Love in the Time of STS
Kit Heintzman

If one of the most cited lines from Judith Butler's *Undoing Gender* is "Let's face it.

We're undone by each other. And if we're not, we're missing something," we ought not

forget the rest of the paragraph to follow: "If this seems so clearly the case with grief, it is

only because it was already the case with desire. One does not always stay intact. It may

be that one wants to, or does, but it may also be that despite one's best efforts, one is

undone, in the face of the other, by the touch, by the scent, by the feel, by the prospect of

the touch, by the memory of the feel" (2001, 19). I seek to read Werskey's essay "The

Marxist Critique of Capitalist Science: A History in Three Movements," (2007) as a love

story, and one that can be paralleled by another such love story in Science and

Technology Studies. By reading Werskey's narrative of Bob Young beside a piece

written by Dorothy Smith (1990) on Sally Hacker, I want to draw attention to what is

both jarring and gripping about such deeply personal and permeating projects. I seek to

locate both of these essays as projects in memory, in what it means to try to both hold

onto a story – to preserve it – but also to (re-)unleash it into the world in the hopes that

the works of their author's and mentor's will be remembered, rediscover, reproductive.

I would like to offer some caveats about how I will be using "love story," throughout this

talk. Historian Alan Bray reminds us: "The inability to conceive of relationships in other

than sexual terms says something of contemporary poverty; or, to put the point more

precisely, the effect of shaping concern with sexuality is precisely to obscure that wider

frame" (2003, 6). Bray is seeking to destabilize the centrality of "sexuality" that comes at

the expense of nuance. It has been all too easy in queer theory and sexuality studies to

look at a homosocial context – be it Fight Club or a buddy cop film – and hunt for the erotic undertones. I sit very cautiously with the moment a queer theorist and theologian friend of mine pointed out that he saw this tendency, that to point out a same sex desire, often came in the face of objects the queer theorist or feminist is applying them to many not like. To him, it reminded him of the schoolyard utterance, "Dude, you're a fag."[1] And since then I have thought of the very different ways the homosocial and erotic is read as recuperative in the cases of female love stories such as *Thelma and Louise* and *The Color Purple* versus discussions that get taken up regarding the roles of "heterosexual men" in MMF threesome pornography or the Soviet Kiss between Erich Honecker and Leonid Brezhnev. The same sex affection, contact, desire in the second category are more likely to be treated as though they were subconsciously caught in the act of the desire that dare not speak its name. In practicing theory with an eye on ethics, this should worry us. So in comparing Werksey's narration of Bob Young to Smith's narration of Sally Hacker's work, I want to remain conscious of, and draw your attention to, the nuances of addressing homosocial desire across narratives focused on women versus those brought up for men.

Furthermore, reading along gendered lines I do not want to isolate what I will be exploring through a single gendered axis. I am not interested in pointing to Werskey as writing out of a masculine perspective or Smith writing out of a feminine one. If these pieces speak to anything, it is the plurality of "We are undone by each other." Werskey's writing on Young as a man writing on a man, and Smith writing on Hacker, a woman on

---

[1] Andrew Pump, personal communication, 2008.

a woman, must be read as mutually constituting and informing gender dynamics. It would be a shame to essentialize either piece to the gendered category of their authors, rather than to also consider the way one might find themselves memorializing women and men differently. Lastly, another distinction between these two pieces needs to be made. Young is still alive today, whereas Smith's project of anthologizing Sally Hacker was triggered by learning that her mentor was dying. As I go through the passages, I want us to dwell upon the stakes at play when writing these kinds of stories for someone who is still alive and for someone the author knows will not live to see the project go to print.

Werskey describes his project as "inescapably autobiographical" (2007, 398) Near the end of the piece he explicates that for the first movement of his essay – that which dwells upon the invisible college – he conducted oral history interviews many decades ago. His second part he explains "part is more a memoir than a history of the radical science movement of the 1970s, in which I was both a scholarly and a political activist. My angle of vision here is necessarily partial and clearest where I was most closely involved" (2007, 398). However, it is interesting that in following the footnotes of block quotes from Young, they are not emerging out of similar life interviews, or out of memory. They come from Young's publications, the memories are externalized. On a final note Werskey explains

> The final, much briefer section is purely speculative and based more on my hopes for—rather than any definitive knowledge of (or optimism about)—the emergence of new scientific Lefts, Marxist or otherwise. My intent here … is not simply to provoke reconnection with certain aspects of our collective past but to invite comment and debate about how we go forward from here." (Werskey, 2007 400).

