

THE ANTI-CIVILIZATIONAL QUEER: RECONCEIVING THE SUBJECT-SUBJECT  
CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE RADICAL FAERIES

---

A Senior Honors Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the

Department of English

University of Houston

---

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Bachelor of Science

---

By

Jacob Foreman

April 2020

THE ANTI-CIVILIZATIONAL QUEER: RECONCEIVING THE SUBJECT-SUBJECT  
CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE RADICAL FAERIES

**APPROVED:**

---

Margot G. Backus, Ph.D.  
Committee Chair

---

Andrew Joseph Pegoda, Ph.D.  
Second Reader

---

Robert D. Zaretsky, Ph.D.  
Honors Reader

---

William Monroe, Ph.D.  
Dean, The Honors College

to Root and my roots

## Table of Contents

|                                 |    |
|---------------------------------|----|
| <i>Acknowledgments</i>          |    |
| Introduction: Learning the Work | 1  |
| To Return, To Depart            | 10 |
| Attention                       | 18 |
| Against Civilization            | 30 |
| Chaotic Good                    | 42 |
| Conclusion: Queer in the World  | 51 |
| <i>Bibliography</i>             |    |
|                                 | 55 |

## *Acknowledgments*

This thesis would have been utterly impossible without the gloriously inspiring Radical Faeries. I therefore first want to acknowledge all of the Faerie trancers, those who could identify the community they were building by name and those who were creating it long before it ever existed. To any Faerie who happens to read this project, my work here has only been possible because of the love, time, and magick you have given to create and sustain radical queer community. You have welcomed me onto your lands and into your homes; you have let me experience rituals and ceremonies that I could have never dreamed of on my own. Whether we have met in flesh or spirit, I thank you for your guidance and anxiously await the moment we get to twirl together once more. Thank you for showing me Sunshine.

Further, although this feels a bit superfluous given the pervasiveness with which you appear throughout these pages, I want to also thank Root for the love you have shown me before and during this process. In addition to your love, I am drawn here to acknowledge the love of Andrew who found this world all too much to handle before he ever found the Faeries. It was your love that first opened me up to my queerness and your astral musings that I return to at moments when nothing on this plane seems to make any sense. The earring that I wore to your funeral was my first offering to the Beltane hole – a gift to a land on which I want to be ever bound to your light and creativity. To the lovers I can no longer touch and those who I have not touched yet, thank you.

Beyond the absurd world of those creatures contained in the pages that follow, this text would be nothing of what it is without the tireless mentorship and support of Dr. Margot Backus. I would have never guessed that an appointment to discuss my possible enrollment in one of your courses, which turned into three hours of ecstatic ramblings, would develop into a year-and-a-half long academic and spiritual partnership. We are completely incapable of keeping to a schedule while together, but those unplanned hours of discourse have become an anchor in times of doubt that I would not imagine trading for any of the meetings or meals I have missed as a result. This text would not exist without your continual encouragement and my deep sense of indebtedness for all the attention you have given me over the past year and a half. Thanks for letting me be one of your queerdo academic children.

For the chaotic synergy with Dr. Backus that has produced this work, I also need to thank Dr. Andrew Pegoda for a sense of grounding and timeliness throughout the past two semesters. I am not the kindest to deadlines, which is why it is always good for me to have someone on my side who actually has a grasp of how time works. In a different vein, I want to thank Dr. Robert Zaretsky for the academic inspiration from your Existentialism in France course without which I am unsure how I would have come to so much of the intellectual underpinnings of this work. More importantly, the grace and attention that you showed me in a moment of trauma is something I will never be able to express enough gratitude for.

Finally, I am obliged to thank the Provost Undergraduate Research Scholarship and Mellon Research Scholars Program for cash money which has been magically transformed into stacks of books and ritualistic experiences. My fellow mellons and I have hysterically laughed, procrastinated these projects for literally countless hours, and vented together about everything that is the academy. But hey, here we are somehow at the end of the road with a whole thesis to show for it. Cheers.

## ***Learning the Work***

Let me begin with the admission that what follows is exclusively addressed to those individuals with whom I cannot make love. For everyone else, the festivity of bodies transforms speech into a servant of the body, nothing else.

- Guy Hocquenghem, *Screwball Asses*

I camped on the land for a week and a half the preceding summer, the summer of 2018, in an attempt to familiarize myself with the community. A dear friend urged me for over a year and a half prior to meet the Appalachian commune. My time on the land during that summer was cut short, however, because I had arrived in search of community and instead found hundreds of sparsely inhabited acres of woodland mountains. More than three quarters of the year-round residents were off the land at the time and those who remained were wanting to indulge in peaceful solitude, not initiate a stranger. I left the rural sanctuary disillusioned, but still in search of the queer community I craved. Through the magick of contemporary social networking, I connected with an urban hive of the community in Atlanta as I made the summer journey back from the land to Houston. My connection with this Atlanta faemily is what initiated my return to the land for this fall gathering. Autumn now brought damper weather and a change in the foliage, but I began to glimpse with this, my second time on the land, why people refer to it as “home.”

The structures of the land are stewarded by the Radical Faeries, a queer counterculture community formed in the late 1970’s in the territory dominated by the nation known as the United States of America. The ethos of the community is informed by earth-based spirituality, anarchism, queer fabulosity and performance, and the infinite beings who grace Faerie spaces. Although Faeries, as with nearly all other queer communities, can be found in urban clusters, the community also maintains rural lands throughout the world. These lands are sustained by localized queer intentional communities of the Faeries. The intentional communities that maintain the lands consist of people who live at the localities for varying times and with varying

degrees of commitment/responsibility. The residents of these lands host events called gatherings, which are oftentimes aligned with the pagan Wheel of the Year, during which members of the broader community camp on the land to partake in rituals, various forms of healing and debauchery, and myriad combinations thereof. For instance, my second arrival at this particular land was for their fall gathering which aligns with the fall equinox (21 September). This is one of the two major gatherings hosted by this sanctuary; the other of which is centered around Beltane (1 May). Gatherings are oftentimes the only interactions with rural Faerie lands that urban-dwelling members of the community have. For others, those who live in community on these lands, rurality is more apparently central to their experience of the Faeries.

I barely had my tent set up – with the help of one of the Atlanta Faeries whom I had met only months before – as the sun set. Christophe and I hurriedly threw my tent together so we could join a party at one of the residential structures on the land before nightfall. But, of course, we made time before our departure from my campsite for Christophe to give me clothing more *appropriate* for the occasion. Thus, changed out of my “muggle” clothes in which I had traveled, I arrived to a scene of joyous embraces and flirtatious introductions clad only in a dark floral robe and my hiking boots. Most people had arrived on the land at some point earlier in the day, perhaps the day before. They journeyed from cities throughout the world to be with friends and lovers they had not shared space with for years in some cases. I meandered throughout the home accepting drags of cigarettes and pipes, introducing myself, and trying to settle. I was overwhelmed by the house full of unknown faces who seemed to be mingling with a lifetime of familiarity. After an hour or two of socializing, I succumbed to my travel-fatigued body while sitting up in one of the chairs in the living room.

I was awoken by a head being rested against my left knee. My hand instinctively reached down to massage the skeletal form as I tried to reorient myself in the room. I realized that the person who had come to rest with me was a tall, slender, scruffy boy who I assumed to be in his early 30's. He had been flitting around the party since before my arrival and was clearly familiar with the other congregants and the space. He responded to my lazy petting by nuzzling his head against my knee. After a few minutes of flirtatious hand to head to knee contact, he raised himself from the floor to join me in the large chair. We kissed for a few minutes then exited the party together without exchanging any words other than his question of whether or not I wanted to see his tent. His tent was quite nice, even in the darkness – tall enough to stand upright with enough space to walk even with a couple large bags of drag<sup>1</sup> inside. His campsite was composed of his tent; two other tents, each occupied by a gay couple; and a tarp-covered common area about five feet square. This campsite became my home for the remaining week. I returned to my tent twice; once to give the impression that I had other places to be and the second to gather some of my essentials so as to not have to return again until the end of the gathering.

I met dozens of queers by name and dozens more by touch, movement, and glance over that week. I found the community that I had heard so much about. But, more affecting, I fell in love with the boy whom I came to know as Root. I returned to Houston and he returned to Brooklyn after our week at the sanctuary. We interacted, annoyingly mediated by technology, constantly thereafter. He visited a month later and it was during that time in Houston that we agreed to be in a romantic relationship. We were committed to that form of our relationship for

---

<sup>1</sup> Drag can refer to literally any form of clothing or garb. People typically have many forms of drag that they wear depending on their setting. For instance, I have a section of my wardrobe that I refer to as my “punk fag” drag which is featured on days filled with errands or chores; and another section of that I refer to as my “femme executive” drag which makes appearances for formal occasions or informal happenings that need a bit more flare. Faeries typically have a certain genre of drag specific to themselves that they wear in Faerie space. As I would learn, my new friend Root’s gathering drag, for instance, could be described as something like “earth wizard” and is mostly composed of long fabrics that he drapes over himself in various styles.

the following ten months, fortunate to hold each other frequently and consistently despite our distance. Root showed me a form of love, made me feel a type of devotion, that I had never before experienced. He cared for me unlike anyone else because he saw me as no one else has. I am reminded of the mornings he made breakfast for me even when he was busy because he recognized that I was melancholy even without me expressing myself. He also, during that time and beyond, led me to parts of the Faerie community that might have otherwise taken me years to connect with. My relationship with Root and the experiences I have had as a result of his shepherding me deeper into Faerie community form the foundation of this thesis.

My love with Root revealed an infinite expanse, which has taught me things that I know I will not come to fully embody for years. Yet this thesis is primarily informed by perhaps the most painful aspect of our relationship: my failure to care for Root as he did for me. The more expansive yet precise Root's love for me became, the more apparent that I had no idea how to reciprocate the care I was being shown. I came to understand through further exposure to the Faeries and conversation with Root that the care he gave was learned through this queer community. I began to witness expressions of this intimacy between lovers, friends, and strangers in the various iterations of Radical Faerie space that I inhabited. It became apparent to me that the love Root shared with me was not a random superpower, but rather a practice of the Radical Faeries. I was being shown, and thus being asked to live, a new, different ethical relationality.

I did not realize in the spring of 2018 that the research I began with Dr. Margot Backus would transform into this exact project, but I can see now that this ethics, new and unclear to me, guided my research even then. I found early on the academic work of Jesse Sanford, a Faerie whose name I first heard associated with his deep involvement in the community. Sanford's

dissertation, “Gathering Kinds: Radical Faerie Practices of Sexuality and Kinship” (2013), is one of the very few examples of scholarship about the Faeries *by* a Faerie. His dissertation explores the Faeries as a community primarily characterized by a reimagination and recreation of kinship and sexuality. I first read the section of his dissertation pertaining to subject-subject consciousness, an ethical term within Faerie community, because it is the only extended consideration of this term by a Faerie in an academic text. The inherently connected nature of our projects should be quite apparent even from this brief description, yet it was not until recently that I understood exactly why I have kept Sanford’s dissertation near at hand. As subject-subject consciousness continually became more central to my thesis, it became apparent that I have been exploring Faerie ethics via a philosophical and phenomenological exploration of how subject-subject consciousness has been revealed to me in Faerie community.

