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‘To Keep Feelings in Circulation’: Private/Public Sexuality and Queer Ambivalence in an Age of Assimilation

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The concept of ambivalence in U.S. queer studies has tended to be less a subject of enquiry in itself and more a component of, or catalyst for, broader arguments about how heteronormative culture shapes, restricts, and challenges queer subjectivities. In this article I explore three forms of ambivalence in order to argue that the foregrounding of publicly ambivalent positions is essential for renegotiating what it means to be queer in an age of respectability politics and conditional mainstream acceptance.

On 26 June 2015, in the case of *Obergefell et al. v. Hodges*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled by a five-to-four vote that the Constitution guarantees a right to same-sex marriage. In the words of Justice Anthony M. Kennedy, concluding the majority opinion, marriage is a “keystone of our social order” (Kennedy 4). This represents an important but ambivalent victory for queer communities in the U.S. While federal recognition grants to same-sex married partners the benefits, rights, and privileges associated with heterosexual marriage and private citizenship, it remains the case that, as many queer activists and theorists have pointed out, marriage can be used as a tool of anti-black racism, of immigration enforcement, of gendered social control, and is at core about protecting private property (see, for instance, Duggan, Conrad, and Spade and Wilse). In light of the U.S. legalisation of same-sex marriage and the ambivalent victory it entails, the concept of ambivalence itself requires fresh scrutiny. Ambivalence – the simultaneous experience of contradictory affects, feelings, and emotions toward an object – is a formative, unavoidable, and even definitive aspect of queer experience. It has, however, tended to be less a subject of inquiry in itself and more a component of, or catalyst for, broader arguments about how heteronormative culture shapes, restricts, and challenges queer subjectivities. In what follows I will explore three different but inextricably connected forms of ambivalence, manifesting in literary texts, in order to argue that the foregrounding and occupation of publicly ambivalent positions is essential for renegotiating what it means to be queer in an age of respectability politics and conditional mainstream acceptance.

Heteronormativity describes the structural conditions that establish and maintain the notion that reproductive heterosexuality is normal. The term was coined in 1991 by Michael Warner in his introduction to the now canonical anthology *Fear of a Queer Planet*, and has roots in particular in the work of Adrienne Rich and Gayle Rubin. In a collaborative essay entitled “Sex in Public,” Warner and Lauren Berlant argue that heteronormativity not only organises heterosexuality as natural, but attributes to it a sense of “society-founding rightness” (312). Far from simply indicating the gender of those towards whom one is romantically and sexually inclined in one’s “private life,” heterosexuality

becomes “the basic idiom of the personal and the social” (312). In order for this to happen, heteronormative culture “organize[s] a hegemonic national public around sex,” which it officially purports to do “in order to protect the zone of heterosexual privacy,” but which it in fact does in order to protect the “institutions of economic privilege and social reproduction” that prop up and are propped up by heteronormativity (314). To this end, the marriage - and couple - forms are consecrated by heteronormative culture as the legitimate forms of intimate social relation through which national existence is mediated. The ideal citizen according to this model is heterosexual and part of a family unit – a worker and consumer who complies more or less willingly with the demands of capitalist society.

The key point Berlant and Warner make is that intimacy and sexuality in heteronormative culture are relegated to the sanctioned zones of the couple - and family - forms, which are constructed as private rather than public realms. This private realm is the realm of personhood, of “personal life,” a space apparently distinct from the public realm of work and politics into and out of which people move on a daily basis in a more or less linear fashion. However, because heteronormative culture takes as given the reproduction of heterosexuality, casting heterosexuality as the default position integral to its continued operation, even those aspects of society which superficially appear to have nothing to do with sex can in fact be read in the register of sexuality, because they are predicated on the assumption of heterosexuality. In this context, then, heterosexuality describes not just the *private* relations between opposite-sex individuals; it is also a naturalised, naturalising, and fundamentally *public* form of cultural and social organisation, expressed by and equally expressive of that culture which sanctions it and which, in turn, is sanctioned by it. Furthermore, this illusorily private realm of intimate personhood, in being conceived as separate from public life, also becomes the primary site of consolation against the tribulations, oppressions, and inequalities of public life necessary for the social reproduction of economic privilege. Mitigating the affective and material fallout of living according to the dictates of capital then becomes a private rather than a public concern. Heteronormativity as a structural force thus encourages individuals to conceive of their private lives as “prepolitical,” rather than as the product of sociopolitical circumscription (Berlant and Warner 317). Even though the intimate world it creates often fails to provide the “good life” happiness it promises, this failure is typically seen as the fault of individuals rather than the institution(s) of heteronormativity.

