiction between men and women. ("In the Gardens" 33; my emphais)

Whereas Duras lambasts straight male readers' "men vs. women" rather than "between men" reading of the novella, for those of us informed by the Anglo-American gender/sexuality theory she is obviously conflating homosociality with homosexuality, which would make her not that different from those she criticizes. Yet is she only using homosexuality as a deprecating figure to indict *all* men as some French feminists do?[44] I think not, for the obvious link, evident in those passages quoted above, of (the) woman with life and (the) man *who fails to desire her* with death, if it does encompass all men as its target,[45] would still hit at gay men first and foremost; especially if we take into consideration Duras's drastic change of attitude toward male homosexuality just around that

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[43] (Note not in the original:) Indeed the most concretized reading Blanchot allows for the text is a gendered rather than sexual one. He has designated the woman as representing "the absolutely feminine," who "accepts everything from him, without ceasing to lock him in his male closure, having relationships only with other men, something she tends to designate as his 'malady'" (*Unavowable* 50-51). And, once again bringing up the topic of homosexuality only to divert it, he comments on the meaning of "death" in the story (41) thus:

> [O]ne could recognize here the confirmation of the conflict which . . . breaks out implicitly or explicitly between men, makers of groups thanks to their homosexual leaning, be they sublimated or not (the S.A.), and the woman who alone can speak the truth of love . . . . The woman knows that the group, the repetition of the Same or the Similar, is in truth the grave-digger of real love which feeds only on differences. (59n12)

[44] The most prominent example of which is no doubt Luce Irigaray's formulation of "hom(m)o-sexuality" (171), punning on *homme* (*man* in French) and *homo*. For an Anglo-American gay critique of this, see Owens.

[45] As argued by Martin Crowley, who thinks that the changed Duras did not target male homosexuality *per se* but, putting it on a continuum with male homosociality, actually "uses homosexuality to represent the self-sufficient sterility of the homosocial, of men without women" (210-11).

time.[46] While she used to be extremely friendly towards male homosexuals, praising them as allies to the women's movement against the patriarchal society, in the early 1980s she abruptly shifted her position to one of strong hostility, dismissing male homosexuality as nothing but "masturbatory narcissism" (Crowley 209).[47]

Critics in general believe that this change of Duras's, as well as the inspiration for *The Malady of Death*, in effect both come from her real-life intimate relationship with a gay man named Yann Andréa that started in 1980.[48] Thirty-eight years younger and a fan, Yann came into Duras's life when she was at an all-time low and they stayed together until her death in 1996. While Duras was clearly in love with Yann, the latter could not really reciprocate in the way Duras wanted and this created great frustration and sometimes fury in her. Nevertheless Yann provided the company Duras needed and helped her get back on her feet to continue living and writing (including her masterpiece *The Lover* [1984], whose film adaptation brought her global fame). That is, despite their tumultuous relationship (as many relationships are) that sometimes yielded such a dismal version as *The Malady of Death*, they nonetheless had one that lasted more than fifteen years. Therefore, all in all, as Victoria Best rightly summarizes it:

> If Yann was an insult to her sense of herself as erotically attractive, he was still a fabulous gesture of defiance to the cultural tendency

[46] As to the suggestion that Duras, by linking male homosexuality with death thus, is actually thinking of AIDS (e.g. Perreau 120), it can only work retrospectively as, given the relatively late awareness of the syndrome in France, the novella was really too early for that.

[47] Crowley has traced this change of Duras's attitudes clearly (208-11). For an example of her early, friendly attitude (as late as in 1980), see Duras, "Women and Homosexuality"; for that of her later hostility, see Duras, "Retake" 13, "Men," and "Résponses" 216-17—although only "Men" was published during her lifetime, Duras had been rather outspoken on this topic in the interviews she gave at that time. For a much more complicated discussion of Duras's (literary) relationship to male homosexuals, however, see Williams 93-114. Interestingly, Duras's attitude towards lesbianism was never positive (see Crowley 208, 210). See also the recently translated (into French and English) long interview with Duras to confirm all the above: *Suspended* 130-33.

[48] The accounts here are based on Duras's biographies, such as Vircondelet, *Duras* (306 *passim*) and the later Adler (323 *passim*); the former has an updated version in Vircondelet's *Marguerite Duras* but is still not translated into English yet. Interestingly, Vircondelet does use Blanchot's "unavowable community" to describe their relationship (*Duras* 308), though only in the sense of their relationship being frowned upon for being one between an older woman and a much younger man (in contrast, another interviewer's quote of Blanchot is more to the point, see Duras, *Suspended* 49-50). The presence of Yann in Duras's work since the 1980s is conspicuously ubiquitous, and not just limited in *Yann Andréa Steiner: A Memoir*. As to Yann's take on their relationship, see *M. D.* (1983) and *Cet amour-là* (1999). For a literary analysis of their relationship, see Williams 139-59.

> to consign older women to sexless invisibility, and her declining years were far more tolerable with his attentive, helpful companionship. Most importantly, he arrived in her life at a point when things had looked hopeless, when she had felt isolated and lonely and sinking towards death, and he had given her something to write about and someone to write for.

