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Keywords An Introduction

What is a keyword? The *Oxford English Dictionary*’s primary definition is “a word serving as a key to a cipher or the like.” In this usage, a keyword solves a puzzle, breaks a code, or unlocks a mystery. Or a keyword may be, in the *OED*’s secondary definition, “a word or thing that is of great importance or significance,” a term or symbol that organizes knowledge by allowing authors, book indexers, concordance makers, web designers, and database programmers to guide users to significant clusters of meaning. As these usages indicate, keywords are terms of great power and utility. Referred to in the field of information technology as “metadata” or “meta-tags,” they sort through large quantities of print and digital information not only by providing quick access to specific content, but also by prioritizing and marketing some clusters of meaning and modes of contextualization over others.

When you look up a term in *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*, you will find that these technical definitions are both accurate and limited. Entries in this volume synthesize a great deal of information about the historical and contemporary meanings of many of the central terms that structure the fields of American studies and cultural studies; they provide contexts for the usage of those terms by discussing how their meanings have developed over time; and they may even unlock a few mysteries and break a few codes. The volume serves, in this primary sense, as a snapshot of the dynamic, interdisciplinary, and cross-methodological research conversations that currently traverse the fields of American studies and cultural studies. But it would be a mistake to read *Keywords for American Cultural Studies* as a standard reference guide to an academic discipline. It is also designed to model a different kind of intellectual activity, and we intend it to provoke researchers, teachers, and students working across a wide range of intellectual formations to engage in problem-based forms of inquiry as they make claims about “America” and its various “cultures.” Such inquiries differ from traditional academic research about “American culture” in two ways: they frame and pursue research questions that are explicitly responsive to shifts in contemporary political and social life; and they enable readers to think critically and creatively about how knowledge about “America” and its “cultures” has been, is, and should be made. *Keywords for American Cultural Studies* is, in this second sense, both a guide to some of the best existing research in and across the fields it maps and an argument for maintaining and enhancing a commitment to critical and interdisciplinary approaches to the future evolution of those fields.
Given these somewhat heterodox aims, it should come as no surprise that the immediate context for our usage of the term “keyword” is one that reference books like the *OED* tend not to mention: the writings of the British cultural studies scholar Raymond Williams. Upon his return from World War II, Williams became interested in how the meanings of certain words, which he later called “keywords,” seemed to have shifted during his absence. The most notable of these keywords was “culture,” a term Williams saw as taking on very different significances in the academic spheres of literary studies and anthropology, and as anchoring new clusters of meaning through its interactions in popular discourse with neighboring terms such as “art,” “industry,” “class,” and “democracy.” Two publications that would hold great importance for the emerging field of cultural studies resulted from this experiential insight. The first, *Culture and Society, 1780–1950* (1958), traced a genealogy of the complex and often contradictory mid-twentieth-century usages of the word “culture” back through nearly two centuries of writings by British intellectuals concerned with the antagonistic relations between political democracy and capitalist industrialization. The second, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1976), collected 134 short entries (151 in the 1983 revised edition), all of which gloss the shifts over the same two centuries in the meanings of terms ranging from “behavior” and “charity” to “sensibility” and “work.” As Williams explained in his introduction to the first edition of *Keywords*, he wrote these entries in his spare moments and originally conceived of them as an appendix to *Culture and Society*, but later developed them into a separate publication as their sum grew in scope and complexity, and as he began to understand and articulate the methodological stakes of the project he had undertaken. *Keywords* is, Williams insisted, “not a dictionary or glossary of a particular academic subject. It is not a series of footnotes to dictionary histories or definitions of a number of words. It is, rather, the record of an inquiry into a *vocabulary*” (15).

