Affective Futurity

Rebecca Coleman

Reader, Sociology Department, Goldsmiths, University of London

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"Visionary feminism offers us hope for the future," asserts black feminist theorist bell hooks (1952–). "By emphasizing an ethics of mutuality and interdependency feminist thinking offers us a way to end domination while simultaneously changing the impact of inequality" (2015, 117). Feminist theorist Elizabeth Grosz (1952–) argues that a "minimal defining condition" of feminism is that it "aspires to change, to innovation, to the future" (2000, 14). Similarly, feminist cultural theorists Sara Ahmed, Jane Kilby, Celia Lury, and colleagues link feminism with transformation and note that feminism "involves a belief in the possibility of a better future" (2000, 6). But despite these affirmations of futurity from many theorists, the status of the future has also been significantly debated. J. Jack Halberstam (1961–), a feminist and queer theorist, explores how a range of representations of queer and transgender people in contemporary popular culture indicate the possibility, or impossibility, of alternative futures for minority and marginalized groups (2005). Queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz (1967–2013) nonetheless understands queerness in terms of futurity: "We are not yet queer. We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality. We have never been queer,

yet queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future" (2009, 1).

As these examples suggest, for scholars and activists concerned with gender and sexuality it is important to consider how the future might be different from the past and present and, in various ways, contribute to bringing these better futures into being. A central objective of gender and sexuality studies is to point out the significance of intersecting differences and positionalities—such as gender, sexuality, race, class, and disability—in how power works in the present day, but another objective is to argue for change. Gender and sexuality studies is, therefore, in part, organized around a desire for transformation of the present into a future that is different and better. What these theories also suggest is that, in any consideration of the future, it is impossible to completely separate it from other temporalities; the future is not a distinct temporality but, rather, is always in conjunction with the past and present.

This chapter takes up the interest in the future in feminist and queer theory to examine affective futurity—that is, the relationship between the future and affect. *Affect* here refers to sensations and forces that are felt in the body and that move or orient that body in certain ways. As forces, sensations, and movements, affect is in some ways evasive and uncontainable. In terms of the relationship between the future and affect, this chapter considers how, as a time that is not-yet, the future can be understood as affective—it is a temporality that is felt and around which present action is oriented but it is not quite tangible or fully actualized, in the sense of being made *actual*. The *actual* in this chapter refers to

a condition that is concrete, tangible, existent. While the future may be in the process of being actualized—or made actual—it can never be actual.

Drawing on work in feminist, queer, cultural, and social theory, this chapter first explores two specific ways in which affective futurity might be conceived: one of these is *potentiality*, or the notion that the future is a potential that is never quite grasped or made actual; the other is *intensity*, which suggests that temporality be understood not (only) as an externally organized linear progression that moves from past to present to future but is (also) encountered, and experienced intensely, in and through bodies, subjects, and social groups. The chapter also discusses two different affective modes or regimes of feeling or orienting around the future that have been identified in cultural and feminist theory as particularly significant in understanding how contemporary Western societies are organized and experienced. These are *anticipation*, where the present is organized around, acted upon, or working toward a particular future, and *preemption*, where the future is brought into the present in an attempt to prevent or forestall an action from happening. The chapter then considers the affective registers of *(cruel) optimism* (Berlant 2011) and of *hope*, in each of which the future is felt and oriented around, albeit with different affects and effects.

These six different modes, regimes, and registers—potentiality, intensity, anticipation, preemption, (cruel) optimism, and hope—are introduced not as oppositions but rather as different ways in which affective futurity can be conceived, sensed, and experienced. They are also seen as challenging the way in

which—since the emergence of industrial capitalism—Western societies have been "inescapably wedded to innovation and progress" (Adam and Groves 2007, 1) and have tended to see time as a straightforward, progressive movement from the past to the future.

To unpack these issues and ideas, the chapter offers examples of self and body transformation, discussed in terms of obesity and dieting, beauty, and biomedical practices. The chapter is concerned with how power works affectively and temporally and is likewise concerned with the ways in which feminist and queer theory have conceived and might further engage with such issues.

