

Queer Methods

Four Provocations for an Emerging Field

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Queer methods. Say the words out loud, and let them linger for a moment. The idea of distinctively queer methods is probably less familiar to you than its companion *queer theory*. Now say those words out loud. Do they sound any different? Feel any different?

Queer theory emerged at an academic conference in 1990 at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Teresa de Lauretis organized the gathering, and she coined the phrase “queer theory” for it. From the outset, the framework exploited an “antimethodological impulse” (Love 2016, 347). Queer theory was inspired by social movements of the day, especially ACT UP, which linked “deconstructive reading practices and grassroots activism together” (Freeman 2010, xv). A focus on methods, which direct techniques for gathering data, and methodologies, which pertain to the logics of research design, would have risked a confrontation with queer claims to interdisciplinarity, if not an antidisiplinary irreverence.

Although queer theorists have made great strides on the clarification of concepts like queerness, sexuality, gender, transgender, race, nationalism, discourse, fluidity, performativity, and normativity, among others, we have made much less progress on the application of these ideas in our research. In fact, scholars who use queer theory often proceed with “undefined notions of what they mean by ‘queer research’” (Browne and Nash 2010a, 1). This isn’t surprising, since queer theory frequently defines its object of study as “fluid, unstable, and perpetually becoming” (ibid.). How do we study ephemeral subjects and their worldmaking efforts using standard methodological procedures?

A movement has been growing in recent years inspired by questions of design, data, and analysis—a renaissance in queer methods, as we, your

editors, like to call it. The turn toward methods makes visible “actual ways of working” (Mills 1959, 195), as scholars and students identify protocols that have been largely overshadowed by advances in theory. The 2010 volume *Queer Methods and Methodologies* (Browne and Nash 2010b) indexed this shift toward methods by reframing the well-rehearsed question “What is queer theory?” as the pioneering “How do we do queer theory?” Three years later, the Gender, Sexuality, and Women’s Studies Program at the University of Pennsylvania hosted a two-day “Queer Method” conference where the panelists similarly asked: What does it mean to understand queer work as having a method, or to imagine method itself as queer?¹ In 2016, we edited a special issue of *WSQ: Women’s Studies Quarterly* under the theme “Queer Methods.” Two years after that, the University of California Press produced *Other, Please Specify: Queer Methods in Sociology* (Compton, Meadow, and Schilt 2018). We’re back again and deliver for you a volume unlike any other. In these pages, we take the deepest dive yet, display the most cutting-edge innovations in the field of queer methods, and sample its intensely interdisciplinary flavor.

The enterprise on which we are embarking in this book has not come easily or inevitably for us. Questions of method incite heated discussions of disciplinarity, since our theories precede and largely determine the particular research strategies that we adopt in our work. Yet queer studies has staked its claim by working within, against, across, and even beyond disciplinary boundaries, thereby blurring distinctions between the field and its methods. Many humanists embrace a “suspicion of method” (Brim and Ghaziani 2016, 16) and assume that queer frameworks are incompatible with social science epistemologies. Scholars in the social sciences, their argument goes, emphasize the systematic, coherent, orderly, modal, normative, positivist, and generalizable while queer theorists in the humanities champion the fluid, flux, disruptive, transgressive, interpretivist, and local knowledges. Hence, conjoining “queer” with “method” can present a paradox. The former celebrates a “failure to adhere to stable classificatory systems or be contained by disciplinary boundaries” while the latter is “defined by orderly, discipline-specific, and easily reproducible techniques” (Ward 2016, 71). What productive avenues of inquiry exist between these orthogonal elements? What are the methodological implications and applications of queer theory in our research practices? Questions like these are impossible to answer unless

we embrace an interdisciplinary imagination. We are pleased to be your curatorial guides as you adventure through the largely uncharted territory of queer methods. Page after page, our contributors shine a light on innovative ways of working and producing new knowledge as they collectively articulate the promises and pleasures of an emerging field.

Worldmaking and Livability

Queer methods are possible, despite the “apparent incommensurability” of the phrase (Brim and Ghaziani 2016, 16). Yes, the words do conjure “a classic odd couple, uptight *methods* attempting to impose order on the slovenly *queer*” (Love 2016, 346). But opposites attract—and often productively so. In the social sciences, the biggest obstacle for developing queer methods has been what political scientists Kevin Clarke and David Primo (2012) call “physics envy.” To establish their legitimacy, sociologists, economists, and political scientists in particular mimic the “real” or “natural” sciences by using words like “theory,” “experiments,” and “laws.” Science has a method, researchers in these areas insist, and to be scientific, we must adopt it. The scientific method proceeds from a theory from which researchers deduce one or more hypotheses that they can test against systematically collected data. This conventional approach to conducting research is called hypothetico-deductivism. “If your discipline does not operate by this method, then in the minds of many it’s not scientific,” Clarke and Primo explain in their thoughtful essay for the *New York Times*. Hypothetico-deductivism is a flawed rendering of how research actually occurs, however, since it ignores “everything messy and chaotic about scientific inquiry”—precisely the place where queerness thrives. The hegemony of this model has stymied social scientific efforts to build queer methods—until recently. A new generation of scholars sees generative possibilities where others felt blocked. Jane Ward (2016), a professor of gender and sexuality studies, writes words we previewed earlier and with which we very much agree: “To pair the terms ‘queer’ and ‘methodology’—the former defined by its celebrated failure to adhere to stable classificatory systems or be contained by disciplinary boundaries, and the latter defined by orderly, discipline-specific, and easily reproducible techniques—produces something of an exciting contradiction, a productive oxymoron” (71–72).