When discussing those who first fully experience<sup>2</sup> Faerie community during a gathering, as most people do, Sanford identifies the usual newcomer perception as that of a magical and surreal world overflowing with opportunities to desire, experience, and actualize a new self and reality. This introductory perception of the Faeries may be evidenced by the *Queer as Folk* episode that brings Emmet and Michael to what is supposed to mirror a Faerie gathering. But, Sanford continues, “As time goes on, the real work of gathering and interconnection is revealed: creating and maintaining relationships.”<sup>3</sup> The evolution of my relationship with Root revealed the rigor of this truth by exposing my failure to do the *real work* of the community. This thesis is an examination of what the work of creating and maintaining relationships means in the context

---

<sup>2</sup> I use the term “fully experience” here to draw a distinction between those who interact with Faeries and those who interact with the community. Scores of people interact with Faeries every day, many of whom may be unaware of this fact on any conscious level. However, there is a sort of critical mass at which the nature of Faerie community, although always evading precise description, becomes tangible.

<sup>3</sup> Jesse Oliver Sanford, “Gathering Kinds: Radical Faerie Practices of Sexuality and Kinship” (UC Berkeley, 2013), <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0xs1770q>.

of the Radical Faeries. One aspect of exploring relationality within Faerie community is of course examining the ethics that guide and structure that relationality. The ethical inquiry that I embark on here is not, however, by any means the only or necessarily best way to contemplate Faerie community. This thesis simply represents my chosen method of approaching the questions that my involvement in the Faerie community has thus far raised for me.

The first section of this thesis is a consideration of Harry Hay's<sup>4</sup> writings about "subject-SUBJECT" consciousness and Sanford's critiques thereof. A refutation of Hay's writings on the topic, which is not a central component of Sanford's dissertation, is where Sanford's work ends. I find it important to present the conversation between these two Faeries, Hay and Sanford, as a backdrop for my own exploration of the topic. My consideration of subject-subject consciousness is noticeably different in form than either of theirs, however. Hay's writing on the term is epigraphic and bombastic; Sanford's writing, while mixed with affect and narrative in other areas, is purely theoretical on this point. My writing on subject-subject consciousness dispenses with Hay's melodrama and moves nearer to Sanford's narrative academic style while prioritizing my own experience and operating within a crudely phenomenological framework. Because of the nature of this academic work, my thesis here is inseparable from my involvement with myself and the Faeries. The work of myself that I am doing here thus begins as I reconceive

---

<sup>4</sup> Harry Hay is a monumental figure in the queer activist history. A founder of the Mattachine Society, Hay went on to be active in a variety of communist and gay rights circles. His place within Faerie community, however, is a point of contention. Hay oftentimes referred to himself as a founder of the Faeries, as have different factions within the community. Some still assert Hay's status as a founder. However, this is a narrative that I find prudent to reject due to available information that there were people working to organize circles that could easily be considered proto-Faerie separate from and before Hay's work on what became known as the first Faerie gathering, A Spiritual Conference for Radical Faeries held in September 1979. Separate early strains of the Faeries can be traced through organizing in Chicago by Murray Edelman and also the work of Arthur Evans. This, of course, not even to begin the complex discussion about Faerie spiritual lineage in Native and Pagan spiritualities, which further complicate Hay's claims to founding.

subject-subject consciousness by interweaving my experience of Faerie community and texts that have helped me comprehend and embody Faerie relationality.

The second section is an analysis of the term which I have, along with Sanford, come to most closely identify with the ethics of Faerie community: attention. I primarily define attention using the writings of Simone Weil, principally through an examination of attention's counterpart, force. The clarity with which Weil explicates what she terms force allows me to discuss force's antidote, attention. I more fully form my conception of attention by examining the closely Faerie-aligned novel *The Faggots and Their Friends Between Revolutions*, in which I locate a series of scenes of communal healing and mutual aid. [note on scenes] These scenes lead my discussion to the embodied nature of attention, which I again primarily conceive of through the negative. Attention at this point in my writing will be seen as the antidote of trauma, here understood in one facet as the corporealization of force. I rely here on the work of Marian Dunlea, which incisively explores how we can identify and counteract the embodiment of our trauma.

Section three is then an approach toward Faerie ethics from the starting point of the subject's relationship to themselves. I draw primarily from Judith Butler's writing about the subject's partial self-opacity. I, however, move beyond the subject via the anti-civilizational critique of *Baedan*,<sup>5</sup> a queer anarchist journal out of Seattle. I explore what *Baedan* terms domestication and the struggle against it within Faerie community, which can be seen as attempts to bring the subject in communion with themselves. The alienation of the subject from the human – a reformulation of Butler's subject's partial self-opacity via a discussion of Agamben's

---

<sup>5</sup> *Baedan* offers the following history of the journal's title on the inside of the front cover: "The modern English word 'bad' came into common usage about four centuries ago, before which time 'evil' was the predominant term. The successor was derived from the Old English derogatory *bæddel* and its diminutive *bædling*: effeminate man, hermaphrodite, pederast. These were derived in turn from *bæden*: to defile."

consideration of apparatuses, itself a building upon Foucault's thought of the same term – is combatted as a means of realizing an ideal of ethical relationality that I view as aligned with the mandates of attention. I thus position Faerie ethics as aligned with the embrace of civilization's decomposition elucidated by *Baedan*.

Finally, I explore Faerie gender practices as a site of the refusal of civilization. I challenge Butler's drive toward intelligibility in her conception of gender performativity by linking intelligibility to subjecthood and therefore civilization. I consider how Faerie gender practices instead emphasize our inherent unintelligibility, which exposes a drive within Faerie community toward what Butler terms precarity. I then link precarity to chaos and explore ways that an embrace of precarity and chaos has been exhibited to me in Faerie community. I further conceive of precarity and chaos, as conditions of our existence, to be necessary sites of embrace in the pursuit of ourselves. This leads me to what I perceive to be the call of Faerie ethical relationality.

The intellectual underpinnings of this thesis will be apparent given its academic nature. However, I have also explicitly incorporated some of my experiences in Faerie spaces as it is these moments, and the myriad others like them, that constitute the primary impetus and resources for my writing. Aware that the mediation of this thesis by written language disembodies my thoughts (which is to mean that your mind alone will engage with me here), I ask that the influence of the touch and movement that I have felt in Faerie spaces remain in mind at all times. I ask that you take breaks from this writing to physically interact with someone you love, dance fervently, or simply allow yourself to return to your body. This thesis, in this mode alone, can never be a full exploration of the ethics of the Radical Faeries. Faerie relationality is actualized in physical intimacy or whimsical play as much as any other form of interaction. This

thesis is not the work of Faerie community no matter how much its existence as a vessel for my thought aids me in that work. Most importantly, ethics as such can never be actualized by thoughts and words alone. Ethics must be lived to exist.

Root informed and edited my applications for each of the research scholarships that would eventually evolve into this thesis project. He has been an interlocutor even when I gave him nothing but scattered ramblings to help piece together. But, most importantly, he buoyed me with a love queerer than I have ever known. He showed me a world within myself and shepherded me into a community of the most astounding beings I have ever met. This thesis is first and foremost the musings about my ethical responsibilities as a coming-of-queer faggot. The academy will recognize this thesis as an exploration of queer ethics, consciousness, and subjectivity. Yet it is something different. This thesis is an apology letter, a note of gratitude, an ever-evolving covenant to Root and the rest of those I love who are doing the real work of community.

## ***To Return, To Depart***

True journey is return.  
- Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*

Subject-subject consciousness is a phrase used in Radical Faerie community to signal a mode of ethical relationality. This phrase is invoked before some Faerie meetings to denote the way in which attendees are expected to respond to one another. Heart Circle, the most common ritual in Faerie community, in which emotionality is privileged, will commonly begin with the facilitator reminding those in attendance to act in a “subject-subject” manner. Sometimes, when it is perceived that someone within the community is not acting appropriately toward someone else, people say that the actions of the perceived aggressor are not “subject-subject.” Some Faeries undoubtedly have a specific, clear vision of the sort of relationality they consider to be subject-subject. However, there does not exist within the community an explication of what this ethical relationality entails beyond the term’s consideration by Hay some forty years ago. I have even heard some Faeries scoff at the term and dismiss it as nothing more than virtue signaling. I have perceived that even those who are dismissive of this term, however, still hold the relationality that I explore here as important.

The ambiguous manner in which I have heard subject-subject used in Faerie community is representative of the Faerie resistance of dogma. As such, I, like every Faerie, am ethically obliged to reconceive subject-subject consciousness for myself alone in some way. I have no desire to make claims about what this term means for the community as any such attempt would be antithetical to the anarchic ethos of the Faeries. However, though I do not seek to universalize my understanding of this ethical term, I put my project in conversation with other Faeries who have also written about subject-subject consciousness as a means of marking a point in Faerie reality. My understanding of this term has been greatly shaped by the specific spaces in which I

have experienced Faerie sociality; my (re)conception of subject-subject consciousness necessarily indicates shifts within the community when juxtaposed with those who have written about this term from other vantage points. I include, as markers, a discussion of Harry Hay's writing on this topic as well as Jesse Sanford's critique of Hay. My thesis is not a historical narrative of Faerie community. Yet discussion between Hay, Sanford, and myself will nonetheless render detectable some significant shifts that have occurred within the community and queer social activism more generally over the past forty years.

Hay always wrote subject-subject consciousness as "subject-SUBJECT" consciousness. I will write the term accordingly when referring to Hay's thought for added clarity. This form of ethical relationality was, for Hay, lived most purely in monogamous homosexual relationships. Deriding what he considered the inherently "Subject-Object" relationality of heterosexual desire, Hay argued that subject-SUBJECT consciousness is born of the mirrored sameness in homosexual relationships. Heterosexual men necessarily objectify women as a result of heterosexual desire. Homosexual men, however, are capable of perceiving one another as mirrored subjectivities and therefore relating equitably with one another. The essentializing and totalizing way in which Hay conceives of sex and gender are directly counter to contemporary Faerie thought, however. I have heard Hay's decidedly pre-Me Too actions cited as why some view this term as empty or, worse, a potential dog whistle for the Faeries' misogynistic, transphobic past.

The Radical Faeries were formed as an exclusively faggot-only community. The transformation of this early Faerie identity marks the most significant shift in Faerie understandings of ethical relationality. Faggot, as conceived of by Hay and many early Faeries was a third gender accessible exclusively by people assigned male sex at birth. The exclusion of

female and trans persons has been a point of contention and criticism since the community's birth. Internal debates about this policy finally came to the fore in the 90s. These debates were a continuation and compounding of the trauma experienced by many non-faggot people who had been participating in Faerie worldmaking for years without proper recognition of their belonging. Years of turmoil later, the community finally rescinded its faggot-only policy in the mid-90s.<sup>6</sup> To cling to Hay's privileging of sex/gender *sameness* as the core location of ethical relationality would condemn swaths of contemporary Faerie community. Those who rightly held their space within this queer community before they were welcomed to do so, and those of us who are now welcomed because of their work, have contributed immeasurably to the queer relationality at the center of the Radical Faerie project. At this point in Faerie reality, any conception of ethical relationality within the community must not only dispense with regressive conceptions of sex and gender; it must actively call in all who build and hold Faerie space.