A further key point is that heteronormativity and heterosexuality should not be understood as synonymous. While heteronormativity creates and maintains the social conditions necessary for the reproduction of normative heterosexual expression, heterosexual activity that repudiates these norms cannot be called heteronormative.¹ At the same time, as the legalisation of same-sex marriage indicates, homosexual activity is not necessarily opposed to heteronormativity. The term *homonormativity* has been used to describe gay and lesbian politics that prioritise assimilating into heteronormative culture over contesting naturalised ideals of matrimony, procreation, and systems of binary gender. In the words of Jasbir Puar, homonormativity “aids the process of heteronormativity

¹ It is important to acknowledge, however, that heterosexual deviation from heteronormativity is far more tolerable to heteronormative culture, and far less dangerous to the individual, than queer deviation, due to the privileged position occupied by heterosexuals in heteronormative society.

through the fracturing away of queer alliances in favour of adherence to the reproduction of class, gender, and racial norms” (Puar 31-32). As Berlant and Warner point out, “queer culture constitutes itself in many ways other than through . . . the privatised forms normally associated with sexuality . . . while elaborating a public world of belonging and transformation . . . that bear[s] no necessary relation to domestic space, to kinship, to the couple form, to property, or to the nation” (322). One example of this is the communities of care that arose in major cities early in the AIDS crisis, in which gays and lesbians, neglected and demonised by the government, took on the responsibility of caring for the swiftly increasing number of sick and dying (predominantly) gay men surrounding them.² Another can be witnessed in the early fiction of Sarah Schulman, which depicts a rapid, improvisatory, and continually shifting world of publicly intimate relations, in which the main aim is “to keep feelings in circulation” in ways that challenge the illusion propagated by heteronormative culture that intimacy is private and prepolitical (Schulman 67).

The term queer has generally been mobilised against heterosexual and homosexual normativity to describe an orientation that is not only “anti-heteronormative, but . . . anti-normative” (Halberstam 77). In the words of David Halperin, queer refers not to any specific sexual or gender identity but to “*whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant” (Halperin 62). Queer, then, is particularly useful in describing not just sexual and gender identity but one’s politicised commitment to difference, inclusion, non-normative modes of being, and even the abolition of fixed identity categories altogether. In recent years, however, much work in queer studies has sought to interrogate “the enduring charisma of the normative” in a less oppositional manner (Berlant 44). My intention in this article is not to pit homonormative assimilation against radical queerness in a reductive binary; nor to vaunt queer publicity as the only morally and politically legitimate response to the legalisation of same-sex marriage; nor necessarily to pit queerness against projects of normalisation. Instead, my aim is to elucidate and distinguish some of the main ambivalences that inhere to heteronormative, homonormative, and queer experience. I argue that heteronormative ambivalence describes the public suppression of contradiction and the privatisation of its negative effects in order to reinforce and reproduce the status quo. Homonormative ambivalence, arising from shame induced by heteronormativity, seeks resolution through inclusion within the structures that produced the ambivalence in the first place. Queer ambivalence foregrounds the experience of ambivalence itself, in order to expose and interrogate the conditions in which it is produced. It seeks, in the suspension of resolution, new, more successful and sustainable ways of resisting the toxic elements of privatised intimacy and sexuality, and reframes the experience of ambivalence as valuable in itself. Finally, queer ambivalence is perhaps especially useful for dismantling the ease with which dichotomies like normative and queer *themselves* become normalised, in search of more open and inclusive ways of thinking and being.

Scenes of Ambivalence

Heteronormative culture sees ambivalence as a problem requiring resolution, and as an individual (private) fault rather than as a product of structural (public) conditions. It also tends to

