

Thinking Wildly with Jack Halberstam

Notes on Two Decades of (Nordic) Queer Feminist Research

I believe in low theory in popular places, in the small, the inconsequential, the antimonumental, the micro, the irrelevant; I believe in making a difference by thinking little thoughts and sharing them widely. I seek to provoke, annoy, bother, irritate, and amuse; I am chasing small projects, micropolitics, hunches, whims, fancies.

(Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* 2011, 21)

IT IS A hot and sunny day in early August 2004, and a classroom at Mariaskolan on Södermalm in Stockholm is packed beyond capacity. During what is possibly the first incarnation of “Pride House” – a kind of summer school for those interested in more than mere partying, in learning and discussion – the room is filled with activists, academics, actors, anarchists, and most likely, people there to cruise among like-minded others. The theme of the workshop is butch/femme, a subcultural grammar of queer gender that was rarely invoked or discussed in Sweden at the time. The speakers are Jack Halberstam, author of *Female Masculinity* (1998) and *The Drag King Book* (1999, with Del LaGrace Volcano), and Ulrika Dahl, presenting on queer femmes (see Volcano & Dahl 2008; Dahl 2014). Curiosity – and yes, perhaps some skepticism –

abounds as queer genders emerge as historical and erotic, as a style, and a dress-up box. Later that warm week, at the fringes of Stockholm Pride, one could find drag king performances (see Lööw 2008, 2014), feminist cultural productions, events themed around gay shame, and even a queer feminist march. Forged as a coalition for one day to call attention to the problems of an increasingly commercial Pride movement – and to the persistent sexism and white norms of LGBTQ movements – the latter brought together not only dykes and feminists but also queer outcasts from an increasingly assimilated gay population: sex workers, leather dykes and S/M practitioners, trans folk and queers of color organizers.

Looking back at the explosive new queer feminist activism and scholarly production that characterized the noughties in the Nordic region – with books such as Tiina Rosenberg's *Queerfeministisk agenda* (2002), Fanny Ambjörnsson's *Vad är queer?* (2006), Jack Halberstam and Del LaGrace Volcano's *The Drag King Book* (1999), and Jack Halberstam's *In a Queer Time and Place* (2005), as well as many other publications, events, and courses – one notices that while queer theory was introduced a decade earlier in this journal (Kulick 1995), it was the 2000s that saw the rise of queer feminist research in thesis topics and higher education in the Nordic countries. The 2002 conference *Farväl heteronormativitet* (Farewell Heteronormativity) in Gothenburg, where Jack Halberstam was also a keynote speaker, brought together a growing body of queer-informed researchers from across the Nordic region to discuss both the end of heteronormativity and the possibilities of queer genders and sexualities. It contributed to the formation of LGBTQ studies across the Nordic region, a field that expanded significantly over the following two decades, as evidenced in and across all Nordic journals, doctoral theses, course syllabi, and more.

Looking back from the present political moment – when all matters queer, trans*, as well as anti-capitalist, antiracist and intersectional, are vehemently dismissed as “woke,” if not “dangerous,” and disavowed on a global scale – the seemingly local moments of Stockholm Pride or a Nordic conference in queer studies shimmer with possibility. These examples drawn from the editors' personal memories might certainly

be seen as minor, and certainly anti-monumental, events of queer history. Yet, they are also events that aimed to make connections, to provoke and, to borrow Halberstam's formulation, to share small thoughts widely. Furthermore, they are examples that demonstrate the degree to which Jack Halberstam's body of flesh and knowledge has made an impact in the Nordic region.

