Introduction: Low Theory

sources of knowledge? Sponge Bob Square Pants

What is the alternative to cynical recognition on the one hand and naive optimism on the other?
What's at stake with this question? hope future anti-social thesis utopia see MLA Forum on Anti-social thesis in Queer Theory

This book loses the idealism of hope in order to gain wisdom and a new, spongy relation to life, culture, knowledge and pleasure (2).

live life otherwise

Low theory tries to locate all of the in-between spaces that save us from being snared by the hooks of hegemony and speared by the seductions of the gift shop (2).

standing outside of success: failure = not succeeding, not achieving success
goal = dismantling logic of Success/Failure
re-envisioning failure (and losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing) as offering more creative ways of being parallels with Luhmann and ignorance, Butler and undoing

Failure's rewards (3)?
• escape punishing norms that discipline behavior/manage development
• preserves some of the wondrous anarchy of childhood
• disturbs “clean” boundary between childhood/adulthood, winner/loser
• allows us to use negative effects (disappointment, disillusionment, despair) to poke holes in toxic positivity and myth of power of positive thinking and positivity/personal responsibility see Ehrenreich and RSAnimate's “Smile or Die” http://youtu.be/u5um8QWVRvo

Is failure necessarily negative? Does it demand that we embrace and value our negative, “whiny,” grouchy attitudes?

Little Miss Sunshine and a new kind of optimism: not based on positive thinking or the bright side at all costs, but a little ray of sunshine that produces shade and light in equal measure (5).

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not being taken seriously, lack of rigor, frivolous, promiscuous, irrelevant (7).
What should count as “serious” and rigorous academic work?

• Benjamin: strolling down the paths, going the wrong way, not knowing exactly which way to go
• Disciplinary knowledge, the sciences and rogue intellectuals

Do we really want to shore up the ragged boundaries of our shared interests and intellectual commitments, or might we rather take this opportunity to rethink the project of learning and thinking altogether (7)? Is this possible in academic spaces, especially at the U?

Let me explain how universities (and by implication high schools) squash rather than promote quirky and original thought (7).
• disciplines and being disciplined
• normalization, routines, convention, tradition, regularity
• produces experts and administrative forms of governance
• disciplines qualify/disqualify, legitimate/delegitimate, reward/punish; reproduce themselves and inhibit dissent (10)

crossroads between university-as-corporation and university-as-new-public-sphere

need for subversive intellectuals not more critical, professionalized intellectuals (8)
What kind of intellectuals/thinkers does the University produce? What could it produce? How?

Illegibility may in fact be one way of escaping the political manipulation to which all university fields and disciplines are subject (10). How so? What would this look like? What impact does illegibility have on the ability to survive in the academy? How do those forms get evaluated/graded?

Foucault and subjugated knowledges

steal from the university (11)

adding to the 7 theses (including, worry about university, refuse professionalization, forge collectivity, retreat to external world):
• resist mastery (11-12)
• privilege the naive or nonsensical
• suspect memorialization
responses to colonial knowledge formations:
• violent (Fanon)
• homeopathic...one learns dominant system and undermines from within
• negative...subject refuses knowledge, refuses to be knowing subject (14)

JH’s book works with violent and negative responses

LOW THEORY

accessible (17)
theoretical model that flies below the radar, assembled from eccentric texts and examples (17)
theory as goal oriented
J Halberstam on *The Queer Art of Failure*

practicing “open” theory. OPEN =
- questioning
- shifting
- flexible
- adjustable
- orients us towards problem-solving

Hegemony (from Gramsci and Hall): “the multilayered system by which a dominant group achieves power not through coercion but through the production of an interlocking system of ideas which persuades people of the rightness of any given set of often contradictory ideas and perspectives” (17).

Traditional vs. organic intellectual

Low theory = counterhegemonic form of theorizing, the theorization of alternatives within an undisciplined zone of knowledge production (18).

**Pirate Cultures**

Linebaugh’s/Rediker’s *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and The Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* and the history of alternative political formations flesh out alternatives: how to live, how to think about time/space, how to inhabit space with others, how to spend time separate from the logic of work (19).
Animated films deliver queer/socialist messages:

- work together
- revel in difference
- fight exploitation
- decode ideology
- invest in resistance

**FAILURE AS A WAY OF LIFE**

goals of book:

1. “I hold on to what have been characterized as childish and immature notions of possibility and look for alternatives in the form of what Foucault calls “subjugated knowledge” across the culture: in subcultures, countercultures, and even popular cultures.”
2. Turn the meaning of failure in a different direction, away from happy/productive failure to the “dark heart of the negativity that failure conjures”—modes of unbecoming
3. Early chapters (1-3) chart the meaning of failure
4. Later chapters (4-6) allow for fact that failure is also unbeing

**It is a book about failing well, failing often, and learning how to fail better (24).**

Reminds me of JB’s passage: “Trouble is inevitable, and the task, how best to make it, how best to be in it.”

JHalb hopes this book is accessible to a wider audience. What do you think? How do we put Halberstam’s desire for intelligibility/accessibility beside our discussion of Butler’s value of difficult writing?

Master the art of getting and staying lost (25).