POST-QUEER POLITICS
Queer Interventions

Series editor:
University of Limerick, Ireland
and Michael O’Rourke

Queer Interventions is an exciting, fresh and unique new series designed to publish innovative, experimental and theoretically engaged work in the burgeoning field of queer studies.

The aim of the series is to interrogate, develop and challenge queer theory, publishing queer work which intersects with other theoretical schools and is accessible whilst valuing difficulty; empirical work which is metatheoretical in focus; ethical and political projects and most importantly work which is self-reflexive about methodological and geographical location.

The series is interdisciplinary in focus and publishes monographs and collections of essays by new and established scholars. The editors intend the series to promote and maintain high scholarly standards of research and to be attentive to queer theory’s shortcomings, silences, hegemonies and exclusions. They aim to encourage independence, creativity and experimentation: to make a queer theory that matters and to recreate it as something important; a space where new and exciting things can happen.

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This project is dedicated to all the creative potentialities of equitable and social justice virtualities that have yet to be actualized.
David V. Ruffolo’s *Post-Queer Politics* puts queer studies and queer theory on the line. The body of queer studies (the institutionalised body of knowledges which have sedimented queer theory, stultifying it, often emptying out its potential) is he tells us ‘stagnant’, ‘dormant’, ‘solidified’, ‘stale’. Queer has reached its ‘peak’, reached the end, as it were, of the line. But Ruffolo’s book disrupts this gloomy narrative by seeking to re-fluidify queer studies, to re-invent a queer theory with the capacity to intervene, disrupt, and produce (the new, the unforeseen). Rather than suggesting or glorying in the ‘end of queer’ Ruffolo seeks instead to re-draw the maps, to bring about new lines of flight, and to effect a ‘potential deterritorialisation of queer as we know it today’. As Alain Badiou says in his *Handbook of Inaesthetics* ‘we want a theatre of capacity, not of incapacity’ (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005, 75) and what we get in *Post-Queer Politics* is a theatre for the production of intensive politics, a smooth space where the potentialities of life can be renegotiated. Ruffolo’s schizoanalytic strategy is one of reading through rather than rejecting, one of anticipation rather than paranoia. In the face of the increasing disciplining of all sorts of bodies (of theoretical work, of knowledge, of thought) he energetically revivifies queer studies.

The post- of the title is interruptive, anticipatory and Jasbir Puar advocates a similar strategy: ‘A paranoid temporality therefore produces a suppression of critical creative politics; in contrast, the anticipatory temporalities that I advocate more accurately reflect a Spivakian notion of ‘politics of the open end’, of positively enticing unknowable political futures into our wake, taking risks rather than guarding against them’ (*Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2007, xx). We are, the author riskily tells us, post-subjectivity, post-discursivity, post-identity, post-representation. This does not mean, nor should it, that we are after subjectivity, or discourse, or identity. Ruffolo finds such binary thinking unproductive and invents a new language which is more fructive, less about the after and more about the beside, the peri- rather than the post- understood as after, assemblage rather than gridlock. By fusing Gilles Deleuze/Félix Guattari and Mikhail Bakhtin (and implicitly Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s later Deleuzian inspired work on affect and periperformativity) he is able to emphasise crowding, besideness and dialogical connection. This move has massive ramifications for queer studies and queer theory, and as Ruffolo himself points out, for theory in general. The post-queering
of queer shifts all the cornerstones (if one can say such a thing) of queer studies, shapes a new ontology (or even, perhaps, a deontology) for queer theory, one which strongly resembles Chrysanthi Nigianni’s vision in Deleuze and Queer Theory where she exhorts us to ‘imagine, form and actualise new forms of political agency: instead of communities of an identitarian logic, machinic assemblages; instead of the individual, a crowd; instead of identities, singularities; instead of representations, expressions’ (‘Introduction’, Nigianni and Merl Storr (eds) Deleuze and Queer Theory, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009, 7).

