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Robert Kulpa and Mia Liinason  
Special issue editors

### **Queer Studies: Methodological Approaches. Follow-up**

In December 2008, the Graduate Journal of Social Science published a special issue on Queer Methodologies. During the production of that issue, we received a number of qualified and thought-provoking articles, focusing on the issue of queer methodologies from different angles. Indeed, the number and quality of submitted articles was so significant that we have decided to publish an additional, extracurricular, issue.

This follow-up issue is a continuation of ideas we proposed in the first call for papers. It is thou an interesting “supplement” to the previous issue, enriching the already broad scope of interests presented. In this issue, the inquiries of the translation of queer are further problematised. While the December issue focused on the relationship between queer and geo-political contexts and academic cultures, the articles in current issue are focusing on the past, present and future of queer, further questioning the notion of “location” and trans-historically located practises.

We begin with the article of Jonathan Kemp “Queer Past, Queer Present, Queer Future”, which (although not directly) dialogues with Tiina Rosenberg’s article about genealogies of queer theory. Kemp however, recalls the past in order to jump into the future. By looking at recently published books in the field, he invites us to wonder what will be the future of queer (even if some queer theoreticians do not believe in any....).

“Agency” is surely one of the problematic issues within queer theoretical and activist thinking/doing, and we are happy to present two articles that offer seemingly different, yet we would argue, complimenting perspectives. Terri Power writing about performance art and university education is a piece based on her own experiences of doing/practicing/performing PhD. Not only do we have here a queer blur of “disciplines” (education, art) but also modalities of doing (doing PhD, doing performances as part of PhD, doing an article about doing performances which are indeed doing PhD....).

On the other hand, Bo Jensen argues for a materialist focus in queer studies through an analysis of “agency” as constructed at the crossroads of human beings and material culture. Seen as performed via materialisation through artefacts, as much as through a human being/doing, Jensen suggests a shift in ways of “ascribing and describing agency”.

A critique of ideas of coherent identities is also in focus in the subsequent article of this issue. With the aim to destabilize an understanding of Finland as a secular and egalitarian country, Eva-Mikaela Kinnari in her article, analyzes the debate around the “Act on Assisted Fertility Treatments in Finland”. Here, Kinnari questions the division of ‘values’ into categories such as ‘religious’ or ‘secular’, and argues that such a differentiation might obscure queer work to destabilise heteronormative ideas of kinship.

Péter Balogh’s article about Anthony Bidulka’s gay detective stories not only focuses on literature, the relationship between gay and straight readership, but also works on Canadian nationalism. In his article, we can thus trace the issues of “homonationalism”, which gain a lot of attention recently.

Finally, this April issue closes with the article of Ellen Zitani, who forges an understanding within the connections between female (same-sex) desire, feminism and free love in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Italy. By looking at private correspondence and literary writing of Sibilla Aleramo, Zitani meanders with us through the maze of never easily categorised spheres of human emotions and needs. By looking at Aleramo’s relationship with man and women, Zitani shows how we should never stagnate in one “definite” category, especially, when what is at stake, is desire...

The review section to this issue is constituted by two reviews and one review essay, engaged with methodological implications of queer politics. In this section, Richard Maguire writes a book review of Sally R. Munt’s *“Queer Attachments, The Cultural Politics of Shame”*, and Camila Esguerra Muelle writes a review of the book *“De la cama a la calle: perspectivas teóricas lésbico-feministas”* [From the Bed to the Street: Lesbian-Feminist Theoretical Perspectives]. The last contribution to this issue is a review essay by Robert Teixeira on queer shame, which also connects to discussions on the ‘anti-social’ and ‘no future’ in queer studies at large and more particularly investigated in Judith Halberstam’s contribution to the December 2008 issue of the Graduate Journal of Social Science.

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## Queer Past, Queer Present, Queer Future

*“Sometimes the very term that would annihilate us becomes the site of resistance, the possibility of an enabling social and political signification” – Judith Butler*

*“Disobedience, in the eyes of anyone who has read history, is man's original virtue” – Oscar Wilde*

The term queer was first used in the sense we understand it today in 1991, by the North American academic Teresa de Lauretis, when she guest edited the feminist journal *differences* and titled it “Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities”. It had yet to take on the full cadence and colour of later theorizations, but this was its birthplace. In fact, de Lauretis would later abandon the term, claiming it had been mainstreamed by the very institutions it was meant to attack. As queer was emerging in the early 1990s, as a term pitched determinedly against the old guard of Lesbian & Gay, Judith Butler acknowledged that

the assertion of ‘queer’ will be necessary as a term of affiliation, but it will not fully describe those it purports to represent. As a result, it will be necessary to affirm the contingency of the term: to let it be vanquished by those who are excluded by the term but who justifiably expect representation by it, to let it take on meanings that cannot now be anticipated by a younger generation whose political vocabulary may well carry a very different set of investments (Butler 1993, 230)

So how has queer aged? How has it changed, or not? Does it still work? Who does it exclude? How is it currently understood, and how does that differ from the conditions of its emergence? In this essay I will offer a potted history of queer, providing the social, political and theoretical context in which queer theory emerged, and tracing its development up to the present, ending

with an overview of where queer theory is today. One of the aims of the essay is to suggest that, in a very real sense, there is nothing new about queer; that, in fact, as long as there has been a ‘homosexual’ identity there have been contestations over what exactly, that means, and what might be the relationship between that identity and the discursive regime within which it claims its intelligibility. This essay traces a kind of genealogy of queer energy, a trajectory of critical force that has always, in profound ways, been engaged with a broader social critique.

### **The Ultimate Question**

At the end of his 1994 book *The Wilde Century*, Alan Sinfield claims:

The ultimate question is this: is homosexuality intolerable? One answer is that actually lesbians and gay men are pretty much like other people, in which case it just needs a few more of us to come out, so that the nervous among our compatriots can see we aren’t really so dreadful, and then everyone will live and let live; sexuality will become unimportant. The other answer is that homosexuality in fact constitutes a profound challenge to the prevailing values and structures in our kinds of society – in which case the bigots have a point of view and are not acting unreasonably. We cannot expect to settle this question, but the hypothesis we adopt will affect decisively our strategic options (Sinfield 1994, 177)

In other words, is homosexuality to be understood as nothing more than a variant sexuality, affecting only those individuals or groups who label themselves as gay or lesbian, or is homosexuality to be understood as a phenomenon with effects across the entire range of human sexualities – and, beyond that, across the entire range of human culture? Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, in her 1993 book *Epistemology of the Closet*, calls these two views the *minoritizing* view, and the *universalizing* view. The minoritizing view, as the name suggests, sees homosexuality as of interest only to “a small, distinct, relatively fixed minority” – consisting of those people for whom it is an identity. The universalizing view, on the other hand, sees

homosexuality, or same-sex desire, as “an issue of continuing, determinative importance in the lives of people across the spectrum of sexualities” (Sedgwick 1993, 1).

While this is a crucial distinction – as Sinfield points out, to take the universalizing view is to see homosexuality as a threat to society as a whole and to consider that homophobia, as such, is in some sense understandable – it is, nevertheless, not a simple question of either/or: either minoritizing *or* universalizing. Sedgwick argues that *both* are at work in our society at any one time. Indeed, the dynamic created by both views is one of her central hypotheses.

As is now well known by now, the word ‘homosexual’ was coined around 1869. Michel Foucault argues that the homosexual did not exist before this date. By this he means that the concept of ‘the homosexual’ names a personality type, a body type, a psychology that was hitherto unnamed. Further, in that naming a discrete and recognizable type of person is invented – the homosexual as a category of human being is invented, or discursively constructed. An identity is formed. From homosexuality as a sin that anyone might commit or a sickness that might afflict anyone, we move to the homosexual as a criminal and psychologically abnormal individual, with recognisable psychological and physiological characteristics.

This turning point from homosexuality or sodomy as a behaviour to the homosexual as a type or species is in a sense the start of the minoritizing view of homosexuality. It becomes regarded as being of importance only to a small number of people – those who fall within that identity bracket; the concept of homosexuality comes to apply, or is applied, only to those individuals so named, or who so name themselves. This is also the start of identity politics, and there were gay movements in Germany, and to an extent France, Britain and America, dating back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>1</sup>. These movements were, for Foucault, examples of what he called ‘reverse discourse’, whereby the terminology concocted by psychiatry and the medical profession was employed as a self-definition and used to argue for the rights of those individuals.

Foucault writes that while the medical model sought to categorise homosexuals,

it also made possible the formation of a ‘reverse’ discourse: homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or ‘naturality’ be acknowledged,

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<sup>1</sup> See John Lauritsen and David Thorstad, *The Early Homosexual Rights Movement* (Times Change Press, 1974); and James D. Steakley, *The Homosexual Emancipation Movement in Germany* (Arno Press, 1975).

often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified (Foucault 1990, 101)

So the labeling of the homosexual worked in both ways – it provided the means of oppression and exclusion, but also the means for fighting it.

But this turning point is also the start of the universalizing view, because at the same time as ‘the homosexual’ is being labeled and constructed in opposition to the ‘heterosexual’ (a word not coined until 1878), that discursive figure enters discourse in the widest sense, in a way hitherto unseen. In the decade between 1895 and 1905 there were over 1000 books published on the subject of homosexuality, and only a very small fraction of those were written by homosexuals themselves. Homosexuality had, in this sense, entered the domain of Western epistemology in a big way. The analysis of homosexuality and the homosexual becomes crucial to the subsequent formation, analysis and controlling of society, and is part and parcel of what Foucault has termed ‘bio-power’, defined as the governing of populations. As David M. Halperin writes:

According to Foucault’s analysis, civil society, scientific research, intellectual activity, and personal life are not in fact free zones from which power has progressively retreated since the Enlightenment, but colonized spaces into which it has steadily expanded, proliferated, and diffused itself (Halperin 1995, 19)

Foucault’s famous example of this discursive colonization is the construction of sexuality as a field of knowledge that presents itself as a form of liberation but is in fact a method for greater surveillance. He takes as an example the received opinion concerning the Victorian prudishness and suppression of sex, arguing that far from suppressing sexuality, the Victorians actively pursued it and devised a system of categorization by which deviations could be labeled and a moral rating applied to sexual expression whereby individuals could be approved, treated, marginalized, sequestered, disciplined and normalized. For Foucault, the ascendancy of psychiatry and medical models for sexuality was a strategy for expanding power beyond the realm of the public. Surveillance extended into the bedroom, into the private realm of desire, and

sexuality became the key for unlocking the secret ‘truth’ of the self within Western discourses. His most famous example of this new technique for controlling populations is the invention of the homosexual. The division of humanity into two categories – the homosexual and the heterosexual – was an artificial means of governing the chaotic multiplicity of human desire, or what Freud calls polymorphous perversity.

As such, according to Halperin

‘The homosexual’, then, is not the name of a natural kind but a projection, a conceptual and semiotic dumping ground for all sorts of mutually incompatible, logically contradictory notions. These contradictory notions not only serve to define the binary opposite of homosexuality by (and as a) default; they also put into play a series of double binds that are uniquely oppressive to those who fall under the description of ‘homosexual’, double binds whose operation is underwritten and sustained by socially entrenched discursive and institutional practices (Halperin 1995, 45-6)

The contradictions brought into play by the arrival of these two understandings of homosexuality are still at work in our culture today. One recent example is the U.S. Military’s “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy. Indeed, Sedgwick argues that

an understanding of virtually any aspect of modern Western culture must be, not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance to the degree that it does not incorporate a critical analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition. (Sedgwick 1993, 1)

Those contradictions, in many ways, can be recast in modern terminology by regarding the minoritizing view as in a certain sense exemplified by the term ‘lesbian and gay’ – whereby there is a discrete minority of people for whom same sex desire is a defining condition of their identity and as such much be assimilated into existing cultural norms. This view is often termed ‘assimilationist’, but we could also call it ‘liberal’ or ‘humanist’ as well. Conversely, the universalizing view is exemplified by the term ‘queer’, which sees societal norms as oppressive,

sexophobic and in need of radical change. We might also call this view ‘revolutionary’, or ‘critical’ or even ‘postmodern’.

In America since the mid 90s a fierce debate has raged between assimilationist lesbians and gay men and radical queers. The assimilationists want gay marriage, inclusion in the military, the right to adopt children – i.e., equal status within the *status quo*. Queers, on the other hand, want nothing to do with the *status quo*, instead regarding the most vibrant and radical aspect of homosexuality as being precisely its opposition to normative sexuality and society.

Simplifying to the extreme, the assimilationists tend to be conservative, seeing nothing wrong with society as it is, apart from the fact that gay people are not allowed the same privileges as straights. As such, they tent to want only to be allowed a ‘place at the table’, to use the title of a book by Bruce Bawer, an American gay rightwinger. Queers, on the other hand, want to burn the table, they don’t want society to accept them because they do not accept society. Like Groucho Marx, they wouldn’t want to be a member of any club that would have them as a member. They reject society’s norms and challenge existing modes of behaviour. Assimilationists want to fit in – hence the name. Queers want to celebrate not fitting in.

In a very real sense, this dichotomy has been around for as long as ‘homosexual’ has been used to name a type of person rather than a type of behaviour. Even in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in Germany the movement for liberation was divided between those who called themselves third sexers, centred around Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, who relied on the medical figuration of a ‘female soul trapped in a man’s body’, and those who called themselves the Community of the Self-Owners, led by Benedict Freidlander, who rejected the effeminacy model, but who dabbled with Fascist politics and were virulently anti-feminist and misogynistic<sup>2</sup>.

According to Richard Goldstein in his recent book *The Attack Queers*, “this duality creates an abiding conflict between those who demand the freedom to be otherly and those who pursue the right to be normal”(Goldstein 2002, 11).

Those who criticize the diversity of queer culture and insist that we all act normal in order to be accepted are what Goldstein calls the Attack Queers – amongst them Andrew Sullivan, Camille Paglia, Norah Vincent, Michelangelo Signorile, Bruce Bawer. Their main

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<sup>2</sup> See Hubert Kennedy, *Karl Heinrich Ulrichs: Pioneer of the Modern Gay Movement* (Booksurge Llc, 2005).

targets are those lesbians and gay men who marginalize themselves by refusing to conform to straight protocols: promiscuous faggots, SM dykes, drag queens, troublemakers. Up for particular attack is a radical group called SEX PANIC, set up in 1997 in NYC by Michael Warner, Allan Berube and Eric Rofes, in order to counterattack the more phobic stance of the right wing gays, or homocons.

But the sex war raging in the States is, in many ways, a new face for an old battle. Social acceptance for homosexuals has always been fought by downplaying the less acceptable (usually sexual) aspects for fear of upsetting liberal sensibilities and offending the people whose acceptance we're seeking. One early example of queer energy, of someone who tied homosexual desire to a programme for social change, is Edward Carpenter<sup>3</sup>. Likewise, though in a different guise, Oscar Wilde's anti-establishmentarianism led him to sympathize with anarchist politics. He signed a petition in support of the famous anarchists, the Haymarket Martyrs, and described himself in one interview as "something of an anarchist"<sup>4</sup>. His essay 'The Soul of Man Under Socialism', with its advocacy of socialism and individualism, has become an important anarchist statement; indeed, in the 2004 entry in Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Wilde's essay is described as "perhaps the most memorable and certainly the most aesthetic statement of anarchist theory in the English language"<sup>5</sup>.

Quentin Crisp's wonderful memoir *The Naked Civil Servant*, and the film of the same name, recall how violently Crisp was treated not only by straight society but also by the gay subculture who were desperately trying to pass as straight in order to avoid the type of violence Crisp encountered daily due to his extremely effeminate or flaming appearance, with his henna'ed hair, and, in his own words, "dumb with lipsick and blind with mascara". In a very real sense, it comes down to whether one wants to fit in, pass, be accepted, or whether one wants to reject normative society and live on the margins. Queer is about saying that either option is a political one. Not to challenge the normative values of heterosexual society is to maintain and perpetrate those values. But queer is also about saying that for some people it isn't even a choice, and those people have a right to live without fear of violence.

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<sup>3</sup> See Sheila Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter: A Life of Liberty and Love* (Verso, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> See Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* (Hamish Hamilton, 1987, 273-310).

<sup>5</sup> See David Goodway, *Anarchist Seeds Beneath the Snow: Left-Libertarian Thought and British Writers From William Morris to Colin Ward* (Liverpool University Press, 2006, pp.62-92).

In a pluralist and truly democratic society there should be room for everyone, not just those people who conform to acceptable standards of the dominant ideology. Because we do not yet live in such a society, there is a need to fight in order to defend people's rights to sexual self-determination, and that fight necessarily challenges the *status quo*. As Michael Warner writes

Because the logic of the sexual order is so deeply embedded by now in an indescribably wide range of social institutions, and is embedded in the most standard accounts of the world, queer struggles aim not just at toleration or equal status but at challenging those institutions and accounts. The dawning realization that themes of homophobia and heterosexism may be read in almost any document of our culture means that we are only beginning to have an idea of how widespread those institutions and accounts are (Warner 1993, xiii)

### **An identity without an essence**

Whilst this division between 'lesbian and gay' on one side and 'queer' on the other is a relatively new phenomenon, the conflict it dramatizes has dogged the history of homosexuality for over one hundred years. As Warner comments,

Queer politics has not just replaced older modes of lesbian and gay identity; it has come to exist alongside those older modes, opening up new possibilities and problems whose relation to more familiar problems is not always clear. Queer theory, in short, has much work to do just in keeping up with queer political culture. If it contributes to the self-clarification of the struggles and wishes of the age, it may make the world queerer than ever (*ibid*, xxviii)

Before the term 'queer' came into common currency as a (dia)critical, affirmative and radical self-denomination, as opposed to a term of abuse from others, the term 'lesbian and gay' stood for progressive and radical political engagement with changing the ways homosexuality was

perceived and treated in heteronormative culture. The gay movement has always been torn by a conflict of interests between those who want social reform and those who want revolution. In this sense, ‘queer’ is just another name for those who want revolution, those who choose to live outside of and thereby challenge society’s norms. According to Foucault

It's not only a matter of integrating this strange little practice of making love with someone of the same sex into pre-existing cultures; it's a matter of constructing cultural forms (cited in Halperin 1995, 80)

As such, queer is nothing new. For as long as there has been a form of homosexual politics there have been those who wanted assimilation and those who wanted something else, some new cultural forms. What is new about ‘queer’ politics or theory is the sophisticated level of theoretical engagement, which has taken its cue from post-structuralism and the critical insights that has engendered.

Without Foucault, in particular, queer might never have happened, although it is a word he himself never used. (He died in 1984). What David M. Halperin shows in his book *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* is that Foucault’s analysis of society enabled a way of thinking that allowed for sexuality to be seen as something to be challenged rather than as something to be embraced and accepted on the terms set down by society. Foucault famously declared that it’s not a question of discovering or liberating who we are, but of refusing who we are, of resisting the norm. In a manner typical of post-structuralism, the concept of the homosexual was opened up by Foucault to expand and problematize its meaning. Rather than being an essence, it became for him a possibility of moving beyond the very notion of essence or identity and into a realm of experimentation with alternative ways of structuring society. What this means is that the notion of a homosexual identity, for Foucault, was another way of exerting power over individuals. It becomes something else to conform to. Instead, he wanted homosexuality to provide an opportunity for society to change radically and for new types of human relationships and ways of being to be explored, what he called a stylistics of existence that took the self as something to be constructed and not simply to be discovered and liberated. Halperin writes:

Queer is by definition *whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. *There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers.* It is an identity without an essence (Halperin 1995, 62, original emphasis)

For Foucault, it was the challenge of anonymous and promiscuous sexual encounters that provided new routes for being homosexual, ways which did not conform to the heterosexual assumptions about what constitutes a relationship, or what constitutes sexuality. But being queer is not prescriptive – and it is not being into SM sex, or fisting, or promiscuity that marks one as queer. Queer is whatever it at odds with the norm. Queer is about not simply imitating the norm but exploring alternatives, and as such it has an inherently political motivation that sees sexuality itself as inherently political. For this reason, sexuality becomes the terrain upon which most queer theory and practice works. But it does so by opening up the term sexuality and challenging its definitions and exploring the ways in which sexuality can be understood, and how we might dismantle or deconstruct our Western assumptions about what sexuality is. It was for this reason that Foucault focused on fisting, because it is a sexual act that does not use the genitals, but reinvents sexuality, or pleasure, as something non-genital.

For the same reason he was interested in forging new forms of relationships – ones that did not conform to heterosexual models of family and partnership. He proposed some form of adoption whereby any human being could adopt another – it need not, he argued, be a form of connection restricted to an adult and a child.

In a very real sense, it isn't possible to give a queer agenda as such because queer is about exploration and invention. As Halperin writes

'Queer'...does not designate a class of already objectified pathologies or perversions; rather, it describes a horizon of possibility whose precise extent and heterogeneous scope cannot in principle be delimited in advance. It is from the eccentric positionality occupied by the queer subject that it may become possible to envision a variety of possibilities for reordering the relations among sexual behaviours, erotic identities, constructions of gender, forms of knowledge, regimes of enunciation, logics of

representation, modes of self-construction, and practices of community – for restructuring, that is, the relations among power, truth and desire (Halperin 1995, 62)

As such, queer is a practice or process of critique, an ongoing challenge to whatever stands as the norm. And over the seventeen years since it emerged as a critical term it has come to stand for different things and be used to critique different aspects of contemporary life.

### **Like a rhizome**

Today, some of the most interesting queer work is grounded in the understanding queer as, “a political metaphor without a fixed referent”, to quote David L. Eng, Judith Halberstam and José Esteban Muñoz. This, they argue, allows sexuality to be “intersectional, not extraneous to other modes of difference”, something which provides for a more focused interrogation of “the social processes that not only produced and recognized but also normalized and sustained identity”. As such, the political promise of the term resides “specifically in its broad critique of multiple social antagonisms, including race, gender, class, nationality, and religion, in addition to sexuality” (Eng *et al* 2005, 1). This erotics of identity, this linking of sexuality to the wider socio-political field provides queer with a broad base from which to direct its critique. And this multiplicity is a direct result of the poststructuralist expansion of critique to become trans-disciplinary. Like a rhizome, queer has made its way into anthropology, philosophy, fine art, literature, film, geography, social theory, history, economics and aesthetics. It has informed, in its short history, many forms of pedagogy and knowledge. I would like, for the remainder of the essay, over a brief overview of where queer theory is at right now.

Challenging the ‘homonormativity’ of first wave queer theorists, who were seen as predominantly white, male and middleclass, a great deal of important work is coming from queers of colour, queers from non-white, non-Western countries and epistemologies<sup>6</sup>. What

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<sup>6</sup> A far from exhaustive list would include: Roderick A. Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Towards a Queer of Color Critique* (University of Minnesota Press 2003); Siobhan B. Somerville, *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture* (Duke University Press 2000); Robert Reid-Pharr, *Once You Go Black: Choice, Desire and the Black American Intellectual* (NYU Press 2007); José Esteban Muñoz,

emerges from this work is a queer epistemology that “insists that we embark on expanded investigations of normalization and intersectionality” (Eng *et al* 2005, 5). Whilst the term ‘queer’ is noticeable by its absence in the 1997 volume *Sites of Desire, Economies of Desire: Sexualities in Asia and the Pacific*, this collection of essays is nevertheless aware of recent theoretical manoeuvres of interdisciplinarity within the field of sexuality, and therefore “query both an easy essentialism and an easy relativism by focusing on cross-cultural exchanges in sexualities – exchanges in meanings and fantasies as well as the erotic liaisons of bodies”(Jolly and Manderson 1997, 1)<sup>7</sup>. José Esteban Muñoz, for example, focuses on non-white performance art to demonstrate how rage functions to politicize these performances, which thereby come to represent “a bid to take space in the social that has been colonized by the logics of white normativity and heteronormativity”(Muñoz 1999, xii). Through a process of what he calls ‘queer worldmaking’, these disidentificatory performances dramatize a performativity that “willfully disavows that which majoritarian culture has decreed as the ‘real’” (196). As a result, such performances offer “a utopian blueprint for a possible future while, at the same time, staging a new political formation in the present”(200).

Roderick A. Ferguson also investigates the useful ways in which race and queer intersect and imbricate as discursive fields saturated with power. Using Foucault’s nonhierarchical model of power as discursive technique, Ferguson offers the insight that “sexuality has a variety of deployments in which we might observe its constitution through discourses of race, gender, and class”, suggesting that “if there is any point to the study of sexuality at all, it is in the observation and clarification of this insight”(in Eng *et al* 2005, 99). Jasbir K. Puar offers one such example of such a clarification of these intersections by exploring the war on terror and using it “to rearticulate what queer theory and studies of sexuality have to say about the metatheories and the

*Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (University of Minnesota Press 1999); David L. Eng, *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America* (Duke University Press, 2001); Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco’s Chinatown* (University of California Press 2001). Elizabeth A. Povinelli and George Chauncey (eds) *Thinking Sexuality Transnationally*, a special issue of GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies Vol. 5 no. 4 (Duke University Press, 1999)

<sup>7</sup> Whilst the term ‘queer’ is noticeable by its absence in the 1997 volume *Sites of Desire, Economies of Desire: Sexualities in Asia and the Pacific*, this collection of essays is nevertheless aware of recent theoretical manoeuvres of interdisciplinarity within the field of sexuality, and therefore “query both an easy essentialism and an easy relativism by focusing on cross-cultural exchanges in sexualities – exchanges in meanings and fantasies as well as the erotic liaisons of bodies”(Jolly and Manderson 1997, 1).

‘real-politics’ of Empire”(ibid, 121). She criticizes what she calls ‘queer liberalism’ for failing “to interrogate the epistemological will to knowledge that invariably reproduces the disciplinary interests of the U.S. nation-state”(122). Through a reading of the sexualizations and racializations of the figure of the suicide bomber, she develops, instead of the concept of intersectionality, the Deleuzean concept of (queer) assemblage: a dispersal and disavowal of identity and the type of politics it engenders. “As a queer assemblage – distinct from the ‘queering’ of an entity or identity – race and sexuality are denaturalized through the impermanence, the transience of the suicide bomber; the fleeting identity replayed backward through its dissolution”(130). Within the figure of the suicide bomber – or monster-terrorist-fag<sup>8</sup> - especially at the moment of death (a death which is not only of the self but of the surrounding others) “the ontological affect of the body renders it a newly becoming body, queerly...Temporal narratives of progression are upturned as death and becoming fuse into one”(129). Queer and temporal rupture have been fruitfully intersected by other recent work. Judith Halberstam’s *In a Queer Time and Place* (2005) ambitiously claims queer time and queer space as pressing contemporary concerns for understanding how queer lives unfold along trajectories radically different to those mapped out by heteronormative imperatives. Within queer space-time, “willfully eccentric modes of being” press forward and compel us into formulating “new temporal logics” that are not chained to the scripts offered by straight space-time: family, inheritance, child-rearing (1-2). This isn’t all about utopian freedom, however; Halberstam also considers how AIDS has impacted on queer life-narratives and severely diminished the horizons of possibility for many gay communities, creating a new emphasis on the here and now (2). Whilst AIDS was very much responsible for the emergence of queer politics and theory, in the years since, due to changes in medication, perhaps, the virus is less present in writings about queer. The phenomenon of barebacking is appearing more and more as a controversial issue in the queer community<sup>9</sup>, and in many ways is intimately linked with notions of time, of curtailed futures, of risked life-times.

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<sup>8</sup> Jasbir K. Puar and Amit Rai, “Monster-Terrorist-Fag: The War on Terrorism and the Production of Docile Patriots”, *Social Text*, no.72 (2002), 117-48.

<sup>9</sup> See Tim Dean, *Unlimited Intimacy: Reflections on the Subculture of Barebacking* (University of Chicago Press, forthcoming, May 2009)

In 2007, an issue of the journal *GLQ* entitled *Queer Temporalities* offered an overview of how the concept of time has emerged as an important and contentious concept within queer theory. How is linear time queered by something more insistent and insistently erotic, an interruption of ‘straightforward’ teleological life scripts? What does it mean to queer time? How do queer lives map time differently? What are the imbrications of time and sexuality?<sup>10</sup> Or, as Elizabeth Freeman, the guest editor, puts it, how do “marginalized time schemes” connect with “subjugated or disavowed erotic experiences, including male homoeroticism, same-sex marriage, interracial coupling, heterosexual feminine desire, mourning, incest, and paedophilia”, which allows us to “reimagine ‘queer’ as a set of possibilities produced out of temporal and historical difference, or see the manipulation of time as a way to produce both bodies and relationalities (or even nonrelationality)” (Freeman 2007, 159). The queer production of nonrelationality has been taken up and developed in the work of Leo Bersani, Lee Edelman and William Haver.

For Bersani, “the elaborating of certain erotic preferences into a ‘character’ – into a kind of erotically determined essence – can never be a disinterested scientific enterprise” because “the attempted stabilizing of identity is inherently a disciplinary project” (Bersani 1995, 3). By ‘de-gaying gayness’, gay men and lesbians have, he argues, almost disappeared, assimilating to the mainstream so much that “we have erased ourselves in the process of denaturalizing the epistemic and political regimes that have constructed us”(4). And we have done this to the point that “we have *learned to desire* from within the heterosexual norms and gendered structures that we can no longer think of as natural, or as exhausting all the options for self-identification”(6, original emphasis). Whilst recognizing that “unidentifiability is an act of defiance”(32), Bersani offers instead a reading of homosexuality that imagines “a curative collapsing of social difference into a radical homo-ness, where the subject might begin again, differentiating itself from itself and thereby reconstituting sociality” (177). For Bersani, homosexuality is queer precisely when it allows for this challenge to standard accounts of (inter)subjectivity in the interests of rethinking the concept of sociality, considering homosexuality precisely as anti-

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<sup>10</sup> Again, a by no means exhaustive list of titles would include: Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Duke University Press, 2004); Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (NYU Press 2005); Elizabeth Freeman (ed) *Queer Temporalities: A Special edition of GLQ Journal* (Duke University Press, 2007); Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Harvard University Press, 2008).

social phenomenon, with all the critical force that such anti-sociality generates. Taking this notion of queer anti-sociality further, Edelman suggests that, not only does queerness figure, “outside and beyond its political symptoms, the place of the social order’s death drive”, but also, more radically, ‘queerness attains its ethical value precisely insofar as it accedes to that place, accepting its figural status as resistance to the viability of the social while insisting on the inextricability of such resistance from every social structure” (Edelman 2004, 3). Such a conception of queerness, he argues, “would deliberately sever us from ourselves, from the assurance, that is, of *knowing* ourselves and hence of knowing our ‘good’”(5). In this severing of ourselves from the safe position of being an object about which knowledge can be gained, we start to see “not only that politics conforms to the temporality of desire [...] but also that politics is a name for the temporalization of desire”(9). For Edelman, queer thus designates anyone who is “stigmatized for failing to comply with heteronormative mandates”, the most insidious of which is, for him, “the familiar familial narrativity of reproductive futurism”(17). In response to those mandates, “the queer must insist on disturbing, on queering, social organization as such”(*ibid*). This resistance to the ontologizing of history focuses its energies on “the epistemological impasse, the aporia of rationality, the nonidentity of things”, by, ultimately, “exploding the subject of knowledge” (in Freeman 2007, 181). Queer epistemology for Edelman is about “an encounter with what can’t be assimilated to any systematic understanding, what doesn’t conduce to the logic of periodization or identity”, or what he calls “the queerness of time’s refusal to submit to a temporal logic” (*ibid*, 188). Edelman proposes an understanding of queer that figures itself as “a nonteleological negativity” (*ibid*, 195) which, as such, insists on the transformation of what we take to be (fields of) knowledge.

William Haver similarly calls for a queer methodology or research which takes for granted that “there can be no authority”, a queer research “which brings us to the inevitability of the erotic which it has been education’s sole purpose to avoid” (Haver 1997, 292). Within the rubric of such an epistemology, relationality as such must be understood as “the site of pure interruption, at which we never arrive because it is never outside the here and now”(*ibid*). For Haver, queer theory must refuse to totalize the social field, and instead implement an interruption to academic business as usual. Drawing on the work of Judith Butler, Sue Golding and Michael

Hardt, Haver suggests that queer can usefully demarcate the limits of knowledge precisely by recognizing that it “can never amount to an epistemological capture of an object by an understanding on behalf of knowledge” (283). Locating queer theory’s philosophical roots, Haver suggests that queer research could do worse than recognize that whilst it cannot do without concepts, those concepts do not correspond to the object named. There is always some remainder, or supplement, that reveals itself precisely in concealing itself, that constitutes a limit or interruption in the production of knowledge. As such, queer theory is most usefully employed in recognizing the ways in which pedagogy reproduces culture by creating ‘good citizens’, based on the assumption that there is “an essential correspondence between knowing and acting, between the True and the Good: the right thinking makes for right acting”(287). Following Deborah P. Britzman’s work on queer pedagogy<sup>11</sup>, Haver argues that “thought must confront its own essential and enabling insufficiency (290) if truly queer interruptions are to be made, ones that refuse epistemological respectability.