² For a thorough history of this phase of AIDS activism, see Gould 2009, esp. pp. 55-120

feminise ambivalence-management, reinforcing naturalised differences between masculinity and femininity and upholding binary notions of gender. In situating ambivalence within the private, domestic sphere, heteronormative culture acts to minimise the radical or disruptive potential of ambivalence by psychopathologising its effects. For example, Sigmund Freud argued that ambivalence arises during Oedipal conflict. As the (male) child begins to compete with his father for his mother, he is forced into a contradictory position: hating his father as competitor but retaining for him his “old-established affection and admiration” (2769). In order to find relief from this conflict between love and hate, the child displaces his hostile feelings onto a substitute object. This displacement can result in neurosis-formation, as in the famous case of equinophobic Little Hans. The child who successfully resolves Oedipal conflict is more able in later life to deal with the ambivalence that inheres in all intimate relations; the child who fails to do so is liable to become or remain neurotic, and thus unable to healthily confront their ambivalence and correspond with social norms. The point is that, if ambivalence is intimately bound to the “heteronormative reinforcement” the Oedipus complex enacts by inducting individuals into accordance with dominant heteronormative culture, then the successful (i.e. *normal*) resolution or suppression of ambivalence can be said to be an important aspect of the reproduction of heteronormativity (Boyarin 206). Failure to resolve one’s ambivalence can then be described as psychopathological; furthermore, the successful resolution of ambivalence becomes tied up with toxic heteronormative prescriptions of masculinity.

Nancy Armstrong complicates this understanding of ambivalence by arguing that the liberal notion of the subject as a rational actor more or less in charge of *his* feelings and emotions is historically contingent on the relegation of ambivalence-management to the realm of so-called femininity. As Lauren Berlant elaborates, this feminisation of ambivalence explicitly reinforces the patriarchy at the heart of heteronormativity by creating “the *figura* of autonomy” in those sufficiently privileged to perceive themselves as relatively coherent and consistent private individuals in charge of their affects and capable of acting rationally. Contending with the often debilitating affective intensity of ambivalence becomes a feminine task, leaving masculinised bodies free to act decisively and directly in both public and private realms. The ideal subject position thus becomes one in which ambivalence is suppressed; to succumb to irresolution is feminine or even antisocial. In practice, of course, this is difficult to sustain.

Richard Yates’s fiction provides an especially lucid example of the corrosive effects of heteronormative ambivalence. His first and most famous novel, *Revolutionary Road*, depicts the dissolution of Frank and April Wheeler’s marriage. Focussing on the discrepancies between Frank’s internal life and external actions, the novel charts his construction of compensatory fantasies to gloss over the disappointing facts of his existence and quell his ambivalence. From a perspective of ironic detachment, Yates documents the contrasts between Frank’s private thoughts and his public performance of conformity with heteronormative demands.

Early in the novel, following a vicious argument with April the night before, Frank awakens hungover to see April “wearing a man’s shirt” (Yates 34-35) while mowing the lawn. His thoughts wander as he watches from their bedroom window, preparing to reaffirm his masculinity by going outside and taking the mower from her “by force if necessary” (40). The narrative traces Frank and April’s shared history from their early relationship to the present. Their marriage, it transpires, was

prompted by April's unexpected pregnancy. April responded to the news by withdrawing from Frank, evoking his anxiety that he is not in control of their relationship and its heteronormative evolution: "Your wife wasn't supposed to turn away from you, was she? You weren't supposed to have to work and wheedle to win her back . . . as if you were afraid she might evaporate at the very moment of this first authentic involvement of your lives" (49). April unambivalently wanted an abortion; Frank, while privately agreeing, struggled to accept that she decided this on her own. April eventually breaks down following a long argument and agrees to have the baby: "no single moment of his life had ever contained a better proof of manhood than . . . holding that tamed, submissive girl and saying 'Oh, my lovely; oh, my lovely,' while she promised she would bear his child . . . 'And I didn't even *want* a baby'" (51-52).

This scene demonstrates the complex relationship between heteronormativity's broad suppression of ambivalence, and its subsequent impact on specific individuals. April behaves contrary to the role she is expected to take in the traditional couple-form by confidently deciding she does not want her baby. In doing so she shows how, despite heteronormative culture's gendering of ambivalence, specific individuals often think against its demands (although their capacity for resistance is mediated by their structural positions). Frank, meanwhile, occupies a more traditionally "feminine" position, full of emotive outbursts and affective intensity. He is ambivalent about the pregnancy. He wants "shared" excitement with April about this "first authentic involvement" of their lives, at the same time as not wanting to have a child yet, and agreeing with her decision (49). Heteronormative culture saturates Frank's ambivalence: he wants to live up to its sanctioning of procreation and matrimony as natural, desirable, and essential aspects of any *authentic* romantic relationship, because to capitulate to his simultaneous disinclination would render his experience of the world and of himself *as a normal heterosexual man* illegible, and thus expose the private contradictions his public identity seeks to mask. The need to suppress this troubling ambivalence is exacerbated by April's masculinised unambivalence. Frank therefore utilises the power and privilege of his structural position, forcefully denying April's agency and reducing her to submission. He thus "pro[ves] his manhood," suppressing his own ambivalence while consigning April to the feminine position of ambivalence-management on which his sense of masculine agency is contingent. Frank resolves his ambivalence by according with heteronormative patriarchy. Instead of finding in their ambivalences the public, structural conditions that have produced them, both characters eventually conform to type against their own desires. They privatise their ambivalence and attack one another, destroying in the process their desire for a less sanctioned existence and reinforcing the norms that have stifled them in the first place.

