



sexual hegemony

CHRISTOPHER CHITTY

STATECRAFT, SODOMY, AND CAPITAL
IN THE RISE OF THE WORLD SYSTEM

edited by Max Fox, and with an introduction by Christopher Nealon

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foreword

MAX FOX /

The following text represents both a precious record and a bitter loss. Though a thrilling and innovative piece of scholarship, it is incomplete and full of the impossible promises of further writing. Compiled and edited from drafts retrieved after their author's early death, the text attempts to present the theoretical innovations that Christopher Chitty had been laboring with over the course of his academic career, in the hope that his insights might be shared and spur others to take up the fruits of his discoveries.

After he died in the spring of 2015, I was granted access to what his family and friends were able to gather from his digital files: early drafts of chapters, essays submitted as coursework, notes for further refinement or research, research he had conducted but not incorporated into a text—that sort of thing. I asked friends and comrades if they had any copies of papers I didn't know about, and I transcribed MP3s of conference presentations that, mercifully, archivists had secured online. Painfully, I mined my own inbox for the drafts of essays on which we had attempted to collaborate but that had gone nowhere (one, I am now astounded to recall, was a review of a recently published book by Foucault titled *Speech Begins after Death*), hoping not to have to look too long at the last email I sent him, an invitation to a friend's film screening, which is where I was when I got the news.

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Christopher Chitty was a brilliant young scholar and activist, endowed with a rare eye and mind and deeply beloved by a genuinely wide community. He was nearing completion on his PhD in the History of Consciousness program at University of California, Santa Cruz, when he killed himself. His dissertation, posthumously recognized under the title “Sexual Hegemony, Early Modern Republics, and the Culture of Sodomy,” was a far-ranging attempt to think through the failure of sexual liberation by “returning the history of sexuality to a history of property,” as he put it, splicing world-systems theory’s account of the transition to capitalism from feudalism with advances in the study of sexuality made since the heyday of Foucault.

Chitty was convinced that the historical emergence of cultures of male same-sex eroticism as a problem within bourgeois polities belied a key aspect of such formations’ new form of rule: sexual hegemony. Sexual hegemony, in his words, “exists wherever sexual norms benefiting a dominant social group shape the sexual conduct and self-understandings of other groups, whether or not they also stand to benefit from such norms and whether or not they can achieve them.” These groups were not communities defined by sexual identity, a category whose history he endeavored to illuminate, but classes. While he deployed this concept to analyze a number of premodern social forms, most crucially, the concept of sexual hegemony allowed him to historicize sexuality as such. For him, “sexuality could only become a problem for societies in which communities of producers have been separated from their means of production” because such a separation “decouples biological reproduction from the reproduction of ownership” of such means.

Broadly following Giovanni Arrighi’s schematic in *The Long Twentieth Century*, Chitty looked for evidence of the link between sexual hegemony and social form in crackdowns on public cultures of male sodomy in Arrighi’s four hegemonic centers: Florence, Amsterdam, London, and New York, adding Paris for its role in the development of the bourgeois state. He found that periods of financialization (which in Arrighi’s understanding signal the decline of one hegemonic center and the rise of the next) tracked with periods of increased policing of homosexuality. This allowed him to argue that homophobia is not a timeless or religious prejudice that stands by waiting for any arbitrary moment in which to flare up; instead, the problem of male homosexuality represents the form taken by a particular political contradiction or antinomy in bourgeois society, one which economic crises can inflame but not defuse without contingent political antagonism. His stance can be summed up in the following passage:

In short, human sexuality is not only malleable and historical; indeed, at certain points in history, such transformations of human nature were central to the forces of production and certain objectives of statecraft. The problem of sexual hegemony is both a question of establishing whether same-sex attraction, solidarity, and erotic attachments, as such, presented an antagonism to particular relations of force that required neutralization and a question of what relations of force in a particular conjuncture enabled its repression or allowed it to exist unperturbed. These considerations have less to do with a “phobia” or “panic,” without regard to political and institutional context, than with an uneven process of development in which dominant groups, who viewed sexual regulation and repression as in their interests, intervened in these relations of force to effect such transformations.

This was the insight with which he wrestled over the course of his writing. It is clear, however, that at the time of his death Chitty was still ambivalent about the form his argument should ultimately take. He drafted and redrafted the chapter on northern Italy, sometimes centering his theoretical apparatus, sometimes staging scenes that performed more of the argumentative work, sometimes pausing to conduct an analysis of a Florentine painting or novel. The later chapters, too, expanded and contracted in scope over various revisions, sometimes dilating on the immediate antecedents of postwar gay identity in the period of American hegemony—the coordinates of which described the limits of the gay liberation movement that occupied much of his thinking—and sometimes diving into later historiographical debates. I found chapter outlines that posited whole new sections or concerns that were evidently never written or which, perhaps, I simply couldn’t dig up. A friend told me recently that the last thing Chris told her about the project was that he’d written a new introduction and was reconceptualizing the whole project as something “sleek,” which, god bless them, the manuscripts he left us decidedly were not.