Affect, Potentiality, and Intensity

To begin to untangle the significance of the future to some feminist and queer theorists, and at the same time to take seriously those theorists who point out the necessity of understanding the future in relation to other temporalities, it is helpful to consider the future as affective. In general terms, *affect* refers to the capacity to "have an influence on someone or something, or to cause a change in someone or something" (Cambridge Dictionary) and to "move somebody emotionally" (*Encarta World English Dictionary*). As a noun, *affect* suggests a force that registers in and through the body or brain (or both) as feeling or emotion and that can generate movement and change. Affect is thus concerned with action and activity, that is, with the affective or the capacities for change and movement. Since the late twentieth century, an "affective turn" in social and cultural theory has revitalized interest in using the notions of affect, feeling, and emotion to understand the world in a more nonrepresentational way. While

wide-ranging and coming from a number of different (and sometimes conflicting) disciplines, positions, and approaches, these theories tend to understand affect as evasive, ephemeral, and effervescent. Feelings are often difficult to pin down and communicate, sometimes because they operate across networks of human bodies, technologies, spaces, and temporalities in ways that are hard to disentangle (such as how a television commercial for a mobile phone may evoke aspirational impulses or the atmosphere of a room can feel inviting or foreboding depending on the quality of light, the time of day, and the people and furniture within it) and sometimes because they escape or exceed an ability to put them into words. Because affects are moving and changing, they are also difficult to capture or express fully (see Coleman 2016 for one overview of affect and its relevance to gender and sexuality studies).

The affective turn has been particularly significant in gender and sexuality studies due to the prominence in those fields of feminist and queer theorists, who have long been interested in feelings and emotions and the body. Some feminist and queer work has focused on specific affects and emotions: these include optimism (Berlant 2011; Snediker 2009), hope (Muñoz 2009), happiness (Ahmed 2010), shame (Probyn 2005), empathy (Pedwell 2014), melancholia (Cheng 2001; Khanna 2003), and "ugly feelings" more generally (Ngai 2004). Other work has explored how affects are produced through engagements with technologies (Paasonen 2011; Clough 2000; Clough et al. 2014; Puar 2013). Still other theorists have examined the way that an understanding of affect requires a mapping out of how power relations work affectively: who or what it influences, who affects, and who is affected (Coleman 2009; Coleman 2012; Skeggs and

Wood 2008; Ringrose and Harvey 2015). In all of this work, there is a concern with how affects shape or constitute bodies and subjectivities and how they are often associated with those who are positioned as marginal (in contrast to the rationality of the white, masculine, middle-class, able-bodied norm).

Drawing on this work in terms of thinking about futurity, affect is productive because it enables an exploration of how the future is difficult to access, capture, and express. As noted above, the future can be understood as affective because it is not-yet, and not actual, and it is therefore evasive and excessive. The future may also be understood as affective because it is a temporality that is felt and oriented around. For example, taking up some of the specific affects mentioned above, the future may be imagined hopefully or optimistically, and happiness may be a feeling that is never quite attained but that operates as a promise that is located in the future (Ahmed 2010). The chapter examines these senses of affective futurity, beginning with a discussion of affect as evasive and excessive, and focusing on the concepts of *potentiality* and *intensity*.

Affective Futurity and Potentiality

An understanding of affective futurity suggests that the future is not fully graspable; as a time that is not-yet, the future slips away from what is. One way to think about this elusiveness of the future is through the notion of potentiality. If something is potential, it is possible, perhaps even probable, but it is not yet actual or concrete. Potentiality is thus a means of understanding how the future exists as something that is not-yet and at the same time exists as something that the present might be oriented toward. In some of the conceptions of the future in

feminist and queer theories discussed above, for example, the possibility of the future is a central aspiration or motivator; feminist, queer, and other progressive movements (such as antiracism and disability rights) are necessary because there is a conviction that a better future is possible, and such movements are organized around this potentiality of a better future.

Another way in which the future functions affectively as potentiality, relevant to gender and sexuality studies, includes the emphasis on self-transformation—through dieting, makeovers, cosmetic surgery, and self-improvement programs—in contemporary Western popular culture (Swan 2010; Jones 2008; Heyes 2007; Coleman 2012). Here, the better future acts as a normative image or ideal to affectively appeal to and compel women in particular to transform their bodies and selves; the implied promise is that if transformation is successful, the future will be happier, healthier, and more comfortable for those whose experience in the present is difficult or framed as problematic. Crucially, the potentiality of a better future cannot be attained; with diets there is always the need to maintain weight loss; with makeovers vigilance is required to not slip back into old habits; with cosmetic surgery there are new procedures or new fashions that may be taken up; and with surgical procedures there is often the need for further procedures, as the body may fall back into its old shape. There is always room for more improvement of the body and self.

