

Is the rectum *still* a grave?

Wade's DEATH ASSHOLE RAVE as an essay in the medium and material of dance. Following the logic of a kind of an anti-futurist thesis with regards to the seemingly insurmountable devastation of our contemporary global capitalist era – the unending winter of debt, depletion, and destruction that makes it easier, as many have noted, to imagine the end of the world rather than the end of capitalism – it follows employs this nihilistic impulse to move the body beyond such a conceptual dead-end, into a terrain where the non-future becomes less about denying the possibilities of a futurity but more about a rejection or revision of what we take to be the optimism for a always deferred good, or simply better, life.

Already, we start from death. Entering the space we confront Wade laying on the floor, the black outline of a coffin drawn around him. Microphone in hand, he greets his audience with a saccharine voice – a nod perhaps to the kind of service economy that performance has become, one in which audiences anticipate entertainment, persistently plagued by a question of “getting” the work in advance, rather than remaining open to the terrain of something extra-linguistic. The audience files past Wades body almost like a wake, an absurd one at that, one in which the corpse speaks back. But we are not only here to mourn the death of the body, to see past bodily decomportment, but perhaps as well we are confronted from the outset with the funeral service to a kind of logic of seeing dance work, preparing ourselves to access by other means the paradoxical notion of a dance in the wake of the body's death.

No future. For many years, this rallying cry has been the locus of debate that has anchored something like queer studies (though more recently the question of futurity seems to be displaced by a certain concern over access to a kind of normative/non-normative futurism). Perhaps most ready to hand is the argument staged between something like Lee Edelman's claims that the future is domain for heterosexual hegemony, a kind of reproduction of hetero-logical thinking embodied by the child. To this end Edelman cries “No Future” as a queer project anti-normative politics. José Muñoz fierce rejoinder to Edelman offers us the opportunity for *Cruising Utopia*, utilizing the Marxist-critic Ernst Bloch's notion of an anticipatory illumination to shift the domain of the future beyond such a circumscribed heterosexual logic to include the capacity for imagining the world otherwise. More than merely abstract theoretical sparring, Muñoz's rejoinder is in large part motivated by concern that the “No Future” as a politic too easily dovetails with more hegemonic state and economic policies which deny a future to certain queer minoritarian subjects. No Future in that sense always implies a degree a privilege of having a future to begin with that one is able to negate or reject. But if Muñoz's work after *Cruising Utopia* is any indication, his reworking of futurity is hardly a call to more positive ethical claims for community nor a rejection of what is known as the anti-social queer theory. In essays on The Germs and queer punk subculture, Muñoz demonstrates a deep investment in the sociality of anti-social queers, a kind of queerness that embraces the difficulty of being together as a kind

of complex politics of anti-social association. Here Muñoz would be inline with something of the foundational texts of queer theory – such as Leo Bersani’s infamous essay “Is the rectum a grave?” (1987) which offers a genealogy of the homophobic logic of the public sphere in the midst of the AIDS crisis. From national news coverage which positions gay male sex as an engine of societal destruction, to male-male desire which Bersani articulates as participating in a kind of augmentation of heterosexual male culture, Bersani evinces that an “authentic gay male political identity” entails resisting given definitions of maleness and homosexuality as they are both inherited from the heterosexual public sphere as well reflected in gay male sexual desire (209). Bersani adopts these mediatized representations that not only constantly reproduce the image of gay men as a dying population but as a series of sex-crazed killers. Working against the more sanitized celebrations of gay male sexuality as communal, utopian or authentic, Bersani proposes a celebration of this promiscuity precisely as a mode of self-shattering and abnegation. He pushes this death-centered metaphor to a theoretical extreme in which such a “frenzied epic of displacements” of meaning becomes the very condition for a kind of radical queer political practice (220). As Bersani concludes, “[i]t may, finally, be in the gay man’s rectum that he demolishes his own perhaps otherwise uncontrollable identification with a murderous judgment against him” (222).

Is the rectum *still* a grave? My title obviously draws on genealogy of thinking that ties back to Bersani among others in which queerness is founded on a certain politics of negation. But if the gravity of the rectum became a certain image of power in the AIDS crisis (specifically 1987), does the potency of self-shattering persist nearly thirty years later? It is here that I’ve come to think of DEATH ASSHOLE RAVE as participating among this constellation of essays and agendas which push for an expansion of what might be thought of as queer practice and queer politics. If Bersani’s claims are possible in the midst of an epidemic, they are also possible on the foundations of a boom – the economic flourish of the 1980s and a kind of exchange occurring in which life could be both celebrated and denied by subjects for whom the future was so bright. Is the rectum still a grave when the future seems to be increasingly denied to all of us, rather than only some? When the rectum becomes a graveyard populated with a more and more bodies that can hardly imagine let alone realize anything like the stability to survive within an increasingly indebted neoliberal landscape? DEATH ASSHOLE RAVE brings its reader/audience to the brink of such extinction, returning queer abjection to a fundamentally capitalist critique of the ways in which we continue to make and inhabit a world inhospitable to life. It is along these lines that I suggest we think of this work as participating in the practice of queer essay writing, something that boards between formal aesthetic exercise and political manifesto.

Wade is out of the coffin. He has walked over to a microphone stand and sound mixer from which he can run the audio. DIY, once the domain of the underfunded avant-garde, has become the common condition for an entrepreneurial performance artist in the age of late capitalism. The back wall of the theater illuminates with a

slide flashing “TOTAL LIQUIDATION” as Wade amps up into a monologic tirade and sales-pitch in which, the warehouses being “fucking full” after a “lifetime of accumulation” we’re now “cutting, slashing, breaking burning with the ties that we have in this lifetime.” Accumulation here serves an illogical function of clutter, something other than the principle of the accumulation of wealth and security. The full warehouses speak not to plentitude but to burdensome ties. Twitching like a rag doll while standing at the microphone, Wade’s arms and legs throw themselves out in reaching expressive gestures as he repeatedly buckles at the waist. His hand press and pull against the powder blue fabric of his suit as his body seems to be crawling outside of itself. There is an urgency and an agitation to his unsettled movements in contrast to the rather vehement and unwavering jeremiad he delivers. He body seems to be pulled by its center backwards, away from the microphone, as his mouth is continually pulled forward, some sort of tug-of-war perhaps between mind and body, language and the wider sensorium, as we see Wade himself being pulled apart.