Queer Being And The Sexual Interstice: A Phenomenological Approach To The Queer Transformative Self

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(BA Hons)

This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of Murdoch University.  

2008
I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

.................................................................
(Julia Horncastle)
This thesis is dedicated to my mate Reg, who died when I was halfway through this project.
Abstract

This thesis explores a notion of “queer being” in relation to a difficult yet creative articulation of queer self-consciousness. The difficulty of attempting to “particularise” self-consciousness is challenged and dismantled by proposing ways in which putatively exclusive esoteric knowledges of being can be exposed and expanded. This is achieved by justifying singular (queer) experience as it coincides with the disparities between subjectivity and objectivity, experience and existence. I argue that two key perspectives (those of interstitiality and self-transformativity) provide a basis whereby we can “force” a radical articulation of queer being-ness into general and contemporary philosophical discourses of being. In doing so, a particularised theory of intersubjective being emerges as a way to identify the complicity of ethics and ontology.

“Queerness” in this thesis is especially articulated as an eccentricity or poetics of being, experienced at the juncture of diverse knowledge spaces. These include not only the threshold and radical spaces of sexuality and gender, but also the perceived limits of theories of being which allow us to formulate understandings of self-consciousness. This is evidenced through a critical analysis of feminist, queer, transgender, phenomenological and existential texts and/or practices, paying special regard to “everyday, real-life” experience. By using a combination of the “logic of the interstice”, genealogical methods, hermeneutical analysis and a deconstructionist theoretical approach, the thesis seeks out, and insists upon, ways to articulate and determine the possibility of a queer sensibility as both a practice of self-transformativity and a more broadly applicable knowledge heuristic.

The thesis demonstrates that by increasing an awareness of a particular kind of self-transformative queer being-ness – one that embraces a critical ethics of being – the rich insights of queer experiences and knowledges can act as a valuable resource for reviewing the horizons of the ontology of the subject. It also suggests that particularising the term “queer” in relation to a complex theory of “sensibility” provides new depths for understanding, and practical ways to make use of, a queer theory of being.
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Acknowledgements

To write theory is a practice of privilege for which I am truly grateful. The material circumstances (such as low-income single parenting) in which that practice has occurred, have determined the form of labour. I am grateful for the space and facilities that Murdoch University has provided and to have been the recipient of an Australian Postgraduate Award. I would like to thank not only those people who have understood what it has meant for me to successfully pursue this project but also those who have supported me in practical, material and emotional ways.

To my supervisor, mentor and sharpest critic, Bev Thiele, I express my deepest gratitude. Since my first day as an undergraduate student, you have consistently inspired and challenged me. I am lucky to have had such a wise and supportive person encouraging my scholarship.

To my “teachers”: Ruby at seventeen and Maya at fifteen, thank you for sticking by your mama through thick and thin. I continue to be overwhelmed by your unconditional and generous support. Your rock-solid love is cherished. To Zozha, who at nine years old teaches me what life is really about and is the young philosopher in my life – thank you. You have each in varying degrees lived with this PhD over the past five years; I am grateful down to my bones.

To my colleagues, Ingrid Richardson, Lubica Ucnik and Vicki Crowley, who have inspired and buoyed me, thank you for words of wisdom, practical support and encouragement. I treasure your friendship. To Lubica, special thanks for incredible generosity. Many thanks to Ron Fox and Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli, who edited a section of Chapter Two for publication and gave wonderful advice. To Linda Beresford, thank you so much for your support in the final stages.

To the participants who gave permission for their personal narratives to be recorded in this thesis: Ash, Dean, Jo, Mary-Lou and Y, I am humbly appreciative. To Ben Singer for his thoughtful discussions with me, thank you.

Over the years, many friends have provided moral or material support: Gerrard, Fenece, Barbara, Kathy, Renée, Liz, Radio, Norma, to name some ... Thank you all for providing such an important support structure.
To staff at Murdoch: Karen Olkowski, Silvia Rosenstreich and Lyn Dale, who have smoothed out bureaucratic and administrative processes in considerate and patient ways – my sincere thanks.

Lastly to Urszula, for brains, heart and realness. Danke schön.
INTRODUCTION
Queer: Maintaining A Term

Queer: Extra-Intra-Sexual

In 2003 when I began this project, the term “queer” had accrued mixed fortunes. These “fortunes” evolved inside and outside academia, especially in the West, and particularly since the inception of a body of work called “queer theory” had reinvigorated the epistemological currency of the term (c. 1990). However, it seemed to me that the term “queer” preserved an ontological quality that remained insufficiently explained in terms of its practical application in the lived-world. Queer theory at thirteen years old (now eighteen), despite having its adherents, was also being historicised in terms of failure and expiry. Whilst aware of the criticisms of an “inadequate” queer theory, or perhaps because of them, I wanted to find out whether the term “queer”, in and of itself, could be further examined, revealing its potential as an ontological tool.

I had always understood queer theory as a liberation theory. After reading feminist explorations into queer theory, and the numerous “special queer issues” of humanities and social sciences journals, as well as authors of texts whose names became associated (momentarily or at length) with queer theory (Julia Creet (1991), Judith Butler (1990), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1990), David Halperin (1995), Judith Halberstam (1998) and Michael Warner (1993) among many others), my own life changed in the sense that I was better able to observe and validate my own being-ness in this world (and the being-ness of others who understood themselves as queer). I was not alone in this view; there are others who have (or did have) a similar appreciation for the “liberating” appeal of queer theory.

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1 David Halperin credits Theresa de Lauretis with the coining of the term “queer theory” in 1990. See Yep, Lovaas, & Elia (2003). See also note five below for further references to the history of queer theory.


3 The label “queer theorist” has been applied as a reductive term to some theorists of the humanities and social sciences whose use of the word queer, or the analysis of queer phenomena in their work, has been seen to imply certain esoteric and narrow applications or political limitations. For example, Eve Sedgwick has been popularly termed the “queen of queer theory”, see Russo (1999). Sedgwick’s work could just as easily be termed literary/linguistic/performance/non-dualistic/deconstruction theory, but the huge impact, and take-up in academia of *Epistemology of the Closet* in 1990, and Sedgwick’s use of the terms “queer” and “queer theory” has meant that her later work, which she describes as “structural recalcitrance” (2003: 2) and also, as an exploration into “tools and techniques for non-dualistic thought and pedagogy” (ibid: 1) are less well associated with her name. Likewise, Judith Butler’s name is most frequently cited in relation to the seminal work *Gender Trouble* (1990), which is (and importantly so) included as fundamental reading material in “queer theory” courses. Although Butler’s name is associated with feminist and philosophical theory, it is now also historically bound to queer theory. It is in this specific “queer theory” sense that I utilise Butler in this thesis; as such much of her later work is less usefully recruited although it’s importance is not discounted. Theresa de Lauretis specifically distanced herself from queer theory in 1994, as soon as she perceived it as being a “conceptually vacuous creature of the publishing industry” (1994: 297). For some academics, the term “queer theorist” is unwelcome; for others
However (and notwithstanding its history), the liberating capacities of queer theory primarily helped me to understand that there were assorted ways of being that could be framed as non-normative and queer. What this signalled was the theoretical space in which I could search for an adequate reason for my understanding. Why did I have an immediate (perhaps intuitive) affinity for a quality of being that could be called queerness and how could this quality be understood? Why did I understand a radical gender or sexuality critique (or social non-normativity, for example) as realistic and attractive components of being, while someone else did not? Why was I better able to validate “something” about non-normative being after reading “queer” texts while still longing for a sharper focus at the borders of queer theory and queer being? Queerness seemed “foggy” to know in theory, yet easy to feel as common-sense. I wanted to further refine and lend precision to ideas that would help me articulate the implications of combining queer knowledge and queer being-in-the-world. There seemed to me to be an underlying and implicit ontology of queer being-ness that was bursting to be made self-evident.

Over the years since queer theory emerged, the promise (political, personal and theoretical) which I found particularly exciting was sparked by two comments: David Halperin’s claim that “queer” need not necessarily refer to sexuality, but instead, that “queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal …” (in Halperin, 1995: xxiii, italics added) and Michael Warner’s remark that queer theory was “largely intuitive and half articulate” (1992: 19). To me this kind of characterisation of queer thinking was crucial; it allowed an even more expansive project to evolve. This was a project that gestured towards theories that I wanted to read and contribute to: those of ontology – queerness and queer being – and those to remedy (yet appreciate) a “half-articulated” queer theory.

who embrace the notion of queer theory and their involvement in it, the negotiation of being labelled any kind of theorist comes with the choice or discretion to qualify or clarify one’s theoretical context and/or position (inside and outside the academy). Of course the political contingencies and personal investments which impact on how this affects the careers of academics and scholars are of “everyday” material relevance, see McWhorter (2000).

4 Michael Warner (1992: 18-19) although recognising its failings, acknowledged the “appeal” and “attraction” of queer theory in relation to the difficulties of and puzzlement over defining it. In a different context and twelve years later, Susan Stryker spoke of queer theory in terms of its earlier potential for radically changing “our understanding of gender” against a notion of its subsequent unrealised potential (2004: 214).

5 I do not provide a definitive history of the terms “queer” or “queer theory” here. My intention is to utilise the term “queer” in relation to a theory of being. The vicissitudes of the terms “queer” and “queer theory” have been documented by authors such as Duggan (1992), Seidman (1996), Jagose (1996), Crimp (1999), W.B. Turner (2000), N. Sullivan (2003), Phelan (1997), Yep, Lovaas, & Elia (2003), and Morland & Willox (2005) all provide extensive and rich edited collections of scholarly work about queer theory.
I pondered over the idea that if queerness was not just about sexuality but also about “something else” (a rather broad notion of being at odds with normativity) then how could that broadly applicable contrariety be at the same time called (specifically) queer? If there was a quality of queerness that could be theorised in terms of being, I wanted to find out how it could be more widely splayed – made readable, knowable and understandable in the world.

This project became an endeavour to illustrate how a broad notion of “at-odds-with-norms” could also be related to a specifics of queer being. As much as I believed David Halperin’s sentiment and felt it to be true, I wanted to explain how this was so without necessarily being constrained by the confines of a “specificity versus generality” debate, or a sexual/non-sexual binary.

I began by sidestepping the issue of whether or not queer theory was useful and I also questioned the homogenising function of “queer” as an umbrella term for the abbreviation GLBT. I preferred to focus instead on gaps between seemingly fixed sexuality and gender categories. If a row of letters (which equated to people’s political and sexual and gendered being) could be problematically subsumed by the word queer, I wanted to not lose sight of a different use: that the oddity of queer-ness nevertheless punctuated the spaces between those categories. It was amongst the many synonyms for strangeness or oddity that I wanted to conceptualise “queer” in relation to being. I wanted to retain the extra-homosexual\(^7\) sense of the word queer in relation to both the categorisation

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\(^6\) This abbreviation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender is problematic for four main reasons: those who do not “fit” any one category are excluded; each category itself is insufficient as a descriptor; categories that do not specifically pertain to sexuality (such as transgender, and intersex when an “I” is added) are equated with sexuality; and the abbreviation has truncated and expanded versions – the attempt to be inclusive can make the abbreviation clumsy and very long and the attempt to keep it exclusive can be interpreted as discriminatory. There are other problematic issues with the use of abbreviations to describe “communities” of people, or sexual or gendered “orientations” of people. In Chapter Three the function of the LGBTIQ abbreviation is analysed. Throughout the thesis I use uncomplicated versions where it is appropriate to do so. Where I write “LGBTIQ\(^*\)” I am acknowledging the practicality yet insufficiency of the abbreviation; it can be extended, for example, to LGBTIQ\(\text{QNN2SAPP}\) (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, questioning, non-normative, two-spirit, straight-ally, pansexual, polyamous). Obviously such a long abbreviation is clunky, and I doubt there are many advocates for insisting upon an impractical, “politically correct” use.

\(^7\) I do not wish to exclude the reference of sexuality to queerness – much of this thesis requires that “queer sexuality” is explicit – however, I do specifically focus on the meaning that “queer” encompasses something odd or strange. There are still various meanings for the word queer: as well as meaning “homosexual”, queer can also be used to describe feeling unwell (although this is somewhat dated), and as a verb it can also mean to spoil. There are also phrases such as “queer street”, which means being in debt, and “to queer someone’s pitch”, which means to spoil someone’s chances of success. The etymological roots of queer are interesting in this regard. The \textit{Oxford English Dictionary} gives a brief etymological reference for the word queer which relates it to early sixteenth century use: “considered to be from German \textit{quer} ‘oblique, perverse’ but the origin is doubtful” (Pearsall, 2001: 1519). Specialist etymological dictionaries are more decisive although they often do not mention queer as meaning homosexual. They do reveal that the meaning of queer as we know it today has roots in many languages and is linked to notions of something being cross-wise, twisted or transverse. For the precise contexts of these terms see Skeat (1968: 492), Partridge (1982: 541-542) and Barnhart & Steinmetz (1988: 874). Barnhart does mention the Scottish medieval poet William Dunbar who used the word queer, “queir”, to mean a strange or odd person. See Dunbar’s \textit{Flying of Dunbar and Kennedie} where Dunbar writes, “Heir cumis our awin queir Clerk!” in Harvey Wood (2003: 21). For people interested in the history of sexual terminology, Dunbar is also credited with the first use in literature of the terms fuck, “fukkit” and cunt “cumbittin”. For an analysis of Dunbar’s work see Kinsley (1979) and Bawcutt (1992). The \textit{Online Etymological Dictionary} gives a particularly...
of sexually marginalised/non-normatively gendered people and at the same
time seek meanings between those categories. It seemed as if “queer-as-oddity”
resided (unclearly) in those in-between spaces.

In order to explain and illustrate what I thus perceived as the foggy areas
of queer being-ness, I sought a new way of disengaging from the dialectical tension
of a mainstream/margin or hetero/homo binary (something I had previously
utilised in my work). I drew on a theory of the interstice; this theory located a
“place” and privileged a logic of in-between-ness, instead of defaulting to the
commonplace logic of particular binaries. The theory I wanted to advance would
provide a spatialised concept within which an analysis of being (queer) and a
practice of being (also queer) would reveal the interconnectedness of knowing
and being, thinking and doing, selves and others.

One of my early intentions (and it has remained so far) was to clear a theoretical
space for what I would come to call a “queer sensibility”, against the backdrop
of normative and/or non-specific usage of the word queer. I also wanted to
establish whether my notion of a queer sensibility could be reasoned in
connection to the everyday material world, and if so, to illustrate how it may be
shared through a theoretical framework. I was interested in finding ways to
make queer meanings of queer people’s experiences.

informative entry for the word queer: “1508, ‘strange, peculiar, eccentric,’ from Scottish, perhaps from Low Ger.
(Brunswick dialect) queer “oblique, off-center,” related to Ger. quer “oblique, perverse, odd,” from O.H.G. twerh
“oblique”, from PIE base *twerh- “to turn, twist, wind” (related to thwart). The verb “to spoil, ruin” is first recorded
1812. Sense of “homosexual” first recorded 1922; the noun in this sense is 1935, from the adj” (“Online Etymological
Dictionary”). Whatever doubts there are about the origin of the word queer, Sedgwick does not allude to them when she
asserts, “the word queer itself means across – it comes from the Indo-European root –twerkw, which also yields the
German quer (transverse), Latin torquere (to twist), English athwart” (1994: xii).

