

# Theses on Hating

JUNE 16, 2015

BY LARA LANGER COHEN AND BRIAN CONNOLLY

Hating is underloved. It loses out to the more presentable avidities: desire, eagerness, delight. To be a hater is to be a joyless troll. Or so we've been told.

But what if we understood hating as an enthusiasm in its own right? Over the summer, *Avidly* will occasionally transform into *Rabidly* to see what happens if we embrace hating culture as fervidly as we embrace loving it. Our goal is not to raise hating to the same status as its positive counterparts. It is to explore hating as an enthusiasm with its own unique possibilities: affective, intellectual, aesthetic, social, political. For too long, hate has been ceded to reactionary politics, so that we encounter it largely in the all-too-familiar vitriol of those who feel their power threatened. But hating does not naturally love to dominate. We would like to see it mobilized more widely as an affect of radical political organizing, but let's start with the juxtapolitical. What would it mean to think about hating as a mode of pleasure, solidarity, imagination?

Hating has a rather remarkable, if repressed, genealogy. William Hazlitt's "On the Pleasure of Hating" (1826) might mark an early moment in this history. "Without something to hate," Hazlitt wrote, "we should lose the very spring of thought and action." In 1949, the psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott wrote in "Hate in the Counter-Transference," "It seems to me doubtful whether a human child as he develops is capable of tolerating the full extent of his own hate in a sentimental environment. He needs hate to hate." More recently we have seen an attempt to drain hating of its power in the rise of the dismissive refrain "haters gonna hate," which tries to explain away hating to an intrinsic trait of the hater rather than the hated. At the same time, giddily virulent songs like [The-Dream's "Florida University"](#) (2010) and [R. Kelly's "Shut Up"](#) (2011) insist that hating continues to thrill and sustain us. And of course there is the enduring example of Silky Johnson:

In that spirit, [and with all due respect to Karl Marx](#), we present:

---

## Eleven Theses on Hating

1. Hating is dialectical. The supplement to loving is liking; we define our great passions against lesser inclinations. But the supplement to hating is loving. We hate some things because we love others so fiercely.

2. Hating is not the same thing as critique, although there are surely affinities between the two. Adorno is the greatest of haters, after all. But hating's affective intensity eschews the more distancing and authoritative stance of critique. In fact, hating refuses the very claims of expertise. Loving traffics in mastery; it asks for a passionate pursuit of more knowledge about an object ("Have you heard the bootleg live version of that song?"). But hating is constituted by an arbitrary rejection based on partial knowledge ("That song fucking sucks"). In its refusal to accumulate more knowledge, hating challenges the dominance of the subject-supposed-to-know.

3. Paradoxically, then, hating is arrayed both against mastery and on the side of knowledge. The discourse of the master, which loving can (but need not) mimic, functions by foreclosing the fact that knowledge can never be complete. The lover is a completist, always seeking union with the object(s). The hater, on the other hand, is an incompletist, refusing the desire for mastery. She is closer to the discourse of the hysteric, who knows that neither the self nor knowledge can be complete and so calls the master—the lover—on his illusions of power. Hating suggests that we will always desire and be unsatisfied and thus chooses to make pleasure of what is so often pain.

4. It is important to hate things injurious to human survival and flourishing—racism, patriarchy, Ronald Reagan, and so on—and to do so loudly, unrelentingly, and disruptively. But it is also important to hate objects that don't quite warrant hate, like chefs, sports, or the Beatles. We could describe this as the difference between "hating" and "hating on." Hate is usually reserved for obviously abhorrent objects (or associated with abhorrent and reactionary politics and ethics, as in hate speech and hate crime), but hating on highlights the repugnance of minor ones. (One cannot really hate on capitalism.) Consequently, hating on tends to be a lonely activity. It is surprisingly close to fandom: the cultivation of a rarefied and unnecessary enthusiasm. Arguably, hating on is more oppositional than hating, because it is doubly so: one clashes with both the object of one's hating and dominant opinion. (One also cannot really hate on Phyllis Schlafly, cockroaches, or the band Creed; who doesn't hate them?)

5. Moreover, hating is a feeling, but hating on is an action, usually discursive. It does not emerge from the interior of an individual ("I hate [XXX]") and thus secure the boundaries of the subject, but exists contingently and relationally ["I am hating on XXX"]. Hating on is thus a kind of passionate surrender to the external world of objects. Whereas loving intensely attempts to subordinate external objects to internal wishes and desires (confirming that the world has magically come in line with our individual desire), hating on acknowledges that the individual is most often arrayed in combative relation to the world, and transforms that embattled position into a passionate attachment.

6. Even when hating is not explicitly leveled at political targets, hating is politicized under liberalism to the extent that it runs against the grain of pluralism, universalism, cultural consensus, objectivity, and civility.