Hay's subject-SUBJECT consciousness is also incompatible with contemporary Faerie community because it is amorously restrictive. It is clear from Hay's writings that subject-SUBJECT consciousness is interwoven with monogamy. Contemporary Faerie community in no way holds to this relational standard. This is of course not to say that there do not exist monogamous Faerie relationships. However, as Sanford has written, Radical Faerie community intentionally holds space for imagining and actualizing relationships that are non-monogamous.<sup>7</sup> While Hay saw his conception of subject-SUBJECT as a cohesive component of his anti-assimilationist ideology, his consideration of sex, gender, and sexuality show otherwise. Given that his reductive understanding of these concepts is central to his construction of subject-

---

<sup>6</sup> John A. Stover III, "When Pan Met Wendy: Gendered Membership Debates Among the Radical Faeries," *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 11, no. 4 (2008): 31–55, <https://doi.org/10.1525/nr.2008.11.4.31>.

<sup>7</sup> Sanford, "Gathering Kinds."

SUBJECT consciousness, his construction bears obvious similarity to the mandates of heteronormativity.

Hay's conception of subject-SUBJECT consciousness is therefore incompatible with contemporary Faerie community. This could explain what I have perceived as the minimal influence of Hay's writings among Faeries. In fact, I have found it difficult to find anyone in Faerie spaces who has actually read any of Hay's writings at all. The only exceptions have been those who still position Hay as the "founder" of the Radical Faeries, subscribe to his problematic views, or study him in an academic context. The first two of these three categories are composed nearly exclusively of white, faggot-identified men over the age of 50. These Faeries exist nearly exclusively in scattered urban pockets of the community, and they do not constitute any of the intentional communities that maintain Faerie communal lands. I cannot speak to the specific ethics of their relationality because I have not interacted with any of them. However, I do take it to be quite apparent that pervasive mirrored sameness, especially in the context of whiteness and maleness, must be understood as fundamentally restrictive.

While I acknowledge the history of this ethical term within the community, and the community's changed policies regarding sex and gender inclusivity, I reject any notions of linear progression that might be implied thereby. There is no reason why Hay ought to have remained mired in misogyny and sexual repressiveness. There exists no preordained order according to which we are capable of realizing ourselves and addressing the ethical responsibilities entailed. To accept such a model of progress would mean subjecting ourselves to a necessarily mechanistic sociality, ensnaring ourselves within the destructive apparatus that currently exist. We would be prevented from eternally pursuing ourselves, moving ever closer to an existence without the alienating barriers our bodies have been inscribed with. To hew too closely to a

deterministic understanding of temporal progression would deaden the spirit and be antithetical to the expansive reality of the Faeries.

I find the incompatibility of Hay's writings and the Faerie community as I have experienced it to be sufficient grounds for beginning my own conception of subject-subject consciousness elsewhere. Meanwhile, however, Sanford distances himself from Hay's thought on philosophical grounds. Sanford approaches Hay's writings because he argues that an invocation of subject-subject consciousness necessarily links the speaker to Hay.<sup>8</sup> This is true in an ancestral sense insofar as Hay originally conceived the term. However, I have no reason to believe that the myriad people who I have heard speak "subject-subject" are invoking any specific content of Hay's ethical thought. I therefore find this ancestral link to be nothing more than a simple historical fact that bears no substantial import for my conception of the term in the contemporary ethical context of the community. Nonetheless, Sanford deems it appropriate to grapple with the philosophical construction of Hay's subject-SUBJECT conception.

Sanford reads Hay alongside Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas because he identifies the ethical thought of these three men as fundamentally based upon a specific recognition of the other. Sanford, however, finds the thought of all three insufficient to account for the full ethical import he perceives subject-subject consciousness to carry in Faerie spaces. While Sanford acknowledges that the thought of both Buber and Levinas address the way that Hay's subject-SUBJECT "conjures a false equality between subjects, thus neglecting power," Sanford concludes that the totalizing ethics of all three men "entail a teleological reduction of the other."<sup>9</sup> The totalizing nature of Hay's thought renders subject-SUBJECT consciousness merely a homosexual reiteration of "Subject-Object" relationality. Sanford shows how Hay's subject-

---

<sup>8</sup> Sanford.

<sup>9</sup> Sanford.

SUBJECT consciousness, Buber's I-Thou relationship,<sup>10</sup> and Levinas's Being<sup>11</sup> each entail assimilative recognition and a positive infinity. Hay's and Levinas's conceptions most explicitly rely on an assimilative recognition in that they both conceive of their relational ethics as existing only between humans. Buber, for his part, considers what an I-Thou relationship to something other than another human may look like. But, the specificity of recognition found in Buber's writings, as Sanford states, requires "some kind of argument of similarity: that recognition be extended in the case of beings near to ourselves, made familiar, made similar, but dispensed in the case of beings more foreign."<sup>12</sup> Assimilative recognition would render any conception of subject-subject consciousness unable to account for human relationality with the environment except by indirect, abstract channels. Environmentalism is, however, central to the Faeries, which is exhibited most noticeably perhaps in the variety of earth-based spiritualities that are prominent throughout the community. Any attempt to locate the community's relational practices must therefore account for interaction with a cosmology of interwoven animistic spiritual practices.

The positive infinity that Sanford finds in each of the three men's writings has the effect of objectifying the other in that it "lifts analysis out of the realm of the particular."<sup>13</sup> Although each of the three theories aims at an ethic of subjectivization, they render any specific other irrelevant in their specificity by prioritizing a transcendental other to which one *actually* relates.

---

<sup>10</sup> Buber's I-Thou was originally explicated in his book *I and Thou (You)* (1923). Buber distinguished between the world of I-It which consists of experience and sensation with objects and the world of I-Thou which consists of relationships not separated by discrete bounds. Buber thus drew a distinction between subject-to-object relationality and subject-to-subject relationality wherein subject-to-subject relationality always brings the subject into a relation with God.

<sup>11</sup> What Levinas conceives of as Being, with important distinctions from Heidegger's conception by the same name, is most clearly seen in his book *Totality and Infinity* (1979). As Sanford states, "What Levinas calls Being is the consequence of an ethical relation with the Other... In transcending myself for the other, I respond to the ethical demand posed by the face-to-face encounter."

<sup>12</sup> Sanford, "Gathering Kinds."

<sup>13</sup> Sanford.

Sanford writes, “Hay could defend his all-too-common encroachments – the tendency to be aggressive and bombastic in conversation, the unwanted tongue pushing down reluctant throats – as subject-SUBJECT precisely because, in such a formulation, it is not the specifics of the other that matters, but rather the great unity of which that other has already been made a part.”<sup>14</sup>

Sanford sees a possible alternative in Martin Hägglund’s reading of Derrida. Hägglund writes, “What makes it possible to be responsible is thus at the same time what makes it impossible for any responsibility to be fully responsible. Responsibility, then, is always more or less discriminating, and infinite responsibility is but another name for the necessity of discrimination.”<sup>15</sup> Discrimination is necessary because we are unable to recognize or act upon a responsibility to an infinite number of others.

Sanford argues that a practice of discriminatory responsibility would look something like the sort of non-possessive love discussed by Harry Hay’s partner John Burnside.<sup>16</sup> Sanford chooses to rename this discriminatory love as “attention.”<sup>17</sup> For Sanford, this attention looks like giving one’s energy to another as one is presented precisely because the specificity of the other must not be subsumed by a totalizing holism. The implementation of a discriminating ethics may be located in the Faerie practice of gatekeeping. This most commonly refers to the policies by which Faerie lands dictate who is and is not welcome on the land. Gatekeeping may be as lax as excluding only those who have caused the land’s residents substantial trauma; other lands may restrict visitors to only those participating in a specific ritual. No matter the specific policy, however, all Faerie lands practice some form of gatekeeping and this process is inherently

---

<sup>14</sup> Sanford.

<sup>15</sup> Martin Hägglund, “The Necessity of Discrimination: Disjoining Derrida and Levinas,” *Diacritics* 34, no. 1 (2004): 40–71.

<sup>16</sup> Sanford, “Gathering Kinds.”

<sup>17</sup> Sanford.

discriminatory. And, interestingly, I have more commonly heard critiques of overly permissive gatekeeping practices than of those which are more restrictive.

Sanford dismisses Hay's conception of subject-SUBJECT consciousness due to its assimilative drive and positive infinity. His philosophical work stops there. However, leading me toward my work here, his discussion of subject-subject consciousness concludes thus:

Were I to reconceive subject-SUBJECT consciousness, I would do so less through questions of subjects and identities and more through the question of consciousness...a possible ethic, then, accepting its own inherent limitation and finitude, would be a practice of paying attention.

The work of myself, a reconceiving of subject-subject consciousness as an approach toward an understanding of Faerie ethics as perceived through my interactions with the community, begins here.

## *Attention*

to my lovers I bequeath  
the rest of my life  
- Judy Grahn, "A Woman is Talking to Death"

I begin my conception of subject-subject consciousness with Simone Weil's "The Iliad, or The Poem of Force." I first read this essay at a pivotal moment: closely following my introduction to Faerie community. I have written about this essay elsewhere as it relates to the dehumanizing presence of force inherent in slavery, but I incorporate it here to explore the antidote to force, attention. I approach attention from its negative in Weil's writing; her conception of force provides a clear way of considering what attention counteracts. The interactions I was having with Faeries as I began spending time in the community were not appropriately explained by any ethical writings with which I was familiar. Weil's essay, however, immediately resonated with the type of relationality exhibited within Faerie spaces. This essay has since been an important touchstone in my evolving ethical thought.

Weil conceives of force as an ever-present negative energy in the world defined as "that *x* that turns anybody who is subjected to it into a thing."<sup>18</sup> As Weil writes, force acts upon every individual in different ways throughout their lives with its final and most profound actualization being death. Weil argues that no individual can ever control force, which is present in every situation, but that one can choose to act as force's *conduit*. The conduit's relationship to force demonstrates the double-edged character of this energy; the conduit of force is not immune to force's dehumanizing energy, but they are rather *also* acted upon in more insidious ways in the process of channeling. Force's multidirectional nature stems from our intersubjectivity which, for Weil, is located in our common needs. The most basic of our shared needs is that of physical

---

<sup>18</sup> Simone Weil and Siân Miles, *Simone Weil: An Anthology* (London: Penguin, 2005).

nourishment, but Weil also argues that we share non-physical needs such as community and culture. This is to say that we are interconnected because of our shared needs and we develop shared needs as a result of our fundamental interconnectedness. Ethical relationality therefore becomes a sort of web for Weil, weaving together the physical, social, and spiritual. We are unable, according to Weil, to neglect the needs of anyone else without neglecting our own needs. To neglect the need(s) of someone else is to act as a conduit of force, to allow force to exert itself in a given situation.

Attention, conceived of as the tending to the needs of others, is therefore the antidote to force. To exercise attention is not only to be aware of the needs of others, but also to do what is within one's ability to facilitate the satisfaction of those needs. Attention can be distinguished from things like care or love due to its requirement of specific awareness. This may be seen as the distinction between loving someone and loving them in the ways that they need to be loved within the realm of our own faculties of care. Attention can therefore be conceived of as two primary components: (1) an awareness of oneself and others; and (2) action that supports the needs of oneself and others, which can be characterized as resisting dehumanization.