My meaning of “queer sensibility” is different to the “new queer sensibility” that Suzanna Danuta Walters refers to in
the book, Queer Theory (Morland & Willox, 2005: 6) in which Walters makes several particular criticisms of “queer
tory” and the term “queer”. Two of the criticisms are especially relevant to this introduction: one is that “queer theory”
often erases lesbian specificity; and the other is that to understand “queer” as being gender neutral is “ludicrous and
willfully naive” (ibid: 14). My usage of the term “queer” (as a signifier of oddity, and as a crucial component of a theory of
“the interstice”) is admittedly risky, as I go on to explain in this introduction. However, I intend my theorising of
“queerness” to result in a discerning application that can be a useful heuristic to a philosophical analysis of being.
Certainly, the emphasis I place on the material realities of everyday life, and on specificities (gender included),
constitute a rigorous theoretical endeavour – not ludicrous, I hope (perhaps ambitious), but expansive: one that has
been carefully, painstakingly and gradually revealed. “Queer” in this thesis is to be read (and I ask my reader to
accommodate this in their reading) as non-neutral, but this is so even when it is not being used to mean gay or lesbian.
This is a partial reading of a multi-layered term that this thesis employs in the knowledge that to do so is problematic:
this is itself a site of tension that the thesis embraces. Where Walter’s criticism of “queer transcendence” (ibid: 14) is
based on the disappointments of an unhelpful, gender-dismissing queer theory (for feminists and lesbians especially),
my analysis of “queer transcendence” in Chapter Seven is one that is imbued with my own indelible feminist
perspectives, and it is explicitly tied to a notion of ethics-of-self that problematises the usual distinction made between
ethics and ontology. “Queer sensibility” then, in this thesis, is about finding one way to utilise queer theory in terms of a
grounded existentialist phenomenology, and it is a way that operates unusually, by refusing to settle for regulatory,
disciplinary traditions and the limitations of any theoretical field (queer theory included). Perhaps in this sense it could
be read as a “new queer sensibility” but I prefer to emphasise any “newness” in the way that a theory of being emerges
here, as interstitial and oddly connected to seemingly disparate phenomena.
Beyond this, I wanted to discover whether my own perceptions of a deep enigmatic potential within queerness could be made real and accessible (in the way that some “queer theory” had affected my life real-ly) and whether my excitement about theorising a mysterious “quality” of queerness could add support and vigour to what I knew at the outset would be a complex and hard-to-argue theory of queer being-ness. I was equipped with feminist and queer insights; I had never been a “philosophy” student. However, I wanted queerness, as I would propose it, to leach into a philosophy of being whose fundamental problematic (especially if we consider the particularity, or not, of being) is the weaving of the mundane and the transcendental, the material and the abstract, theory and practice.

I extrapolated that a philosophical analysis of being within a queered theoretical framework would expose the phenomena of “queer-ness” and “queer-being” as enigmatic. I wanted to shape these qualities through two perspectives: as actual sensibility (political and ethical and embodied) and as theoretical tinder (for example, queering phenomenology). I saw “queer being” and “queer-ness” as explosives that a complex ontology of queerness would ignite.

This thesis does not conform to an orthodox methodology and there are two aspects to this. One is that the empirical material is used to ground the phenomenological investigation but this material is explored philosophically, not sociologically. The other is that the theory is advanced through an investigation of eight key terms (as set out in the table below). The terms are more than a structuring device for the logic of the arguments presented; they also constitute a loosely historical queer interstitial trace. Whilst there are the eight specified key terms, I also adopt an interrogation of other terms as a more general methodology; this is seen here in the Introduction as well as in Chapters One and Two.

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9 A book that may have assisted in my early formation of “queer phenomenology”, Sara Ahmed’s Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others, was not available to me until 2007 (although it has a publication date of 2006). Ahmed’s discussion of queer phenomenology was foregrounded in a journal article (2006a); however, the “queer phenomenology” of this thesis was shaped prior to my reading of Ahmed’s work. Consequently I do not draw on Ahmed’s book until late in the thesis. It is in the Conclusion that I acknowledge the possible future theoretical developments that can be made, especially by expanding on what Ahmed calls “a queer encounter with existential phenomenology” (2006b: 162).
Broadly speaking, this thesis is interdisciplinary and it proposes the articulation of a particular kind of queerness that situates itself within, and celebrates qualities of, eccentricity, oddity, and the non-normative. It tracks the development of a theory of the interstice as one way to reveal a philosophical approach to queer self-consciousness, utilising hermeneutic and deconstructionist challenges at the theoretical limits of phenomenology.

The thesis contends that there is indeed such a phenomenon as “queer sensibility”. It proposes and develops a particularised (queer) perspective about being and it seeks to establish a terrain upon which theorising queer experiences of everyday life can also pursue enigmatic notions such as “eccentricity of being” or “poetics of being”. There is a heterodoxy (perhaps an “irregularity” is more precise) at the heart of this thesis: it is a thesis about queerness and about being, neither of which can be separated. Therefore the thesis necessarily grapples with the abstract theory of being (what we might partially term “transcendental inquiry”) whilst at the same time locating that sense of being in the notion of lived everyday queer experience.

**Articulations**

Before discussing the thematic outline of the following seven chapters, I will briefly extend my explanation of the terms “queer” and “interstitial” ahead of their expanded analysis in the thesis. I will also introduce the neologism “sexgender” which I derive from the work of South Australian academic Vicki Crowley.

**Sexgender**

I use the term “sexgender” as a rubric. “Sexgender” in this thesis means something to do with (any or all) sexuality, sex acts, biology, gender and identity. Where any of the individual components of “sexgender” are specifically analysed they will be qualified; for example, when I mean only sex acts I will not say sexgender acts. In my previous work (Horncastle, 2002) that analysed sex, sexuality, sex acts, gender and identity, I required, yet lacked, a simple term to

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10 Although I do draw on a range of postmodern and twentieth/twenty-first century philosophical thinkers, there are particular traditions that I do not draw on in this thesis. Not having studied Marxist, psychoanalytic, sociological or linguistic traditions in great depth, they are beyond the scope of this project.

11 I first became aware of the slightly different term “sexgenders” in 2003, when Crowley gave a joint transgender academic/art presentation at the Body Modification Conference at Macquarie University in Sydney. Crowley used the term “sexgenders” to reference “an inescapably hyphenated actuality” of being (2003: 3). This notion of hyphenated being resonated with my own desire to be able to theorise being as an actuality that was at once (but especially, “inescapably”) linked to transformative corporeality, sex, sexuality, desire, gender, and knowledge movement processes.
denote their interrelatedness without diminishing their specificity. Sexgender is such a term. Its predominance in this thesis is therefore based in my preference for practical, yet considered use of “sexgender language”.

The conjoining of the terms sex and gender specifically refers to sex and gender specificity (which the sex/gender distinction realises) alongside sex and gender mutability (which also allows sex as acts to be included in the rubric of sexgender). My use of “sexgender” is not intended to reduce sex and gender to each other: it serves the pragmatic purpose of allowing the connections between them to be privileged as aspects of holistic being – as Crowley says, an “inescapable hyphenation” (2003: 3).

“Sex” and “gender” are in themselves complex, non-binary terms; but they are often formulated as binary concepts (woman/man, female/male, hetero/homo). The term “sexgender” provides a way to intermingle notions of gender identity with bodies and desires in relation to composite and contextualised sexual being-ness, which comprises the material everyday reality for many of us. As Mark Graham says in his discussion of gender and sexuality:

I would like for us to think about sexuality together with things, the vast array of objects that make up the material culture in which we live and from which we cannot escape...I shall simply assume that a clear boundary between objects and persons must be abandoned and that persons do not finish at their skins. Instead, they must be seen as part of assemblages that include bodies and things. Once persons are understood in this way, the question of how to sex them, gender them, and attribute sexuality to them emerges with particular force. When considering the meaning of the terms sexuality, sex, and gender, context is all. Things help materialize the composite we refer to as sexuality (2004: 299).

I will especially avoid conflations between biology, sex acts and sexuality; the use of sexgender as a rubric will not hinder this aim. This is evidenced, as we shall see, through the context and careful use of sexgender terms throughout the thesis.

**Queer**

Despite being a somewhat over-determined word with several popular uses, I have maintained the word “queer” in this thesis. As I have indicated, what I am referring to when I use the word queer relates to its facility as a concept, in the capacity it has to suggest something – to allude to something. It is in the very allusion to something which is not normative, which is difficult to capture and which is part of a queer epistemology (a twisting of ways to know) that the word queer becomes useful and heuristic. Therefore, I ask my reader to resist reading
too much of the general and easily available sense of the word queer into my usage.

There are, however, occasions in this thesis where I do use the word queer in a general sense to mean a community, or to refer at once to many kinds of sexually marginalised or non-normative folk. This is usually done for the practical reason of keeping sentences and their meanings clear (particularly when it is appropriate for the long abbreviation LGBTIQQNN2SAP to be supplanted with “queer”). When queer is used in this way, it will be written as queer*. Note that “queer*” is also inclusive of the odd, eccentric and non-normative senses of the word queer that I use.

There is some poignancy to the way in which the reclamation of the word queer (particularly by gay and lesbian activists) has evolved. Instead of being an insult towards sexually marginalised people it has been adopted within popular culture to such an extent that its usage has become reduced to a vague adumbration of “gay”. It may be that the popularization of the word queer (with non-specific, trendy or fashionable applications) masks the very quality of the term that I wish to elaborate: that which encompasses and celebrates the strange, the weird and the non-normative. What I am interested in is the consideration of what can be signified and indeed known through the use of the word queer when there is a particular and precise referral towards not only the “foggy” areas of sexual and gender knowledge (which must especially be made more clear), but also, and simultaneously, a philosophy of being.

Interstitial

My coinage of the term “interstitial” (in direct relation to both an abstraction of, and a quotidian reality of, queer/-ed knowledge space) stems from the desire to create a theoretical transparency around notions of queer oddity, at the same time allowing for a being/knowing hybridisation to occur. By casting the “queer interstice” as a space between things (such as the knowledge spaces of corporeality and consciousness, or sexuality and gender categories) the theory becomes more complex. When I say spaces between things, “things” can be ways of being or understanding (queerness) that will be framed a certain way in language or behaviour. My intention is to pin down the notion of a hazy interstice in order to pick out specific detail about queer being. It is necessary,
therefore, to pay close attention to, and become familiar with, the initial haziness of this queer territory\textsuperscript{12}.

Early in the thesis, I will emphasise a particular kind of space (interstitial) that is connected to sexual knowledge dissemination and the articulation of some queer characterisations or identifications – which are ways of “being” in the real world. Just as notions of space can be abstract, as in the idea of conceptual space, they can also be distinctly physical, as in the notion of geographical or embodied space. The early emphasis on space is intentionally displaced, as the thesis develops, by a phenomenological theory of the oddity of being; this is located through the use of eight key interstitial terms. These are illustrated in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interstitial Term</th>
<th>Theorist</th>
<th>Era</th>
<th>Theoretical Movement</th>
<th>Location in Thesis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drive to inhabit</td>
<td>Susan Stryker</td>
<td>Late 20\textsuperscript{th} Century</td>
<td>Late postmodern transgender and queer theory</td>
<td>Chapter Five</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding</td>
<td>Maurice Merleau-Ponty</td>
<td>Mid 20\textsuperscript{th} Century</td>
<td>Phenomenological Theory</td>
<td>Chapter Five</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intersubjectivity</td>
<td>Hannah Arendt</td>
<td>Mid 20\textsuperscript{th} Century</td>
<td>Philosophical/political theory</td>
<td>Chapter Five</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newly-born</td>
<td>Catherine N. Clément, Hélène Cixous</td>
<td>Late 20\textsuperscript{th} Century</td>
<td>Feminist Theory</td>
<td>Chapter Six</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impulse of virtuality</td>
<td>Brian Massumi</td>
<td>Late 20\textsuperscript{th} Century</td>
<td>Late postmodern/deconstructionist theory</td>
<td>Chapter Six</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual rearrangement</td>
<td>Sasho Lambevski</td>
<td>Late 20\textsuperscript{th} Century</td>
<td>Late postmodern/queer theory</td>
<td>Chapter Six</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epistemological thaw</td>
<td>Michel Foucault</td>
<td>Mid-late 20\textsuperscript{th} Century</td>
<td>Philosophy</td>
<td>Chapter Seven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Übermensch (as self-becoming or self-overcoming)</td>
<td>Friedrich Nietzsche</td>
<td>Late 19\textsuperscript{th} Century</td>
<td>Philosophy</td>
<td>Chapter Seven</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although three initial distinctions\textsuperscript{13} are made in this grouping (theorists of renown, of era, of theoretical movement), it will be the specific \textit{qualities} relating to interstitial space that these terms represent or are represented by, that are drawn out.

\textsuperscript{12} The ‘haziness’ and complex conceptual layering that I employ in order to fully articulate ‘interstices’, necessarily poses a challenge to the readerly experience in the early stages of this thesis. I ask my reader to bare with this difficult process.

\textsuperscript{13} Tables such as this one provide a way to collect and order information and will only indicate connections. It is also reductive to categorise the terms and their meanings within the limited form of tablature. “Feminist theory”, for example, here excludes any reference to the many types of feminism. The terms are far too rich conceptually (and some lyrically) to be discussed in depth through such a simple grouping. The purpose of this table (considering the complexity of the final three chapters) is simply to signpost an intellectual location and to collect together some of the terms’ basic associations.
Further to this, the way in which these terms can be understood, in specific relation to problematics in philosophical discourses of being, will be linked to the connections I specifically make about qualities of being in relation to human acts of thought and behaviour.

I will show how these terms contain a “queer trace” by casting them alongside contemporary examples of everyday life, and particular texts, that are readable as queer. A phenomenological interpretation of self-consciousness is subsequently developed which will connect the idea of queer self-consciousness with queer self-transformativity.

The aim to produce an ontology of queerness is grounded throughout the thesis by persistently relating theory to “everyday reality”, and vice versa. A mutually exclusive bifurcation, of epistemological and ontological analyses, is subverted precisely because the interstitiality of queer being also translates into an interstitiality of theory making.

**Discussion Of Chapters**

Chapter One initiates and develops the notion of queer theory as a theory of the interstice. The notion of relational positionality (margin to mainstream or periphery to centre) is too easy to account for, or conceive of in terms of “the masses” and “the minorities”; or dominance, subordination, and opposition. Chapter One is concerned with the qualities of queer positions that do not always refer back to an overarching “mainstream”, and it begins the process of theorising the problematic uses of terms such as the “mainstream” or the “margin”.

Qualities of interstitiality (or hybridity, for example) allow room for a more subtle theorisation of queer experience and queer knowledge-making processes than the confines of a mainstream/margin binary permit. Hence, a notion of the “mainstream” is not especially privileged in this thesis although it is still recognised as a functioning discursive/linguistic device.

The “mainstream” invokes the oppositional idea of “the margin” and this binary relation fixes two nebulous categories against each other, in theory, in a way...

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14 Examples include the conflict of oppositional logics which (at least) encompass the binaries: self/other, self/world, mind/nature, theory/practice, thinking/acting, freedom/authority, knowledge/fait, doubt/belief, enlightenment/romanticism, mind/body and subject/object.
that does not necessarily exist in everyday lived experience (at least not all the
time). In other words, it is hard to pinpoint a seemingly ubiquitous “generic”
mainstream in the “specific” terms of all our everyday moments; this in turn can
skew our meanings of what “the margin” is, and the possibility that both the
margin and the mainstream may be mutable entities.