The term “vocabulary” is in many ways the unacknowledged keyword of Williams’s introduction, and his use of that term can help us to explain how our *Keywords* volume works as well. He deployed it in order to distinguish his project not only from those of dictionary editors and glossary makers, but also from the work of academic philologists and linguists who examine the formal and structural components of language systems and their evolution. In contrast, Williams focused his keyword entries on what he called “historical semantics” (23), a phrase that emphasizes the ways in which meanings are made and altered over time through contestations among the usages of diverse social groups and movements. “What can be done in dictionaries,” Williams wrote, “is necessarily limited by their proper universality and by the long time-scale of revision which that, among other factors, imposes. The present inquiry, being more limited—not a
dictionary, but a vocabulary—is more flexible” (26). This underlining of the flexibility of a
“vocabulary”—as opposed to the universality of a “dictionary”—both points to Williams’s
general premise that language systems develop and change only in relation to local and practical
usages, and explains his editorial decision to include blank pages at the end of his Keywords in
order to signal that “the inquiry remains open, and that the author will welcome all amendments,
corrections and revisions” (26). Like institutionally established academic methodologies and
disciplines (philology and linguistics, in this case), dictionaries, glossaries, and other reference
books reproduce a discourse of expertise by downplaying the creative, idiosyncratic, and
unpredictable aspects of problem-based thinking and research. Like the forms of critical
interdisciplinarity to which Williams’s own work contributes, vocabularies provide a counterpoint
to this discourse of expertise. They treat knowledge not as a product of research that can be
validated only in established disciplines and by credentialing institutions, but as a process that is
responsive to the diverse constituencies that use and revise the meanings of the keywords that
govern our understandings of the present, the future, and the past.

Keywords for American Cultural Studies shares a number of these fundamental premises with
Williams’s volume, as well as its other successors (e.g., Bennett, Grossberg, and Morris 2005). It
provides an accessible and readable introduction to some of the central terms and debates that
shape the study of culture and society today. And it insists that those debates can be enhanced—
rather than settled or shut down—by an increased understanding of the genealogies of their
structuring terms and the conflicts and disagreements embedded in differing and even
contradictory uses of those terms. To this end, we asked our contributors to address four basic
questions as they wrote and revised their entries: What kinds of critical projects does your
keyword enable? What are the critical genealogies of the term and how do these genealogies
affect its use today? Are there ways of thinking that are occluded or obstructed by the use of this
term? What other keywords constellate around it? These questions were intended to spur our
contributors to map the contemporary critical terrain as they see it developing in and around their
keyword, and to ensure that a reader opening the book to any given entry could expect to
encounter many of the same things: information about that term’s genealogy; a specific thinker’s
take on the lines of inquiry that the term opens up or closes down; and links between the term and
others in the volume or elsewhere. Attentive readers will note that individual authors responded in
different ways to these prompts. Some entries are explicitly argumentative and polemical, while
others are more descriptive and ecumenical. A few are willfully idiosyncratic, and several hint at
implicit disagreements among the authors. Yet across all of the entries the reader will find
scholarly writing that models critical and creative thinking, and authors who simultaneously 
analyze and evince the ways in which keywords are, as Williams put it, both “binding words in 
certain activities and their interpretation” and “indicative words in certain forms of thought” (15).

At the same time, there are several aspects of our *Keywords* that make it distinctive. Most 
obviously, it is a collaborative project involving more than sixty authors working across a range 
of disciplinary and interdisciplinary fields that overlap with, but seldom map neatly onto, either 
American studies or cultural studies. Most importantly, its exploration of culture and society is 
explicitly linked to a nation (the United States) or, at times, a geography (the Americas). The 
keyword “America” is thus central to the volume in two ways. First, the term in all of its 
mutations—"American,” “Americas,” “Americanization,” “Americanist”—needs to be defined in 
relation to what Williams called “particular formations of meaning” (15). “America,” in other 
words, is a category with particularizing effects that are as central to how we think about the 
possibilities and limitations of the field of American studies as the universalizing term “culture” is 
to our understanding of the shape of the field of cultural studies. Second, contemporary 
disagreements over the category’s field-defining function point toward a wide range of debates 
related to what is now commonly called the postnational or transnational turn in American 
studies. Just as the universalizing referents of Williams’s own project have been troubled by 
subsequent work in cultural studies that has rendered explicit his tendency to assume a narrowly 
“British” (largely white, working-class) readership and archive for that project (Gilroy 1987), the 
category “America” has been troubled within American studies in part through the field’s 
interactions with cultural studies, though more pressingly by its engagements with new 
“formations of meaning” emerging from shifting patterns of migration and immigration, existing 
and evolving diasporic communities, and the cultural and economic effects of globalization. The 
fact that nine of the words in this last sentence—"culture,” “white,” “class,” “America,” 
“immigration,” “diaspora,” “community,” “economy,” and “globalization”—appear as keyword 
entries in this volume indicates how rich and complex this research has become.