Attention resonates with the relationality that I experience in Faerie community in part because of its inherently spiritual nature. Force interacts with humans yet is intangible. Humans never control force, yet we have a responsibility to be aware of it and to counteract its presence in our relationships. Though Radical Faerie community does not promote or adhere to any specific spirituality, Faeries generally practice a loosely structured form of animism that is primarily informed by neo-paganism and spiritualities of indigenous peoples of the land that we now occupy. Spirituality is pervasive in Faerie culture and takes on myriad forms, some of the most venerated of which are extravagantly absurd. One such ritualization that I have heard

mythologized is known as the “Shit House Ritual” wherein two Faeries would, year after year, get on all fours in front of the main outhouse<sup>19</sup> on the land. Pieces of chocolate placed upon their backs with toilet paper available for passersby to grab a piece, they would perform monologues or scenes ventriloquizing with their assholes. This performance contains elements of attention, as does every instance of human relation that recognizes our humanity and encourages an embrace of ourselves in a collective context. But I want to continue my examination of the connection between Faerie spirituality and attention by discussing a different event.

Christophe, one of the Faeries from Atlanta, who I met shortly after my first trip to the land, the same Faerie who escorted me to the party where I met Root, moved into a new space in the fall of 2019. The move was following a separation with his partner, which happened at the same time that Root and I were going through the same process. Beyond the alignment of our cycle of heartbreak, we are also close in age and both grew up in south Louisiana. So, despite our different aesthetics and styles of performativity, we quickly became close sisters navigating our evolving relationships and roles in Faerie community together. To make his move even more momentous, he moved into the other half of the duplex where we met with a Faerie from Detroit. The opposite side of the duplex is still inhabited by Orion and Kyle who hosted the potluck where I originally encountered the Atlanta Faeries while on my way back to Houston during the summer of 2018. Given our various alignments within and beyond Faerie community, I felt a responsibility to be with Christophe during his transitional moment.

I took an evening flight after classes and arrived a couple hours into the gathering. In addition to the Atlanta Faeries, who I expected to see, there were also Faeries visiting from

---

<sup>19</sup> Faerie lands exist off the grid to varying degrees, usually trending toward complete separation from outside utilities and surveillance. This means that indoor plumbing is rare in the form of anything other than a kitchen sink. I have been to one Faerie land that has one indoor toilet and I have never seen Faeries wait so patiently for anything other than dinner.

Detroit who I had met months earlier in Vermont as well as Faeries visiting from Appalachia. There was an assortment of snacks and delicious mulled wine for refreshments. The four Faeries now living in the house set out couches and makeshift chairs for socializing around a firepit in the backyard. The scene of lovers and friends embracing one another which had disoriented me a year earlier during the house party on the land now felt familiar. Just outside the circle around the firepit was a large altar with a circular mirror, about three feet in diameter, at its back. The mirror rested against the base of a large tree<sup>20</sup> with an assortment of candles illuminating its base in the brisk nighttime. Guests pulled cards from an oracle deck to bless the new home and placed food and mulled wine at the altar for the (tr)ancestors. Various incense burned in a small cauldron at the center and a blanket was lain at the foot of the altar for guests to sit with one another and the spirits. Those who brought housewarming gifts found a spot at the altar to place their blessings. My offering was a small piece of twig and yarn that I got from the Altar of the Sun during a ritual that Christophe and I attended during the summer of 2019 at a sanctuary. I brought this token as a remembrance of our rituals together and a vessel for the healing power of Faerie lands.

I sat with Christophe at the altar for a while reflecting on the winding paths we had followed in the previous year and our gratitude for walking so near one another. Orion came to the altar and announced that it was time to birth Christophe's new familiar<sup>21</sup> with Orion acting as the doula. Orion brought two boxes to Christophe who paused for a moment then handed one of

---

<sup>20</sup> I have shared pictures of this tree with multiple friends skilled in identifying fauna in addition to consulting online databases, but I have been unable to identify this tree. I have come to the conclusion that this is the only tree of its kind, which comes as no surprise given the magical place it holds in the lives of us who have shared time and love around its base.

<sup>21</sup> Familiars are inanimate objects, usually animalistic in form, that accompany one for good luck or guidance. Some Faeries I know will keep specific familiars for certain periods of time; others might have familiars that they carry with them for specific activities like traveling. They take on a position similar to that of a daemon, but nearly always are characterized by a youthful playfulness.

the boxes to me. He explained that he was unsure why he purchased two Sexy Furby<sup>22</sup> dolls a couple months before, but that he then realized one was for me. This was especially surprising because my presence at the party was unannounced; only Orion had known beforehand that I would be there. We recognized the divine sanction of our Sexy Furby joint birth and began the labor of love. Christophe peeled back the wrapping paper in the cardboard wombbox to reveal Leroy, a greyish lemur with a tail long enough to wrap around Christophe's neck and a large orange Furby face with blue eyes. I welcomed to the world Furbette, a Smurfette doll, frock and all, with a yellow Furby face over the doll's original anatomy. Just as Christophe and I have followed similar temporal-spatial paths through life, our Sexy Furby familiars were birthed together and will continue to share Faerie space.

Careful not to sediment our sentimentality though, we each mingled about and connected or reconnected with our friends, the fire, and the cozy indoors. After about an hour, everyone was called outside for a performance by Orion and one of Christophe's closest Faerie-adjacent friends, Paegé Turner. They performed what I interpreted as a birthing ceremony; they slowly clawed and stretched their way out of a womb-like construction of pink, clear, and black plastic bags and rope that they connected to the chain-link fence lining the backyard. "Mutual Core" by Bjork, a song about two individuals sharing a core, representative of the mutual core shared by the four Faeries now living on the two sides of the duplex as well as the psychotherapeutic work and performance art that Orion and Paegé respectively engage in daily, played from a portable Bluetooth speaker held by someone in the audience. The performance, about five minutes in all, was a mix of experimental dance and Faerie signature DIY chaos magick. Both performers were

---

<sup>22</sup> Sexy Furby is a series of handmade absurdist objects that consist of any variety of stuffed animal, doll, or random children's toy with a Furby face glued to it. The part of the Furby that gets pasted onto the other object is the flat plastic part that contains the eyes and mouth. They are made by Nicole Daddona, the editor of *Friday Magazine* and owner of Magic Society in New York City.

covered in dirt, sweat, and marks from the plastic and ropes by the end. They went inside to clean themselves off and everyone departed who would not be joining for dancing. Those of us there for an all-night christening changed into looks and went to a party at a warehouse space nearby. After some hours of being together on the dancefloor, we returned home to pay our final respects to the altar before going to sleep. We spent the following afternoon roaming the expansive Westview Cemetery with time spent writing, reading Tarot cards, and napping at the base of an old water tower that is affectionately referred to as the Witches' Tower because of its medieval architecture.

I departed Atlanta the following morning to return to school and work in Houston. The relatively brief time that I spent in Atlanta for this housewarming, the moments that we spent at the altar, dancing, and roaming together, exemplify the pervasive and unstructured nature of Faerie spirituality. Every aspect of the housewarming was imbued with a feeling of the sacred, most importantly the more whimsical, spontaneous moments. The transition into a new space was treated as a moment of reflection and intentional movement forward. Most relatedly, it was a time of communal witness of the healing relationality that the four Faeries sharing the duplex sought to carry with them into a new home arrangement, later termed 4Korners.

Conceiving of the relationship between subject-subject consciousness and attention brings me to a passage from *The Faggots and Their Friends Between Revolutions* (1977), a novel that holds a place as close as any to what could be conceived of as a Faerie canon. Written by Larry Mitchell and illustrated by Ned Asta, this graphic novel is loosely autobiographical, telling the story of these Lavender Hill<sup>23</sup> communards' experiences living in radical intentional

---

<sup>23</sup> The commune, based in Ithaca, NY, was home to Ned Asta and Larry Mitchell along with a rotating group of about a dozen other queer radicals. See Austin Bunn and Bob Hazen's 2013 short film, *Lavender Hill: A Love Story*, for further information about the commune.

communities. The novel follows the faggots and their friends who live in Ramrod, a metaphor for the imperialist colonial state we call the United States. We witness stories of the faggots, the women, the dreamboats, the queer men, the queens, and the fairies as they practice revolutionary communal care in opposition to the oppressive world of the men. It is a statement on interlocking oppression, a critique of heteronormativity, a celebration of queer fabulosity in the face of imposed austerity, and an ode to earth based spirituality. It is interspersed with epigraphs of faggot or women's knowledge such as, "There is more to be learned from wearing a dress for a day, than there is from wearing a suit for a lifetime," and, "We gotta keep each other alive any way we can 'cause nobody else is goin' to do it."<sup>24</sup>

Heavenly Blue is a worry-prone faggot<sup>25</sup> who lives with Loose Tomato, Hollyhock, Moonbeam, Lilac, and Pinetree in the faggot section of the empire of Ramrod. Heavenly Blue pays the bills, protects his fellow faggots, and cares for the melancholy Hollyhock. But, one day Heavenly Blue's worrying drives him mad. Heavenly Blue is no longer able to take care of the administration of the house or keep Hollyhock content. Heavenly Blue's fellow faggots step in:

Lilac and Pinetree and Moonbeam and Loose Tomato and Hollyhock gathered. They held Heavenly Blue in their arms for days, they let him cry and stare and slobber and scream and be silent. They paid the bills and looked after the roof and watched the street for strange men and talked to the neighbors and Hollyhock kept himself happy. Their house filled up with comfort and routine and gladness until Heavenly Blue could no longer resist and became response-able<sup>26</sup> again.

---

<sup>24</sup> Larry Mitchell, *The Faggots & Their Friends Between Revolutions* (New York: Nightboat Books, 2019).

<sup>25</sup> Footnote on the use of the term faggot, especially its relation to early Radical Faerie community

<sup>26</sup> Mitchell's use of the term "response-able" here reveals Heavenly Blue's inclination toward attention; his ability to respond, his default position as the faggot who tends to other faggots, is a sign of his attentiveness.

Heavenly Blue now had a house filled with his friends. Contentment overwhelmed him. After much chattiness they all decided to call themselves the Tribe of the Rising Sons. Everyone felt quite elated about the name and about the house and about Heavenly Blue's recovery. They painted the house pink and the trim lavender. They carved peacock feathers in the wood around the door and planted roses in the front yard. Then they all began again to be who they were.

This scene of communal healing reveals the embodied aspect of force and attention. The spiritual nature of Weil's conception of force is actualized in the material; our being acted upon or through by force is the interaction between the spiritual and the material. Attention therefore must also be located in the material as well. There is in this an implicit critique of the more traditional, disembodied forms of psychotherapy. What is important here is to recognize the way that the faggots' attention is expressed as something other than simply prayers or life advice for Heavenly Blue. He is held, the bills are paid. Heavenly Blue's body and the capitalist chores of the assembled family become material sites of attention.

Though the connection between the spiritual component of force and a discussion of Faerie ethics was immediately apparent to me, the embodied aspect of attention is especially relevant for my relationship to the work of this thesis. Root has a connective tissue disorder that causes him chronic pain, especially in his ankles and knees. He regularly practices Pilates and takes a plethora of supplements to alleviate this pain and support his body, but his physical pain often required me to be a more attentive lover. For instance, nights dancing together meant regularly checking in with him to make sure that his pain was manageable, sitting with him when it was not, and massaging his feet and ankles once home. Root's connective tissue disorder is potentially the result of, and certainly exacerbated by, childhood abuse. Part of my responsibility

with loving Root was therefore working to counteract the embodiment of his trauma, of the force which he suffered throughout his life.

