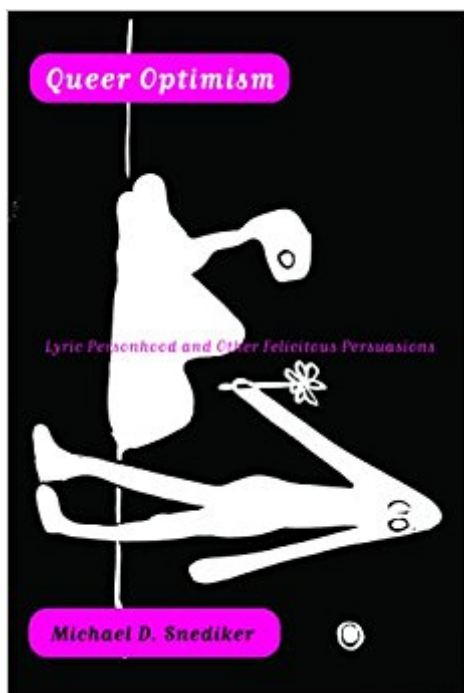


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# Queer Optimism: Lyric Personhood And Other Felicitous Persuasions



## Synopsis

Michael Snediker offers a much-needed counterpoint to queer theoretical discourse, which has long privileged melancholy, self-shattering, incoherence, shame, and the death drive. Recovering the forms of positive affect that queer theory has jettisoned, Snediker insists that optimism must itself be taken beyond conventional tropes of hope and futurity and reimagined as necessary for critical engagement.

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"Mobilizing disparate resources in lyric poetry, personal reflection, and queer theory, Michael Snediker argues for an optimism not reducible to hope and not opposed to knowledge. Queer Optimism demands that we think again about enjoyment, pain, personhood, and whether and how we live our theories. It's a challenging book of fresh perspectives and previously unwritable sentences." — Rei Terada, author of *Looking Away: Phenomenality and Dissatisfaction, Kant to Adorno* "Queer Optimism is a major — potentially paradigm-shifting — work in queer theory. I cannot remember the last time I learned so much from reading a work of literary criticism." — Tim Dean, Director of the Humanities Institute, University at Buffalo (SUNY)

Michael Snediker offers a much-needed counterpoint to queer theoretical discourse, which has long privileged melancholy, self-shattering, incoherence, shame, and the death drive. Recovering the forms of positive affect that queer theory has jettisoned, Snediker insists that optimism must itself be

taken beyond conventional tropes of hope and futurity and reimagined as necessary for critical engagement. Through fresh, perceptive, and sensitive readings of the poetry of Emily Dickinson, Hart Crane, Jack Spicer, and Elizabeth Bishop, Snediker reveals that each of these poets demonstrated an interest in the durability of positive affects. Dickinson, Snediker argues, expresses joy and grace as much as pain and loss, and the myriad cryptic smiles in Hart Crane's White Building contradict prevailing narratives of Crane's apocryphal literary failures and eventual suicide. Snediker's ambitious and sophisticated study, informed by thinkers such as Winnicott, Deleuze, and de Man, both supplements and challenges the work of queer theory's leading figures, including Judith Butler, Leo Bersani, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and Lee Edelman. Queer Optimism revises our understanding of queer love and affiliation, examining Spicer's serial collusion with matinee idol Billy the Kid as well as the critically neglected force of Bishop's epistolary and poetic reparations of the drowned figure of Hart Crane. In doing so, Snediker persuasively reconceives a theoretical field of optimism that was previously unavailable to scrupulous critical inquiry and provides a groundbreaking approach to modern American poetry and poetics.

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