Similarly engaged with queer theory’s origins in a certain critical philosophical tradition is the work of Sara Ahmed on queer phenomenology<sup>12</sup>. Exploring what it means to have a sexual orientation, Ahmed engages with the philosophies of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, designating queer the disorientations that allow normativity to take form. Queer, for her, thus has at least two senses: firstly, it designates what is ‘oblique’ or off line’; secondly, it describes specific sexual practices. It is a way “to disturb the order of things” (Ahmed 2006, 161). Sexual deviation is thus always already social, and therefore political, deviation: “queer as a sexual orientation ‘queers’ more than sex, just as other kinds of queer effects can in turn end up ‘queering’ sex. It is important to make the oblique angle of queer do this work, even if it risks placing different kinds of queer effects alongside each other”(ibid, 161-2). How might we understand the ‘orientation’ in sexual orientation as having a spatial dimensionality? What is a queer space? How is space or place queered? How do we understand concepts such as the queer urban? The epistemology of the cruising ground, or the cottage. Sexualized public spaces and public sex. Important work here has been done by Sue Golding, Michael Warner, Samuel R.

<sup>11</sup> Deborah P. Britzman, ‘Is There a Queer Pedagogy? Or, Stop Reading Straight’, *Education Theory*, 45: 2 (Spring 1995), pp.151-165.

<sup>12</sup> See Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Duke University Press, 2007).

Delany and Paul Hallam, amongst others<sup>13</sup>. As David Bell and Gill Valentine describe it in their important volume *Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexualities*, the work of Sue Golding “discusses the ‘impossible geography’ of the city as a site for reconfiguring counterhegemonic sexualities. Through a dense deployment of philosophy, physics, politics and pornography, she envisages the ‘creative and wild possibilities’ presented by ‘the “elsewhere” of decadent urban life or the ‘elsewhere of sexual mutation curiosity, as she also calls it’(Bell and Valentine 1995, 16). Delany and Warner offer sophisticated and provocative defences of gay public sex, whilst Hallam’s explorations in Sodom are predicated on the understanding that “any city worth its salt has been called, at one time or another, Sodom”(15).

In his ruminations on queer space theory, John Paul Ricco insists that “The democratization of knowledge production and the articulation of queer (counter-)publics has always been a political aspiration for practitioners of queer theory”<sup>14</sup>. What he calls queer sex space theory

foregrounds its discursivity and configures itself as simply one materialization of queer sexual insurgency and erotic itinerancy. It does this by citing that which forever eludes the capacities of identity, representation, and objectification – mechanisms of referentiality and the evidentiary. It is in this way that the forms of theory and practice being put forth here are anti-normative, or more specifically, queer (i.e. difficult and nearly impossible to cite and site) (149)

One way Ricco suggests that queer sex space theory might disseminate is through other routes than the merely academic. Citing William Haver’s comment that “it may well be that the university, or education institutions generally, will not be the site of queer research” (1997, 289), Ricco suggests activist networks, sites of ‘alternative’ culture and independent bookstores as

<sup>13</sup> Delany, Samuel R. *Times Square Red Times Square Blue* (New York University Press, 1999); Golding, S. ‘The excess: an added remark on sex, rubber, ethics, and other impurities’ *New Formations* 19, 1993, 23-8; ‘Quantum philosophy, impossible geographies and a few small points about life, liberty and the pursuit of sex (all in the name of democracy)’, in M. Keith and S. Pile (eds) *Place and the Politics of Identity* Routledge 1993; ‘Sexual Manners’ in V. Harwood, D. Oswell, K. Parkinson and A. Ward (eds) *Pleasure Principles: Politics, Sexuality and Ethics*, Lawrence & Wishart 1993; Hallam, P, *The Book of Sodom*, Verso 1993; Michael Warner, *The Trouble With Normal: Sex Politics and the Ethics of Queer Life* (Harvard University Press 1999).

<sup>14</sup> John Paul Ricco, *The Logic of the Lure* (University of Chicago Press, 2002)

outlets for such work, giving as an example the free pamphlets printed by QUASH (Queers United Against Straight-acting Homosexuals), a Chicago-based queer activist collective in the mid-to-late 90s. As such, this kind of queer sex space theory, in being non-archivable, embodies the risk of “anonymous modes of sociality that abandon situated identities as they become itinerant intensities”, threatening the ‘familiar, the recognizable, the recuperated, and the knowable – all of those anchors in which we think we find assurance of a self and a world”(Ricco, 152).

One of the first questions that arose from the reappropriation of queer as an affirmative and critical term was, “Can the term overcome its constitutive history of injury”, given that “when the term has been used as a paralysing slur, as the mundane interpellation of pathologized sexuality, it has produced the user of the term as the emblem and vehicle of normalization”(Butler 1993, 223)? How have queer identities been forged by a discourse of shame? How has the reappropriation of ‘queer’ as a badge of pride reiterated its history as a shameful insult? What, indeed, are the cultural politics of shame? Eve Sedgwick attaches shame to queer performativity and theatricality in an attempt to rethink the nodalities that constitute it as a structuring fact of identity for certain (‘queer’) people (2003, 64). She suggests that in its integral role in the formation of queer identities, shame can inform and deepen our understandings of performativity and identity politics without reverting back to straightforward essentialism, or binaries of ‘depth’ and ‘surface’, especially in relation to ‘camp’.

In a useful summary of writings on queer shame, Tavia Nyong’o notes that “accounts of shame tend to fall in one of two camps, therapeutic and transfigurative”. In the former camp, he places Patrick Moore’s *Beyond Shame* (2004) and James Gilligan’s *Preventing Violence* (2001), although the latter, according to Nyong’o, “moves a great deal further than Moore toward the transfigurative approach developed in the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Robert Reid-Pharr, and now Kathryn Stockton”(in Freeman 2007, 403)<sup>15</sup>. In exploring the meeting point of ‘queer’ and ‘black’, Stockton “permits her texts to apply themselves to her”, calling for “new modes of

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<sup>15</sup> Patrick Moore, *Beyond Shame: Reclaiming the Abandoned History of Radical Gay Sexuality* (Beacon, 2004); James Gilligan, *Preventing Violence* (Thames & Hudson, 2001); Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Duke University Press, 2002); Robert Reid-Pharr, *Black Gay Man: Essays* (NYU Press, 2001); Kathryn Bond Stockton, *Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame: Where “Black” Meets “Queer”* (Duke University Press, 2006).

reading that break down the distinctions of subject and object animating many identity projects”(404).

Queer shame has, of course, emerged in response to Gay Pride, and Matt Bernstein Sycamore, one of the original founders of the Gay Shame activist group in New York and San Francisco, gives an account of their activities in ‘Gay Shame: From Queer Autonomous Space to Direct Action Extravaganza’<sup>16</sup>. Gay Shame was a queer anti-consumerist direct action group. Much like the early 90s homocore/queercore groups, or the Riot Grrrls, it was characterized by a DIY/Punk aesthetic/ethic and a rage against the ‘off-the-peg’ identity of the commercial gay scene. Focused around music and ‘zine culture, this aspect of queer living is defiantly non-academic, non-institutionalized, and as such currently underwritten/under-researched<sup>17</sup>. Tied in with this is the emerging field of queer economics<sup>18</sup>, in which the cooption of lesbian and gay identities and politics by late capitalist models of consumerism is seen to dismantle any necessary or immediate link between dissident sexuality and socialist or Left politics.

Since Butler used aspects of cross-gender behaviour to exemplify her theory of gender performativity in *Gender Trouble* (1991), transgender/transsexuality has emerged as its own field or discipline and as a consistently queer challenge to gender binaries. As Jay Prosser has noted,

In its earliest formations, in what are considered its foundational texts, queer studies can be seen to have been crucially dependent on the figure of transgender [...] Seized on as a definitively queer force that ‘troubled’ the identity categories of gender, sex, and sexuality – or rather revealed them to be always already fictional and precarious – the trope of crossing was most often impacted with if not explicitly illustrated by the transgendered subject’s crossing their several boundaries at once: both the boundaries

<sup>16</sup> See *That's Revolting: Queer Strategies for Resisting Assimilation*, Mattilda, AKA Matt Bernstein Sycamore (Soft Skull Press, 2004), 237-262.

<sup>17</sup> See Bill Hsu, ‘Spew: The Queer Punk Convention’ in *Postmodern Culture* Vol.2, No.1, 1991; Alan Sears, ‘Queer Anti-Capitalism: What’s Left of Lesbian and Gay Liberation?’ in *Science & Society* Vol.69, No.1 (2005); Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality?: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics and the Attack on Democracy* (Beacon Press, 2003).

<sup>18</sup> See Amy Gluckman and Betsy Reed (eds), *Homo Economics: Capitalism, Communism and Lesbian and Gay Life* (Routledge, 1997); Joyce Jacobsen & Adam Zeller, *Queer Economics: A Reader* (Routledge, 2008); Hennessy, R., *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism* (Routledge, 2000); Morton, D., *The Material Queer: A LesBiGay Cultural Studies Reader* (Westview Press, 1996).

between gender, sex and sexuality and the bound that structures each as a binary category (in Stryker and Whittle 2006, 258)

Post-Butlerian queer performativity finds itself most dramatically played out within the movement across genders and the refusal to acknowledge – except in the most critical way – gender dimorphism<sup>19</sup>. On the other hand, performativity, and its anti-essentialist concept of constructed gender identity, does not, in many ways, speak to a transgender community for whom an essential, ‘true’ and inappropriately bodied gender holds true, providing a position from which to work towards rectifying the biological ‘mistake’ via radical surgery. This is not a conflict that will be settled any time soon, and critical queer energies will be deployed, no doubt, on both sides.

Ultimately, and in conclusion, the ongoing problem with queer, which is a problem Derrida predicted for deconstruction (from which queer gets much of its critical energy), is the ongoing threat of institutionalization that occurs when a critical term enters the academy, a taming of the critical energy, a domestication, a declawing and detoothing of its sharpest assets.

Queer, if it names anything, names a critical impulse that can never, must never, settle.

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<sup>19</sup> See any of Kate Bornstein’s work; also, Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (eds), *The Transgender Studies Reader* (CRC Press, 2006); Viviane K. Namaste, *Invisible Lives: The Erasure of Transsexual and Transgendered People* (University of Chicago Press, 2000).

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### **For Queer Eyes Only?: Creating Queer Performance Art at University**

A number of social changes over the last few decades have resulted in the rise of cross-gendered casting; I think that's a good start, but cross-gendered casting merely scratches the surface of what we could be really be doing theatrically with gender. There (sic) so much more to playing with gender than simply going from man to woman or from woman to man....What might you build with bodies that walk beyond the boundaries of what's allowed by the proprietors of the popular culture? (Bornstein 2004: 17)

This quote taken from Kate Bornstein's article *Theatre and the Future of the Body* featured in *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory*, reads like a transgender performance call to arms and as a queer performance artist in academia, I couldn't help but to rise to the challenge and create a performance that would walk within and without such boundaries. Bornstein is essentially describing the performative convention that I have been developing as a dramatic practice towards a PhD in Performance Practice at the University of Exeter. Throughout my research I have staged and defined what I term 'trans-dressing' and have offered clear exercises and insights to playing with gender in front of audiences.

Trans-dressing, unlike theatrical conventions such as Drag or cross-dressing, oscillates between and beyond gender categories, constructing and deconstructing gender(s) fluidly throughout a performance. Throughout my research I use the prefix *trans-* to evoke the sense of crossing over, between and mostly beyond categories. In my use of trans- I also reference transgender attentive politics and scholarly writing derived from the queer and academic community. My description and technique of trans-dressing in performance is based upon queer, feminist, transgender, and gender performativity theories introduced by such scholars as Judith Butler, Jill Dolan and Judith Halberstam. In my work I have taken these theories and turned them

into practical exercises and performances that investigate and play with gender in ‘the performance of the performance’ for diverse audiences.

In this article I would like to detail how my practice-led research resulted in an original performance that was underpinned by queer, gender and performance theories and how my queer subjectivity and trans-dressing performance practice was intertwined in the process. I also aim to describe my understanding of gender performance theory and how I infuse theory into practice in order to (re)present and deconstruct gender axioms theatrically. I will also detail my devising process and set it within queer methodologies, practices and discourses, and finally, I endeavour to describe the academic reception that the performance garnered. As a result of the audience’s interpretation of *Through a Glass Darkly*, the controversial question, which is also the title of this paper, was posed. Should queer performance and theory remain ‘for queer eyes only?’

## **Performing Gender**

One major discovery that resulted from my performance explorations throughout my practice-led research was the importance of the audience in the interactive event of ‘gendering’ the performer. I learned that ‘gender proves to be performative’ (Butler 1999: 33), defined and performed through repetitive acts of social interaction and intelligibility. These acts do not exist in a vacuum, but rather in constant consort with an external audience; for one does not perform gender acts for oneself but for an audience that dictates and recognises those acts and therefore interprets the performance in order to gender the performer.

This gendering process I am describing originates in the social ‘everyday’ performances of gender deemed by the status quo as ‘natural’. My use of dramatic language such as ‘acts’, ‘perform’, ‘audience’, and ‘performer’ references terminology used by gender theorists. They have borrowed from theatrical and dramatic terminology in order to highlight theories of gender and ‘performativity’. Their appropriation of theatrical language also implicates gender as not a state of being but as an action, a doing, and a doing that is not for oneself but for an assumed audience and therefore is a social, political and dramatic act. When a performer on stage

highlights the theatrical semiotics of gender, particularly in cross- and trans- gender play, her act doubles not only as a (re)presentation, but a social and political critique of gender, marking gender performance as ‘queer’ in context. Jill Dolan writes: ‘To be queer is not who you *are*, it’s what you *do*, it’s your relation to dominant power, and your relation to marginality, as a place of empowerment’ (Dolan 2002: 5). Gender performance and theatre is embedded in ‘queer’ acts of deconstruction, discord and the subversion of dominant ideologies: ‘Theatre and queer theory challenge ideas of fixed identities. Both break through the seemingly impermeable walls of gender and sexual categories by unmooring them from the idea that they derive absolutely and inevitably from an original objective source’ (Solomon 2002: 14).

This is not to say that dominate ideologies have no value in queer explorations of gender performance and theory. I have discovered, through my approach, that the social ‘everyday’ performance of gender and its ontological material effects, language, codes and acts are blueprints for the ‘extra-daily’ performance of gender on the stage. It stands to reason that if the audience in the theatre is the same audience that ‘genders’ the actor on the street outside the theatre, that this same audience will use the same gendering process and language to gender the character the actor plays on the stage. Therefore it is imperative, particularly in cross- and trans - gender castings that the actor not only understands this process and its codes but employ practices that help her build her character’s gender in consort with or against the social and political gender ideology of her ‘theatrical’ audience.

This performance of socialized ideologies of gender construction is furthered articulated and set against theatrical language and modes of presentation by Elin Diamond:

Gender refers to the words, gestures, appearances, ideas and behavior that dominant culture understands as indices of feminine or masculine identity. When spectators ‘see’ gender they are seeing (and reproducing) the cultural signs of gender and by implication, the gender ideology of a culture. Gender, in fact provides a perfect illustration of ideology at work since ‘feminine’ or ‘masculine’ behavior usually appears to be a natural – and thus fixed and unalterable – extension of biological sex.  
(Diamond 1988: 84)

## The Dance of Darkness

*Through a Glass Darkly*, was constructed as a performance that would not only stage my growing research-led practice towards a PhD, but also to foreground trans-gender theory in performance under the umbrella of queer social and artistic politics. Transgender theory and politics as described by Katrina Roen ‘are informed by postmodern conceptions of subjectivity, queer understandings of sexuality and gender, radical politics of transgression and the poststructuralist deconstruction of binaries...’ (Roen 2001: 11) and it was with these radical conceptions that I originally wanted to shape my performance. In the end, it was through a playful embodiment of trans-gender performance that I was able to stage queer theory and politics within a personal viewpoint and public event that constructed and deconstructed gender and its prescriptive categories.

My overall interest in queer performances of gender and ‘radical politics of transgression’ led me to study transmogrification of the body in performance, particularly the work of Japanese ‘butoh’ artists. In 2006 I was invited to study butoh with renowned practitioner Endo Tadashi and I was introduced to his personal practice of butoh-MA.

MA is a word derived from Japanese Zen Buddhist philosophy and means ‘emptiness’ or ‘the space between’. It describes a state of being that, as Endo explains in dance terms, is ‘...the moment just at the end of a movement and before the beginning of the next.’ (Endo 2006: 2) Immediately I was inspired by the shape-shifting and metamorphic aesthetics embodied in the practice. Endo’s practice of butoh-MA seeks to perform between genders, and other dualisms including life and death, visibility and invisibility, night and day, heaven and earth, and so on, revealing that there is always an ‘in between’ and ‘other’ space to be explored.

Like Endo Tadashi, my practice of trans-dressing is rooted in the act of exploring the ‘in between’, ‘other’, or ‘queer’ space in performance. My interest and exploration of the intersection between gender categories is considered a butohist quality as butoh dance ‘befuddles the rational mind...it survives on images that continually change, riding the moment of meaning in transition.’ (Fraleigh and Nakamura 2006: 3-4) Although butoh is a dance form, its ethos of

‘becoming’ echoes arguments within gender performativity theory, and its focus upon the intersections between corporeality and nothingness mirrors my trans-dressing practice. Also, at the core of butohist philosophy and theory, is the rebellion and deconstruction of the social body as it is ‘culturally conditioned or constructed.’ (Fraleigh and Nakamura 2006: 73) Butoh’s aesthetics are based upon queer models and practice, and, particularly in butoh-MA, its shape-shifting between genders fundamentally implies a transgender discourse.

My use of butoh-MA did not result in dance compositions (as is usually the process) but in building my trans-gender performance, artistic approach, and radical play with the audience. My use of butoh’s theatrical and philosophical approaches to creating performance resulted in a multi-layered cross-cultural trans-formative context for the staging of *Through a Glass Darkly*. This context guided my creative process in writing, devising and performing my production.

### **Devising a Solo Performance**

As a solo performance artist I have always had great difficulty in working alone, yet my solo performances have always resulted in the most artistic and creative explorations of my innermost expressions. In nearly every solo performance I have devised, I have staged layers of meaning through appropriation, adaptation, integration, deconstruction, and re-imaginings. *Through a Glass Darkly* was a similar attempt. My approach to solo performance is not unlike Matthew Goulish’s description of Elizabeth LeCompte’s work from the Wooster Group:

Although LeCompte’s approach appears fundamentally deconstructive, one sees how the process of gathering, altering, and recombining texts easily lends itself to the construction of the more-self. The texts become a layer on the surface of the actors, and that surface then becomes the more-self. This may be what Gilles Deleuze meant when he spoke of, in contrast to Jung’s “collective unconscious,” the existence of the “constructed unconscious” and its imminence to creativity. (Goulish 2000: 83)

In addition to performing my approach in a theatrical context, *Through a Glass Darkly* was my attempt to construct and stage the unconscious of a character caught ‘between’ genders. As I attempted to devise a performance that would evoke an unconscious or dreamlike effect, I started to recognize echoes of the ‘more-self’ within the piece. In the beginning, I tried to delineate between the character and myself, but soon, lines blurred and I realised that this blurring was essential to the process. If, as I had argued, trans-performance seeks to transcend and explode all boundaries, then certainly it should follow that the boundary between self and character would be territory for such disruption and eventually be blurred as well.

This key concept was further explored in my work as I integrated advanced technologies into my performance and began researching aspects of intermediality within my staging. Like trans-gender politics and theory, intermediality attempts to break through boundaries and criss-cross between binary oppositions:

...intermediality is associated with the blurring of generic boundaries, crossover and hybrid performances, intertextuality, intermediality, hypermediality, and a self-conscious reflexivity that displays the devices of performance in performance.(Chapple and Kattenbelt 2006: 11)

Foregrounding the devices of performance, particularly in application to gender in performance, was exactly what I had aimed to accomplish, and with the addition of intermediality, I had introduced into my process a new means whereby I could do so.

### **Inter- Trans- Mediality**

*Through a Glass Darkly* was devised in the final ‘practice’ year of my PhD and at a time when I was beginning a very difficult multi-media editing process of the video documentation of my research. The more I engaged with these advanced technologies to support my thesis, the more I became fascinated with the performance possibilities new media introduced. I began to research

theoretical applications of technology on performance and integrated these applications in the staging and devising of *Through a Glass Darkly*.

Of particular interest in incorporating technology into my work was exploring arguments and examples of live/mediatised performance possibilities. I wanted to incorporate a possible ‘future’ trajectory of gender performance and felt that advanced technologies and new media juxtaposed with ‘the live’ body/performer would create a nexus of intersections that could theatrically stage and foreground transgender performance and its future outcomes. Freda Chapple and Chiel Kattenbelt write about the changing representations and transformative performance meanings imbued in applications of intermediality to performance, ‘These new modes of representation are leading to new perceptions about theatre and performance and to generating new cultural, social and psychological meanings in performance.’ (Chappele and Kattenbelt 2006: 11) Furthermore, intermediality in performance negotiates through between spaces, creating new sites for performance investigations whilst riding on its own wave of change and ‘becoming’:

...(Intermediality) is creating new modes of representation; new dramatrical strategies; new ways of structuring and staging words, images and sounds; new ways of positioning bodies in time and space; new ways of creating temporal and spatial interrelations. (Chappele and Kattenbelt 2006: 11)

Fundamental aspects of intermediality and butoh also influenced my writing methodology as I created the written components of the performance. During my dramaturgical practice, I approached creating a written text that conveyed intertextualities, particularly as they are represented in the staging and artistic viewpoint of my developing ‘play’. I wrote primarily in spurts, which served to subvert any tendency to write towards a defined narrative or linear structure and therefore my writing methodology resulted in a ‘queering’ of the text. I also wrote in prose and poetry on specific themes, such as binary oppositions; night/day, life/death, masculine/feminine, etc, and this acted to highlight the experience of living in the shifting sands of ‘between-ness’ which was my attempt at textualizing a trans- experience.

From *Through a Glass Darkly* written and performed by Terri Power, 2006:

***Seeking to Destroy***

People seek out my eyes. They want to look into them  
to ‘know’ my sex.

They can’t read me and it disturbs them.

They want to know what sex I am so they can determine their relationship to me. If they think I am male, they will show me respect, move out of my way, give me space in this world and let me walk on by. If they think I am female, they may look down upon me, push me aside, stop my mouth, and objectify my body.

They need to determine if I am equal or lesser than. They calculate, compare, analyze, dissect and weigh me up. It’s a gendering science in which I defy all social and biological laws. I suppose it’s hard for them to wrap their little brains around that.

I imagine that this practice will continue after my death.

Perhaps one day anthropologists will dig up my bones  
and sex me ‘female’ because my pelvis bone is fused. They’ll determine that I never  
had children and make all kinds of assumptions based on my body.

Under a microscope my DNA might tell another story. Maybe they will note high traces  
of testosterone and discover the gay gene, and with this forensic information they’ll  
make new assumptions about me based on my body.

What remains is not me.

I am much more than hardware and compounds.

### **Jelly Fish**

I am from the sea  
 Nothing about me is static or permanent  
 I am fluid. I slip through fingers.  
 I rise and fall with the tide.  
 I appear and disappear in the wake of a wave  
 In seafoam and shattered shells.

My main aim in mixing these textual forms throughout the piece was to highlight the dramaturgical performance of liminality and subliminality in context with an embodiment and/or disembodiment of gender performativity. By foregrounding these performances through text, particularly in spoken form, I aimed to further stage my performance of ‘between’ and ‘crossing’. In my view, these pieces of text represented the liminal ‘body’ and the subliminal ‘essence’ and the socio-political content they conveyed was furthered through my extensive use of metaphor and imagery throughout the performance.

### **Trains and (Trans)portation**

The main body of the piece, ‘the text’, was written and envisioned primarily on trains in southwest England. At first, I didn’t think much about this aspect of the process, except noting that I had time nearly everyday to write in short bursts between my home in Exmouth and my working life in Exeter. As I reflect on the creation and writing process, I can see how trains and transport had influenced the conceptual vision of the piece and furthered my trans-performance investigation.

Riding in trains is, in my experience, a trans- subject position and can inspire deeper ‘constructing of the unconscious’ in writing. My experience of being on these trains is usually

deeply reflective as I forget my body and turn inwards towards my thoughts. I am also inspired into further meditative reflection as I watch the changing scenery pass by through ‘dirty’ train windows. The views are tainted yet spectacular and constantly shifting from the sleepy Exmouth seaside, the still and natural estuary, the rolling Devon hills, to the growing capital city. Unconsciously or serendipitously, this experience is mirrored throughout *Through a Glass Darkly*. In devising the performance and creating the environment for an audience, I wanted to convey these ideas and experiences.

What is interesting to note is that trains are a social technology, moving people across spaces. They have their own social rules and are a microcosm for the world at large. The train world creates sites wherein we are in transition as we are transported from one place to another. When aboard a train we enter a world ‘between’, and unconsciously this location helps to dislocate me, the artist, from my personal ‘world’ and perspective and write from the viewpoint of my character, or rather, my own unconscious musings from the more-self.

### **Bodily Enactments**

As part of my devising and research practice, I also spent long hours studying the performative body on digital video. I wanted to experiment with the technology and its representations and visual applications to the body and gender readings. I had been inspired by the work of contemporary trans-gender artists’ use of bodily acts in their performances such as in the photography of Lauren Cameron. The more I learned about the subversive effects of these performances the more drawn I became to my own explicit use of the body in my performance. I had taped my nude body on digital video in practical experiments with cameras and had planned to show that as a backdrop to my live performance, but I also felt compelled to stage a ‘live’ nude body in performance as well. I believed that in staging a nude body, I could introduce performative bodily discourses into the political and social gender challenges I was already presenting.

In the past few decades, naked bodies have taken the stage to aggressively signal the power of theatre and performance...(throughout these decades) the naked body was presumed to organize a dramaturgical site from which both a political charge and a seductive promise could be launched. The body bared was perceived as enabling the stage and the social. (Case 2002: 186)

In my view, by introducing performative bodily discourses into my trans-gendered dramaturgical structure, I ultimately stage a critique of the social prescriptions of gender and its effects on ‘real’ and ‘lived’ bodies; representing both the ‘archetypal’ gendered body and the ‘subversive’ critique. To me, in this context, the idea is clearly articulated that sex is not gender is not sexuality; that other genders can be performed and read on a ‘naturally’ sexed body ‘revealing’ that ‘natural’ is not, as the preconception maintains, ‘normative’ bodily acts. Furthermore, trans-gender and more specifically trans-sexual bodies and experience have always been a key element in trans- discourse and have fundamental, complex and important relationships to technology. Sue-Ellen Case explains:

Of course the basic problem for the performance theorist is to understand how anything like the performing body might be configured in such a space. The fleshly body, along with other material effects, seems likewise distant, and more ephemeral. Yet there is one kind of body that admits, at base, to virtual, technological intervention – a body enacting, in the flesh, the oscillation between gendering systems and sexual practices – the transsexual body. More than naked, this body displays itself as a construction at the deepest base of physiological and hormonal structures. Moreover, its very technological intervention is the site of the construction of sexual difference. (Case 2002: 195)

I felt that through my nude (re)presentation of the body, set within a woven framework of trans-gender and gender performativity theory along with applications of intermediality and theatics, I was deconstructing social gender performativity, highlighting the performance as a performance through theatrical conventions and the mechanisms of my own technique, and reconstructing

gender(s) through new modes of representations. Performance artist Guillermo Gomez Pena writes about this experience and theatrical use of the body in performance:

Our body is also the very center of our symbolic universe – a tiny model for humankind...and at the same time, a metaphor for the larger socio-political body. If we are capable of establishing all these connections in front of an audience, hopefully others will recognize them in their own bodies. (Gomez-Pena 2005: 23-4).

Through this means, I believed that I was ultimately staging my PhD thesis and Trans-dressing the stage.

### **Shock Spaces and the Contention of Performing ‘Otherness’**

One of my main aims in constructing my performance was to apply queer methodologies and practice to not only the content and devising of the performance but to its delivery and in effect its reception. I wanted to evoke a ‘otherness’ in the delivery of the production to dislodge the final performance outcome from the usual, casual and normative performative experiences audiences, particularly those attending University productions, were anticipating. How I aimed to accomplish this was through many ‘disruptions’ in time, space and content that emerged as ‘shock spaces’. I originally thought that these shock spaces would not be ‘shocking’ but rather simple disruptions or provocations that could allow the audience to interpret the meanings and images being presented in innovative ways. These spaces in practice however, were received by the audiences as quite provocative and so disrupting that the performance’s place of ‘otherness’ was hotly contested as segmented, indecent and even blasphemous to the non-queer audience.

The first shock space was encountered at the very start of the performance. At this point, the audience was led by an attendant dressed in casual attire into a pre-show room. This room was a large empty space with white walls and a clinical/industrial setting. Suspended from the ceiling were three television screens upon which my image was projected out of sequence. Once the audience had all entered the room the attendant started a pre-recorded video of me, the

performer, speaking as ‘the self’ to my ‘standing room only’ audience about the queer performance ‘my persona’ was about to present. As the recording aired each television became increasingly out of sync and the content became harder and harder to comprehend. Suddenly the televisions, one by one, became fuzzy and there was a loud buzzing noise that dominated the studio. All the lights in the pre-show room were turned off and the room was lit by the fuzzy televisions. A soundtrack played with the song ‘Utopia’ from Goldfrapp blaring over the buzzing and the lights were turned on whilst the attendant opened a hidden door in the room instructing the audience to follow him into the next performance space. As the audience moved from the pre-show space to the next performance space, the Utopia song continued through the spaces simultaneously with the audience.

The second performance space was also the site of the second shock space. Although this space was similarly designed like the first, it was larger and had seating set up for the audience facing a blank white wall. There was a bit of a ‘stage space’ with a microphone on a stand to the right and a television on a stand to the left. Once the audience seated themselves the sound track stopped playing and a ‘black font’ quote was projected onto the blank white wall:

“For now we see through a glass darkly” 1 Corinthians 13:12.

At this point in the production the television on the stand was rolled to centre-stage by the attendant who then started a recording that was aired on the small screen. This recording was a recording of a the same television with a fuzzy screen playing in a small white room with a stained glass window just behind it giving off some light. As this recording played a voiceover rang out through speakers in the room of an Evangelical minister giving a sermon about Adam and Eve. The sermon lasted over seven minutes and it seemed like a legitimate sermon at first, but as it went on it was clear that the voice was mine and the content became queer as I included men, women and Trans people in the biblical Eden story.

The television screen then went fuzzy and was turned off by the attendant and moved back to the left side of the stage. The stage went black and the audience sat in the dark in silence for a few seconds. Soon a film was projected across the entire white wall with a trans-voiced

speaker (the voice of my persona) narrating. The images presented were of trans-spaces, such as interiors of moving trains and the sandy wet slopes where the sea meets the beach. The content of the spoken narration was of a person caught between genders and feeling the ongoing pressure to perform either masculinity or femininity.

After this screening of the short film, the audience experienced another moment of silence and darkness. Soon I entered the stage space in high-heeled shoes as my persona, wrapped in a white sheet (worn like a toga) and wearing a bad blonde wig. I entered precariously and reluctantly, as images were projected onto my persona's body of socially 'ideal' women and the body I was being 'programmed' to inhabit. As this series of images ran, another pre-recorded voiceover of my trans-voiced persona narrated. In this recording my persona explained how these ideal images and my persona's 'lived experience' of gender were not congruent.

Then again, the lights went out and the audience sat in silence until my nude body was presented in a small pool of blue light. The same pre-recorded voiceover played as I presented my body (representing the trans-gender body of my persona) in various positions and shifting between masculine and feminine semiotics. At this point in the production, if about one third of the audience *had not* left because of the previous 'shock' spaces, they would leave during this time. Presenting a nude body performing trans-gender fluidity was apparently the final straw that shattered the decent morals of some hetero-normative university audience members.

The performance continued along these lines; shifting between live and recorded materials as well as fluidly moving between gender performances in various states of dress and undress. My voice also shifted between gender readings as well; sometimes being presented live, sometimes recorded. The shock spaces increased and the content continued to support and give voice to a trans-gender experience. I also made the deliberate choice to increase the 'between' spaces of silence and darkness to disrupt the theatrical experience in order to make my production distinctly queer in not only content but overall delivery. This was the point of most contention for the audience that stayed. After each performance they repeatedly spoke to me suggesting that if I 'tightened up the theatrical elements' the performance wouldn't seem so segmented and strange.

## The Audience Enters (and Leaves)

Over the course of my PhD, most of my gender performance explorations were created for conventional audiences, such as my all-female staging of *Romeo and Juliet* or for specific queer audiences such as my Drag King acts performed in gay clubs and pubs in London. These performances were well received, and the audiences either interacted with the event, or were very vocal about its positive reception. However, when I created my trans-dressed ‘queer’ performance piece *Through a Glass Darkly* for a mostly academic audience as the final homage to my research, my queer subjectivity, the queer content of the piece, and the queer methods I employed became a source of contention between ‘queer’ and ‘vanilla’ audiences. This experience of creating a strategically queer theatrical performance within an academic course of learning prompted me to question if queer has a legitimate place in academia.