By re-thinking and re-assessing the position and influence of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler in queer studies, Ruffolo is able to exploit Deleuze and Guattari’s ontology or intensive politics of becoming, and this is a necessary intervention if we want to think about a non-essentialised or non-assertable queer ‘identity’. The decentered theory (it is, after all, theory itself which Ruffolo interferes with) we get in Post-Queer Politics is what we would call a Theory without Organs (TwO), analogous to Deleuze and Guattari’s Body without Organs (BwO). By co-assembling the motifs of becoming and the Body without Organs, Ruffolo can dis-assemble bodies of power, desire, and institution as they have been understood in Western formations. This newly sketched ontology of becoming (of post-queer) challenges the concretised homo- and hetero-sexual identities on which some (perhaps most) versions of queer theory have depended. But Ruffolo’s post-queer bodies refuse to be stabilised, fixed, binarised, regulated, disciplined, controlled. And if post-queer theory is critical of theory itself, then it can also be said that post-queer identity is critical of queer identity itself too. Post-queer, on Ruffolo’s terms undoes identity, is an identity without an essence. Post-queer is multiple, fluid, rhizomatic, always in tension with stasis, permanence, and striation. Post-queer theory, then, is a rhizomic Theory without Organs (or organisation), always in the process of becoming, always being opened by the outside. By refocusing the argument on biopower toward questions of immanence, desiring-machines and biovirtualities (the virtual and material productivities of life) Ruffolo effects a swerve away from (or rather a reading through) Foucauldian, Butlerian, and Agambenian frameworks towards a Deleuzoguattarian analysis. It is this turn from the policing of bodies (in all the senses of this term) toward bodily becoming that the practical and theoretical force of queer can really take flight. And Ruffolo calls this, drawing on Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, a radically democratic post-queer theory, a democracy which is open rather than closed to the world. We might, borrowing from Reza Negarestani in Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials (Melbourne: Re.Press, 2008), call this a ‘politics’ of anomalous or unnatural participation with the outside, a set of ‘schizotrategies’ for openness and insurgency. For Negarestani and Ruffolo ‘the plane of openness’ means being opened by rather than open to, means lodging oneself on the TwO. And, Ruffolo reminds us, this being opened by entails a certain responsibility, what
Lisa Henderson calls ‘a preserving and consoling receptivity that is hard to find and harder to hold onto in these mean times’ (‘Every Queer Thing We Know’, The Massachusetts Review, xlix 1/2 [Spring/Summer 2008], 79). In the mean times Ruffolo describes in these pages it is possible to make intelligible the Deleuzoguattarian claim that queer is a process (always en process, always to-come), not an object; an active engagement not a rigid and stable (theoretical or sexual) identity; a performative praxis not a fixed (or fixable) category. We might, after Jeffrey Nealon, call Ruffolo’s post-queer politics an ‘alterity politics of response’ (Alterity Politics: Ethics and Performative Subjectivity, Duke University Press, 1998, 15).

To reiterate: David Ruffolo’s experimental book-machine Post-Queer Politics puts Queer Theory ‘on the line’, the original title for the opening plateau of A Thousand Plateaus, a book which begins with two queer declarations and the opening pages of which need to be re-read alongside the present volume for an incipient theorisation of post-queer politics: First, that ‘The two of us wrote Anti-Oedipus together. Since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd’. Second, ‘we have made use of everything that came without range’ (Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, trans. Brian Massumi, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987, 3). The first announces theirs is to be a theory of multiplicities and if Guattari talks of the way we make love to every author we read and Deleuze talks of how, in a way, he and Guattari loved, when they wrote together, then becoming-imperceptible for them is a queer becoming. That they will make use of everything within range is typical of the queer eclectic approach. We may not ‘know yet what the multiple entails’ (4) but post-queer theory as war machine will arm itself with every available tool for dismantling the arborescent, phallocentric, tree-like logic of Western metaphysics, the ‘weariest kind of thought’ (5). Post-queer theory events, experiments, intervenes like William Burroughs cut-up method, rejects linearity, is anti-genealogical, anti-filiative as it tries to map alternative, denaturalised models of development. Ruffolo’s post-queer theory is opposed to the teleological, the hetero-reproductive; it is rhizomatic, has heterogeneous genealogies: ‘any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be’ (7). It is a schizo-micropolitics, a nomad war machine, smoothing space and evolving ‘by subterranean stems and flows’ (7) like the AIDS activists of ACT-UP and Queer Nation, or the alterglobalisation movements. Post-queer theory decenters the heteronormative logos and exposes ‘arborescent multiplicities for what they are’ (8), ‘never allows itself to be overcoded’ (9) but relentlessly decodes, scrambles the codes of hetero-logic (but in a way which is productive rather than dyadic or binaristic). Post-queer theory is a war-wachine pitted against the State, a nomad which ‘constantly flees’ (9) down lines of deterritorialisation, destratifies on the Body without Organs. Refusing assimilation, refusing normalisation the ‘Pink Panther’ that is post-queer politics.
‘imitates nothing, it reproduces nothing, it paints the world its colour, pink on pink, this is its becoming-world’ (11), its open-ended becoming preferring ‘abominable’ (11), unnatural, sodomitical couplings, transversal connections, lines of flight which ‘scramble the genealogical trees’ (11).