And to further illustrate this Blanchotian "impossible love" that is nevertheless capable of forming a relationship and, by extension, a community despite everything, it is fortunate to have at hand another similarly unlikely relationship that still came about between two people, with both of whom we are familiar, namely Hannah Arendt—yes, the one who earnestly opposes the politicization of love—and English poet W. H. Auden, who was also openly homosexual.[49] Both of them having been living in New York for some time, Arendt and Auden became friends after *The Human Condition* was published and given a highly appreciative review by the poet, and since then Auden had been a regular visitor to Arendt and her husband's apartment. Although recalling them as being "very good friends but not intimate friends" ("Remembering" 294), Arendt—judging by her moving essay in memory of him—was apparently very caring for Auden, minding his "slum apartment," no second suit for changing (they constantly argued over it), and his being "an expert in the infinite varieties of unrequited love" (295-97).[50]

In a slightly surprising but really amazing episode of their relationship, in 1970, less than a month after Arendt's husband died, one evening Auden, rather distraught, came to Arendt's apartment and suddenly asked her to marry him, "suggest[ing] that the two of them—both alone—take care of each other" (Young-Bruehl 436). As reported by Arendt in a private letter, Auden said that he returned to New York only because of her and that she "was of great importance for him, that he loved [her] very much, etc." (qtd. in Young-Bruehl

[49] This peculiar relationship was brought to my attention by Kascha Semonovitch's short essay on "strange love," which actually focuses on the similarities and differences between Auden's and Arendt's views on love and community. However, as can be evidenced by the citations below, Semonovitch is not the first critic to touch upon this. Besides their respective biographies (see Young-Bruehl for Arendt and Davenport-Hines for Auden), the opening of Susannah Young-ah Gottlieb's *Regions of Sorrow* is particularly helpful (and the book offers another, much longer comparative study on Arendt's and Auden's intellectual viewpoints).

[50] About Auden having only one suit, Arendt did not just argue with him but actually took him to a department store, "forcing him to buy a second suit" (Young-Bruehl 436).

436). Arendt made what she regarded as the rational decision of saying no, but the two "continued to see each other" and "helped and encouraged each other in various, more private, ways," besides paying each other "public tributes" in publications (Gottlieb 9). And when Auden died three years later, in 1973, Arendt was said to have lost her "public composure" even more than she had been able to muster when her husband died (Young-Bruehl 455). Each being a foreigner in an adopted country, either solitary or widowed, Auden and Arendt were indeed forming a "relationship" despite a certain discrepancy that still distanced them. Was it heterosexuality vs. homosexuality? Probably. Anyway, whatever it was, it is obvious that they did love each other, though not as lovers. And what could better describe this peculiar relationship of theirs, moving and inspiring as it is, except the Bataillean/Blanchotian "negative community of those who have no community"? Along with the Duras-Yann relationship which may more easily fall into the category of what is colloquially called "fag hags" and gay men,[51] this kind of "impossible love" has in fact long been a subcultural queer form of "living together" that offers mutual companionship and indispensable support that not only keep people going but make their lives worth living. Therefore the prime exemplification of Hardt and Negri's politics of love, even if substituted by the community model, remains queer after all,[52] just not the kind they originally proclaim, but what happens *beside* or *after* it. It seems that once again Foucault is right in pointing out the queer potential for inventing "new relational modes" at a time when the possibilities of existing relations are extremely impoverished ("Social Triumph" 158). Yet those queer modes of connecting are not just interpersonal as seems to be highlighted in the above discussion, but fundamentally communitarian as a collective commitment to accept, accompany and support (i.e., love) one another no

[51] Though often derogative, the name of "fag hag," depending on the person who uses it, can also be a sign of endearment (see Dawne Moon). For more of those moving stories of a similar kind, see the collection edited by Melissa de la Cruz and Tom Dolby. An ambitious attempt at articulating this connection (though more from the perspective of gay men's cross-identification with women) can be found in Maddison.

[52] One reviewer kindly alerts me to the likelihood that the impossible "couple" of a gay man and a straight woman reinscribed here as paradigmatic of Hardt and Negri's "politics of love" may—for being a man together with a woman after all—strike some as nothing but heteronormative. Although there is no problem of intentional closetedness in the two case illustrations brought up here, it is undeniable, as Sedgwick insightfully points out, that in a heterosexist environment the closet situation is something that cannot be rid of once and for all, since people would, either absent-mindedly or intentionally, erect a new closet as they go (68). However, what really matters here is not how people would see those "couples" but how they feel about and act toward each other given their frank acknowledgment of their respective sexuality.

matter how different we are, and for better or worse—as Hardt and Negri must have been aware of all the way when they seek inspiration from not only the "anti-identity vein of queer theory" but also "the construction of community through differences and not through sameness and identities."[53]

[53] I want to thank one of the reviewers for reminding me of the queer capabilities of forming such communities of love, especially at dire times in the past such as the AIDS crisis, which should also be an invaluable resource for such reconceptualizations.

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