As I devised, wrote, characterized, composed, filmed and edited the artistic pieces that would meld to become the *Through a Glass Darkly* event, I did not give much thought to the reception of this performance. In my view, I wanted to stage my work unashamedly and with the artistic belief that elements of the radical and provocative in behaviour, play and identity was essential to my performance in staging the ultimate trans-gender experience. By not pre-censoring my work or shaping it for a particular audience or sensibility, as I had done with my past productions, I felt that I would achieve a more poignant production located in the nexus of gender, self, art, identity, biology and culture. I wanted to cross into what Gomez-Pena refers to as a ‘conceptual territory’; a queer territory that was embedded in an unchartered and rough terrain:

(Performance artists) converge in this overlapping terrain precisely because it grants us special freedoms often denied to us in other monocultural/unidisciplinary realms. In a sense, we are hardcore dropouts from our original metiers and communities, embarking on a permanent quest to develop a more inclusive system of political thought and esthetic praxis. (Gomez-Pena 2005: 22)

I naïvely believed that in not sculpting my performance for any particular audience and allowing myself absolute freedom of expression, I would create a performance that was essentially inclusive and relevant to any audience.

The audience that attended my performances of *Through a Glass Darkly* was a mixture of academics, students, friends and my PhD research examiners. Most of the students were from the Gender in Performance classes I had taught within the drama department as a student teacher during my PhD, postgraduate drama and sociology students or they were members of the university's lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) organization. The reason I mention this demographic is because, with a few exceptions, it was my queer 'student' audience that responded most positively to the material. Also, there were a few postgraduate students studying gender and sexuality in the social sciences department that also positively received and interrogated the socio-political themes in the piece. In fact, a member of the sociology department emailed me following the performance and invited me to perform the piece as part of the inaugural Centre for the International Study of Sexuality and Gender in Europe (CISSGE) conference.

The academics were apathetic to the material, unless, they identified, in some way, as queer. For example, in a meeting with my two examiners, I probed them for their responses and thoughts on the performance. One, a married heterosexual mother of two and a very accomplished academic on the subject of performance stated bluntly "I didn't get it", whilst the other examiner, an out lesbian and queer scholar, quickly tried to explain the work and how it conveyed a completely unique queer subjectivity. As they interrogated me with regards to my approach, my examiners debated back and forth about the integrity and validity of my performance in respect to my academic research.

Most of the audience was nearly the same, although about a third simply walked out during the performance, either they enjoyed the content and delivery of the piece or demonstrably argued against its validity and artistic merit. Many academics interpreted the performance as 'obscene', 'disconnected', 'lacking narrative', 'offensive' and even 'exhibitionist'. My queer-identified audience, however, described the performance as 'engaging', 'intelligent', 'thought provoking', and even reflecting of their own personal experiences. One

hetero-sexual woman that felt her own social gender performance was deemed queer by others, said to me after the show “Thank you. That show (the performance) is how I feel everyday”, and I took her words as genuine. With an outcome that resulted in blatant oppositional opinions and receptions I began to question my work. Had I created a performance that could only be understood by a queer audience, or was academia lacking in its understanding of queer theory and practice?

Since the performance of *Through a Glass Darkly* I have continued to resolve these questions through my everyday practice of living and learning as a queer scholar, teacher and practitioner. My research, practice and experience has led me to realise that in order to legitimise my work in academia I have to teach my students, colleagues, audiences, and yes, even examiners about queer theory and practice. I understand that this is part of creating a discursive educational environment. I cannot assume that queer theory is an acceptable theoretical framework in which to underpin my arguments and practice, but rather I have to constantly *prove* that it is and that it contains all the hallmarks of legitimacy that academia requires.

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### **Rude tools and material difference - Queer theory, ANT and materiality: an under-explored intersection?**

#### Abstract

*Recent advances in archaeology and Actor-Network-theory stress the agency and irreducibility of material objects. Such an approach may allow us to problematise the narrow focus on texts and the semiotics of identities still dominant in some queer theory and supplement it with more attention to lived practice.*

*This requires a shift in ways of ascribing and describing agency: rather than focusing on independent and coherent human agents in the bourgeois liberal humanist tradition, we may shift our focus to proper monsters, construed at the interface of human beings and material culture. I suggest that the queerness of e.g. Leathermen and Skins is realised at least as much through materialisation performed with artefacts as through any inherently human agency.*

*I also suggest that a keener materialist focus allows queer theory to return attention to the impossibility of any natural body and to the importance of class and economy in creating identities and subcultures. I suggest that such a focus must problematise any claims to coherent identity, thus queering the identities under investigation.*

In May 2007, I was fortunate enough to participate in the workshop “What’s up in queer theory”, hosted by the Centre for Gender Studies at the University of Lund. In many ways, this was a very positive experience. However, it also served to remind me, again, just how narrowly much academic research focuses on texts and pseudo-texts such as tapes, films, and prints. One of the central themes of the conference was that of archives, their ethics and technical limits. Throughout these talks, it seemed clear that an “archive” was understood as a collection of texts, both concretely and metaphorically. In this contribution, I shall argue that the metaphor of the archive might be unnecessarily limiting for queer theory. Queer theory can and should benefit enormously from an increased awareness of material culture. A queer look at recent advances in material culture studies can show how and why Viagra™, wheel-chairs, leather jackets and shavers all deserve queer theorisation, alongside any textual archive.

I understand this specific discourse on archives to be particular to history, and perhaps especially to the Foucauldian tradition, with its heavy focus on writing, as metaphor and as concrete practice. However, I believe that disagreements among historians and archaeologists might also throw some light on other disciplines, which may sometimes have been too focused on texts. Whereas texts are probably central to historiography, there is little reason why other fields should limit themselves so.

The past decade or so has seen significant developments in material culture studies. Indeed, we are now at the point where leading theorists suggest that these have exhausted their potential (Julian Thomas at TAG Exeter 2006), echoing the claims made about queer theory in the late 1990s. Surely, such claims are a symptom of theoretical maturity! Likewise, queer theory has been changing and expanding during this period, especially in developing a new confidence and becoming more of an independent framework for research than simply a rebellion against LGBT studies (that is, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transvestite/Transsexual). Yet, there seems to be little contact between these two fields. In both cases there is some attention to “the body”, and in both cases leading theorists have noted that “the body” in question is often not a physical body but a purely semiotic or ideal construction (Grosz 2005, Sofaer 2007). However, beyond this body-that-is-not, it is my impression that queer theorists have paid little attention to materiality and material culture theorists have paid little attention to queer dimensions of our work. It is my impression that the material articulations of non-conformist sexuality remain under-explored.

The project of this paper, then, is to explore the potential for queer materiality. I want to argue that

- 1) materiality has a potential well beyond the semiotics of identity, in that artefacts directly enable specific ways of being (a central point in ANT, Actor-Network Theory);
- 2) that the necessary material culture theory is already available, and that it simply needs to be occupied for queer theory; I shall try to document that this has not been achieved yet;
- 3) that such a project has queer potential, even if ANT theorists have largely ignored this aspect (notable exceptions include Donna Haraway); that is, the ANT erasure of

the subject-object dichotomy challenges the proper subject to a degree that makes all such subjectivities queer, independently of the identities claimed by the people in question.

My argument goes beyond a call for attention to the material dimensions of queer anthropology, and includes a call for attention to the queer dimensions of all materiality, including all human culture. I have taken George Chauncey's "Gay New York" (Chauncey 1994) as an example of the "textual" genre. Chauncey's work is very powerful, well-researched and important, and yet it begs a few questions.<sup>1</sup>

This then, is my contribution to queer theory: I submit that we have not been natural since the early Palaeolithic. We have "always" been naturecultural. People with objects are always historical constructs, and subjects are always people with objects.

### **The limits of metaphors: archives and hoards**

The question of the archive or the museum might form a useful starting point for discussion: What sorts of texts are archived, and what sort of objects are curated? What parts of the past are

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<sup>1</sup> One caveat needs to be stressed: I am not, of course, equally familiar with everything published under the broad umbrella of "queer theory". My professional attentions have necessarily been concentrated on archaeology and material culture, with some reference to history and anthropology. The present paper refers primarily to those disciplines. If it has any value beyond them, that is a bonus. Moreover, I shall not engage in any critique of queer archaeology here. The field is too new, too small and entirely too vulnerable for that. Those few brave colleagues who have dared to write queer archaeologies deserve all the encouragement I can give them, and if parts of the field remain underexplored, this is probably due to the limited number of papers written so far. Few of us are doing any kind of queer archaeology at all, fewer still are doing anything as good as the standards set by queer theorists in other fields, and practically no-one has yet developed queer archaeology to its full potential. Most remain, like me, enthusiastic amateurs trying to find our ways in this strange new world.

More specifically, I need briefly to address Insoll's venomous attack on queer archaeology (Insoll 2007, 75): based on "at least" five of the nine papers in one publication, Insoll suggests that all queer archaeology everywhere is limited to the study of same-sex attraction in the past. As I read him, this is based on his own refusal to recognise the other four papers, or anything like them, as proper queer theory. I disagree with both method and conclusion, and especially with the way in which Insoll arrogates to himself the power of disqualifying studies as queer theory. Indeed, Insoll seems to write either in bad faith or with circular logic or both. Nonetheless, he does have a slight point: so far, much queer archaeology has focused narrowly on the study of same-sex attraction in the past. I suggest that this is unnecessarily limiting, and that archaeologies of the body allow us to queer body and identity, as well as attraction. If we can dissolve the subject/object divide by showing that subjects were and are always construed through objects, then we can denaturalise not just attraction and sexuality, but being tout court. I also suggest that this is exactly what some of the papers explicitly ignored by Insoll do (for one very fine work, see Wilkie 2000).

preserved for the future? One of the few people to write on these issues, Mills asks rhetorically: “Should the queer museum contain the same kinds of thing as any other museum? I sincerely hope not.” Instead, he hopes that

“[q]ueer-history exhibitions will adopt a style of presentation partly modelled on scrapbooks and collage; in place of the representative ‘object’, they will appropriate fragments, snippets of gossip, speculations, irreverent half-truths. Museum-goers will be invited to consume their histories queerly – interacting with exhibits that self-consciously resist grand narratives and categorical assertions. It will be a mode of display, collecting and curating driven not by a desire for a petrified ‘history as it really was’ but by the recognition that interpretations change and that our encounters with archives are saturated with desire” (Mills 2006, not paginated).

While I respect Mill’s point, my counterpoint is that his challenge concerns archives of texts more than collections of things: it is possible to take “the same kinds of things” and re-use them in a very queer ways. Thus, Black artist Fred Wilson exhibited silverware and slave chains together to provide a Black perspective on the extremely traditional Museum of the Maryland Historical Society (Baltimore, Maryland), and observed that “It was not so much the objects as the way things were placed that offended me” (quoted in Pearce 1999, 22).

Of course, the museum *exhibition* is in no way innocent of power. Museum exhibitions have been heavily implicated in for instance naturalising racism (Haraway 2004, 151ff) and legitimising nationalism (Anderson 1996, 163ff). However, the *collections* created by colonialism have since then been re-interpreted in the light of revisionist history, and in some cases this has led to a re-appropriation of the museum by formerly de-privileged groups (for further discussion see e.g. Clifford 1988). Material objects offer different possibilities for resistance than do texts. Like other tools, these may be re-used for many different tasks. If we can regard our sources less as archives of documentation and more as collections of odds and ends that might be useful in the future, they may also prove more useful, politically.

## **Agency and material culture, tools for monsters**

Above, I took my staring point from the specificities of the study of the past. However, materiality is more broadly relevant. In this section, I want to explore how a focus on objects can be integrated with a queer political project. This will require some brief discussion of so-called abject agency, of how some thinkers attribute “agency” or something like it to tools, landscapes and other non-human objects. The central argument here is that the independent individual agent, central to bourgeois liberal humanism is a historical construction, not a naturally occurring phenomenon.

In order to integrate the material dimension into queer theory, it may be useful to re-address the subject/object dichotomy. My original inspiration for these thoughts came from post/feminist philosopher, cyberspace theorist, biologist and activist Donna Haraway’s famous cyborg manifesto (Haraway 1991, 149ff). Haraway adopted the cyborg as one metaphor for late 20<sup>th</sup> century feminism, arguing that dreaming of pre-industrial, pre-capitalist romantic innocence was both dangerous and futile. Since the mid-eighties, when Haraway made this point, technologies have changed, and few modern feminists would argue against using communication technologies. If the cyborg seems less relevant today, this is at least partly because of the success of the project it represented.

I hesitate to use Haraway’s cyborgs as a metaphor outside the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. To do so would rob them of their important, polluted heritage. Yet I think a very similar symbol might be useful. If, say, medieval people had not yet conceived of cyborgs, they were certainly familiar enough with monstrous figures who/which blurred the same boundaries, from the Golem to Wayland smith. Latour (1999, 189) uses the phrase “shape-changers”, certainly familiar to the medieval mind. The change from man to wolf is every bit as radical and destructive as that from man to gunman, and its heritage of witch-hunts and extinction every bit as polluted.

This monstrous agency is crucial to my own understanding of material culture: for the past decade and more, archaeologists and actor network theorist have wrangled over how and why material objects do or do not have agency. These issues remain unresolved. However, the working solution that seems most useful to me is to sidestep the whole subject/object-distinction:

people with objects have a radically different agency than people without these objects. If “Guns don’t kill people... people kill people”, then people with guns kill people a lot more efficiently (see also Latour 1999, 176). I think it is more urgent to account for this *somehow* than to maintain a perfectly coherent and transparent universalist concept of conscious agency.

From a purely archaeological viewpoint, the promise of monsters is that they allow a reconstruction of the past, in the sense of feminist literary critic Gillian Beer (1997): a *re*-construction is not simply an attempt at setting back the clock and returning somehow to the past, but rather a *construction* in the present which actively *recreates* a modern version of a past actant (Latour’s word; see footnote 2). That is, if I were to take a real, prehistoric stone axe, fit it with a realistic shaft of entirely modern wood and add my own, subjective body, I could cut down a tree in the present. This would be a *re-construction*, or a re-destruction, in the sense that this tree was not actually cut down by Stone Age “man”, but was actually cut down by a Stone Age axe, although one possibly changed by time. The actant axeman would not be purely prehistoric or purely modern but a modern reconstruction of prehistory. I would gain some subjective understanding of the affordances of stone axes, while retaining the specificity of my body, and we could readily repeat the experiment with someone else supplying the body. I may be radically different, by birth or experience, from the original user, *but* I am also radically different in the same way from any number of my contemporaries. If we, today, have any hope of understanding each other, then we also have a hope of understanding the past. The axe and the wheel-chair are more than documents of past agents: they are literally parts of past and future actants.

Moving from the specifics of archaeology to general observations, my point is that artefacts are tools. They are really useful in the real world, not evidence left to gather dust in drawers. If queer material culture makes any sense at all, it does so in context. These artefacts should be taken out and used to create contemporary actants, whether as exhibits, as performances, or in other ways. We are not keeping the slave chains around because we like them, but in order to use them later, in contraposition to silverware, say.

The basic idea that artefacts may have something like agency<sup>2</sup> has been argued especially by Actor network-theory doyen Bruno Latour. I shall limit the discussion here to repeating the claim made above, that a gunman and axe-man are radically different actants than either man or tool on its own. Latour makes similar claims for speed bumps and hotel keys (Latour 1999, 186; Latour 1991, 104f). The central point is that *effect* may be more important than *intention*: speed bumps, in themselves, do not "want" anything, yet they certainly affect human behaviour. They are not *conscious agents*<sup>3</sup>, yet they do influence action. A story that is only about humans leaves out half the actants, or in my vocabulary half of us monsters - not every other, but literally one half of each of us. To focus on the human part of the axe-man or werewolf alone is to misrepresent their capabilities entirely.

Thus, I think ANT has queer potential: it suggests that maybe liberal humanist are missing something, and that the world is far richer and stranger, more monstrous, queerer than their accounts credit. Yet, *Latour's* Actor-Network Theory (ANT) must raise uncomfortable political questions: he describes the speed bump as "sleeping policeman", raising the ghost of policemen on every street. This vision of total and non-negotiated, asymmetric control is uncannily similar to the effects of Bentham's panopticon, as problematised by Foucault. This is the world as prison, a system of self-enforcement, with a policeman in every head. Queer history does not inspire a lot of confidence that authority is necessary on our side (Foucault 1991; cf. Fergusson 2005, 64). Indeed, Latour himself notes as the "*male-like, hairy, gorilla-like*" aspects of his approach (Latour 2004, 16): he blithely ignores race, class and gender, cordoning them off in brackets, and clearly treating them as irrelevant (Latour 1999, 42).

This is not an inherent flaw in all ANT, but a choice specific to Latour. As Lee & Stenner argue, ANT is ethical rather than moral: it *can* consider any number of actants, but equally, it can ignore them. Latour's emphasis lies on (male) engineers and scientists and their mighty

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<sup>2</sup> The exact word for this "something like agency" has been the topic of long debates that are largely irrelevant here. It suffices to note that Latour has taken to refer to these pseudo-agents as "actants" in order to avoid confusion and hairsplitting. The gist of the problem is that Anthony Giddens insists on relating "agency" to an agent's reflective understanding of her own place in the world and her strategic possibilities of changing that place. Arguably, speed bumps and hotel keys cannot be agents proper under such a definition. Many thinkers would deny even animals this sort of agency. Yet, as Latour stresses, objects (and animals!) *do* have something *like* agency.

<sup>3</sup> I am told that Anthony Giddens, one of the front figures in formulating Agency, insists on agents being conscious. These are not, so they may not be proper Giddensenian agents. Yet, they do transform action. Hence Latour's neologism "actants". See footnote 2.

machines, and explicitly disregards considerations of power and justice. Others emphasise the ethical aspects far more (i.e. Star 1991, 27ff, Law 1991, 2). Where Latour foregrounds how individuals within the elite struggle for supremacy, at the expense of any attention to the ethics of technology, thinkers like Star and Haraway foreground these very issues. Latour's focus implicitly echoes the logic of Taylorism, as it existed in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century West and has now been relocated to the developing world (Mason 2007, 255; Klein 2001 throughout). My suggestion here is that ANT offers a valuable approach to queering the actor, but these perspectives remain under-explored. This is an omission, not a flaw, but one that I think queer theorists are ideally placed to address. Thus, ANT is not inherently allied with any project for greater equality, but it can be occupied for such a project. Lee & Stenner forcefully make the point that ANT has a vast ethical potential which can be activated if we chose to include specific agents and if we focus on accountability towards them. More concretely, Donna Haraway (1997, 80) has devoted some attention to the ethical complexities of animal research in breast cancer treatments, an illness that affects poor and minority women disproportionately. Haraway's account which includes aspects of race, class and animal suffering is ethically different from any more clinical account – ANT or otherwise. I do not believe that ANT, or any other approach, will in itself guarantee sufficient attention to these issues, but I do believe that the very open nature of the Actor Network allows for possible inclusions, and for making aspects visible that would otherwise be ignored. We can, *if we want to*, include economic inequality, OncoMice™, the Black diaspora, and other actors in our network, and recognise them as ethical persons. We can include queers sexuality, stone axes and wheelchairs, slave chains and silverware.

To do so, we need to make the composite construction of the actant visible. We need to see both the “were-“ and the “wolf”, as it were. Latour points out that most technologies are socially invisible most of the time (Latour 1999, 183). As long as I can get to work on time, no-one will care too much whether I walk or drive or arrive by train. As long as I can find the information I need, and as long as it is reliable, it does not much matter whether I find it online or through a phone-call or in a book. As long as technologies work, it does not matter much *how* they work. If they fail, it *does* matter how they fail (Latour 1991, 105).

Once technologies break down, they become visible: one of my friends tried to ferry their youngest across Copenhagen in a pram. Theoretically this was perfectly easy: he walked to the Metro, took the elevator down, caught a train for three stops, and found that the elevator at his destination was out of order. Obviously, he could walk the stairs. He could even carry the baby along. He could not carry the pram, however. In the event, the train company recommended that he ride to the next stop and walk back. Some parents chose to carry their babies in kangaroo packs, which offer a different set of affordances: be better able to get off the train, but less able to carry the shopping (see also Michael 2000; I here use “affordances” in the narrow sense of Norman 1988, 9f and note 1:3: those action possibilities which are readily perceivable by an actor). This logic applies directly to exclusion, as well: my local LGB society meets in the Student’s Union Building. There are six steps up from the street. To this date, I have never seen a wheel-chair user in there.

An account that only documents the intentions and actions of human beings, with no attention to the artefacts and material landscape involved, will only tell half the story. It might tell us *what* happened, but not *how*, in practical terms. In this contribution, then, I want to move queer theory out of the archive and into the physical world. This is especially, but not exclusively relevant for the “archive disciplines”, including history and historical archaeology.

Not incidentally, such constraints are economical as well as physical: outside my economic circle of starving students, many would solve the elevator problem simply by going by car, and trust customer demand to facilitate access. I shall return to these concerns below.

Thus far, I have outlined a narrow reading of Latour, based on people-with-tools, the implication being that “tools” are relatively small objects. However, the whole world is material. Thus, the above may be further linked with anthropologist Tim Ingold’s idea of the “task-scape” (Ingold 2002): Ingold argues that historically, the *landscape* is a fairly recent and elite invention. Most people do not devote much attention to the pure aesthetics of space. Rather, our chief interaction with space is functional: space is useful for some activities, less so for others. A field might afford agriculture, rather than transport, and various landscape features (mountains, bogs) may effectively block travel and communication. Moreover, Ingold argues, such task-scapes become part of the bodily, muscular memory. Thus, a field is not just a pretty sight but also

linked to the embodied memories of clearing off stones or making hay while the sun shines. Moving in a landscape creates a bodily knowledge of gradients and slippery surfaces, of what places are passable or impassable at in different conditions. To Ingold, the whole landscape is a setting for embodied experience of movement and work during time (cf. also Michael 2000, throughout).

In a queer perspective, we might add different subjectivities to this claim: some spaces might have universal value, but many are used differently by different groups. Notably, of course, bars and cruising grounds may be unknown or at least unvisited by the mainstream population, yet central to queer subcultural uses of space (Walcott 2005, 98, coined the term “sex-scapes” for this phenomenon). Pace Ingold, I would argue that having sex or being beaten up in some place creates a very specific body-memory. The same is true of other subcultures, of course: in divided Jerusalem, Derry or Berlin, different populations live(d) side by side with very little overlap. Different groups live in very different task-scapes, even if these overlay each other in actual, physical space. The fact that a street is physically open does not mean that it is actually safe to walk, for all people at all hours (see also Carbado 2005, throughout).

In one sense, there is nothing much that is new in this: Chauncey notes that in the 1920s, people in gay New York had finely tuned mental maps of the sexual landscape (Chauncey 1994, 195 and part II throughout). Yet, on the other hand, this penetrating and thoughtful study largely fails to address the physicality of these maps, that is, the purely bodily question of how to get from one point to the other, and what zones of experience people had to pass through along the way. Even in Chauncey’s excellent account, the city seems more a system of abstract semiotics than a physical place. This is not least due to the limits of the written sources: as Chauncey himself emphasises virtually no information is available on e.g. the physical layout of bathhouses. Indeed, this information is so rare that the single exception warrants a detailed presentation of its background (*Ibid.* 182)

This materiality can be internalised: as masculinity studies doyen R. W. Connell especially has argued, identities are *structured by and structuring for* the body (Connell 1995, 35 & 50) and the world (*Ibid.* 65). Connell takes athletes and disabled people as examples: if a person can run a marathon, this is probably because of training, but such training mainly consists

of running. Being in shape makes it a lot easier to get in better shape. Obviously, some specific bodies might rule some identities out altogether – most marathon runners have both their legs – but anatomy is not destiny, and no amount of “good genes” will remove the need for training. While sport might illustrate this claim, it is equally true for work and so many other identities: being a mason or a dry-line angler or an alcoholic all relies on performing certain activities regularly. All of these might require certain bodily abilities and at least some might in turn shape the body of the agent (see also Sofaer 2006, 70ff). The monstrous actant, then, is not just a body, any-body, who walks on stage and picks up tools. By the time we can recognise the werewolf, she has been one for some time already.

Identities, bodies and material artefacts all structure each other. Most runners wear shoes. Shoes might not be essential for running, but the right shoes significantly improve performance. Again, the shoes do not run by themselves, but people with shoes might run a lot more effectively than they would without. This is not determinism: no pair of shoes makes anyone a marathon runner (“Shoes don’t run marathons: people run marathons”). However, having access to shoes (and time, nutrition and decent road-scapes) might allow us to practice and so to build up the necessary bodily capabilities, the ability to run a marathon in shoes. In the short term, shoes afford running, in the long term running re-shapes the body.

Most human agents are more cultural than natural, then. They are so radically transformed by culture as to be something entirely different from "human nature". Whether they are athletes who keep themselves in shape with barbells and running or singers who maintain their pitch with tuning forks and their recall of the part with recordings or sheet music or painters who use a spirit level to check the horizontal, almost all meaningful human agency incorporates some artefact. This is equally true for mundane activities like cooking a meal or going to work. Every day most of us rely on tools for transportation (bicycles, trains, cars, elevators, shoes), for communication (email, phones) and for interacting with the world around us (hammers, gas stoves, pencils). Almost all meaningful agency is in some sense mediated and empowered by artefacts.

Nowhere is this more evident than among the disabled. Large minorities rely on prosthetics, ranging from wheel-chairs and pace-makers to optics or hearing aids to allow us to

live more normal lives. Paradoxically, these artefacts make us *less natural and more normal* (see also Moser & Law 2003, throughout, Freund 2005, 185). Indeed, as disability theorist L. J. Davis stresses, dis/ability is itself a social construct, judged against social norms of normality (Davis 2005, 169). The narrower the bounds of acceptable performance, the more people will be disabled. In an example borrowed from sociologist Peter Freund, someone able to walk may not be able to walk fast enough to cross the street while the light is green (Freund 2005, 183; cf. Norman 1988, 167ff). Social decisions about how fast the “normal” able citizen walks can disable slow walkers. Conversely, a green light with sound is an out-of-body-prosthetic for the blind. In the tasc-scape, (dis)ability does not stop at the skin (for archaeology and disability, see also Cross 2007).

There is an ideological point to this: archaeologist Morag Cross laments that “*Popular culture is full of disabled villains and monsters*” (Cross 2007, 184). Yet, the heroes of popular culture, and perfectly ordinary people of real life, are no less monstrous than these villains. We may be more enabled, but as leading actor network-theorist John Law observes, we are all monsters. If some can pass for normal and others are truly wretched, then *the very normalisation of some helps the demonisation of others*. The more universal the ideals of “nature” and “norm” become, the more marginalised the deviants will be.

Thus, I believe that ANT *already has a great, queer potential*. However, very few theorists have explicitly focused on this aspect, and mainstream ANT (e.g. Latour) is decidedly normative by default. We need to move from the body-that-is-not to bodies-that-are. Any such move needs to recognise the material specificity of these bodies in the world.

### **Queering object agency: enter the fetish, exit the fetish**

Obviously, some artefacts have been instrumental in affording some queer people some opportunities to realise our identities. In itself, this does not make them obviously queer artefacts, however. A solid pair of shoes might enable you to go dancing, but hopefully, your

choice in shoes is not decisive for your chances for the night. Indeed, normal queers (!) might not care too much about all this: as long as you can get to the scene, it might not matter how.

As queer theorists and activists Gayle Rubin (1993, 13f) and Berlaut & Warner (2003, 178) observe, any sex that involves tools may be queer simply for that. Some queer communities are quite obviously artificalual: something like Leather or Fetish, or BDSM (bondage, submission and sadomasochism), relies a lot more on visible artefacts. Those *cultures* could not exist without their relevant *materials*. In a very real sense, these are queer *material cultures*, constituted as much by their material artefacts as by their sexual cultures. Things get even more pronounced elsewhere: GenderQueer writer C. Jacob Hale has described how his FTM (female to male) community of Leatherdyke Boys and their Daddies rely on artefacts for their very gender identity (Hale 2003, 66, cf. Link 2002, throughout). Like so many other men, these appear to be somewhat phallocentric in their sexuality, the chief (in)difference being that these men are not quite satisfied with what nature provides. The case described by Hale illustrates my central point with remarkable clarity: the men in question have sex. Clearly, this is “real” sex, involving real orgasm and so on. Yet, some of the sexual organs involved are, not unreal, but certainly unnatural. A Man who satisfies his Boy with a strap-on is really having sex in the same way that a marathon runner in shoes is really running, or a tree cut down with an axe really falls. Neither action would be the same without the relevant tools, so the sexual actant is not simply “a woman”, “a dildo”, “testosterone” or “a fantasy” but rather “a Man”, made up, temporarily, of these parts. These, in effect, are Men whose masculinity is not exclusively located in their bodies. They are not terribly different from those other men who pick fights or eat anabolic steroids or spend a fair part of their lives in gyms to maintain their masculinity.

This situation is not limited to sex, or to FTMs, or to men. Simply being a socially recognisable man or woman usually requires a person to be able to look and/or act in some specific way, to be a *successful* gendered agent even more so. Some of these relevant agencies are embodied (strength, grace, the ability to hold your drink), but others are more obviously material (access to a car or a set of leathers or formal dress or a tool-chest), and most rely on some combination of knowledge, bodily skill and the right tools.

Outside of specifically sexual acts, most recognizable, relevant material culture is *queered* rather than simply queer. That is, the individual objects are produced within a mainstream culture first, then creatively reused in queer ways. Nothing illustrates this better than clothing, the single aspect of queer material culture to have a voluminous biography (Murphy 2000, 143ff; Stockton 2006 throughout). I return to this below, but for now let me merely point out that the queerness of, say, a butch Lesbian depends as much on her being a woman as on her wearing “men’s clothes”. The same clothes would not be as queer on a man. Likewise, even the infamous coded handkerchiefs, earrings and so on of classical gay culture were queer only by association: *any earring could be used to signify gay identity if worn right* and no earring would signify anything if not worn. “It is not the objects in themselves... but the way they are placed”.

A werewolf is not just any old wolf, but a wolf who spends part-time in human shape (or vice versa). A wheel-chair used is not immobile, but immobilised under specific conditions, as when encountering stairs. Thus, normality and deviance are always already socially constructed in a material world. They are not ideal semiotic categories but lived practices. *The culture of normality and deviance is always already a material culture.*

### **Class is a queer issue, double marking and the politics of exclusion**

In this section, I want to make a political point: All the above means that queer subcultures have a material history and a contemporary material reality. This may in fact situate such sub-cultures in the larger framework of culture and economy, and in turn help foreground the powerful socialist tradition of critical theory that underlies some queer theory. I submit that an increased awareness of materiality may help restoring the radical political relevancy of queer theory through a return to economy.

As others have pointed out, the history of queer cultures is an economic history. Thriving sexual communities do not come into being by magic, but through economies that afford people options such as economic independence and geographical mobility (d’Emilio 1997, Rubin 2000, Berlaut & Warner 2003, Cohen 2005, 34f, cf. Halberstam 2003, Nero 2005). Any strong

community relies on some control over resources, legitimate or otherwise, economic or otherwise: as Gramsci argued, the most wretched tend to be subaltern, rather than revolutionary, and the revolutionaries tend to recruit for the elite of the disadvantaged groups. Queer resistance to the mainstream relies on our ability to control such resources.

A discussion of the economy of queer subcultures allows another aspect to be highlighted, that of double marking. Here, I rely on a model described by Donna Haraway, and based partly on work by bell hooks, Audre Lorde and the women of colour feminists. Haraway identifies the three main axes of oppression and resistance in modern society as sex/sexuality/gender, “race” and class (Haraway 1991, 139; cf. Moore 1988, 80, Connell 1995, 26f & 76ff, Cohen 2005). In some places, we might add age, religion and so on, and for Europe, “ethnicity” may be more accurate than “race”. While class is structured by economy and sexual identities by anatomy, they are also structuring *for* these aspects (see Connell 1995, 50). Hence, class is a total performance, rather than a matter of economy alone, just as race/ethnicity cannot be reduced to skin-colour, and sex/sexuality/gender cannot be reduced to anatomy (see e.g. Connell 1995, 116, Butler 1990, 137; but see Johnson 2005, 134 for another view). Of course, this model should not be mistaken for the reality it tries to describe: for all that sex, sexuality and gender are somewhat co-dependent, they are not identical, and neither the experience of discrimination, nor the strategies of resistance available are quite the same. The model raises three important points:

First, double marking is a strategy for creating subalternativity: by claiming that a double marked subject cannot logically exist and so speak, hegemonic elites and their recognised oppositions also ensure that no-one will *legitimately* speak from such a position. In effect, if the only recognised workers’ spokesmen are white heterosexual males (Marx and too many others), the only recognised feminists and queer spokespeople are white bourgeois (Wollstonecraft, Radclyffe Hall, Krafft-Eberding) and the only recognised spokespeople of colour are bourgeois heterosexual males (Martin Luther King, Senghor), this ensures the implicit legitimacy of white, heterosexual, bourgeois males as “normal” (ideal) people. The reactionaries and the recognised opposition share an interest in rendering any dissenting opposition silent. Subalterns are not

silent, we<sup>4</sup> are silenced. Despite the fact that Black Lesbians, queer first nation people, working class gay men, and so many others do in fact exist, double marking mean that we cannot be recognised as existing: to be recognised as speaking for Black people, you have to pass straight (and preferably male), to speak for a Gay community, you have to pass white and/or bourgeois (again cf. Johnson 2005, 134), and so on. I suggest that any count that fails to explicitly address these double-marked identities implicitly support such hegemonic notions.