In assembling the following text, however, I did try to condense the exposition of his thought. Given that it was written as his PhD dissertation and not a book for wider publication, there were plenty of passages intended mainly to demonstrate his fluency with the literature. He had it. Attentive to the long tradition of political philosophy from which his innovations emerged, Chitty was an unsurpassed reader of Foucault as a close reader of Marx, the latter of whom he, too, could boast of a rare understanding. In a paper delivered at a conference in 2013, framed by an exploration of Fou-

cault's "sins" vis-à-vis the intellectual formation of queer theory that sprung up after him, Chitty wryly observes the following about his two signal thinkers, which could equally well describe his own approach:

Foucault read *Capital, Volume I*, and he read it very carefully (definitely a sin). . . . I use the term *sin* here somewhat facetiously, but considering how Foucault was attacked by Sartre for being "the last rampart the bourgeoisie can erect against the revolution," and considering all of the facile leftist critiques of him for lacking any kind of theory of revolutionary praxis or something, it's ironic that Foucault's own conceptualization of history as a process without a subject is derived from none other than Marx himself. I am suggesting it's kind of dangerous, in some circles of Marxism, to read *Capital* too closely.

He goes on to read *Capital* very closely, proposing an equivalence between Marx's account of the real subsumption of labor by capital and Foucault's "biopolitical threshold of modernity," in which sexuality plays a central role. But Foucault's *History of Sexuality* omitted most of what was necessary for modern, bourgeois sexuality to consolidate itself historically, he argues, and much of the text published here represents Chitty's long effort to correct the errors that Foucault had, wittingly or not, allowed to stabilize into something like a dogma, both within the study of sexuality and, negatively, within more Marxian treatments of bourgeois rule that fail to address sexuality as one of its key components. I have tried to combine from his drafts only those passages that most starkly lay out what is compelling about this argument, in a form that respects the architecture he seemed to keep intact over the many revisions.

This has meant excising whole chapters, which it distresses me to imagine no one else will ever read. But this isn't simply a collection of papers dedicated to his memory, intended to be of interest only to those who knew him. His intellectual achievement is singular and deserves to be presented as such even if he weren't survived by comrades and interlocutors who love and miss him, and his insight is legible and generative even though its full exposition is now impossible.

While working to piece this text together, I have approached it as would an editor rather than a scholar. This means, in general, that I have privileged the argumentative cohesion, rather than, say, its historical or theoretical soundness, which I have had to leave up to the material he assembled. I tracked down nearly all of his sources and was able to verify their accuracy (or fix his citations), but between him and me and each of our limitations, there are

bound to be errors for which we share responsibility. Where he deviated from what I could find in the record or formulated something in a way I found suspicious, I, as a rule, reworded as minimally as possible to add the most clarity while leaving its initial sense in place. Still, it is impossible to characterize this work as exactly what he would have written or ended up with himself. I was keenly aware that, every time I intervened on the page, there was no one from whom I could seek validation for my editorial choices, and so in a sense that I can't fully shake, this is also my own, very partial reading of his unfinished work and a record of where my own investments lie.

But it was also Chris who taught me how to read these kinds of texts in the first place. I met him when I was a barely formed undergraduate, seeking to reconcile a desire to treat my sexuality as both an important and unremarkable center of my identity with a desire to join the tradition of doing intellectual combat with capital, which, whatever its intentions, clearly treated homosexuality as outside the arena. Chris was an electrifying, shining example of how to do the two at once. He embodied for me the cutting knowledge of the genius fag in its most vivid, world-burning force. Early on, he fixed me with wide eyes and recounted the lost universe built by gay liberation, one which held a revolutionary kernel but whose defeat through biopolitical counterinsurgency had left unprocessed trauma among survivors and installed a class of ideologues whose function was to justify their betrayal of this past. I had known about this world but not its promise, and I had sensed the deathly energies of its usurpers without knowing what end they were serving. But Chris had the gift of Benjamin's historian for "fanning the spark of hope in the past," and he convinced me that even the dead were not yet safe.

Nor, ultimately, was he. In grasping at him and his project, trying to save it at least from disappearing irretrievably, I know I risk siding with the world that hurt him so much. When I tell people what I've been working on, I have to steel myself against the optimistic but stomach-rending response that this project is generous or selfless. My fear, in fact, is that publishing his unfinished work selfishly exposes him to criticism and judgment he can't answer on the basis of a project he remained unsatisfied with. But I couldn't let go of him; I needed his intellect to exist beyond my private experience of it, and I know I'm not alone in feeling this way. And when I was submerged in his efforts, trying to impose some order on the undated drafts, I couldn't keep from marveling at what he had already achieved.

Unavoidably, the following text is limited to a reconstruction of what this work could have been. Had Chitty lived to finish it, the project might have

taken an entirely different form. His argument presumes the existence of equally rich veins of history corresponding to other moments in the succession of sexual hegemonies, many of the source documents and narratives of which are already in circulation but that he had not run through his analytic. There remain omissions he seemed to be hoping to fill in after having set up this theoretical architecture—most notably, in my view, what to do with the assumption that the equally historically contingent and co-implicated concepts of race and gender will function stably precisely in these moments when they, like sexuality, are crossing the “biopolitical threshold of modernity” and assuming their familiar form. But his central insight—the nature of the link between sexual hegemony and the social form of bourgeois rule—remained durable enough across the various iterations of this text that I feel confident in uniting what I have into an introduction to his intellectual project, so that the work he started might continue.

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FOREWORD

introduction

CHRISTOPHER NEALON /

Christopher Chitty's *Sexual Hegemony* gives us a new way to think about the history of sexuality. It is primarily a book about male homosexuality, though it has implications for understanding forms of sexual life far beyond that particular form. It is also a book about the role of the policing of homosexual activity in the era of the rise of capitalism—or, to be more precise, the role played by the classes that would become the modern bourgeoisie in strategically weaponizing “sodomy” in a struggle against both the aristocracy it hoped to displace and the peasant, proletarian, and lumpen classes whose capacity for labor it needed to manage.