This special issue of *lambda nordica*, and in particular this editorial, aims to take stock of some of this 'Halberstamian' impact in the Nordic region, and more specifically in Sweden.² To that end, the issue is also the scholarly outcome of an event organized at Uppsala University in conjunction with Jack Halberstam's Hesselgren Professorship at Lund University, where some twenty queer researchers, mostly – but not only – based in Sweden, gathered to share work and discuss how Halberstam's ideas have informed queer studies and their own work, both methodologically and theoretically.³ Needless to say, an editorial cannot quite do justice to those discussions, nor to the impact that Jack Halberstam has had on queer and transgender studies in the Nordic region; nor can (or should) it fully flesh out the ways in which friendship and collegiality – manifested in Halberstam's frequent visits, numerous courses, and presentations in the Nordic region – have inspired scholarly thinking, or the many ways in which Halberstam's work has been taken up (or critiqued). Instead, in what follows, we take brief and necessarily partial stock of more than twenty-five years, summarize some key aspects of Halberstam's work, and highlight selected examples of how these ideas have been taken up. We also hope to inspire students and scholars to think with Halberstam's approach, public engagement, and interdisciplinary mode of exploring contemporary cultural phenomena and politics.

Jack Halberstam: Three decades of public intellectual critical queer work

Born and raised in England and trained in English literature at the University of California, Berkeley, and the University of Minnesota, Jack Halberstam⁴ is currently Professor of Gender Studies and English at Columbia University in the United States. The author of seven books and

countless articles, book chapters, edited volumes, and blog posts, which have been translated into several languages, Halberstam has contributed to – and pushed – theoretical and methodological discussions across a range of fields relevant to queer and trans studies, feminist theory, contemporary humanities, and critical thought in Europe, the Americas, and beyond over the past thirty years. Areas in which Halberstam has had significant influence include, but are not limited to, monsters (1995), posthumanism (1995), masculinity (1998), trans (2018), temporality and queer subcultural understandings of time (2005; several roundtables and special issues), sociality and affect, passivity, the role of (silly) archives, and popular culture (*The Queer Art of Failure* 2011, *Gaga Feminism* 2012), trigger warnings (2017), and, more recently, anarchy and the wild (2020). Common themes across these works, beyond the changing meanings of sexuality, gender, and gendered relations, include how space, architecture, and forms of worlding reflect and shape presents, histories, and futurities. With a decidedly queer approach to research – challenging conventional models and scientific methodologies – and with a consistent and convincing cultural studies focus on what can be learned when we take popular culture, art, and queer subcultural production seriously for what they offer, Halberstam also invites us to imagine how we might live *otherwise*.

Let us turn to a few more or less well-known insights from Halberstam's oeuvre. Their first book, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horrors and the Technologies of Monsters* (1995), makes a crucial contribution to work on monsters and monstrosities – themes with intimate kinship to (Nordic) queer studies (cf. Hellstrand et al. 2018). It approaches Gothic fiction, including a number of films, as “a technology of subjectivity, one which produces the deviant subjectivities opposite which the normal, the healthy and the pure can be known” (1995, 2) and as a “rhetorical style and narrative structure designed to produce fear and desire within the reader” (ibid.). Tellingly, the book concludes by declaring that “[t]he monsters clearly outnumber the men and posthumanity is upon us,” (1995, 188), an observation that simultaneously opens onto *Posthuman Bodies*, a volume Halberstam edited together with Ira Livingston, at a moment when trans/gender theorizing was beginning to extend under-

standings of queerly gendered bodies and embodiments beyond the human, into fiction, technologies, and environments (cf. Stryker 1994). In the introduction, Halberstam and Livingston (1995, 3) propose that “posthuman bodies are the causes and effects of postmodern relations of power and pleasure, virtuality and reality, sex and its consequences.” The volume also takes stock of the many “posts” that characterized the late twentieth century and intervenes both in discussions of the future of the humanities and in feminist debates about the body. Following Donna Haraway, posthuman bodies “emerge at nodes where bodies, bodies of discourse, and discourses of bodies intersect to foreclose any easy distinction between actor and stage, between sender/receiver, channel, code, message context” (Halberstam & Livingston 1995, 2).