Scholars in the humanities have encountered their own challenges by casting queer theory in the dual roles of method and method's foil. The late literary theorist Eve Sedgwick's "nonce taxonomy" created an early flashpoint for this conflation. Rather than embrace reproducibility as an emblem of methodological rigor, Sedgwick champions "the making and unmaking and remaking and redissolution of hundreds of old and new categorical meanings concerning all the kinds it may take to make up a world" (1990, 23). Humanities scholars have gravitated toward terms like "critical approaches" and "critical frameworks" to name their work. Such phrases imply that we create a lens through which to view our objects of analysis, and these in turn influence and direct how we see them.

Worldmaking matters, but a critical position doesn't always lend itself to a discussion of methodological specificity. Recent advances in queer, trans, non-Western, and queer of color scholarship respond to this elision of methods in our worldmaking efforts by featuring the resistant, mobile, and intimate practices by which knowledge is constructed. The cultural critic Phillip Brian Harper (2005, 108) identifies one way to re-engage with methods in the humanities at the millennial turn by promoting what he calls "speculative rumination," an approach that counts as evidence the "guesswork and conjecture" that accrues to the experience of eroticized blackness in the United States. Certainty and guesswork, knowability and conjecture mix quite easily in this framework. Consider as well the renewed discussions of reading that have emerged from scholars like the English professor Peter Coviello (2013), who advocates "ground-level explication" and "long exposure" to texts. These, he says, are "better served by a practice invested in detail, particularity, and unsystematizable variousness—all the specificities that literature proffers" (2013, 18). Citing the "descriptive turn" away from the literary, Heather Love (2013, 404), who generously writes an additional introduction to our volume, promotes "thin description," a practice that describes "patterns of behavior and visible activity but that do[es] not traffic in speculation about interiority, meaning, or depth." Her efforts at reworking research practices in the humanities show that any analysis of "layers of meaning" (407) is incomplete without also including "visible behavior[s]" and "physical act[s]" (406). Love rejects the assertion that empiricism is confined to the social sciences. Such a fallacy has "blocked humanities scholars from using a range of potentially useful tools" (419),

including observations and descriptions, both of which are “an important part of reading” (427). Love offers an insight that a number of scholars in the social sciences and humanities have mutually proposed yet seldom said: what appears as an expression of pure theory also implies a methodological praxis.

With repercussions beyond the academy, and certainly beyond just one discipline, queer methods offer options for “making space for what is” (Love et al. 2012, 144). They “bring to the surface social worlds only dimly articulated hitherto—with, of course, the suggestion that there are more, many more, even more deeply hidden” (Plummer 2005, 368). To see them, we must resist the hypothetico-deductive urge to “fix objects in place” and instead “ask what we think we know and how we think we know it” (Morgensen 2015, 311). We thus envision a dual mandate for queer methods: *to outline the conditions of queer worldmaking* and *to clarify, but not overdetermine, the conditions that “make life livable,”* to borrow a lovely phrase from an interview with the gender theorist Judith Butler (Ahmed 2016b, 490).

The proposals and practices that we share with you in this volume are coherent and provisional, precise and protean, expansive and self-reflexive, timely and anticipatory, disciplinary and boundary-spanning. Unlike the first published volume on queer methods, which focused on the social sciences (Browne and Nash 2010b), or the next iteration that zoomed in on just one discipline (Compton, Meadow, and Schilt 2018), we offer an inclusive call to action that comes from all corners of the academy. We have brought together thinkers who have very different viewpoints on what methods mean and why they matter. In fact, we deliberately sweep from *verstehen*, pure interpretivism, reading, and ephemera to formal measurement, modeling, sampling, scaling, and statistics. This range represents the interface of scientific and humanistic modes of producing new knowledge, the place where qualitative, meaning-oriented approaches mix and mingle with formal, behavioral, and quantitative styles of knowing the world. No one else has attempted to do what we’ve done in this volume.

We asked our contributors to grapple with tough questions. If interdisciplinarity, multidisciplinary, and antidisciplinarity are the defining features of queer theory, then what challenges emerge as especially urgent within a program of queer methods? What inferential and inter-

pretive possibilities are afforded to us when we think about this as a program of study unto its own? What we present to you is a picture of queer methods as an emergent enterprise—hardly the last word. We want to stir and provoke you, not force a premature consensus and closure. Here you will find ways of holding multiple, opposed ideas in your mind while still retaining the ability to imagine queer methods as a new scholarly enterprise.