This is not to say that a general idea of “mainstream” heteronormativity is not a
dominant factor of Western popular thinking; but it is to say that a queer sense of
being (when conceived in interstitial terms) has no necessary, default
position at the putative “margin”. This allows the “particularity” of queer being
to be articulated according to specific, unpredictable contexts, rather than the
standardised discourse of a mainstream/margin binary.

Having said this, another binary – the normative/non-normative binary – while
also being vague, alludes to a social phenomenon that the “mainstream/margin”
does not. To explain: the “margin” and the “non-normative” can be seamlessly
conflated as synonymous, but “mainstream” and “normative” may not.
“Normativity” exists in so-called marginalised cultures; gays and lesbians who
assimilate to heterosexist norms, or who discriminate against bisexuals, or
queer, or trans folk, might for example constitute the category “normative
marginals”. The term “homo-normative” can also be used in this sense.

The normative/non-normative binary also refers to what we might call
moralistic duty. Normativity requires “good” and “right” behaviours of social
subjects (adherence to “naturalised” social norms and the maintenance of
traditional social mores). Non-normativity runs against the conservative grain
(whether it be marginal or mainstream) and this comes closer to a sense of
queerness that is interstitial.

Another way to articulate “marginal spaces” is to understand them as
interstitialities. Queer spaces that operate between an array of normative
structures (although constructed through their oppositions) allow the physical
reality of habitation to be characterised in terms of what they are (their
particularities, specificities, sophistication, richness and queerness, as well as
their mode of occupation (everyday lives, feelings, embodiments, strategic
activism and sensibilities), rather than what they are not (othered constructs
directly and explicitly linked to the notion of a dominant mainstream).
Chapter One begins with an analysis of space; more properly, of “gaps between”. These are read as physical, intellectual, spiritual and abstract spaces. The chapter theorises qualities of the interstice and draws on a combination of texts, particularly the work of philosopher Martin Heidegger, Latina feminist theorist Gloria Anzaldúa, queer theorist Eli Clare and transgender theorist Ben Singer. By producing a queer hermeneutics, this chapter builds upon a late-modern and early-postmodern feminist and existential academic legacy in order to “fill a gap” that queer theory texts seem to have under-theorised. Chapter One acts as a premise for the theory of queer selfhood, which is especially refined in Chapter Seven, and it introduces the notion of an “onto-epistemic” juncture. It is in this chapter that the phenomenon of knowledge movement is first cast as a queer, threshold, knowledge moment, in epistemological terms. This illustration serves as a platform from which the analysis of knowledge movement is developed. By drawing on the link between “real” lived queer experience and existential philosophical analysis, the concept of interstitiality is illustrated in relation to the ways abstract theory and everyday queer experiences are interrelated.

Chapter Two continues “grounding” a theory of being queer that references particular lived experiences. It aligns an abstract theory of the interstice with illustrations of the specifically queer phenomena of queer bisexuality and queer kink. These are analysed in relation to embodied perspectives.
The analysis of bisexuality as *queer and interstitial* draws on knowledge spaces of sexuality that inform our conceptualisations of non-normative sex, gender, and the experience of queerness. Here the term “knowledge pool” is introduced and explained. This chapter examines the interstices of bisexual, gay, lesbian and trans* identities and further explores what is knowable about queer bisexuality. Current theoretical literature and personal narratives are utilised to examine real-life issues such as discrimination and anti-discrimination, the production of desire-narratives, coming out as a “non-normative” bisexual, and the exploration of bi-diversity through links with transensual, polyamorist and kink culture.\(^\text{18}\)

This analysis provides a sophisticated articulation of the tension between the use of the term “bi” as a political endeavour (as in “bi-pride”) and a disruption of the term “bi” because of its popular association with a sexual normative binary (straight/gay and man/woman). The phenomenon of “queer bisexuality” enables the “thinking space” for queerness to be examined in terms of sexuality and identity. The analysis of queer kink has a different effect, one that allows the specificity of sex practices to inform the analysis of queerness.

The “kink” section of Chapter Two examines the particularity of some expressions of queer being which can also be understood as radical and interstitial. As a point of entry into a discourse about what can be considered “kinked queer identity” I choose to illustrate some of the specific ways in which the ageing sexual body is an exceptional sexgender heuristic that has the potential to radically dislodge the generic interpretation of an ageing body.

This choice is informed by a desire to “queer” the overwhelmingly sex-negative portrayals of the ageing body: in effect, this is another portrayal of queer interstitionality. There are BDSM, fetishistic and kink celebrations of the body which offer ways to rethink, see and perform the sexual body, particularly the ageing one. Queer kink complicates notions of age through the example of intergenerational kink role-play, and the analysis in Chapter Two examines how the queering of the notion of age is a critical factor in sharing queer sexual knowledge. Of particular interest are the ways in which queer concepts of the “hinge”, in relation to a theory of between-ness or interrelatedness, which draws on the work of Merleau-Ponty and the notion of embodied penetration.\(^\text{18}\) Transensuality denotes attraction to trans* identified people. Polyamory is related to having more than one love-relationship simultaneously. Further explanations of these terms are given in Chapter Two.
familial relations trouble the notion of a normative nuclear family. Mummy/girl or granny/girl role-play dynamics provide examples which can broaden our understandings of sexual bodies and sex/age discourses.

Chapter Three illuminates the distinctions between sexgender categories (categories which translate to actual lived experience) by drawing on the personal narratives and questionnaire responses of contemporary Australians who identify “somewhere” on the LGBTIQ* spectrum. This chapter contextualises everyday lived experiences of queers* and the formation of sexgender identity in relation to the availability of a “sexgender knowledge pool” alongside the perspectives of anti-assimilationist and assimilationist personal politics.

The aims of Chapter Three are not statistical or quantitative, although questionnaires were used to collect a breadth of viewpoints from a range of local target groups. ¹⁹ All of the Australian States and Territories hold LGBTIQ* events which range in size and attendance, and I attended the annual pride fair days of six, ²⁰ as a participant observer. At these six fair days, questionnaires were distributed from which I was able to gather sample data. This enabled me to elicit a broad range of personal and political viewpoints about issues such as how the everyday experience of non-normative sexuality was articulated, how identity labels were perceived, how desire narratives were expressed, how “coming-out” or being closeted had been or was experienced, how “queer” was perceived, how the abbreviation “LGBTIQ” and its variants was interpreted, and what the pertinent political and personal issues were in the respondents’ everyday lives.

The empirical material is used to ground the theoretical reflections that are the substance of this thesis. The lived experiences of people who claim (or want to claim) an identity within the LGBTIQ* spectrum are linked in this chapter to the notion of knowledge thresholds by contextualising the effects of non-normativity, radicalism, normativity and political ambivalence/activism, in relation to “the everyday”. This provides necessary insights for an analysis of the ways queer sensibility emerges. Two particular issues are identified in Chapter Three: a “living knowledge” of queer*-phobia; and “normativity”. They are

¹⁹ See Appendix A for the complete questionnaire.
²⁰ Western Australia, New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Australian Capital Territory, Queensland.
analysed through the responses to the questionnaire, which were given as general, personal comments about sexuality and sexual behaviour in relation to issues of oppression, otherness, coming out, identity categories and the LGBTIQ* abbreviation.

Chapter Four also draws on empirical material, and it moves the discussion along from the general LGBTIQ* viewpoints in Chapter Three to an analysis of the specificities of radical queer subjectivity. By drawing on the personal narratives of five queer-identified interviewees, Chapter Four begins to deconstruct the notion of queer radicalism, and this is complexified by illustrating specific notions of self-identity which involve the strategy, or art, of living.

The radicalism of queer selfhood (as a particular self-awareness) plays a significant role in developing nuanced enactments (and ethics) of the queer self. Chapter Four lays down the foundations for understanding queerness as a sensibility which is formed of, and from, the interstice. It emphasises the development of a sensibility that occurs through the variations in life experiences that cause people to change the way they think (about self and other, the material and the abstract, and the resistance to norms). The interview data reveals this development and foregrounds a queer ontology.

Before examining the empirical data itself, Chapters Three and Four both provide descriptions of, and a rationale for, the methodology employed. Where Chapter Three serves as a reminder to look out for the material, everyday realities that inform and ground theories of being, Chapter Four acts as a hinge or pivot that gestures both retrospectively (to the emphasis on “real” people and their “real” lives), and forward, to a complex theory of being that amalgamates ethics, ontology, queerness and interstitiality.

At the end of Chapter Four, the development and understanding of queerness as a way of being emerges out of the contradictions and tensions which exist at the interstices of sexgender articulations and categorisations. It is in the final three chapters – through an interwoven philosophy of being and queer self-consciousness which is not distanced from the concrete and contemporary reality of (queer) experiences – that a queer way of being is more solidly shaped.
Chapter Five extends the analysis of “the interstice” and links the notions of queer being and queer self-consciousness, a link which will later inform the important analysis of “askesis”, a term drawn from Foucault’s later works, which the thesis drives towards. It begins by tracing the “queer interstitiality” of key terms (utilised as genealogical elements) which arise from late nineteenth- and twentieth-century philosophical, or contemporary queer, discourses of being. As I have already stated (in relation to my use of an unorthodox method) I employ eight key terms as points of particular theoretical focus. An analysis of the first three in Chapter Five – “drive to inhabit” (Stryker, 2004), “understanding” (Arendt, 1994) and “intersubjectivity” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 1968) – illustrates how “being”, “quality of being” and the embodied consciousness of a “motion of being” are connected as elements of queerness.

Although comparisons can be made between these three theorists and between the terms themselves, I follow a queer phenomenological perspective that illuminates the particular issue of a subjectivity/objectivity binary (as it can be linked to the terms) which is further analysed to reveal its own interstice. The concept of “intersubjectivity” becomes the theoretical device for articulating an interstitiality of the subjectivity/objectivity binary and this concept is utilised as a “platform” from which a theory of penetration (sexual and non-sexual) serves to illustrate “queer being-ness”. By drawing on trans* and queer texts, the concept of “penetration” is configured in queer interpenetrative terms in order to illustrate that “qualities” of queer being can be theorised as specifically interstitial and odd.

In the latter half of Chapter Five, three case-study scenarios (taken from contemporary real-life subterranean events) are also utilized to link notions of intersubjectivity and penetration. These scenarios operate as three outlines of occupied space (a public toilet in Vienna, a hospital passageway in Perth, and a

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21 As a basic definition – I will elaborate on this later in the thesis – “askesis” refers to the process of exercising, or training, or striving towards goals of self-development. It is a Greek term (originating in classical antiquity) that has been used in philosophical and religious senses. Foucault distinguishes between these uses as I explain in Chapter Seven. My utilisation of the term, which I preface here as meaning to push at one’s limits, and to embrace living as an art through which self-transformation occurs is derived from Foucault’s use, although it is specifically related to queer ontology and expands Foucault’s interpretations. The main analysis of askesis takes place eponymously in Chapter Seven – as it can be related to queer sensibility and a theory of the interstice.

22 I am particularly referring to Volumes Two and Three of The History of Sexuality, both published in France in 1984 with the first English translations in 1985 (Volume Two) and 1986 (Volume Three) and the many lectures and interviews which have been collated and serialised in various publications. For example, see Foucault, Faubion & Hurley (2000, 1998), Foucault & Rabinow (1984), L. Martin, Gutman, & Hutton (1988). The three scenarios are all literally located underground. I chose them with the specific intention to contextualise “underground-ness” itself, as a penetrative and interstitial phenomenon.
festival performance venue in Melbourne), from which a queer hermeneutics is developed. These case studies weave together the abstract notion of queer interstitial space with a concrete viewpoint of how we might interpret “everyday” (putatively non-sexual) space.

Chapter Five also introduces the term “interstitial trace”, which acts as both a knowledge mapping device (an historically locatable path of philosophical knowledges about being) and as an illuminator that exposes the possible queer ways to reassemble knowledges of being.

Chapter Six is a short intermediary chapter that continues to develop the phenomenological perspective of Chapter Five. It turns to the notion of what I call “queer transcendence” and it is here that a shift in emphasis is signalled. This shift develops the concept of “newly-born-ness”, which is introduced here as a key term coined by Cixous (1986). This term functions as an element of interstitiality. I also utilise it in an abbreviated sense to mean “transformativity”, and “going-beyond” and I cast “newly-born-ness” in relation to queer practices that are also interstitial and self-reflective. In this chapter, knowledge movement is theorised from an ontological perspective.

The notion of embodied consciousness is coupled with two other key terms in Chapter Six: “impulse of virtuality” (Brian Massumi, 2002) and “sexual rearrangement” (Sasho Lambevski, 2004). In order that queer knowledges can be understood in a way that builds on the analysis in Chapter Four (linked to the development of queer sensibility), Chapter Six focuses on the notion of knowledge assemblies (especially re-assemblies). These are articulated by contesting Lambevski’s (non-queer and non-subject-aligned) reading of non-normative sex acts, and proposing that sexgender self-practices and sexgender discourses (read as filaments of the “interstitial trace”) can be theorised in terms of a queer existential phenomenology.

In Chapter Seven the notion of queer being as a “self-fashioning” (which in previous chapters has been gradually linked with “askesis”) is directly and explicitly articulated as a sensibility and practice of being (both of which are positioned as mutually inclusive). The final two key terms (“Übermensch” and “epistemological thaw”) are introduced in this chapter and it is through these terms, the former after Nietzsche (1968) and the latter after Foucault (1995),
that all eight key terms are consolidated as important contributors to an ontology of queerness.

This chapter also draws on the term “genealogical elements”. This queered sense of the term “genealogy”, which acknowledges the Nietzschean and Foucauldian formulations, is more closely aligned with the definition of genealogy given by Judith Butler. She says:

A genealogical critique refuses to search for the origins of gender, ... female desire, ... sexual identity ...; rather, genealogy investigates the political stakes in designating as an origin and cause those identity categories that are in fact the effects of institutions, practices, discourses with multiple and diffuse points of origin (1990: ix).

I agree with the philosopher C. Colwell here, who discusses Butler’s use of genealogy: “Butler specifies the goal of tracing the lines of descent that run between identity categories, institutions, practices, discourses with multiple points of origin” (1997: n.p., italics added). It is the notion of multiple points of origin, in relation to poetic or political spatialities, contexts and directions that the genealogy of this thesis ultimately becomes concerned with. My use of the term “genealogy” is extended as a method from Butler’s account. I am not attempting to demarcate, question or emphasise the multiple points which have been designated as origins (of sexuality/gender and phenomenological discourses for example), but – especially as we can see from Chapter Five onwards – I seek the traces from any causal point (originary or not), from which a queer interstitial reading can be made.

The term “Übermensch” is a particularly rich one to which I give an abbreviated meaning. I utilise it in relation to the notion of self-overcoming (Selbstüberwindung) and specifically in terms of an “asketic” practice. Nietzsche’s term “Übermensch”, and his writings in Thus Spoke Zarathustra (1968) are surprisingly well-suited to a queer hermeneutics; in Chapter Seven I explain why this is so, and how this particular work of Nietzsche’s can be connected to a contemporary everyday queerness. Part of this explanation turns to the notion of poetics, which allows us to “sense” the interstitiality of queer being.