In a curious twist of fate, their bold declaration that “history as social or chronological history is dying with the white male of western metaphysics and consequently it is no longer enough to say where we have been,” might have been too optimistic, given that this particular all too white and male subject has once again turned itself into the master, albeit now in the throes of death and by way of destruction of all things progressive and hopeful. Taking inspiration from the theoretically deft and politically urgent impetus of the introduction to *Posthuman Bodies*, however, we can only hope that we are witnessing a temporary violent reaction to the promises of queer futurities, and thus find political solace and hope in their proposal that “the posthuman condition is upon us and that lingering nostalgia for a modernist or humanist philosophy of self and other, human and alien, normal and queer is merely the echo of a discursive battle that has already taken place – and the tiny futurism that often answers such nostalgia is the echo of an echo” (Halberstam & Livingston 1995, 19).

Speaking of temporalities and desires, there is, for most of us, an intimate relationship between queer studies and queer world-building, both because of who we are in the ivory tower and because who and what we draw intellectual inspiration and nourishment from matters. Halberstam’s scholarship consistently captures and speaks to matters and ephemera from queer subcultural contexts, as well as on topics

previously primarily articulated through memoirs, subcultural performances, and cultural productions. In this tradition of organic intellectual work, *Female Masculinity* (1998) is often heralded as Halberstam's most important intervention, insofar as it finally opened up the question of masculinity beyond the purview of cisgendered males, aiming to depathologize masculinity in women and to invite more nuanced discussions of queer and trans masculinities. Here, Halberstam critiques the idea of lesbianism as devoid of gender difference and reclaims the (stone) butch, along with a range of queerly masculine figures in history – including the tribade, tomboy, invert, and passing woman – as they move through the twentieth century. Searching for a more precise vocabulary for butch–femme desire and aesthetics, and extending work by previous generations of scholar-activists such as Esther Newton and Leslie Feinberg, the book also offers intersectional analyses of how, for instance, dragkinging conjures up different forms of masculinity.

Capturing the late 1990s' array of gender performances (as mentioned above), and through collaboration with artist Del Lagrace Volcano, *The Drag King Book* (1999) documented and reflected on the growing movement of queer embodiments during a time in which female masculinity also started to be visible in mainstream media. In the Nordic context, the phenomenon and its significance within and beyond feminism were further explored in Anna Olofsdotter Lööv's doctoral thesis (2014) in gender studies, as well as in countless student papers over the years. In many ways, though, Halberstam's attempt to make sense of their own gender, along with the "scavenger methodology" proposed in this book, has inspired further queer interventions, as it "uses different methods to collect and produce information on subjects who have been deliberately or accidentally excluded from traditional studies of human behaviour" (Halberstam 1998, 13). This approach has lent itself well to interdisciplinary queer studies (see, for instance, Alasuutari 2020). In the early 2000s, these books contributed to a simultaneous rise in local expressions and interpretations of drag and a growing scholarly interest, and they were also featured in, among other media, the magazine *Zon*, edited by Anna-Maria Sörberg and Elina Grandin in Stockholm, which is

known in queer circles for its efforts to introduce queer as a concept in Swedish media and politics.

The book *In a Queer Time and Place* (2005) furthered discussions of queer and trans subcultural production and embodiment and also made an important contribution to the emerging conversation about queer temporalities (see Dinshaw et al. 2007). Focusing on the emergent visibility of, and continued violence against, transgender subjects – as exemplified in the highly mediatized story of Brandon Teena – and on what the cultural production around his death tells us about matters of race, gender, sexuality, place, and class, the book is, at its broadest, concerned with questions of memorializing, history-making, and archives. Importantly for many of us, Halberstam here extends the critique of what counts as research and who does it, now proposing that “we need to rethink the relation between theorist and subcultural participant, recognizing that for many queers, the boundary between theorist and cultural producer might be slight or at least permeable” (2005, 161). Stressing the importance of queer subcultural archives, Halberstam also opens up the possibility of taking mainstream popular culture seriously, while at the same time questioning both the “metronormativity” of queer culture and the rewarding dimensions of “repronormativity”, which compel some queer subjects to wish for reproduction rather than revolution, citizenship over dissidence. Here, Halberstam’s celebration of the queer subject’s refusal to submit, to mature, to go to bed, or to become a parent contributed to a larger conversation about queer temporalities (cf. Dinshaw et al. 2007). This work has been particularly useful to scholars such as Elin Bengtsson (this issue), as well as to scholars who take up queer theory to read for examples in which the heterosexual script does not work out, such as in Jenny Björklund’s (2021) study of Swedish novels concerning heterosexual mothers who leave their families, and in Mara Lee’s (2018) analysis of othered figures as temporally articulated.