In the rest of this chapter, we offer four provocations to arouse your imagination: identifying new types of data; modifying existing protocols to better resonate with queer theoretical frameworks; challenging methodological norms of coherence, generalizability, and reliability; and eliciting the pedagogical implications of queer methods. These are not prescriptive, exhaustive, or mutually exclusive. Rather, we wish to identify some of the most exciting and useful possibilities of queer world-making and the conditions that make life livable.

The First Provocation: Queer Methods

Although they write from different backgrounds and different countries, English and comparative literature professor Jack Halberstam (1998) in the United States and emeritus sociology professor Ken Plummer (2005) from the United Kingdom both see in queer theory “a refusal of all orthodox methods—a certain disloyalty to conventional disciplinary methods” (Plummer 2005, 366). Implied in their argument is the possibility of something new, rather than a reworking of what we already have available to us in our existing portfolios. But how can we diversify our approaches beyond an “overwhelming” interest in “an analysis of texts—films, literature, television, opera, musicals” (ibid.)? How do we respond today to the earlier proposition that “almost everything that would be called queer theory is about ways in which texts—either literature or mass culture of language—shape sexuality” (Warner 1992, 19)? We know that sexuality is epistemologically distinct (Sedgwick 1990)—not to mention “complex, diffuse, and messy”—and existing methods tend to “make a mess of it” (Law 2004, 2). What are we to do?

Sociologists John Mohr and Amin Ghaziani (2014, 231–36) offer an example from the history of science that can help us. Scholars who developed a theory of measurement in the mid-century argued that its for-

mal applications were possible only if the “axiom of additivity” (Stevens 1959, 21), or the ability to add or subtract numerical quantities, corresponded with how we manipulated objects. In other words, the applications of measurement theory required “quantitative estimates of sensory events” (Stevens 1975, 38). This standard was too stringent, however. The psychologist S. S. Stevens, who we know today as the founder of scales (nominal, ordinal, interval, and ratio), complained, “Only a few properties, such as length, weight, and electric resistance are measurable in this fundamental way” (1959, 21). The belief that true measurement was possible only when an experimenter could perform a physical or empirical addition—or locate a phenomenon in discrete categories and then count those categories—was “blocking progress in psychophysics,” Stevens lamented. How do we measure subjective states like brightness or loudness, which escape “the requirement of empirical addition” (Stevens 1979, 50)? Stevens saw a need “to measure the previously unmeasured” since “procedures such as the counting and adding of beans do not suffice for the measurement of such concepts as the social status accorded a person” (1979, 46).

Like the scholars in our volume today, Stevens then sought to extend an existing theory into new domains. To clear a path forward, he resisted “old-style assumptions” about the singular application of measurement theory to “problems of counting” (Stevens 1959, 19). New developments were possible only under new conditions of the imagination: “the assignment of numerals to objects or events according to a rule—any rule” (*ibid.*), he supposed, not just the assignment of numerals by addition or subtraction alone. Provided that “a consistent rule is followed, some form of measurement is achieved” (*ibid.*). Procedural innovations are hard to devise because the approaches we adopt in our practice of a theory appear “ontologically real” (*ibid.*). Stevens explained how he maneuvered his way through the quagmire: “The best way out seemed to be to approach the problem from another point of view” (*ibid.*, 23). To adopt the ever-elusive “another point of view” requires us to engage in an “on-going and regular confrontation with the methodological assumptions of the field” (Mohr and Ghaziani 2014, 233). Only then can we reinvent our protocols and procedures. This process consists of conflict, differentiation, and split, and it produces a “fractal distinction” (Abbott 2001) at the end, or a new idea that upends entrenched conventions.

The development of queer and measurement theories have a surprising amount in common. Concepts within each framework structure how we experience reality and how we study it. The imagery of fractals is apt for queer conversations, as these structures can account for irregularly shaped objects and spatial nonuniformity in a way that Euclidean geometry cannot process.² The challenge for us is how to move from a place of conceptual innovation and experiential resonance to empirical expression and methodological diversification—the fractal distinction of queer methods. To do this, we replicate Stevens’s logic below. We first present the hallmarks of queer theory that Arlene Stein and Ken Plummer (1994, 181–83) proposed—but we use them “to approach the problem from another point of view,” that is, to outline the possibilities of distinctively queer methods.

1. REJECT UNCHANGING CATEGORIES. Terms like “heterosexual” and “homosexual” are not ahistorical (it is a fallacy to assert that sexuality is a biological expression exempt from historical forces) or transhistorical (it is equally misguided to believe that sexual meanings are stable across time). Sexuality has a history (Halperin 2002). One early example of this constructionist argument comes from the British sociologist and activist Mary McIntosh (1968), who argued that homosexuality is a “social role” that varies across societies, not an essential “condition” that has existed in all places at all times. The French philosopher Michel Foucault provides another influential redirection when he declared that “the homosexual as a species” was born around 1870 (1978, 43). In this tradition, we also find the American historian Jonathan Ned Katz, who notes that German sodomy-law reformer Karl Maria Kertbeny coined the terms *heterosexuality* and *homosexuality* in 1868. Unlike other scholars who focused on *homosexual* history, Katz dives into the “sex cultures” (Ghaziani 2017) of *heterosexuality* and challenges an idea that many people accept, even now, without second thought: heterosexuality is not as “old as procreation, ancient as the lust of Eve and Adam.” Although many people mistake heterosexuality as “unchanging, universal, essential: ahistorical” (Katz 1990, 7), Katz proposed an alternative thesis: heterosexuality is a recent invention, located in specific moments in time, and it has organized