Marian Dunlea's *BodyDreaming in the Treatment of Developmental Trauma: An Embodied Therapeutic Approach* offers insight into the ways that we experience and may work to heal corporealized trauma. Dunlea writes that "BodyDreaming engages an approach to psyche/soma<sup>27</sup> that awakens us to the default responses of our particular body's nervous system, opens our hearts and minds, and refines our capacity for inner and outer attunement."<sup>28</sup> She draws upon her work with Jungian psychoanalysis,<sup>29</sup> a variety of "body-focused, somatic approaches to psychotherapy," and two particular trauma therapies. BodyDreaming is, as Dunlea writes, "grounded in a view of humanity that prizes the individual's inherent capacity for healing and self-regulation through the attunement of body, mind, and soul within a particular and immediate environment."<sup>30</sup> What Dunlea calls attunement is, I argue, a translation of attention as discussed here.

Dunlea, when discussing her time as a therapist in a community in L'Arche, France, frames attunement also as "presence" which was revealed to her as a crucial component of any relationship. She also witnessed during this time the truth in Antonio Damasio's statement that, "careful attention to basic needs provides the basis for future healing."<sup>31</sup> We see the exact

---

<sup>27</sup> Psyche/soma refers to the study of the mind (psyche) and body (soma) and the relationship between the two. This study goes back to the ancient Greeks and has evolved in contemporary contexts, Marian Dunlea as an example, to conceive of an interconnected system wherein disembodied approaches to psychotherapy must be altered to account for the ways that we come to embody our experience.

<sup>28</sup> Marian Dunlea, *BodyDreaming in the Treatment of Developmental Trauma: An Embodied Therapeutic Approach* (Routledge, 2019).

<sup>29</sup> Two of the people who were very closely involved with the early formation of the Radical Faeries, Mitchell Walker and Don Kilhefner, are both Jungian psychoanalysts. I have not been able to find writing about how this influence has specifically shaped the community. However, I was first introduced to Jungian psychoanalysis after meeting the Faeries and, though the introduction did not occur in a Faerie space, I was immediately struck by how aligned the writings of Jung that I was reading were with my experience of Faerie spirituality.

<sup>30</sup> Dunlea, *BodyDreaming in the Treatment of Developmental Trauma*.

<sup>31</sup> Dunlea.

mirroring of Weil's emphasis on the satiation of common needs as the expression of attention (and therefore the method by which we allow ourselves and others to progress). Dunlea pushes our understanding of attention one step further by recognizing its power at a specifically non-verbal level. Her time at L'Arche showed her that sometimes the most transformative thing that a therapist can do for a client is to simply act as a container, allowing their client to feel attuned with themselves, their own body. Dunlea exposes the way in which we may channel healing rather than oppression with our presence alone, thereby providing an exact opposite form of relationality to that of the conduit of force. This is exactly what the faggots do for Heavenly Blue when he goes mad.

This is also the role that sanctuaries play within Faerie community. Sanctuaries can be understood specifically as Faerie lands that have an open-door visitor policy for all or nearly all of the year and have full-year residents.<sup>32</sup> These lands have been a part of the community since its birth. They have, throughout the past four decades, been primary sites of healing for the community in various ways. They provided housing and respite during the plague; many Faeries have found themselves at a sanctuary for food and shelter during times of transition or instability; and sanctuaries now find themselves as primary sites for the battle against methamphetamine addiction in the community. Additionally, at the moment I am writing, conversations abound about what responsibilities the sanctuaries have to their residents and the broader community during the COVID-19 pandemic. No matter their specific role, however,

---

<sup>32</sup> Each land maintained by the Faeries has a different resident policy regarding the process of becoming a resident and what residents are called. Some lands simply refer to the people who maintain them as residents while one land in particular I have spent time on refers to its long-term residents as "Temple Keepers" whereby the spiritual nature of the land is emphasized. The one common characteristic of these policies I have come across is the integral use of consensus for approving anyone to inhabit the land for an extended period of time.

sanctuaries are the material tranifestation<sup>33</sup> of the ethical past and potentiality of Faerie community.

Working to counteract the force that Root has embodied also brings me back to the complex temporality of attention. Force, as an omnipresent dehumanizing energy, is counteracted with attention in the present even though the force being countered does not solely exist in the present. Force compresses and expands time as it interacts with our reality. Attention therefore calls us to reject what Walter Benjamin refers to as “homogenous and empty time”<sup>34</sup> in favor of what Judith Halberstam conceives of as queer time. Drawing upon the future-negated realities of people living with AIDS in the early years of the plague, Halberstam urges us to imagine temporalities that compress time in such a way that the present is claimed over the future thereby bringing our attention to the here and now which simultaneously expands the potentiality of contemporary action. Halberstam skillfully positions queer time against the temporal logics of reproductive time inherent to heteronormative capitalist notions of the family, longevity, and risk/safety. Halberstam further positions their project as a reclaiming of the history of crisis from the sole perspective of white men as is perpetuated in retellings of the history of AIDS. Halberstam instead positions themselves alongside those who are offered no clear hope of redemption within a political system that has never ensured their safety, unsurprising given its intentional structuring against providing for their care.<sup>35</sup> An attentive understanding of temporality must move us beyond the neatly partitioned past, present, and future into a

---

<sup>33</sup> Faeries will regularly alter or “queer” common speech so as to resist oppressive logics or simply delineate a space as specifically Faerie. Two of these common Faerie-isms are the terms “trancestors” and “tranifestation” wherein the genderqueer nature of those spirits with whom we are interacting is emphasized. This could be viewed as a spell whereby specifically queer spirits are called in and masculine or heteronormative spirits are resisted or banished.

<sup>34</sup> Walter Benjamin, *On the Concept of History* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016).

<sup>35</sup> Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, Sexual Cultures. (New York: University Press, 2005).

conception of time that both compresses/specifies and expands/empowers our response to force. Attention entails locating trauma in all times and recognizing its potentiality in the present.

Weil's notion of force with its domesticating, double-edged, spiritual and embodied nature closely resembles what I perceive to be the energy that Faerie conceptions of subject-subject consciousness attempt to counteract. The reaction against force has been the consistent drive in Faerie ethics despite ways in which this ideal can only unevenly be realized. Force is the perpetuation of queer childhood trauma and trauma from the perpetuation of that trauma, the shame inevitable in the experience of becoming liberated, the denial of material security, the criminalization of queer means of self-sufficiency. Attention is allowing someone to inhabit themselves, their experience, their process. It does not seek to transform, but simply to care. It recognizes the force that acts upon us all and the ways in which we may allow one another to overcome, to resist the destruction of the self. Attention does not hope to cure us of force. We are not naïve enough to believe that queer existence in heteropatriarchal, colonial, capitalist systems of Ramrod could ever be free of anguish. But we do believe that it is only by caring for our community and for ourselves that we exist, resist, and create. What we move toward as we resist the isolating and traumatic logics of capitalism, racism, transphobia, and liberalism is a reality in which we may experience our humanity. Force, formalized and proliferated by a variety of oppressive systems in which we are socialized, has severed us from ourselves and others. An ethic of attention brings us back to ourselves and therefore reopens channels of ethical relationality. This threatens contemporarily structured civilization and reveals an expanse of relational potentiality.

## *Against Civilization*

our attitude toward life  
is come easy go easy  
we are like human beings  
used to be before they became  
too civilized to enjoy themselves

- Don Marquis, "The Lesson of the Moth"

Attention primarily concerns one's consciousness; the practice of attention requires an awareness of oneself and others and force is then countered by actions resulting from this consciousness. This conception of attention thus brings me to questions about who we are. What is it that we must become aware of and what sort of ethical relationality might be derived therefrom? Hay grounded his conception of subject-SUBJECT consciousness in the subject's identity; he derived ethical relationality from the subject's identity as a faggot homosexual. Beyond the reasons why Hay's construction falters due to its homonormative understandings of sex and gender, his reliance on a definite and knowable identity inappropriately structures the subject. Rather than an identarian conception of subject-subject consciousness, I move toward a notion of the ethical actor as fundamentally opposed to the mandates of identity and subjecthood. My conception of subject-subject consciousness will, in the course of considering who we are, with whom we interact, and on what grounds this interaction occurs, move beyond "the subject." I am moved toward this path by the radical queerness I have experienced in Faerie community. The untamed character of the Faerie lands I have come to love is mirrored by Faeries while on and off those lands. Their movement with themselves and the world points to something elsewhere, something other, something both more and less than subjecthood.

I chart my path beyond the subject, toward who I perceive to be the ethical actor in Faerie community, through the subject. I begin with Judith Butler's poststructuralist consideration of ethics in her book *Giving an Account of Oneself* as well as her essay by the same name. Her

project responds to the critique of poststructuralism that “has held that the postulation of a subject who is not self-grounding undermines the possibility of responsibility and, in particular, of giving an account of oneself.”<sup>36</sup> Butler is concerned with the crucial ethical questions of responsibility and self-narrativity that must be addressed if we are to retain the poststructuralist insight that the subject is knowable only through language, given that an account of the subject in language renders subjectivity both mutable and partially opaque. She locates five ways in which the subject’s account of themselves in language necessarily fails to establish a narrativizable and self-knowing subject:

There is (1) a non-narrativizable *exposure* that establishes my singularity, and there are (2) *primary relations*, irrecoverable, that form lasting and recurrent impressions in the history of my life, and so (3) a history that establishes my *partial opacity* to myself. Lastly, there are (4) *norms* that facilitate my telling about myself but that I do not author and that render me substitutable at the very moment that I seek to establish the history of my singularity. The last dispossession in language is intensified by the fact that I give an account of myself to someone, so that the narrative structure of my account is superseded by (5) the *structure of address* in which it takes place.<sup>37</sup>

Our exposure and primary relations, 1 and 2, constitute the history of ourselves, 3, that precedes our existence as a self-reflexive, and therefore knowable subject. Yet this history preceding our self-reflexivity is no less a part of ourselves due to our unknowing. Our exposure, our corporeality, our reality as “visible, seen, existing in a bodily way and of necessity in a domain of appearance,”<sup>38</sup> is a fundamental condition of our existence, yet we have no way of

---

<sup>36</sup> Judith Butler, “Giving an Account of Oneself,” *Diacritics* 31, no. 4 (2001): 22–40.

<sup>37</sup> Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).

<sup>38</sup> Butler.

knowing how we came to inhabit this body. We cannot know even how this particular body came into this particular world. This information about ourselves is held by those others who performed this activity for us. Similarly, the first multiple years of our existence were shaped by those with whom we related, and those relations reverberate throughout our experience in ways we can never know. Butler relates this to what Levinas calls a “passivity prior to passivity” wherein we are passive not because of our self-reflexivity, but because we are primarily characterized before our establishment as a subject by our impressionability.<sup>39</sup> The history of ourselves that we internalize and perpetuate in ways unknowable to ourselves constitute, I argue, what Butler refers to as the “inevitable and insuperable dimension” of impingement that separates us from ourselves and therefore renders our self-knowledge limited.<sup>40</sup>

The norms, 4, which facilitate our giving an account of ourselves – primarily the methods by which we are recognizable as a subject, consisting of the language we use and the structure of our narration – are not established by us and therefore act upon us as we attempt to narrate ourselves. We must submit to the dictates of some innumerable others who have established these norms that we are given for constructing ourselves in language. We therefore necessarily disorient ourselves as we convey our narrative through a medium and with forms that are not our own. Further, the adherence to these norms renders my account substitutable in some way despite the fact that the entire reason for a narrative account of myself is to establish my singularity. Yet any attempt to narrate ourselves as an ethical actor must be communicated with regard to these norms if we are to receive recognition from the other; intelligibility (which is also to say legibility) is a precondition of subjectivity. Thus, as Butler argues, the norms of narration are fundamental conditions of our relationality within the hegemonic heteronormative order,

---

<sup>39</sup> Butler.