In our editorial conversations with our contributors, we have attempted to draw out this 
richness and complexity by insisting—as Kirsten Silva Gruesz does in her entry on “America”— 
that authors specify when they are talking about “America” and when they are talking about the 
“United States.” It is an editorial decision that has produced some interesting results. Nearly all of 
the entries reach across U.S. national borders to track usages of terms like “America,” “South,” 
and “West,” and across disciplinary formations such as political philosophy and social theory
where terms ranging from “liberalism” and “democracy” to “secularism” and “religion” may be
inflected in particular ways in the United States, but cannot be subsumed under either an
“American” or an “Americanist” rubric. Similarly, terms that might from one perspective be
viewed as a subset of American studies (or cultural studies focused on the United States) are
consistently shown to have transnational histories and future trajectories. Entries on “African,”
“Asian,” “mestizo/a,” “coorie,” and “white”—not to mention “diaspora,” “immigration,” and
“naturalization”—all map cultural formations and develop lines of inquiry that are neither
exclusive to the United States nor exhausted by historically U.S.-based fields such as African
American or Asian American studies. Transnational understandings of these keywords push us to
re-imagine the political geographies of the United States, as well as the nation-based intellectual
geographies of the institutions that study it. And they indicate the involvement of our contributors
in a wide variety of critical interdisciplinarities, ranging from postcolonial studies to queer studies
to community studies. One lesson taught by these relatively new intellectual formations is that
attempts by traditionally nation-based fields such as American studies to contain “particularities”
within a universalizing (U.S.) nationalism, no matter how “diverse” or “multicultural,” always
leave something—and often someone—out of the analytical frame.

Faced with this inevitability, it is tempting to apologize for specific terms and perspectives we
have failed to include. Many keywords of American studies and cultural studies do not appear in
this volume, some due to oversights that reflect our own intellectual and institutional orientations,
but most because we wanted the book to be affordable and portable. This second factor required
that we pare our original list of 145 entries to the current 64, a vexing process, but one that
allowed several clusters of meaning to surface even as significant terms vanished. Take as an
example the keyword “individual.” A college student who in high school was exposed to the old
saw that “American” (read: U.S.) culture is characterized by an ideology of “individualism” might
at first be dismayed to find no entry for that term in this volume. But that student might then look
for—or be guided to—terms closely related to the concept of individuality: most clearly
“identity,” but also “interiority” and “body.” From there, the student could move either to
keywords that qualify and constitute individuality, such as “race,” “ethnicity,” “gender,” “sex,”
and “disability,” or to keywords that name places and concepts within which “individualism” is
contested and constructed, such as “family,” “religion,” “corporation,” “state,” and “city.” This
line of inquiry could then bring the student to “public” and “community” for broader framings of
the missing entry on “individual.” And the student might even end up reading the entry on
“society,” remembering that a previous course had suggested that individualism is always in
tension with social norms, though now reflecting more critically on that simplistic analytical framework. At this point, the student would have a much more nuanced understanding of what other keywords and concepts are necessary to map the relationship between “individual” and “society,” and would be prepared to launch a research project around the problem of the “individual” that had been enriched by the simple fact that the term itself does not appear in this volume.

We imagine that this hypothetical example will strike some readers as persuasive, while others will remain skeptical of our editorial choices. To both groups, we want to extend an invitation to become collaborators in keywords projects that extend beyond the covers of this book. We ask you to revise, reject, and respond to the entries that do—and do not—appear in this volume, to create new clusters of meaning among them, and to develop deeper and richer discussions of what a given term does and can mean when used in specific local and global contexts. While we have not followed Williams’s cue by providing blank pages for the reader’s use at the back of our Keywords, we do want to offer the following, necessarily incomplete list of words about which we, as co-editors of this keywords project, would like to hear and read more: activism, age, agency, alien, anarchy, archive, art, black, book, bureaucracy, canon, celebrity, character, child, Christian, commodity, consent, conservative, country, creativity, creole, depression, desire, development, disciplinary, diversity, education, elite, equality, evolution, European, experience, expert, fascism, feminine, fiction, freedom, friendship, government, hegemony, heritage, heterosexual, history, homosexual, human, imagination, individual, intellectual, Islam, Jewish, justice, labor, Latino, liberty, literacy, local, masculine, management, manufacture, media, minority, mission, multicultural, Muslim, native, normal, opinion, oratory, patriotism, place, pluralism, policy, popular, poverty, pragmatism, psychology, radical, reality, representation, republicanism, reservation, resistance, revolution, rights, romance, security, segregation, settler, socialism, sodomy, sovereignty, space, subaltern, subjectivity, technology, terror, text, theory, tourism, tradition, transgender, translation, trauma, utopia, virtual, virtue, wealth, welfare, work.