In these examples the efforts at self-transformation are most often in the service of achieving a relatively homogeneous kind of body and self, which fits within hegemonic values of femininity, heterosexuality, consumption, and capitalism.

Self-transformation, understood in terms of affective futurity, is therefore gendered. In this sense, self-transformation can be understood in terms of social and cultural power. The gendered (and also classed, raced, sexualized, and aged) body necessitates change and transformation: bodies must become better in the future. Power here thus functions as and through potentiality: it concerns not only what is but also what might or what should be. For example, certain bodies are compelled to feel dissatisfied with how they are in the present, and must therefore work toward the promise of a potentially better future. Power also functions as potentiality in that the potential of a better future always exceeds its actualization: the potential of the future can never be attained.

In sum, an understanding of affective futurity as potentiality rests on the idea that, while the future is not-yet, it is also not a time that is completely separate to the present. The future is a potentiality in the present that is aimed or worked toward, even if it may never be reached or achieved. the potentiality of the better future directly determines actions taken in the present: The dieter, for instance, makes ongoing restrictions on the intake and output of calories in order to reach a specific target weight in the future. Feminists and queer theorists take action in the present in an effort to materialize a different and better society in years to come. In these various ways, the potentiality of the future exists in the present.

Affective Futurity and Intensity

As affective, the potentiality of the future exists within the present as a particularly intense feeling or affect. To recall that one of the definitions of affect is a force that registers in the body (and/or the brain), affect may be understood

as (an) intensity, as an energy, quality, or passion that moves and changes someone or something (see, for example, Massumi 2002). In the terms summarized here, the pull or lure of the possibility of a better future can be understood as an intensity. Affective futurity is an intensity that is felt as the desire to transform and change the body, the self, the social world—or all of these.

Potentiality and intensity indicate conflictual states. On the one hand, the intensity of the potential for a better future might stimulate those interested in creating a different social world and so to commit to feminist, queer, and anti-racist movements, for example. *Better* for those activists or theorists could mean that their work interferes in the reproduction of oppressive power relations and helps to create a society that is open to diversity and multiplicity. On the other hand, as forms of power, social categories, inequalities, and differences of gender, sexuality, race, age, and ability may be re-made through potentiality and intensity. This is the case in the examples of self-transformation provided above, where the promise of a better future reinforces rather than challenges the status quo. From the perspective of affective futurity, power works not (only) through external forms of coercion such as rules, regulations, and discipline but (also) through intensity; it also works through affect and materiality, where bodies feel particular things and act on them—for instance, a desire to be slimmer or healthier prompts a regimen of dieting or exercise. The point here is that affective futurity involves multiplicity and contradictions. This descriptive chapter is not concerned with deciding whether affective futurity is good or bad, positive or negative, but rather it explicates some of what affective futurity

does—that is, the chapter describes how the affectivity of the future organizes social and theoretical movements as well as particular kinds of bodies and selves.

Anticipating and Preempting the Future

Anticipation and preemption are two specific modes of orienting toward and feeling the future that are especially salient to understanding contemporary Western power relations and how they work temporally.

Anticipation

According to feminist theorists of science and technology Vincanne Adams, Michelle Murphy, and Adele E. Clarke, anticipation is a "defining quality" of Western societies (2009, 247). For these authors, anticipation "now names a particularly self-evident futurism in which our presents are necessarily understood as contingent upon an ever-changing astral future that may or may not be known for certain, but still must be acted on" (2009, 247). What they mean by this is that anticipation involves the present being directed toward a "contingent" and "ever-changing" future. While what may happen in the future is uncertain—it is a potentiality—it nevertheless "must be acted on"; events that may or may not happen in the future come to shape the present. Moreover—and importantly for the focus of this chapter—the authors note that anticipation defined in such terms is an affective state:

> Anticipation is the palpable effect of the speculative future on the present. . . . *As an affective state, anticipation is not just a reaction, but a*

> *way of actively orienting oneself temporally*. Anticipation is a regime of being in time, in which one inhabits time out of place as the future. (2009, 247, original emphasis)

Adams, Murphy, and Clarke go on to explain anticipation as "palpable." The potentiality of the future is felt as an affective intensity. What the affective state of anticipation involves is a temporal orientation to the future "as if the future is what matters most. Anticipatory modes enable the production of possible futures that are *lived* and *felt* as inevitable in the present" (2009, 248, original emphasis).