<sup>40</sup> Butler.

which pull us from ourselves; in the same way, we ask others to dispossess themselves in the course of giving us an account of themselves.<sup>41</sup>

Though her discussion of our limited self-knowledge due to the norms with which we must interact is more firmly imbedded in a psycholinguistic framework, I nonetheless find her consideration of how our pursuit of recognition inherently involves a negotiation with existing structures and therefore a balancing of specificity and substitutability to be useful beyond her specific framework. I here diverge from Butler's ethical consideration of the subject's self-opacity insofar as her analysis is restricted to a consideration of the subject's relationship to language alone. Truth be told, her thoughts on our historically imposed alienation is also framed in a more explicitly linguistic manner in her writing than I have alluded to here. For her, our primary relations are important because the infant questions who those with whom it interacts are just as those elder subjects pose the same question to the infant. A discussion of how we are fundamentally exposed and acted upon in that condition of existence, thereby unalterably being shaped before we come to know ourselves, can easily be divorced from the functioning of language, however. Her final site of separation, the structure of address, is, however, purely linguistic in nature. I do not consider it here because alienation resulting from language in the course of an attempt to coherently narrate ourselves is not my concern. To acknowledge that language alienates us from ourselves by mediating our experience *of ourselves* is sufficient for what I contemplate here.

From Butler's analysis I carry with me her understanding of our out-of-timeness resulting from our delayed reflexivity, an idea of our interaction with norms which will be further developed later on, and, most importantly, her interweaving of our partial self-opacity with

---

<sup>41</sup> Butler.

ethical inquiry. Butler states that “if it is precisely by virtue of [the subject’s] relations to others that it is opaque to itself, and if those relations to others are precisely the venue for its ethical responsibility, then it may well follow that it is precisely by virtue of the subject’s opacity to itself that it sustains some of its most important ethical bonds.”<sup>42</sup> Stated differently, the subject is partially hidden from themselves due to their socialization yet society is the arena for ethical action; the relationship between the subject’s partial self-opacity and ethics is therefore an important site of ethical inquiry.

Levinas, in addition to locating passivity prior to passivity, also considers the subject’s “passivity, susceptibility, and condition of *being impinged upon*” as constitutive of the moment of subject formation. Further, Levinas conceives of this process as “synchronic and infinitely recurring.”<sup>43</sup> Alternatively, we become a subject at the point at which we are acted upon by another according to externally (from ourselves *and* the other) structured norms and we are then continually formed as subjects through this recurring process of being acting upon. Our subjectivization, which is also our separation from ourselves, is therefore inherently social in that “incoherence establishes the way in which we are constituted in relationality: implicated, beholden, derived, sustained by a social world that is beyond us and before us.”<sup>44</sup> Yet while this relational incoherence may be inherent to our condition, Butler’s construction of the subject by way of Levinas, indicates that we have a responsibility to ethically interrogate the ways in which we act upon others. Thus, I make use of Butler’s preliminary schema as a point of departure toward and investigation of what those “socially contingent and reversible conditions”<sup>45</sup> by which we are alienated from ourselves might be. I undertake this inquiry toward the end of more

---

<sup>42</sup> Butler.

<sup>43</sup> Butler.

<sup>44</sup> Butler.

<sup>45</sup> Butler.

clearly understanding what is distinctive about the Radical Faerie ethos and its importance for a general understanding of queer ethics.

The conspirators of the queer anarchist journal *Baedan* approach the social and reversible ways in which we are alienated from ourselves by considering the sociosymbolic process they term domestication, which they define following the insights of Jacques Camatte as:

...the capture of living beings by a dead thing, and the integration of those beings into all the roles and institutions which comprise the dead thing. Furthermore it is all the practices which force those beings to spiritually accede to their capture. And lastly it is the discourse and ideology which justifies that capture.<sup>46</sup>

These dead, life-taking systems that domesticate us are at all times breaking down, inciting contradictions within themselves, as they must infinitely complexify in order to hide that they are nothing but a carcass animated by domesticated subjects. Domesticating systems can only continue to function by continually bringing new beings within itself and are therefore marked by a perpetual decomposition; any domesticating instance's central characteristic is that of decomposition which is hidden through increasingly intricate processes of domestication. A specific instance of domestication can be found in Jacques Camatte's writing about the anthropomorphosis of capital.<sup>47</sup> Capital, as a dead thing that feeds off the living, must become ever more complex to prevent the realization that it is nothing but a decomposing dead thing. We are emptied of our humanity and reconstituted by capital. Our present, in this late stage of capitalism, is appropriated by capital in the form of our attention as well as our wage. Even our own private hobbies and skills, akin to what Foucault terms "technologies of the self," become sites of commodification. Further, the complexification of debt appropriates our future while

---

<sup>46</sup> *A Queer Journal of Heresy*, Baedan 2 (Contagion Press, 2014).

<sup>47</sup> Jacques Camatte, "Against Domestication," 1973, 25.

capitalism drives the destruction of the Earth which appropriates the future of all conceivable futures. Similarly, language creates a gap between the subject and the real; rationality disembodies the mind; materialism deadens the spirit.

Domestication occurs in infinite processes that are formalized in the superstructure of civilization, which *Baedan* defines as “the web of power between the institutions, ideologies, and physical apparatuses which perform domestication and control.”<sup>48</sup> The connection between domestication and Civilization<sup>49</sup> was first explored by Fredy Perlman in his *Against His-story, Against Leviathan* in which he is clearly inspired by Camatte’s writings. While Hobbes’s leviathan, from which Fredy pulls the term, might be conceived of as “[a] blond, masculine, crowned man bearing a sword and a scepter... [and] composed of countless faceless human beings, tasked with moving the springs and wheels and levers which make the artificial beast move,” the leviathan that Fredy conceives of, Civilization, is more appropriately thought of as “a giant worm, not a living worm but a carcass of a worm, a monstrous cadaver, its body consisting of numerous segments, its skin pimpled with spears and wheels and other technological implements.”<sup>50</sup> Civilization, as the site of intersection of the various ways in which we are domesticated, must also therefore be understood as continually in a process of decomposition, complexification, and recomposition wherein subjects are reincorporated by domestication, sometimes through the processes by which they attempt to escape.

The instrumentalization of the subject in the service of civilization is more precisely delineated in *Baedan*’s use of what Foucault and Agamben have termed apparatuses. Agamben

---

<sup>48</sup> *A Queer Journal of Heresy*.

<sup>49</sup> I reference Fredy’s conception of Civilization in the proper form while other writers’ consideration of the same, as well as my own, will be written in lower case. This is done only for visual clarity and should not be taken as a signal for a comparison of the importance of the term in any one or other thought.

<sup>50</sup> *A Queer Journal of Heresy*.

defines an apparatus as “literally anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviors, opinions, or discourses of living beings.”<sup>51</sup> This is an expansion of Foucault’s classification of apparatuses and admittedly yields a bit of an unwieldy analysis. Yet only such an expansive definition could be adequate to the scope of the struggle *Baedan* champions. Agamben continues by stating, “We have then two great classes: living beings (or substances) and apparatuses. And, between these two, as a third class, subjects.”<sup>52</sup> The subject is here once more characterized by the disciplining of the body, considered before by Butler and Levinas as one’s being acted upon in language. However, we see here a significant point of departure from Butler’s construction of the subject wherein the subject is here separated from the human. Conceiving of existence outside of civilization, existence apart from subjecthood, provides a crucial opening from which an anti-civilizational critique may be understood. Only by positioning ourselves as in some way apart from that which has been domesticated may we potentially locate the site from which the project of destroying society by ensuring its decomposition may be launched.

This position against civilization is what *Baedan* considers to be the position of the queer; queerness is, in *Baedan*’s conception, the modality in favor of the decomposition and destruction of domesticating civilization. They radicalize Lee Edelman’s project of queer negativity found in his work *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* in this way. Edelman promotes an apolitical stance of the queer due to the queer’s necessary noninvolvement with society’s inherent logic of reproductive futurity, sacralized in the cult of The Child. The conspirators of *Baedan*, however, align their work more closely with that of Guy Hocquenghem’s writings on

---

<sup>51</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *What Is an Apparatus?: And Other Essays*, Meridian, Crossing Aesthetics. (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2009).

<sup>52</sup> Agamben.

desire and homosexuality to conceive of an *anti-political* stance of the queer whereby the queer “[refuses] all political logic: representation, mediation, dialogue with power.”<sup>53</sup> *Baedan*, following the anti-capitalist homosexual critique of Hocquenghem, expands Edelman’s conception of the death drive to oppose reproductive futurism as only one part of the totality of civilization. They conceive of “queerness as wildness, as a madness attacking the civilized order,” as “an ever-present violence.”<sup>54</sup> One might be tempted here to link queerness to force, but that would be misguided. While both may be thought of as ever-present destructive currents, the crucial distinction is toward what that negation is aimed. Queerness is the self unintelligible, unmediated, uncivilized; queerness is the refusal of anything which captures the human and ensnares us as subjects. Force destroys the human; queerness revolts against civilization so as to humanize the subject.

*Baedan* thus pursues an analysis of our domestication in civilization so as to locate that “which shows us where the decomposition can be hastened, where we might sneak out, or ways that others have attempted to evade being recomposed.”<sup>55</sup> They state:

Decomposition isn’t only a force of nature or accident; it is primarily the willful refusal of Leviathan by individuals and groups. Leviathan breaks down when those who maintain its springs and wheels refuse to do so—when they flee to the mountains, sing, dance and practice ecstatic ritual; when they scream, loot and burn; when they rip out the armor, tear off the mask and burn the beast to the ground.<sup>56</sup>

A scene in which queers “flee to the mountains, sing, dance, and practice ecstatic ritual” will sound very near a description of core components of Faerie gatherings to anyone who has

---

<sup>53</sup> *Journal of Queer Nihilism*, Baedan 1 (Contagion Press, 2012).

<sup>54</sup> *Journal of Queer Nihilism*.

<sup>55</sup> *A Queer Journal of Heresy*.

<sup>56</sup> *A Queer Journal of Heresy*.

witnessed these events. The anti-political stance of *Baedan* is, further, more precisely exhibited in a key element of these gatherings: the creation of a sociality apart from the political. A dear friend who originally told me about the Faeries has repeatedly remarked regarding his introduction to the Faeries, which occurred during a Beltane gathering, that he had some of the most engaging conversations of his life, but that he was shocked at his inability to find people who wanted to have pragmatic political discussions. Despite the fact that he found a radical queer community with the intellectual and spiritual capacity for political reform, he did not find people having discussions about politics. This, to him, was a flaw in the community, a way that the community was failing to actualize its radical ideals. He perceived a lack of activism.