arrangements between men and women in ways that are culturally constructed. From this corpus of research flows four queer methodological principles: (a) embrace a logic of historical variation and social construction; (b) analyze how the meanings of sexuality change over time, especially their discursive character; (c) identify triggers of change (e.g., institutional agents such as psychiatrists and legal definitions); and (d) specify the contexts in which these definitions operate.

2. REJECT IMPERMEABLE CATEGORIES. A study by neuroscientist Simon LeVay showed that homosexuality may have a biological antecedent based on a controversial finding that gay men and straight women have a similarly sized hypothalamus. To this, psychologist John Money retorts, “Of course it [sexual orientation] is in the brain. The real question is, when did it get there? Was it prenatal, neonatal, during childhood, puberty? That we do not know.”³ Searching for the origins of sexual orientation—asking what “makes one” a lesbian or if she was “born that way,” for example—has been afforded an outsized and obsessive role in sexuality studies. Underlying the raging nature/nurture debates are assumptions about identity and difference, continuity and change. According to history professor David Halperin, sexuality scholars need a “strategy for accommodating the aspects of sexual life that seem to persist through time as well as the dramatic differences between historically documented forms of sexual experience” (2000, 88). Such a procedure begins with the “methodological suspension of modern categories” (90) so that we can locate them at different points in time (to Kertbeny, for example, who coined homosexuality and heterosexuality). Halperin calls this a “genealogical analysis” (ibid.), and queer researchers can use it to investigate the cultural contradictions of categories (does heterosexuality require the absolute negation of homosexual encounters?) and their allegedly unified meaning (is heterosexuality as timeless as the lust of Eve and Adam?). We can use ongoing arguments about sexuality as an analytic device to trace historical changes in its meanings, which leave behind “genetic traces, as it were” (ibid.). If we do this, Halperin is confident that we’ll see sexuality as an “eloquent” expression of “the historical accumulation of discontinuous no-

tions sheltered within [a] specious unity” (ibid.)—sexuality as a sedimentary formation that balances diverse elements in a “thinly coherent” fashion (Ghaziani and Baldassarri 2011).

3. **REJECT DUALISMS.** Power operates through the imposition of conceptual binaries such as gay *or* straight, male *or* female, masculine *or* feminine. According to cognitive sociologist Eviatar Zerubavel (1996), this process of “lumping and splitting” the world is inconsistent with an “essentially continuous” reality. As an example, Halperin (1993) shows that antiquity was populated by “molles” (soft or unmasculine men who depart from cultural norms of manliness by embracing femininity) and “tribades” (masculine women who are eager to have sex with other women). When historian George Chauncey (1994) used the archives to visit early twentieth-century New York City, he uncovered a world filled with “trade,” “husbands,” “wolves,” “fairies,” “third-sexers,” and “punks.” Sociologist Peter Hennen (2008) notes that the “wedding date” of effeminacy and homosexuality was written into the popular imagination in the eighteenth century, while Halberstam (1998) asserts that masculinity exists apart from the male body and its effects. By extending the study of gender and sexuality across geographical and temporal domains, we can act on the queer impulse to distinguish Western and non-Western epistemologies as well (Babayán and Najmabadi 2008). All these studies show that queer worldmaking and livability require us to embrace multiplicity and pluralism, not binaries and dualisms. Because existing categories imperfectly map onto many of our lived experiences, queer methods reject a close-fit assumption across categories, identities, attraction, arousal, and sexual behavior. Multiple categories, new categories, and continua are among a number of innovative possibilities that emerge from queer methods.
4. **REJECT INTEREST GROUP POLITICS.** According to the final hallmark, lobbying and other forms of electoral, single-issue identity politics are not the most effective ways to create change. Queer theorists initially examined street-level forms of provocation, parody, and coalitional politics that had cultural revisionism, or what we define as normal and natural, as their goal (Berlant and Freeman 1993). Scholars have continued to expose the risks

of identity politics by tracing how power is unevenly distributed through, not just against, categories of minority genders and sexualities. These efforts include critiques of homonormativity (Duggan 2003), homonationalism (Puar 2007), and legal inclusion (Spade 2011). British-Australian feminist writer and independent scholar Sara Ahmed's call for an "affinity of hammers" (2016a) similarly rejects identity in favor of a model of trans/feminist politicality that draws on the lived experiences of different people who share the feeling of being hammered by oppressive systems (see Cohen 2001 for another example). Ahmed's work suggests that we can use how identity *feels* as a way to study the isolating perils of identity politics. In a recent blog post, political scientist Paisley Currah proposes another approach that uses a model of gender asymmetry rather than gender neutrality or even plurality that is typically associated with newer transgender analysis. He writes, "Any conceptual framework, from the sex/gender binary to the transgender-cisgender dichotomy, risks ossification, risks turning what had been a provisional and generative idea into a methodological imperative that over time obscures more than it reveals. But I do think that, in particular moments and circumstances, we need a transgender feminist approach that is not gender-neutral—that dares to identify *asymmetry* when it sees it" (2016). A turn to queer methods can navigate such complex returns—to politics, identities, isolation, asymmetries, worldmaking, and livability.