By drawing on the term “epistemological thaw”, Chapter Seven manoeuvres all the previous articulations of knowledge movement into conceptual proximity with askesis, and from this theoretical location the creative processes of queer
being and queer self-becoming (queer askesis) are clearly illustrated. The notion of queer being as transformative being that is linked to Foucault’s later works and the idea that living is an art. From this premise, a particular kind of queer self-conscious practice is constituted as queer sensibility.

Foucault’s notion of care of, and for, the self is analysed in relation to queer sensibility and askesis. Simultaneously, I do not lose sight of the fact that a knowledge of self takes place in a “shared” (social and political) world. A relationship of “the self to the self” which acknowledges the lived-in social world (and everyday experience) is conceived and contextualised in terms of an ethics of self and an orientation or transformative becoming of self.

If we are to agree with Dorothée Legrand (after Zahavi, 2005) that “understanding selfhood requires a fine-grained understanding of self-consciousness” (2007: 674), then the idea of removing selfhood from a queer existentialist phenomenology of consciousness is one that is implicitly challenged throughout the thesis and one which culminates explicitly here in Chapter Seven.

In the conclusion of the thesis, I suggest ways in which the coherence of queer being can be justified. In order to comprehensively argue for this, it is suggested that a subsequent undertaking could begin with the work of philosophers such as Dan Zahavi, Sara Heinämaa, Sara Ahmed, David Ross Fryer and Gayle Salamon (who all provide a contemporary phenomenology of self-consciousness). As a fruitful extension to this current project, this approach would open the way to an even more expansive articulation of queer ontology, and it could create a robust existentialist-phenomenological framework within which, poetry, sensibility, self-consciousness, subjectivity, selfhood, and the ethics of self, could combine as odd, eccentric and queer elements of being.
CHAPTER ONE
Spacing Out Knowledge And Ontology: Queering The Interstice

Spaces open up by the fact that they are let into the dwelling of man. To say that mortals *are* is to say that *in dwelling* they persist through spaces by virtue of their stay among things and locations. And only because mortals pervade, persist through, spaces by their very nature are they able to go through spaces. But in going through spaces we do not give up our standing in them (Heidegger, 1971b: 157, italics in original).

I will name the dual personality *mexican/american*, with no hyphen in the name, to signify that if the split were successful there would be no possibility of dwelling or living on the hyphen (Lugones, 1994: 470).

There is a freak show photo: Hiram and Barney Davis offstage — small, wiry men, white, cognitively disabled, raised in Ohio... Just once I want someone to tell me what they're staring at. My trembling hands? My buzzed hair? My broad, off-center stance, shoulders well muscled and lopsided? My slurred speech? Just once. But typically one long steely glance, and they're gone. I'm taking Hiram and Barney as my teachers (Clare, 2003: 260-261).

Having outlined my use and sense of the word queer, I want to begin my exploration by showing how queer theory can be thought of as a theory of the interstice. In this chapter I will draw on notions of “dwelling”, “the bridge” and “the hyphen” (after Martin Heidegger (1971b), Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) and Maria Lugones (1994)) and subsequently “velveteen realness” and “the freak” (after Ben Singer (1996) and Eli Clare (2003) respectively). These examples are historically separated and originate from seemingly disparate intellectual traditions. The disciplines of early twentieth-century existentialist philosophy, late twentieth-century feminist Latina theory, and early twenty-first-century, queer, disability and trans* theory are not usually aligned as academic bedfellows. They each analyse notions of being differently, especially in relation to abstract and subjective notions of self. In this chapter I do not wish to insist on a neat alignment between these theorists’ works, but to show how a queer phenomenological inquiry that explores notions of the interstice and queerness can be revealed through them all.

The conceptual fluctuation between abstract and concrete realms provides a theoretical space that can be articulated in various ways, especially in relation to “the self”. Maria Lugones has theorised a “mestiza consciousness” (1994: 458-

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24 As we shall see later in the chapter, Lugones explicitly distances her work from other postmodern theories and Western traditions. There is however, considerable “take-up” of Latina and Chicana theory, especially Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (first published, 1987), at the intersections of post-colonial, literary and philosophical analyses of space and being. Pappas’ (2001) analysis of a dominant metaphysical perspective (in which the world is conceived and experienced in singular terms that do not allow for multiple identities, genders, cultures, races, sexualities, and so on) draws on the work and lived experiences of Latina lesbian women whilst employing a Deweyan perspective to develop his critique. See also Ortega (2004) who draws on Heidegger, Anzaldúa and art, to analyse notions of in-between space. Having said this, it is still uncommon to find specifically queer existentialist phenomenology which locates, for example, trans* and feminist embodiment theories (which could include Latina theories amongst others) alongside radical sexgender theories.
479) in relation to her analysis of curdled or mestiza being; a being that is complexified by notions of hybridity, and dwelling on the hyphen. It is in that notion of dwelling, a place that is abstract or metaphorised and lived in, that a particularised (in this thesis, queer) consciousness evolves. I will utilise the notion of hybridity as a way to begin framing the complexities of interstitiality.

The idea of hybrid spaces is not new but what goes on in them can be. For example, social spaces where emergent queer subcultures struggle to find a “home” (in language, as self-awareness, as a valid way to “be”, and as a sensibility) negotiate that struggle in interstitial space, a space of in-betweens and in-between-ness. This is a complex space but it is not dystopian. In other words, it may be a site of tension (the negotiations of sexgender oppression are one element of that tension) but it is an ideal space for knowledge dissemination: it is not a space for unawareness, it is explicitly characterised by the realities of challenge. That is, challenge to self, to others, to social institutions and to power relations.

The naming of in-between space as interstitial is expanded by illustrating how living in and understanding that space is a work of dwelling, through which the oddity and freakishness of queer being is emphasised. Words and phrases in their simple forms that define interstitial spaces (physical, intellectual, spiritual and abstract) also suggest a particular conceptual thread which points to the being and knowing of queerness. In this chapter I illustrate how that thread can be read through the lens of a queer theory that draws upon epistemological and ontological perspectives to provide a theory of the interstice.

Although a queer semantics is ambiguous by definition (it suggests both the meaning of queerness and also queer meanings) it is made clearer by explicitly seeking out the “onto-epistemic” junctions that serve as crucial demarcation points for the being of queer/ness and the knowing of queer/ness. The onto-epistemic junction is a name for the interstices of being and knowing or

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25 Aperture, crack, fault line, intersection, punctum, hyphen, fringe, gap and threshold are examples of the generic, core sense of the interstice; they signal a “sense” of the interstice which at this point in the thesis is as yet ambiguous. However, by gradually developing a queer theory of the interstice, I shall layer-up complex and rich meanings about “gaps between” and interstitiality that enable a precise reading to emerge.

26 Judith Butler says there is no “merely epistemological approach to gender” (2004: 215). I hold that the same comment applies to queerness; and that as such “knowing queerness” and “queer knowingness” do not come about in the absence of other knowledges which, for example, can be ontological, political or poetic.
thinking and doing. It is described in detail later in this chapter, but as an initial definition, it can be thought of as another term for interstitial space, but one that acknowledges the disjuncture of a singular mind and singular body. The term “onto-epistemic” provides a blurred notion of two kinds of being: what being itself is, in relation to self-consciousness, and what being is in relation to everyday queer experiences. Throughout the thesis it is utilised as a conceptual abstraction, and simultaneously as an indicator of lived reality. It will be discussed at different times in relation to spatiality, place, and qualities of being.

As a basis for my theoretical notion of the interstice, I shall draw on the use of a non-dualistic logic. The primary reason for this is that I want to provide a pliable yet stubborn and tenable analysis of queerness that does not have to rely on a relational definition of its (putative mainstream) “other” in order to articulate itself. In simpler terms, by speaking of “gaps between”, I shall not overly emphasise the question “between what?” and I shall not (in this chapter) be concerned to demonstrate what is outside of the interstice. In this opening chapter, the complexity of the interstice itself and how one can “be” in it is the focus of my inquiry.

My aim is to explore notions of the interstice in order to articulate an understanding of a heterodoxy of being. This is not just located in queer subcultures, but in any space where vague ideas about “not quite fitting”, or where clear feelings about a sensitivity to (or affinity towards) living oddly and non-normatively, exist. Throughout the thesis, such a queer being (as a way of living) is not “resolved” or understood through a “mainstream” or normative framework; it is revealed in relation to an interstitial logic that begins to unfold here.

**Gaps Between**

In the following four characterisations of the interstice, I expand upon meanings which signpost:

- *movement* into/from/within interstitial space
- the *quality* of interstitial space
- the *potential* of interstitial space
- something that can *occur* or does *happen*, in the interstice.
The ensuing four sections all bear relation to the occupation of interstitial space. Beginning as brief delineations, these initial characterisations act as preliminary sketches of the interstice that will interconnect and overlap. Eventually becoming articulated as interstitial elements of onto-epistemic junctions, these early senses and conceptualisations of the interstice will be expanded on in increasingly clear terms, as the thesis develops.

**Movement**

The first characterisation – movement – suggests the idea of an interstice as a portal space; a space that is entered, traversed, exited, or travelled in. The notion of movement to or from an interstice necessarily invokes the questions, “Where from? Where to?”. As I have already said, this concern is displaced for the time being in order to focus on movement within the interstice as an occupation of being and thinking.27

In order to make sense of the characteristic of movement in an interstitial space, we can consider the type of movement that takes place. It could be a knowledge movement (such as coming to understand queerness as a particular sensibility, or a shift in knowing oneself as bisexual and then knowing oneself as queer bisexual,28 or knowing vanilla sex29 and then knowing kink or BDSM). It could also be a physical movement: moving between queer* spaces such as clubs, cafes, queer* dwellings, queer* homes, the beat,30 pride fairs, mardis gras celebrations, festivals and parades. Also, there are movements (we can also think of this as changeability) of queer embodiment that occur for example, in queer sex acts, genderqueer dressing, surgical or hormonal manipulation/crafting/designing of the body, and overt or coded queer gestures.

I will begin the analysis of movement by looking at the obvious relationship between movement and space: that is, in the sense of embodied movement that

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27 Having said this, the interstice I speak of is not a vacuum, nor does it exist as an isolated entity: what is external to it does bear a significant relation to it. This significance is implied in this chapter but given an empirical grounding in Chapters Three and Four by addressing the “macro-world” issues which are displaced here.
28 Chapter Two gives an in-depth discussion of queer bisexuality.
29 “Vanilla sex” is a slang term for sex that is not “dirty”. It refers to sex acts that do not involve power play, BDSM, kink, sex toys and so on. “Vanilla sex” can be cast as a kind of “opposite” to BDSM or kink practices, wherein vanilla is synonymous with negative – plain or boring – qualities. In my view analyses of “hot” (interesting) sex should not discount or exclude the phenomenon of “hot vanilla”. Having said this, the term “vanilla” is used to delineate, or make a firm distinction, between BDSM and non-BDSM lifestyles. The term “vanilla relationship” is an explicit indication of a non-BDSM relationship. For an example of this usage see (Langdringe & Barker, 2007: 51).
30 The “beat” refers to places where people (gay men especially) cruise for casual sex. Public toilets are a common location for beats. In the UK the term “cottage” is used to describe beat locations, in the USA the term “tea-room” is used, and in New Zealand the term “bog” is used. See Moore (1995), Humphreys (1975), and Ings (2007).
occurs through and within lived spaces. I will not describe particular spaces at this point (such as geographical locations), although they will become points of focus when queer everyday lived experience is analysed later. The first important connection to make (considering my stated aim of a queer ontology) is between space, movement, and the notion of being.

Those of us in the humanities who speak of spaces and dwellings, lived experience and being, can hardly miss the work of Martin Heidegger (1927): “being” was the central component of his work. Although Heidegger’s work is not queer theorising, it does start a discussion of being that I want to link with “queer being” and “being queer”, through schools of phenomenological existentialist thought. These have emanated in a linear, chronological fashion from Husserl \(^{31}\) (at least), through Heidegger (1927), Sartre (1943), Merleau-Ponty (1945), De Beauvoir (1949), Ricoeur (1966), Gadamer (1960) and onwards to the historical philosophy of Foucault. *The History of Sexuality* originally published as *The Will to Knowledge* (*La Volonté De Savoir*) (1976), is in my view a significant antecedent to queer theory.

It would be very difficult, however, for Heidegger’s philosophical notion of the structure of being to accommodate queer being or any other differentiated (raced, gendered, sexed, classed, particularly embodied) being. Within Heidegger’s philosophy (and that of other Western phenomenologist and existentialist thinkers) “being” is not apportionable; “being” is human existence itself rather than existence as a particular kind of human. \(^{32}\) From this premise one could similarly say that there is no such thing as a “kind” of truth of being. However, the ontological particularities inherent in the “truth” of being are

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\(^{31}\) Edmund Husserl’s most famous work, *Logical Investigations*, was first published in German as *Logische Untersuchungen* in (1900) with additions in the second edition in 1913. For a history of the Husserlian tradition, see for example Kockelmans (1994). From Husserl onwards there have been existential, hermeneutic and deconstructionist “turns” in the discipline of phenomenology.

\(^{32}\) Heidegger comments that: “any uncritical lapse into a particular interpretation of existence ... ought to be avoided from the start ...” (in McNeill, 1998: 9). See also Husserl (1970: 304). However, this is not to say that Heidegger’s work should be dismissed in terms of its usefulness for a queer theory of being. Heidegger’s notion that movement (for example) as mode of being, can be characterised as an emerging into presencing (in McNeill, 1998: 91) provides in my view, great potential for theorising the interstice, as does the concept of “Lichtung” (1967: 171), (1984: 103), (J. Young & Haynes, 2002: 30). Heidegger uses “Lichtung” (a word for a forest clearing) to denote illumination, lighting or clarity, or in-between light and dark, which serves as a metaphor for between-ness or interstitiality (amongst other metaphors including those for truth). However, Heidegger’s work is not my initial or primary object of analysis. I begin with terms and concepts rather than the distinct oeuvres of theorists per se. In untangling a complex set of perceptions of queerness, this thesis has been able to focus on terms which are in themselves descriptors of interstitiality and can be aligned with the interstitial theory that develops from an unorthodox process. It is through those terms that different theorists’ work has been hugely insightful. My use of Heidegger in this chapter predominantly focuses upon the publication, *Poetry Language Thought* (1971). Throughout this thesis I have been mindful that a peripheral engagement of the notion of “being”, as it is formulated in Heidegger’s work and that of other phenomenologists, is to be qualified as part of an exploratory method. That method is essentially a graduation; from “light”, easily accessible concepts to a deeply complex, layered theory; the formation of which has relied on this unorthodox process. This forms the necessary platform from which a more developed theory of the interstice and “the self” will emerge in the final three chapters.
often camouflaged within Western, scientific, androcentric and universalised writing.

Consequently, Heidegger’s analysis of being is not one with which I can easily align my queer theorisation. I am not writing from a traditional existential phenomenological perspective, and as I will reveal in Chapter Five, there are heterosexual norms embedded within philosophical writing about being. “Being” in existentialist theories (if we do read it for specificity) is heterosexual by default and therefore not queer, and certainly not queer by default.

Having said this, it is easier from a queer perspective to engage with Heidegger’s analysis of space in the essay “Building Dwelling Thinking”, from the book Poetry Language Thought (Heidegger, 1971b: 143-161). This analysis places being and buildings into a location or space. So even if Heidegger maintains a putative neutrality of an “exist-ing” subject or thing, as soon as we think of the space it produces and occupies we cannot (unless we take an idealised transcendental perspective) also make that space neutral: thus we cannot ignore queer space.