Homonormative and queer experience are generally framed as being opposed, as indicated above in Jasbir Puar's categorisation of the former as sapping away the radical vitality of the latter. For this reason I will look at homonormative and queer ambivalence in conjunction. While the concept of ambivalence has attracted surprisingly little critical attention *in itself*, gay and lesbian experiences of ambivalence have been documented relatively extensively.³ Deborah Gould describes

³ On ambivalence in general see Freud 1900, 1909, 1916-17; Merton and Barber 1963; Laplanche and Pontalis 1973; Smelser 1998; Warner 1999.

gay and lesbian ambivalence as “a contradictory constellation of simultaneously felt positive and negative affective states about both homosexuality and dominant, heteronormative society” (Gould 12). For Gould, ambivalence is *the* defining affective backdrop against which queers in general experience public and private life, due to the fact that their sexualities, gender expressions, and even their simple right to exist, have been consistently and often violently impugned at both micro and macro levels. My suggestion is that homonormative assimilationism and queer radicalism both stem from the attempt to resolve the ambivalence that arises from the shame of being non-normative in a profoundly heteronormative society.

Michelle Tea’s *Valencia* is a fast-paced memoir that narrates the author’s promiscuous twentysomething years, set in the early 1990s in a then predominantly lesbian area of San Francisco’s now increasingly gentrified Mission district. In the chapter I am looking at, narrator Michelle and her girlfriend Iris leave their shame-free, publicly queer life in the Mission to attend Iris’s sister’s wedding in conservative Georgia. Though Iris’s family do not entirely reject their daughter for being gay, they do expect signs of her queerness to be hidden when in their presence. Iris is required to behave homonormatively in order to participate in conventional family life. By suppressing the public identity permitted to her by the queer community in San Francisco, she is allowed the comforting normative pleasures of the sanctioned family form. Michelle and Iris both, with varying degrees of willingness and consistency, internalise these demands: “[we] thought it would be fun to have sex . . . in the house where [Iris] grew up . . . and we did attempt some weak teenage boy-girl seduction in front of the television, but . . . we couldn’t smack each other or play around with the recycled bicycle tire whip because it would wake Mom” (113-114). They subsequently abandon their libidos for the remainder of the trip and resume a “slug-like position on the couch” (114).

The chapter is striking in two regards. The first is in its depiction of the collision between homonormative and queer ambivalence. On the eve of Iris’s sister’s wedding, Michelle breaks down and considers not attending the ceremony: “Maybe I Just Won’t Go. I *Can’t* Go. I was crying on Iris’s bed. It’s Just *Wrong* That I Can’t Hold Your Hand. We *Always* Hold Hands. I was wracked by the injustice . . . And Iris, it seemed so easy for her to pretend we were pals” (129). Michelle becomes resentful: “Little tough-shit-kiss-my-ass Iris, all self-righteous in San Francisco . . . and she can’t even hold my fucking hand. But it’s her family, and that’s a big deal, and you can’t force someone” (130). Iris, who has a lot more at stake in this family context than Michelle, is coerced into suppressing the ambivalence she feels about denying her queer identity. Toleration by her family is conditional on the minimisation of her queerness and her conformity with heteronormative protocol, and she complies intuitively as a result of heteronormative culture’s conditioning. Michelle, though hurt and frustrated by Iris’s behaviour, understands her actions and accepts them. Whereas Iris’s ambivalence is homonormative, in that she seeks its resolution through suppression, Michelle’s ambivalence is queer in its accommodation of Iris’s concessions to normativity. Michelle experiences disgust with the need to conform, at the same time as accepting that in an overwhelmingly heteronormative culture one sometimes needs to defy oneself and conform with demands to which one is fundamentally opposed. Significantly, her ambivalence remains active and unresolved.