Existing research methods only partially capture the "mess of social worlds" (Browne and Nash 2010a, 13). That's because "parts of our world are caught in our ethnographies, our histories, and our statistics. But other parts are not" (Law 2004, 2). As we outlined in our first provocation, queer theory sees a world that is "vague, diffuse or unspecific, slippery, emotional, ephemeral, elusive, or indistinct, changes like a kaleidoscope, or doesn't really have much of a pattern at all" (ibid.). The methodological directive that follows from a mandate to *embrace the mess* is to devise new modes of inquiry and analysis. British sociology professor John Law elaborates, "If we want to think about the messes of reality at all then we're going to have to teach ourselves to think, to practice, to relate, and to know in new ways. We will need to teach our-

selves to know some of the realities of the world using methods unusual to or unknown” to us (2004, 2). Following a trail of breadcrumbs left behind by queer theory, we have shown that queer methods can guide our data collection techniques around the “playful possibilities of unstable and indeterminate subjectivities and for transgressive practices that challenge binaries” (Browne and Nash 2010a, 5). Queer methods can access hidden histories by negation (Muñoz 1996), by emphasizing instability and the disruptive (Krahulik 2006), and by using deconstructive practices.

The Second Provocation: Queering Methods

“Queer methods” is a noun. It connotes a new set of protocols and procedures. “Queering methods” functions as a verb, and it inspires a different question: How can we use queer insights to adjust established protocols in the humanities and social sciences? Our second provocation is a revisionist effort that begins by identifying the limitations of extant models, metrics, or empirical approaches and then innovates based on the signature strengths of queer studies. Let’s assume that our methodological toolkits are robust in general but ill-suited for responding to the distinctiveness of sexuality.

Plummer (2005, 366–67) coins the term “subversive ethnographies” to describe “relatively straightforward ethnographies of specific sexual worlds that challenge [heteronormative] assumptions.” Laud Humphreys’s (1970) study of tearoom trade is a classic example in the social sciences, and Jason Orne’s (2017) research on “sexy communities” in Chicago gay bars provides a contemporary illustration from sociology that foregrounds the role of sex in queer communities. Gender studies scholar Marlon Bailey’s (2013) first-person performance ethnography of ballroom culture in Detroit offers an organic method for examining queer cultural formations that resist normative genders, sex, and kinship.

Plummer also raises the notion of “scavenger methods” (2005, 367), and cites Halberstam’s (1998) work as an example. He shows how humanists can “raid” literary textual methods, film theory, field research, historical surveys, archival records, and taxonomies to produce unique arguments about “female masculinity.” More recently, Peter Hennen

(2008) chronicles how three groups of gay men (faeries, bears, and leathermen) respond to the historical association of effeminacy with male homosexuality. Inspired by Halberstam and echoing Plummer, Hennen calls his approach a “scavenger method” as well because he uses existing techniques to “produce information on subjects who have been deliberately or accidentally excluded from traditional studies of human behavior.” He mixes “methods that are often cast as being at odds with each other,” such as participant and nonparticipant observation, interviews, historical data, and archival data, and “refuses the academic compulsion toward disciplinary coherence” (Halberstam 1998, 13, qtd. in Hennen 2008, 23).

Studies like these assume that “queerness is often transmitted covertly” (Muñoz 1996, 6). The Cuban American academic José Estaban Muñoz explains the consequences of this assumption for research practice: “Leaving too much of a trace has often meant that the queer subject has left herself open for attack.” This alters the nature of evidence. “Instead of being clearly available as visible evidence, queerness has instead existed as innuendo, gossip, fleeting moments, and performances that are meant to be interacted with by those within its epistemological sphere—while evaporating at the touch of those who would eliminate queer possibility” (ibid.). The covertness of queerness compels Muñoz to propose “ephemera as evidence,” as he titles his essay. Ephemera include all those things that remain after a performance, a “residue” (11) that provides “evidence of what has transpired” (10). The ephemeral provides a type of proof that traditional methods would miss, especially “structures of feeling” (10) that drive queer “worldmaking capabilities” (11).