The authors focus on some examples of anticipation within biomedical practices that involve girls in particular. They discuss how practices concerned with reducing breast cancer or human papilloma virus (HPV) infections (which in a minority of cases can turn into cervical cancer) increasingly focus on prevention in prepubescent and teenage girlhood. These include studies that attempt to reduce environmental exposures in the home—such as chemicals in cleaning products, cosmetics, furniture, and food—that may (and may not) increase the potential risk of developing breast cancer; they also discuss the promotion of a vaccine against HPV infection that requires administration prior to a girl being sexually active. Such examples, they argue, indicate a "management of the future within anticipatory regimes" that "requires projecting ever further back into younger years, positing the future as urgent in ever earlier moments of organismic development. Anticipation thus reterritorializes and expands the domains and sites—not only in space, but also in time—that are called into the

future" (2009, 253).

In other words, in these examples, the future extends or spreads back in time. The future is expanded from the not-yet to "ever earlier" points in time that become crucial to act on. The potential of developing breast or cervical cancer as a result of HPV infection in adulthood is projected "ever further back into younger years" so that whether or not these diseases will manifest, girls are required to be implicated in preventative measures. With these examples, the important point for discussion is not about whether or not these preventative measures are good or bad—efforts to prevent breast or cervical cancer are arguably worthwhile. Rather, the point is that anticipatory regimes have become increasingly prevalent, and these regimes draw in some bodies more than others; in the cases of breast and cervical cancer, girlhood is seen as particularly significant to bring into the "domains and sites" of the future. To return to how power may function through affective futurity, this is significant because the gendered body is enrolled in such schemes.

Preemption

Like anticipation, preemption is a regime that involves orientation toward the future. The distinction between anticipation and preemption rests on whether or not temporality is conceived as linear. Adams, Murphy, and Clarke argue that anticipation often operates through prevention, as discussed in the examples regarding female health. Cultural theorist of affect Brian Massumi (1956–) argues that prevention is underpinned by a linear temporality; it is rooted in the present and seeks to prevent an event (such as cancer) happening in the future.

Massumi suggests that linear temporality is disrupted through preemption; preemption, he writes,

> does not prevent, it effects. It induces the event, *in effect*. Rather than acting in the present to avoid an occurrence in the future, preemption brings the future into the present. It makes the present the future consequences of an eventuality that may or may not occur, indifferent to its actual occurrence. The event's consequences precede it, as if it had already occurred. (2005, 8)

In Massumi's conception here, a preemptive measure in the present may or may not result in preventing an event in the future, but the action ensures that the future is brought into the present. Whether or not an event has occurred or will occur, with preemptive regimes, it is "as if" the event "had already occurred"; the event is induced, according to Massumi—or brought into being, or actualized—in its effect. The important point is that while anticipation aims to prevent something happening in the future, with preemption, the future is brought into the present. Hence, time is not understood to progress in a linear fashion (from past to present to future) but is scrambled.

One of the examples that Massumi explores to develop this idea of preemption is the fear of the threat of future terrorist attacks that was generated in the United States and other parts of the Western world following the September 11, 2001, attacks by al-Qaeda using US planes. Massumi argues that "threat triggers fear. The fear is of disruption. The fear *is* disruption" (2005, 3)—or in other words,

the threat of future terrorist attacks on the United States triggers fear of disruption, and, as an affective state, fear of disruption becomes disruptive itself. The effects of a possible future attack come to be felt in and as the present, as if the possible future attack had already taken place.

A further example of a preemptive logic is the threat of an obesity crisis in the future. In the United Kingdom, this has led to a government-funded study on the risks to both individual people and to the nation's economy and the creation of a public health campaign, Change4Life, that through encouraging exercise and healthy eating, aims to halt rising obesity levels. Although the campaign, which began in 2009, is described by the Department of Health (2010, 13) as preventative, it can be better understood as preemptive in its widespread attempts to encourage people to become healthier now. In its television advertising, for example, the campaign urged viewers into immediate action: "60 active minutes. Just one of the ways to change for life. Search Change4Life or call 0300 123 4567 for your free info pack. Now." A coordinated campaign called Start4Life, aimed at pregnant women and new mothers, instructed with equal urgency: "It's never too early to get your baby on the right path to a healthy and happy future. Get started now!" (Change4Life website, 2011).