Ruffolo’s post-queer theory to-come is a rhizome-map, always revisable, open to new events, new experiments, new becomings. It plugs in everywhere ‘fosters connections between fields’ (12), removes blockages on the BwO, is the ‘maximum opening of the Body without Organs onto a plane of consistency’ (12). The map of post-queer theory is ‘open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification’ (12). It must not, as Ruffolo argues queer studies has, become sedimented, normalised, assimilated, reterritorialised, must not become a tracing rather than a map. It must be rhizomorphous, produce ‘stems and filaments that seem to be roots, or better yet connect with them by penetrating the trunk, but put them to strange new uses’ (15), work in an ‘offbeat’ ‘untimely’ way (16). The tree has even ‘implanted itself in our bodies, rigidifying and stratifying even the sexes’ (18) but the rhizome empties out, dis-organises the body, makes a Bwo which refuses to ‘subjugate sexuality to the reproductive model’ (18). The rhizome ‘liberates sexuality’ and desire, allows the body to vibrate. The rhizome is always to-come ‘perpetually in construction’, a process that ‘is perpetually prolonging itself, breaking off and starting up again’ (20). It is open to the incalculable, indeterminable future, has ‘neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows and which it overspills’ (21). For Ruffolo, post-queering is always interbeing, always happens in the middle. The rhizome, the BwO, the post-queer theory to-come are located on a thousand queer plateaus: ‘a continuous self-vibrating region of intensities whose development avoids any orientation toward a culmination point or external end’ (22). For Ruffolo there are queer machines and bodily desire is machinic, forms assemblages, effects linkages, and performs temporary combinations of parts. Embracing rhizomatic, involutionary potentialities means being opened by queer ethics and the post-queer theory to-come on/as the plane of consistency. The plane of consistency of post-queer theory can be diagrammed, as it is on the cover of this book in the painting by Masoud Ghaffarian-Shirazi, as a kind of free-floating space that is formless, without subject, without development, without centre or structure, without beginning or end. Post-queer bodies as they are thought here allow us to think the ‘becoming of zones of rarefaction. There must exist virtual rarefactions. We need a non-organic past of bodies—there must exist virtual rarefactions. We need a non-organic past of the living being, an inorganic becoming of bodies. Or further, we need a body without organs’. (Quentin Meillassoux, ‘Subtraction and Contraction: Deleuze, Immanence and Matter and Memory’, Collapse III, 2007, 98) Or, further again, we need a theory without organs, a ‘typology of vital becomings’ (Meillassoux, 98), to negotiate an
openness by the future, to actualise the virtual; to allow for the emergence of the radically new one must move beyond the forms of disciplinary subjectivity, discursivity and identity, that predetermine one’s relations to the outside. To gloss this new form of relatedness, this proliferation of connection, and the ethical imperatives to readjust or reorient our extensions, to be opened by the outside, we will do well to follow Ruffolo and further trace the suggestive links between queer theory and Deleuze/Guattari. As Guattari himself puts it in *Soft Subversions*, we desperately need ‘soft subversions and imperceptible revolutions that will eventually change the face of the world’ (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 306). *Post-Queer Politics* is softly subversive and the imperceptible revolutions its schizoanalytic politics promise can only be found on the BwO or in a TwO, and the work of changing the face of the world, work that is long overdue, will have to take place between the two.

Michael O’Rourke and Noreen Giffney
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The potential for *Post-Queer Politics* could not have been actualized without the radical activism and scholarship over the past few decades and so I hope this project humbly expresses my sincere appreciation and gratitude for all the work that endlessly commits itself to equity and social justice.

I feel very fortunate to be a part of such an exciting and refreshing series as Queer Interventions. I am very honoured to share the company of those that have already published in this series and I look forward to future publications committed to thinking critical about contemporary queer studies. At the heart of this series is the brilliance of the series editors: Noreen Giffney and Michael O’Rourke. I thank them for supporting this project from the very beginning and for providing such insightful and critical feedback throughout its development. Their excitement and eagerness to engage a post-queer terrain encouraged this project immensely. I also thank everyone at Ashgate who contributed to this project’s fruition and especially Neil Jordan and Pam Bertram for guiding the publishing process with ease, flexibility, and direction.

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Queer has reached a political peak. Its theoretical movements have become limited by its incessant investment in identity politics and its political outlook has in many ways attained dormant status due to its narrowed interest in heteronormativity. This is, of course, not to suggest the end of queer but instead a potential deterritorialization of queer as we know it today. Over the past two decades, a significant body of work has contributed to what is referred to as queer studies. Queer theorizations are at the heart of this anti-canonical genre where the intersection of bodies, identities, and cultures continue to be a central focus. Although queer theory informs much of this work vis-à-vis the queering of theory and the theories of queer, important feminist, postcolonial, and trans theories; Stryker and Whittle (2006) also offer a collection of essays in The Transgender Studies Reader, Alexander and Mohanty (1997), Eng (2001), Ferguson (2003), Muñoz (1999), Rodriguez (2003), and Roman (1998) offer critical contributions intersecting race with queer studies; Clare (2001) and McRuer and Wilerson (2003) queer disability studies; for readings linking queer theory and education see Garber (1994), Kumashiro (2001), Pinar (1998), Ristock and Taylor (1998), Rodriguez and Pinar (2007), Ruffolo (2006a, 2006b, 2007, 2008a), Talburt and Steinberg (2000); Britzman (1995, 1998, 2000) provides an important psychoanalytic reading of education; David Morton’s edited collection The Material Queer (1996) includes many prominent theorists that provide “a materialist understanding of marginal sexualities”; for an edited collection linking queer theory with cultural criticism, see Morland and Willox’s Queer Theory (2005).