Methods are *queered* when we use the tenets of queer theory to tweak or explode what is possible with our existing procedures. The most common pursuits include making strange the otherwise commonplace or familiar; interrogating alternate possibilities for worldmaking and livability; negotiating differences; resisting categorization or adopting an anticategorical stance altogether; disrupting ideals of stability, rationality, objectivity, and coherence; rethinking the meaning of empiricism and our assumptions about data; critiquing heteronormative practices and recentering the lens on queer lives; and “deconstructing rather than reifying social constructs” (McDonald 2017, 134–35) like gender and

sexuality, as we would expect, but also disability (McRuer 2006), failure (Halberstam 2011), intelligibility (Martinez 2013), loss (Love 2007), migration (Manalansan 2003), racism (Holland 2012), shame (Halperin and Traub 2009), and time (Halberstam 2005). Unlike the first provocation, the goal in this second one is not to establish a “discrete or stable queer methods,” communications scholar James McDonald hastens to add, since “queering is an ongoing process” that requires “an attitude of unceasing disruptiveness” (2017, 8). The ambition, at least for sociologists like Kristen Schilt, Tey Meadow, and D’Lane Compton (2018), is “to find ways to gather empirical data about the experiences of people who are politically and socially marginalized without reproducing such marginalization through practices of research and theorizing that conflate objectification with ‘good science.’”

The Third Provocation: Queering Methodology

Our discussion thus far has focused on methods. The word denotes “what is ‘done,’ that is, techniques of collecting data (interviews, questionnaires, focus groups, photographs, videos, observation, *inter alia*)” (Browne and Nash 2010a, 10). Having considered some possibilities for a distinct queer methods as well as queering established methods, we turn now to concerns of *methodology*, which entail “sets of rules and procedures that guide the design of research to investigate phenomenon or situations; part of which is a decision about what methods will be used and why” (ibid.). To speak of methodology means to articulate the logic that links our theoretical frameworks with the choices we make about how to study the expressions of those theories in texts, ephemera, performances, conversations, discourses, memories, corporeality, interactions, and behaviors. How can queering our rules, procedures, and practices illuminate the epistemologies and ontologies that we deploy when we try to understand gender and sexuality? Three themes strike us as especially urgent: knowability and queer reflexivity, zombie categories, and quantification of the subject.

By connecting queer theory with protocols for data collection and analysis, both humanists and social scientists challenge basic precepts of the research process, including the “knowability of the social” (Browne and Nash 2010a, 13). Some scholars go further and declare that the social

is dead. They favor alternatives like “assemblages” (Puar 2007) that reject “the idea of the social as coherent” or else shift focus to “objects, animals, environments, [and] materials” (Browne and Nash 2010a, 13). Rather than tumbling into methodological nihilism, this exercise can free how researchers think about concepts like “methodology” and “empirical research” (McDonald 2017, 134) along with the “knowledge-power relations” (Di Feliciano, Gadelha, and DasGupta 2017, 405) between us and what or whom we study. Questions of knowledge-power frequently implicate related concerns of whether we should adopt a stance of “emotional neutrality” (Burkhart 1996, 34). Doing so is often costly for LGBTQ field researchers. Hennen responds to the “positive science emphasis on distance and objectivity” by advocating a “sensitivity to borders” (2008, 26). He says that we should “identify freely” with our study participants, since doing so creates “an enormous amount of good will” (27) and builds rapport in interviews. Deconstructing accepted understandings about the practice of research, as Hennen does, requires that we adopt a skeptical stance toward “traditional claims to objectivity” (McDonald 2017, 135). Those who travel down this road encourage us to be reflexive; hence, “queer reflexivity,” which McDonald defines as “a form of reflexivity that entails reflecting on the performativity and closeting of identities over the course of the research process, with particular attention to the ways in which heteronormativity is enacted and resisted in the field” (2017, 135).

Queering methodologies also draws attention to what the German sociologist Ulrich Beck (2003) calls “zombie categories.” These are categories that “once had life and meaning but for many now mean very little” (Plummer 2005, 358). So why do we keep using them? Plummer muses, “We probably go on using them because at present we have no better words to put in their place. Yet dead they are.” As a testament to the growing chasm between undifferentiated categories like “gay” and the complexities of worldmaking and livability, we only have to consider the proliferation of terms like queer, of course, but also bisexual, same-gender loving, and MSM (men who have sex with men). In avoiding a conventional identity-based category, the goal of epidemiologists who coined MSM was to find a way of counting “non-gay-identified MSM” without automatically assuming that they are closeted gay men (Carrillo and Hoffman 2016). The category “unscrambles sexual behavior

from sexual identity” (Ghaziani 2017, 151) and prevents researchers from conflating these two dimensions of sexuality. MSM didn’t stick beyond certain academic and medical circles; other terms like “heteroflexible,” “mostly straight,” and “bicurious” have become more popular. As one of us argues elsewhere, “These neologisms expand the definition of heterosexual . . . by incorporating same-sex desires and practices into the sex cultures of straights” (Ghaziani 2017, 151). For our purposes here, the terms also stress the need to address zombie categories by creating newer ones that better resonate with the diverse aspects of queer lives. Cultural and linguistic anthropologist David Valentine’s (2007) ethnography of “transgender” as a category is a creative example of this tradition and its sensitivity to language.