Sexual Hegemony is shaped by a remarkable theoretical and methodological sophistication, and its structure has a complexity born both of its ambition and its incompleteness, but at its root it tells a straightforward story. The book tracks the history of the displacement of young men from Mediterranean peasant lifeways in the transition to capitalism, paying particular attention to how these men were partially and unstably absorbed into a range of new social relations, especially apprenticeships in the cities and maritime labor in the era of its great expansion. Chitty suggests that these forms of absorption were only ever imperfect and involved the constant danger of superfluity and uselessness to the men who had been driven into them. And he argues that these early forms of proletarianization not only shaped

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what historians of later periods would come to think of as “working-class homosexuality,” but also became the focus of ongoing projects of statecraft that continue to influence sexuality down to the present.

In order to make this argument, Chitty drew on a range of theoretical resources that is remarkable for seeming, at first glance, not to address sexuality at all. He also developed a narrative arc that spans distinct—in terms of disciplinary boundaries—historical periods. I’d like to outline the theoretical terrain for a moment, then turn to what is special about Chitty’s historical narrative, moving on to some observations about the politics that emerges from the project, and finally providing a brief reflection on the work *Sexual Hegemony* leaves undone and the kind of work I hope it will inspire.

As its title suggests, *Sexual Hegemony* draws on the work of Antonio Gramsci, specifically the writing in *The Prison Notebooks* that concerns the bourgeois project of managing potentially insurrectionary working and lumpen populations. Many readers will have a working understanding of the Gramscian idea of hegemony as a kind of ideological “soft power” that is a necessary supplement to state-sanctioned force in the maintenance of capitalist class relations—and this is indeed the idea Chitty relies on when he suggests that the manipulation of the charge of sodomy in late-medieval Florence, for instance, was a tool in exactly this kind of class agon. But Chitty takes this a bit further, by turning to Gramsci’s sense of the importance of historical contradiction for understanding how hegemony works. Gramsci, that is, sees contradiction both as a collision of forces no single class can control, and as material for tactical (if imperfect) manipulation by a ruling class. For Chitty, the archive of Florentine sodomy prosecutions can be seen as the record of an innovative conflict-management system, in which both cross-class and same-class homosexual contact was liable to disrupt the social order: apprentices attempting to seek revenge on abusive masters, or political rivals seeking to discredit each other, could turn to accusations of sodomy to exacerbate conflict or bring it out in the open. Relying on the work of historian Michael Jesse Rocke and others, Chitty notes that Florence’s distinction from places like Venice, where sodomy prosecution meant spectacular punishment and execution, was that it deployed a system of fines. As Chitty puts it, “The city monetized sodomy” (38). In doing so, he suggests, the ruling class of Florence not only profited from the ongoing sexual entanglements among the city’s men, but also began to develop a form of “hegemony” that linked emergent forms of “homosexuality” to property relations and to manipulate it in strategically contradictory ways: it could be seen as a quiet, open secret from behind the protections of

property, even a sign of privilege, just as it could be a scandalizing mark of dispossession—the mark of someone too poorly behaved to participate in the extraction of wealth, in the elite case, or too unruly to deserve work, in the proletarian one.

Already here we are in remarkable new territory: homosexuality being rethought in terms of property relations, and property relations being thought not only in terms of some linear accumulation of wealth or as the static antagonism between two ancient, self-similar classes, but as the contradiction-driven circulation of labor and early forms of capital, to which access is blocked or proffered, in both inter-elite competition and the survival-struggles of the labor market. In his introduction to the book, Chitty suggests that turning to this particularly open-ended version of Gramscian hegemony has implications for how we think about the category of the “queer.” Referring to his method as a “queer realism” that is neither utopian nor melancholic, Chitty writes,

Queer realism takes its cue from the idea of an “open Marxism,” one inspired less by restrictive orthodox principles than by the ways in which Antonio Gramsci and others have sought to relate developments in the relations and forces of production to cultural developments and back again. In his *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci makes the case that Marx’s (and Machiavelli’s) philosophical significance was to conceive of politics as operating according to principles and rules other than those of religion and morality. Princes make use of pieties when it’s favorable to do so and abandon them when it’s not. (27)

This practical, tactical deployment of scandal, Chitty suggests, can key us in to a history of homosexuality that assumes a transhistorical “homophobia” repressing a submerged but eventually triumphant gayness. Linking homosexuality to property relations, and seeing property relations as driven by contradiction, he writes,

The “queer” can then be recast as a narrower descriptive category, signifying the lack of such status property: the way in which norms of gender and sexuality get weakened, damaged, and reasserted under conditions of local and generalized social, political, and economic crisis. The queer would then imply a contradictory process in which such norms are simultaneously denatured and renaturalized. Rather than marking some utopian opening up of these logics for self-transformative play, the queer would describe forms of love and inti-

macy with a precarious social status outside the institutions of family, property, and couple form. (26)

Queerness as outsiderhood will be familiar to readers of the queer theory of the last twenty years; the crucial difference here is Chitty's bidirectional sense of historical movement—he will argue later in the book that norms can get weaker and stronger, by turns, or at once, in different locales—and his sense that this contradictory movement is itself traceable to conditions of “local and generalized social, political, and economic crisis.”

This brings us to another of Chitty's theoretical and historical coordinates, which is the body of work known as world-systems theory. Chitty makes particularly innovative use of the scholarship of the economist and historian Giovanni Arrighi, whose 1994 volume *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times* has proven widely influential in periodizing capitalist crisis. By linking the Gramscian attempt to understand class hegemony to the world-systems theorists' investigation of the dynamics of capitalist crisis, Chitty opens up the possibility of new periodizations in this history of sexuality as well as new political optics for it.