As well as the obvious notion of going in and out of spaces, Heidegger briefly discusses the notion of standing in them (as the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter attests). He also comments: “If we pay heed to these relations between locations and spaces, between spaces and space, we get a clue to help us in thinking of the relation of man and space” (Heidegger, 1971b: 156, emphasis added).

Despite my resistance to the possibility of neutralising the particularity of human manner (which cannot be separated from human being), Heidegger’s work can nonetheless be linked to Latina, Chicana and women-of-colour

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33 Bearing in mind the previous footnote, this is one reason why I chose to draw upon four particular publications which can be utilised for theorising the interstice in a way that Being and Time cannot. They are On The Way To Language (Heidegger, 1971a), Pathmarks (McNeill, 1998), Off The Beaten Track (J. Young & Haynes, 2002) – popularly known amongst Heidegger scholars as Holzwege (1950) – and Early Greek Thinking (1984) originally published in parts in Holzwege and Vorträge und Ausfsätze (1954).


35 We can contextualise Heidegger’s use of the term “man” according to his own definition. When Heidegger says “man” he thinks of “a being who exists in a human manner – that is who dwells – ...” (1971b: 156). We can simultaneously note a double erasure here: of “woman” (by preferring to use “man” rather than human) and of the particular (therein queer) subject (when using the term “human”). We can also note that from a historical perspective, Simone De Beauvoir was challenging such writing in her hugely influential feminist, existentialist work, The Second Sex (1949). The essay “Building Dwelling Thinking” was first published in 1954, although it first appeared in print as colloquium proceedings in 1952, see (1971b: xxiv).
feminist theory of the nineteen eighties (especially as Heidegger goes on to
discuss the concept of “the bridge”, which I will mention later in this chapter). It
is from this linkage that I seek out meanings of experience and being that
connect abstractions about “neutral” (therefore heterosexual) space and
particular queer spaces, as well as the lived experience of being in them.

Standing in space, need not be static; it is also a presencing. It denotes
something other than going in or out. Standing does not have to mean stillness;
it can be thought of as pervading, claiming, remaining in or dwelling in space
simply for the fact of being in it. In the sense of a queer interstice, this means
that the queerness of being can perhaps be linked to a sense of oddity between
“man”, space and spaces, which we shall see in Heidegger’s essay in a moment.
Before this I will move on to the second characterisation of interstitial space.

Quality

Interstitial space can be thought of as having a “liminal” quality, a “domain-like”
quality, a “hybrid” quality and a “tensile” quality. Liminal, in the tribal,
ritualistic sense that Victor Turner (1979) famously used it, suggests the
characteristic of in-between-ness. He says: “Liminal entities are neither here
nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by
law, custom, convention, and ceremonial” (1979: 95). Liminality in this sense is
suggestive of movement, but it is not so much about actual physical movement
from one place to another as an epistemological one: the conceptual threshold
moment of “moving” from familiar spatio-temporal social structures to
unfamiliar ones. It also suggests a place of non-belonging (not belonging to
where one came from, and not yet belonging where one is destined to go). This
intermediate phase of ritual (a rite of passage) is different from the non-linear
sense of liminality that I want to invoke here – that is, an interstitiality with no
defined (teleological) process towards a fixed destination or end point.

Turner’s meaning of liminality (a twentieth-century anthropological perspective
focusing on particular tribal rituals among the Ndembu people of Central Africa
in the early 1950’s), 36 although taken up in other cultural and social theories as a

36 European study of African tribes in classical anthropology is problematic, not least for the embeddedness of “othering”
in some white and colonial anthropological studies. In this thesis I do not expand on post-colonial or race theory
(although these and queer philosophical theories are commensurable). I draw on Turner primarily because the notion of
liminality that is so thoroughly associated with his name also aids my explanation of a liminal quality to interstitial
term in and of itself, was also, importantly, aligned by him with another term, “communitas” (Ibid.: 96-97).

“Communitas” is an element of liminality which Turner uses to describe a modality of social relationship in terms of social structure. It is the “human” bond within liminal society that is a necessary component for successful being, “outside” of the normal social structure. For Turner, communitas exists in liminal society (read as temporarily unstructured, having relatively undifferentiated social ties) because the usual hierarchical structures (of caste, class, rank, economy, the sacred, kinship, official role, law and so on) are temporarily disorganized, and liminal subjects therefore form social bonds which do not conform to a usual hierarchy.

This “human” bond bears some relation to a queer sensibility which situates itself in the interstices of normative social structures. Queers can have an affinity for other queers, yet queer interstitial space differs from Turner’s liminal space: it is productive of, and a product of, a “not there but here” status rather than the “no longer/not yet” status that we see in Turner’s analysis. And a “human” bond, like Heidegger’s “mortal being”, neutralises human particularities and the contexts within which those particularities are shaped and understood.

Liminality, as an inter-structural phenomenon, can be applied to a queer study of the interstice so long as the notion of structure itself is problematised. For Turner, who was specifically examining notions of social structure, to cast liminality and communitas in relation to this structure served a descriptive analysis more than it critiqued structure per se. The interstitial logic of liminality has a different focus: it is queered and phenomenological, and it is wary of relying on uncritical notions of rigid structure. In so far as a space amongst other spaces cannot exist without a delineating structure, that spatial notion of structure is not a problem. But a broad notion of social structure can be problematic if, for example, it is naturalised as “the mainstream” (including

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37 “Not there but here” status resonates with the notion of presence and place that the Queer Nation slogan “Were here, were queer. Get used to it” emphasized in the nineteen nineties, particularly in the in the USA and Western English-speaking countries. Queer Nation and Act Up were radical activist LGBT rights groups which formed at a time when homophobic AIDS discourses and gay-bashing were prevalent. For a history of Queer Nation, see Crimp (2002, 1988), Bristow (in Knellwolf & Norris, 1989), Sears (1992), Warner (1993) and Trend (1996).
the institution of sexgender normativity) which eclipses non-normative, disordered, fluid, chaotic, cultural, personal and queer micro/re-structures.

Qualities Of Domain, Hybridity And Tension

A “domain” suggests even more structural quality, especially if we think of the shoring up or maintenance of a social domain. A spatialised domain, such as an interstitial space, also alludes to the occupation of space: an occupation that does not necessarily have to rely on normative, concretized social structures. In other words, a “normative” or “normalising” social structure does not have to be privileged because it is seemingly concrete. Queer being – the experiences and phenomena of what it means to be queer in an everyday way – exists at the interstices of normalising social structures.

In order to understand this more clearly, we can clarify a distinction between power and government in Foucauldian terms. If we think of queers occupying a social space (physically lived in) and a conceptual space (the awareness of thoughts) and, for example, of queers as subordinate to a mainstream “other”, we might think of this (familiarly) as a power relation. In a way we would be correct. However, as Foucault says, this kind of power is assumed to exist universally, in a concentrated or diffused form, but actually it does not exist in that universal form. According to Foucault, this sense of “power over” only exists if it is put into action through the relationship of forces acting against each other (in Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982: 219).

As such, if queer occupation of the interstice does not, by default, act against a perception of universal “power over” (whereby it is seen as the weak subordinate, and produces itself as such), it will instead engage with the day-to-day realities of what Foucault calls government – “the way in which the conduct of individuals or groups might be directed” (Ibid.: 221).

The interstitial queer challenge to heteronormativity still negotiates power relations but not necessarily in terms of a confrontation between two adversaries: it can be done differently, by being aware of the way in which the conduct of individuals or groups anywhere might be directed (Ibid.: 221). In addition, Foucault states that it is as important to know the way in which that directing of the actions of others is structured:
The relationship proper to power would not therefore be sought on the side of violence or of struggle, ... but rather in the area of the singular mode of action, neither warlike nor juridical, which is government (Ibid.: 221).

So, we can place an emphasis on queer occupation of the interstice by thinking of it as an activity of dismantling, or reading many different methods of government (its own and others), through a queer non-normative perspective. Rather than make an abstract theorisation about the possible transcendentalism of this domain, for the moment, we can think of the “odd” but real practices of being queer that insert interstices, into what we can call perforations of larger governmental social structures. We can understand this by articulating “domains of” in different ways: as domains of “reality” (Miller & Rose, 1990: 8) and as I have already suggested, of government. Miller and Rose say:

Government of course, is not only a matter of representation. It is also a matter of intervention ... [A]ttempts to instrumentalise government and make it operable also have a ‘technological’ form (cf. Foucault 1986: 225-6) ... If political rationalities render reality into the domain of thought, these ‘technologies of government’ seek to translate thought into the domain of reality, and to establish ‘in the world of persons and things’ spaces and devices for acting upon those entities of which they dream and scheme” (1990: 8, italics in original).

By moving away from the concept of power (as it might be thought of in terms of the mainstream and the margin, as confrontational adversarial phenomena), we can look at the way any phenomenon may structure the possible field of action of others. If we take Miller and Rose to mean that the intervention of technologies of government (for example, discourses of the truth of sexgender knowledge) into the lives of persons is reversible (rendering reality into thought and translating thought into a domain of reality), we can consider the extensions which are applicable to the interstices of thought and physicality (or the theoretical and the practical). The queered domains of thinking, of language, of sexuality, of objects, of morality, of “the social”, of “the public”, of “the private” and many others including the domain of “the self” and “the interstice”, can be unhinged from the familiar structures of social institutions which produce the familiar knowledges (“truths”) of everyday reality. The occupants of a queer interstitial domain are alerted to this unhinging, as a structural interstice. This is expanded upon in the next section, which looks at notions of structure (that is, sexgender knowledge and social structures) from the personal perspective of trans* theorist Ben Singer.

Hybridity and productivity, as elements of queer sensibility, also resonate with what we can call inter-structural notions of being. The notion of hybridity is
documented in scholarship that examines the quality and ontology of queer subjectivity. Some of this writing has theorised the notion of realness and authenticity, especially in relation to citizenship, ethnicity, selfhood, performativity and trans* subjectivity. I shall turn specifically to the trans* example shortly. In other writing, the productive quality of queer interstitiality allows the space for queers to produce accounts of how their perceptions of hybridity can be characterised and/or dwelled in. A second example, in which I cast hybridity in terms of queer “freak sensibility”, is discussed in the last section of this chapter.

The final quality of interstitial space I want to draw out is the quality of “tension”. It exists within what Henri Lefebvre might call the “concrete abstraction” of a social space (Lefebvre, 1991: 27). Interstitial tension is both a concrete thing (a lived reality) and an abstract thing (also and still real), where the link between a philosophy of (queer) being and a lived reality of being (queer) are constantly merging in queer sexgender discourses about queering norms, producing queer ethical culture, articulating queer sexual and gendered multiplicities, combating queer*-phobic discrimination, and so on.

The notion of tension that I am drawing on is not the one commonly associated with a feeling of anxiety but one more akin to a quality of “tensity”. We can envisage this by thinking of the surface tension of water, which is also called interfacial tension or the dynamic surface. It is a “place” (between air and liquid) with an energy all its own. The following example illustrates the tensile qualities of interstitial space in concrete terms.

**The Velveteen-Real**

In 1996, at a seminar in New York, trans* theorist Ben Singer articulated realness as “velveteen”, as a way of intervening in (and thus creating an interstitial space for) the debate about the authentic trans* subject (1996). In recent comments about the conference paper he says:

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39 See Warner (1999: viii) for a discussion of queer “alternative ethics” and Carter (2000: 36) for a discussion of “ethics of creativity”. In Chapter Seven I analyse the notion of queer subjectivity in relation to a queer ethics and the “asketic self”.

40 I am grateful to Ben Singer for allowing me to conduct an interview with him via email and giving permission for the transcript to be used in this thesis.
At that time, ... and somewhat still today, there was a tension between the realness associated with TS re-embodiment and a TG\textsuperscript{41} politics that threw all notions of realness into question. The latter seemed in favor of a politics that was aligned with strict social constructionist theories; those theories, however, did not ring true for some transsexual people who were very concerned with passing (as non-trans) and gender authenticity (e.g., “I’ve always been this way” or “I’m a __ trapped in the body of a __”). So I was trying to find a way to re-articulate a notion of realness as something “velveteen”, that is, as something constructed yet “real” in a deeply felt and authentic way. This was an attempt to complicate the simple binary (tension) between classical TS narratives and TG politics (personal communication, February 28, 2006).

Rather than situate realness within a binary of socially constructed gender versus “natural” or “real” gender, or “passing” versus “not passing”, Singer created the notion of realness in relation to the heart-rending children’s story \textit{The Velveteen Rabbit} (Williams).\textsuperscript{42} The quality of velveteen-ness that Singer invokes, brings together the real and the unreal in a way that hybridises and also validates the “realness” of being “unreal”. In both the story and Singer’s analysis, “velveteen realness” also brings into question the notion of realness in relation to being loved.

In the story, the rabbit, who is made of velveteen, wishes to be “real”. This cannot happen (according to the lore of toy magic in the story) until the rabbit is truly loved by the child that owns it. Much of the evidence of being truly loved is in the wearing away of the rabbit’s body: the velveteen “fur” becomes threadbare, the boot-button eyes lose their polish, the whiskers are rubbed off, the tail becomes un-sewn, and it becomes grubby and loses its shape. This wearing away is not the destruction, but the construction of the “real” rabbit. The boy ends up loving the rabbit “so hard that he loved all his whiskers off, and the pink lining to his ears turned grey, and his brown spots faded” (Williams: 32). The notion of wearing away as a “destruction” can be transformed to mean something else entirely (of uncovering the “real”), if we think of removing layers in order to see, in close-up, the core, authentic self.

When the magic moment finally occurs, the wish is granted and the rabbit develops real fur, muscly legs and real seeing eyes. Singer likens this to transition through hormone use: “I compared this to a person using synthetic hormones ... to transition into a more deeply felt and authentically embodied state” (personal communication, February 28, 2006). Singer’s discussion about

\textsuperscript{41} TS and TG refer to transsexual and transgender respectively.

\textsuperscript{42} \textit{The Velveteen Rabbit} by Margery Williams with original illustrations by William Nicholson was first published in 1922 and popularised throughout the United States of America during much of the twentieth century. It is now widely available throughout the world (in different formats: book, DVD, and audio cassette) and has been adapted for live theatre.
transition and realness is not only about the materiality of the body (in the sense for example, of physically transitioning as FTM or MTF), nor is it only about the body as a conscious being, a person, rather than an abstraction. Singer’s comments lead us to question the relationship of the rabbit in both “real” and “unreal” forms (which can be equated with the person who wishes to transition) to other toys, rabbits and humans (that is, the social world), some of whom (a point of crucial significance for Singer) will love the rabbit in any of its pre-transitional, transitional and post transitional states.

As Singer points out,

If I was to use this [example] again today I might make more of the relational aspect of realness that necessitates an other to (co) author-ize, through acts of (loving) recognition, the authenticity of the person with a non-standard gender or embodiment. Identity and gender itself, seem to be constituted relationally (Ibid., square brackets added).

This way of regarding realness may be interpreted as a hybridisation of sexual and gendered knowledges of transgender and transsexual people (who may or may not be queer) but the polarisation of debate about what constitutes realness in trans* terms (such as passing and assimilating or being “inauthentic”) invited then, as it does now, a space for queer interstitial analysis. The forthcoming example of queer “freak sensibility” extends Singer’s point about relationality and both of these examples will help to illuminate the notion of the queer asketic transformative self put forward in Chapter Seven, in which an ethics of the self is cast as co-given with the world, and therefore others.