Again, Chauncey's fine study may form an instructive example: the gay men he describes have profession and ethnicity: they are Irish and Jewish and Black, labourers, soldiers and barbers. Yet, none of them are described as *either* ablebodied or disabled. Were there no disabled people in Gay New York before 1940? Why do they not appear? Where they excluded by stairs and social discipline, or by the author's lack of interest?

Second, oppression on different axes may be similar, but not identical. Notably, the strategies of passing or flaming as are rarely very different for racial minorities from how they are for white queers (cf. Sedgewick 1993; Montgomery 2002, 245). Fergusson (2005, 53) stresses the complicity of the white, Gay community in the US in the exclusion of Black people from the elite, even as Cohen (2005, 28) emphasises Black heteronormativity. However, as Lorde famously argued, we are all up against the same norms: if we are all second-class citizens, we are so in relation to the same privileged group of first class citizens (white, straight, bourgeois and often male; cf. Lorde 1982, 226). We do share an interest in challenging the hegemony and in the possibilities of resistance.

Third, all identities are construed through multiple variables. No-one is *just* queer. Rather, we are defined on all three axes simultaneously, so that the experience of being coloured, poor and queer may be quite different from that of being white, rich and queer. This also means that deviation from the norm exists in multiple forms, and that any sexuality that differs in terms of class or ethnicity may be as queer as one defined exclusively by object-choice. In as far as ethnic groups or classes construe their sexual identities differently from the hegemonic norm,

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<sup>4</sup> As my editor pointed out, this is the only place I dare speak as "we" rather than as "I". That is not due to grammatical inattention. I will not arrogate to myself any claim to speak for the reader, or for anyone other than myself. However, on this one issue, I shall claim to speak in solidarity with the rest of "us". This once, then, I shall use the collective first person, and speak as one of "us". However, I do not, and do not claim to, speak for all of us. So, "We, who?" – "We, the subaltern, we, the double-marked, we, who have to claim all our identities in the conditional, because we deviate even from minority norms".

those identities are queer, even if they are not homosexual (e.g. the aggressively heterosexual promiscuity ascribed to West Africans in British folklore). This is not to say that we should ignore sexuality, of course. However, nor should we limit ourselves to the study of sexuality in isolation. I take it as a central queer theory point that sexuality does not exist in isolation, but intersects with everything we do. The personal is political. Not incidentally, Chauncey suggests that the supervisors of the free *mikvahs*, the Jewish public ritual baths, and of the cheaper public baths were stricter in enforcing sexual “morality” than were attendants at other, more expensive baths (Chauncey 1994, 208f). The specific, embodied experience of a night at the baths, then, was not the same for everyone, and indeed the purity of the Jewish community was upheld through a simultaneous exclusion of unbelievers and of (recognisable) queer people. The same baths that afforded the possibility of encounters stripped of material artefacts also reproduced structures dependent on income, property and ethnicity.

“Queer” then, is positional, rather than inherent in any practice. It is not what people do, but the social meaning of these actions that define them as queer (or not). It is not the objects themselves, but the way they are placed, that holds political potential. Specific identities are always also lived through a specific economic reality, and the artifactual affordances available to people in different economic positions may be quite different. Specifically, quite different sexual communities might exist at different economic levels.

These claims might be illustrated with reference to the Skin (skinhead) community. Most Skins are white (race, ethnicity), young, and proletarian, indeed often unemployed (class). However, Skin identity is not created exclusively through these framing factors. Not every unemployed, white male joins. Rather, the identity relies on a number of material signs, including the shaved heads and often white t-shirts, boots, tattoos, donkey jackets etc. Thus, the Skin community owes some of its coherence to the electric shaver and the economics of hair-cuts. The functional aesthetic that made Skin an acceptable look for many young, economically disadvantaged men (and some women) rely on the material reality of mass-produced shavers. Not incidentally, Skin is also a sexual subculture, or rather, there are also sexual subcultures that use Skin as their emblem. The material artefacts allowed the creation of a specific subculture that combines

certain political, sexual and cultural preferences into a recognisable whole. Without this material basis, the homogeneity of the groups could not be upheld, and the imagined community not maintained. Skin, *as an identity*, did not exist before the technological and economic developments that made cheap uniform haircuts a class-badge, even though the pioneers of the culture presumably did. Groups and communities only come into existence once they are recognised as such. This is even more true for the sexual subculture: although brownshirts did exist before Skins, they did not evoke the same (auto)erotic responses. Skin as a sexual identity depends on a reflective recognition that this look could be attractive, and in turn upon the recognition that this look exists. Before the shaver, Skins did not look like this. Before they looked like this, they did not provoke the same attraction. In a fetishist sense, shaved heads *feel* different, and produce different sensual experiences. The *material* experience would not be the same under other circumstances. Thus also the perceived paradox of gay Skin culture: quite beside the semiotics of right wing extremism, Skin is also a look, and even an attractive one, to some people.

To put it crudely, a sexual subculture consists of people who recognise a shared interest in some collective sexual practice. No matter how interested they might be as individuals, unless they can also find each other, nothing much will happen. The possibility of creating a different look (Skin, Leather) also allowed different groups to define themselves. In a very similar way, (Castro) Clone identities depended at least in part on the existence of mass produced, standardised textiles. The industrial revolution made it far easier to look just like any other man, while the anonymity of urban living made it possible for such men to aspire to be perfect strangers. The Clone aesthetic of purely physical, casual sex depended on these signifiers<sup>5</sup>.

Of course, such shared identities are not innocent of power. Not every member has an equal say in what some subculture can or should entail. The (wo)man on the street has the limited option of opting into or out of such a subculture, but not of creating an alternative, *recognised* identity from scratch. Some may not even have that much choice. For gay male groups, specifically, porn, erotica and erotic art seems to be one privileged medium for creating

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<sup>5</sup> Tom of Finland, born Touko Laaksonen, was a pioneer of homoerotic art, producing a large number of characteristic pencil drawings of muscular men in uniform and in various states of undress; originally part of a more or less underground culture, these drawings are now almost ubiquitous in modern Gay mainstream culture. Those interested might Google his name for examples of his work.

and codifying new identities (cf. also Alberti 2006, 137, based on Butler). The Bears might illustrate this: the formal Bear culture seems to go back to *BEAR magazine* from the mid-1980s, and photographer Chris Nelson's "The Bear cult", published in 1989 (Lucie-Smith 1997, 21). Obviously, the men featured in these media existed before they were photographed, but publication allowed similar men elsewhere to articulate their identity and to identify as "Bears", rather than to be socially invisible as fat and hairy. Bear, *as a recognized identity*, owes something to this articulation, although the people already existed. Since then, the formal material culture of the Bear community has mushroomed to include a flag, paw-print tattoos, and some styles of clothing and jewellery shared by other subcultures. These include plaid shirts, Navajo turquoise and silver. In fact, they look a lot like field archaeologists (see also Wright, ed. 1997 & 2001). Are these natural Bears or wereBears or both? Does anyone care?

Incidentally, Tom of Finland and his whole fascist heritage played a similar role in the genesis of Clone and Military identities (see also Sontag 1975). So did *Drummer for Leather*<sup>6</sup>.

If subcultures are materialised, then they are also economic. Material aspects do not percolate out of nothing. They are made by someone, and very likely bought by someone else. This is to say that Skin, Leather and other subcultures are more economically accessible for some people than others. If early Leather culture focused on the utilitarian biking leathers, as Gayle Rubin suggests and Kenneth Anger's "Scorpio Rising" seems to confirm, then some people could enter the culture at a minimal outlay. Rubin (2000, 66f) suggests that "In the late 1940s... pretty much any masculine, working class attire was acceptable". Some men could walk in from the street and fit into Leather, even as some people are "natural Bears" today, before stumbling into any organised culture (one of the standard claims is that "I always knew what 'Bear' meant", or "People have always been calling me 'Bear'"). On the other hand, today at least parts of the Leather scene seem to have developed much more towards fetishism and heavy expenses, approaching the baroque excess Brian Bouldrey observes for latex:

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<sup>6</sup> The clone look is sometimes exemplified with reference to Freddie Mercury: 1950s Americana, white t-shirts, blue jeans, leather jackets, heavy moustaches, built bodies. The Castro Clones were so named because they were ubiquitous in San Francisco's Castro, then the centre of American West Coast gay culture, and all looked alike. I understand that this particular community is more or less gone now, devastated by AIDS and driven away by increased costs of living.

"This stuff is not cheap. No wonder so many guys are talking about real estate and decorating: by day they're executives and lawyers... The expense of latex is only surpassed by its delicate quality... these days the uniform that has succumbed to fashion is thing that requires hard work to maintain, rather than accommodating hard work." (Bouldrey 2004, 94 & 99).

These material cultures are class cultures, and their history is (also) class history. Indeed, Rubin's history of the San Francisco Leather community seems to echo that of San Francisco more generally, with bourgeoisie driving out creative pioneers and replacing them with high salaried consumers.

None of this is to say that queer subcultures are simply created by technological or economic changes. They are not. Indeed, some of the queer adoptions of such material signs were significantly delayed – thus clones appeared in the 1970's, although the standard elements of the uniform had been around since before 1900, and the shaver is a lot older than Skin (which does, however, owe much to 1980's urban unemployment). However, while material culture does not determine sexual identity, it does afford and structure possible identities, not least economically. Leather may have started out as a working class alternative to bourgeois gay culture (Rubin 2000, 67), at a time where motorbikes and leathers alike were more central to proletarian life, and less connected with expensive leisure, than today. In much the same way, bodies changed, from the worker's physical strength to the muscularity of the idle rich. Unskilled labour today is often boring and repetitive, rather than physically hard, and while workers may leave exhausted, and more or less poisoned by chemicals, such work neither builds nor rewards heavy physiques. At the same time, physical ideals have changed, with less valorisation of the overall bulk of a mover or brewery worker, and more focus on the tight, precise definition of an athlete. Consequently, economics play a significant role in allowing some people access to certain queer cultures and in keeping others out (for discussion, see Ricketts 2005, 230f, Dyer 2003, Baudrillard 2005, throughout; Forrest 1994 seems more confused than enlightening). The whole beauty industry is based around promising the rich have better access to the social signifiers of attractiveness. In some cases, the industry even delivers. Conversely, at least for some people, attractiveness can itself be a ticket to wealth.

*Thus, if queer is an aspect of material culture it is also inherently an issue of class, economy and power.*

### **Ethics; Werewolves vs. Virtuvian man**

The self neither transcends nor ends with the body. This is an ethical claim. By including objects in our theories we may begin to de-naturalise the body. Indeed, by re-constructing actants in all their monstrous glory, we may argue that all human bodies, always (or at least for 2,000,000 years we have been using tools) have been “unnatural”. There is nothing particularly natural about gender-reassignment surgery, safe sex or fetishism, but then there is nothing particularly natural about writing, monogamy or good health in winter, either. We need to untangle the “natural” from the normal and the ideal: ideally, all citizens are able to move independently. In fact, this is not so, but some manifestly *unnatural* technologies may allow some citizens a more ideal mobility. Likewise, heterosexual promiscuity may be “normal” (common), and “natural” (natural human reproduction seems to rely on it), but normal heterosexuality today seems to involve all manner of *unnatural* manipulations of fertility: having children if and when you want, with whom you want, without unwanted pregnancies and infertile unions is manifestly unnatural, however *normal and ideal* this may be today. Likewise, there is nothing either common or natural about celibacy or chastity, however idealised it may be in some circles. As Butler has pointed out, if all sexuality is culturally constructed (and real) then hoping for liberation through some return to “natural” sexuality is foolish and dangerous (Butler 1990, 30). Nor is this limited to sex: Wally Braid describes how she found a lump in her breast, and concluded that

“A prophylactic mastectomy would decrease my breast cancer risk by 90%, according to my cancer surgeon. It’s a no-brainer, particularly for a boy who has longed for the flatness of her yesteryear, Take ‘em off” (Braid 2002, 261).

In the event this turned out to be very difficult indeed. Women, it seems, are supposed to have breasts, even if these are artificial. A woman who chooses to live without is, well, queer. She

would look downright *abnormal*, whereas, presumably, a woman with a few pints of (unnatural) silicone adding “normal” mass to her chest would be more acceptable to these aesthetics – more ideal and thus more “normal”.

We would, all of us, benefit from a greater tolerance for artificial bodies - post-operative cancer patients, people with disabilities, transmen, marathon runners. There are worse things to be than honest monsters, and more noble goals than artificially fitting everyone to some uniform ideal of normal beauty. The curse of the werewolf is that of forced passing, the man disappearing when the wolf appears, and vice versa. The werewolf, like the working class queer or the breastless woman is an impossible creature. The wheelchair-user, now mobile, now handicapped, is another. Modernity has solved this problem by blaming, then erasing the subalterns: if proletarian, we cannot “really” be queer, if queer, not “really” proletarian, if unable to get up the stairs, not really mobile. I suggest that an inversion: we are real, and if the stairs or the categories do not work, they should be redesigned.

If we can reconstruct these monstrous actants of the queer past, then we may truly understand how "men [and women, and everyone else] make themselves", and so, how we may remake ourselves in the future. As long as we allow others to pretend that their natureculture is genetic and/or Gods' will, we will never have the freedom to become all we can be.

Likewise, there are ethical aspects to the discussion of class. There is one strong discursive tradition for casting queers as victims, what Black queer theorist Cathy Cohen (2005, 25) describes as “the single oppression framework”: legally and culturally, many queer sexualities have been either persecuted or at least rendered invisible and subaltern. Yet, not all queer sexualities are equal in this regard. Specifically, white bourgeois urban queers have traditionally done rather better for themselves than anyone else. At least in gay culture, there has traditionally been some claim that there are no coloured or working-class gay men. At present, this claim is being made with particular force in Europe, where many on both sides are eager to rule out any possibility of queer Muslims. If queer theory has any ethical merit, this derives from its strong roots in radical feminism, ethnic liberation and left-wing activism. If queer theory has any ethical merit, it derives from solidarity with other subaltern groups. Since we are already misfits and

unacceptable deviants audacious enough to speak despite this, we might as well revel in our monstrosity: we cannot accept any attempt at silencing any groups through “logical arguments” disproving its existence, if there are in fact real people out there who belong to that group. Specifically, the promise of monsters is that if some combination exists, it must be real no matter how illogical it might appear.

*Thus, denaturalizing the agent will allow us to problematise any and all claims to normality and render the ongoing cultural enforcement of norms visible. In turn, this will foreground the trace of those who are made impossible by hegemonic logic and rearticulate the question of “Who pays? Can we pay them back?”*(Lee & Stenner 1999).

### **Some practical suggestions on how to improve on current knowledge**

As Freud probably never said, sometimes a cigar is just a cigar. The ambiguity and the irreducible specificity of the material object also allow some re-negotiation of identity categories: certainly, many traditional identities were partly created in defiance of prevalent stereotypes. Thus, by adopting the signs of, say, a Femme or a Leatherman, a person might both be recognisably queer and recognisably distinct from facile stereotypes - a Lesbian, but not a *mannish* Lesbian, a gay man, but not an *effete* gay man.

Such ambiguity means that any observer needs to maintain a keen eye for the duality of material culture: what it *is* inherently and what is *means* by association. Inherent attributes (colour, weight) can be observed at any time, as long as the original artifact remains. Associated attributed can only be documented in context. It is perfectly possible to return later and check the weight or colour of a leather jacket, far harder to find out afterwards whether the owner was Lesbian and/or disabled (cf. also Gosden 1999, 127 & 137ff; Gosden & Knowles 2001, 1ff, Kopytoff 1986, 65ff; for those interested, there is an extensive bibliography on artefact studies elsewhere; the *Journal of Material Culture* is a good place to start).

I submit that we need to study queer culture *as* material culture. That is, whenever you are out doing your usual observing as researchers, take some time to register the material culture

as well. Don't settle for the lyrics of the songs and the psychology of choosing between the men's and the women's toilet, but register some information also on how much floor space is available, how different implants favour high or low cleavages, and whether the drag queens made it all the way cross town in those heels or whether they carry a pair of flat shoes in their handbags. Document what the Leather set wears on hot summer nights, and how nickel-allergies influence choices in handcuffs. Give us *bodies*, *places* and *materials* as well as meanings. More importantly, give us bodies with organs, places with access, materials with weight and value.

By foregrounding *how* people manage and afford to live their queer lives we may also make our analyses a resource for others who want to appropriate aspects of such practice. For the participant reader, subcultures are not just semiotic systems or identities but also real, lived practices. Moreover, as I hinted at above, in the long term such an approach may serve to queer *all* agents: if we can foreground how agency is always construed socially and materially, and never limited to the "natural" body, then we can also foreground how all agency is "unnatural", even that of self-identified "straight" or "normal" people.

Moreover, materiality is inherently involved in economy, and vice versa. Both are further connected to embodiment. A material turn will allow us to foreground those traditional left discussions of justice and equality that we have all but lost beneath the queer semiotics. Then, we may start treating our resources, not as an archive of the past but as a tool-box for building a better, wheel-chair accessible present.

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## **Between the Ordinary and the Deeply Religious – Re/Negotiating the Religious and the Secular in the Finnish Parliamentary Debate on Assisted Reproduction**

### **Abstract:**

*In this article I analyze a recent debate preceding the Act on Assisted Fertility Treatments in Finland (Act number 1237/2006, given 22.12.2006). The discussion about the government proposed act was framed as a ‘value-debate’, with two major discursive strands forming the basis for arguments put forth by the various members of parliament: a socially conservative discourse on gender and sexuality based on an interpretation of Christianity and a discourse on Finnish equality politics. In this article I give a reading, based on queer theoretical insights as well as recent theorization of post-secularism, of the aforementioned discourses and their interconnectedness. I question the notion that the ‘values’ operating in the debate can be fully differentiated into categories of ‘religious’ or ‘secular’, and further argue that maintaining such a division might obscure connections that are fundamental to heteronormative conceptions of kinship. The aim of the article is to destabilize an understanding of Finland as secular and egalitarian.*

### **1. Introduction**

I fully understand that deeply religious people condemn that single women or lesbian couples could receive fertility treatments. But I do not understand how we ordinary, less religious people, judgmentally can say that there should be no fatherless children, when thousands of bastards are born and when there are divorce children, as many of us here have told. How do you propose to ban this with some act? MP Sirpa Asko-Seljavaara, Coalition Party, 12.10.2006, PTK 100/2006 VP) (In Finnish)

During the past decades debates regarding queer<sup>1</sup> kinship have taken center stage in organized politics in several European countries. In this article I analyze a recent debate preceding the Act on Assisted Fertility Treatments in Finland.<sup>2</sup> Within the framework of this debate different understandings of gender, sexuality, family, kinship, tradition, religion, secularism and Finnishness emerge. Finland is seen as not only a model country of functioning welfare and social security systems, but also as a largely secular nation and as having a high level of gender-equality, as are the rest of the Nordic countries (Norris and Inglehart 2004, 5). In this article I question the understanding of Finland as a secular and egalitarian nation by using the debate on assisted reproduction as a case study. This is done via a deconstructive reading, based on queer theoretical insights as well as theories on post-secularism. In this article I discuss two discursive strands that emerge within the debate: a socially conservative discourse on gender and sexuality based on an interpretation of Christianity and a discourse on Finnish equality politics. I argue that the analysis of what is being said in the debate has to be done by taking into account the underlying power and interconnectedness of the aforementioned discourses.

Unless otherwise stated, all of the examples I highlight and analyze in this article are taken from the minutes of a parliamentary debate on the proposed Act on Assisted Fertility Treatments that took place on the 12<sup>th</sup> of October 2006<sup>3</sup>. The minutes from which the quotes I analyze are taken are in Finnish or Swedish and all the translations are my own. I use the term ‘assisted reproduction’ when referring to the debate that preceded the actual implementation of legislation on assisted reproduction, and ‘The Act on Assisted Fertility Treatments’ only when referring to the actual act.

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<sup>1</sup> By queers or “the queer” I am in this article referring to people who do not identify or fit into a heteronormative framework. In this article queer citizen refers to parents who do not fit into a heterosexual nuclear family-framework, and who are the imagined target group of the legislation being discussed in the parliament on the 12th of October 2006.

<sup>2</sup> The English translation of the Act on Assisted Fertility Treatments (1237/2006):

<http://www.finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/2006/en20061237.pdf>, (accessed December 21, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Minutes of the parliamentary debate, 12<sup>th</sup> October 2006:

[http://www.eduskunta.fi/faktatmp/utatmp/akxtmp/ptk\\_100\\_2006\\_ke\\_p\\_1.shtml](http://www.eduskunta.fi/faktatmp/utatmp/akxtmp/ptk_100_2006_ke_p_1.shtml)

(accessed December 10, 2008)

## 2.1 The debate on assisted reproduction as a debate on values

During the past ten years Finnish GLBTQI<sup>4</sup> citizens have become increasingly visible not only in popular culture and media, but also in the field of legislation and state politics. The Act on Registered Partnerships<sup>5</sup> from 2001, and the Act on Assisted Fertility Treatments from 2006, and the public discussions that were connected to them, both opened up questions about the meaning of family, kinship, reproduction and sexuality. Different identity categories were also produced/constructed in these discussions, most notably ‘the lesbian’ and ‘lesbian couple’. These identity categories were largely invisible during the debate on registered partnerships – there the focus was primarily on homosexual men as the object of legislation (Charpentier 2000). One explanation for this is that the debate became both implicitly and explicitly focused on gay men, as often seems to be case when ‘homosexuality’ is discussed (in both media or in academia), lesbians and queer women remain invisible (Garber 2005).

Both the debate on registered partnerships and the debate on assisted reproduction were framed by members of parliament (MPs) and the media as ‘value-discussions’. Briefly, this meant in the case of the parliamentary debates that a MPs positioning in favor of, or against the proposed Act not only expressed her/his view of a certain legislative measure, but also was understood as an expression of basic values. Sometimes the MPs stated the foundation of their basic values outright, e.g. “As a Christian I believe that the heterosexual nuclear family is the best environment for children and therefore I cannot condone this act”, or “It is against the principles of equality to deny lesbian couples access to reproductive technology”. In these debates, what are being constructed are not only discourses regarding gender, sexuality, reproduction and kinship, but also entire value platforms. Apart from discussing whether or not lesbians and single women should have access to assisted reproduction, the MPs debated the role of Christianity and the state Church in (secular) politics, secularism, marriage as an institution, welfare politics, equality politics and so on. The framing of the debate on assisted reproduction

<sup>4</sup> GLBTQI = gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, queer, intersexed

<sup>5</sup> The English translation of the Act on Registered Partnerships (950/2001):

<http://www.finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/2001/en20010950.pdf>, (accessed December 21, 2008)

as a value-discussion put pressure on the MPs to be confessional – in other words to make clear from ‘where’ they are speaking:

There has here tonight been a demand for a discussion on values, and I think some of the MPs have had their basic values questioned, and I want to now testify, that I consider myself a Christian, I am a member of the evangelical church, but I feel distant from a church that does not support people’s equality. If this is the case, I feel distant from such a church. MP Jouni Backman, Social Democrats

The above example is quite telling of the discursive terrain that the MPs had to navigate through. Through a close-reading of the parliamentary minutes I have identified two discursive strands that emerge within the debate: a discourse on gender and sexuality rooted in a certain interpretation of Christian teachings/canons and a discourse on Finnish equality politics<sup>6</sup>. There are a number of ways in which these discourses are interconnected.

## **2.2. Values, sexuality and religion**

First of all, both the discourses make use of a two-sex model<sup>7</sup>, with naturalized identity categories such as man, woman, father, mother, lesbian. Furthermore, the framing of the debate as a value-debate was not questioned. The framing has a number of effects: firstly the idea that values and sexuality are connected becomes normalized, and secondly (in connection to the normalization) that statements regarding sexuality can be grounded on values. After a presentation I gave at a

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<sup>6</sup> “Genealogically speaking, for example, Finnish equality discourse has been a site for identity construction for particular kind of "woman" that stands in a particular relationship both to the "man" (the Finnish man) and the nation. The history of Finnish women (written in the 1980s and early 1990s) is a history of equality, but also of normalized heterosexuality (Honkanen, 1997).” (Honkanen 2007, paragraph 17)

<sup>7</sup> The term two-sex model builds on work by Thomas Laqueur (1990) and Yvonne Hirdman (2001), and is widely used in Finnish/Nordic Women’s/Gender- studies. The basic premise of the two-sex model is that there are two biologically separate and mutually exclusive (and complimentary) genders. Kattis Honkanen argues that: The language of equality is a hegemonic arena for the construction of the two-sex model. It allows for various combinations of sexed meanings to be circulated and articulated. Equality discourses are sites where a language of woman and man is produced and where power is constantly negotiated in relation to man and woman (Honkanen 2007, paragraph 29).

conference, one of the members of the audience asked why it seems to be that political discussions on morals or values seem to be dominated by religious discourse? My response was that it has to do with the (political) history of Finland, and with the role that Christianity has played in the formulation on what has been seen as the commonly acceptable morals and values for the Finnish citizen<sup>8</sup>. Over time the explicit power of the Church and its teaching on the lives, morals and values of Finnish citizens has decreased and become challenged by other ideals and ideologies. Teemu Taira (2007, 1) states, that Finland has changed discursively from a religiously and culturally homogenous society to a more pluralistic and heterogeneous one, where Christianity has come to be defined more as a ‘cultural heritage of Finnishness than ‘religion’. This according to Taira “implements a certain hierarchy in which a liberal form of *Christianity is privileged and fused with pluralism and moderate secularism*” (2007, 1, emphasis in original). There is thus also a multiplicity of values and morals that inform the arguments put forth by the MPs in the debate on assisted reproduction. However, I question the notion that these values can be fully differentiated into those that fall into categories of ‘religious’ or ‘secular’.

There were a few challenges to a discursive naturalization of the connection between values, sexuality and religion. The opening quote of this article can be read as an example of this: “*I fully understand that deeply religious people condemn that single women or lesbian couples could receive fertility treatments...*” The MP, Sirpa Asko-Seljavaara, actually repeats the statement almost verbatim later on in the debate. There is a myriad of ways that this statement could be read, however, I find the tone of the statement to be somewhat sarcastic with its allusions to ‘bastards’, a term that is extremely outdated – the aim seems to be to connect deeply religious people to the past/pre-modernity, and by the use of the term ordinary for less religious people imply that the deeply religious people are an exceptional minority. A rhetoric that ties religiosity to backwardness and homophobia is frequently employed in current public discussions about Islam in Europe (Scott 2007, Butler 2008). The common denominator in these examples is the othering of religion/religiosity by stressing the modernity and ‘superior logic’ of a secular standpoint, especially when it comes to questions regarding gender or sexuality (Pitcher and Gunkel 2008, Butler 2008). This rhetoric is, however, not especially efficient in the case of the

debate on assisted reproduction since the connection between tradition and religion is presented by the opposition of the government act as exactly what superior values are built upon in the first place.

A further common factor in the statements by MPs that oppose the proposed act is what Sanna Karkulehto calls heteronostalgia (2004, 58), a longing back to an imagined time of ‘innocence’ when men were men, women were women, and there were no queers.

Today, as this discussion has shown, there is a multiplicity of values and multiple ways of relating to different values, and so it follows that our idea of the family is very different and that there are different types of families, and one could say, that the traditional one, based on the marriage between a man and a woman is being destroyed in this society, and that makes me very sad. I find that those traditions, that are included in the Finnish Christian tradition, have been based upon that family, marriage between a man and a woman, is a good foundation. We humans of course commit adultery, don’t love enough and so on, and the result of this is negligence and sickliness, but that does not mean that the relationship between a man and a woman is not foundationally well intentioned. MP Leena Rauhala, Christian Democrats

Taking a stand for so called traditional values seems to occur when heterosexuality is threatened by the ‘queer’. Michael Cobb writes about the ‘rise of values voters’ (2005, 251) as result of an increased visibility of queers (see also Castelli, 2007). The queer, in debates on queer civil rights, thus becomes a ‘constitutive outside’ of values. Attempts to formulate values as non-discriminatory, in the debate on assisted reproduction, seemed to necessitate a defense of the legitimacy, or indeed the normalcy, of non-normative sexualities or forms of kinship:

Sexual orientation does not belong to the realm of free choice. In my value-world all people are equal, regardless of what gender, sexual orientation, or type of family they represent. I support the Government proposition. It will not open the gates of hell, but it will let the current, moderate treatment practice continue. (MP Susanna Rahkonen, Social Democrats.)

There are two particularly interesting points in the above statement: firstly, notice how religion is brought into the argument in a rather extravagant fashion by the invocation of ‘the gates of hell’. A second interesting point to note is how the concept of free choice works in the argument. Michael Warner, commenting on the search for the so called gay gene and the attempts to legitimize homosexuality writes: “Both sides seem to agree on an insane assumption: that only immutable and genetic sexuality could be legitimate, that if being gay could be shown to be learned, chosen, or partly chosen, then it could be reasonably forbidden.” (1999, 9)

One can interpret Susanna Rahkonen’s argument as case in point with regards to Warner, or one could read her as saying that a woman willingly can be in a same-sex relationship at some point in her life and then be in a opposite-sex relationship in the next, or be single – and that these relationships are not really a matter of choice and that she therefore should be entitled to fertility treatments regardless of what kind of relationship she is in (or not). Rahkonen’s statement nonetheless leaves the question of what would happen if sexuality were a choice unanswered. The notion of sexual fluidity does not sit well in debates regarding legislation where GLBTQI citizens are the object – these are debates that are dependent on an identity politics with clearly defined borders as I will show next.

### **3.1 Queer kinship and legislation**

The Act on Assisted Fertility Treatments (1237/2006), which states that *all* women, regardless of their marital status, have legal access to fertility treatments, was finally passed in 2006. Up until this point Finland was the only Scandinavian/Nordic country that did not have any kind of legislation on assisted reproduction. Mainly, this was due to the fact that a consensus around the right of single women and lesbian couples to have access to assisted reproduction could not be reached. Because the issue was constructed as problematic in reference to these identity categories, the proposed acts were either withdrawn or shelved (Juvonen 2006, Jämsä, Mustola & Sorainen 2005). In practice, the situation was such that it was up to the fertility clinics and their doctors to decide whether or not to give treatment. The new Act also ended the possibility

of using anonymous gametes; it states that only sperm and egg cells from known donors can be used for fertility treatments in Finland. According to the Act on Assisted Fertility Treatments, a child has the right to know the identity of the donor who's gametes were used when the child turns 18 (chapter 4 § 23).

The demand for the non-anonymity of donors was in the debate argued for mainly by claiming that it is an essential human need, 'the right of the child', to know 'where he/she came from'. This argument was, at least on the 12<sup>th</sup> of October, completely uncontested. In fact, it was part of one of the arguments that the proponents of the act used most frequently. There are several problematic issues in this line of argumentation; firstly it is blatantly biologist, assuming that identity is essentially tied to biology, and secondly, it reinforces an idea found in psychoanalytical and anthropological thinking, namely that two sexes need to be present, even if only in a symbolic manner, for the child to be properly culturally intelligible – i.e. that culture itself is dependent on the presence of the male and female (Butler 2004). The most commonly used argument in favor of granting lesbians and single women to fertility treatments is thus tied to the reiteration of heteronormativity.

As I mentioned previously, the previous significant debate regarding legislation on non-heteronormative kinship issues in Finland was the debate regarding registered partnerships. A family commission set up by the Ministry of Justice in the spring of 1992 proposed the possibility of registering gay/lesbian partnerships. It took ten years for the registered-partnership act to be passed (Juvonen 2002, 53). During these ten years the debate circulated around the reasons for, and nature of, homosexuality. Due to the limited space I will not discuss the arguments brought up in that debate at length here. I will rather now focus briefly on some of the ways in which debates on same-sex marriage and queer kinship in a broader sense have been thought and problematized within the field of queer studies, and more specifically, some of the possible consequences of what happens when queer kinship(s) become legitimized by the state.