The Queer Art of Failure (2011) continues and expands Halberstam’s trajectory in the British cultural studies tradition of Stuart Hall, alongside a commitment to writing accessibly and reading queerly. Taking its cues from “silly archives” of popular culture and including animated

films as cultural critique, this widely read and cited book challenges the emphasis on competition and winning in a global capitalist world, on the grounds that this emphasis is predicated on the vast majority being losers. Looking for alternatives to “static models of success and failure” (2011, 2), the book challenges the narrative of progress that characterizes many accounts of recent LGBTQ activism and considers “the cluster of affective modes that have been associated with failure and that now characterize new directions in queer theory” (2011, 23). In an academic and political context seemingly more committed to (theoretical and intellectual) hegemony than to countering it, Halberstam here proposes the idea of “low theory” as a mode of accessibility. Eccentrically assembled and refusing to reproduce hierarchical modes of knowing, low theory is “a counterhegemonic form of theorizing, the theorization of alternatives within an undisciplined zone of knowledge production” (ibid., 18). To that end, and turning to the murkier and darker affective registers, *The Queer Art of Failure* also asks us to reconsider our histories, to imagine alternative modes of kinship between those who fail, and to look for counterintuitive forms of resistance. Many reviewers describe this book as a pathbreaking and radical anti-capitalist project, in which absurdity and wackiness are part of the queer.

The following two books, *Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender and the End of Normal* (2012) and *Trans: A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variance* (2018), in our view speak to Halberstam’s enormous pedagogical potential beyond elite university classrooms and their deft ability to offer cultural critique. *Gaga Feminism* introduces many key concepts from queer theory, including a critique of the normal in normativity, and often reads as a manifesto for a new kind of queer feminism that takes its departure from the anarchistic lessons of the Occupy movement, as well as from the lessons we might learn from cartoon characters and the seemingly frivolous gender performances of artists such as Lady Gaga.

Building on decades of work on queer and transgender across several books, *Trans* (2018) is a short and reader-friendly discussion of how the idea of trans shifts as both discourses and access to hormones and medical care evolve. Pointing to the colonialist imperative to categorize,

this pedagogical overview indirectly works as a guide to understanding contemporary debates about the figure of the transgender child, about access to restrooms, and more. Given the emergence and expansion of transgender studies – to which Halberstam has frequently contributed – this accessible book, with its historical and intersectional approach, adds to the literature we might assign to students, as well as to colleagues who may not fully grasp what is at stake in the processes of transing gender.

Turning to a different, albeit very timely concept, the wild marks a slightly different direction for Halberstam's work, even if it continues in a cultural studies tradition of drawing together a diverse archive of cultural artefacts and remains committed to a continued undoing of oppressive binaries, colonial legacies, and modernizing tactics of human mastery over animals and ungovernable populations and places. In a special issue of the *South Atlantic Quarterly*, co-edited with Tavia Nyong'o, he argues that wildness shares some dimensions with queer in that "wildness names, while rendering partially opaque, what hegemonic systems would interdict or push to the margins" (2018, 453). Importantly, rethinking wildness does not aim to reclaim the historically weighty ideas of wild/ness, but rather to open up what it could be. Here Halberstam draws inspiration from Sedgwick and proposes an epistemology of wildness that critiques colonial categories and advocates for methods of bewilderment and unknowing in order to move beyond binaries of wild and civilized/domestic, toward liminality and slippage. Among the sharper and also more controversial critiques of this book (see, for instance, Adams 2020) – which we also witnessed during one of Halberstam's many talks in Sweden – is the critique of pet keeping and the domestication of certain animals – dogs, for instance – as necessary for an understanding of humanity as benevolent and empathetic. Halberstam calls this a kind of zombie humanism, in which the aliveness of humans can only be created in distinction from other creatures.