For Arrighi, “hegemony” names the dynamic by which, since the fifteenth century, capital accumulation has been organized by the dominance of single political-economic bodies, which have succeeded each other across a series of “long centuries”—or, as he puts it, “cycles of accumulation.” The historical scheme Arrighi lays out for this succession runs chronologically from a “Genoese-Iberian” hegemony (fifteenth through seventeenth centuries) to a Dutch one (late sixteenth to the late eighteenth centuries), then to British (mid-eighteenth to early twentieth centuries) and finally American dominance (late nineteenth century to the recent past).¹ Each cycle is more globally extensive than the last.

The transfer of such power over accumulation from one hegemon to another involves, for Arrighi, a tipping point in which the profitability of material expansion reaches a conjunctural limit: there is only so much more infrastructure to invest in; there is only so much more of key commodities to sell to saturated markets. This tilts the hegemon, and the system organized around it, away from material expansion and into financial expansion, which is to say, into speculation on future material possibilities. Such periods of financialization are politically unstable (as we have seen, since 2008), and for Arrighi they have historically marked the beginning of a transfer of power from one hegemon to the next, usually in the thick of “systemwide chaos” and war.²

Chitty's intuitive stroke of genius is to ask: If the history of capitalist production has indeed been structured this way, what does capitalist reproduction look like in such periods? This question structures the unusually ambitious historical arc of *Sexual Hegemony*, which roughly tracks the Arrighian narrative by beginning with a study of the class dynamics of sodomy prosecutions in fifteenth-century Florence, moving to the Dutch cities of the seventeenth century, and then to revolutionary and nineteenth-century Paris, before reflecting on the dominance and limits of late twentieth-century, American-style LGBT identity politics. Because so much scholarship on the history of sexuality has followed a modernity-framework that differs from the history Arrighi outlines, it is all but impossible for Chitty not to turn to the political character of sexuality in revolutionary France—itsself the source of many of our historical stories about the birth of modernity. But his focus, even there, is on the question of what pressures might be shaping social reproduction—and through it, sexuality—in periods of political-economic crisis.

It was highly generative for Arrighi to construe “hegemony” in terms of inter-state relations, but *The Long Twentieth Century* is not primarily focused on the closer-to-the-ground, intranational class dynamics of “hegemony” in Gramsci’s original sense. Nor is it focused on the peasant lifeways that subtended the transition to capital and that were so dramatically reorganized by it. For help with this, Chitty turns to the historian Fernand Braudel, whose pathbreaking work on the rise of capitalism in the Mediterranean basin is a key source for Arrighi as well. Following Braudel, Chitty isolates a key moment in the transition to capitalism in the Mediterranean world of the twelfth through the fifteenth centuries for its significance to social reproduction (such a long “moment” is typical of the *Annales* school of civilizational history to which Braudel contributed foundational methods). This period is epochal for Braudel partly because it involves the massive restructuring of peasant and agricultural lifeways, and Braudel tells its story with a layered historiography that superimposes archival discoveries about daily life with long-term civilizational transformation. In yet another remarkable and ambitious intuitive leap, Chitty takes advantage of the possibilities afforded by this layered historiography to pursue its implications for a history of homosexuality left unattended to by *Annales*-style scholarship. For Chitty, the rise in the extent and complexity of circum-Mediterranean textile manufacture that Braudel and others track is important because it drives a separation from peasant forms of production that is also a separation from their forms of reproduction. As he puts it:

The production of a propertyless condition is the decisive factor in the transition from economic production centered around mastery, reproductive marriage, and agricultural community to one based on impersonal market-mediated relations in towns and cities. The compulsion to produce for an employer or for the market is a form of life that produces surpluses, leading to the further development of the forces of production. It is a form of life that emerged on the periphery of peasant proprietorship, a population superfluous with respect to inheritance and land. (132)

For Chitty, it is this separation from production and reproduction, along with the forms of migration and journeying they generate, that gives us the matrix of modern sexuality:

Alternate or queer sexualities . . . emerged within the interstices of transformed property relations, through population displacements from the countryside and the subsequent concentration of those workers who were superfluous to agrarian production in urban centers, as well as within the institutions that attempted to manage or capture these surplus populations—factories, workhouses, standing armies, policing and punitive apparatuses, naval and merchant fleets, and colonial territories. (129–30)

The shift in this paragraph from an attention to queerness in relation to property, initially, to an emphasis on queerness in relation to institutions and settings that we might think of as catchments for labor—this shift indexes Chitty's other remaining theoretical coordinate: the work of Michel Foucault. Readers of Foucault will no doubt find aspects of the passage above familiar—the references to policing and punishment, say—and Chitty was indeed a deep, attentive reader of Foucault. But the differences are crucial. In *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, Foucault argues that sexual identities—including the precursors of those we'd now think of as "alternate," or "queer"—emerge as a result of the rise of sexual science, which itself is a product of the historical bourgeoisie's long attempt to displace older, aristocratic forms of authority and organization. Because Foucault is focused on developing a theory of power that is immanent to social relations, rather than merely elaborating a theory of power as the exertion of force by rulers upon the ruled, it is important that he distinguish this bourgeois project of sexual science from simple repression or domination. Sexual science was part of that class's quest for a firm understanding of itself, the "self-affirmation of one class rather than the enslavement of another."³

Foucault specifically counterposes this idea to what he seems to think would be a Marxist understanding of discipline, that is, the bourgeois discipline of workers:

If one writes the history of sexuality in terms of repression, relating this repression to the utilization of labor capacity, one must suppose that sexual controls were the more intense and meticulous as they were directed at the poorer classes; one has to assume that they followed the path of greatest domination and the most systematic exploitation: the young adult man, possessing nothing more than his life force, had to be the primary target of a subjugation destined to shift the energy available for useless pleasure toward compulsory labor. But this does not appear to be the way things actually happened. On the contrary, the most rigorous techniques were formed and, more particularly, applied first, with the greatest intensity, in the economically privileged and politically dominant classes. The direction of consciences, self-examination, the entire long elaboration of the transgressions of the flesh, and the scrupulous detection of concupiscence were all subtle procedures that could only have been accessible to small groups of people.⁴

This is a counterintuitive story, or at least an unexpected one. And it is not necessarily an anti-Marxist one. But it is easy to imagine a Marxist rejection of such a passage: no, this reply would go, the bourgeoisie really did discipline workers' sexuality first. Another Marxist reply to Foucault's counterintuitive idea might be that this story of bourgeois self-experimentation, which later spreads to the working classes, leaves aside something too important to ignore, which is a history of the at least semi-autonomous working-class sexualities that existed on the periphery of the bourgeois world, sometimes in defiance of it. The first reply would be an insistence on the intellectual, historical, and political primacy of exploitation rather than "power"; the second would be an insistence on the importance of recognizing the spaces and practices of freedom developed dialectically out of that exploitation.

Chitty takes neither of these routes (I am tempted to say he doesn't take the bait), because his Marxism is not primarily shaped by a desire to assert the moral primacy of the working classes. He simply notes that because Foucault makes the bourgeoisie his starting point, he misses something about the history of class struggle: "[Foucault's] theory of the emergence of modern sexual categories proceeds by assuming bourgeois sexuality to be hegemonic, rather than rigorously accounting for how it came to be so" (156).

When Foucault describes a gradual transformation from bourgeois indifference about the lives and deaths of the laboring class to a meticulous concern for its health and well-being, he does so using a broadly functionalist language: the bourgeoisie needed healthy populations to operate complex, heavy machinery, for instance.⁵ While this functionalist language has the advantage of not allowing moral outrage to cloud an analysis of class conflict, it has the disadvantage of linearizing the history of that conflict. The project of capital accumulation did not just demand the management of workers' health after a long unconcern with it in a simple, unidirectional, or monolithic shift of attention. Capital accumulation has always been in continuous flux, down to this day, pitting workers who labor without managerial care for their health against those whose health is monitored and managed, producing a stratified working class according to the demands, not of machinery, but of the intercapitalist competition that compels the use of machinery in the first place.

What this means is that while Chitty is deeply sympathetic to Foucault's critique of power-as-repression-from-above, he is also committed to holding off on telling the story of the bourgeois management of populations as the story of a single epochal shift driven by new forms of technical knowledge about the self. His dialectical sense of sexual history leads him to argue, instead, that homosexuality in its forms as a recognizable identity are inseparable from processes of proletarianization that redounded even to the styles of homosexuality practiced by elites. This has political consequences. As the last part of *Sexual Hegemony* makes clear, Chitty shares with Foucault a skepticism that modern "gayness" is either innately leftist or liberatory, or even simply "freer" than some earlier, supposedly "closeted" or repressed innate homosexuality. Indeed, he is clear that he owes some of this skepticism to Foucault. But I want to venture that he gives us more to work with than does Foucault when it comes to recognizing that homosexualization, if we want to call it that, is dialectically enmeshed with the reproduction of class struggle, in that it cuts across the divide between styles of gayness that "reek of the commodity," as Michael Warner once put it, and styles of gayness that are rooted in displacement from the reproduction of capital. These working-class gay styles are harder to pin to sexuality exclusively; they are closer to the kind of "trade" that John Rechy describes in *City of Night*, or that Whitman identifies with when he calls himself "one of the roughs" in *Leaves of Grass*. The two styles—the two classed lifeways—are of course enmeshed at every level, including that of erotic fantasy: for every working-class camp subculture that ransacked the opulence of aristocratic

style to build its own queerness, there is a patrician gayness that seeks release in contact with rough-hewn laboring masculinity (one literary lineage of this would run from E. M. Forster's *Maurice* to Alan Hollinghurst's *The Swimming-Pool Library*).

Queer theory has tended to read these styles in polar rather than dialectical terms (this is less true of gay historical scholarship, as I will suggest below). Mid-2000s queer academic debates about the “anti-social thesis” were a kind of summary and climax of this polarity—the question of the day was: Are LGBT folk innately ill-suited to the norms of social reproduction because their sexuality is unignorably internally riven, and they therefore represent unwelcome evidence that all sexuality, including self-congratulatory heterosexuality, is riven and unviable too? Or are LGBT people opposed to such norms because their non-self-identity opened onto the possibility of unexpected forms of social connection, more horizontal, less hierarchical? At its root this was a highly literary debate about the place of psychoanalysis in queer practices of interpretation, pitting Lacan's pathos of self-splitting against Deleuze's more optimistic sense that each “split self” was in fact part of a potentially multisubjective subjectivity. Though the parties involved did not frequently cite it, these debates found their impetus in Michael Warner's 1999 volume *The Trouble with Normal*, which was in part a riposte to journalist and commentator Andrew Sullivan's 1995 *Virtually Normal*, which made a widely read conservative argument in favor of the assimilation of gay men (and to some extent lesbians) into traditional forms of family and citizenship. Though the activist Urvashi Vaid had made decisive historical arguments against Sullivan-style bids for assimilation in her 1996 book *Virtual Equality: The Mainstreaming of Gay and Lesbian Liberation*, it was Warner's popularization of the theoretical term “heteronormativity” that served to orient academic critiques of the assimilationist impulse in the U.S. LGBT movement. Outside literary queer studies, scholars like Lisa Duggan extended this assimilationist-resistant binary by popularizing the term “homonormativity,” which was meant to designate the politics of well-to-do white gay men who happily accepted racial exclusion, patriarchal privilege, and class power from the state in return for its acceptance of certain expressions of homosexuality. In this line of argument, “homonormativity” was opposed to a politically rebellious homosexuality that was antineoliberal, antiracist, and antipatriarchal.