### 3.2. State legitimized queers?

In *Undoing Gender* (2004) Judith Butler ponders the question of what the implications of so called the turn to marriage might be for queer politics, for a politics that strives to proliferate and support sexual practices outside of marriage and the obligations of normative kinship-relations. The issue of gay marriage has become, or has been constructed as, one of the key issues of contemporary gay and lesbian politics. Michael Warner states that the debate over gay marriage has been one-sided and not reflective enough when it comes to the implications for queer politics if the campaign for gay marriage (in the US) were to succeed (1999). Finland does not have ‘gay marriage’, but registered partnerships. The framing of the debate differs to the US debate on several accounts, primarily in that the issue was not discussed in terms of gay marriage but in terms of registered partnerships. These registered partnerships have thus far not been equal to hetero-marriage(s), for example, the government proposition did not include the right to adopt. Although the Finnish debate was heated, the act on registered partnerships was not a politically decisive issue in the same way as gay marriage was in, for example, the US presidential election in 2004 (Duggan 2004). Voting for the act on registered partnerships did not adversely affect the political careers of the MPs that did so – our current Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen, Minister of Justice Tuija Brax, and Minister of Education Sari Sarkomaa all rose to their current posts despite voting for the act.

Lisa Duggan (2004, see also Duggan and Kim 2005), speaking about the US debate on same-sex marriage, takes a different route in her analyses of what lies at the heart of the opposition to same-sex marriage and GLBTQI rights more broadly. Duggan views the opposition as grounded in socio-economic factors more than in homophobia as such: the defense of marriage – initiatives strive to anchor the symbolic position of the conjugal family as the sole legally recognized household structure. Focusing on gay marriage, according to Duggan, actually limits the possibilities of legally recognizing other forms of kinship and household arrangements (2004, 223). Opening up the possibility of a flexible menu of different partnership and household recognition available to all citizens depending on varying needs would “threaten the normative

status of the nuclear family, undermining state endorsement of heterosexual privilege, the male “headed” household and “family values” moralism as social welfare policy” (*ibid.*, 223).

When reading the minutes of the parliament debate on the 12<sup>th</sup> of October I did find examples where the two-parent heterosexual nuclear family is constructed as the glue that holds society together in terms of economics. The fatherlessness of children in lesbian families, and thereby the lack of a second breadwinner, was by many MPs seen as putting a strain on state funds. As one MP put it: “in the case of single women and lesbians the Finnish state is the father and will be so until the child turns 18” (Lasse Hautala, center party). This perceived problem, of course, has nothing to do with the fact the children in lesbian families are fatherless, but rather with the fact that Finnish legislation, at the time of writing, only recognizes biological parents as legally liable to provide maintenance.

The situation will in all probability change during 2009, as it is expected that 9§ of the Act on registered partnerships will be modified in order to make it possible for the registered partner of a biological parent to adopt his/her child. Nevertheless, adoption for GLBTQI citizens will still only be possible for citizens in registered partnerships – thus reinforcing the coupledom norm, a norm that can be seen as essential to heteronormativity (Cover 2006, paragraph 2). Some of the MPs that opposed assisted reproduction for lesbians and single women warned during the debate that the outcome of passing the act would be the opening of the doors for ‘gay adoption’. Most of these MPs are also opposing the so called interfamily adoption act<sup>9</sup>. The Center Party MP Tapani Tölli likened this new proposition to a slice of salami sausage, saying that the traditional understanding of family is being chopped away one piece at a time, and that this started with the act on registered partnerships. The opponents are using very similar arguments in the current debate as they were in the debate on assisted reproduction although with a lesser focus on Christian tradition and more on traditional understandings of family and biology. One reason might be that Church Council issued a statement in support of the interfamily adoption act (this statement is brought up in the debate). In the statement the Church Council says that it views the betterment of the legal situation of children living in registered partnership as well

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<sup>9</sup> Minutes of the parliamentary debate, 26<sup>th</sup> November 2008, on the government proposition to change 9§ of the act on registered partnerships: [http://www.eduskunta.fi/faktatmp/utatmp/akxtmp/ptk\\_113\\_2008\\_ke\\_p\\_2.shtml](http://www.eduskunta.fi/faktatmp/utatmp/akxtmp/ptk_113_2008_ke_p_2.shtml), (accessed December 9, 2008)

founded, but stresses that a child should have a right to a mother and father and, that it does not view the creation of families where this right is lacking as good<sup>10</sup>.

One might ask why it is that sexuality has come to be such a central and emotionally explosive element in debates about legislation that deals with social security, inheritance, rights of visitation and so on? Furthermore, why is religion so frequently referred to as the basis for resisting the implementation of new forms of legislation pertaining to private life? Gayle Rubin, in the opening lines of her classic text “Thinking Sex”, makes an apposite remark touching upon these questions that seem as relevant now as they were in 1984, namely:

The time has come to think about sex. To some sexuality may seem to be an unimportant topic, a frivolous diversion from the more critical problems of poverty, war, disease, racism, famine or nuclear annihilation. But it is precisely at times such as these, when we live with the possibility of unthinkable destruction, that people are likely to become dangerously crazy about sexuality. Contemporary conflicts over sexual values and erotic conduct have much in common with the religious conflicts of earlier centuries. They acquire immense symbolic weight. Disputes over sexual behavior often become the vehicles for displacing social anxieties, and discharging their attendant emotional intensity. (1984, 267)

As I will show below, religion, as well as sexuality, has been seen as an ‘unimportant’ topic with regards to politics in much of Europe. It is time, to paraphrase Rubin, to think about religion, and also, about its connection to secularism, gender, sexuality, temporality and geography.

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<sup>10</sup> The Church Council of The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland’s official statement on interfamily adoption: <http://evl.fi/EVLUutiset.nsf/Documents/A97D914EA20D447EC22574A4004C6073?OpenDocument&lang=FI>, (accessed December 10, 2008).

#### **4.1 Past – present – future: Christian Finland and the Möbius strip**

If the Lord, when he created the world, would have come to the conclusion, that a woman could have a child on her own, then he would have created her as a hermaphrodite, so that problems of this kind would not exist. MP Seppo Lahtela, Center Party

It is not common place practice in Finnish parliament to refer to Genesis when making a political argument. However, the whole debate on assisted reproduction, and the minutes of the discussion in parliament on the 12<sup>th</sup> of October, are scattered with references to creation and God, as well as the ‘Christian values’ that Finnish society is built upon. The MPs discuss not only the proposed act, but also their own faith, the role of the church, or what the role of the evangelical-Lutheran state church should be.

In both the debate on registered partnerships and the debate on assisted reproduction, the prevailing values of society, in terms of past – present or indeed future, are held up as the reason why the heteronormative family is entitled to its special and privileged position. In their memorandum<sup>11</sup> on the act on assisted reproduction the Act Committee recommend that fertility treatments should only be given to heterosexual couples. The preamble given is that:

...the regulation pertaining to assisted reproduction is a very sensitive issue from the legislator’s point of view. In an area such as this the choices made by the legislator are in an exceptionally large degree dependant on the different ethical viewpoints dominant in society as well the attitudes towards for example different family forms that are influenced by these viewpoints.

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<sup>11</sup> Act Committee memorandum on the act on assisted reproduction:  
[http://www.eduskunta.fi/faktatmp/utatmp/akxtmp/lavm\\_12\\_2006\\_p.shtml](http://www.eduskunta.fi/faktatmp/utatmp/akxtmp/lavm_12_2006_p.shtml), (accessed December 10, 2008)

Here a kind of Möbius strip<sup>12</sup> is created; it does not matter which way you travel, you can never really get to the other side (still traveling on the same side of the strip) and you can never get out of the loop. Monique Wittig also uses the figure of the Möbius strip in her discussion on heterosexuality and the social contract: "...But this Möbius strip is fake, because only one aspect of the optical effect appears distinctly and massively, and that is heterosexuality. Homosexuality appears like a ghost and sometimes not at all (1992, 41)".

According to Karin Sporre, religions can be seen as social systems, where discrimination on the basis of gender and sexual orientation is legitimized and accepted (2007, 30). She asks how this could be understood using feminist epistemological tools. By placing gender at the foreground, the discriminatory practices of, for example the Christian Church, become evident. Sporre further states, that by looking at how churches symbolically perceive the numinous, it is clear that the 'masculine' aspects are dominant. In defense of the masculine divine, be it in the case of opposing female priests or openly gay or lesbian clergy, the 2000 year *history* and *tradition* of the Church is used as legitimating of the past – present and future of gender and its 'proper' place. The referencing to tradition and the canons (texts that are hundreds or thousands years old) creates an epistemological prerequisite which is quite uncommon in most academic disciplines; a prerequisite that needs to be acknowledged and destabilized.

Sporre's contention that religions can be seen as sites of legitimized gender and sexual discrimination becomes clear in the above quote by the Center Party MP. However, the discursive power of a religious tradition for the re/negations of heteronormativity in the Finnish debate on assisted reproduction has not hitherto been scrutinized or analyzed to any large extent; often the referencing to God and the Bible is taken as empty rhetoric by a Christian minority in parliament. I believe this approach misses the point of *why* this line of argumentation is employed in the first place. Furthermore, dismissing the religiously based argumentation as minority rhetoric might also hide the power that these arguments are invested with as well as the effect they have.

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<sup>12</sup> Lee Edelman also uses the figure of the Möbius strip in his commenting on the "politics of futurity": "...that rhetoric was intended to avow that this issue, like an ideological Möbius strip, *permitted* only one side."(2004:2) Elisabeth Grosz understands the figure of the Möbius strip as creating *both* inside and outside. (1994: 116)

#### 4.2 Vicarious Religion and the Post-Secular Turn

Religion, as a part of the Enlightenment project, has in Europe been constructed as the constitutive outside of modernity, as something no longer relevant in the public sphere (Keenan 2002, Latour 1993, Wolin 2005). The portrayal of Europe, and especially Scandinavia, as secular, has been hegemonic in sociology and several other academic disciplines (Keenan 2002, Davie 2000). The secularization theories (which can be seen as Eurocentric grand narratives – European religious life held as a prototype of global religiosity) put forth by Weber (1961), Berger (1967) and others, have permeated academia to the extent that questions about how religion, or in the case of Finland – Lutheranism, can be seen to shape politics and everyday life, seem insignificant and marginal (Davie 2000).

The secularization theories have come under sharp criticism from a wide variety of academics and thinkers, and some of the criticism has come from the originators of these theories themselves (Berger 1999). This criticism has fostered a debate around what is being called the post-secular turn. The debate has, apart from academics and scholars, also engaged religious authorities, most prominently Pope Benedict XVI, who entered into an exchange with the philosopher Jürgen Habermas (Habermas 2006, Pope Benedict XVI, 2006). The central point of the critique is, to paraphrase Bruno Latour (1993), that we have never been secular, or as Meyda Yegenoglu puts it, that “religion has never ceased to be in the public space” (2006, 246). Thus, it might be claimed that it is not a resurgence of religion as such that has fostered the debate around what has been called the post-secular. Hans Joas argues that “‘post-secular’...doesn’t express a sudden increase in religiosity, after its epochal decrease, but rather a change in the mindset of those, who, previously, felt justified in considering religions to be moribund” . (cited in de Vries and Sullivan 2006, 2)

Hent De Vries argues that a nation state can be said to be ‘post-secular’ if it counts on the diminishing but enduring existence of religion (2006, 3). I would add to this the view of the role of religion as shifting in terms of both meanings and expressions. In keeping with this argument I find the concept of *vicarious religion*, introduced by Grace Davie, useful in discussing the case of

Finland vis-à-vis the normative discursive power of Christian tradition within the debate on assisted reproduction: "...the notion of religion performed by an active minority but on behalf of a much larger number, who (implicitly at least) not only understand, but, quite clearly approve of what the minority is doing (2006, 24)."

According to Davie, religion can operate vicariously in a number of ways; church leaders and churchgoers embody moral codes on behalf of others, and further; churches can offer space for the vicarious debate of unresolved issues in modern societies (*ibid*, 25). I find the latter point very interesting with regards to the debate on assisted reproduction. Davie asks, whether it could be the case, that churches offer space for debating topics that could be difficult to address elsewhere in society, and gives the example of a current debate about homosexuality in the Church of England. Is this just a matter of an internal debate about senior clergy appointments, or is it one way in which society as a whole is coming to terms with shifts in 'moral climate'? If the latter is not true, Davie states, then the attention given to the churches in question is hard to understand. It seems as if a lot of European media is pointing to controversies within the Church, while at the same time stating that religious institutions must be marginal to modern societies (*ibid*, 26). This can be seen as case in point with regards to the pervasiveness and power of secularist discourse (rooted in secularization theories).

Davie is here talking explicitly about *European* churches and religious life. The way in which religious institutions matter to people who are not active participants in them is important to understand. What Davie calls the 'exceptional nature of Europe's religion' is derived from a particular history of state-church relationships, out of which the notion of a state-church as a utility rather than private organization, has grown (*ibid*, 27). The Church is, especially in the Lutheran countries in Europe such as Finland, set up as a public utility available to the whole population and funded by a tax system. One of the central points in the new Finnish *Freedom of Religion Act* (came into effect in August 2003) was, that religion should not be considered only as a choice of the individual but also as a part of a *community* tradition<sup>13</sup>. The ways in which the

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<sup>13</sup> *Church in Change – The Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland 2000-2003*, page 16. Church Research Institute, Publication 55. Tampere.  
[http://www.evl.fi/kkh/ktk/english/publication2000\\_2003/p55.pdf](http://www.evl.fi/kkh/ktk/english/publication2000_2003/p55.pdf) (accessed October 10, 2007).

church works as a public utility are manifold, but most frequently this is tied to different rites of passage; baptism, confirmation, marriage and burial.<sup>14</sup>

The importance of the religious institution for secular politics might *seem* marginal, but the impact it has on everyday life and especially the turning points in people's life, is all but marginal. One of the most visible rituals of the contemporary Finnish sacralisation of heteronormative hegemony is the continuously reiterated spectacular heterosexual (ecclesiastic) wedding ritual (Charpentier 2000, 16). As the rationale behind the new *Freedom of Religion Act* makes evident, the role of religion in Finland is closely tied to the idea of a Finnish community with shared values and rituals. The debate on registered partnerships and assisted reproduction is thus also a debate about what 'Finnish-ness' is, or what it ideally should be. Michael Azar (2001, 301) argues that one of the primary goals for every project of nation-building is to create a sense of loyalty between the people and the state-apparatus; hereby it becomes consequential that the 'matter' (race, language, history etc.) the population is meant to accept as the basis for its identity also serves the purposes of governmental power and a hegemonic order. Michael Cobb argues that the queer push for civil rights is also a contest of citizenship (2005, 251). He further states that queers function at the limits of the (American) "nation-state, and, as such cannot ever fully be included."(ibid, 252)

If we return to the question of whether it could be the case that churches offer space for debating topics that could be difficult to address elsewhere in society, a further complication might be added; might it be that 'religion' as opposed to 'the Church' in the Finnish context of vicariousness becomes a site for contestations of topics deemed inappropriate for discussion in a what is described as a modern secular state?

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<sup>14</sup> The percentage of those baptized of all births in Finland is 87 percent, 68 percent of all marriages (hetero only) are solemnized in church, 10 percent of civil marriages are blessed in church, of the deceased 98 percent are given a Lutheran funeral (this number being higher than the percentage belonging to the Evangelical Lutheran Church). Church Research Institute, 2005.

## 5. Conclusions

...Tonight there appears to be two competing ideas in this hall, the Christian Democratic and green liberalism. Christian Democracy is founded on the central aspects of Christianity and democracy, which societies have been built upon for thousands of years. Green liberalism is intrinsically tied to the values of feminism. The platform of the Greens claims that green feminism is a liberation movement for men also. However, in connection to this act on assisted reproduction, green feminism presents itself more as movement to demean and abase men. In the vision of the Greens the role left to men is that of a sperm-machine, when female couples and single women want to have children through fertility treatments. MP Kari Kärkkäinen, Christian Democrats

In this article I have questioned an understanding of Finland as being a secular and egalitarian nation by using the debate on assisted reproduction in Finnish parliament as a case study. I will now discuss what can be seen as the shared history and interconnectedness of the two discourses that I have analyzed in this article. In the above quote, by one of the most fervent opponents of the proposed act on assisted reproduction, the two discourses I have analyzed in this article are given the names ‘Christian Democratic’ and ‘Green feminism’. The MP attempts to make a clear break between the two. In the following concluding remarks I argue that such a break is highly contestable.

Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart note that “even in highly secularized societies, the cultural legacy of given religions continues to shape worldviews and define cultural zones” (2004, 17). While I do not subscribe to the notion of Finland as a ‘highly secularized society’ – I find it to be an oversimplification, I do agree with the latter part of the argument. ‘Finnish culture’ is very much shaped by Christianity, but also by the narratives of modernity and the legacies of Enlightenment. The narratives of modernity, progress and democracy are in fact bound closely to Judaeo-Christian tradition. In her discussion on Samuel Huntington, the man who famously coined the notion of a ‘clash of civilizations’, Judith Butler concludes that:

...the ideals of democracy that Huntington espouses are also those that express the values of a Judaeo-Christian tradition, a view that suggests that all other religious traditions are outside the trajectory of modernization that constitutes civilization and its 'missionary' claim to the future. (Butler 2008, 14)

'Green feminism' is presented as the opposite of Christian Democracy – as anti-Christian, anti-men, and anti-society – and implicitly secular. The arguments in the debate of those labeled as 'Green feminists', were, as I have shown, built on the idea of equality, and more specifically gender-equality. Richard Wolin (2005, paragraph 12) cites Jürgen Habermas as saying that modern notions of equality and fairness are secular distillations of time-honored Judeo-Christian precepts. The idea of universal human rights, according to Habermas reading of Durkheim in his two volume "Theory of Communicative Action" (1989, 43), has its roots in the Christian ideal of the equality of *all men and women* (emphasis mine) in the eyes of God (see also Habermas 2006, 252).

If we accept the claim that the notions of equality and fairness are rooted in a religiously legitimated two-sex model, and that these notions are not unproblematically 'secular', as there seems to be a tendency to think so , it might be easier to fathom why heteronormativity is not destabilized in the debate on assisted reproduction. The debate instead works to further a dichotomous and exclusionary identity politics. Equality and human rights are neither 'innocent' nor unproblematically secular (Honkanen 2007, paragraph 4). One can argue, on the basis of the examples that I have presented from the debate on assisted reproduction or the current debates on the role of Islam in Europe, that the idea of secularism as somehow foundational to modern European nation-states is challenged when this idea comes face to face with its religious self – this realization occurs via the encounters with religious or sexual others.

Finally, I am not advocating that we should 'get rid' of the ideals of equality and fairness – the ideals are not the problem, but rather (some of) the politics done in their name. Neither do I say that all values should or even could be abandoned, nor that we should all become 'secular', as this might not be at all desirable. With regards to this Judith Butler aptly states that some varieties of secularism involve "forms of absolutism and dogmatism that are surely as problematic as those that rely on religious dogma" (Butler 2008, 13). I am rather arguing for a problematization and

awareness of the genealogy of these ideals, in order for us to able to question our complicity in structures of power that undermine a striving for an inclusive and open-ended politics on queer kinship.

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### **Queer Eye for the Private Eye: Homonationalism and the Regulation of Queer Difference in Anthony Bidulka's Russell Quant Mystery Series**

During the last few years, activists and academics have been pointing to and questioning the depoliticization of the gay and lesbian community in Western societies. Gay pride parades, once demonstrations for human rights, have become spectacles of queer tourism; advertising in lesbian and gay newspapers and magazines celebrates exclusive condo developments and circuit parties. Recently, at a pride organizing committee, a volunteer questioned how much longer we would need pride parades: after all, we have gay marriage. What else is there to fight for? Indeed, in Canada, the legalization of same-sex marriage in 2005 was a major accomplishment for activists nationwide. At the same time, it is also a key factor in the depoliticization of the community. As Ishay (2007) notes in her newly revised book on worldwide human rights, “it is easy for gay politics to become politically conservative in an era of gay marriage and same-sex partnership benefits. These arguably assimilationist political moves also lead to the construction of some ‘queers’ as rights undeserving—the dangerous and the uncivilizable” (2007, 434). The problem, then, is that with the neo-liberalization of the community, those queers who do not form part of the dominant culture of mainstream lesbians and gays are further marginalized and oppressed. Indeed, this tendency was already apparent in 2002, when American academic Lisa Duggan sought to explain what she termed the “new Homonormativity.” Today, scholars continue to examine queer politics and queer culture for various manifestations of homonormativity (Johnston 2005).

Anthony Bidulka’s detective series, featuring gay private eye Russell Quant from Saskatoon, is the first of its kind in Canadian literature. It not only includes lesbian and gay characters and themes, but also, in Bidulka’s desire for the series to be as realistic as possible for his reading audience, he makes the Saskatoon lesbian and gay community and its internal relationships the primary focus of his work. In this paper I explore how lesbians and gays are

represented in Anthony Bidulka's imagined community and interrogate the relationship between Bidulka's fictional representations and the homonormalization of the lesbian and gay community in Canada today.

Using foundational concepts of post-colonial and queer theory, as well as recent applications of these theories by noted scholars, including Canadian Eva Mackey and American Jasbir Puar, I undertake a discursive analysis of Bidulka's work to demonstrate that the detective series presents a dominant gay culture that is primarily homonormative. As such, the novels can be read as a cultural site that reflects the management and regulation of contested forms of gender and sexuality, as well as the privileging of the white middle class that the gay community continues to hold up as the social ideal. I attend to the novels' embrace of gay consumer masculinity, their regulation of sexuality, and to the way the author literally makes a monster out of the only racialized gay male presented in the series.

I conclude that, whilst Bidulka's writing helps make lesbian and gay identities more visible and legitimate, it also participates in the Western political project of "homonationalization" (Puar 2007). By setting "proper" lesbian and gay citizens in opposition to the monstrous "queer terrorist," homonationalism melds good lesbians and gays into the heteronormative nation to the exclusion of perversely sexualized and racialized queers who are subject to exclusion and detention.

Lesbian and gay crime writing originated in the United States in the 1960s and began to flourish during the rise of the gay liberation movement, especially after the Stonewall Riots of 1969. Today, there are several well-known private-eye series, ranging from the dark and gritty Benjamin Justice Series to the more playful Tom & Scott Mystery Series. Until only five years ago, however, while a handful of lesbian crime writers were published in Canada, there were no gay Canadian authors and no gay Canadian crime-fighting heroes. Finally, in 2003, with the publication of Anthony Bidulka's *Amuse Bouche*, Canada's gay private eye had come out. He is Russell Quant, a first-generation Canadian of Ukrainian and Irish heritage living in Saskatoon. By October 2007, Bidulka had published *Sundowner Ubuntu*, his fifth novel and the most recent in what has become the first successful gay detective mystery series to be written by a gay male Canadian author and published by a Canadian press.

The creation, performance, and representation of queer-identified space in contemporary culture offer fruitful research areas for cultural studies today, especially in the United States where queer theory was arguably born. In Canada, however, gay cultural productions are fewer. As Terrie Goldie (2003) points out in his recent collection of essays, *Pink Snow: Homotextual Possibilities in Canadian Fiction*, this is very likely because it is harder to maintain the attention of a gay Canadian audience given its attraction to overwhelmingly hegemonic American and globalized gay culture (2003, 235). At the same time, in Canadian popular culture—indeed in society at large—Canadians have a penchant for defining themselves in opposition to Americans, rather than in terms of “authentically” Canadian characteristics. What Eva Mackey (2002) terms the “Benevolent Mountie Myth” is a classic example of this. As Canadians, we tell ourselves that the Canadian government and police have always behaved much more kindly and gently towards Aboriginal Canadians and other minorities than has the American government. Canada is a multicultural nation built on diversity; the United States is an assimilationist melting pot. If we are not like Americans, we do spend a lot of our time immersed in American popular culture. Aniko Bodroghkozy (2002), among other cultural studies theorists, argues that popular culture does not necessarily only re-present the dominant ideologies of the times. Rather, it is “popular to the extent that [it] help[s] socially situated readers work through fundamental dilemmas” (572). If, as Benedict Anderson (1991) has theorized, the nation is an “imagined community,” then I suggest that we can look to the imagined lesbian and gay community in Anthony Bidulka’s popular detective series to see what issues that community is struggling with and how the author reflects our “nation” back to us. I believe it is imperative that we undertake to analyse critically our lesbian and gay cultural productions, especially if we wish to transform hegemonic heteronormative discourses that continue to marginalize and oppress.

### **From (Hetero)Normativity to Homonormativity**

Any discussion of homonormativity presumes an understanding of heteronormativity. Arguably the first to use the term, Michael Warner (1993) defined heteronormativity broadly as systemic

power relations that govern society. These power relations operate under “common sense” assumptions, which have been normalized over time, such as the “fact” that people are born either as men or as women and that heterosexuality is the only natural sexual orientation.

In *American Homo: Community and Perversity*, Jeffrey Escoffier (1998) sets out the trajectory of the contemporary gay project of normalization and underscores how it represents a double-edged sword for the gay community. At their most general, movements that work to normalize gays and lesbians seek to transform the sexual outlaw or pervert into a citizen with rights and obligations like the heterosexual majority. This presents challenges to the majority as well as to the sexual minority. While the perversity of homosexuality opposes hegemonic values regarding sexuality and gender, normalization also challenges the gay community in that it threatens the pervert and/or outlaw status that helped gays and lesbians recognize each other and form liaisons and communities in the first place. Accordingly, there is the attraction of acceptance on the one hand and the draw of diversity on the other. Just as normalization offers rights such as legislation against discrimination based on sexual orientation, it also further prescribes codes of acceptable behaviour and circumscribes gay and lesbian agency. As Escoffier observes, “the normative expectation is that the gay man as sexual outlaw must give up his public sex in the park in order to become the sexual citizen who qualifies for the right to serve openly in the military” (1998, 226). Any normalizing project, therefore, functions with a disciplinary effect that helps to form the identities, political, economic and otherwise of citizens. Indeed, Escoffier suggests that corporate marketing and the commodification of gay culture are also normalizing projects that function in the same ways. Here, too, normalization regulates and disciplines: “It represents an improvement in some aspects by offering new goods and services—but it also shapes the psychological and physical need that those goods satisfy” (*ibid*, 226). Products and services that are not marketed and offered are not valued and become marginalized. Hence, as Escoffier observes, gay citizens who behave appropriately are assured the protection of some rights and access to a market that further normalizes and regulates on one hand and oppresses and marginalizes on the other. While Escoffier acknowledges that it is not possible to live outside a dominant society with its inevitable norms, he is optimistic that gays and lesbians

can continue to bring about social change through the triad of community, direct action, and alliances with other groups.

Lisa Duggan (2002) further explores the repercussions of normalizing projects in terms of developing tendencies on the American political front. In her less hopeful article, Duggan analyzes the forging of a new gay mainstream in the United States and introduces the term “homonormativity,” which she defines as:

a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption. (2002, 179)

Homonormativity opposes both radically conservative claims that gays and lesbians represent a threat to society and the State, as well as progressive calls for queers to work for radical change within the hegemonic heteronormative system. It represents in effect an unhappy “third way,” an ambivalent position that only stands opposed to certain forms of oppression—mainly homophobic attacks against the gay, white majority—while actively assimilating into a white heterosexual mainstream dominated by corporate capitalism and the marketing of appearance and behaviour.

The “depoliticized” politics of homonormativity and the management of difference represented in the Russell Quant Mystery Series are laid out from the beginning of Bidulka’s first novel. On only the second page of *Amuse Bouche*, Bidulka (2005) sets the tone for the whole series regarding Quant’s relationship to women and his misunderstanding of the Women’s Movement overall. Quant tells the reader about the history of the PWC building where his office is located:

Back in the early eighties when it was cool to delete the reference to ‘man,’ a group of professional women bought the building and rented space to female tenants who ran female-oriented businesses. For several years the Professional Womyn’s Centre was a success. But as the nineties matured and women overall became less hung up about the

‘man’ thing, what was once politically correct became a bit of an embarrassment and serious-minded tenants moved out. (2003, 8)

In one short paragraph Bidulka writes off decades of women’s struggle against oppression, reducing one of the most significant social movements the West has known to an early 1980s debate about political correctness, a game of semantics, and the creation of women-only work spaces. This implies that feminist struggles are immature and that serious-minded people have out-grown them. It works to depoliticize not only Russell Quant’s workplace but, more so, his relationship to the women in his community and the political struggles related to the formation of the gay community in the first place.

There is perhaps no more direct exposition of the author’s depoliticizing project, than in the explanation Russell Quant’s friend Anthony Gatt gives regarding how he and his partner Jared fit into the dominant culture of Saskatoon:

Although neither admits it, I believe Anthony and Jared do more for allaying homophobia in Saskatoon than a thousand gay pride parades. They do it not by raising placards or pushing their lifestyle into people’s faces, but by simply being there, existing with the ‘normal’ crowd and fitting in perfectly. Often, by the time anyone gets around to discussing the possibility that they might be a couple of homosexuals, it just doesn’t matter anymore. (Bidulka 2003, 119)

In this passage, gay activism and politicized queer difference are presented as antithetical to the “natural” social community or “*gemeinschaft*” (Anderson 1991). This normalization is further justified by its apparent effect of mitigating homophobia. Bidulka presumes here that the solution to homophobia is not political activism but rather assimilation into the “‘normal’ crowd.” This insists on the ability to “pass” for heterosexual and suggests that those who cannot pass would be excluded from the larger community. Furthermore, the normalizing project turns around the issue of heteronormative moral respectability:

Our connection to and success in the straight world is a tenuous one at best. We succeed at it because we play by their rules most of the time. Or at least we make them believe we are. We can escort a man to ritzy social events, refer to ourselves as ‘we’ and ‘us,’ make no excuses for leaving at the same time, and hold our heads high—just as long as we remain scandal free. But, one nasty homosexual imbroglio and we lose more ground than for a thousand straight divorces. And that’s our story. (Bidulka 2003, 142)

Bidulka’s gays and lesbians must maintain a normative respectability. It is their visible performance of moral respectability that allows them to claim a space in Anderson’s *gemeinschaft* and thereby be accepted as part of the authentic community. One is also reminded of Foucault’s panopticism here: Bidulka’s gays are disciplined to scrutinize and police their own actions in order that they remain within boundaries acceptable to dominant culture. Russell Quant himself illustrates this notion through his attempts to “pass” as straight acting and his self-reassurances of his masculinity. He regularly attends the YWCA and derives security from having his conventional masculinity confirmed by being “the hunkiest guy there” (*ibid.*, 229). Furthermore, masculinity is the product of historical shifts in how men demonstrate their sense of it, such that today, masculinity is not defined by what a man produces but instead by what he consumes (Clarkson 2005). Anthony Gatt’s disciplinary role further underscores the panoptic device. As a gay clothier, Anthony both markets cultural commodities and polices their use in the community:

Anthony is my unofficial liaison to the gay world. He knows what we’re wearing, what we’re drinking, what celebrities we’re building up and which, sadly, we’re tearing down, what sun-drenched holiday spots are hot, which ones are not and, most of all, he knows who is, who isn’t and which of the aforementioned are sleeping together. I, on the other hand, had to be told to stop styling my hair in the George Clooney/ER/Caesar fringe. (Bidulka 2004, 98)

In effect, Anthony takes on the role of a *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* expert in the style of the Fab 5: “idealized manhood is centered on the consumption of beauty and hygiene products and

services, extravagant foods, high-end couture, expensive furniture and involvement in high culture" (Clarkson 2005, 239). Like the Fab 5, Anthony is the gatekeeper to gay consumer masculinity. He also acts like a deputy to the force of heteronormative dominant culture, ensuring that morally respectable gay members continue to pass. In completing this metaphor, Russell Quant positions himself both inside and outside the gay community and in league with the straight guy, who needs instruction, coaching and discipline in what to wear and how to wear it in order to embrace more fully a socially accepted version of consumer masculinity.

It is not only queer appearance that is regulated by depoliticized homonormative values in Bidulka's writing. In her review of *Stain of the Berry* in *Spinetinger Magazine*, Sandra Ruttan (2007) observes:

This book is not filled with descriptive sex scenes—in fact, there's little sex at all and it is primarily off camera—so I hope people won't confuse my point. I have read other stories where sexual orientation was a critical factor of the plot and the protagonist was gay, but I have never read one where the majority of the characters were openly gay. As a result there is always the sense throughout the storyline that the issue of sexuality is very important. It is a central theme to the book. (2007, 77)

I would argue that while sexuality is indeed a central theme to the series, the sex act itself, is not. An ironic side effect of Bidulka's normalizing project is the erasure of homosexual activity in his novels. In the first novel, Russell Quant does not engage in sex with the Catholic priest in spite of the drawn out dance of desire that unfolds in the last half of the book. A final page of striptease at the end of the novel reveals only that a sexual encounter might take place between Quant and another man outside the narrative, yet only if the reader imagines it. At the beginning of *Flight of Aquavit*, what appears to be a hot cruising and pick-up scene turns out to be something completely different, and Quant flees the scene to save his life, while sex between Quant and James later in the narrative is reduced to phone sex, again, only if imagined by the reader. Finally, once Quant is involved in a relationship with Alex Canyon, a potential sex scene between the two in Quant's car ends prematurely. Quant forgets to turn the engine off after he has parked it in his garage, so due to an influx of carbon monoxide, the sex act becomes

poisoned. Effectively, the possibilities for “immoral” sex acts with a priest and as a result of cruising in the outdoors are disciplined out of the narrative. Sex is returned to the privacy of the bedroom and, if imagined at all, takes place outside of the text beyond the prying eye of reader. The homosexual outlaw in Quant is indeed quarantined. In fact, all sex is quarantined in these novels: this gay community is comprised of desexualized homosexuals.