To take up Massumi's terms, whether or not an obesity crisis occurs in the future, the crisis is brought into the present, so that the effects of a potential future event precede it: in order to tackle an impending obesity crisis, it is necessary to act "now!" The concept of affective futurity is further illustrated in the way the campaign takes up the threat of a future obesity crisis and reframes

a dystopian future as one that could be better. One of the Change4Life television advertisements ends by saying that if we eat better and move more, we could "all live . . . happily, not exactly ever after, but more ever after than we had done." Here, the preemption of the future is framed in terms of affect: it is happy, and thus a felt intensity; it is potential, in that it is not yet actualized; and it operates as a regime of power, in that it is a government-funded campaign into which bodies framed as obese or overweight are enrolled.

Anticipation, Preemption, and Power

According to Adams, Murphy, and Clarke, anticipation creates "an ethicized state of being":

> Being ready for, being poised awaiting the predicted inevitable keeps one in a perpetual ethicized state of imperfect knowing that must always be attended to, modified, updated. The obligation to "stay informed" about possible futures has become mandatory for good citizenship and morality, engendering alertness and vigilance as normative affective states. (2009, 254)

The preemptive logic that organizes the Change4Life campaign may also be understood to bring about what Adams, Murphy, and Clarke call "normative affective states" (2009, 254)—that is, identities and embodiments that adhere to the norm. For example, while the government report that engendered the campaign states that obesity occurs across social categories of class, race, age, and gender and that it is the outcome of complex social and environmental issues

(rather than a failure of individual willpower), the campaign targets a number of social groups in particular. Mothers (who are positioned as responsible for the health of their family) and children are especially addressed (Evans, Colls, and Hörschelmann 2011). The program also targets ethnic minorities, for whom a customized campaign was commissioned from a specialist marketing agency. For these groups, then, the Change4Life campaign takes on a specific salience, as it requires particular people to feel and live out the affective state of a future threat being brought into the present. It is these groups who are expected—for themselves and/or for others—to feel the threat of an obese future and the lure of a better (healthier, happier, longer-lasting) future as an affective intensity. To return to the significance of self-transformation introduced above, it is these groups who feel transformation as a requirement or imperative. Specific people and groups feel and live out anticipatory or preemptive regimes, and difference and inequality are therefore made and remade. Power thus works through the pull of affective futurity.

Hope for and Optimism about the Future?

With anticipatory and preemptive regimes, alertness to, and vigilance about the future become normative affective states. If the potentiality and intensity of the future is a "defining quality" (Adams, Murphy, and Clarke 2009, 247) of industrialized and progress-oriented Western societies, other affective states might also be identified, including optimism and hope. Optimism and hope are of a register similar to anticipation and preemption; they operate as modes or regimes of feeling and orienting around the future, through which more specific affects, emotions, and feelings (such as alertness and vigilance) are generated.

(Cruel) Optimism

As discussed above, one way in which the future is affective is through the image or ideal that it will be better. In this way, the future is imagined and oriented around optimistically. Optimism is usually regarded as a positive or affirmative affect; however, feminist and queer cultural theorist Lauren Berlant (1957–) suggests that an attachment to the idea that the future can and will be better also functions cruelly. Berlant explores how "tender fantasies of a better good life" (2008, 1) permeate cultural forms such as novels and films, as well as neoliberal political discourse (which suggests that achieving a better future is the goal of successful citizenship and is the responsibility of each individual) and everyday practices (including practices of self-transformation). She argues that these "tender fantasies" foster "good intention," which "produces an orientation toward agency that is focused on ongoing adaption, adjustment, improvisation, and developing wiles for surviving, thriving, and transcending the world as it presents itself" (2008, 2). But the world "as it presents itself" in contemporary capitalism is for many people difficult and thus the desire for or fantasy of a better life requires constant self-improvement—a process that Berlant labels "cruel optimism," in a 2011 book-length study of the adaptations people make to pursue this better life.

The concept of cruel optimism has at its heart a paradox. In one sense, the fantasy that a better future is possible "provides something of the continuity of the subject's sense of what it means to keep on living on and to look forward to being in the world" (Berlant 2011, 24). The difficult present is made bearable

precisely though the fantasies of a better future. Optimism makes "living on" possible. At the same time, attachments to the ideal of a better future are cruel in that "the subjects who have *x* in their lives might not well endure the loss of their object/scene of desire, even though its presence threatens their well-being" (2011, 24, original emphasis). That is, the fantasy of a better future (the x of the "object/scene of desire") takes on such prominence in a subject's life that if it were removed or destroyed, it would damage that subject. While the fantasy keeps subjects going, it is cruel in that it ties them to a "significantly problematic object" and hence "threatens their well-being" (2011, 24).