Lastly, and most recently, Halberstam has turned to considering the broader state of a world facing climate crisis, global economic inequalities after colonialism, and what they call real estate capitalism (see, for instance, Halberstam 2024). Here, Halberstam considers the

utopian possibilities of unworlding rather than those of building anew and attends to questions of collapse, undoing, and dismantling. Again, he offers counterintuitive readings of what many now experience as an apocalyptic end of the world as we know it, by turning to artists, architects and writers who both take apart and reassemble the material world, rather than attempting to repair it. This work reaches new audiences, including architects and philosophers (see Weinstein, this issue). Across all of their many projects, Halberstam manages to both comment on and contribute to both broader debates as well as those specific to the humanities and social sciences, proposing a pedagogy and a method for how to deal with faulty records, incoherent archives, and insufficient theories of the human.

As we have seen in this brief overview, Halberstam is a prolific scholar who has consistently spoken to key debates both within queer studies and Marxist cultural studies, as well as in gender theory and across the humanities, and, clearly, they reach a range of audiences too. Indeed, their timely books, published almost every couple of years for the past three decades, have spanned a range of topics within queer cultural studies, whilst always keeping questions of how time and space shape livable lives central, and insisting on the value of queer desires for both making and unmaking worlds as we know them. Beyond these well-cited books, Halberstam's *oeuvre* also includes countless articles, book chapters, and reprints across a wide range of academic fields, pointing to the wide-ranging impact and the many conversations to which Halberstam's work speaks. As a final and crucial point, bringing us back to where we started – namely with public engagement and activist and artist conversations – Halberstam's frequent commentaries on, in particular, U.S. politics and popular culture on the blog *Bully Bloggers* are worth mentioning. A wide range of topics have been discussed in these blogs and in other more popular media, from #MeToo and trigger warnings to commentary on the overvalorisation of certain male authors such as Knausgård, as well as on films, television series, and comedy. Almost always engendering some kind of debate, these interventions, we think, serve as important reminders of what it means for queers to do public

intellectual work, and its continued importance – if not urgency – in times like ours. We shall return to this in the roundtable conversation of this special issue.

Thinking wildly with Halberstam

Against this admittedly partial outlining of Halberstam's work, we are now delighted to present an issue brimming with texts that in various ways are in dialogue with Halberstam's theoretical universe. First out is gender studies scholar Elin Bengtsson's article "'Daddy Says I Should Be Home at Nine': Ageplay, Queer Temporality, and Domesticity," exploring the relation between queer temporality and domesticity through an ethnographic study of experiences of ageplay and littleness. Bengtsson extends Halberstam's (2005) theorization of queer temporality as being in opposition to bourgeois family ideals and straight reproductive time, and asks whether there might be queer potential in seemingly normative spaces and relations, as well as in night clubs and fugacious hook-ups. Through centering the voices of people who engage in ageplay, and in conversation with queer theorists of the everyday and waiting, such as Felski and Muñoz, Bengtsson shows how seemingly mundane activities – being tucked in at bedtime, having to adhere to a curfew, and being made to wait for a treat or for an anticipated activity – might instill a sense of "littleness" that may constitute a break with normative life schedules and temporalities. As such, she argues, "non-normative temporalities can arise from the rhythms of the queer club's dance floor, but they may also arise from the rhythm of one's own heartbeat while running from that same queer club in order to be home before curfew."