Whilst there are ongoing debates about trans* “realness”, the trans* person is situated relationally with lovers, desirers, supporters and advocates who may not need to situate themselves in relation to the “realness” of the trans* person but in relation to a love/care/sexual/erotic space of transitional interpersonal existence. Singer calls this being “loved into existence” (Ibid.).

The domain of “transensuality” is one in which the thread-baring process can be read as a realising process and this lends some weight to a necessary critique

44 Interestingly, there is a similar use of the term “velveteen” in relation to trans* realness, which occurs in sexually explicit, erotic writing contextualised through a depiction of FTM, gay, non-monogamous public sex acts. See Hailey in Blank & Kaldera (2002: 225). In another use that relates to lovers becoming “real” to each other through the staged erotic dramas of BDSM experiences, Susan Farr also references The Velveteen Rabbit. She draws on the conversation between the rabbit and the “skin horse” in which the horse (another toy) explains, “Real isn’t how you are made ... it’s a thing that happens to you” (1987: 186).
45 Transensuality, a term that denotes attraction to trans* people, is discussed in the following chapter.
of the often temporalised focus of trans* theory. This temporal focus is concerned with the process – and particularly, the linear and teleological progress – of transition, rather than a “de-teleogised sense of liminality” which is an equally valid part of sex and gender transitioning.

Although surgery and hormones can now enable the relatively speedy achievement of a fixed aim (successful sex reassignment surgery being the end point of transition), which is eminently desirable for some people, for other transitioning people and their allies, the notion of stopping or pausing along the way, or moving the end and start points, or removing the end point entirely, can be just as desirable. In some ways (which may seem ironic to some but to others are simply the production of “being” in interstitial space), the mutability of sex and gender is required by some transitioning people in order that they can eventually claim an immutable sex/gender position that sits unproblematically (for them) within the dominant sexed and gendered culture. From a different (queer) perspective, the explicitly mutable sex/gender position provides a “tensile freedom” from the strictures of the dominant heteronormative sex/gender binarised institution.

**Potential**

The third characteristic of the interstice – potential – refers to the potential for something (an act, a thought, a moment) to occur in interstitial space. As I previously indicated, the meanings of the interstice used in this chapter will coalesce and overlap. The qualities and movements of particular (queer) knowledges are very closely linked with “potential for” knowledge exchange and production. This is held in the notion of a threshold moment.

A threshold moment in interstitial space is predominantly (but not exclusively) epistemological. It is the “potential for” rather than the “act of” because it is precisely a moment of opportunity that precipitates change: a moment on the

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46 In some countries (such as Australia) that have “relatively progressive” trans* legislation, this can take months rather than years, due in part to the development of less tortuous engagements with the medical profession, and jurisdictions where laws concerning transgender and transsexual people have become more supportive. There is also more access to providers of surgery and hormones through the information exchange between trans* support networks, and a growing number of places in the world where a person can utilise or “buy” sex and body reassignment surgeries, depending of course on the context of their economic situation. Here in Western Australia, a person can be referred (albeit with a “diagnosis” of gender dysphoria) from general practitioner, to psychological clinician, to endocrinologist, to surgeon, all within the space of 12 months. For recent examples of information (for and by trans* people and their allies) about FTM and MTF transitioning in Australia, see (http://www.ftmaustralia.org/) whose self-funded publication, *Transitioning Female-to-Male in Australia*, is due for release in April 2008; and the local government-funded booklet *Simply Trans* (2007).
brink. It is easy to imagine this moment in physical and spatial terms: (for example) when a ball which has been thrown into the air, is going neither up nor down; or when one walks across the mid-point of a bridge and reaches the point in one’s stride where the back foot and front foot are simultaneously ascending and descending. Alternatively, this imagery can easily be taken in a mathematical direction and theorised in the sense of a mathematics which includes statistics (the Bell curve and tipping point analyses), geometry (the pattern of the cycloid and curve analysis), and trigonometry and set theory (infinity and pi).

One might ask what social/humanities theories (particularly feminist and queer) can gain from mathematics; not being a mathematician I am tempted to circumvent the terrain of equations and numbers in order to expand the context of interstitial space. There are, however, two points which should not be overlooked. Firstly, any philosophy of space (including the theory of interstitial space) is implicated in an interesting historical tension between mathematics and traditional philosophy. The work of Henri Lefebvre (1991) is located at this juncture, as we shall see. Secondly, the mathematical field (one that can represent concepts as shapes and patterns and equations) is, quite simply, attractive – both aesthetically and conceptually.

On an aesthetic level, the esoteric symbols (the squiggly lines and angular shapes) of this coded mathematical field can be juxtaposed and inserted into the font styles of generic reading texts. This can be exoticised as ornamental fancy, it can be fetishised by language lovers as esoteric, unusual and mysterious, and it can also be corrupted – for example, the meaning of “sin” in \( \sin x = 2 \) can (albeit nonsensically) also be read as an offence or an immoral act.

These kinds of incongruous associations are not unfamiliar in popular culture. There are numerous examples of the consumption and appropriation (which can be critical, uncritical, parodic, iconic or nonsensical) of mathematics and

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4 Cycloids appear in architecture, clock-making, furniture design, gearing mechanisms and everyday life; they come about from the “natural” and “mathematised” effect of following the curved line made by a point on a circle which is rolled over a straight line. Animated diagrams of cycloids are available on the internet in the public domain, these animations present a general and easy way to understand how cycloids are formed. For one example, see http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Image:CycloidAnim04.gif (accessed November 12 2007). For scholarly mathematical references to cycloids see Lockwood (1961), Yates (1992), Gutenmacher & Vasilyev (2004).
more broadly the “hard sciences” especially in such forms as visual media and merchandising.  

In terms of conceptualising a hard-to-define interstitial space, a mathematical equation can precisely pinpoint it, at once making it available to any reader as an encapsulation, but the scientific encapsulation of space does not suggest the “clutter” of queer lived experience. For this reason among others, science has been criticised for its sanitised way of defining space and casting the world. For example, a significant body of feminist theory emerged in the nineteen eighties to especially critique science, which until then had largely been unproblematically viewed as neutral, universal and objective. In this work, the interstitial threshold moment can also be called an ideological moment and this relies on the notion of provisional and partial knowledge. Donna Haraway’s insightful work on “situated” knowledges, produced twenty years ago, is highly relevant. She says:

The moral is simple: only partial perspective promises objective vision ... Feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object. It allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see. These are lessons that I learned in part walking with my dogs and wondering how the world looks without a fovea and very few retinal cells for color vision but with a huge neural processing and sensory area for smells. It is a lesson available from photographs of how the world looks to the compound eyes of an insect or even from the camera eye of a spy satellite or the digitally transmitted signals of space probe-perceived differences “near” Jupiter that have been transformed into coffee table color photographs. The “eyes” made available in modern technological sciences shatter any idea of passive vision; these prosthetic devices show us that all eyes, including our own organic ones, are active perceptual systems, building on translations and specific ways of seeing, that is, ways of life (1988: 583).

In this critique of objectivity, we could interchange the word feminist with other referents, and “queer” could be one. The humanising, embodying, ethnicising, sexualising, gendering and queering – in other words the particularising – of space in which ways of life exist, does not call for an abolition of scientific language per se. But users and creators of scientific language and, for that matter, users and creators of humanities knowledges, need to heed the feminist critiques and recognise the partiality of their positions. The mathematical baby (as one partial perspective) should not be thrown out with the bath-water.

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48 See *The Simpsons* episode where the character Apu says he can recite Pi to 40,000 places and the last digit is one. Followed by Homer saying “Mmm, pi(e)” see Oakley & Weinstein (1993). Also a range of clothing and jewellery accessories can be bought which cover everything from black holes to periodic tables. See [http://www.scientecher.com/index.html](http://www.scientecher.com/index.html).

49 For example, e=mc² is known and “read” as a familiar term in Western popular culture but only a small percentage of that populace can explain the equation in relation to energy, matter, light speed, space-time and gravitational force.
I return now to the earlier imagery of a ball being thrown into the air, and how this can relate to queer interstitial space. I persist with this image in order to provide a theoretical segue to the link I want to make between mathematics and queer life – this rests in philosophy – and by extension to feminist, postmodern and queer epistemologies. And, as I go on to say, the juncture of queer epistemologies and queer ontology informs and is informed by, queer lives and queer interstitial space. Henri Lefebvre says:

Mathematicians, in the modern sense of the word, emerged as the proprietors of a science (and of a claim to scientific status) quite clearly detached from philosophy – a science which considered itself both necessary and self-sufficient. Thus mathematicians appropriated space, and time, and made them part of their domain, yet they did so in a rather paradoxical way. They invented spaces – an ‘indefinity’, so to speak, of spaces: non-Euclidean spaces, curved spaces, x-dimensional spaces (even spaces with an infinity of dimensions), spaces of configuration, abstract spaces, spaces defined by deformation or transformation, by a topology, and so on. At once highly general and highly specialized, the language of mathematics set out to discriminate between and classify all these innumerable spaces as precisely as possible. (Apparently the set of spaces, or ‘space of spaces’, did not lend itself very readily to conceptualization.) But the relationship between mathematics and reality – physical or social reality – was not obvious, and indeed a deep rift had developed between these two realms. Those mathematicians who had opened up this ‘problematic’ subsequently abandoned it to the philosophers, who were only too happy to seize upon it as a means of making up a little of the ground they had lost. In this way space became – or, rather, once more became – the very thing which an earlier philosophical tradition, namely Platonism, had proposed in opposition to the doctrine of categories: it became what Leonardo da Vinci had called a ‘mental thing’. The proliferation of mathematical theories (topologies) thus aggravated the old ‘problem of knowledge’: how were transitions to be made from mathematical spaces (i.e. from the mental capacities of the human species, from logic) to nature in the first place, to practice in the second, and thence to the theory of social life – which also presumably must unfold in space? (1991: 2-3).

So, the ball in the air, the mid-bridge-mid-stride, the bell curve, the tipping point, and the cycloid all have a relationship to a threshold moment, all have a relationship to a mathematics of space, and all have a relationship to the philosophising of that space, as we shall now see.

In the next section I will make comparisons between Gloria Anzaldúa and Heidegger, but one difference between them that is relevant at this point is that Anzaldúa does not turn to mathematics to analogise interstitial space, whereas Heidegger does. Heidegger states:

[F]rom space as extensio a further abstraction can be made, to analytic-algebraic relations. What these relations make room for is the possibility of the purely mathematical construction of manifolds with an arbitrary number of dimensions. The space provided for in this mathematical manner may be called “space”, the “one” space as such. But in this sense “the” space, “space”, contains no spaces and no places. We never find it in any locations...” (Heidegger, 1971b: 155).
And a few pages on, Heidegger sums up.

But building never shapes pure “space” as a single entity. ... Nevertheless, because it produces things as locations, building is closer to the nature of spaces and to the origin of the “space” than any geometry and mathematics (Ibid.: 158).

The mathematical connection I am signalling is somewhat more charitable: despite the obvious lack (in mathematics) of the “nature” of a space or its tangible location, it does have the ability to reference or indicate (or bring attention to) a space of anywhere, of anything, including the interstice.

The cycloid and the ball in the air are similar to each other; they both suggest a movement from one space to another (from moving up to moving down) and so they both invite a thought about the moment when that change in direction will take place. A string of cycloids seems fixed and natural, just a like a string of some sexual categories does (LGBTIQ*) but they both have their in-betweens; one in abstract mathematics and the other in the queering of categories.
Likewise the bell curve and the exponential curve suggest a direction towards an axis which becomes more and more stretched out – distant from the centre – and yet infinitely receding or accelerating from a point of fixity. Both these notions are comparable to queer life. A knowledge threshold is like a mid-point (the turning point of the ball in the air, or the cycloid). The space in which to be queer resembles the line of a curve, never meeting the line of its axis.

In short, the interstitiality of queer space can be read as infinite, it will always move away from any normalising or assimilating forces. What was queer in 1998 for example may not be queer in 2008. What remains (as that which occurs in interstitial space), however, is a queer sensibility and we come to that now, in the fourth characterisation of the interstice – “occurrence”.

**Occurrence**

As I have pointed out, there are overlapping qualities, movements, and potentialities within interstitial space which produce queer knowledge shifts, queer realisations, and ways of being in and occupying queer space. Let us consider the ways in which these occurrences (which are specific to interstitial space) are narrated.
If we backtrack from contemporary queer theory we could weave an Ariadne-like thread or wend a snake-like path back through feminist and postmodern discourses, and further back through hermeneutic and existentialist phenomenology, in order to see that particularities of contemporary queerness are certainly not ahistorical ways of being. The space of being that I call queer interstitial space has been implied and narrated differently by theorists (theorists of place and space and being and experience). The significance of such a legacy, which queer theorists today might wish to point to, is that (valuable as a transhistorical perspective is) many previous narratives of queer interstitial space are considerably devoid of one important element: narration by the occupants themselves. In other words, external and/or abstract intellectual endeavour to theorise interstitial space (and especially queer interstitial space) must be expanded by those thinkers who physically and routinely dwell in it.

Having gestured towards a particular (phenomenological and feminist) philosophical legacy I shall not now follow it in the linear or chronological fashion noted earlier (from Husserl through to contemporary queer theory). I wish instead, to start with Latina feminists, Heidegger and the concept of the “bridge”.

**I Must Be The Bridge To Nowhere ...**

Some accounts of interstitial space which characterise “dwelling on the hyphen” are illustrated in a large body of Latina and Chicana scholarship that emerged in the late nineteen-seventies and early nineteen-eighties. This work was initially aimed at forging links between women of colour. As described by Toni Cade Bambara in the foreword to “The Bridge”, it was “a gathering-us-in-ness, a midwifery of mutually wise understandings” (in Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983: vi). Such writing aimed to continue to expand the early feminist goals of...
women of colour with writing that linked them to a wider range of issues, including sexuality, global perspectives and a new mestiza hermeneutics.\footnote{Sonia Saldivar-Hull states that Anzaldúa’s book \textit{Borderlands: La Frontera} compelled her to “engage its New Mestiza hermeneutics”. See Anzaldúa (1999: 1).}

It is important to note, however, Lugones’ rejection of any intended linkage between an emergent tradition of Latina writers, and postmodern literature and philosophy – a linkage that is explicit in my own work. At the beginning of her article \textit{Purity, Impurity, and Separation} Lugones says:

Note to the reader: this writing is done from within a hybrid imagination, within a recently articulate tradition of Latina writers who emphasize mestizaje and multiplicity as tied to resistant and liberatory possibilities. All resemblance between this tradition and postmodern literature and philosophy is coincidental, though the conditions that underlie both may well be significantly tied. The implications of each other are very different from one another (1994: 458).

Quite clearly there are resemblances between various traditions: philosophical, feminist, postmodern, deconstructionist and queer. Whilst not wanting to reduce any distinguishable body of work to a particular theoretical framework that it does not associate itself with, (for instance, I will not cast Heidegger nor Moraga nor Lugones as queer\footnote{Here, then, I am not enquiring whether resemblances between traditions are “intentional” or “coincidental”, but whether and how any resemblance can be made useful from a queer perspective. As such, any connection I make between Lugones and postmodern or philosophical theorists also values the distinction she herself makes.} theorists), traditions do become themselves as soon as particularities are articulated. What I am concerned to discover within the tradition of Latina writers who narrate in-between space, and other traditions which do the same, is whether in fact the queer theoretical intervention into interstitial space has something additional to say.\footnote{Sonia Saldivar-Hull states that Anzaldúa’s book \textit{Borderlands: La Frontera} compelled her to “engage its New Mestiza hermeneutics”. See Anzaldúa (1999: 1).}

Lugones states:

When I think of my own people, the only people I can think of as my own are transitionals, liminals, border-dwellers, “world”-travellers, beings in the middle of either/or. They are people whose acts and thoughts curdle separate. So as soon as I entertain the thought, I realize that separation into clean, tidy things and beings is not possible for me because it would be the death of myself as multiplicitous and a death of community with my own (Ibid.: 469).