Smith (1990) in contrast describes her process of putting together this anthology in great detail. We learn of her car trips, transcription, checking the interviews:

> In the summer of 1987 I drove south … to spend four intense days with Sally. The mornings were spent interviewing her for as long as she was able to work. During the afternoons I listened to the morning tapes, reread the papers, and planned the next day's work. … I devised the sections; Sally approved them.
> Though I suggested the overall strategy of the book, Sally took it up joyfully as a form she was entirely at home with and found wholly congenial to her work and its intention. We had a great time together—I would question and listen; Sally would tell. We learned from each other; we laughed a lot. (Smith, 1990, 1-2)

Smith stresses the collaborative process, but one that needs to negotiate a complicated dynamic between her own wellness and Hacker's illness. One might see Smith's emphasis on this collaboration between her and Hacker throughout the interviews as part of echoing the political and personal dynamics Smith finds so engaging and worthy of attention in Hacker's own work: "in showing the methodological relationship of the papers to a project of social action that was both personal and political" (Smith, 1990, 2). This line must be read both as descriptive of Sally Hacker's project, but also as one that has transformed Dorothy Smith's project upon Hacker.

That being said, there is utility in specificity and as I introduce these two stories, I do not wish for them to be read as the same. Werksey and Smith express their affections in different ways, and provide us a different kind of access to themselves in so doing. Werskey's project might be seen as hagiographic, and canonization has a long standing investment in martyrdom. But, Young is not dead, and this is not a story of how he was destroyed. Werskey instead describes Young as a scholar who put the movement before himself; someone who risked everything. What was lost is not important, but rather what he was ready to lose.

> Young abandoned Cambridge and academic life in 1975 to become a full-time
> independent scholar-activist. In doing so, he risked his finances, career, and
> growing reputation as something of a rising media star, as well as a scholar.
> (Werskey, 2007, 434).
> However, what was never negotiable for Young and all who served with him on
> the *RSJ* collective was that our intellectual work was overtly driven by
> partisanship and ideology, with the intent of advancing socialism, not our careers.
> (Werskey, 439).

Smith on the other hand does not use metaphors of sacrifice or martyrdom; language

which might resonate very differently applied to a dying scholar. Rather she narrates

Hacker as a powerful woman, one whose research faced repeated obstacles, and one who

rose to those very occasions.

> Denial of information is reinforced by denial of funding to do critical research.
> Her project to investigate how women and men engineers and technicians made
> their living during a period of rapid technological change was cut under the
> Reagan administration's withdrawal of support for proposals to study race and sex
> discrimination. (Smith, 1990, 13)
> In working around the resistances of the powerful to providing information that
> will enable people to know about the policies, workings, and effects of the
> organization of power, Sally's method assumes the multiple ways in which they
> appear in people's lives. She conducted a kind of guerrilla warfare. There is
> knowledge there somewhere. Sometimes it can be located even when it is
> officially denied. (Smith, 1990, 14)

Smith wants us to remember not only that Sally's work was important, but that she faced

repeated systemic barriers to producing it. That there was a willfulness born out of a

desire to confront oppressive institutional structures in the funding of the academy and in

the engineers and technicians whom Hacker listened to, spoke with, and hung around

with. Her project was immersive.

If Smith has narrated a story of struggle with less of an emphasis on triumph, Werksey

instead paints a picture of Young's successes:

> Young was also an academic entrepreneur, as marked by his success not only in co-founding the King's seminars … but in establishing the Cambridge Wellcome Unit for the History of Medicine as well. Through these activities he was able to attract and inspire a whole generation of historians of science—one of his most lasting influences on the field." (Werksey, 2007, 434)

I want us to note the contrast in Werskey's emphasis on "success" and "prestige", it is the measure of accomplishments that he stresses, whereas Smith is much more interested in Hacker's process.

> 'I wanted to learn about the mathematics learning from the inside, from experience,' she told me. So she took courses in mathematics in the engineering program at Oregon State University. 'I wanted to know *what it feels like*. I called it "doing it the hard way." I wanted to learn about the mathematization of engineering, where it comes from, what it does, how it's organized, how it is passed on, transmitted. It was after moving out here and knowing what it felt like to be an engineering student, after I did the ethnographic experience that I then came to do the historical work.' (Smith, 11).

Werskey is outlining in the productive force of Young's work, Smith is more interested in how Hacker continued to transform as the thinker, there is a much greater emphasis on process.

The memorization process for both of these scholars stresses their intellectual appetite, it is the desire to learn more, their disregard for rigorous dividing lines between disciplines and methods that makes them exceptional.

> Throughout these periods, the sources of Bob's thinking were well and truly on display in his copious footnotes and detailed bibliographies. They ranged from the classical texts and dissident voices of Marxism (and the *RSJ* collective) to a wide range of historical scholarship and social theory, especially related to psychology. He was a voracious reader and intellectual omnivore, getting through more books and data than anyone I have ever known. (Werksey, 2007, 435).
> Sally did not, as some feminist sociologists have done, identify feminist sociology with a qualitative methodology. She found her exceptional skills as a quantitative sociologist very valuable. … Sally worked all the time from what was available, what would do the job, what would be most effective in the contexts to which it would speak. When she found the numerical data were lacking in agribusiness,

she sought other approaches, using the knowledge that grassroots organizations develop in their political and organizational practice, putting herself in contexts where she could learn through her own experience, as by taking courses at a community college in agribusiness." (Smith, 1990, 8)

For Wersky, the markers of Young's intellectual hunger can be found in the unquantifiable excess of reading often and widely, and in the girth of Young's footnotes. The comment upon the footnotes might sit less comfortable with Science Studies scholars in the wake of Lorraine Daston's (2009) comment: "The improved craftsmanship of the footnotes [by Science Studies scholars] alone would signal a steep rise in disciplinary standards—footnotes being to historians what joints are to carpenters, that is, the place where the trained eye looks first to test the quality of workmanship" (809). Hacker's appetite is not recorded through these markers of expertise and prestige, but rather through an ongoing quest for learning that recognizes her own limitations. She does not sit in the isolating company of a book to expand her horizons, she enters a new class room.