Next is femme-inist philosopher Angelica Stathopoulos's contribution, entitled "From Mr. Big to mr. small: Seven Interludes on Impotence," a tongue-in-cheek ethico-political argument for the potential of impotence. Inspired by what Stathopoulos eloquently describes as "the formal promiscuity of Jack Halberstam's theoretical methodology," the article revisits the Western philosophical and literary canon – and its obsession with masculine activity and potency – through the lens of queer and feminist thought, to sketch a "diminutive, pathetic, and impotent subject." With

Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011) in hand, Stathopoulos scrutinizes the larger-than-life lives and thoughts of Aristotle, Heidegger, *Sex and the City*'s Mr. Big, Karl-Ove Knausgård, and others. In doing so, they locate theoretical gems in the ashes of mundane failure and passivity, and as a byproduct recuperate the potential of Irigaray's contestation of the amalgamation of masculinity and agency from Halberstam's lack of interest in her desire to philosophically probe the feminine.

The third article, "Thinking Wildly with Chihuahuas," by queer literary scholar Ann-Sofie Lönngren, activates another vital aspect of Halberstam's theoretical legacy, namely a critical examination of the exploitative culture of domesticated non-human animals. Lönngren takes as her point of departure Halberstam's description of the zombie economy of animal-keeping and the perverseness of pet love, incidentally also the theme of a public talk Halberstam gave in Uppsala in conjunction with an editorial board meeting for *lambda nordica* back in 2017. Lönngren reads Swedish cultural depictions of "eroticized woman-dog relationships" from the late nineteenth century and onwards, framing the analysis of the trope within the perennial – though shape-shifting – legislation against "unnatural fornication," the budding movement for gay rights, and the equally budding movement for animal rights. Here Lönngren argues that in these depictions of intimate relations between dogs and women, the dog cannot be reduced to the category of the pet, a category that describes the dog as "developed in a co-evolutionary way with humans, [it] is stupefied, brushed, perfumed, and trained, and has a provocative submissiveness in its eyes that activates all our contempt for weakness and dependency." Rather than a zombie, dogs seem to belong to the sphere of what Halberstam calls "wildness" – that which cannot be captured by the concepts of civilization and that vibrates with the connection between desire, sex, and death. Lönngren concludes that we are best served by keeping the categories of domesticated, tame, and wild open for situated interpretations.

In addition to these three articles, this issue also includes three essays by notable queer scholars based in Sweden. Taking up the invitation for this issue to combine personal memories with ongoing work on art and

archives, theatre and performance scholar Tiina Rosenberg – who has been responsible for organizing many events with Halberstam, always with students and broader audiences in mind – moves from reminiscences of a workshop with Halberstam on queer archives, staged in 2009, to contemplating the changed landscape of archiving the ephemeral dimensions of queer lives. In conversation with Halberstam, Sedgwick, and Muñoz, but also with scholars writing about the specifics of archiving as and through artistic practices, Rosenberg explores Every Ocean Hughes’s version of the classical “A Gay Bar Called Everywhere” (from 2011) at Stockholm’s Modern Dance Theatre in 2022. She argues that the choice of venue and the involvement of local artists, writers, and performers made for a re-imagining of queer lives and archives. Entitled “Embracing the Ephemeral: Navigating Archives and Queerness in a Digital Age,” Rosenberg’s essay is simultaneously an archive of queer scholarly work and of queer spaces brimming with individual and collective repertoires of embodied memories, holding a promise: “In this polyphonic realm, voices converge, weaving narratives that celebrate our shared capacity to imagine, and prepare for encounters with worlds yet unknown.” To our minds – and quite possibly in the minds of many students, PhD students, and activists – Rosenberg and Halberstam are joined not only by their commitment to pedagogy and to teaching for better worlds, but also by a shared interest in the possibilities of art and performance, and a queer approach to archives, along with an interest in the politics of female masculinities.