Berlant explicates the concept of cruel optimism by looking at the modern experience of food, eating, and obesity. She suggests that the rise in levels of obesity has occurred as "ordinary people" find themselves responding to or immersed in the demands of contemporary capitalism, which involves "speed-up at work" (2011, 116), constant and ongoing self-transformation and self-improvement projects, and "time organized by the near future of the paying of bills and the management of children" (2011, 116). In such a situation, where the future bears down on and comes to be felt in the present, "food is one of the few spaces of controllable, reliable pleasure people have" (2011, 115): eating (and its preparation and sharing) provides "ordinary and repeatable scenes of happiness, if not health" (2011, 116). Whereas the Change4Life campaign works through a notion of a better future, Berlant argues that "eating adds up to something, many things: maybe the good life, but usually a sense of well-being that spreads out for a moment, not a projection toward a future" (2011, 117).

This sense of "well-being that spreads out for a moment" is a helpful way of understanding both the rise in numbers of people who are categorized as obese and the recidivism rates of dieting, where the vast majority of diets fail and individuals begin them again and again. If the future is increasingly felt and/or brought into the present through preemptive regimes, eating as conceived by Berlant is a means of being in the present, an "interruption" (2011, 115) or "small vacation" (2011, 116) from "the body or life [as a] project" (2011, 116) that must be worked on in order to achieve a better future. However, Berlant again notes the paradoxical character of cruel optimism; when eating is focused on pleasure in the present, "there is less of a future when one eats without an orientation toward it" (2011, 117). In other words, eating for pleasure in the present may result in a less healthy and lengthy future.

Through her concept of cruel optimism, Berlant seeks to focus attention on the present rather than the future. She is critical of theories that emphasize futurity because they "enable a concept of the *later* to suspend questions about the cruelty of the *now*" (2011, 28, original emphases), and she explains her concept of cruel optimism as a politics of presentism that disrupts the understanding of political activism and social change necessarily being organized around the future. Here, Berlant is drawing attention not so much to the theories of anticipation and preemption that are discussed above (these theories approach futurity in a critical fashion and are interested in how anticipation and preemption can operate as a form of power); rather, she is pointing to how, as also discussed above, counternormative politics such as feminist and queer movements often focus disproportionately on the future. She sees this emphasis

on futurity as problematic because it distracts attention away from the cruelty of the present toward a "*later*" or not-yet. Far from seeing optimism as being a positive version of or orientation to the future, then, Berlant draws attention to the complex and contradictory affectivity of optimism—to how it both sustains and damages living in and with capitalism.

Such a project of thinking critically about a seemingly positive emotion can also be seen in black feminist cultural theorist Sara Ahmed's 2010 book, *The Promise of Happiness*, in which she looks at happiness as an emotion that reproduces normative values. For example, to be happy, one must adhere to heteronormative ways of living (for example, being heterosexual and belonging to one or the other sides of a gender binary). Such an argument also questions the authenticity of affect: for example, for Ahmed, the feeling of happiness is culturally produced and thus may not be "true" or "real." Indeed, Ahmed proposes the feminist killjoy as a figure and activity whereby feminists and queers point out, disturb, and change how happiness becomes a norm.

Hope

In developing her concept of cruel optimism, Berlant makes a distinction between optimism, which is capable of focusing on the present, and hope, which she sees as a passive patience for the arrival of some better future (2011, 13). A similar distinction is also made by queer theorist Michael D. Snediker (2009), who sees hope as a faith in the better future, whereas optimism has a focus on the present. The distinctions made by these authors are part of a wider debate

about the status of the future in queer theory and how orientations to the future may be understood through optimism, hope, and other affective states.

Some queer theorists call for giving up on the future. Perhaps the most well-known exponent of this position is Lee Edelman (1953–), who in his polemical book *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004) argues that the future is collapsed into the figure of the Child: indeed, Edelman argues, the Child comes to constitute "the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics, the fantasmatic beneficiary of every political intervention" (2004, 3). In other words, politics is framed in terms of what is in the interest of the future generation (see also Stockton 2009). Edelman's focus is on American politics (for example, speeches and policies) and popular culture, and in this context he uses the figure of the Child as a representation and a rhetorical symbol; his argument does not focus on "real" children. However, feminist theorists Erica Burman and Jackie Stacey (2010) contend that this distinction between "real" children and the figure of the Child is difficult to maintain, as representations and rhetoric cannot be easily separated from "real life" but are instead involved in constituting it.