This already too-long list could go on for pages, and even then it would be easy to conjure other possibilities. Whether keywords projects like this one take the form of classroom assignments, research and working groups, edited volumes, or public forums, they must remain open to further elaboration and amendment not simply due to dynamics of inclusion and exclusion or limitations of time and space. Rather, their incompleteness is essential to any problem-based understanding of how research is conducted and how knowledge is made, both inside and
outside of academic settings. Claiming the ability to map complex fields of knowledge while also maintaining a critical approach to how the problems that constitute those fields are—and should be—framed requires both intellectual modesty and an openness to further collaboration. One response to this modesty and openness is critique. We welcome this response, and we also want to encourage all of our readers to react by making something new, whether that thing is as minor as a new conversation or classroom assignment or as major as an edited volume, digital archive, or public initiative. The true measure of the success of *Keywords for American Cultural Studies* will be its ability to clear conceptual space for these future projects, as scholars, teachers, and students develop new and challenging research questions in dialogue with others who may not quite share a common vocabulary, but who do know something about where conflicts and debates over meaning come from, why they matter, and how they might matter differently in the future. We look forward to reading and hearing about the results of these inquiries.
“Queer” causes confusion, perhaps because two of its current meanings seem to be at odds. In both popular and academic usage in the United States, “queer” is sometimes used interchangeably with the terms “gay” and “lesbian” or occasionally “transgender” and “bisexual.” In this sense, it is understood as an umbrella term that refers to a range of sexual identities that are “not straight.” But in some political and theoretical contexts, “queer” is used in a seemingly contradictory way: as a term that calls into question the stability of any categories of identity based on sexual orientation. In this second sense, “queer” is a critique of the tendency to organize political or theoretical questions around sexual orientation per se. To “queer” becomes a way to denaturalize categories such as “lesbian” and “gay” (not to mention “straight” and “heterosexual”), revealing them as socially and historically constructed identities that have often worked to establish and police the line between the “normal” and the “abnormal.” Fittingly, the word “queer” itself has refused to leave a clear trace of its own origins; its etymology is unknown. It may have been derived from the German word quer or the Middle High German twer, which meant “cross,” “oblique,” “squint,” “perverse,” or “wrongheaded,” but these origins have been contested. The Oxford English Dictionary notes that, while “queer” seems to have entered English in the sixteenth century, there are few examples of the word before 1700. From that time until the mid-twentieth century, “queer” tended to refer to anything “strange,” “odd,” or “peculiar,” with additional negative connotations that suggested something “bad,” “worthless,” or even “counterfeit.” In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the word “queer” began to be used also as a verb, meaning “to quiz or ridicule,” “to puzzle,” “to cheat,” or “to spoil.” During this time, the adjectival form also began to refer to a condition that was “not normal,” “out of sorts,” “giddy, faint, or ill.”

By the first two decades of the twentieth century, “queer” became linked to sexual practice and identity in the United States, particularly in urban sexual cultures. During the 1910s and 1920s in New York City, for example, men who called themselves “queer” used the term to refer to their sexual interest in other men (Chauncey 1994). Contemporaneous literary works by African American writers such as Nella Larsen (1929) and Jean Toomer (1923/1969) suggest that the term
could also carry racialized meanings, particularly in the context of mixed-race identities that exposed the instability of divisions between “black” and “white.” But it was not until the 1940s that “queer” began to be used in mainstream U.S. culture primarily to refer to “sexual perverts” or “homosexuals,” most often in a pejorative, stigmatizing way, a usage that reached its height during the Cold War era and that continues to some extent today. In the early twenty-first century, “queer” remains a volatile term; the *American Heritage Dictionary* even append a warning label advising that the use of “queer” by “heterosexuals is often considered offensive” and therefore “extreme caution must be taken concerning [its] use when one is not a member of the group.” The term has also carried specific class connotations in some periods and contexts. On the one hand, as one participant in a recent online forum put it, “‘Queer’ is a rebellion against those posh middle-class business owners who want to define gay-dom as being their right to enjoy all the privileges denied them just cos they like cock” (Isambard 2004). On the other hand, these class connotations are unstable. “If I have to pick an identity label in the English language,” wrote poet and critic Gloria Anzaldúa, “I pick ‘dyke’ or ‘queer,’ though these working-class words . . . have been taken over by white middle-class lesbian theorists in the academy” (1998, 263–64).