Continuing the path of shared memories, we are especially grateful to queer historian Jens Rydström, both for initiating Halberstam’s visiting professorship and for sharing generously with all of us, as well as for his essay “Wild Puffins: An Essay on Queer Activism in the Wild,” which recalls a joint visit to the Faroe Islands, described in Halberstam’s *Wild Things: The Disorder of Desire* (2020). Drawing on Halberstam’s description of “wildness” as “the outside of categorization, unrestrained forms of embodiment, the refusal to submit to social regulation, loss of control, the unpredictable” (Halberstam 2020, 3), Rydström embarks on an exploration of how Swedish porn magazines served as a platform for

queer subjectivities. Reminding us of the continued value of alternative histories and odd archives, Rydström hones in on how these magazines flaunted non-normative sexual and gender practices and expressions, while also portraying nonwhite bodies as eroticized and fetishized, yet stayed clear of what Rydström calls the wildest sexual crime of all: bestiality. In Rydström's reading, publisher Curth Hson can be understood as attempting to "unbuild the world he inhabited" through the publicizing of expressions of unbound sexuality. The memory of the Faroe Islands here serves as a reminder to Rydström that while certain expressions of non-normativity – such as marching for gay marriage in conservative, heteronormative Faroes, as Halberstam and Rydström did – are not wild in and of themselves, they may become so in particular contexts.

Last among the scholarly works in this issue is queer philosopher Jami Weinstein's tour-de-force essay, "Is Another World Possible? Queerness, Blackness, and the Future," a conversation with Halberstam and Heidegger, informed by Black nihilism and Afropessimism, that exposes what unworlding means in a world built on the literal and symbolic abjection of Black bodies through the transatlantic slave trade, colonization, imperialism, and capitalism. While queerness and Blackness are often both relegated to the wild, Weinstein argues that queerness is, to a lesser degree, perceived as a threat to the world order as we know it, and that this juxtaposition risks repeating the primordial erasure of Blackness. Reading Halberstam's understanding of what unworlding as a project grounded in the work of Black nihilist and Afropessimist scholars such as Calvin Warren and Frank Wilderson might mean – and thus as a project of no return, in which the dismantling of white supremacy entails an ontological crisis of the world (as we know it) – Weinstein insists on the potential of something new: "that it is only in telling stories of the residues, those inchoate or outside, that we may be pessimistically optimistic that the end of the world is not the end of the story but their beginnings."

Like all our queer work, the production of this issue has been a labor of love and patience, and, as always in *lambda nordica*, the issue concludes with "We're here" – in the form of a conversation between guest

editor Ulrika Dahl, senior editor Erika Alm, and Jack Halberstam, in which we look back and ahead, and inevitably take stock of the implications of the current U.S. leadership in this political moment, and of what it means for critical scholars engaged in work on issues of gender, sexuality, race, and diversity.

There is no way around it: the times we are in are bleak – for the world and 99.9 percent of its inhabitants; for queer and trans folks, immigrants, Indigenous peoples and people of color in particular – as we witness what may be the end of the world, or the last trembling breaths of heteropatriarchal white supremacy that would rather destroy the world than relinquish power. As a theorist who has looked to alternative histories, unexpected archives, and seemingly silly dimensions of popular culture in order to both understand the present and reimagine what is possible, Halberstam has, it seems to us, always been bold and persistent in their critical analysis of the present, including the institutions within which we work. While always timely, and speaking to its time and from archives assembled and scavenged intuitively, it is clear to us that Halberstam's work also holds – and sometimes even becomes more useful – over time, as we reread it. Consistently willing to engage in debate, frequently generating and commenting on affect and the work it does in our scholarship and often daring to call upon us to imagine the world *otherwise*, Halberstam remains a cherished colleague and an enduring inspiration. Read alongside the work offered in this special issue, we end with one of the many astute observations Halberstam has offered, namely that concerning the antisocial turn, a figure that might take on a new meaning in the present moment. In *The Queer Art of Failure*, Halberstam (2011; see also 2008) took issue with a certain kind of gay male theorizing around masculine (same sex) desire in which queerness is not about progress but about death and “no future.” One of the points made there is that this line of (embodied) thinking has some uncanny resemblances to the masculine (read: humanist) ideals of fascism. Furthermore, Halberstam proposes that we remain suspicious of theorizing that tends to stay within the tiny archive of what we, with Stathopoulos, might call “Mr. Bigs.” Advocating counterintuitive readings, Halberstam (2011,