Edelman's specific interest is in interrogating the heteronormative assumption this collapse of the future into the figure of the Child both rests on and reproduces. He argues that the consequence of the Child being the "perpetual horizon" of political intervention is what he terms "reproductive futurism"; an understanding of the future as reproduced by and for the Child. Because it rests on this figure of the Child, reproductive futurism "preserv[es] in the process the absolute privilege of heteronormativity by rendering unthinkable, by casting outside the political domain, the possibility of a queer resistance to this

organizing principle of communal relations" (2004, 2). The Child comes to stand for "our way of life"—a straight way of life. For Edelman, then, reproductive futurism is heteronormative, and queerness is placed outside the realm of reproductive futurism: queerness is rendered as having "no future." Edelman's suggestion for how those who are marked as queer should deal with the situation of having "no future" is not to turn to liberal arguments that demand more rights for queer people; he does not propose an expansion of reproductive futurism so that everyone has equal access to it. Rather, he argues that queers should not only accept but embrace the "ascription of negativity to the queer" (2004, 4). Queer theory should refuse the future, "assert itself instead *against* futurity, *against* its propagation" (2004, 33, original emphasis). It should take up the negativity of being outside "generational succession, [linear] temporality, and narrative sequence" (2004, 60). It should embrace its lack of futurity in order to become properly queer.

Another queer theorist, José Esteban Muñoz (2009), takes issue with Edelman's argument for rejecting futurity because of how that argument is based on accepting or embracing negativity as an exchange for the pleasures of *jouissance*. As a concept that has been developed in French poststructuralist theory, and in psychoanalytic theory in particular, *jouissance* refers to pleasure and enjoyment that works in transgressive and/or excessive ways. This pleasure may emerge through the enjoyment of rights, property, and consumption (of objects, images, and texts), and it also has a sexual dimension, as in the affective pleasure of orgasm. Muñoz's argument is that the "jouissance" that Edelman lays out is classed and raced, so that it is only white, middle-class, urban male queers—

those who are able to take advantage of consumer culture—who have access to pleasure. That is, while some may be able to turn away from the future and enjoy the present, the appeal of the future remains important to many other people.

In contrast to Edelman, then, Muñoz argues against rejecting the future and embracing negativity. Instead, he says,

> It is important not to hand over futurity to normative white reproductive futurity. That dominant mode of futurity is indeed "winning," but that is all the more reason to call on a utopian political imagination that will enable us to glimpse another time and place: a "not-yet" where queer youths of color actually get to grow up. (2009, 95–96)

Muñoz does not want queer theory to turn away from the future; he sees the future as necessary. As such, he asserts, "The here and now is simply not enough. Queerness should and could be about a desire for another way of being in both the world and time, a desire that resists mandates to accept that which is not enough" (2009, 96).

Edelman's refusal of futurity is at the same time a refusal of hope. Hope, he says, "reproduces the constraining mandate of futurism" through its "insistence of [itself] as affirmation" (2004, 4). Hope is, in this sense, characterized as necessarily affirmative and as necessarily a deferral to the (reproductive, successive) future. However, Muñoz offers an alternative understanding of hope: he sees hope as being not necessarily tied to the affirmation of reproductive time

but rather being about "an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world" (2009, 1). Whereas Edelman defines queerness in terms of negativity, Muñoz argues that "queerness is primarily about futurity and hope" (2009, 11). Edelman defines the future in terms of the preservation of heteronormativity, whereas Muñoz takes the position that "queerness is not yet here" (2009, 1).

In arguing that queerness is not yet here, Muñoz is not suggesting that a queer future is some far-off time. Rather, his understanding of futurity is developed through the potentiality of hope. For example, Muñoz explains his concept of hope as an "affective structure . . . that can be described as anticipatory" (2009, 3). The anticipatory affectivity of hope is Muñoz's means of imagining a time other than the "broken-down" here and now; it is an anticipation that he describes not in terms of a deferral to the future but instead as an illumination or animation: "The anticipatory illumination . . . is a kind of potentiality that is open, indeterminate, like the affective contours of hope itself" (2009, 7). Hope here is potentiality: "a certain mode of nonbeing that is eminent, a thing that is present but not actually existing in the present tense" (2009, 9).