The use of “queer” in academic and political contexts beginning in the late 1980s represented an attempt to reclaim this stigmatizing word and to defy those who have wielded it as a weapon. This usage is often traced to the context of AIDS activism that responded to the epidemic’s devastating toll on gay men in U.S. urban areas during the 1980s and 1990s. An outgrowth of ACT UP (AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power), a powerful AIDS activist group, Queer Nation became one of the most visible sites of a new politics that was “meant to be confrontational—opposed to gay assimilationists and straight oppressors while inclusive of people who have been marginalized by anyone in power” (Escoffier and Bérubé 1991, 14–16). Queer political groups have not always achieved this goal of inclusiveness in practice, but they have sought to transform the homophobic ideologies of dominant U.S. culture, as well as strategies used by existing lesbian and gay rights movements, many of which have tended to construct lesbian and gay people as a viable “minority” group and to appeal to liberal rights of privacy and formal equality (Duggan 1992).

The more recent movement to gain the legal right to same-sex marriage demonstrates some of the salient differences between a lesbian/gay rights approach and a queer activist strategy. While advocates for same-sex marriage argue that lesbians and gay men should not be excluded from the privileges of marriage accorded to straight couples, many queer activists and theorists question
why marriage and the nuclear family should be the sites of legal and social privilege in the first place. Because same-sex marriage would leave intact a structure that disadvantages those who either cannot or choose not to marry (regardless of their sexual orientation), a more ethical project, queer activists argue, would seek to detach material and social privileges from the institution of marriage altogether (Ettelebrick 1989; Duggan 2004b).

Sometimes in conversation with these activist efforts and sometimes not, queer theory emerged as an academic field during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Drawing on the work of Michel Foucault, scholars who are now referred to as queer theorists argued that sexuality, especially the binary system of “homosexual” and “heterosexual” orientations, is a relatively modern production. As Foucault (1978) argued, although illicit acts between two people of the same sex had long been punishable through legal and religious sanctions, these practices did not necessarily define individuals as “homosexual” until the late nineteenth century. While historians have disagreed about the precise periods and historical contexts in which the notion of sexual identity emerged, Foucault’s insistence that sexuality “must not be thought of as a kind of natural given” has been transformative, yielding an understanding of sexuality not as a psychic or physical drive, but as a “set of effects produced in bodies, behavior, and social relations by a certain deployment” of power (127). Moving away from the underlying assumptions of identity politics and its tendency to locate stable sexual subjects, queer theory has focused on the very process of sexual subject formation. If much of the early work in lesbian and gay studies tended to be organized around an opposition of homosexuality and heterosexuality, the primary axis of queer studies shifted toward the distinction between normative and non-normative sexualities as they have been produced in a range of historical and cultural contexts.

For this reason, a key concept in queer theory is the notion of “heteronormativity,” a term that refers to “the institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent—that is, organized as a sexuality—but also privileged” (Berlant and Warner 1998, 548 n. 2). Heteronormativity, it is important to stress, is not the same thing as heterosexuality (though the two are not entirely separable); indeed, various forms of heterosexuality (adultery, polygamy, and interracial marriage, among others) have historically been proscribed rather than privileged (Rubin 1984; C. Cohen 1997; Burgett 2005). Rather, heteronormativity is a form of power that exerts its effects on both gay and straight individuals, often through unspoken practices and institutional structures.
Because queer critique has the potential to destabilize the ground upon which any particular claim to identity can be made (though, importantly, not destroying or abandoning identity categories altogether), a significant body of queer scholarship has warned against anchoring the field primarily or exclusively to questions of sexuality. Instead, these scholars have argued, we should dislodge “the status of sexual orientation itself as the authentic and centrally governing category of queer practice, thus freeing up queer theory as a way of reconceiving not just the sexual, but the social in general” (Harper et al. 1997). In local, national, and transnational contexts, such a formulation allows us to contest constructions of certain issues as “sexual” and others as “non-sexual,” a distinction that has often been deployed by U.S. neoconservatives and neoliberals alike to separate “lesbian and gay” movements from a whole range of interconnected struggles for social justice.