Homonormativity, then, underscores the importance of “passing” and how the homosexual outlaw who is morally antithetical to the heteronormative system can be accepted, so long as he is a white, masculine consumer. Eva Mackey’s (2002) exploration and analysis of the ways “dominant culture” functions to maintain its hegemonic position in the Canadian nation are also very useful in helping to explain further homonormative processes and the concomitant development and self-maintenance of a gay “dominant culture” within the heteronormative mainstream. In *The House of Difference* Mackey (2002) reads a variety of Southern Ontario community festivals with her own queer(ying) eye to elucidate the various ways in which “dominant culture” reveals itself through its management and regulation of difference. She analyses various aspects of festivals, including event policies and promotions, the performances themselves, and interviews with community members.

Difference is not allowed if it threatens the imagined community’s non-political *gemeinschaft*. Repeatedly, people who embody forms of political difference perceived to threaten community consensus, are cast outside of the boundaries of ‘community’, and nation. Those left inside the ‘community’...may feel pride in the supposedly natural and authentic solidarity and consensus that remain in the community. (2002, 134)

Mackey posits a “construction of innocence” that occurs within the dominant community such that the attitudes and behaviours of the majority just make “common sense” in the Foucaultian use of the term. The community’s attempts at inclusion of minorities, so long as this inclusion is not politicized, can reveal colonialist, racialized, and paternalistic undertones and privilege the continued whitening of the community. The suggestion that the “dominant culture” is guilty of these attitudes is, however, met with disdain, since their embrace of difference is innocent of

controversy. In the examples of Anthony and Jared cited above, the two gay men are not a threat to the dominant community so long as they neither act politically nor create scandal.

Both Bidulka and his fictional hero struggle to maintain part of conventional heteronormative society while at the same time attempting to negotiate difference: for example, Bidulka homosexualizes the traditional hardboiled detective genre but maintains its form; Quant claims an affinity with straight-acting hegemonic masculinity but accepts the market's version of gay consumer masculinity, as well. Moreover, Bidulka's subjectivity reveals the author to be, like his hero, negotiating space within the dominant culture—as a gay, white man who “passes” well enough to blend in with the “normal” people—and outside it as a member of a community who advocates diversity on behalf of sexual outlaws. In an interview with Sandra Ruttan (2007), Bidulka further reveals the tensions he faces in mapping difference in his construction of the Saskatoon gay community. Ruttan asks about crime in Saskatoon and how Bidulka uses it to develop the criminality in his novels. She raises a specific incident that took place in November 1990 where two Saskatoon policemen transported an Aboriginal youth outside the city limits and left him to die in the cold. Ruttan asks Bidulka how this affects his writing. He responds:

It does and doesn't ... Certainly our population leans towards aboriginal population and *there's a lot of crime amongst aborigines*, the way statistics run, and in our province *we're* still shifting to that *reality* and making sure *we're doing the right stuff for the aboriginal population*, that's really important to me. *We* need to get smart about that. *We* have to work together ... But certainly stuff like that is damaging to a community as a whole overall, to have a situation where you have allegedly two policemen who have taken an aboriginal youth out and dumped him on the edge of the city. It's *horrendous*.  
(2007, 67-68)

(italics mine)

This passage clearly displays colonialist and paternalist sentiments and reveals the “construction of innocence” that Mackey explores in her work. It reiterates discourses of the “dominant culture” - about who belongs within community and who is not acceptable. Readers of Bidulka’s novels will realize that this real crime against Aboriginal people is re-presented in the “survival”

scene in *Stain of the Berry* in which a client's jealous wife trucks Russell Quant and Jared out beyond Saskatoon city limits and dumps them in a field at night during a blizzard. In Bidulka's whitened version, however, the Aboriginal people have been erased. As the racialized subject of a "horrendous" action, the Aboriginal body is abjected, intentionally forgotten. In Bidulka's retelling of the story, Russell Quant and Jared Lowe are brought back into the community and the symbolic order, guided by Detective Kirsch who represents the law force that Quant originally withdrew from in order to become a private eye. Most significant, however, is that in Bidulka's version, as Kirsch welcomes the two gay men back into the symbolic order of the "*gemeinschaft*," they are flanked by two members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. This can be read as a direct reference to the "Benevolent Mountie Myth" and functions as a device to signal the tolerance of the Canadian "nation" in its acceptance of gay people—who until very recently were excluded from dominant culture. Because most gay detective novels are American, this scene also serves to remind its Canadian (and American) readers who we are as Canadians: apparently, we are not intolerant like Americans who continue to discriminate against gays.

### **Homonationality and the Case of the Boogeyman**

The Russell Quant Mystery Series does not, however, present a "nation" that is free of intolerance, discrimination, and hate. On the contrary, as a product of Canadian popular culture, the series acts as a site where community and national struggles regarding queer race are played out. These struggles, I argue, include the move from the homonormative to the homonational. According to Jasbir Puar (2007), who develops the concept in her book *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, homonationalism involves the use of good homosexuals to help support and reaffirm contemporary neo-liberal nationalist projects.

The Orientalist invocation of the terrorist is one discursive tactic that disaggregates U.S. national gays and queers from racial and sexual others, foregrounding a collusion between homosexuality and American nationalism that is generated both by national

rhetorics of patriotic inclusion and by gay and queer subjects themselves: homonationalism. (Puar 2007, 39)

Accordingly, the queer body always already stands in opposition to the heterosexual body and thereby helps to reinforce the latter as natural. At the same time, “proper” white lesbians and gay consumers also stand in contrast to other “queers.”

As we will see below, *Stain of the Berry*, the fourth novel in the series, stands apart from the other novels as the most dark and sinister. It is central to the series in that it is the only novel to place the Saskatoon gay community, Russell Quant’s friends, and the private eye himself under threat. In *Stain of the Berry*, this threat comes in the form of a character who lives both inside and outside the lesbian and gay community. Known throughout most of the novel only as the “boogeyman,” this character terrorizes the gay community, wounding some members and literally scaring others to death. I argue that it is significant that the boogeyman is revealed to be the only racialized gay male in the mystery series.

Indeed, the boogeyman is Jin (Jinny) Chau, an occasional member of the Pink Gophers gay choir who is not accepted by his gay peers. Although he is a member of the Pink Gophers, his marginalized status as non-white, non-masculine, and non-middle-class renders him a threat. I suggest that this points to homonationalist discourses at work. Bidulka’s initial description of Jinny Chau is revealing:

Jin Chau was very thin, his shoulders scrawny under a well-worn, pink B.U.M. Equipment T-shirt that just barely reached the top of a pair of waist-squeezingly tight black jeans. He wore no socks and his narrow feet were noticeably paler than his face. At first I thought it was a no sunblock thing...until I looked closer and saw that Jin was wearing makeup; concealer to even out the ochre tones of his elongated face, mascara to make his dark eyes pop, eye shadow, a hint of lipstick and a pinch of pink on high but sallow cheeks. His once black hair (roots were showing) had been dyed red but ended up a faded, pinky-orange hue and was styled into a feathered puff that dominated the crown of his head, reminiscent of the Bay City Rollers. (Bidulka 2005, 140)

This characterization of Jinny Chau stands in stark contrast to the descriptions of the other gay men presented in the novel. For example, our protagonist, Russell Quant, is described as a “six-foot-one, fresh-faced, sandy-haired Adonis” (Bidulka 2005, 21). The other gay men in the novel are variously presented as tall, dark or blonde (but not pink!), strong, masculine, rugged, sensual and/or sexual. It is clear that there are two principal aspects to the description of Jinny Chau that differ from the characterizations of the other men portrayed in the series. One aspect is Jinny Chau’s effeminacy, the other is his race. The feminization of Jinny Chau is signaled by the description of his body and the clothes and make-up he wears, as well as by his mannerisms and voice.

As a gay Asian-Canadian, Jinny Chau becomes doubly different from the rest of the members of the gay community of which he is (a)part. According to Puar’s thesis, racialized—in particular Orientalized—queers have little range within which to move in terms of their expression of gender and sexuality. When they do not meet the mainstream model of the dominant culture, their bodies arouse terrorist suspicions. As Puar writes,

The multicultural proliferation of the cosmopolitan ethnic (...) has some demanding limitations in terms of class, gender, and especially sexuality. That is, what little acceptance liberal diversity proffers in the way of inclusion is highly mediated by huge realms of exclusion: the ethnic is usually straight, usually has access to material and cultural capital (both as a consumer and as an owner), and is in fact often male. These would be the tentative attributes that would distinguish a tolerable ethnic (an exceptional patriot, for example) from an intolerable ethnic (a terrorist subject). (Puar, 2007, 25)

Accordingly, it is not wholly surprising that in the neo-liberal and post-911 context of the novels that Jinny Chau becomes the boogeyman suspect. Moreover, further analysis can help to theorize how Jinny Chau’s abject set of campy stylizations has been preserved within the gay community and how it comes back to haunt gay men like Russell Quant who would fearfully check themselves for what Quentin Crisp (1968) once termed the “lice” of effeminacy and with trepidation ask, “I’m not macho?” (Bidulka 2006: 94). Indeed, as evidenced in contemporary

Western gay communities, camp is still employed today, and in many of the same ways as it was some eighty years ago. Bidulka clearly presents Jinny Chau in a camp role that repels Quant when they first meet:

‘I’m Russell Quant,’ I told him, feeling rather unglamorous.

‘Yeeeessssss, you are,’ he purred, placing a hand on a hip in a gesture that was meant to be sexy. I noticed his nails were long and shone with clear polish and he wore a multitude of rings. ‘What can I dooooooooooo for yooooouuuuuuu.’ (*ibid.*, 140)

Camp can be read as subversive play but also as abject in both hetero-dominant society and within the straight-acting segment of the mainstream gay community. Jinny Chau’s hand-on-hip posture in his initial encounter with Quant renders him abject through his performance of camp stylizations which he intends as sexy but which are rejected by Quant. Julia Kristeva’s (1982) theorization of the abject in *Powers of Horror* is helpful here in that it explains how the abject is “what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules” (1982, 4). Jinny Chau troubles the boundaries of gender, race, class and sexuality. Accordingly he represents a significant terrorist threat to the symbolic order and is abjected by it and, consequently by Quant, who represents, through his role as private eye, one whose job it is to restore order/the symbolic order. Jinny Chau, even before becoming the boogeyman, is radically excluded from the community—indeed, he is kept by his parents in a West End Saskatoon apartment owned by his uncle because no one wants to live with him—and as a representative of the abject, his flirtation with Quant draws Quant close to that boundary where all meaning collapses (1982, 2).

Yet Jinny Chau does not become the boogeyman overnight. Although Bidulka makes few ostensible judgments regarding his characters, he does use Quant’s quiet reflections to infer certain ‘truths.’ Accordingly, he implies that Chau has long suffered from marginalization and oppression: “Something told me Jin Chau had had many fearful boogymen of his own to deal with in his lifetime” (Bidulka 2006, 284). Chau is not employed. His parents pay him to live in his small apartment in one of the poorest neighbourhoods far from the centre of the city where

more ethnically and sexually diverse people would be more likely to associate. He has long been the object of hatred because of his race and gender performance.

The image of a visibly and sexually deviant Chau entombed in his family's apartment in a community where he is clearly marginalized recalls images of repression and haunting. In my reading of Jinny Chau, I am reminded of Himani Bannerji's (2002) article on racism in Canada, entitled "On the Dark Side of the Nation," where the author writes about the marginalization of non-white immigrants to and citizens of Canada:

We cannot be successfully ingested, or assimilated, or made to vanish from where we are not wanted. We remain an ambiguous presence, our existence a question mark on the side of the nation, with the potential to disclose much about the political unconscious and the consciousness of Canada as an 'imagined community.' (2002, 3)

This notion of an unassimilateable and ambiguous presence that questions the legitimacy of an "imagined community" helps one theorize Jinny Chau's ambiguous role in *Stain of the Berry*. Publicly ridiculed as an effeminate, gay Asian male, he cannot be accepted and assimilated into the normal gender and ethnic roles of his family, or into the white, masculinist gay consumer community of Saskatoon. Living separately from his family and visiting the gay community only occasionally for choir practice, Chau lives a liminal existence. As he moves between the gay community and his family or ethnic community, he becomes publicly the question mark that Bannerji speaks of, a question mark that forces the interrogation of the racial, economic, gender, and sexual power relations that shape each of those "imagined" communities, gay and straight, and draws borders between them.

In *Stain of the Berry*, the racial and sexual hatred that causes Jinny Chau to move from a marginalized gay Asian man in the Saskatoon gay community to queer terrorist occurs on a trip to Regina with the Pink Gophers, where they compete at a music festival. What begins as a seemingly innocent game of "Tequila pigs," soon turns into a scene where the other community members ridicule, mock, and shun Chau. While Bidulka does not overly provide justifications for Chau's treatment, he implies racism and homophobia are the cause. The author explains:

Maybe to a regular person their actions wouldn't have seemed as devastating, but to someone like Jin, a damaged soul, someone who lived his life in constant defense of who he was and couldn't help being it was, simply, the final straw that broke the camel's back. (Bidulka 2006, 281)

He became their boogeyman. In his mind, this seemed a fitting sentence for those who'd made his life so miserable...really none of the Pink Gophers — were specifically to blame for the greater woes of life as lived by Jin, but they were handy scapegoats. (ibid., 283)

Accordingly, Jinny Chau takes on the form of the boogeyman and begins to terrorize his victims. I argue that Chau's evolution into the boogeyman signifies that he is no longer performing the role of Bannerji's question mark on the face of the gay community. Rather, Chau has become the queer terrorist/exclamation mark that rips into the side of the gay community, at the same time exposing its abject racism, masculinism, and internalized homophobia.

The boogeyman's reign of terror in Saskatoon causes people to get hurt and threatens the integrity of the community. Lesbian partners Tanya Culinare and Moxie Banyon die of fright. As the only sexual partners in the group, their destruction could signify the destruction of the fundamental basis for the formation of the community: same-sex relationships. Before Russell Quant can bring about the unmasking of the boogeyman and put a stop to his violent attacks, Jinny the boogeyman attacks Quant's best friend Jared, a former male model and member of the Pink Gophers. When Jared opens his apartment door, Chau throws a bucket of acid in his face, which effectively burns into his skin, causing his skin colour to darken and appear stained (hence, *Stain of the Berry*). This type of attack clearly signifies terrorism and in effect "racializes" Jared the model. Russell Quant recounts the events of the tragedy and offers an interesting perspective on Chau's motives: "Jin did not have the physical strength to physically kill Jared, so he did what came to mind. He destroyed the object of his affection: Jared's beautiful face" (284).

Jared's beautiful, white, masculine model face may be read as the face of the dominant culture: Jinny's oppressor. It symbolizes all the white, racist, masculinist, colonialistic

determinations that have entombed him in that place of ambivalence that Bannerji writes about, neither in community, neither fully outside of it, where by crook of question mark he asks: how can I belong?

When along comes Russell Quant, trouble-maker ... getting too close for comfort, and another one of those unattainable kinds of gay guys who habitually scorn him. (281)

Racism, masculinism, and homophobia all express themselves through bio-power and body politics (Puar 2007). Consequently, the story of the boogeyman/queer terrorist is also about body politics, the right to perform one's body as one chooses, and to have that body included in "gemeinschaft" with others. In *Stain of the Berry*, however, the metaphorical struggle over bodies becomes a veritable bodily struggle for domination.

In the final action scene in the novel, Chau, ambushes Quant in a dark alley in the Hagar's Heath trailer park and knocks him unconscious. Sense of place is very important to Bidulka in his desire to make his novels realistic for his audience; realistic locations are necessary ingredients for a believable narrative. Accordingly, the trailer park is like a character to Bidulka, as he explains in his interview with Sandra Ruttan (2007):

In this fourth book, I was at a book club meeting in Saskatoon and there's a couple scenes in the book that take place in *a trailer park* within Saskatoon city limits and people were just so excited about it because they had no idea that was there. People have actually gotten in their cars and driven there to take a look because *it is kind of an oddity*. That's part of the reason I wrote about it. About two years ago I came across it, just by *turning the wrong way down a street*, I ended up in this kind of *No Man's Land*, something that looked like nothing else in our city, and there it was and had been for decades. (2007, 66)

(italics mine)

Bidulka's description of the trailer park as being within city limits but also an "oddity" gives it a blurred, liminal quality. At the same time, it does not belong within the acceptable community; it

is abject (Kristeva 1982). You get there “by turning the wrong way down a street” and it is a “No Man’s Land.” The treatment by Bidulka *and* his audience of a trailer park as somehow exotic and somehow uninhabitable by them (an empty border area), draws on the idea of community being built on consensus, where there is pride in similarity and a perceived authenticity. The trailer park is the site that attracts yet also disgusts. Bidulka builds the trailer park into the narrative, as well as into the website he uses to market his books. Here a photo of a trailer park is captioned: “Where the streets have no name.” The trailer park passes quickly from exotic locale to the liminal site of the boogeyman’s attack on Quant, and is summarily abjected.

When Quant comes to, he finds himself wounded, bound hand and foot, and nauseous. The boogeyman, Jinny Chau sits astride Quant, preparing to rape him. The scene unfolds with Quant himself now in a liminal, feminized state, moving in and out of consciousness. From above him, Chau expresses his hurt, his oppression, and how he intends to take revenge. It is a one-sided conversation, however, as Quant is incapable of entering into dialogue with his assailant. In this most terrorizing of all scenes in the series, Chau’s brief domination and feminization of Quant also renders subordinate and feminine the gay community and the larger “nation” which Quant represents. It is also significant to note - as does L. Pauline Rankin (2002) in her article on queer nationalism -that the nation is often represented as female in nationalist discourse. Nationalists “use this powerful metaphor to encourage male citizens to protect the ‘mother country.’ In military propaganda, the metaphor has been used to rationalize rape as a weapon of war or nation-building” (Rankin 2000, 178). Chau’s attempted rape, then, can be read as a terrorist attack on the dominant culture and on the “nation.”

Before Chau can effectively dominate the “six-foot-one, fresh-faced, sandy-haired Adonis” (Bidulka 2006, 21), however, a group of Hagar’s Heath inhabitants pulls Quant to safety and subdues the boogeyman/queer terrorist until the police arrive.

It is significant that the white, masculine, sexy and *gay* hero has been rescued from the racialized terrorist, and accordingly sanctioned, by the heteronormative community of Hagar’s Heath. This white working-class community strips Chau of the last remaining power he has to exert over his oppressors. The future for Chau thus includes deportation from the community and detention in a psychiatric hospital until authorities figure out what to do with him. Perhaps, like

presumed terrorists, he will be held indefinitely, so that his perceived threat can be erased. He will be entombed, as it were, in a “state” where he will not be able to be successfully assimilated, or made to vanish from where he is not wanted.

As Mackey (1997) notes, “the notion of the nation and the community as made up of non-political and natural ‘people’ draws on notions of ‘civil society, and ‘the popular’ which are fundamental to Western modernity and the development of ‘the nation’” (1997, 160). A queer reading of Anthony Bidulka’s Russell Quant Mystery Series can reveal not only the legitimization of the lesbian and gay community in Canada, but also that community’s homonormativity, by demonstrating how the dominant culture works to privilege white economically productive and sexually privatized (or deprived) consumers. Moreover, in this neo-liberal, post-911 era, the “imagined” gay community can also be seen to serve the homonational projects of the “nation” through its self-regulation and the proscription of the racialized queer terrorist.

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**Sibilla Aleramo, Lina Poletti and Giovanni Cena:  
 Understanding Connections between Lesbian Desire, Feminism and Free Love in  
 Early-Twentieth-Century Italy**

Feminist author Sibilla Aleramo met her first and only lesbian lover, Lina (Còrdula) Poletti, at the national meeting of the CNDI (Consiglio Nazionale Donne Italiane) held in Rome from April 24-30, 1908. The women, seven years apart in age, engaged in a two-year long romance documented in their extensive correspondence<sup>1</sup> and in Aleramo's lyrical novel, *Il Passaggio* (Aleramo 1982 and 1919).<sup>2</sup> The women's letters provide clues as to the ways in which they conceptualized their relationship. While a second set of letters, between Sibilla Aleramo and her male lover, Giovanni Cena, demonstrates Aleramo's personal need for a double relationship much aligned with contemporary views of free love, along with Cena's positive and negative analysis of this need. Aleramo was living with Cena when she met Poletti and engaged in an open relationship with them both simultaneously.

Aleramo and Poletti loved each other in the surrounding atmosphere of the first wave of feminism. The first two decades of the twentieth century saw a plethora of feminist activism and thought in Italy and Europe. The women's very relationship embodied this climaxing social movement; they used language from the feminist movement to express their feelings for each other as well as to explain their desires. Additionally, because Sibilla Aleramo admittedly wanted to have a relationship with both Poletti and Cena at the same time, she was greatly

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<sup>1</sup> The letters referenced here are housed at the *Fondazione Istituto Gramsci* in Rome, Italy. Alessandra Cenni edited and published some of the letters between Sibilla Aleramo and Lina Poletti in *Lettore d'Amore a Lina*, Alessandra Cenni (Ed.). Milan: Grafica Sipiel (1982). This article quotes the letters published by Cenni when possible. The translations are my own. All other quotations from letters by Sibilla Aleramo, Lina Poletti or Giovanni Cena were transcribed from the originals at the Gramsci Institute and translated by me into English.

<sup>2</sup> I translated quotations from Italian published materials cited in this article (unless otherwise noted in the bibliography).

influenced by contemporary ideologies of free love. Therefore, both free love and feminism intersect with lesbian desire, while feminism also intersects with free love, in the telling of this love story.

While Poletti is the “lesbian” of this story, this article focuses on Aleramo because of her double love for both Poletti and Cena. For many Italians, homosexuality was more of an ideology than an identity at this time (“homosexualism” is the term used in the documents); the bohemian women and men of this story contextualized their desires through gendered terms like active and passive, masculine and feminine, and above all, through understandings of love and morality.

This article has three parts. Section I provides a brief history of Aleramo and Poletti’s relationship.<sup>3</sup> Section II analyzes the correspondence between Cena and Aleramo, while section III considers the influence of the feminist and free love movements on women’s same-sex desire and particularly, Sibilla Aleramo’s own, very personal, interpretation of her sexual ideal.

## I. Sibilla Aleramo and Lina Poletti: A Brief History

### *Sibilla Aleramo*

When Lina Poletti and Sibilla Aleramo met in 1908, Poletti was a student of philosophy living in Ravenna. Both women shared a passion for education and feminism. Aleramo, born in 1876 as Rina Faccio, was, at the time of their meeting, seven years older than Poletti and already a celebrity in the world of Italian feminism because of the recent publication of her semi-

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<sup>3</sup> Because the majority of the secondary scholarship on this topic is in Italian and thus I believe many readers of this journal will not be aware of the Aleramo and Poletti story, I borrow heavily in section I from the work of Alessandra Cenni, an academic in Comparative Literature, who began researching the Aleramo and Poletti story in the 1980s. In this section, I use quotes from Cenni’s edited volume of the Aleramo/Poletti correspondence (Cenni and Aleramo 1982), interspersed with sections of letters she did not use that I read and transcribed during the summer and fall of 2008 in the Aleramo archive of the Gramsci Institute in Rome. Cenni’s pioneering efforts reconstructed the women’s relationship, but did not discuss Giovanni Cena’s opinions in concert with the women’s correspondence (Cenni 1982 and 2007).

autobiographical novel, *Una donna*.<sup>4</sup> In this novel, Aleramo told her story of being raped at fifteen, marrying her rapist, having a son with him, and choosing to leave their home and her son because of her husband's mental and physical abuse. Her tale of self-liberation was quickly translated into the major European languages and earned her speaking engagements and recognition by organizations in support of women's emancipation.<sup>5</sup> Coincidentally, Poletti was part of the generation of young feminists influenced and inspired by the honesty of *Una donna*.<sup>6</sup>

Aleramo wrote and published *Una donna* with the guidance of her partner, author and editor Giovanni Cena, then the director of the journal *Nuova Antologia*. They met in 1899 in Turin, Aleramo moved in with him in 1902, and their co-habitation without marriage exemplified the "new secular religion" of the free love movement (Cenni 2007). Through Cena's contacts and the success of her first novel, Aleramo became a regular in a circle of Italian intellectuals, socializing with the likes of Luigi Pirandello, Giacomo Balla, Gaetano Salvemini, and Grazia Deledda. During this time, along with writing and editing, she traveled with Cena to aid earthquake victims in Sicily and Calabria and taught literacy at a secular Sunday school for migrant workers in the Agro Romano, the rural area around Rome (Cenni 2007).

Aleramo's friend and founder of the *Unione Femminile Nazionale*, Ersilia Majno, established one of the first secular Sunday schools in the Agro Romano in 1904. The 28-year-old Aleramo was among the first wave of missionary teachers and became a leading figure in the school movement. She was herself a teacher, a recruiter of other teachers and a member of the executive committee. Therefore, her relationship with Cena led her to Rome's reformist and feminist circles – and Cena even attended the women's conference at which she met Poletti (Drake 1990, 255).

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<sup>4</sup> Sibilla Aleramo is a pseudonym for Rina Pierangeli Faccio. Rina became Sibilla upon the publication of her first novel, *Una donna*, in 1906. According to Rosalind Delmar, "Sibilla" is a "reference to the Roman Sybils, women gifted with oracular powers of prophecy" (Delmar, Afterword to *A Woman*, 177). Cena is credited with suggesting the name Sibilla. In 1907 he wrote in a sonnet titled, "Sibilla" – "I discovered her and I called her Sibilla" (Zancan, *Il doppio itinerario*, 200). Regarding her last name, "Aleramo," Sibilla chose that herself because it was the family name of the Faccio's ancestors. She writes, "I chose 'Aleramo' one evening while reading 'Piedmont' by Carducci. I am from Monferrina: [quote from Carducci:] 'and the great lover of castle and vineyards – the essence of Aleramo'" (Zancan, *Il doppio itinerario*, 200.).

<sup>5</sup> Aleramo's novel, *Una donna*, published in 1906 is cited by many as the book that launched Italian feminism.

<sup>6</sup> Much of the biographical information on Lina Poletti is from the introduction and postscript to *Lettere d'Amore a Lina*, written by Alessandra Cenni and Cenni's 2007 chapter in *Fuori della norma*.

Despite the fact that Aleramo appears to have been in only one same-sex relationship, as a prolific writer she was no stranger to the world of early-twentieth-century lesbian Europe. She corresponded with American salonnier Natalie Barney in Paris, who passed Aleramo's book onto one of her partners, Renée Vivien, with whom Aleramo engaged in an extended correspondence.<sup>7</sup> Aleramo herself wrote about, thus publicizing, her relationship with Poletti in *Il Passaggio*, a lyrical novel in which she described the “fairy tale” with blond hair and golden eyes. However, this book wasn’t all that Aleramo published on homosexuality. In the anthology *Andando e stando*, which is a collection of prose written and published by Sibilla Aleramo from the 1910s to the 1940s, there are book reviews of works by Otto Weininger (whose *Sex and Character* is discussed below), Natalie Barney (Aleramo titled the book review, “The Living Room of an Amazon,” as it is a review of Barney’s *Aventures de l’Esprit*), and Virginia Woolf (Aleramo favorably reviews *Orlando*). Yet it is her relationship with Poletti, the volume of their letters, and Aleramo’s *Il Passaggio*, that make these two women an obvious starting point for historians of early-twentieth-century Italian lesbian history.

After her relationship with Poletti, Aleramo spent a year alone until she began her next relationship with writer Vincenzo Cardarelli. After Cardarelli, Aleramo engaged in romances with many famous male writers including Giovanni Papini, Umberto Boccioni, Giovanni Boine, Dino Campana, and Salvatore Quasimodo. Her final relationship, at age sixty, was with poet Franco Matacotta who was forty years her junior. In her lifetime, Aleramo published over 25 volumes of novels, poetry and diaries. She died on January 13, 1960. She was 83 years old.

### ***Lina Poletti***

Biographical information on Sibilla Aleramo is not hard to find, but who was this “fairy tale with blond hair and golden eyes” called Lina Poletti?<sup>8</sup> Born Cordula Poletti in Ravenna on August

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<sup>7</sup> For more information on Aleramo’s friendship with Barney and a close reading of *Il Passaggio* see Daniela Danna (2004).

<sup>8</sup> A recent chapter by Alessandra Cenni, an academic in Comparative Literature, documents Poletti’s life before and after Aleramo. Cenni’s pioneering efforts provide an essential history of one of the first well-documented Italian lesbians. Because Cenni’s work has not been translated into English and therefore readers here may not be able to

27, 1885, Poletti was the second youngest of four sisters. Her family was well off and they lived on via Rattazzi, near the *Piazza del Popolo* in Ravenna. She graduated in 1907 from the University of Bologna with a thesis on Carducci's poetry. According to Alessandra Cenni, Poletti had a "negative legend" in her town because of her "unprejudiced life choices"; she dressed in men's suits and "showed no love for the stagnant atmosphere" of her small town (Cenni 2007, 44). Nonetheless, Cenni implies that it was this very eccentricity that attracted the attention of her husband and childhood friend, Santi Muratori. Her marriage, according to Cenni, was a social cover that worked well because like Cena had been for Aleramo, Muratori was also a feminist, a "humanist of tenacious and intransigent loves" and understanding of Poletti's great struggles (Cenni 2007, 54-55).

When Poletti met Aleramo, she was a young student of literature and philosophy who also volunteered as a fundraiser for the schools of the Agro Romano and planned conferences on behalf of Italian workers around the country – often coordinating the schedule of her events with Aleramo's so that the women could see each other (Cenni 2007, 49). In fact, Richard Drake, who wrote an introduction to the second English translation of *Una donna* as well as an article about Sibilla Aleramo's work in the Agro Romano claims that it was her relationship with Poletti that prevented Aleramo from publishing the "powerful novel of social realism" based on her work as a literacy teacher. He quotes Anna Celli, an Agro Romano volunteer as having "begged [Aleramo] to turn away from 'the abyss' [of lesbian love] while there was still time, to find satisfaction in 'the fulfillment of our [workers']/volunteers' duties,' not in fleeting passion" (Drake 1999, 266). Certainly Aleramo and Poletti must have faced some criticism towards their relationship, but the writing that Aleramo *did* produce during her time with Poletti exists as one of the most extensive collections of lesbian love letters from this time period. Certainly that is more significant than any missed opportunity to produce yet another "powerful novel of social realism."

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read her work themselves, I have chosen to summarize a portion of her chapter: "Ritratto di un'amazzone italiana: Cordula Poletti (1885-1971)" in Nerina Miletta and Luisa Passerini (Eds.) *Fuori della norma: Storie lesbiche nell'Italia della prima metà del Novecento* (Turin: Rosenberg & Sellier, 2007). Incidentally, while Sibilla Aleramo's *Una donna* has been translated into English, Aleramo and Poletti remain on the periphery of European lesbian and feminist history while they are central to these histories of Italy.

Poletti is described by Aleramo as having dressed in masculine clothes.<sup>9</sup> Her pseudonym, “Tristano Somians,” may offer a small clue as to how she might have conceptualized her own gender identity. The first name, Tristano, makes one think of Tristan and Isolde, the famed medieval secret lovers. Would Poletti think of herself as the lover who engaged in a secret relationship with his uncle’s wife? Cena and Aleramo were certainly old enough to be Poletti’s aunt and uncle. Her taken last name is more challenging. “Somians” is the term for an Ethnic group, also of medieval origins, from the East Baltic region.

After her relationship with Sibilla Aleramo, Lina Poletti had a relationship with Eleonora Duse; after Duse, Poletti began a relationship with Countess Eugenia Rasponi who, coincidentally also attended the 1908 congress of the CNDI. Poletti and Rasponi lived together for 40 years; Rasponi was, indeed, the love of Poletti’s life.

### ***Sibilla Aleramo and Lina Poletti***

When Aleramo and Poletti met at the CNDI in 1908, Poletti was 23 and Aleramo was 30.<sup>10</sup> Aleramo wrote that as she was leaving her seat on the committee for women’s suffrage one night, “the young girl” accompanied her home because it was late. They walked close to one another down a dark and narrow street. A nervous shudder went through Aleramo and she felt like she couldn’t speak. Aleramo was afraid to turn toward the girl, but wondered if the girl was looking at her. Aleramo didn’t sleep at all that night. She wrote to the girl immediately and told her that all she thought of was her – her “isolated and imperious figure.” She asked the girl if she was aware of the place she has taken in her life and she said that without her, she felt a “rut” in the space she occupied (Aleramo 1982, 26).