Muñoz describes hope-as-potential of as having four interconnected aspects. First, hope as potentiality is an anticipation or illumination. Here, anticipation is not so much a regime of power and governance (as with Adams, Murphy, and Clarke's argument) as it is a spark or flicker that indicates the possibility of another kind of world. Second, as potentiality, hope is open or indeterminate. Hope is an adventure, where the destination is uncertain or unknowable. In this

sense, hope might be understood in terms of Kathryn Bond Stockton's concept of the "queer child," "growing sideways more than up" (2009, 37)—that is, it wanders away from normative models and resists linear, progressive temporality. Third, potentiality is affective: it is a feeling. Fourth, this potentiality exists within the present: it is a potential "that is present" (Muñoz 2009, 9) but that is not actual. Taking up these interconnected aspects of hope-as-potential—as an anticipation, as open, as affective, and as existing in the present—we can see that hope is not necessarily a deferral, a suspension until later, but rather it is a potential that might be actualized in or from the present.

Such an understanding of hope—not as a rejection of the future, nor as a deferral of the problems of the now to later—can illuminate the relationship between hope and optimism, and it can also clarify the relevance of affective futurity to gender and sexuality studies and to the organization of the contemporary social world more generally. Taken together, hope and optimism might not necessarily be at odds in their focus on the present (optimism) and the future (hope) but might instead both be pointing to the necessity for a conception of temporality as nonlinear and as multiple and diverse. For example, because the modes of anticipation and preemption are so prevalent in contemporary Western societies, the affectivity of contemporary sociocultural life involves the future not as later but as now, as in the present. In this sense, the future is not that which is beyond the present (that is, a time that follows on from the present that must be waited for) but instead is folded into the present. The future is an intensity or potentiality in the present, but affective futurity may be experienced in contradictory or multiple ways. Feminist and queer theory must remain

interested in the future because the future is a central aspect of the present—and both optimism and hope are modes in which it is possible to explore the affectivity of futures and presents.

Summary

This chapter discusses a range of different approaches to the affectivity of the future within gender and sexuality studies. It focuses particularly on the relevance of, and debates about, affective futurity—in the context of feminist and queer theory but also in terms of understanding how power works in industrial capitalist Western societies. The concepts of potentiality and intensity are introduced, and later returned to, as ways of understanding the future as affective. The affectivity of the future is developed through discussions of anticipatory and preemptive regimes, where present action is oriented around the future "as if [the future] matters most" (Adams, Murphy, and Clarke 2009, 248), or the future is brought into the present so that the effects of possible future events come to proceed the event. Lastly, optimism and hope are considered as complex affective registers where the future and present are attached to, encountered, and experienced.

Across these various discussions, temporality emerges not as a straightforward linear progression from past to present to future but, rather, as affective, as nonlinear; it is moving and flexible in a way that involves the past, present, and future being in changing relations with each other (Adkins 2008). Temporality is capable of assembling in multiple and diverse combinations. Understood as potentiality, for example, the future is in the present; it is felt and lived out not as

a temporality that is separate from the present but instead as one that is folded into the present. Such an understanding of the nonlinearity of affective temporalities raises questions regarding the ways in which potentiality, intensity, hope, and optimism may be studied and engaged. Methodologies are yet to be developed to connect with or relate to temporalities that are affective—temporalities influenced by feelings that are slippery, changing, transient, or not quite actual. Potential remains for gender and sexuality studies to inquire into the affective registers of hope and optimism, or the affective modes of anticipation and preemption, and write about them.

The chapter further looks at the affective as well as temporal operations of power. Gender and sexuality studies, in line with the social sciences and humanities more generally, have developed rigorous accounts of how power works in repressive and disciplinary ways. But theorists are only beginning to develop understandings of, and interventions into, how power works affectively, through affect and materiality, where bodies and subjects (are encouraged to) feel things and act on them. Similarly, while the social sciences and humanities have worked out a range of ways to examine how power works spatially, the temporal aspects of power relations have received less attention. In the twenty-first century, theorists are turning their attention to developing frameworks for understanding, and intervening in, the way power works temporally to make and remake differences and inequalities.

Finally, the chapter looks at the way the image of the better future has been important to mobilizing and organizing feminist and queer theory, as well as

other progressive and radical movements, and it raises the question of what happens when the ideal of the better future is problematized, as with the concept of cruel optimism. It summarizes arguments about how these movements might organize when the future is in the present, as with the regimes of anticipation and preemption, and with the register of hope, and how the potentiality and intensity of a different kind of world might be engaged and actualized. Issues such as these make the study of affective futurity, as well as nonlinear temporalities more widely crucial, productive, and stimulating for gender and sexuality studies.

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