In my reading, what Lugones protects is obvious on at least three counts. Firstly, she wants to be quite clear that the implications for Latina women in comparison perhaps to the “armchair” theorists of difference (who are not Latina or transitional or queer or grounded in the experience of oppression) vary greatly in “real” material terms. Secondly, the notion of a unified subject as analysed by philosophers and postmodern theorists is arrived at, in Latina
writing, by an explicit relationship to the consciousness of and also the “dwelling in” mestiza versus “pure”, “unified” existence. Thirdly, that an explicitly liberationist and resistant politics drives the specifically positioned mestizaje critique.

The struggles of queers who are not Latina, and Latinas who are not queer, can be markedly different; however the struggles of Latina queers implicate an intertwining of both these particularities. Lugones does mention queers in amongst the territory of those who develop a hybrid imagination:

> If women, the poor, the colored, the queer, the ones with cultures ... are deemed unfit for the public, it is because we are tainted by need, emotion, the body. This tainting is relative to the modern subject’s urge for control through unity and the production and maintenance of himself as unified (Ibid.: 467).

This territory is familiar to the many queers whose differing embodied and social realities are contextualised (at the local and global levels) by complexifying the ideas of a unified self, or a world that is conceived, as Pappas inferred, in singular terms (Pappas, 2001: 152-161). For some queers this is a subtle, creative and strategic art of living; for others it is an explicit challenge to sexgender norms especially. We shall see examples of this contextual diversity of being queer in the subsequent chapters.

The in-between-ness of queer interstitial space necessarily negotiates “in-betweens” of knowledge, sexuality, gender, ethnicity, embodiment, and so on. These negotiations (occurrences) take place as an effect of what I term “the tensity of freedom”. This is a freedom to move within interstitial space, to be part of its production and to knowingly engage with the queering of normative structures. The freedom to make such engagements is always held within a degree of tension caused by everyday real life: embodied dwelling in interstitial space. The multi-focal perspective of a queer gaze informs such engagements and coalesces around the thresholds of quality, potential, movement and occurrence.

We can question whether Heidegger’s critique of dwelling as well as Latina/Chicana/feminist/queer hybridity “speak to each other” in terms of an existential phenomenology which emphasises lived experience. There are ontological and metaphysical connections between Heidegger and Anzaldúa especially, who both use etymological, divine and poetic references to layer-up
meanings of being. The next four segments (queering, bridging, languaging and extracting) locate these connections.

**Queering**

It seems to me that interstitial dwelling is present, if almost phantom-like, in Heidegger’s writing about the bridge. To borrow from Heidegger’s words in the opening epigraph, we could say that in going through spaces, indeed we do not give up our *queer* standing in them (1971b: 157). Queerness is ironically beckoned; because Heidegger’s universal marking of dwelling cannot then be interstitial dwelling, or any other particular form of dwelling. Yet to me, this immediately invites a consideration of what such a universal marking of dwelling silences. We cannot for instance think of dwelling as embodied and “real” in the absence of particularity. To use Heidegger’s own terminology, we could think of “Aus-schlag” (breaking-out of/blossoming) and “Durchschlag” (breaking through/appearance) of queer interstitiality in his work (in McNeill, 1998: 191). The extent (ghostly or otherwise) to which it appears is perhaps a project of new queer hermeneutics and existential phenomenology.

In contrast to the “ghostly” queer interstice in Heidegger, Anzaldúa concretely names the “man” that dwells in the interstice; “man” becomes embodied and particularised:

> *Los atravesados* live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over or go through the confines of the ‘normal’ (1999: 25).

This reminds me also of Donna Haraway’s comment:

> Feminism loves another science: the sciences and politics of interpretation, translation, stuttering, and the partly understood... Its images are not the products of escape and transcendence of limits (the view from above) but the joining of partial views and halting voices into a collective subject position that promises a vision of the means of ongoing finite embodiment, of living within limits and contradictions – of views from *somewhere* (1988: 589-590, italics added).

Anzaldúa certainly provides a view from “somewhere” in her book *Borderlands/La Frontera:*The New Mestiza* (1987) – it is from the space of a real physical border and from the perspective of a particularised subject.

One of the most significant ways in which Anzaldúa describes a particular sense of border-dwelling-ness is to be found in what she calls the “*facultad*”. Her account of it is very close to the sense I have of a “queer sensibility”. She says:
La facultad is the capacity to see in the surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface. It is an instant “sensing”, a quick perception arrived at without conscious reasoning. It is an acute awareness mediated by the part of the psyche that does not speak, that communicates in images and symbols which are the faces of feelings, that is, behind which feelings reside/hide. The one possessing this sensitivity is excruciatingly alive to the world (1999: 60).

Anzaldúa’s addition to what “passing over the confines of the normal” means and her specific articulation of a sense of dwelling has, for over two decades, implicitly beckoned a further analysis of being which I contend is enhanced through a queer theory of interstitial being. In Chapter Five we shall see how “la facultad” can be linked to the concept of queer being and self-consciousness.

**Bridging**

Although Heidegger analyses the bridge in terms of a broader discussion about dwelling and building and thinking (and which in turn is part of an even more pervasive and complex notion of “Dasein”), he does speak poetically and metaphysically of what a bridge does, what it is, and how it can be useful as a “thing”, from which point we can think about dwelling and being. His various descriptions include the notion of a bridge as a thing that connects, gathers, guides, leads to/from, escorts and assembles. Rather than merely a structural object, the bridge as a built thing is, for Heidegger, a means to reflect on the meaning of building and therefore, dwelling and being. He transposes the literal bridge to its phenomenological abstraction.

When Latina, Chicana and women-of-colour theorists write about the in-between, which also draws on the notion of the bridge, it is explicitly embodied, explicitly political, and it specifies particularities of existence. Moraga writes, “How can we – this time – not use our bodies to be thrown over a river of tormented history to bridge the gap” (1983: xv). Moraga’s “we” is not only raced but also gendered and politicised (women of colour working through the difficulty of racism); her “bridge” is an actual body, it is not the built, literal bridge; and her “gap” (read interstitial space) is an epistemological space.

One of Heidegger’s rare bridge metaphors in Building Dwelling Thinking occurs when he likens the “last bridge” to death. He says:

Now in a high arch, now in a low, the bridge vaults over glen and stream – whether mortals keep in mind this vaulting of the bridge’s course or forget that they, always themselves on

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56 See Being and Time, Heidegger’s major work of 1927, for his extensive analysis of the temporality of existence and his coining of the concept of “Dasein”.

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Heidegger’s “we” is “man” by which he means human beings: his bridge is the epistemological junction between reality and abstraction (a “thing”) and his gap, as he goes on to say, is a space (we can read it as interstitial space). Heidegger says: “Space is in essence that for which room has been made, that which is let into its bounds. That for which room is made is always granted and hence is joined, that is gathered, by virtue of a location, that is, by such a thing as the bridge” (Ibid.: 154).

Heidegger’s abstraction of “bridge space” and Latina and Chicana personalisation of the bridge metaphor both provide opportunities to think more deeply about a sense of dwelling. For Moraga it is the articulation of what dwelling means and feels like that is of primary importance. She says: “A bridge gets walked over ... I used to feel more white ... but at the meeting last night, dealing with white women, ... I have felt so very dark: dark with anger, with silence, with the feeling of being walked over” (1983: xv). This invocation of feeling is echoed in this excerpt from Donna Kate Rushin’s The Bridge Poem:

I've had enough
I'm sick of seeing and touching
Both sides of things
Sick of being the damn bridge for everybody
I'm sick of filling in your gaps (in Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983: xxiii).

As well as the feeling of dwelling, Moraga uses the notion of bridging to say:

A theory in the flesh means one where the physical realities of our lives – our skin colour, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings – all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity. Here we attempt to bridge the contradictions in our experience:
We are the colored in a white feminist movement.
We are the feminists among the people of our culture.
We are often the lesbians among the straight.
We do this bridging by naming ourselves and by telling our stories in our own words (Ibid.: 23).

This comment starts to complexify as Moraga illustrates the tensity of living in interstitial space: “I am a woman with a foot in both worlds; and I refuse to split. I feel the necessity for dialogue. Sometimes I feel it urgently” (Ibid.: 34).

Moraga is not presenting any idealism, her bridge is also able to collapse: “the failure between lovers, sisters, mother and daughter – the betrayal. How have we turned our backs on each other – the bridge collapsing ...” (Ibid.: xvii)
Heidegger, on another hand (one of many rather than two), does not reference a collapsing bridge and, although “people” cross it, he does not give those people “real” form: they are mortals in their clamour (a viewpoint somewhat akin to the one Haraway critiques as being “from above”) or they are “man” with his trundling wagon (1971b: 152). In Heidegger, this non-specific “man” is not gendered and sexed, classed, ethnicised, embodied and so on. “Man” is never explicit, as if he were the migrant crossing illegally, or the refugee, or “the desperate people” in need or terror or hope. “Man” is never explicitly repeating the act of crossing a bridge that always signals death as equally as it signals life. Heidegger’s bridge is not a frontier of “real”, live risk.

I must, however, rescue something of Heidegger’s work for my own critique. The clamour of “man” and his trundling wagon are metaphors-in-waiting: they are the implied oppressions that face all “men” including, ironically, those Latina women who face (at the least) the threefold discriminations of race, sex and sexuality. An absence of sexual, gendered, raced, particularly embodied and politically driven motivations in Heidegger’s essay does not exclude certain other connections; there is a sense of dwelling that permeates through both approaches; they have a common ground in poetry and notions of the divine. I will come to these in a moment but here there is another connection to be made. Both Heidegger’s notion of the bridge as a “thing” (1971b: 153) where gathering occurs, and Latina/queer/feminist insistence on claiming a non-discriminatory, validating space to “be”, invoke the same focus – that is, attention to letting dwell. One of Heidegger’s terms for a mode of being (as a quality of occupying space) is “das Verweilen”, which means to while, tarry, linger or dwell (1967: 156). Anzaldúa brings attention to that space as a “home” – a place to dwell – which signifies very specific (borderland) living conditions: it is also the home of “una cultura mestiza” (1999: 44).

Both Heidegger and Anzaldúa speak of the border or the boundary. Heidegger says, “a boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognised, the boundary is that from which something begins its presencing” (1971b: 154). It is in this notion of presencing that we can again read a phantasmatisation of queerness in Heidegger; it is a “ghostly interstitial whiff”,

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57 As I have said before, this putative sex/gender neutrality of “man” is problematic in terms of inherent androcentric bias.
an invitation to note the material specificity of the borderland and queer interstitiality.

Anzaldúa says: “A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place ...” (1983: 25). In this way Anzaldúa forces the boundary to life, she fills it out with the presencing that Heidegger speaks of, and articulates it as a dwelling place, saying that the borderlands are not comfortable but familiar; they are a home, and they are a “thin edge of barbwire” (1999: 35).

Another comparison of Heidegger and Anzaldúa, which leads us to the poetic and divine realms, can be extended from their further attention to the way in which interstitial space, bridge space, or border space is presenced. Heidegger explains:

[O]nly because mortals pervade, persist through, spaces by their very nature are they able to go through spaces. But in going through spaces we do not give up our standing in them. Rather, we always go through spaces in such a way that we already experience them by staying constantly with near and remote locations and things. When I go toward the door...I am already there, and I could not go to it at all if I were not such that I am there. I am never here only, as this encapsulated body; rather, I am there, that is, I already pervade the room, and only thus can I go through it. Even when mortals turn ‘inward’, taking stock of themselves, they do not leave behind their belonging to the fourfold. When, as we say, we come to our senses and reflect on ourselves, we come back to ourselves from things without ever abandoning our stay among things (1971b: 157, italics added).

In order to explain his concept, Heidegger does in fact make a switch from an external narrative (from “above”) to speaking of himself (which is the embodied and personal self). Heidegger’s “I” is intended to explain presencing: so does Anzaldúa’s when she says:

I was the first in six generations to leave the valley, the only one in my family to ever leave home. But I didn’t leave all the parts of me: I kept the ground of my own being. On it I walked away, taking with me the land, the valley, Texas (1999: 38).

Despite Heidegger’s “I”, his space remains an uncluttered, putatively neutral space, a space to pass through. He succeeds in creating the idea of a pervasive presence, one that does not (cannot in fact) abandon itself. Anzaldúa’s extension of this presencing is in the notion of such space as “home” and in the fact that her sense of being and dwelling, when transient, also does not and cannot be abandoned. The carrying of being through space in this way is sharply illustrated in Anzaldúa’s poem Cihuatlyotl, Woman Alone.

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58 In Chapter Seven I discuss the problematics of the notion of “return to self” in so far as a queer transformativity means that we cannot in fact “return”, but only “move on from”, the self.
Heidegger’s collection of poems under the title, *The Thinker as Poet* (1971b: 1) focuses on thinking more than dwelling; however, the phrase “topology of being” (*Ibid.*: 12) in one of those poems could accurately be applied to Anzaldúa’s work and the connection between being and presencing. Heidegger says:

The poetic character of thinking is still veiled over. Where it shows itself, it is for a long time like the utopianism of a half-poetic intellect. But poetry that thinks is in truth The topology of Being. This topology tells Being the Whereabouts of its actual presence (*Ibid.*: 12).

In terms of divinities, Heidegger encompasses the bridge within a notion of the fourfold. According to Heidegger, the fourfold is a primal “belongingness” of earth and sky, divinities and mortals. He says:

The bridge gathers, as a passage that crosses, before the divinities – whether we explicitly think of, and visibly give thanks for, their presence, as in the figure of the saint of the bridge, or whether that divine presence is obstructed or even pushed wholly aside ... Gathering or assembly, by ancient word of our language, is called “thing”. The bridge is a thing – and, indeed, it is such as the gathering of the fourfold ... To be sure, people think of the bridge as primarily and really merely a bridge; after that, and occasionally, it might possibly express much else besides ... (*Ibid.*: 153).

Anzaldúa encompasses all her herstory/history within a reconfigured and retrieved divine mother narrative, and her association between self and divinity, the body and the earth, bears some resemblance to Heidegger’s oneness of the fourfold. In relation to her writing practice she says:

I sit here before my computer ... my altar on top ... with the Virgen de Coatlalopeuh candle and copal incense burning. My companion, a wooden serpent staff with feathers, is to my right while I ponder the ways metaphor and symbol concretize the spirit and etherealize the body ... And for images, words, stories to have ... transformative power, they must arise from the human body ... and from the earth’s body (1999: 97).

Anzaldúa’s combination of her language, her sexuality and her spirituality are all part of an activism of being. Heidegger’s use of language is also part of a retrieval of lost meanings, but Anzaldúa and Heidegger have a different presencing to each other.

