For this class, I use “queerness” in two ways: first, as an umbrella word for people and practices outside cis-heteronormativity; second, as a lens to read history that refuses fixed categories. Contemporary usage often treats “queer” as a reclaimed term and a broad, flexible label, even though some still feel its hurtful past; that tension is part of its meaning today. Bronski’s overview of language shows how words shape visibility: earlier labels like “sodomite,” “crimes against nature,” and later “homosexual” marked different eras and limits of what could even be said; this reminds me that categories are historical, not timeless.  Building on that, Godbeer argues sexual categories are cultural products, and Puritan legal-theological discourse did not think in terms of “orientation,” which again warns me not to project modern identities backward.

I define “dissent” as intentional, public criticism that contests prevailing authority or norms. Collins & Skover emphasize why definitions matter—if we stretch “dissent” too far or too little, we lose clarity—and they note how calling something “dissent” can affect whether society or law treats it as legitimate. They also stress that intention and criticism are core: a dissenter aims to communicate, and the act must confront something in public view.  This more precise frame helps me analyze examples across periods, even when laws or vocabularies differ from today.

As a case of “queer dissent,” I point to Queer Nation’s early-1990s reclamation of the word “queer” and its street actions. Activists deliberately turned a slur into a badge, spoke in public, and directly criticized heteronormative culture and state neglect during the AIDS crisis—clearly matching the “intent + publicity + criticism” idea above. Bronski notes how this reclamation pushed “queer” into mainstream culture (e.g., the spread from zines and slogans to TV titles), which shows dissent working not only as protest but as language politics that change common sense.  I also see continuity with earlier term-reclamations (Fag Rag, Dyke) that used naming itself as a dissenting tactic against stigma.