These binaries tended to congeal into polar opposites during the course of academic debate, and they have always had a lightly prescriptive tone and a preoccupation with something like the moral question, Who should “we”

LGBT and queer folk be? Should we be good citizens? Or radical opponents to society as it is? Such binaries are not merely academic: they are often expressions of tactical decisions and concrete struggles in social movements. What makes Chitty's scholarship so interesting in this regard is his willingness, having studied some of the deep history preceding these dilemmas, to let go of the possibility of and the desire for a "we" based in either an identitarian-communitarian "homosexuality" or an abstractly antinormative "queerness." This is because he sees the vicissitudes of capital accumulation as analytically and historically prior to the formation and deformation of classes and views those processes as themselves prior to any identitarian experience of sexuality. It is also because he sees homosexuality's identitarian expressions only barely masking a class conflict with homosexuals on both sides, a conflict that runs deeper than individual identity and that obviates any attempt to make "gay people" or "queer people" an anticapitalist identity category tout court.

So rather than ask what kinds of politics homosexuals should have, Chitty begins with an anticapitalist politics that is committed to abolishing the forces that produced "gay people." He is agnostic about what forms of sexual life would outlive capital: he does not make an abolitionist argument per se, suggesting that "homosexuality" should disappear as an identity category; and he does not make a '70s-style utopian argument that, after some social revolution, "we" would all be bi- or pansexual. Rather than predict a future or prescribe a politics for homosexuality, Chitty closes *Sexual Hegemony* with a set of startling reflections on the recent past, which suggest alternatives to earlier scholarship on the relation between male homosexuality and capitalism. Let me describe briefly what some of that past scholarship has established.

Though Chitty refers to influential arguments made by scholars like George Chauncey, Jonathan Ned Katz, David F. Greenberg, and Jeffrey Weeks about male homosexuality and capitalism, he highlights the work of John D'Emilio as closest to his own. For D'Emilio, the social movement that marks its appearance on the national stage with the Stonewall riots of 1969 has important origins in both the same-sex intimacies enjoyed by soldiers in World War II and in the changes to the urban landscape of places like San Francisco after those soldiers' demobilization. In his landmark 1983 volume *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, D'Emilio suggests that separation from the strictures of the nuclear family afforded young men and women the opportunity to experiment with nonprocreative sexuality as more than a series of isolated experiences. In an essay slightly predating this volume,

called “Capitalism and Gay Identity,” D’Emilio is clear that capitalist social relations have a contradictory relationship both to the nuclear family and to the homosexual identity that he thinks breaks free from it:

On the one hand, capitalism continually weakens the material foundation of family life, making it possible for individuals to live outside the family, and for a lesbian and gay male identity to develop. On the other, it needs to push men and women into families, at least long enough to reproduce the next generation of workers. The elevation of the family to ideological preeminence guarantees that capitalist society will reproduce not just children, but heterosexism and homophobia. In the most profound sense, capitalism is the problem.⁶

In the conclusion to his essay, D’Emilio draws on his historical argument to make some political remarks from the perspective of a democratic socialism, remarks that scale down from the contradiction between capitalist accumulation and homosexual identity to another binary, that between homosexuality and family. Because they provide a useful contrast with Chitty’s approach, I will quote them in full:

The instability of families and the sense of impermanence and insecurity that people are now experiencing in their personal relationships are real social problems that need to be addressed. We need political solutions for these difficulties of personal life. These solutions should not come in the form of a radical version of the pro-family position, of some left-wing proposals to strengthen the family. Socialists do not generally respond to the exploitation and economic inequality of industrial capitalism by calling for a return to the family farm and handicraft production. We recognize that the vastly increased productivity that capitalism has made possible by socializing production is one of its progressive features. . . .

We do need, however, structures and programs that will help to dissolve the boundaries that isolate the family, particularly those that privatize child-rearing. We need community- or worker-controlled daycare, housing where privacy and community coexist, neighborhood institutions—from medical clinics to performance centers—that enlarge the social unit where each of us has a secure place. As we create structures beyond the nuclear family that provide a sense of belonging, the family will wane in significance. Less and less will it seem to make or break our emotional security.

In this respect gay men and lesbians are well situated to play a special role. Already excluded from families as most of us are, we have had to create, for our survival, networks of support that do not depend on the bonds of blood or the license of the state, but that are freely chosen and nurtured. The building of an “affectional community” must be as much a part of our political movement as are campaigns for civil rights. In this way we may prefigure the shape of personal relationships in a society grounded in equality and justice rather than exploitation and oppression, a society where autonomy and security do not preclude each other but coexist.⁷

Writing at the dawn of the Reagan era, D’Emilio remains hopeful for a socialist politics that would gently abolish “family” as a stand-alone category by organizing a struggle whose aim is to draw on the productive plenty of which he feels presocialist capitalism has been capable. In one regard, D’Emilio is prescient here—on the other side of the long economic downturn that began in the years before D’Emilio’s essay, the end of American hegemony has given U.S.-based democratic socialism its highest profile in a century, and left-democratic proposals for job guarantees and a “Green New Deal” are attracting wide attention. At the same time, however, D’Emilio’s soft-abolitionist position regarding the family skips over the ways in which capitalist productivity does terrible harm not just because its products are poorly distributed, but because capitalist accumulation produces and requires labor regimes built on violence, subjugation, and the stratification of the workforce. And when he writes hopefully that “there may very well be more gay men and lesbians in the future,” he is imagining a political success in terms that Chitty has abandoned.⁸ Instead, Chitty writes drolly, “Gays and lesbians got a shot at dreams of the good life in the period of American hegemony precisely at the moment of its political-economic liquidation” (173). At this late stage of Chitty’s argument it is clear that, for him, the global downward mobility of labor will pull not only gays and lesbians but “gay and lesbian” identity into its gravity as well.