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<sup>9</sup> Alessandra Cenni (2007) analyzes Poletti’s masculine gender expression; therefore this article will not go into depth on this topic. The picture published in Bruna Conti and Alba Morino’s book displays a smartly dressed young woman, a stark contrast to the overt femininity of Aleramo (Conti and Morino 1981). Also, the photo of Poletti in Cenni’s article (2007) can be seen on the Italian lesbian community website elleXelle: <http://www.ellexelle.com/leswiki/index.php?n=Biografie.PolettiCordula> (accessed March 30, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> At the CNDI, topics of discussion included women’s economic independence, equality in love and marriage, fair child custody laws, and women’s suffrage. For more information on the CNDI see *Donne e conoscenza storica*: <http://www.donneconoscenzastorica.it/testi/accardidonne/actutconsiglio.htm> (accessed March 30, 2009)

Aleramo's friends at the conference talked about this young girl: Lina Poletti. They said she was "irresistible." Aleramo wondered if this made Poletti laugh. Aleramo told Poletti that she could not stop thinking about the first time she saw her, "at the legal session of the Congress, one morning." It was a beautiful Roman spring in late April, 1908:

You came into the room, you had a diffused look. You smiled at me without knowing me and maybe without noticing me, and I felt... I don't know what to say to you...something profound, like I was swooning...then, later, you talked to me...do you remember? And then I left and you wrote to me. I saw in you the first Italian woman. Do you remember?...And I felt and feel that you liked me a lot....And now the anguish is in your voice, with the passion that seems to make your voice crack. I would like to talk to you for a long time. I would like that you let me breathe into your soul, yes, but I fear, I fear....can I be frank? It seems to me from seeing this in your eyes, you don't like my sentiment...no, no? I am young, you see, and all that you try is for vehement strength...But don't be offended, you say? Permit me to be like this?...I am already terrified of losing you. Oh your enigma, your smile (Aleramo 1982, 26-27).

Continuing this letter to Poletti, Aleramo asked her if she remembered their "first hour of passion." Aleramo envied Poletti and was jealous that Poletti seemed to already know the ways to love women, even though they both were "invested from the same sacred wind." Aleramo felt tremendously, dizzy and out of breath. She wrote:

Lina, I never had in my life thought of the possibility of loving a woman, never, do you understand? I didn't believe in the love of the human couple, to the integration of the two human branches...Reading one time of a sad passion of Michaelangelo for a young man I had shivered, like in front of incomprehensible insanity. But no desire ever came to me to scrutinize the dark horror. And no soul of a woman had attracted me with its secret, like no feminine shape I had ever desired. You can imagine, then, that a strange destiny came instead from a young girl against this mystery; can you imagine how I would have been upset when I discovered that I was in love with you? Oh your soul! Because it was a woman's, because it was a sister's I felt it vibrate like that next to mine

like no other had before? With which intoxication did I welcome its sigh? And how it expanded itself to the breath of your ample and strong being! And your youth, in front of which I found myself time and time again mother and infant! (Aleramo 1982, 27-30).

Aleramo here said she loved Poletti because she was a “woman” and a “sister.” There was a sense of newness, apprehension and exhilaration in their love. Aleramo was surprised by her same-sex desire, but also found a familiarity in Poletti’s body because of her femininity. Cenni points out the paradox of the fact that while Aleramo described Poletti as the “masculine young girl,” she also admitted being attracted to her because of her femininity (2007, 51). Aleramo wrote:

We are in the light of dusk, in the closed room. I am lying on a small bed, and I have my hair scattered on the pillow and my eyes half closed. You speak to me, with your face leaning over mine, flaming pink face, and your hands lightly play with my hair like it was a harp. You speak beautiful and sweet words to me, with a voice that goes with the palpitations in my veins. Your hands pass over my forehead like the springtime wind. And all of the fragrance and pang of the spring enwraps me, it lays this way motionless in the little, obscure room, in front of my half-closed eyes...To the man that I loved I gave my smile. To you, woman, go my tears. You can love life also across them, like the stars do (Aleramo 1982, 35-36).

It is perilous to assume lesbian desire was enabled by feminism. However, when I look at these diary entries and letters, and pair them with the feminist action in which the women partook during the day, the energy is not unfamiliar or difficult to imagine. For Poletti and Aleramo, being feminist was intertwined with being in love with each other. When Aleramo wrote that she gave her tears to Poletti, she meant that Poletti understood her struggle as a woman and could therefore love her in a more profound way than any man who would love her simply for her superficial appearance, such as her smile. Supporting this idea, are Aleramo’s words to Giovanni Cena, her male lover, in an undated letter written between 1909 and 1911, “I was for you the

extreme smile of youth, I was beauty, serenity, [here she crossed out “the smile”], harmony...” (Aleramo, Lettera 39).

In 1908 when the two women met, Sibilla was still living with author Giovanni Cena. Aleramo and Cena broke up after a seven-year relationship because of the “revelation” of her love for Poletti (Cenni 1982, 15). But it wasn’t a clean break. Cena, progressive enough to have been one of the only men in attendance at the Congress of Women in 1908, held out for a while to see if this infatuation would last. Aleramo had hoped to maintain both the relationship with him, “her companion,” and Lina, her “creature.” Alessandra Cenni writes that “Sibilla believed in the possibility of a relationship between three people – in which it wasn’t necessary to renounce a bond with one in order to maintain the other” (Cenni 1982, 17). Comparing this relationship to that between Vita Sackville West, her lesbian lovers and husband Harold Nicolson, Cenni cites “free love” as the burgeoning and popular concept among artists and middle-class socialites that contributed to Aleramo’s belief in a successful multiple relationship. Yet I believe that this “free love” is more of the ilk described by Caroline Arni: a “freedom to love” denoting a more modern, romanticized and autonomous relationship instead of a promiscuous one (Arni 2004). I provide a detailed explanation of this thesis in the third section of this article. The following section of this article will examine Cena’s reaction to Aleramo’s desire to maintain a relationship with her “companion” (Cena) and her “creature” (Poletti).

## **II. Giovanni Cena and Sibilla Aleramo**

There is evidence that Giovanni Cena both supported and rejected Aleramo and Poletti’s relationship. For Aleramo, Poletti was a creature that she could love much in the same way that Cena loved her. In a letter to Cena, Aleramo wrote: “For so much time I didn’t even understand it. But you, you who loved me for this, you who I had given this happiness, and had blessed me, oh you can understand what that creature means in my life, that no one before had meant...” (Aleramo, Lettera 39).<sup>11</sup> Aleramo assumed that Cena could understand her love for Lina by

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<sup>11</sup> Emphasis in original.

relating it to his love for her. She also recognized that he saw her love for Poletti as “disloyalty” toward him or a “sickness”: “You told me that I am disloyal or very sick. It’s neither the one nor the other, my poor Giovanni. Disloyalty would be maintaining for you the illusion” (Aleramo Lettera 48). She did not see herself as having had an affair behind his back; she was honest about her love for both Cena and Poletti. Yet neither could accept the love of the other for her.<sup>12</sup>

One long letter, dated June 10, 1909 attempts an early understanding of Aleramo’s love for Poletti. Cena begins:

I had an agitated night thinking of you. In the morning, I received your letter and all day long the words “to live *constricted*” echoed in my head...The thing is very difficult for me...Because I see you as far away with a love full of sadness, but without reserve, without criticism? ...I feel I yelled, sometimes waited, sometimes unreasonably irritated, almost cruel against you? P. [Poletti] is therefore a great difference...The truth is that we feel like two spouses against our will, that are more willing to be in company other than only ours...our dialogue [is] ...the opposition of two discordant and irreconcilable opinions (Cena, Lettera 66).

Cena’s reaction to Aleramo’s new romance was a mix of jealousy and compassion. He asked why she did not criticize her own love for Poletti as she did seem to dive head first into this romance, while at the same time, he expressed concern that she did not seem happy in this new love. He wanted to understand why she felt “constricted” by a heterosexual monogamous relationship with him and obviously did not feel so “constricted” himself. In stating that they were like a married couple who stayed together against their will, he acknowledged that there was something missing from their relationship, but his last sentence indicated that perhaps he did not think Aleramo should have engaged in her relationship with Poletti as a remedy. The letter then becomes more confrontational:

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<sup>12</sup> Many of Cena’s letters to Aleramo are short, detailing only meetings about publishers or travel plans; many are written on letterhead from *Nuova Antologia*. His handwriting is extremely difficult to read and for this reason, some words are illegible. For any words that are illegible in the primary sources, I’ve indicated this simply by using parentheses around the word “illegible”.

But we come to us. Constricted in life! No...There aren't modern or antique morals...and your [Aleramo and Poletti] morals tells you that each life has its reasons of being in itself and in others: you can be useful to others, in a reformist mode...On the other hand the suicide wants to say the failure of all that you had behaved and preached in your book [*Una donna*] and the triumph of the old morals of the Albino Snake! (Cena Lettera 66).<sup>13</sup>

The suicide Cena referred to could be both Aleramo's own attempt, and the suicide of her mother. Aleramo's mother committed suicide because of unhappiness in her relationship with her husband, and Aleramo attempted suicide for the same reason (Aleramo 1906). Both acts represented a rebellion against the patriarchal system of heterosexual marriage and oppression.

What Cena meant by the "old morals of the albino snake" is less clear. I hypothesize that Cena was referring to the Chinese legend of the white snake which is also a famous Chinese Opera by the same name. It is the story of a young male herbalist who falls in love with a beautiful woman who is in reality, a white snake demon. The white snake also befriends another female snake whose powers were not as potent as her own. The white snake woman helps the herbalist, who becomes her husband, make his herbs more potent. A monk discovers that this woman, who is also now pregnant with the man's child, is really a snake demon and banishes her for eternity to the Leifeng Pagoda. But the other woman snake destroys the Pagoda and in one version the two women snakes retire to heaven, and in another version, they live happily ever after with the man and the child (Shepard and Zhang 2001).<sup>14</sup>

The legend of the white snake also can be seen to represent a feminist rebellion. The husband is impotent and the woman is saved only by her female friend. In this paragraph, perhaps Cena is telling Aleramo that they do not have to be constricted to heteronormative patriarchal values and recognizes that his relationship with Aleramo and Poletti is mirrored by the relationship of the herbalist with the white snake woman and her friend. But then Cena

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<sup>13</sup> Emphasis in the original.

<sup>14</sup> For a queer analysis of this story, see Tan See-Kam, "The Cross-Gender Performances of Yam Kim-Fei, or the Queer Factor in Postwar Hong Kong Cantonese Opera." *Journal of Homosexuality* 2000, Vol. 39, Issue 3/4, 201 – 212.

contradicts this understanding by making an argument about the natural love between men and women – stating that he needs her in a most respectful and complete way:

By constricted you want to mean that you live for me, I feel the duty of freeing you from this constriction. For as much as I believe that you are necessary for me (you should think that you are necessary for me in a complete way, not as an illicit lover, nor a devoted sister, but as a legitimate lover, as a woman in respect to a man, in all that a woman can represent in a man's life, morally, intellectually, physically) you don't have to dedicate yourself to me in strength or piety... (Cena Lettera 66).<sup>15</sup>

He then ends by telling her to go and live alone. That he will always be her friend, and always read her work, but that he believes it was Poletti's influence on her, not hers on the younger woman's, that ended his relationship with her. He writes of Poletti: "To her the absolute didn't cost anything" meaning that Poletti had nothing to lose in pursuing Aleramo. Cena was sad in the end, knowing that he was unable to save the relationship. "Sometimes I judged poorly, but I prefer to believe that I didn't get it" (Cena, Lettera 66). In a letter dated October 8, 1909, Cena expressed much of the same, impotent sentiment:

I feel profoundly useless now...you reply to me with the reality of your feelings, if I speak to you of my feelings, you tell me to change them in the sense that favors the illusion or voluntary error...You need my love, you wrote (illegible) but it isn't enough for you. I need yours, but I can't support you if it's not total. Maybe the tragedy and what one wants is a double love that destroys also another. You can tell this theme to your friend and lover...you didn't become this way because of accidents in life, but for another woman, for something that is superior to all of my pain, to all of my love, to everything; much stronger, etc (Cena, Lettera 66).<sup>16</sup>

In stating that the tragedy was that Aleramo wanted a "double love that destroys also another" perhaps he meant that Aleramo's attempt at loving both Cena and Poletti at the same time was

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<sup>15</sup> Emphasis in the original.

<sup>16</sup> Emphasis in the original.

futile and maybe even selfish. Cena's emotions were normal for someone who had lost a love to another person. But Cena felt especially emasculated by Poletti and acknowledged that the women's attraction was far more powerful than anything he could have offered Aleramo.

But how did Aleramo see this situation of loving two people at once? She felt despair over the failure of her relationship with Cena in light of her relationship with Poletti. While Cena and Aleramo were not married, but living together, Aleramo did not see her relationship with Poletti as the cause of her breakup with Cena, but instead she lamented the fact that both Cena and Poletti could not accept each other's love for her. On August 8, 1909 she wrote to Poletti:

This, for our relationship. Then he is tormented from the thought that my only love for him is over, and that I love you at least as much as I love him...My poor companion [Cena] is always more and more desperate. Not only for changed relationships, but for the love that I bring to you...He told me that I can't divide myself...that I must, despite myself, choose... (Aleramo 1982, 35).

She also told Poletti that Cena, "doesn't presently agree absolutely with my judgment of the relationship that we have, and he repeats to me with crudeness that he believes it is the result of a mental aberration, to which *you* led me for a favorable disposition of mine, physiological or pathological I don't know well" (Aleramo 1982, 39). In these two quotes, it is obvious that Cena feared the women's relationship, but also believed it was either a result of a medical problem or a pathological vice. Perhaps Aleramo was referring to his letter of 1909 cited above when he admonished Poletti for leading Aleramo down the path of lesbian deviance. In a later letter to Poletti, Aleramo explained that Cena accepted her feelings for Poletti, but questioned why Poletti could not accept Aleramo's feelings for Cena.

The words "mental aberration...physiological or pathological," indicate that both Aleramo and Cena were aware of the scientific writings on sexuality of their time. Psychological, sexological, and criminological discourse was prevalent at the turn-of-the-century in Italy. In 1878 the German theories of *Conträsexualität* were brought to Italy by forensic physician Arrigo Tamassia, furthered by Guglielmo Cantarano in 1883 with his study on the woman known as "X," and developed later by criminologist Scipio Sighele in 1892" (Danna 2004, 118). Famous

criminologist Cesare Lombroso, who believed that “born” female criminals had a taste for violence, weapons, horses, a voracious sexual appetite and abnormal virility, outlined a physical and psychological sketch of the female deviant (Gibson 2004, 90-104). Additionally, anthropologist Paolo Mantegazza, who believed that marriage brought more restrictions rather than freedom, joined the debate over women’s bodies and sexuality (Mantegazza 1938, 157-158).

While they all had something to say about lesbianism, the anthropologist Mantegazza stands out for his analysis of lesbianism and heterosexual marriage. While Aleramo and Cena were not married, but living together, Cena’s feeling of impotence and Aleramo’s feeling of self-righteousness are mirrored in Mantegazza’s analysis. He is clear about his belief that “Lesbianism” is a death knell to heterosexual marriage:

More often than once, Lesbianism brings with it domestic unhappiness; and it behooves the married man to keep a sharp eye out for those strange and hidden manifestations of lasciviousness...Where the vice is of long standing, a cure is all but impossible; for the reason that the clitoris, with prolonged exercise of its nerves, becomes unduly sensitive and overdeveloped, and all normal pleasure is thereafter a pale and colorless thing, compared to the Lesbian’s convulsive spasms. The husband then may find himself in a cruel dilemma, having to choose between loathing and condemning the companion of his love, or himself acquiring a vice, which alone can satisfy and make her happy (Mantegazza 1938, 80).

Mantegazza believed that women’s same-sex love will ruin a heterosexual marriage, ruin her ability to be pleased by a man and drive a man to vice (most likely performing oral sex on her) in order to please her. Mantegazza began this section by noting how frequent this occurrence is, and that Italians should not believe the myth that women’s same-sex love is rare. He follows this section with a discussion of the “shamefulness” of sodomy, practiced upon a man or a woman and likewise the shame of bestiality, especially that which women practice with their little poodles.

But Cena never showed any signs of making an effort to bring Aleramo any more pleasure to enhance their relationship. Instead, his greatest concern consistently seemed to be his own well-being. In the following letter, he writes about how he missed her while she was in Venice, and in the quote after that, he trembled at the thought of her with Poletti at the beach house in Santa Marinella.

I need peace, if not that, then the complete caress of your love...I can live alone; I don't want to be alone, but I can, I've convinced myself, live without sweetness, without joy, with anger, like being on the run from something...It would be an agitated and toned-down life, but maybe productive like its been in these days [without you here] (Cena, Lettera 96).

The second example of Cena's crippling fear was from a letter dated June 12, 1909. It was sent to Aleramo while she was staying with Poletti in a house by the sea in Santa Marinella, just north of Rome: "Why do my hands tremble when I open your letter? Instead I find you calm – up until another letter from Ravenna, that could also be bad [the word *cattiva* could mean "evil" or "naughty" in this context too]...maybe my letter will reach you together with that other girl!" (Cena, Lettera 82).

Cena was starting to realize that Aleramo's feelings for Poletti weren't fleeting. Aleramo's letters to Poletti indicate her intention to live a double life – one with Cena and one with Poletti – yet being honest about it all: "It was in me the divine force of love until death, of living the double life of one who loves, double the pain and double the joy, a free soul perpetually in front of another woman, in a perennial exchange, in a perennial reaction with God" (Aleramo May 29, 1910).

Sibilla's belief in free love as well as her right to experience a same-sex relationship while maintaining her heterosexual relationship with Cena directly coincided with not only the women's emancipation movement but her belief in how love nurtures the soul. Historian Bruno Wanrooij pointed to Aleramo who was famous for her positive attitude about physical love nourishing her soul and her writing. She said in *Amo dunque sono*: "The seed enriches the woman who receives it, if she has the deep virtue of love, and every embrace, if it doesn't

fertilize the womb, it fertilizes one's intellectual substance" (Aleramo 1982, 182). Wanrooij writes, "Sibilla Aleramo distinguished herself from those who indicated in sexual relations with a man a precondition, or a guarantee, of a true and sentimental physiological maturity. The woman had true autonomy, although in her opinion, physical contact with a man contributed at times to the development of her 'profound treasures'" (Wanrooij 1990, 183). The following section will explore how ideas about free love and feminism intersected with Aleramo and Poletti's relationship. More than something that helped her writing or creativity, Aleramo believed that love was essential in any relationship – heterosexual or homosexual – and that without it, the relationship had no moral base and was just an expression of physical desire.

### **III. The Matrix of Ideals: Free Love, Feminism and Lesbian Desire**

Historian Lucienne Kroha states that in Italy "[w]hat emerged from the half century between the completion of Unification (1871) and the onset of Fascism (1922) was a conscious attempt to renegotiate and extend the parameters of female identity..." (Kroha 2000, 174-175). As an example of this "renegotiation," Aleramo's book, *Il Passaggio* along with her letters to Poletti and Cena, indeed attempted to "extend the parameters of female identity" through an analysis of female sexuality, morality and social norms. Aleramo blended biological sex with the construction of gender by using the terms "active" and "passive" in a discussion with Poletti in an attempt to make sense of both their love and Poletti's (perhaps feminist, perhaps transgender) choice of wearing masculine attire:

You don't divide humanity into *masculine and feminine*, but into *active and passive*...In every way, the fact is that active or passive, in the physiological and psychological order, the men would always be men in their *shape* (maybe the language is not scientific, but it's not important), and the women will always be women (Aleramo 1982, 53).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Emphasis in the original.

Arguing for biological determinism (in shape only), Aleramo here believes that women can be both active and passive. While she admits that she is not using scientific language, in doing so, one can assume she is aware of a scientific discourse on what was deemed the “Sexual Question.” She continues:

[Y]ou, my Lina, energetic and active as ever, you however, like it or not, have a nice, blond, sweet girlish form, and the soul that unconsciously rises to the lips...is the soul of a woman, more ready, more tender, more passionate, than a soul of a man. ...[S]ome generations of women who are cultured and free will have had enough of radical modification of the *feminine concept*...*Particularly women*, like me, and I could not at my time tell you that *you don't know me*, because all of the instincts of conquest, of control/domain, of savage will of pleasure that are in my father, I possess them, they were honed for good fortune... (Aleramo 1982, 53).<sup>18</sup>

Here, Aleramo encourages Poletti to see that she, despite any masculine appearances, is actually a woman underneath and should be happy to have such passion and tenderness that comes with being a woman. In the same breath, Aleramo admits that within herself are instincts of domination, like those of her father. Working a few generations before Aleramo, in fact he died in 1909, Criminal Anthropologist Cesare Lombroso marked female “born” criminals as having received traits from their father (Gibson 2004). Sibilla certainly believed that her “activity” was a legacy from her father, a man for whom she worked as an adolescent and put on a pedestal until she, as a teenager, learned he was unfaithful to her mother (Aleramo 1906).

This dual self-identity of masculine and feminine appears frequently in Aleramo’s writing. She wrote in *Il Passaggio*, “I thought that I had in myself elements of war, the softness of my mother and the violence of my father, the fearful melancholy of one and the rebellious boldness of the other...the instinct of devotion and the instinct of conquest in perpetual opposition” (Aleramo 1919, 4-6).

In many ways, Aleramo can’t seem to get past the idea of Poletti as “masculine.” She believed that Poletti was trying to hide her own womanhood. At the same time, Aleramo claimed

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<sup>18</sup> Emphasis in the original.

to know more about women because she was more feminine, and believed that Poletti didn't understand women because she was more masculine. Aleramo writes: "In the gift of love, the woman...doesn't have at all that sense of *submission* that you [Lina], with a masculine psychology, presume. The theory of the passive and the active...has also, in this anatomical camp, the need for more...reserve" (Aleramo 1982, 54). She continued to defend women who were forced unwillingly into the subordinate position of relationships, as she once was in a heterosexual marriage, and attacked Poletti's equation of masculine with dominant. In a later paragraph, Aleramo attacked her again for thinking of women in such subordinate positions as if they were prostitutes, consenting to the whims of the active male.

Then, using this example of the crime of prostitution, she twists her logic and says: "You tried to commit that same crime [prostitution] that pigeonholed you into the masculine, the crime of enjoying, without love, taking advantage of someone else's abjection." Aleramo accused Poletti of being "evil" because she had sex with her, without loving her. "And homosexualism doesn't postpone the relief either" (Aleramo 1982, 55). Just because it was lesbian sex, there still was no excuse for sex without love for Aleramo.

She believed that "free love" included emotion, not just sexual encounters, an idea that pairs well with Caroline Arni's thesis on free love in the same time period. Arni focuses on the writings of Swedish pedagogue Ellen Key, who was a social reformer popular throughout Europe at the turn of the century, and German literary critic Helene Stöcker, who was a main advocate of the "New Ethic," a social ideal advocating a higher morality through love not legitimized by the state through marriage. In examining Key and Stöcker's writings, Arni finds that "free love" was not a movement for promiscuity, but one that incorporated the ability for women to have the freedom to love, to end love, to have control over their romantic relationships and therefore engage in love that would not be reduced to eroticism (Arni 2004).

Ellen Key and Sibilla Aleramo knew each other. In a letter dated between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> of March, 1909, on a Friday morning, Aleramo wrote to Poletti: "I'm not leaving tomorrow evening, or else I'll give up the chance to see Ellen Key again" (Aleramo 10-27 March, 1909). This is the only mention of Key in Aleramo's letters that I have read, but this short sentence is quite significant as Aleramo shared Key's beliefs on the significance of love in relationships.

Key, like Aleramo, believed that love was defined by erotic impulse but both women also believed that engaging in relationships with more than one person at a time was essential because one might find one characteristic in one partner, and another in someone else. Arni writes that for Key, love began and ended according to an “astronomy in the world of emotion;” therefore state sanctions like marriage could not prevent people from infidelity or divorce. Additionally, Key believed that men, and sometimes women, should love more than one person at a time because a great, true love may not have been given to them. Thus the ideal is “one-love”, but in its absence, individuals should feel free to find characteristics in different partners in order to express their true love (Arni 2004).

This is exactly how Aleramo felt. She found the ability to share a depth of emotion and pain with Poletti; and as we read above, she gave Cena her “smile.” Additionally, she believed that Poletti didn’t really love her and therefore Poletti’s lack of love made Poletti’s physical desire for her immoral and masculine.

Related to feminism, Arni demonstrates that for Key and Stöcker, keeping love as an essential component in any relationship coincided with the women’s emancipation movement:

By taking into account its far-reaching consequences, namely the possibility of simultaneous love, the authors I have cited radicalized their argument about love as a relationship between individualized subjects. Furthermore, this entailed a radicalization of what was intrinsic to this concept of love: the feminist promise of including women in modernity as well as the theorem that social cohesion would be the ultimate outcome of personalized love (Arni, 2004. 200).

The examples of Key and Stöcker, along with Aleramo and Poletti, provide case studies of women’s same-sex desire intersecting with the first wave of the feminist movement. Another writer, of whom Aleramo was aware, theorized on this connection in detail. Infamous for his anti-Semitism and misogyny, Otto Weininger is worthy of exploration here because of his attempt to link women’s same-sex desire and women’s emancipation in the same discourse. He said that “women’s need for emancipation, and her capacity for emancipation, derives

exclusively from the proportion of M[asculinity/Man] in her” (Weininger 2005, 57).<sup>19</sup> He explains:

W[oman] has no need and, accordingly, no capacity, for this kind of emancipation. All those women who really strive for emancipation, all those women who have some genuine claim to fame and intellectual eminence, always display many male properties, and the more perceptive observer will always recognize in them some anatomically male characteristics, an approximation to the physical appearance of a man...Its application to the problem of homosexuality led to the discovery that a woman attracted to another woman is half man...the degree of a woman's emancipation is identical to the degree of her masculinity (Weininger 2005, 58).

Taking at face value the fact that Aleramo and Poletti met each other at a conference for women's emancipationists, and certainly other women's emancipationists were involved in same-sex relationships, Weininger is not completely off the mark in connecting feminism with women's same-sex desire. However, Aleramo was decidedly feminine and as we have seen from her scoffing at Poletti's masculine gender expression, she saw no need for any woman to dress in a masculine style. As for Weininger's claim that women attracted to women are “half men” – this does agree with common contemporary beliefs about those with characteristics of the opposite gender, but he is applying this to all women who loved women. Of course, all women who loved women, in his mind, appear masculine. This process of essentializing is problematic. More importantly, he claims that feminine *women* feel no need for emancipation. It is the part of women that is masculine that feels this need and therefore women who have no part that is masculine, have no need to be emancipated (Weininger 2005, 62).

Not surprisingly, Aleramo read Weininger critically. In 1933 in the *Journal of Politics and Literature* she wrote about him:

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<sup>19</sup> Weininger also believed that every sexual invert displayed some degree of gender characteristics of the opposite sex. Additionally he differed from those who came before him in thinking that sexual invert are all bisexual, defined as capable of intercourse with both men and women (Weininger 2005, 41).

When he was 33 years old, in 1903, he killed himself. His great book, *Sex and Character*, was translated into Italian. Few readings are more tragic. We know in which moment of his precocious adolescence Otto Weininger asked himself for the first time the sense that he had on the ground and under the sky of the creature called woman, the creature that had an organized mind like that of the man... (Aleramo 1997, 126).

Weininger's pairing of women's emancipationists with women who have romantic and sexual relationships with other women is a result of the fact that women's emancipationists were quite often rebelling against many of society's rules. For Poletti, loving Aleramo was a form of rebellion against patriarchy. In a letter dated March 8 (probably 1910), Poletti wrote: "I love you and I bring you with me in the vast sense of our communal mother, the natural saint, from whom came Virgo to the rebellion against the society of men, I bring you with me with my disdain and my fury..." (Poletti March 8, 1910?). Poletti, born on August 27, was a Virgo and saw a direct relation between her own rebellion and her astrological sign. This quote also indicates that she saw their love as a rebellion against the confinement of patriarchal society and that together, with all their "disdain and fury" they would triumph against this oppression.

Additionally, the events of Aleramo's life existed as one example after another of unjust oppression due to patriarchal norms. She was raped at fifteen; coerced into a violent marriage with her rapist; the one joy she had – her son – could not sustain her as she was constantly abused by her husband and was not helped by any official authority or even family member; because she ran away to escape the abuse, she could not gain custody of her son. By living with Cena she rebelled against marriage – the institution that led her into the world of pain from which she had escaped – and then in discovering her love for Poletti, she saw the possibility of having a love that wasn't plagued by patriarchy and oppression. I'm not saying that Aleramo "experimented" with lesbian desire because she was hurt by men or because she was engaged in the women's movement, but she instead was supported by the new ideas of free love (even Cena accepted some of these ideas) and the desire to find a love that would be free from patriarchal oppression and make her happy in all aspects of her life. Even though these loves did not last, hers is a story of triumph over adversity. She loved men, but knew that it was patriarchy and the institution of marriage that enabled misery to seep into her life. Therefore, in loving Poletti and

Cena together she attempted to reach a new ideal and height of romantic love, one that was uniquely personal to her, and suited her own needs and desires. Individually Poletti and Cena would not have been enough for Aleramo, but together they provided her with a complete sense of love and desire.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

When I began this research, I wanted to understand how women who engaged in same-sex relationships in early-twentieth-century Italy understood their own expression of masculine gender identity. I was curious to know if Poletti saw her gender identity as something intrinsically connected to her sexuality, or as Joan Scott found of Poletti's contemporary Madeline Pelletier, something more connected to the women's emancipation movement (Scott 1996, 125-160). But when I got to the Aleramo archive in the Gramsci Institute, I saw the plethora of letters between Giovanni Cena and Sibilla Aleramo during the same years of the letters between Sibilla Aleramo and Lina Poletti. I had just read Caroline Arni's piece on Stöcker and Key for my oral exam in Queer History and the similarity between Key and Aleramo's words were striking. When I found Aleramo mentioned Key, I had an "ah ha!" moment that made me redirect my research toward an analysis of free love and its intersection with women's same-sex desire and feminism. In the end, I see the feminist movement as an integrated thread that runs between the two.

Aleramo needed a double relationship for herself and for her own reasons. She didn't have the "one great love" that was so idealized by Key. But she found elements that she liked in both Cena and Poletti, and thought of herself as a modern woman who had the right to enjoy this new form of double love that laughed in the face of society's norms. In being honest and requesting this, she's demonstrated to those of us who came one hundred years after her, the real meaning of free love and its relationship to both feminism and lesbian desire in her time.

My original question about Poletti's gender expression was answered in Cenni's chapter in *Fuori della norma* (2007). Cenni argues that Lina's masculine attire reflects her sexuality

more than her feminism. Supporting this, Cenni found a very salacious story about Poletti at Eleonora Duse's house attempting to seduce American art collector Mable Dodge. I'm encouraged by her research knowing that there is so much more to be done in the burgeoning field of queer Italian history. As I mentioned above, Aleramo and Poletti are only the first path of inquiry for historians of Italian lesbian history because of the availability of the sources. But I predict that the small group of historians interested in the question of sexuality in Italian history will soon grow, as will the connections between historical subjects like Aleramo and Key, phenomena like feminism and free love, and sources like letters and the medical/legal publications. Buon lavoro!

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Munt, Sally R. (2008) *Queer Attachments, The Cultural Politics of Shame*. Aldershot: Ashgate.  
ISBN: 978-0-7546-4923-6 (pbk). 248pp. RRP:£18.99

A few years ago in a dark corner of the now defunct gay bar, The Brief Encounter, in London's West End, I had a very brief encounter with a man in his early twenties. All we did was kiss, but his joyful enthusiasm was like a kick in the teeth compared to the jaded, posing gay culture that I was used to. *He kissed a boy and he liked it!* "It's so horny, kissing another man" he said, almost gasping for air. He'd only just come out and I was envious of his proud transgression and shamelessness recalling my own difficult teenage years kissing other boys and the accompanying shameful pain. Those early years and my attempts to 'straighten' myself out follow the familiar narrative of the coming-out story first put to paper by Edmund White in 1982.