The field of queer studies has increasingly challenged this tendency by using “intersectional” approaches that begin from the assumption that sexuality cannot be separated from other categories of identity and social status. Whereas some early queer theorists found it necessary to insist upon understanding sexuality as a distinct category of analysis, one that could not be fully accounted for by feminist theories of gender, it is now clear that sexuality and gender can never be completely isolated from one another (Rubin 1984; Sedgwick 1990). Indeed, Judith Butler (1990, 5) has shown that our very notions of sexual difference (male/female) are an effect of a “heterosexual matrix.” A significant body of scholarship, largely generated out of questions raised by transgender identity and politics, has insisted on the pressing need to revisit and scrutinize the relationships among sex, gender, and sexuality, with an emphasis on recalibrating theories of performativity in light of materialist accounts of gender (Stone 1991; Prosser 1998).

If queer theory’s project is characterized, in part, as an attempt to challenge identity categories that are presented as stable, transhistorical, or authentic, then critiques of naturalized racial categories are also crucial to its antinormative project. As a number of critics have shown, heteronormativity derives much of its power from the ways in which it (often silently) shores up as well as depends on naturalized categories of racial difference in contexts ranging from sexology and psychoanalysis to fiction and cinema (Somerville 2000; Eng 2001). Heteronormativity itself must be understood, then, as a racialized concept since “[racially] marginal group members, lacking power and privilege although engaged in heterosexual behavior, have often found themselves defined as outside the norms and values of dominant society” (C. Cohen 1997, 454). This insistence on putting questions of race at the center of queer
approaches has been vigorously argued most recently in a body of scholarship identified as “queer of color critique” (Ferguson 2004).

At the same time that intersectional approaches have become more central to queer studies, the field has also increasingly turned to the specificities of nation-based models and the dynamics of globalization and imperialism. Scholars have begun to interrogate both the possibilities and the limitations of queer theory for understanding the movement of desires and identities within a transnational frame, as well as the necessity of attending to the relationship between the methods of queer theory and colonial structures of knowledge and power (Povinelli and Chauncey 1999; Manalansan 2003; Gopinath 2005). The resulting interest in the “nation” and its constitutive role in processes of racialization and sexualization has raised new questions about the ways that queer theory might usefully interrogate the nation’s less charismatic companion—the state. Jacqueline Stevens (2004, 225), for instance, has envisioned queer theory and activism as a site for articulating “a revolution against all forms of state boundaries . . . the unhindered movement and full-fledged development of capacities regardless of one’s birthplace or parentage.”

If the origins of the term “queer” are elusive, its future horizons might be even more so. While the term itself has a contested and perhaps confusing history, one of the points of consensus among queer theorists has been that its parameters should not be prematurely (or ever) delimited (Sedgwick 1993; Berlant and Warner 1995). The field of queer studies is relatively young, but as it has made inroads in a number of different academic fields and debates, some critics have asserted that the term is no longer useful, that it has become passé, that it has lost its ability to create productive friction. Pointing to its seeming ubiquity in popular-cultural venues such as the recent television shows *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* or *Queer as Folk*, others criticize the ways that the greater circulation of “queer” and its appropriation by the mainstream entertainment industries have emptied out its oppositional political potential. Whether we should be optimistic or pessimistic about the increasingly visibility of “queer” culture remains an open question. Meanwhile, scholars continue to carefully interrogate the shortcomings and the untapped possibilities of “queer” approaches to a range of diverse issues, such as migration (Luibhéid and Cantú 2005) or temporality (Edelman 2004; Halberstam 2005). Whatever the future uses and contradictions of “queer,” it seems likely that the word will productively refuse to settle down, demanding critical reflection in order to be understood in its varied and specific cultural, political, and historical contexts.