110) argues for a different set of “antisocial affects” found in the archive of uncompromising radical queer feminists and other queerly feminized subjects, such as “rage, rudeness, anger, spite, impatience, intensity, mania, sincerity, earnestness, over-investment, incivility, brutal honesty and disappointment.” While striving for happiness in a context where that very idea has become synonymous with denial of the crises currently constituting our present is the least of our desires, we do nonetheless need to imagine what queer might still become, and how the wild might help us think otherwise. If thirty years ago Halberstam argued for the end of man and of the humanities, it is clear that he has returned – missiles in hand – fighting to regain control of the world, its resources, and its historical narratives, as well as its racial and economic order, by any means necessary. In such times, we might both follow the lines of recent work on unworlding and consider Halberstam’s insistence that

we need to craft a queer agenda that works cooperatively with the many other heads of the monstrous entity that opposes global capitalism, and to define queerness as a mode of crafting alternatives with others, alternatives which are not naively oriented to a liberal notion of progressive entitlement but a queer politics which is also not tied to a nihilism which always lines up against women, domesticity and reproduction.

ULRIKA DAHL is a writer, cultural anthropologist and professor in gender studies at Uppsala University. Her current research concerns, on the one hand, the queer assisted reproduction of race and nation, with a particular focus reproductive futurities and matching gametes with intended parents and, on the other, anti-gender as a site of knowledge production. Among her books are *Femmes of Power: Exploding Queer Femininities* (2008, with Del LaGrace Volcano), *Skamgrepp: Feministiska essäer* (2014) och *Queer(y)ing Kinship in the Baltic Region and beyond* (edited with Joanna Mizielska, Raili Uibo & Antu Sorainen). Ulrika was senior editor of *lambda nordica* 2009–2020.

ERIKA ALM is a senior editor of *lambda nordica*.

A NOTE ON THE COVER ART

We are delighted to feature a portrait of Jack Halberstam shoot in 1997 by the legendary gender-queer artist Del LaGrace Volcano as the cover of this special issue. Del LaGrace Volcano has captured, nourished and instigated queer communities through photography, performances and films since the late 1980s, often in collaboration with queer scholars and activists. In 1999 Volcano and Halberstam published *The Drag King Book*, an anthology that to this day is a hallmark of queer public scholarship and resistance, and a love-letter to the joys of gender non-conforming identities and expressions. The two have remained in deep conversation with one another through the years.

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NOTES

1. See *lambda nordica* 2002 8(3–4).
2. Ulrika Dahl would like to thank Jenny Björklund for feedback and to acknowledge the Department of Gender Studies at Lund University and her queer colleagues there for providing an excellent space in which to work on this special issue during a visiting professorship in 2023–2024.
3. This event was co-sponsored by the interdisciplinary network Nature as Culture: The (Re)production of Common Sense (funded by the Centre for Integrated Research on Culture and Society (CIRCUS)) and the Queer Research Group at the Centre for Gender Research at Uppsala University, and we gratefully acknowledge both for their financial support.

4. As Halberstam has gone from the name Judith in early publications to Jack in recent ones, and, perhaps in keeping with their commitment to anarchy beyond binaries, has frequently stated that they do not have a strong investment in any particular pronoun, we have likewise alternated between pronouns in this review of Halberstam's work.