In her latest book, *Queer Attachments*, Sally Munt examines the emotion of shame and its retinue of other connected emotions: envy, resentment, suffering and pride. As a self-confessed butch lesbian she's encountered shame often in her life; in her working-class roots, in her abortion while she was an Evangelical Christian and, in the eyes of some lesbians, in being too noticeably lesbian. (Munt 2008, 1) Though she asks whether shame is not one of the very cornerstones of a homosexual identity: 'Can there be a homosexual subject who is *not* formed from shame? In any personal trajectory, the growing consciousness of same sex-desire must, in a Western context, give rise to feelings of difference and exclusion.' (95) Instead of shunning these feelings of shame, Munt suggests that we use the emotion to our advantage. We should 'approach shame, as a potential, as a change agent for the self.' (8)

Munt considers many sites of shame in this volume from the refusal of the Irish diasporic organisers of the New York Patrick's Day Parade to allow the Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization to march alongside them, the continuing portrayal of the Irish and the working class as lazy and amoral in TV programmes such as *Shameless*, to the liberatory artworks of Tracey Emin. Within shame lies the opportunity for a re-inscription of the Social and in the case

of *Shameless*, Munt believes that instead of embodying Capitalist aspiration the poverty-stricken families on the Manchester estate move beyond the stereotype of white racist trash to symbolise, albeit briefly, a Britain that includes all races and gender positions. (156)

Despite the title of her book, her explorations into these shameful texts are not always queer. She admits as much, but sees Cultural Studies as a ‘‘queer discipline’’ with its emphasis on collectivity, collaboration and mutuality...and its principle of ethical, public intervention.’ (15) However, I’m still not convinced with her argument that Ricky Gervais’s mock documentary/sitcom *The Office* is queer. She sees David Brent, the politically incorrect and officious protagonist as performative in a Butlerian manner, ‘as a manager in drag.’ (129) The fact that it is an exercise in shame, the viewer, ensnared by scopophilia and *schadenfreude*, watches it ‘with her own hands shamefully covering her face, her fingers parted over her eyes’ (129), Munt attests, give the text its queerness. *The Office* charts an optimistic journey from shame to joy, from melancholia to ‘successful’ mourning, as in the last episode Brent finally humiliates the man who sacked him and succeeds in ‘get[ing] a fabulous and funny girlfriend’(129) and it’s this optimism, despite the shame, that has led to its popularity. But I wonder whether its very optimism and popularity dequeer any queer potential it may have contained.

Optimism and mourning suggest a future and it’s the future some recent queer theorists have told us we must avoid as the future is always representative of a homophobic heteronormativity. In his polemic with reproductive futurism, *No Future – Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004), Lee Edelman interrogates the deathly anti-social space that queers have been historically pushed into. Instead of attempting to force our way out of this position, Edelman calls on us to welcome this death drive with open arms. While legal moves and public opinion may lead us to believe that

the future will hold a place for us – a place at the political table that won’t have to come at the cost of the places we seek in the bed or the bar or the baths...there are no *queers* in that future as there can be no future for queers, chosen as they are to bear the bad tidings that there can be no future at all. (Edelman 2004, 29-30)

Indeed, he proclaims that we should ‘insist that the future stop here.’(31) But while Munt similarly suggests that we should embrace our shame in the same way that Edelman invites us to embrace our death drive, she maintains that we should look towards a future. She is adamant that shame and its attendant emotions can transcend our exilic identities: ‘shame is a kind of imperative to the emergent self.’(Munt 2008, 89) It is by immersing ourselves in shame that we desire a ‘reconnection’ (103) that returns us to the Social, but returns us queerly. She offers two compelling examples.

The first is Stuart, the Irish gay man from Channel Four’s *Queer as Folk* (1999 and 2000). When his eight-year old nephew threatens to tell Stuart’s parents that Stuart is gay and that Stuart has molested him (Stuart hasn’t, but the nephew sees blackmail as a way to extort some money) Stuart outs himself in a powerful speech, one that I still use occasionally. Stuart says,

I’m queer, I’m gay, I’m homosexual, I’m a poof, I’m a pufftah, I’m a ponce, I’m a bumboy, batty boy, backside artist, bugger. I’m bent, I am that arse bandit. I lift those shirts...I dine at the downstairs restaurant...I fuck and am fucked. I suck and am sucked...And I’m not the pervert. If there’s one twisted bastard in this family it’s this little blackmailer here. (Quoted in Munt 2008, 96)

This speech, this eloquent rant, is, Munt says, ‘an invocation to shame, a citation of shame that through its dramatic, confrontational momentum exceeds the confessional moment and becomes a statement of being.’(96) And what is more, Stuart is able to deflect the shame on to the blackmailer. Stuart, the queer, has agency here. (96)

Her other striking example is David Fisher from HBO’s *Six Feet Under* (2001-2005). At the start of the series which begins with the death of David’s father, David is a closeted gay man, and the series then charts David’s flirtations with heteronormative respectability – he plans to become a Deacon in the Episcopalian Church – to his acceptance of his homosexuality. It’s not just a conventional conversion narrative as through his battles with shame David is able to refigure gay life, and importantly have a future. The American poet, Mark Doty in response to some graffiti announcing ‘HOMO WILL NOT INHERIT’ writes that what he *will* inherit will be

'the margins/which have always been mine' and the 'impenetrable/edges no one wants'. (Doty 1996, 70-1) While this peripheral politics may be an earlier strategy of resistance in a similar vein to Edelman's, David Fisher is able to inherit the objects that lay in the centre of family life. He inherits his father's business; he marries his Afro-American working-class boyfriend; the two of them adopt children who will inherit their names and, presumably, the business. David inherits, and will leave, a future. Munt does not see this as a homonormative move, a mimicking of heterosexual traditions, but a queer and multi-racial strategy in which homosexuality's inner deathliness is inverted to allow the equation 'homosexuality=life.' (178)

Edelman may be turning in his death drive, but Judith Halberstam has also called for a queer politics that doesn't rely on nonreproductive tenets, or as she puts it, on a masculinist archive. (Halberstam 2008, 151) Halberstam may not agree with Munt's redemptive shame and its resulting individuation; she favours Leo Bersani's 'counter-intuitive but crucial shift in thinking away from projects of redemption, reconstruction, restoration and reclamation.' (Halberstam 2008, 140) However, she believes that we 'need to craft a queer agenda' alongside other resistant strategies that battle against Capitalism which refuse 'a liberal notion of progressive entitlement' to create a 'queer politics which is not also tied to a nihilism which always lines up against women, domesticity and reproduction'. (Halberstam 2008, 154) Provocatively optimistic, Munt's *Queer Attachments* allows for queer theory to break its nihilistic shackles and shamefully and joyfully 'make dancing sodomites of us all.' (Munt 2008, 225)

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Jules Falquet (2006) *De la cama a la calle: perspectivas teóricas lésbico-feministas [From the Bed to the Street: Lesbian-Feminist Theoretical Perspectives]*. Bogotá, Colombia: Brecha Lésbica, 83 pp. ISBN/ISSN/EAN: 958-930761-2 (in Spanish).

This book combines academic, emotional, and activist perspectives. For this very reason it is a vital reading material for both scholars, interested in analyzing compulsory heterosexuality as a global political institution, which affects material and emotional conditions of women's lives in general, and for social activists, since it summarizes a series of experiences and ideas with an invaluable political strength. Falquet proposes a brilliant material reading of compulsory heterosexuality and its political and economic consequences for women's everyday lives; it represents a call for analyzing current movements and their potentials in front of several overlapping oppressive systems.

I had an opportunity to read this book for the first time, when one of its editors who belonged to an international group *Brecha Lésbica* made a suggestion to me to make a preliminary presentation of it in Bogotá. That presentation was attended mainly by scholars and activists interested in gender, cultural and feminist studies, human rights, etc. I read it as an activist, as a young researcher in the field, and also as a Latin American lesbian. At that time, I found that many questions on the book referred to very important issues of my personal and political experiences. Now, reading it for the second time, I again find it very stimulating, and strongly linked to my new personal situation (I am an immigrant in Europe, I think of myself as a privileged one, and also with my research interests in migration of Latin American lesbians to Spain. I think it is really difficult to find a book, in which so many different elements are mixed. In this book, the emotional and the political form a unity.

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In the first part of the book called *Breve reseña de algunas teorías lésbicas* [Short review of some lesbian theories] the author analyzes some lesbian theories, reflections, and struggles, focusing on some Francophone countries, the United States, and some countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. Being aware of the fact that countries in the North produce more theory, which is, moreover, published on a wider scale, especially the works produced by urban white middle class female scholars, Falquet takes a clear political position — she points out that this problem ‘is reflected by this book [...] and it does not stop being a limitation’ (p. 16) of her work. Therefore, the author is aware of her position in the academic power networks.

Falquet questions the meaning of the word ‘lesbianism’, and, at the same time, she underlines the importance of using a word ‘lesbian’ as a way of linguistic resistance and as a basis for struggles against a male domination in the form of male homosexuality. She also shows a problem of confusing female homoerotic practices – which we can observe across the time in the whole world — with the political project, implicit in the word ‘lesbian’. She explains that ‘lesbian’ as a category has a political basis upon which political subjects are constructed. For this very reason, ‘lesbian’ refers neither simply to sexual practices, nor to constructions of identity. The book provides us with a theoretical basis for understanding an autonomous lesbian movement, which is closely related in its development with feminist ideology and organization, especially with the feminism of so-called ‘second wave’. However, she shows how the relationships between the lesbian movement and feminist and gay movements have sometimes been contradictory. Falquet describes three main tendencies within the autonomous lesbian movement, which co-exist currently: feminist lesbianism, radical lesbianism, and separatist lesbianism. She also recognizes the contributions made by non-white and working-class lesbians. Finally, in this part of the book she shows that she distances herself from ‘pro-sex’ and ‘queer’

liberal theories, which, in her opinion, represent a kind of backward movement to male patriarchal thought. At the same time she stays critical about the integration of lesbian movement into LGBT (Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender or Transsexual) Movement, since it represents a way of making lesbian struggles and women's exploitation invisible.

In the second part of her book, called *La pareja, este doloroso problema: Hacia un análisis materialista de los arreglos amorosos entre lesbianas* [The couple, this painful matter: Toward a material analysis of love deals among lesbians], Jules Falquet analyzes love, sexual, and economic agreements between lesbians from international and material perspectives. She alerts to the ways neo-liberal globalization imposes 'neo-nuclear family' (pp. 56-57, 60) (re)composed of and around individuals of the same sex, who are not self-sufficient materially or emotionally. This 'new' family is based on patriarchal, bourgeois, Western values, and is mainly grounded in the idea of 'love' centered in the couple. She talks about 'exacerbation of the due and whished fidelity' (p.70), which, being coupled with lesbophobic hostility, stirs up violence within lesbian couple. Such ideas of love are related with a neo-liberal way of thinking, which imposes an individualist retreat towards 'private happiness' (p. 58). Following Chilean theorist Margarita Pisano and others feminists who preceded her in this reflection, Falquet explains how such monogamist model of 'living in twos' (pp. 69,70) becomes detrimental for an autonomous development of a woman, and at the same time does not allow to consider Women as a class. As an alternative, Falquet offers examples of several female communitarian experiences in Mexico, which represent ways to break up with the dichotomy 'private sphere - public sphere', to 'go out from the bed to the street'. She assures that 'coming out of the frame' becomes more important than 'coming out of the closet', since it allows imagining a different way of living — living beyond the couple. I find this project fascinating, firstly, because it brings into practice the statement 'political is personal', secondly, because it implies that it is necessary to construct a subject, which is composed of both material and symbolic aspects, and which is irreducible to only one identity or subjectivity. It is a proposal to break up with a dichotomist thought concerning the public and the private and also with the metonymic identity, which constructs a one-dimensional, non-historical, culturally non-contextualized subject. In my view, this book breaks up the 'epistemology of closet' (Kosofsky Sedwick, 1990).

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Given our strange and dangerous times, the mobilization of everyday productions of disciplinary regimes of the normal and the pathological serve to organize affective responses, channeling desire toward governmental objectives, intensifying normalizing regimes and installing insecurity and fear as a kind of operant conditioning for political imaginations. Lee Edelman's *No Future* (2004), attempts to diagnose the contemporary constitutive effects of authoritarian governance, subjectivity and neoliberalism. His work lends itself to a consideration of the practical and affective constitution of autonomous relations as a form of contemporary, local anti-capitalist resistance to modern regimes of power and its effects on subjectivity and social space. I believe his work does this by alerting us to the lineaments of fascist desire constitutive of the solemn parade of normativity that is always already embedded in volatilized formations of childhood and contemporary images of the child as infinitely vulnerable. His work offers potential escape routes from the house of mirrors and flying daggers that represent the intensified collisions between the child and the queer as a site of social regulation and authoritarian and/or fascist desire.

In *No Future*, Edelman suggests that the symbolic force of the figure of the Child in contemporary western culture is a fundamental dividing practice akin to racism and anti-Semitism that particularly impacts queers. Edelman uncovers the totalizing narratives embedded in the image of the Child and suggests its imbrication with social and political formations as "reproductive futurism." The logic of reproductive futurism, as Edelman terms it, locks the image of the Child to specific forms of identity-formation, social and political practices, and the self-perpetuating logic of heteronormative communal or family life. "The Child," Edelman writes, "has come to embody for us the telos of the social order and came to be seen as the one

for whom that order is held in perpetual trust" (Edelman 2004: 11). Breaking that trust in the image of the Child means attending to other social and political logics, other practices and other embodiments that children present to the world, thus *queering* the child. The 'queering' of the image of childhood means resisting the reification of the future as an order of the same, resisting the violent attempts to domesticate the present in order to secure a future in the image of the Child. This prospect is both more dangerous and more radical than we may assume at first, since the image of the Child, like that of the Nation, always secures its own longevity and sovereign repetition through a violent ordering of the present. Edelman writes:

That Child, immured in an innocence seen as continually under siege, condenses a fantasy of vulnerability to the queerness of queer sexualities precisely insofar as that Child enshrines, in its form as sublimation, the very value for which queerness regularly finds itself condemned: an insistence on sameness that intends to restore an Imaginary past. The Child, that is, marks the fetishistic fixation of heteronormativity: an erotically charged investment in the rigid sameness of identity that is central to the compulsory narrative of reproductive futurism. (Edelman 2004: 21).

The Child is the mini-State in formation. Desire for the Child is becoming indistinguishable from the utter imperative to protect and defend its ultra-normative borders. These ordering practices exist at the level of solemn state rituals and everyday life, such that the well-governed family prefigures the order of the nation. The image of the hegemonic Child is generative of nationalist and familial order as twin process cemented by the stress laid on the unimpeachable value of childhood innocence. This hegemonic image of the Child is in lock-step formation with other forms of racism, catalyzing fascist desire. Clearly there is much riding on the Child. It has become fascist desire made domestic and consolable, indeed, as Edelman writes, "this fascism of the baby's face" (75) is a compassion we can't refuse.

For queers, feminists and anti-capitalist activists creating new spaces for the practice of autonomy and self-determination, this critique can be an important tool in understanding the social and symbolic force behind the violence and hate promulgated by right-wing Christian activists and their insistent focus on the protection of children and systems of erotic and

gendered normalization. Right-wing Christian discourse attempts to preempt a relational and intimate politics of bodily autonomy which link together the overlapping struggles around practices of reproductive choice to the expansion and revaluation of pleasure in unique and unforeseen combinations. For those invested in political struggles around issues of gender, sexuality and the body, Edelman's book is a difficult and provocative aid to thinking through the force field of affect produced by the heightened social regulatory practices that exploit the image of the normative child and the family.

Edelman's analysis is a powerful denaturalizing perspective on the shape of desire and its libidinal configurations in identity constructions. If, as Judith Butler (1993, 2004) suggests, the social force of a symbolic is related to its continual repetition in discourses and practices that lend it the appearance of a natural process, constitutive of patterns of disavowal, then uncovering the ways social power and inequitable systems produce the lineaments of desire provoke fault lines in the social fabric that locate other ways of becoming intelligible as human. Edelman attempts to exploit these fault lines by locating practices of desire and the signifying systems that compose identificatory structures as mobile assemblages—heterodox desiring practices—as multiple, unstable and not locked into the hegemonic order of sameness and static identity. Edelman's text anatomizes the social force of symbolic relations and the production of subjects whose affective dispositions serve to subjugate them to specific intelligibilities amenable to normalizing regimes. As a diagnostician of incipient micro-fascisms, Edelman's critical polemic ferrets out the way fascist subjectivities are tied to circuits of enjoyment, the nostrum of compassion, and the constrained productions of disfiguring and self-satisfied authoritarian identities. This is especially important in our age of the production of neoliberal subjectivities combined with the inducement to enjoyment that is nowhere tied more intensely, I think, to a nexus of nationalist, capitalist and totalitarian practices as, for instance, the recent spectacle of the 2008 Beijing Olympics demonstrates.<sup>1</sup>

Edelman's work represents a new direction for queer theory and a needed development of its critical themes with respect to psychoanalysis. I think *No Future* is a critical development in

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<sup>1</sup> On this point it is interesting to note what Guy Debord (2004) wrote a few years before his death in 1994: "The pleasures of existence have recently been redefined in an authoritarian way—first in their priorities and then in their entire substance" (65).

queer theory in two respects. First, by submitting the cultural and political work performed by the maintenance of an image of the child in need of protection as its primary object of analysis, Edelman mobilizes a space for queering the relations of childhood. Second, Edelman focuses on themes of negativity via the death-drive that has been neglected by the psychoanalytic critique, giving queer theory its analytical purchase on theories of subjectivity and social power.

In the first case we can point to the emergence of the critical figure of the “queer child” within queer theory primarily through Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley’s (2004) landmark collection, *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children*. Critical scholarship in the area of the queer child enables a new focus on the space of childhood as culturally strategic narratives, unmasking the multiple dimensions of normalized relations in which children and the space of childhood are regulated. Edelman’s work on the child in queer theory is equipped to pose questions pertaining to the way stories of childhood, the stories told by the ‘psy’ discourses, and the retrospective narrative framing performed by queer adults speaking/writing about their own queer childhood past, both inform and problematize a persistent binary thematic of threatening adults and vulnerable children. It is posed to uncover a greater terrain of experiences that give the lie to monolithic constructions of what adult and child identities signify. Given the fact that the child’s primary caretakers and storytellers insist on making child queerness into a story that will not be, narrating other stories of the child, effects a twist and a turn in the cultural narratives of childhood sexuality and casts light on the production and circulation of cultural narratives and the position of the storyteller (Probyn 1996).

Yet there is another issue that is not dissociable from the queer critique of how childhood identities and sexualities are produced and narrated. Edelman does not address this directly in *No Future*, but future work could benefit from his powerful critique. I am referring to the concomitant production of the figure of threat represented by the paedophile, a figure that has become especially important in understanding a new turn of the screw in the threatened and threatening discourses of the hegemonic normalized family. Edelman’s analysis can be developed by attempting to understand why the figure of the paedophile is given a tremendous valence today in light of the sacralization of the image of the Child. The social, political and psychic ‘work’ done to figure the image of the paedophile buttresses a fantasized political space

with multiple dimensions and material effects. This threatening figure is constituted by and produces a set of cascading effects in social life regulating, in part, child and adult identities and their ontologies, the space of the family, parental relations and authority, and the practice of sexuality as (queer) pedagogy. In light of critical psychoanalytic accounts of infantile sexuality, family drama, and the Lacanian and post-Lacanian work in the accession to subjectivity and language, queer theory can call the figure of the paedophile and the incessant compulsion to repeat its disfiguring cultural narrative to account. Critical psychoanalysis can help elucidate why our cultural stories about intergenerational sex remain highly vituperative and vitriolic; why they remain, as child psychologist Adam Phillips writes, a “stuck narrative” (Phillips quoted in Bruhm and Hurley 2004: xxii).<sup>2</sup>

It may be that the figure of the paedophile, like the negative figuration of the ‘queer’ that Edelman pursues as a toxic dissolving substance on Child-centred futurity, is the limit of the Western nation-state and of liberal politics more generally. It is hard to say if the public for the hatred of homosexuality has increased or not of late, but its lineaments of radical refusal is tied to a fear of destruction so fundamental that its imaginary fuses proper sexual conduct, the sacred Child, marriage, the family and the fear of permissiveness into a tight conceptual tangle. Moreover, these affective and social responses to what is deemed radically unintelligible are nested within overlapping governmental sites that link the family, the nation and empire. The horror of incest and paedophilia is aligned with the horror that homosexuality still engenders in some quarters, especially when alternative or permissive kinship relations become alchemized as “private” family freedoms in which children set the stage for what is deemed an all-too-risky social laboratory. If the figure of the queer, torqued as “anti-social” fails to cement fascist desire, then the figure of the paedophile is more than exploitable in this regard.<sup>3</sup>

How Edelman takes up Lacan is both a novel turn of events in queer theory but it is not without its problems. Queer theory has largely marshaled a critical perspective on psychoanalysis that describes a social process of the attainment of sexuality and ego formation as a constitution of norms produced through power arrangements. Queer theory has also developed

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<sup>2</sup> Sheila L. Cavanagh (2007) has also written about the cultural disfigurations produced through the panic over the figure of the female predator or “pedophile” in student-teacher sex scandals and their impact on queer pedagogies.

<sup>3</sup> My analysis in this paragraph has been informed by Michael Cobb (2005) and Lauren Berlant (2004).

a sustained examination of the production of heteronormative identity constructions as a process of othering that disavows homosexual attachments. What is missing from queer theory is the negativity afforded by the focus on the death-drive and *jouissance*. Queer theory is too sanguine, Tim Dean suggests, about the proliferation of pleasures and tends toward a utopian account of the body and its pleasures. However, as Tim Dean explains, the pressure of the unconscious and the partial drives, (these are central categories for Lacan) signals a space of infinitude that potentially undermines the subject's capacity for living. This aspect of Lacan's thought is not properly explored by Edelman, as he neglects to envision the implications of the death drive and the pursuit of pleasure as a limit on *jouissance* itself.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, in a series of exchanges, John Brenkman<sup>5</sup> has also criticized Edelman for totalizing the symbolic constructions of the child, albeit important, in his vision of how the social effects of heteronormativity clinches queer oppression. I tend to agree with Brenkman on this point, yet also think he fails to get at the substance of Edelman's critique. Following Brenkman, Edelman's text can be troubled for failing to account for how innumerable inequitable practices form the template of stratification in the social order. Edelman's account neglects to specify the disfiguring effects of gendered, racialized and class stratification and its implications in the mobilization of heteronormative discourses centred around the production of the child as a regulatory force. The present moment in the mobilization of the endangered child is, after all, largely a North American phenomenon, (albeit undergoing globalization) and the bodies under acute concern are usually white and bourgeois.

*No Future* tantalizingly presents important affinities with contemporary theory and practice relevant to the creation of queer autonomous spaces. Yet, works of "high theory" are always difficult to translate into the kinds of critical, cognitive and emotional resources suitable for contemporary activists who are interested in anti-capitalist resistance and the development of autonomous spaces. A work like *No Future*, with its challenge to the notion of the political,

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<sup>4</sup> I refer the reader to a thought provoking article on this issue that tackles Lacanian concepts and queer theory: Tim Dean, "Lacan and queer theory" in Jean-Michel Rabaté, *The Cambridge Companion to Lacan* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 238-252.

<sup>5</sup> For Brenkman's critical appraisal of Edelman's chapter "The Future is Kid Stuff" as a previous article included in the book, *No Future* and Edelman's response see: John Brenkman, "Queer Post-Politics" *Narrative* 10(2): (May 2002): 174-180. Edelman, "Post-Partum" *Narrative* 10(2):181-185 and Brenkman, "Politics, Mortal and Natal: An Arendtian Rejoinder" *Narrative* 10(2): 186-192.

presents special problems. As in any theoretical work that draws from a radical or critical tradition, we are invited to think through what activism means, broadening its aims, its practices and objects of thought.<sup>6</sup> A series of questions follow from this. What is the place of critical discursive interventions in a field of thought and its relationship to individual and/or collective capacities to act? What does it mean for texts written in the grammar of specialist knowledge that exist in rarefied channels of distribution and oriented toward a specific audience have to say to community inspired visions of radical social transformation? *Should* it be directly applicable to practical action? Can its translation into ‘common sense’ or common parlance also revoke its critical thrust? I think that this problem has multiple dimensions. One is a problem of translation. Another may be a problem of the scale, scope and tactics envisioned for social change. Yet another problem resides in the understanding of the dynamics of power, subjectivity and affect and the place of reflexivity in social movement building and/or radical world building.

At first blush a text like *No Future* extends and develops the radical deconstructive thrust of queer theory as thoroughgoing negativity, positioning itself as anti-political, if not apolitical. Yet there is also a sense that it undoes its own manifest theoretical aims. What Edelman does not consider, as a kind of ‘unbecoming’ performative contradiction immanent to queer theory, is that all acts, (and act we must), contain both a utopian moment that contests norms, potentiating a becoming-other, and a line of power that recapitulates hegemonic teleologies. Both moments exist in the logic of practice. A poststructuralist elaboration of subjectivity tied to a contemporary anti-capitalist critique of hierarchy and normalizing power has the potential to make such moments more visible and potentially practicable. Thus, a text like Edelman’s can provoke further theoretical developments and bridge the emerging literature on poststructuralist anarchism, or ‘postanarchism’ with the literature of affect and social space (see Lim 2007; May 1994; Day 2005; Newman 2007).

The relevance and power of a text like Edelman’s is its ability to convey how our subjectivity is produced through power dynamics at the level of the unconscious and our libidinal investments. *No Future* reminds us that there is an historical process to who and what we are, to

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<sup>6</sup> For a reflection on the limitations of certain notions of what constitutes “activism” see: *Do or Die! Collective*, “Give up Activism” (2001). Available online at, [www.eco-action.org/dod/no9/index.html](http://www.eco-action.org/dod/no9/index.html)

who we think we are or what we may become. It helps us understand and recognize that the passionate attachments we make to our loves, lusts, desires and repugnancies have histories and are shaped by specific configurations of power. It can help us recognize, diagnose and hopefully thwart, what Gilles Deleuze warned against: that societies of control require an alignment of micro-fascisms that exist first or primarily within the interstices of daily life. Contemporary neoliberal governance requires the transformation of subjectivity, and the participation of subjects into a series that articulate and enforce the norm in new and powerful ways. The normal has always been a category of terror. This terror becomes diffuse, distant and constitutive of our politically organized subjectivities, our *habitus* channeling desire and recrafting memory to erase histories of intimate violence and degradations that are potentially enabling of resistance. This is why anti-normative practices can, at times, manifest in the body as extreme anxiety, a certain buzzing, even faint and somatic experiences akin to schizoid manifestations, producing its own violent ruptures. This is also why, in the often-described “intense” experiences of creating and sustaining queer autonomous spaces, that volatile passions, displacements of desire and ego-defenses attend the ego-shattering proximity in which individual identities are brought up against possibilities for change and becoming-other that radical spaces can sometimes produce.

In the contemporary practice of creating temporary (and sustainable!) queer autonomous spaces, we find a redefinition of the space of politics different from what Judith Halberstam (2008) has recently identified as a danger of fascism stemming from a negativity manifested as anti-political. Halberstam outlines how some German queer anti-communitarian groups in the pre-Nazi years, with a commitment to transcend the failing Enlightenment project of liberalism, took on disturbing fascist sensibilities, invested in part, with a cult of masculinity that predominated throughout the period as the rising tides of authoritarian nationalism culminated in the Nazi state. Halberstam describes a complicated topography of queer and gender politics in the era, with a complex array of groups who variously take up the question of queer emancipation, legal reform, and gender freedom. National socialism both played on and repudiated homoerotic social bonds, and thus some homosexual groups variously accommodated themselves to the cult of masculinity and the promotion of a fraternity of masculine homosexuals that resonated with some tendencies in the national socialist movement. We can uncover

evidence of nationalism, eugenicist thought, anti-Semitism and male supremacy in some of the Wilhemian and Weimar era's homosexual activist and cultural groups. However, Halberstam's précis of that era's homosexual emancipation movements obscures other tendencies and figures whose emancipatory visions were drawn from a wider canvas that links their social, aesthetic and political thought to a line of thinkers drawn from classical antiquity to the individualist anarchism and libertarian philosophy of Max Stirner (1806-1856) and Nietzsche. Those German writers and activists that are deemed central to a queer anarchism of the past have been Benedikt Friedländer (1866-1908), John Henry Mackay (1864-1933) and Gustav Wyneken (1875-1964). Their work leaves an unmistakable residue of anti-statist politics that is anti-social, or anti-communitarian but not apolitical, with marked anti-fascist tendencies. Although the routing of radical groups and their archives by the power of Nazism is a tragedy of immense proportions, careful and patient genealogies has again begun to uncover the panoply of tendencies and groups that helped lay the groundwork for the post-war social movements for queer liberation and their ties to an anarchism of the past.<sup>7</sup>

Rerouting a failed liberal humanism vies with fascist lineaments of power in the contestation of modernity at specific moments in history, but it also contends with the production of radical autonomous anti-capitalist and non-hierarchical practices that have been and are again precariously emerging in local spaces throughout western countries. Thus today, we can witness a contemporary form of queer "anti-social" politics that is organized around the theory and practice of autonomy inspired by anti-capitalist networks and an organizational ethos that is guided by the anti-capitalist anarchist principles of voluntary association, non-hierarchical relations and decentralization. I mention here the yearly gatherings since 1998 of anti-capitalist queers in various cities known as Queerupt; the various social living experiments and squatting practices that define queer spaces in cities like Barcelona and Amsterdam; Gay Shame in the US and Montréal's Les Panthères Roses and the Anti-Capitalist Ass Pirates are all examples of this tendency to remap queer desire, identities, practices and social space as a mode of living that mounts a resistance to neoliberalism and the heteronormative systems it

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<sup>7</sup> For more on the lives and politics of Friedländer, Mackay and Wyneken consult: Bauer 2005; Laqueur 1962; Kennedy and Oosterhuis 1991; Steakley 1975; Lauritsen and Thorstad 1974. French queer anarchist author and activist Daniel Guérin (1994) has left us an account of the youth movement in the Weimar and Early Nazi era. For a history of the US queer liberation movement's ties to an anarchism of the past see Kissack 2008.

instantiates.<sup>8</sup> These practical experiments in queer autonomy are precarious collective embodiments of forms of resistance and they exist at a remove from social relations that can stabilize them as an archive, thus making them not readily available for academics and other activists not directly involved in these events. These events are practices of negativity and a form of anti-politics that is itself redefining the space of politics by insisting on holding subjectivities and the spaces for their realization in suspension. These forms of spontaneous organization reflect a utopianism tempered by the radical realities of negotiating power by individuals, collectives and small affinity groups and the inevitable affective dimension to the everyday proximity of living, loving and conflict that this process inevitably faces. These precarious and contingent queer practices of collective resistance participate in a redefinition of political praxis, reflecting in practical terms the theoretical space marked out by the emerging literature on poststructuralist anarchism. Poststructuralist anarchism, in part, can be seen as a space for rethinking and reenacting new configurations of identities aware of the immanence of power to these exchanges as crucial to the interactions and relations constitutive of micro-political practices. A text like *No Future*, which creates a space for thinking through desire, power and subjectivity can enable new productive exchanges with the ‘postanarchism’ literature by politicizing the dimension of affect imminent to the creation of autonomous spaces.<sup>9</sup>

In *No Future*, Edelman is mapping the queer as affect, and as politically invested affective practices which inquire into the libidinally-charged configurations of what we take as real: our very identities and our emotional investments. The lineaments of order that embeds itself into the production of social imaginaries delimit identities and the collective moves one is compelled to undertake in its name. Edelman’s challenge is to continually examine the norms that enclose and enfold our acts and collective organizing efforts within transformational

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<sup>8</sup> Extant literature on these movements are sparse, and reflect what Halberstam (2008) refers to as “tiny archives” (151). Most participants experience these spaces as emotionally and intensely life-changing events, an “archive of feelings” as Ann Cvetkovich (2003) calls them. These remain precarious spaces in radical queer world building and the patterns of symbolic and material regulation that prohibit and deter their emergence and development is breathtaking. Some sources to consult are: Vanelslander 2007; Brown 2007a, 2007b; Mattilda 2004. For personal accounts of Queeruptation, see: <http://ovl.indymedia.org> and <http://indymedia.nl>. For the Montréal scene check out: [www.lespantheresroses.org](http://www.lespantheresroses.org).

<sup>9</sup> My brief comments on the conjunction of ‘postanarchism,’ sexuality and queer autonomy should be supplemented by the extended account provided by Heckert 2005. Available online at: <http://sexualorientation.info>. For a critical account of the postanarchist literature see: Cohn and Wilbur (2003).

horizons and to recognize the inevitable consequences on our work for social change that obtain from organizing a structure of reality around the disavowal of a drive. If there is a definitive message for queer activists in *No Future*, it entails submitting the lineaments of our desire and the passionate attachments we invariably have to our identities as stable, complete and *necessary* as part of our radical praxis. In fucking against the future, as it were, we begin to imagine ourselves otherwise, to provoke an embodied pedagogy of resistance to what we think we are, and what we think we are capable of doing. Foucault has mentioned that one of the most urgent tasks today may be not to seek to know who we are, but to refuse who we are. Becoming otherwise, and attending to the embodied practices of affinity-based movement work is a crucial task for practicing queer autonomy. It may be that the ‘queering’ of the theory and practice of autonomy itself will enable new ways of working through collective social transformation that doesn’t neglect how our passionate attachments and emotional investments set the stage for charting collective moves. *No Future* can lead us toward fundamental questions about the kind of social order we want to affirm and what possibilities for becoming we enable and foreclose when we produce specific intelligibilities about who we think we are and what we are capable of doing.

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