The second striking aspect of the chapter resides in the fact that it is not *necessarily* Michelle and Iris’s homosexuality that bothers Iris’s family, so much as their deviation from the norm. This is

demonstrated by Iris's sister, the conventional bride, not wanting to be overshadowed on the day of her wedding by Michelle's green hair and butch appearance. After reluctantly "scrub[bing] the lime colour from [her] scruff", Michelle concludes that the bride "didn't want everyone to be paying attention to me and my green hair on her big day" (129). In other words, as long as the signs of their queerness are removed, allowing their sexuality to become a private affair separate from the public ceremony of heteronormative matrimony, Michelle and Iris will be permitted to participate free from overt harassment. The passively homophobic family's ambivalence regarding the love they feel for Iris on the one hand, and their fear and confusion about her sexuality on the other, is resolved for them through the privatisation of Iris's queerness. This illustrates both the problem with homonormativity, as well as what its assimilative tendencies seek to resolve: to be accepted as normal by those who are consecrated as such, one must publicly conform to established norms. The assimilationist emphasis on homonormative conformity aims to resolve ambivalence by legitimating queer sexuality as no different to normative heterosexuality. The hope is that, as public opinion changes, the public kissing and handholding Michelle ambivalently foregoes will eventually be accepted by culture as the same as its heterosexual equivalent. However, the radical public intimacy and experimental approach to community and relationality that is elsewhere depicted in *Valencia*, and which grants the text – and queer forms of intimacy in practice – much of its invigorating and galvanising force, must be foregone if its queer characters wish to attain the public acceptance accorded by normative private personhood.

What, then, does queer ambivalence entail? Texts like *Valencia* demonstrate that homonormativity is, at an individual level, an understandable response to oppression. Queer people need to get through the day and, in an overwhelmingly heteronormative culture, the prospect of legal and cultural recognition, and the various benefits such recognition entails, represents a powerful pull, especially for those who are privileged in other respects (middle-class, white, male, cisgender, able-bodied) and thus more immediately able to reap those benefits. My suggestion is that recognition of the contradictory pleasures of normativity is itself a key component of queer ambivalence. Many people for numerous intersecting reasons – occupational, generational, religious, racial, etc. – are not able to publicly perform their sexuality or pursue queer forms of intimacy that resist heteronormativity. The recognition of queerness and normativity's ambivalent relationship by queer radicals who are fundamentally opposed to heteronormativity and the system it serves to uphold rejects neat dichotomies between normative and not. Such recognition demands that closer attention be paid to the particularities of specific lives in specific situations conditioned by specific structural conditions, rather than further alienating or even castigating people for their relative, and often superficial, conformity. Furthermore, it foregrounds the recognition that many non-normative people seek ambivalent sanctuary in normative institutions and relations because it is difficult or deadly not to, or simply because the pressure of constant resistance can be too exhausting. The resolution of homonormative ambivalence through assimilation can then be understood as beneficial for some at an individual level, if still deeply problematic at a structural level.

Queer ambivalence, then, describes a form of experience that comprehends the heteronormative division between private and public life, and acknowledges one's own ambivalent position in and towards it. Unlike heteronormative ambivalence, which suppresses and privatises ambivalence in order to reinforce patriarchal heteronormativity, and unlike homonormative

ambivalence which seeks relief through conformity with heteronormative culture's private/public divide, queer ambivalence entails publicly foregrounding the experience of ambivalence itself *as a form of inclusivity*. While in practice queer ambivalence can and must appear in a variety of ways, the essential component on which I wish to focus is its refusal to distinguish absolutely between queerness and normativity: both can be experienced at once, and for most queers in contemporary culture they have to be.

Maggie Nelson's recent essay-memoir *The Argonauts* (2015) explores the relationship between Nelson, an acclaimed and successful author and academic, and the butch, male-passing Harry Dodge, an equivalently successful and acclaimed artist, to whom she is married. Through a series of poetic fragments, observations, and passages of varying linear narrative, the text traces Nelson's shift away from the radical anti-normativity she lived by before meeting Dodge, towards an embrace of marriage and parenthood that she would previously have dismissed as heteronormative. Ambivalence is foregrounded consistently throughout as a way of resisting becoming trapped in "the tired binary that places *femininity, reproduction, and normativity on one side and masculinity, sexuality, and queer resistance on the other*" (135.4, emphasis in original), and of rejecting having to choose finally between queerness *or* normativity. While gripping in its depiction of the frustrations of trying to reconcile the couple's domesticity with their radical politics, most pertinent to my characterisation of queer ambivalence are the sections that treat queerness as a form of perpetual movement: a "pure wildness" (94.8), a refusal of the "[unsustainable] binary of normative/transgressive," (94.8) and, drawing on the work of Eve Sedgwick, a way of "asserting while giving the slip" (54).