However, he did not recognize that the setting in which he encountered the Faeries, a Beltane gathering in the woods of Appalachia, is intentionally structured as a separation from the sociopolitical realities that exist off the land. An insight from *Faggots and Their Friends* goes, “The fairies have left the men’s reality in order to destroy it by making a new one.”<sup>57</sup> The “men” in *Faggots and Their Friends* are not simply people assigned the biological sex male at birth. The title is instead a placeholder for those who uphold systems of oppression, those who uphold civilization as they give themselves over as fuel for the processes of domestication. The distance between the men and the faggots can be measured by the existence of the “queer men” in the novel who, like Edelman, have resigned themselves to their misalignment with the reality of the men, become apolitical, while still reaping the benefits of participating in that reality. They are those who pass, whose parents are, in the novel, ignorant of the deviance of their still beloved son. They embody the insidious domesticating drive of homonormativity. Faggots, however, exist a step beyond the assimilationism of the queer men. They are not only oppressed within the

---

<sup>57</sup> Mitchell, *The Faggots & Their Friends Between Revolutions*.

reality of the men; they imagine and actualize a queer relationality within the oppressive regime of Ramrod. The fairies, encountered rarely in the novel, resist the reality of the men by an act of separatism. Queerness as it is understood by myself, and as I have encountered it in the writings of *Baedan* and my experiences with the Faeries, is embodied by some combination of the faggots and fairies – those who destroy the civilization of the men by imagining and actualizing alternate realities and, occasionally, embracing separatist practices. The Faerie separation from the reality of the men and imagination of a reality beyond Ramrod, as embodied in gathering practices, are ultimately a rejection of civilization itself. The anti-political sense of Faerie gatherings reflects an understanding that all politics necessarily engages us with civilization and thus can never offer any fundamental transformation.

*Baedan*, claiming that one primary leviathan must exist due to the hegemonic tendency of leviathanic structures to consume all that is not already within them, locates gender as leviathan. Their anti-civilizational critique is therefore primarily a critique of gender as they consider gender to be the most fundamental and primary site of our alienation. While I am hesitant to accept what feels to be an overemphasis on a single system or mechanism by which we are subjectivized, just as I turned from Butler's analysis as it became too consumed in language, I agree with their analysis of gender as a profound and pervasive system by which we are domesticated. Further, I find their critique of gender to be very closely aligned with how I have experienced the gender of myself and others in Faerie community: as a realm for refusal of civilization and for communion with oneself. Movement toward oneself is the method by which we may practice attention; resisting domestication and civilization is therefore an ethical imperative of subject-subject consciousness as I have conceived of it thus far. I therefore join *Baedan* as a champion of decomposition. Moving from *Baedan's* critique of civilization and

their project's relation to Faerie practices, I transition to a comparison of Butler's conceptions of gender performativity and precarity with Faerie gender practices so as to more clearly conceive of Faerie gender practices as part of an ethics of awareness of oneself in pursuit of radical queer ethical relationality.

## *Chaotic Good*

As for me, I have chosen: I will be on the side of crime. And I will help the children, not to win back access to your houses, your factories, your schools, your laws, and sacraments, but to destroy them.

- Jean Genet, *The Criminal Child*

Genderplay is integral to Faerie sociality. This is perhaps one of the only threads of the community that has endured, along with animistic spirituality. The Faeries were originally organized around the existence of a third gender: faggot. This is related to Harry Hay's claims of Native American/Faerie kinship as relayed to Hay by Wovoka;<sup>58</sup> Hay viewed the Faeries as being of the same origin as gender-transgressive Two-Spirit people. Another related discourse can be located in Arthur Evans's *Witchcraft and the Gay Counterculture*, heavily influenced by proto- and early Faeries, which explores the centrality of gender transgression in the lineage of gay liberation. Though the Faeries I know no longer seek legitimization through colonialist narratives, they all resist the ensnarement of gender through drag, performance, ritual, affect, and aesthetics. The Faerie practice of gender, which I have come to understand as gender refusal, is a primary site of returning to oneself as a practice of attention necessarily linked to what the Faeries have shown me as queer ethical relationality.

The weekend I met the Faeries in Atlanta was a Deep South weekend. This monthly queer dance party has been produced in its current iteration for almost five years – it was in a previous tranifestation under the name Flux for almost a decade prior – by the Atlanta born and based DJ Vicki Powell. Vicki and a visiting artist, whom Vicki recruits for the weekend, play sets for the party, which is hosted by a core group of Atlanta-based Faeries with occasional Faerie guest hosts from around the world. Ariel Zetina, a trans POC DJ, producer, and writer from Chicago headlined that first Deep South party that I attended. As part of the Deep South

---

<sup>58</sup> Stover III, "When Pan Met Wendy."

tradition, some of the local Faeries hosted a potluck before the night's dancefloor festivities; this particular potluck was hosted by Orion and their roommate Kyle. I found out about this party through a community-wide virtual invite. I reached out to Orion and he extended a warm welcome despite me not knowing either of the hosts nor any of the other attendees.

Orion and Kyle's home was unlike any living space in which I had ever been. Their living room floor was covered with cushions and bean bags; the entire perimeter of the room was lined with plants and small altars. Their kitchen/dining room was filled with an assortment of snacks and drinks brought by guests. The backyard area was relatively large and appropriately tailored to facilitate a freeform yet cozy sociability. Their home was, in short, the first bohemian-esque home in which I had been. Yet bohemian is not a precise descriptor. There was a small vanity area inset in Orion's closet which consisted of a tiny stool in front of a short vanity table covered by lipsticks, nail polish, and assorted eye accoutrements amid a bulk of their drag in a space about five feet square. The weed smoking, plant growing liberality and aesthetic of the rest of the home was in some way animated by or existing inseparably from the closet's gem of gender resistance.

My first (unsuccessful and rather halfhearted) attempt at doing my own makeup occurred at this altar. It was also Orion who purchased a bag of assorted nail polish for me while transporting me to the fall gathering where I met Root. One particular shade from that bag, which was the first nail polish I ever wore, is something I still wear for inspiration and astral guidance. Nail polish, usually chipped to varying degrees, is now a common component of my aesthetic. My wardrobe has also shifted to include an assortment of "women's" pieces. In short, the permissiveness of gender in Faerie community has initiated an exploration of my own gender, an exploration of myself.

Playing with, bending, refusing gender has been one of the most profound practices of attention that I have learned from the Faeries. Gender performativity of the Faeries does not, however, fit with Butler's definition of the term that she offers in her essay "Performativity, Precarity and Sexual Politics." Butler writes:

To say that gender is performative is to say that it is a certain kind of enactment; the "appearance" of gender is often mistaken as a sign of its internal or inherent truth; gender is prompted by obligatory norms to be one gender or the other (usually within a strictly binary frame), and the reproduction of gender is thus always a negotiation with power; and finally, there is no gender without this reproduction of norms that risks undoing or redoing the norm in unexpected ways, thus opening up the possibility of a remaking of gendered reality along new lines.<sup>59</sup>

Butler, later in this essay, relates gender performativity to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's notion of "translation" which is "the way of bringing about a new understanding."<sup>60</sup> We see here that Butler understands the subject to be inherently linked to gender both in that the subject performs gender on socially acknowledged terms and that the result of gender performativity is the proliferation of gendered subjectivities. The subject-gender connection that Butler makes wherein our interaction with gender structures us as subjects is consistent with *Baedan's* understanding of the same.

Butler's conception of gender performativity, however, is imbued with a drive toward intelligibility that is directly counter to the gender-destructive stance entailed in *Baedan's* critique of gender as leviathan. The possibility offered by Butler is the remaking of gender

---

<sup>59</sup> Judith Butler, "Performativity, Precarity and Sexual Politics," *AIBR. Revista de Antropología Iberoamericana* 04, no. 03 (September 1, 2009): I–XIII, <https://doi.org/10.11156/aibr.040303e>.

<sup>60</sup> Butler.

through a negotiation with power. *Baedan* explicates how this dialogue with power necessarily perpetuates domestication when they state, “The contemporary function of power can be understood as one unending move toward intelligibility – one of moving what had been blind spots into new subjects to be marketed; new identities to be surveilled.”<sup>61</sup> The mechanism by which Butler’s conception of gender performativity entails intelligibility is the proliferation of gender, which must be understood as a the continual creation of uniquely gendered subjects. Subjects may express genders unintelligible to civilization or themselves, but, in Butler’s construction, the performance of gender trends always toward a more precisely defined gender – the increased incisiveness offered by a proliferation of gender must be conceived of as a deeper ensnaring of subjects in civilization. The gender reality is reconstituted by Butler’s conception of gender performativity; the subject’s interaction with the system of gender transmutes gender within themselves in a specific way such that they are bound to an intelligible system wherein the civilized subject is afforded recognition from the sociosymbolic order. What is exchanged for civilizational recognition is, however, just as demonstrated by Camatte’s analysis of the anthropomorphosis of capital, nothing less than a living body that is turned over to the life-negating system of gender as fuel for the preservation of the façade of gender’s legitimacy.

This is, of course, a bargain that many who appear to be transgressing gender are happy to make, which is exhibited by the commercialization of drag by RuPaul – necessarily understood as the homogenization of drag as it interacts with the civilizing (structuring, ordering) systems of capitalism and heteronormativity. Drag queens who have aligned themselves with this homogenization nearly always adopt a drive toward what RuPaul refers to as a “glamazon,” which is shorthand for a high-production, polished aesthetic. No matter what style these queens

---

<sup>61</sup> *Journal of Queer Nihilism*.

adopt, undoubtedly varied in genre, there is an emphasis on *production*. This is fundamentally different than the Faerie approach to drag which is radically DIY and commonly shape, sex, and gender defiant. I think of Charlene Incarnate, a Faerie who identifies as a post-drag priestess, who regularly performs with her breasts and penis exposed to country hits with male vocals like “The Devil Went Down to Georgia” by The Charlie Daniels Band. She disrupts any stable understanding of sex, gender, masculinity, or femininity as she performs herself, a transfeminine witch from rural Alabama. I am also reminded of a Faerie named Joann Fabrixx whose signature look consists of a sort of intergalactic illusion painted on the upper half of their face, an eye contact that makes looking at them disorienting, and a wig big enough to get lost in (in which they have in fact lost themselves once or twice). I remember a moment when it became unclear to me whether or not Joann *was* the wig, which is to say that recognition of Joann as a human became suspended somewhere amid the conglomeration of fake hair, clips, bows, ribbons, metallic streamers, and collected detritus. Faerie drag is not about “passing” or posing for Instagram. The emphasis of Faerie drag is *performance* understood as an outward expression of the self’s inherent unintelligibility.

Butler’s drive toward intelligibility is what links her conception of gender performativity to *precarity* which she defines as “that politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death.”<sup>62</sup> Butler’s notion of precarity is related to Weil’s notion of force in that precarity is a sort of measure for the propensity of the subject to be further dehumanized; precarity signifies the likelihood that a subject will experience force as a result of the political. This specifically civilizational form of force may be located in an array of scarcity-related

---

<sup>62</sup> Butler, “Performativity, Precarity and Sexual Politics.”

phenomena such as racism, misogyny, police brutality, denial of healthcare, war, and an infinite other recurring and complexifying justifications for stability or order. As Butler states, it is on the basis of “who counts as a subject and who does not that performativity becomes linked with precarity.”<sup>63</sup> We can here trace a relationship between the subject, intelligibility, civilization, and precarity as mediated by politics. The subject understood as the civilized human can also be seen as the human rendered intelligible by domesticating apparatuses. It is the disciplining apparatuses of civilization that render the human intelligible to themselves via the construction of identity which is a suture for the gap opened up between the subject and themselves. But identity is also socially constructed and therefore is also the mode by which the subject becomes intelligible to others. Politics is the process of negotiating the intelligibility of subjects within civilization; politics is the process by which some number of subjects determine which humans have been appropriately domesticated and can therefore be recognized also as subjects worthy of care. Intelligibility therefore forms the foundation of the human’s relation to the political. A rejection of civilizing apparatuses, an embrace of the anti-political stance of the queer elucidated by *Baedan*, must therefore be a rejection of intelligibility and an embrace of precarity.