As Max Fox notes in his preface to this volume, there is a painful dovetailing at the end of Chitty’s manuscript between the historical present into which he’s brought us, across so many centuries, and the abrupt end of his own life. Any reader of this book who takes its claims seriously will wonder what a more fully fleshed-out account of the present Chitty might have offered, in the last part of his argument, had he felt able to continue writing. This is true of his account of the past as well: readers will no doubt feel the

range of ways in which this dazzling work remains unfinished. In closing, then, let me describe what I take to be the most important underexplored aspect of Chitty's argument and then briefly place him in a promising contemporary tendency.

A pressing question for any student of the history of sexuality who reads *Sexual Hegemony* will surely be its relationship to feminism and to lesbian studies. Chitty's attention to scholarship on these questions is peripheral to the book's focus on male homosexuality, but he is clear that women's labor and women's role in social reproduction are at the center of the historical forces that produce that sexuality. Writing about the beginning of the five-hundred-year period he adopts, Chitty attends to how homosexuality emerged in the interzone between act and lifeway on the margins of a peasant subsistence in which women's reproduction of children is constantly at issue; when he turns his attention toward more recent history, he notes that women's entry into the industrial workforce in the nineteenth century produced reverberations for male sexuality in tandem with transformations in women's. He turns to scholarship by historians like Janet Zollinger Giele and Kathleen Canning to support these observations, and when he brings the book around to the recent past, he turns to the work of scholars like Lillian Faderman, Martha Vicinus, Gayle Rubin, and Sharon Marcus for support in thinking about the political relationship between lesbians and gay men who experience their sexualities as identities. Reflecting on Adrienne Rich's classic 1980 essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," he touches on the contradictory character of this political alliance, which amalgamates different relations to productive and reproductive labor in a tactical alliance with the state:

Rich confronts us with another paradox of sexual hegemony: the extension, by analogy, of an epistemology of male homosexuality [the equation of "homosexuality" with male gayness] to women-identified women erases their unique political existence and history. Politically, however, this elision has made possible new forms of solidarity between gay men and lesbians for the achievement of formal equality, same-sex marriage, and the radical politicization of AIDS. Political mobilization around AIDS drew upon feminists' crucial experience in making women's health issues visible to medical bureaucracies. Feminist affinity with male homosexuality often involved solidarity with gender-variant types and with oppressed axes of class, racial, and sexual identity from which the mainstream movement for gay rights

sought to distance itself. Although the feminist tradition continues to emphasize the vital importance of particularity in understanding experiences and histories of oppression, the price of legal recognition for gays and lesbians as a class involved glossing over such particulars. (146–47)

Nonetheless, it is hard to read *Sexual Hegemony* without a sense of its unfinished exploration of feminist scholarship. This is true in terms of both period-specific and *longue durée* work. A deeper engagement with work like Marcus's *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England*, for instance, would have shed light on the limits of Rich's continuum model of women's relationships: Marcus amply demonstrates that, in the mid-nineteenth century, such relationships demonstrated a range of textures and a variety of roles which would find no place in a continuum model but which, if we were to cross-reference Marcus with Chitty, we would recognize as reproductive in a broader sense, and dialectical. That is, Marcus shows that female friendships could serve as material support for heterosexual marriage, or even as its ideal model, while also bequeathing habits of couplehood and kin-building to future women who would think of themselves, as modern "lesbians," in terms more opposed to nuclear family and marriage. Chitty's work, in turn, allows us to reread *Between Women* with a clearer sense of the class-hegemonic character of the social projects that both shaped women's relationships and afforded them unexpected leeway.

Similarly, it seems undeniable that *Sexual Hegemony* would only have benefited from engagement with feminist work on the *longue durée* such as Silvia Federici's *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation* or Maria Mies's *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*. To take Federici as an example: like Chitty, she is committed to developing a historical account of sexuality linked to the epochal transformations of European agrarian life that led to the birth of capitalism. And like Chitty, she identifies a flexible capitalist strategy which spans the entire period and which shapes sexuality as necessary. For Federici that strategy is primitive accumulation, rather than statecraft; and it is clear that Chitty's sense of male homosexuality's emergence from the disruption of peasant forms of subsistence and reproduction would only have been deepened by attention to the archive Federici assembles of political struggles over those peasant forms—not least struggles led by women in the name of both actual and possible forms of communalism. Federici's welcome feminist universalism leads her to underplay the history of the development of a heterosexual-

homosexual divide, but it affords an emphasis, not only on capitalism, but also on active, conscious struggle against it; Chitty's keen historical awareness of the adaptability of capital, not least in its making and remaking of states as well as identities, leads him to give only passing attention to anti-capitalist struggle. The two volumes are very productively read in tandem.