7. That said, hating is differentially legible—and acceptable—when read across different bodies. When white people hate things, they are outraged; when black people hate things, they are out of

control; when Muslims hate things, they are fanatical; when Latin@s hate things, they are hot-tempered; when queers hate things, they are being dramatic. When men hate things, it's exciting; when women hate things, it's awkward and brings everyone down. Old people hate things because they are bitter; kids hate things because they're just kids. Consequently, embracing hating requires us to remember that hating is riskier for some people than others.

8. Hating can be an affirmingly social experience. In a conflict-averse culture, especially, it forges strong solidarities. There are few pleasures keener than discovering that someone shares the feelings of hate you have nursed alone.

9. Hating is hard to monetize. It is easier to market to people's desires than their aversions, as Facebook well knew when it built in a "like" button. Users regularly grumble that they wish there were also a "dislike" button, but because Facebook's profits depend on the revenue they can create from people "liking" things, which then becomes data for advertisers, a "dislike" button is unlikely to materialize any time soon.

10. Hating is fun. It is fun because of the bonds it forges; it is also fun because hating, much more than loving, gestures toward *jouissance*. The pleasure derived from hating relies on the cathexis of a hated object and reveling in that enthusiasm. Hating insists that we live enthusiastically with what we hate.

11. Enthusiasts have hitherto only loved the world in various ways; the point is to hate it (too).



There are any number of examples of the joyous ethics of solidarity that come from hating, but we want to close with a recent favorite one: the girl punk band at the center of [Lucas Moodysson's 2013 film \*We are the Best!\*](#), whose signature song is called "Hate the Sport." The film was critically lauded for its portrayal of adolescent friendship, but the fact that the friendships are constituted around an affective immersion in hating seems to have gone unnoticed, despite the title of the song. This adolescent hating is something we are supposed to leave behind as we grow

up. But the film's exuberant antipathies ask us to say, fuck that, hate away. If we are stuck in a culture that fetishizes the teenager, let's at least focus on what is best about those years—uninformed hating of the inconsequential.

The three girls who make up the band—Bobo, Klara, and Hedvig—are all, in some sense, rebelling against the stultifying nature of parental culture. That their parental cultures are not the same—Bobo is an ornament in her mother's depressive narcissism, Klara encouraged to be a full part of her parent's hippie-ish indulgent positivity, Hedvig in her mother's austere Protestantism—suggests that hating is a specific adolescent response to the strictures of an older generation. As the Nation of Ulysses declared in an ur-text of hating, directed at the most reviled of revered objects, the Beatles, "I'm not talking about a Beatles song/Made a hundred years before I was born." But the film also situates the girls' hating as an entirely sound response to liberalism's own combination of everyday vitriol and preening civility. Called ugly by other teen girls, "fucking cunts" by various others, and (sneeringly) "the prettiest girls in the world" by the boys at the community center, Bobo and Klara form a band. They sign up for the rehearsal space at the community center, previously the sole domain of the boys' cock-rock band, Iron Fist. There they deliriously bang on the drums, strum a bass guitar, and scream "Prettiest girls in town!" into the mic. They later recruit Hedvig, who is actually a church-trained guitarist but willingly trades her expertise for the band's chaotic thrashing.

The film culminates with their first public performance, at a battle of the bands held in another suburban community center in neighboring Vasteras. They begin playing "Hate the Sport," but the crowd starts to scream at them, calling them communists and cunts—at which point they change the chorus of their song to "Hate Vasteras," starting a riot among the teenage audience members and their chaperones. All the while, Bobo, Klara, and Hedvig continue to play, laughing and reveling in a kind of ecstatic affront. Afterwards, the community center directors ask them why they can't just be nice and the girls tell them that they are "boring" and "We are the best!" "You are the worst," the men correct them, prompting the girls to shout louder and louder, "We are the best!" Adolescent solidarity and self-acceptance here constitute themselves through hating, and make themselves heard as antagonism.

Let us leave you with the lyrics to "Hate the Sport," which capture at once the incomplete knowledge, the pleasure and pain, and the political possibilities of hating:

*HATE THE SPORT*

*HATE, HATE, HATE, HATE THE SPORT*

*PEOPLE DIE AND SCREAM*

*BUT ALL YOU CARE ABOUT IS YOUR SOCCER TEAM*

*CHILDREN IN AFRICA ARE DYING*

*BUT YOU'RE ALL ABOUT BALLS FLYING*

*NUCLEAR POWER PLANTS POISON THE AIR*

*YOU'RE PLAYING HOCKEY, SO UNAWARE*

*THE ATOMIC BOMBS BLOW UP OUR CITIES*

*YET YOU WANT MORE TENNIS COMMITTEES*

*COME ON! COME ON!*

*NO DIFFERENCE AT ALL IT'S JUST A BALL!*

*NO DIFFERENCE AT ALL IT'S JUST A BALL!*

*NO DIFFERENCE AT ALL IT'S JUST A BALL!*

*–Lara Langer Cohen: Monkees all the way & Brian Connolly: Hates everything and once lived  
in Florida*

Featured image: [Stefan Bruggerman, No in Twelve Different Colors, 2010](#)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.



**This Week in Task Forces**