Perhaps the biggest area of contention between humanist and social scientific investments in queer theory pertains to counting. Sociologists of sexualities often feel cornered in this conversation. On the one hand, they struggle with the acutely normative pressures induced by hypothetico-deductivism. We constantly confront “positivist gatekeepers who evaluate the significance of research in terms of p-values and generalists who prioritize broad ‘so what’ claims” (Schilt, Meadow, and Compton 2018) that are best handled by flaunting large sample sizes. On the flip side, social scientists are also burdened by anxieties that they are “not yet queer enough” in the eyes of our humanistic colleagues” (ibid.). Humanists are clearer on the matter of quantifying the subject. Muñoz asserts that “the inability to count as proper proof” is a “profoundly queer” position (1996, 6). As an alternative to quantification, queer theorists like him propose a “worldmaking project” that promotes “queerness as a possibility” over counting bodies (or “same-sex partner households,” to invoke a zombie category that demographers use; see Spring 2013). He emphasizes “a sense of self-knowing, a mode of sociality and relationality” (6) over quantification. Allergic reactions to counting among humanists don’t surprise social scientists who are versed in queer theory. They recognize that it may be “illogical to count subjects once one has argued that a countable subject does not exist” (Schilt, Meadow, and Compton 2018). Until recently, this created an impasse because of binary thinking about methodology: you either count or you don’t. In our volume, we will showcase the surprising compatibilities between quantification and queerness.

The Final Provocation: Queer Pedagogy

A book about interdisciplinary approaches to queer methods must acknowledge our intellectual forebearers, especially the black lesbian feminist collective who co-edited the anthology *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies* (Hull, Bell-Scott, and Smith 2015). Of that founding document's many contributions, its innovations in pedagogy continue to resonate and inspire, and we organize our final provocation around this theme. What are the implications of a queer methods collection for classrooms and for relations of teaching and learning?

As editors, we believe that an inclusive set of essays from across academic fields will make for a better text, but we became more committed to exploring the relationship between queer methods and pedagogies when we realized that our contributors have teaching experiences across a broad spectrum of institutions in higher education. When conversations about queer methods are collected as we have done here, cross-class perspectives necessarily emerge. This makes our effort an expansive pedagogical project, potentially indicating a new way to figure the field of queer studies in relation to socioeconomic class and institutional status.

Our authors teach at commuter schools, elite private liberal arts colleges, sprawling public urban university systems, and Research 1 flagship campuses. Some are graduate students who have recently returned to the academy; others hold endowed chairs at prestigious sites of knowledge production; still others are artists. They write from the United Kingdom and Canada, and in the United States they are based at institutions that are situated in the South, the Northeast, the Midwest, and the West. The scholars in this volume teach students who are earning their associate, bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees. They work in places that span from prisons to the Ivy League and in certificate programs, night schools, graduate programs, and community centers. They teach students who are homeless, from the working poor, middle class, upper class, and the one percent. They teach and train people of color, Dreamers, and in our contributor Zandria Robinson's words, "first-gen-of-all-races scrappers" (2015), as well as students who receive the special accommodation of legacy admission at highly selective schools. As

they write *about* and crucially *with* people at all levels of socioeconomic status, they speak as scholars who come *from* disparate socioeconomic statuses.

It makes sense that the scholars who are thinking today about queer methods are also engaged in debates about the class-inflected inequalities that structure queer worldmaking and the conditions that make our lives livable. It shouldn't be a surprise that the question of how to teach queer methods frequently forms in tandem with inquiries about institutional access and status. Yet queerness and class have historically been difficult vectors to hold in tension, despite calls to do so by thinkers such as Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis (1993) and Allan Bérubé (2011). This has been particularly true in the context of the dominant narrative of class mobility in higher education. Class has always been a moving target for queer studies, and for all its gorgeous and generative introspection, queer studies has not fully engaged with its own class-based institutional life. The essays that we have gathered here coalesce around the potential of queer methods to intervene in these concerns and to democratize intellectual work in the academy and beyond, a project made urgent by the fact that institutions of higher education in the United States have over the past forty years become symbols of the expansion of opportunity *and* the explosion of class stratification. What should we make of the coincidence that the rise and relative success of queer studies has been contemporaneous with the academy's massive redistribution of resources and people according to class and socioeconomic status? The collection that you hold in your hands offers leverage in the struggle not simply to reverse this course but also to creatively and concretely redirect it.

The less recognizable but perhaps more exciting pedagogical possibilities that this volume puts into play extend across disciplines, across institutions, and across class backgrounds. The need for such structural crossings-over among scholar-teachers working at different types of colleges and universities is imperative, English professor and higher education innovator Cathy Davidson (2017) argues. Now more than ever, higher education reflects and reproduces shocking degrees of class stratification. Socioeconomic inequality has become the defining feature of higher education as institutions ruthlessly sort students by class background (with the attendant racial implications of that class sorting

as well). From this perspective, the academy couldn't be more in lock-step with the "real world" against which it is so frequently pitted. What does queer studies have to say about class dynamics in the academy? How do we contribute to the processes of stratification that divides the field of queer studies from itself along the lines of class and institutional status? How might queer collaborations across peer and nonpeer institutions offer a model for the redistribution of intellectual and material resources? And how might a fresh volume on queer methods, rather than another on queer theory, galvanize the kinds of interclass, cross-institutional queer formations that don't rely on the aspirational model of progress that our administrators adore? Eve Sedgwick once said, "You can write your way out of anywhere." But what if "out" means not just up but also down, sideways, and around? What if "anywhere" mapped not just the institutional locations we want to leave but the universe of other destinations toward which we wish to direct ourselves? Where can queer methods take us?