After Wersky (2007) quotes Young

I don't know a single Marxist intellectual who is not in distress. All are suffering acutely their lived contradictions among and within their commitments—to job, relationships, political groups, self-education, child care, writing, international solidarity, need for privacy. This is occurring in a period when Thatcherism and a worsening world recession are pressing harder on socialist struggles. How are we to manage—much less make headway—'in and against the state'? (444)

Wersky somberly comments "Eventually, we all picked ourselves up and went on to fashion new lives and careers—many of them far removed from the careers for which we had prepared ourselves. I suppose we are all now 'over it'," (444). This is a very different

narrative of loss. Werksey is grieving a movement, and finds himself and his colleagues

complicit in failing it, with it, failing Young.

Both Smith and Werskey see their own stories as deeply indebted to their friends and

mentors. However, Werskey's approach is more distant. He describes himself as a part of

a movement, a movement he fears may never become what he and Young hoped it could

be. Smith on the other hand thinks about her own position as she appraises the way that

scholars interact with Hacker's work. There is a collapse of boundaries between them,

there is sadness, fear, and empathy.

> When I learned from Sally in April [1987] she had terminal cancer, with possibly
> only four or five months to live, I thought of making a collection of her papers for
> publication. … We had talked once about how we had both been people who
> tended to research, think, write, publish, and then forget about it as we went on to
> the next thing. As I age, I've become more concerned to have my own work
> known as the whole it is. I saw Sally's chances of doing the same being snatched
> from her, and I didn't want that to happen. Papers written years earlier, some
> published outside the regular sociological outlets, others presented at conferences
> but as yet unpublished—to lose these permanently would be a serious loss to
> feminist sociology. (Smith, 1)

Werskey titles his last section Summoning the Ghosts, and continuing with his musical

metaphor he writes:

> If we ultimately serve no other purpose, I would feel confirmed in the knowledge
> that like Mozart's ghost in the *Ghost Variations* of George Tsontakis, we
> continued to figure in the creation of new variations in the ideas and struggles that
> hopefully will make for a better world. (Werskey, 449)

I want to end with how Avery Gordon (1997) understands the project of haunting, which

is to say that I think the profound literalism of Sally Hacker's death and this anthology as

a memorizing project does not strip it of the nuances of how "haunting" has been taken

up in other theoretical practices. Gordon writes: "To write stories concerning exclusions

and invisibilities is to write ghost stories. To write ghost stories implies that ghosts are real, that is to say, that they produce material effects" (17). Smith's project is one where she believes firstly that there were meaningful effects of Hacker's work, but that through this story, this reproductive process of anthologizing and re-narrating into a new kind of whole, the project can continue and those ripple effects will continue to abound.

> I visited her once more. She was then in constant pain and sedated. I could hold her hand and tell her that we had a published, that the book was going forward and I thought it an important and valuable work. I'm not sure it still mattered a lot at that point in her dying. She died a few weeks later. (Smith, 2)

Death, loss, sorrow, and grief figure in both of these author's imaginaries of their mentors. As does affection, love, passion, and desire. Perhaps the kinds of love stories that we prefer, that we are most moved by, say more about us than they do about the stories themselves. And this analysis has taken at its core the sense that the way that one goes about telling a love story tells us more about the author – in presence and absence, in emphasis and priorities – that it does about their subject. These specters that haunt – in life and in death – make themselves manifest in paper and memory. This act of memorialization on both sides offers an expanding potential for memory and attachment. If we think not of the grief and desire Bulter (2001) speaks of just in terms of the sentiments for the authors themselves, but also the capacity for these pieces to move their readers, provoke in us a consciousness regarding our proximity and distances from our own mentors, this too must be understood as its own kind of productive undoing.

Bibliography

Alan Bray, *The Friend* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

Lorraine Daston, "Science Studies and the History of Science," *Critical Inquiry* 35, (Summer 2009), 798 – 813.

Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

Dorothy Smith, "Editor's Introduction: On Sally L. Hacker's Method," in eds. Dorothy E. Smith and Susan M. Turner's *Doing it the Hard Way": Investigations of Gender and Technology* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 1 – 18.

Gary Werskey, "The Marxist Critique of Capitalist Science: A History in Three Movements?," *Science as Culture* 16, no. 4, 397 – 461.