Embracing precarity can also be understood as embracing chaos in opposition to the order of civilization. Neither precarity nor chaos should be confused with force, though. Just as it is important to distinguish between the negativities of force and queerness, we must also understand the distinction between force and precarity or chaos. While force is an inherently dehumanizing energy, precarity and chaos are conditions with which we live; to understand queerness as an incoherent madness of the human in search of themselves we must also understand that any sense of order inscribed in our bodies is nothing other than a phantasm produced by

---

<sup>63</sup> Butler.

civilization. Yet any clear understanding of these conditions must acknowledge that, so long as we do not live completely separate from the reality of the men as the fairies do, acceding to a position of precarity will entail some additional experience of force at the hands of civilization as punishment for a refusal to give oneself over to the structures of domestication. This is evidenced pervasively in Faerie community by those who choose to only engage with capitalism via underground economies. These Faeries risk physical harm due to the combination of false austerity and mass surveillance which drives the use of force in those markets deemed undesirable. Further, for those who manage to protect themselves from the violent crises that civilization produces within itself, the threat of violence at the hands of the police and prison system is ever present. Even those who choose to make money legally oftentimes do so in a freelance arrangement which means forgoing many traditional workplace benefits such as healthcare and retirement. I know few Faeries who support themselves financially through any form of corporate, non-profit, or government employment, and tension between Faeries in different relationalities with capitalism has frequently been palpable to me. For those unwilling to accept the one inducement of civilization, a sense of stability which must be understood as nothing more than a façade, exposure to constructed instability – imposed force – is guaranteed. The force experienced by those refusing civilization is therefore twofold in that civilization itself is constituted by apparatuses designed to channel force and also impose additional force upon those who refuse to accede.

Faerie space was novel for me in part because of this embrace of chaos. Christophe has aptly described himself as “a sex priestess in the temple of the Goddess of Chaos.” This sort of invocation has been mirrored by others in a variety of contexts by the worship of Inanna, Akasha, Asherah, or some situational notion of chaos itself. I have never heard anyone in Faerie

spaces refer to the God of Order whereas the vast majority of my spiritual life has entailed a dialogue with a variety of disciplining mandates and threats first handed down to me in the Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church. Faeries accede to a position of precarity, claim inner chaos, because they understand it to be a necessary condition of those who resist the civilized reality of the men by imagining and moving toward unmediated, attentive relationality with themselves and others. The Faeries have thus exposed me to a compelling insight: combatting politically induced force – resisting the realm of the possible, the common sense, the logical – must be coupled with a persistent playfulness. Rejecting civilization is not possible by carrying with us the pragmatism and imposed austerity that domestication demands. Anti-politics involves a separate form of sociality and a different energetic modality to match. Mitchell writes in *Faggots and Their Friends*, “The faggots reminded me that superficiality, style, messiness, and play are not bad things, they are transformative ways of being.”<sup>64</sup> The Faeries have called me to harness the chaos inherent in a queer revolt against domestication within myself. Our bodies are the site of the battle against civilization and the Faeries teach us to love, nurture, and enjoy this precarious, continually evolving struggle. Subject-subject consciousness calls us to be with ourselves and to honor others in all of our queer, silly, chaotic power.

Faeries have also taught me to sustain this sense of precarity borne from an embrace of unintelligibility within larger collectives. Anti-politics renders the project of Faerie community always at least partially unintelligible to itself because our understanding of sociality has been so thoroughly subsumed by civilization. In the late stages of nation-state formation and capitalism, we can point to no social structures that are not inherently linked to the domesticating apparatuses of civilization. Further, we are unable to point to any former society as a model

---

<sup>64</sup> Mitchell, *The Faggots & Their Friends Between Revolutions*.

except in fragments either because our access to information about those societies is moderated by the lens of civilization (in the form of the academy) or because doing so would render us unable to address the contemporary specificities of our domestication. *Baedan* is explicit for their part that their critique offers no positivist visions of society because, just as capital and gender ever expand and complexify to inhabit us, engaging with the positivist logics of politics will necessarily domesticate any radical sociality.<sup>65</sup> I refuse here, following *Baedan*'s lead and honoring my experiences of present-oriented chaotic communal attention with the Faeries, to offer any visions for a future society that the ethical relationality I have been exploring here might make possible. The Faerie call, as I have experienced it, is to embrace the inherent chaos of our existence which civilization attempts to conceal. We must eschew the security of subjectivity; we must embrace the inevitable precarity of all living beings as we embody the process of queer relationality.

---

<sup>65</sup> *Journal of Queer Nihilism*.

## *Queers in the World*

A crazy story about crazy people told by a crazy.  
Should only make you wonder.

- Tom Spanbauer, *The Man Who Fell in Love with the Moon*

Root and I separated in the summer of 2019 on the weekend of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Stonewall riots, which was also the occasion for New York City to host World Pride. It was a bittersweet moment as we welcomed Faeries from around the country to the city – I had been staying with Root in Brooklyn for most of the preceding month while I was out of school – to celebrate the queer negativity of those who refused the brutality of civilization on that momentous night five decades prior. I had just returned the previous week from a deeply affecting ceremony that scrambled my sense of self, which was compounded by inhabiting a space and existing in a city that was not my own; Root turned to negative coping mechanisms as I rebuffed his attempts to attend to me in my time of transition and uprootedness. Our romantic relationship thus dissolved amid a flurry of friends and lovers with whom we shared an enchanting few days of anarchic bliss on dance floors and in living rooms throughout the city. I remained in Brooklyn for the remainder of the summer, staying in the basement of friends who live in a queer anarchist intentional community. Root and I saw one another regularly as we attempted to sort through the web of our relationship and it was in those moments that I began to identify the ways in which I could not face our reality because I was uncomfortable with the role I had played.

I had not seen Root in person, we had not been in the same city once I returned to Houston to begin my fall semester, until I returned to New York City in the late winter of 2020, some eight months after I left. I was in the city for interviews for teaching positions with middle and high schools. We grabbed lunch after my last interview of the week. I felt nervous as I waited out on the street for him to arrive; I anxiously looked at the visible intersections to see

when I would be able to identify him biking toward me. I had been increasingly intentional over the preceding months to care for him in ways that I knew I could, especially as I began to interrogate my relationship with this project and the praxis I have felt it calling me toward. However, tension within me built as I questioned whether or not he would notice or care about the work I had been doing within myself, if he would want to see past the trauma of the summer. And yet, as soon as we noticed one another, we could do nothing but smile and embrace. For that moment there was no past nor future nor interviews nor deliveries; there was simply attention that suspended time, that brought us out of time and into ourselves and one another.

My rare moments of clarity about this project – about myself, my relationship to the Faeries and Root, and what I am to learn from the bewildering relationality they have shown me – have come when I have been *living* Faerie relationality. My sexual-romantic partnership with Root was my point of entry, a primary site of growth, and an important touchstone alongside our relationality since that prior engagement has ended. Also profoundly important have been the myriad rituals and ceremonies that have exposed me to a spirituality I never knew I could crave, the endless nights of revelry that have allowed me to play with chaos, the femininity I am learning to channel within myself, and the heartfelt moments where the real work of community has felt *real*. The more I live these moments, the more I am able to access the self which they have exposed and the more I am able to see the selves of others hidden behind the carcass of civilization. And, most precisely for this project, the more I am able to recognize why Faerie ethical relationality presents a response to the dehumanizing present in which we live.

I finish writing this thesis in the midst of, or perhaps what we will come to know more accurately as the beginning of, the COVID-19 pandemic. Children sit at home as schools remain closed indefinitely; skyscrapers are vacant as workers who are now being appropriately

understood as “non-essential” work from home and houseless people remain on the streets; doctors and nurses around the world are risking their lives daily to combat a virus that capitalist governments have been all too incapable of addressing; the stock market rises at the whims of investors despite consistently increasing death tolls; government officials are finally brazen enough to explicitly wager lives for the economy. We are outraged at the blatant disregard for the living as civilization scrambles to salvage the dead systems it relies upon. Yet we are not surprised.

Queer people in this country learned decades ago during the plague that the government cannot be trusted with our health and wellbeing; communities of color have lived the reality of dehumanization at the hands of the political for centuries. And yes, we mourn our friends and lovers who are falling ill and dying from this virus just as we know that more people we know who have been denied healthcare and housing will too be exposed to the force of this pandemic as they are refused recognition by civilization. Yet we also find in this moment of chaos kernels of opportunity. We celebrate those around the world who are refusing to pay rent; the housing advocates in Los Angeles and other places who are reclaiming buildings without waiting for permission that we know will not come; those who are looting stores to prepare essential care packages for those in need; those who are refusing to operate with the façade of business as usual. While we vehemently reject any assertions regarding the necessity of death during this time, asserting instead that the dehumanization of the political is never a necessary point along some predetermined path to ourselves, we locate this period as a potential point of departure from the systems of civilization. We claim this moment as a moment for decomposition.

The ethical project of the Faeries, as I have communicated it here, is one of destruction. We refuse the apparatuses that mine ourselves for identities that may be given over to the dead

systems of domestication in exchange for a false sense of security. We honor our spiritual selves in spite of those who attempt to ensnare the spirit with hierarchies and deferred life as well as those who cling to materialism as they offer visions of a restructured economy. We claim, nurture, and hone our inherent chaos. We dance, we dance, we *dance*. We are the queers who have come to destroy this world of decadent alienation; we are the queers who have come to destroy civilization. We are the queers who have come to claim ourselves so that we may know queer love and relationality.

## Bibliography

*A Queer Journal of Heresy*. Baedan 2. Contagion Press, 2014.

Agamben, Giorgio. *What Is an Apparatus?: And Other Essays*. Meridian, Crossing Aesthetics. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2009.

Benjamin, Walter. *On the Concept of History*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016.

Butler, Judith. "Giving an Account of Oneself." *Diacritics* 31, no. 4 (2001): 22–40.

———. *Giving an Account of Oneself*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2008.

———. "Performativity, Precarity and Sexual Politics." *AIBR. Revista de Antropología Iberoamericana* 04, no. 03 (September 1, 2009): I–XIII.  
<https://doi.org/10.11156/aibr.040303e>.

Camatte, Jacques. "Against Domestication," 1973, 25.

Dunlea, Marian. *BodyDreaming in the Treatment of Developmental Trauma: An Embodied Therapeutic Approach*. Routledge, 2019.

Hägglund, Martin. "The Necessity of Discrimination: Disjoining Derrida and Levinas." *Diacritics* 34, no. 1 (2004): 40–71.

Halberstam, Judith. *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. Sexual Cultures. New York: University Press, 2005.

*Journal of Queer Nihilism*. Baedan 1. Contagion Press, 2012.

Mitchell, Larry. *The Faggots & Their Friends Between Revolutions*. New York: Nightboat Books, 2019.

Sanford, Jesse Oliver. "Gathering Kinds: Radical Faerie Practices of Sexuality and Kinship." UC Berkeley, 2013. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0xs1770q>.

Stover III, John A. "When Pan Met Wendy: Gendered Membership Debates Among the Radical Faeries." *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 11, no. 4 (2008): 31–55. <https://doi.org/10.1525/nr.2008.11.4.31>.

Weil, Simone, and Siân Miles. *Simone Weil: An Anthology*. London: Penguin, 2005.