If pedagogy is a relation of teaching and learning, we propose that *queer pedagogies* are central to interdisciplinary articulations of queer studies and the integration of queer-class worksites across the academy. In other words, we see queer methods as capable of recoding operations of institutional differentiation (rank, cost, and reputation) as operations of institutional integration by envisioning class as a queer connective tissue rather than a divisive barrier in higher education. Queer pedagogies facilitate queer-class linkages because students can see how scholars do queer studies differently when they're faced with different institutional resources, student demographics, regional locations, and career goals. A program of queer methods can help us recognize and communicate across those differences. Seeing queer methods invented and adapted in relation to institutional status—which itself closely relates with socioeconomic class in today's educational landscape—can teach our students about their own intellectual investments, including what they prioritize in research and how they connect research to their own often-unarticulated class locations. Paula Krebs, the dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences at Bridgewater State University, suggests in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (2016) that pedagogical programs such as the one we are promoting here can help graduate students prepare for academic careers in and beyond the R1 universities for

which they are almost exclusively trained. Queer pedagogies can orient us, even in the midst of the powerfully disorienting forces of the neoliberal academic marketplace, by allowing us to think critically and expansively about what kind of teacher-scholars we want to be—with whom, for whom, and where.

Perhaps the best reason for depressurizing queer theory at this moment is because of its longstanding association with elite sites of knowledge production and institutional privilege. While queer theory has “traveled,” to borrow from Katie King’s (1995) framing of feminist theory—and while it has even traveled methodologically—we believe that a focus on methods can offer a more public form for the transportation of queer ideas at a time when privatization, class and racial exclusions, and institutional status overdetermine how the academy works and, at times, how queer studies works within the academy. This is not a critique of high theory but rather of the structural embeddedness of queer studies in a class-stratified university system. The essays gathered here suggest, often individually but collectively for certain, that queer methods can act as a “relay” (Henderson 2013) across queer-class divides in higher education. We understand this work not as primarily compensatory (à la shiny diversity initiatives) but integral, not assured but possible. Queer methods can offer critical and pedagogical *ways*.

A Renaissance in the Making

Queer studies is in the midst of a renaissance. The incitement to explore queer methods and methodologies that we present in this volume offers an opportunity to reevaluate a number of practical, philosophical, and pedagogical issues about the craft of our disciplines, along with academia’s attachments to class, privilege, and status. As you travel through these pages, you will notice that some problems persist and endure, plaguing the scholars here just as they did those who came before us. But there are also issues on which we have made much progress, including our capacity to think in nuanced ways about sexuality and its complementarities with methods.

We have organized our volume with a goal of dramatizing the possibilities of, and for, queer methods. That impulse is reflected in the title of our book, which positions the boundless and protean queer imagination

alongside more disciplinary and deliberate methods. The book's structure includes innovations that playfully upend genre conventions, such as offering two introductory chapters (ours and another written by Heather Love) that speak to the novice and the expert. And just as the introductory "Methods/Mess" section emphasizes multiple entry points into the volume, each of the four parts that follow evoke plenitude and possibilities in doing queer research. We actively resist intellectual silos; none of our sections is populated solely by essays in the humanities or social sciences. We wish instead to enable unexpected combinations, configurations, and conversations. We debated whether to use a "slash" or "and" in our section headings. We settled on the slash, as you can see, because it declares that a relationship exists without confining its nature, leaving you the reader with a sense of unease that we believe is generative as you embark upon using these ideas in your own work and life. Part I: "Subjecting/Objecting" urges you to maintain an inventive tension between performativity and positivism, to be both intimately present and precise. After that, in "Narrating/Measuring," our contributors show that while quantification might seem incompatible with interpretive methods, the two are not always easy to disentangle, let alone distinguish. The third part, "Listening/Creating," rejects the passive/active duality as our contributors incorporate the voices of others into their visions for the shared queer work ahead of us all. The final section, "Historicizing/Resisting," will propel you beyond this volume with a set of essays that reflect the urgency of imagining new methods for queer intellectual and pedagogical engagements.

Before our ink dries, we offer a call to action to ensure that the fountain ever flows: drawing on your own desires, disciplinary protocols, assumptions, horizon of expectations, and hopes, identify the patterns that leap out from the essays in this collection and use them to build a productive, plentiful, powerful, and pleasurable queer worldmaking and livability project of your own. Onward—bravely turn the page.

NOTES

- 1 *Queer Method*. 2013. Blog. www.queermethod.tumblr.com/.
- 2 "Tourists in an Unknown Town: Remapping the Social Sciences," *University of Chicago Magazine* 93 (2) (December 2000). <https://magazine.uchicago.edu/>.
- 3 Quoted in "Homosexuality: Born or Bred?" *Newsweek*, February 24, 1992, 46, 48.

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