Much as married life and parenthood is not always conducive to such dynamic motion, Nelson wonders whether or not prose might be "but the gravestone" (94.8) of wildness in its capacity for specificity; and yet earlier in the book, writing is held up as the only place where she has ever been able to consistently find the sense of "merging" entailed by ambivalence's refusal of neat and distinct resolution (85.8). In other words, established norms and forms often have stultifying effects on individuals, but they can also contain vital and even radical force by being explored queerly. The text of *The Argonauts* itself performs this contradiction through its foregrounding of an array of ambivalences whose content pushes against the specificity of its form; at the same time, she questions whether or not such a performance is merely an elaborate intellectual game replete with "boring . . . reversals" and lazy deconstructions (79). In doing so, Nelson articulates both the vitality and the privilege of ambivalence: while exposing the radical potential of interactions between queerness and normativity, she also highlights the cultural and economic privilege required to inhabit the contradictions her text depicts. This illustrates the need for intersectional analysis when considering the political utility of ambivalence. While queer ambivalence is important in its capacity for inclusivity, any advocacy of ambivalence must register the necessity of unambivalence for those who, quite simply, do not have sufficient respite to withstand the contradictoriness of productively ambivalent experience. In other words, queer ambivalence must always maintain ambivalence towards itself.

The Argonauts shows how one couple collapse "the tired binary" into something more sustainably liveable without ever capitulating uncritically to normativity. It showcases the pleasures

and struggles of remaining suspended in ambivalence and elaborating new ways of living with old and dominant forms, and situates queerness and normativity in the present day of gay rights as existing by necessity in a new and dynamic symbiosis. Most significantly, *The Argonauts*' interminable exploration of Nelson's own intimate queerness through the public optic of ambivalence refuses to seal that queerness into the safety of private personhood.

The present is a very different context than the one out of which radically anti-normative queer theory emerged in the early 1990s, with *Bowers vs. Hardwick* still upholding the criminalisation of sodomy, and protease inhibitors yet to be developed, to name just two factors; at the same time, the relative safety queer people experience today is by no means equally distributed.⁴ Queer ambivalence, then, can be understood to describe: a) a contemporary attitude or approach to experience that rejects the heteronormative privatisation of personhood at the same time as acknowledging *and seeking to understand* the desire by many queers to embrace elements of it; b) resistance to binaries that establish queerness and normativity as irreconcilably opposed by being critically and cautiously open to the intersection of both; and c) making ambivalence public and therefore inclusive by understanding oneself and one's queerness as not a component of private personhood but a fundamentally public identity that can and must be situated historically.

Considering ambivalence queerly elucidates the queerness of the concept itself, a queerness that is avoided by hetero and homonormative forms in their suppression of ambivalence. To acknowledge and adapt to the fact that elements of heteronormative culture are now more open than ever to some queer people does not entail unambivalent embracing or rejection of that fact. Instead, by foregrounding ambivalence queerly and categorising it as a fundamental and even pleasurable condition of experience, queer people can more realistically resist the ambivalent lure of privacy and, to echo to an earlier quotation from *Girls, Visions, and Everything*, keep their feelings about the current state of things unsuppressed and in circulation. A queered understanding of ambivalence is vital to negotiating the changing terrain of queerness now and foregrounding questions of private and public sexuality at a time when, as *The Argonauts* exemplifies, the family form itself is being queered by radicals who have ambivalently embraced parenthood.⁵ The concept of queer ambivalence is one way of evoking and reframing for the contemporary moment the sense of openness, inclusivity, of feelings kept in circulation, while gesturing towards new ways of being queer in an age of assimilation.

⁴ It is important not to overstate this comparative safety, in order not to overshadow the many dangers and oppressions still experienced by queer trans people, people of colour, and disabled people. For an overview of queer theory's exclusivity, see Cohen 1997.

⁵ See also Califia 2004

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