Sexual Hegemony also forms part of a contemporary wave of Marxist scholarship that is providing fresh ways to think about gender, sex, race, and revolutionary practice. Key writing from this moment has been published in the communist journal *Endnotes*, and much (though hardly all) of it emerges from cycles of political struggle in Santa Cruz and the San Francisco Bay Area dating to around 2010. But the new wave of scholarship is wider than the *Endnotes* project and is linked, if sometimes only implicitly, by an attention to what Marx called "The General Law of Capitalist Accumulation."

In chapter 25 of volume 1 of *Capital* (the chapter that goes by the title "The General Law"), Marx develops an argument about how the organic composition of capital—that is, the value ratio between means of production and labor-power—shifts with the tides of intercapitalist competition, always tugged in the direction of more efficient machinery, with the result that the production process comes to involve less exploitable human labor. Because this expulsion of labor-power from the production process is also the expulsion of the source of that process's profitability, capitalists have to maintain profitability in a range of other ways, from finding new markets to pushing wages as low as possible. This is why, in the second half of chapter 25, Marx shifts from a discussion of the pressures on the composition of capital to his famous account of the "reserve army of labor." Here he provides a schematic description of negative relations to the wage—what he calls stagnant, latent, and floating reserves—as well as a brief account of sheer pauperdom. This relative surplus population is the product of a dynamic of exploitation by which capitalists continually try to reduce the number of workers they employ and create, in the process, a population of formerly and intermittently exploitable people.

Marx closes out chapter 25 with brief empirical analyses of gang-labor in English agriculture and of impoverishment in Ireland. But it's not hard to see how we might expand the frame of his analysis to think, for instance, about capitalism's global dynamics, or about the household arrangements that have accompanied the rise of the wage relation. For me, this is where the rubber hits the road today. If the revival of interest in Marx after the 2008 financial crisis first led us to try to understand financialization and the contradictions in the money form, it was very soon accompanied by a revival

of interest in aspects of the Marxist tradition that had lain understudied by Marxists for decades, not least the political and intellectual work of Black and anticolonial Marxists, and of Marxist feminists. Returning to this work and bringing it into contact with a range of contemporary Marxist thinkers is providing us an opportunity to develop a stronger, more flexible account of capitalism, one that takes into account the waves of struggle since 2008 from Occupy to Black Lives Matter to #NoDAPL to #MeToo as well as conversations about universal basic income, robotization, and job guarantees. It goes without saying that this more robust Marxism, one that keeps exclusion from the wage in a close relation to the compulsion to work, can also help us think about processes of environmental degradation, since the waste products of capital are the sources of that degradation, just as the populations capital wastes are the objects of its indifference.

Work like this could help us move past old divisions between a Marxism that saw capital through the lens of a narrow version of “class,” on the one hand, and a range of social movements, including so-called identity movements, that rightly suspected this Marxism of deprioritizing struggles outside the industrial workplace or, worse, taking the wrong side in struggles to oppose racism, sexism, and colonial subjugation. The rising superfluity of the kinds of labor that built global middle classes is affording an opportunity to see links between different moments in the history of capitalist exploitation: the ejection of wider and wider swaths of the global population from a stable wage could and should make us take notice of the history of the shaping of other unwaged, intermittently waged, and surplus populations long before our time. Chitty’s work in *Sexual Hegemony* does just this: one of the most startling effects of reading the book, for me, was the realization that the specific prehistory of male homosexuality that makes the most sense for thinking about its contemporary contradictions is less the modernity-story of the rise of sexual science than the long story of labor-seeking migration that is most visible in the United States today in political struggles over immigration.

This is just to say that, as *Sexual Hegemony* begins its future in print, it has many fellow-travelers. Readers of this volume will benefit from thinking of it alongside work on racial capitalism by Nathan Connolly, Donna Murch, and Nikhil Singh; on the abolition of “race” as one aim of anticapitalist, anti-racist struggle, by Chris Chen; on “the logic of gender” and on revolutionary motives by *Endnotes* and by Jasper Bernes; on settler-colonial violence by Iyko Day and Glen Coulthard; on the production of waste frontiers by Jason

Moore; on the accumulation strategies of energy regimes by Andreas Malm; and on the *longue-durée* rhythms of anticapitalist struggle by Joshua Clover.

I was an outside reader on Chitty's dissertation in the History of Consciousness program at the University of California, Santa Cruz; that work is this book. We only met once, in a café on Shattuck Avenue in Berkeley in 2014; Chitty wanted to outline his work for me to see if I might be interested in serving on his committee. I didn't know what I was in for. My excitement grew as Chitty described the ambit of his thesis; before he was finished, I was already imagining the range of scholars whose work would be altered by such a project. I had no idea that the work would remain unfinished, of course. But my effort here has been to suggest the riches you can find in this work, if you are patient with it. The chapters are of sharply varying lengths; it is clear that the final reflections might have made better sense as part of a sustained introduction; passages notionally focused on one period contain long asides on other periods altogether; and the citational apparatus will never be what it should be or could have been. The text digresses, leaps, and speculates, sometimes on the basis of the archive, sometimes on the basis of intuitions whose sources are invisible. It is not polished. But it is extraordinary, even singular—and my hope is that it will change the way we think about sexuality and anticapitalist struggle alike.

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notes

Introduction

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- 4 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*, 120.
- 5 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*, 166–68.
- 6 D’Emilio, “Capitalism and Gay Identity,” in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David Halperin (New York: Routledge, 1993), 474.
- 7 D’Emilio, “Capitalism and Gay Identity,” 474–75.
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Chapter 1. Homosexuality and Capitalism

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- 1 Françoise Barret-Ducrocq, *Love in the Time of Victoria: Sexuality, Class, and Gender in Nineteenth-Century London*, trans. John Howe (New York: Verso, 1991), 2.

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