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This is a fragment of the whole poem, which covers an entire page. See Anzaldúa (1991: 195).
Language-ing

In a further effort to illustrate his concept of dwelling, Heidegger excavates the lost meanings of the roots of words – the historico-linguistic roots of being. He frequently turns to Latin and Greek words as well as to the old languages which have been woven into and out of his native German tongue: Norse, Old English, High German, Old Saxon and Gothic. Some of these are listed below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key: G=German, HG=High German, L=Latin, GK=Greek, OE=Old English, OS=Old Saxon, Goth=Gothic.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bauen (G)</strong> Building.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bis (G)</strong> Be.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>**Buan (OE/HG)**Dwell.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cultura (L)</strong> Building.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Das frye (G)</strong> The free.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Du Bist (G)</strong> You are.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Extensio (L)</strong> Extension.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Friede (G)</strong> Peace.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fry(G)</strong> Preserved from harm/danger.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gebur (OE)</strong> Dweller.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Horismos (GK)</strong> Horison/boundary.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Anzaldúa claims a borderlands language using standard English, working class and slang English, standard Spanish, standard Mexican Spanish, North Mexican Spanish dialect, Chicano Spanish, Tex-Mex and Pachuco. She draws on the political use of a multilingual herstory of the Mexican/Texan frontier in order to find new ways to speak about “being” on the borders.60

The following list shows some of the words that she has employed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key: SS=Standard Spanish, CS=Chicano Spanish, MS=Mexican Spanish, N=Nahuatl, GK=Greek.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coatlicue</strong> (N) Creator /serpent goddess.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coyote (CS) Smuggler.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>El mundo zurdo</em> (SS) The left-handed world (one of possibilities for those who do not fit neatly into categories).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hermanas</strong> (SS) Allies/women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hieros gamos</strong> (GK) A holy coupling between a deity and a human. The coming together of opposite qualities within.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>La chingada</strong> (CS) The fucked one.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>La facultad</strong> (SS) A faculty (more properly, a sensing, awareness or capacity, to see deep realities).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

60 See Anzaldúa (1999: 77) for a description of eight languages that she uses.
There is some irony in the use of languages lost to us. Heidegger makes the concepts, “fry” and “wunian” surface, but they do not signal (in my reading at least) a presencing of dwelling (dangerous, peaceful, interstitial or otherwise); they signal a nostalgia or predilection for the history of words. It is not clear whether Heidegger laments the loss of these words; he excavates them without passion, with factuality. He says the true and real meanings of words has been “lost” and that they have “fallen into oblivion” (1971: 147-148). In my reading, their direct correlation to “being” (for example, being in danger or being brought to peace) are records of etymology, of the distortions, twists and turns of words. Put simply, they “feel” dead.

Likewise, Anzaldúa records the loss of a language, one of her own childhood use. She says: “Through lack of practice and not having others who can speak it, I’ve lost most of the Pachuco tongue” (1999: 78). Anzaldúa’s words do not “feel” dead, yet her willingness to share (to presence) the facts of Pachuco or Chicano or Nahuatl languages by telling us of their existence and explaining their use, is not matched by a full translation of her usage. Anzaldúa’s eight languages and Heidegger’s seven do not retrieve each other; the solipsism of both excludes such an interchange.

Heidegger’s own presencing, which we can conceptualise through his choice of language, takes shape through a universalising Western intellectualism that comes from a privileged (white, middle-class, European, male) perspective. This does not mean that this privileged perspective should necessarily be judged negatively – Heidegger’s work constitutes a rich theoretical endeavour that provides the opportunity for engaged discussion – but it must also be critiqued, as all work must, for inherent solipsism. In particular, Heidegger’s work must fall under the scrutiny of a feminist and queer gaze, at least in the context of a white, middle-class, male, heteronormative bias which has been historically revealed.

In this regard, Anzaldúa does not write for readers of English whose grasp of English and Spanish is limited. Anzaldúa’s purpose in mixing language codes (in Borderlands/La Frontera specifically) is to trouble the privileged status of (English) Anglo-centric reading and writing practices. This tactic works by the very “presencing” of language. One gets a sense of how hegemonic language practices inflict pain on generations of real people, but it does not help other non-privileged readers of English who may benefit from understanding all of Anzaldúa’s words in Borderlands/La Frontera.

See Holland & Huntington (2001), for a collection of feminist interpretations of Heidegger’s thought. A criticism of androcentric bias is not revealed in Ahmed’s use of Heidegger: she is seeking (as I am) the usefulness of Heidegger in terms of how we can queerly add to a phenomenology of being. See (2006a, 2006b). However, my feminist reading of any canonical philosophical text is not diminished by my queer reading and although I do not critique canonical phenomenological texts at every turn for inherent biases and the erasure of embodied, cultural and social specificities, I
as if her life depended on it. One gets a sense of how, for Anzaldúa, being can never be neutrally exposed. As we have seen, Anzaldúa writes from a first-person, corporeal perspective that connects the self and the world: “for images, words, stories to have ... transformative power, they must arise from the human body ... and from the earth’s body” (1999: 97).

What is the queer extraction we can take from the ontological and metaphysical relation of Heidegger and Anzaldúa? As Moraga indicates, a Latina politics is born out of necessity. Heidegger’s theorisation in the essay Building Dwelling Thinking does not contain political necessity. In what way then can the mestiza subject and the mortal subject be related? For my purposes the relationship is that they share a problematic in the theory of being. It centres on this issue: the dichotomous subject (“man” for Heidegger, the “dual personality” for Lugones, “the mestiza” for Anzaldúa) is in perpetual need to “be” towards some other place – such as escaping to an idealised “outer” space – in order to somehow “get out of” the “thrown-ness” of the self, or the dystopia of situated circumstance.

It is the notion of existence itself as a constraint, and existence as a dichotomy of objectivity and subjectivity, that I want to disrupt. This is also part of the ongoing project of queer existential phenomenological theory. The notions of inside/outside, them/us, mind/body, either/or, pure/impure, subjective/objective, mainstream/margin and so on, must become blurred – queered – and understood as a certain kind of “gathering-us-in-ness”, “communitas” and “curdling” – a particular form of bridging that does not span the interstitial space, but links the “here with the here” rather than the “here with the there”. Such micro-bridging does not have to aim solely for an idealised liberation of existential transcendence; rather, it is sufficient to aim at an occupation of queerness, a being-in-ness of dwelling (in queer interstitial space). In addition, and as we shall see in Chapters Five, Six and Seven do stress that such critiques are necessary at the general, or close level of reading. For example, where Ahmed draws on Heidegger’s example (which he in turn has taken from Kant) of walking blindfolded into a dark room (2006b: 6), my first thoughts are how this analysis may be understood through the perspective of sight-impaired embodiment. Only then am I able to conceptually engage with the notion of an “able-bodied coherence” in which the concepts of light/dark and orientation (in relation to the experience of walking blindfolded) are vastly different to those of someone who may not experience sightedness in the way that Heidegger, Kant and Ahmed situate as being unproblematically given and singular; if not universal. This may simply mean that I will always have a difficult reading of Heidegger, but as I have said earlier, it is important to acknowledge the perspectives of situated knowledges because of their partiality.

63 The dual personality for Lugones is, for example the “mexican/american” rather than the “mexican-american”. Without the hyphen there is only the possibility of a split into two “pure” parts, or a dual personality. This is quite different from the mexican-american for whom a dwelling on the hyphen is indeed possible. See Lugones (1994: 470). Note that here I am following Lugones’ preferred non-capitalized spelling of “mexican/american.”
especially, queer interstitiality and queer sensibility can also support an ethics of being which is in fact, transformative.

**The Onto-Epistemic Junction**

An onto-epistemic junction, as I use the term, provides another way of thinking about interstitial space. If we permit (neither agreeing nor disagreeing for now) the basic premise that a subject is dichotomous (in the broadest sense, having a mind and a body), then whatever it is that forms the disjunction must have a point of separation or beginning – a point of proximity to the very thing that constitutes it as dichotomous or even fragmented: its borders. The border, as we have noted, through Anzaldúa and Heidegger, is both a presencing and a home neither of which can be detached or abandoned.

Queer life – the *everyday, embodied experience* of life – challenges the notion of a dichotomous self which has (ironically) become an almost “singular” two-way self as *the* standard encapsulation of the philosophical paradox of being. Foucault terms this paradox the empirico-transcendental doublet. He says: “Man, in the analytic of finitude, is a strange empirico-transcendental doublet ...” (1973: 319).

The hyphenation of empiricism and transcendentalism in Foucault, provides the blurred (as he says, “strange”) ferment out of which distinct (queer) physical experiences of *what there is to being*, and distinct (queer) metaphysical experiences of *how being can or could exist*, can be formed. Queer theories and other postmodern theories of the self, the subject and “being” have grappled with, disengaged, and de-centred the dichotomous yet unified “man” from “himself”.

The final three chapters of this thesis will provide an existentialist phenomenological queer theory which will address the problematic of transcendence. For now I remain with the question: “What more can be said about the specificity of queer interstitial space, through the notion of an onto-epistemic junction?”. To this end, I turn to the words in the third epigraph:

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64 Again we are presented with the term “man”, which signifies humankind but only problematically signifies (for readers of texts in English) women.
There is a freak show photo: Hiram and Barney Davis offstage – small, wiry men, white, cognitively disabled, raised in Ohio... Just once I want someone to tell me what they’re staring at. My trembling hands? My buzzed hair? My broad, off-center stance, shoulders well muscled and lopsided? My slurred speech? Just once. But typically one long steely glance, and they’re gone. I’m taking Hiram and Barney as my teachers (Clare, 2003: 260).

What Eli Clare invokes when he speaks of freaks and their heuristic potential are the significant queer sensibilities which extend Heidegger’s presencing and Anzaldúa’s *facultad*. Queer oddity is not simply “difference”, it is “non-normative difference” and it crosses the fixed limits of gender, sexuality, embodiment, aesthetics, cultural ethics, sexual practice. Clare venerates “freaks” who have come to mirror all that society does not want and yet all that society desires. As a rebuff to normativity, he not only admires and validates Hiram and Barney, he makes them become readable as teachers (2003: 261).

What we learn from onto-epistemic junctions in queer interstitial space is told to us by the queers and freaks who dwell there. It is told by their silent language, often by their fatigue, their self-explanations. It is seen in body language and facial expression and by resistance to normativity, to assimilation. It is also told by their visibility and their voices, their language and their culture and their preference to dwell in and “drive to inhabit” the queer terrain which is comfortable with the odd, the eccentric, the freak and the deviant.

It is interesting to note how Anzaldúa and Clare both place a heuristic value on the occupants of queer interstitial space. Anzaldúa calls upon the broader chicano culture to learn from their queer: “People, listen to what your *jotería* (queer) is saying” (1999: 107), and Clare offers to learn for himself from his choice of freak-teacher. Neither defers to the normative expectation of learning from normative narratives of desire. Clare’s micro-social personal approach to learning and his broader teaching to others through his published text is an example of the bridge-like quality of queer interstitial space. This is one example of how queers learn from each other and validate and understand each other.

Statements of the everyday queer self, like Clare’s, become the powerful spokespieces for queer sexgender knowledge as soon as they are uttered, written, shared and engaged with. I shall introduce other queer narratives in the subsequent chapters in order to analyse ways in which this sexgender knowledge is disseminated.

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66 This term, after Susan Stryker (2004: 212), is utilised as a key philosophical concept in Chapter Five.
Clare’s everyday life is embodied in a particular way that has engaged with the discriminatory gaze of the normative for too long. He turns, somewhat like the velveteen rabbit, to the desire of being loved and authenticated: “I spent thirty years ... slamming the door ... Thirty years, and now I am looking for lovers and teachers to hold all my complexities and contradictions gently, honestly, appreciatively”. He looks to those who dwell in queer interstitial space for this:

[W]e all need teachers and heroes: folks to say you’re not alone. My best heroes and teachers don’t live on pedestals. They lead complex, messy lives, offering me reflections of myself and standing with me against the gawkers…. Who shows us how to be a drag queen, a butch, a trannyfag who used to be a straight married woman and now cruises the boys hot and heavy, a multigendered femme boy/girl who walks the dividing line? I keep looking for disabled men to nurture my queer masculinity, crip style. Looking for bodies a bit off center, a bit off balance (2003: 260).

The onto-epistemic junction can be partially illuminated in Clare’s article through the existence of what I have previously termed, a “tensity” of freedom. There is a process of learning and experiencing being played out in the sense of what there is and what there could be. Clare’s desire to be loved is a real thing, so is his history of being gawked at and so is his history of shutting out the staring. Out of this there comes the reality of a desire:

He cradles my right hand against his body and says, ‘your tremors feel so good.’ And says, ‘I can’t get enough of your shaky touch.’ And says, ‘I love your cerebral palsy’. This man who is my lover. Shame and disbelief flood my body, drowning his words (Ibid.: 258).

What there could be is then turned to by Clare, who knows that he has to learn something more: “How do I begin to learn his lustful gaze?”(Ibid.: 258). What there could be is found in the teachings of border dwellers; it is their words, their example, their behaviour, their love, their bravery and their being-ness, that make new ways to embody and occupy queer interstitial space a reality.

My own way of extending la facultad is to re-emphasise that a queer sensibility is a conscious thing, that there is a direct knowledge of “self” as queer and that queer selfhood operates with particularity – socially, culturally, spiritually, sexually, as thinking and being, as knowledge and ignorance. It includes the desire and celebration of queer gathering-us-in-ness and the sense of appreciating the unusual. It also welcomes the visionaries and leaders who stand at the forefront of new ways to be.

Queer sensibility can also fetishise the perverse, the kinked, the strange, and the depths of queer being; it leaps especially into the abyss of sexual and gendered
knowledge in order to learn more. Queer sensibility continually finds and creates its own being, desiring less and less ignorance, learning itself with more and more critical insight. This sort of insight can only be gained through the “doing” of queer being; through a combination of physical, mental and spiritual presencing/dwelling in interstitial space. Chapters Four and Five initiate the theoretical development of this idea as an approach-way to the notion of “queer asketic being”.

Everyday queer life negotiates seemingly overarching normative social structures by creating “spaces to dwell” in the shadows, among cracks, or on narrow strips. These spaces may appear to constitute very fine fault lines scoring an otherwise solid terrain of normativity, but the easiness of living that queers are able to create within such spaces in fact serves to enlarge them (and by inference, to weaken those dominant structures). We can also say that anti-normative, political being and queer insistence to dwell interstitially sustain the insertion of “homes” into those fault lines. This daily activism of being requires a queer sensibility.

In Chapter Three (through empirical examples) I illustrate the ways in which queer people narrate and record the practicalities of everyday “real” queer. Of particular importance in that chapter are the notions of oppression and knowledge dissemination. The intervening chapter foregrounds that discussion by addressing embodied queer perspectives.
CHAPTER TWO
The Queer Qualifier

I am a male to female, female to male, male to female, male to male transsexual and I am not confused. I want to express in my work what I see as schisms, things that fall between the lines, outside the binary. I’m in the process of re-invention, post-operative and still going. In this life I want to cultivate a body with no destination. A body in perpetual transition; full of slippage, sexuality and liveliness (Y, 2005: 1).

In this chapter I direct my theory of queer sensibility to an embodied perspective which is grounded by an illustration of two phenomena; queer bisexuality and queer kink. This chapter steers us towards corporeal and empirical understandings of what being queer can mean in a subjective, lived-in sense.

By examining queer kink and queer bisexual sexgender categories from an ontological perspective, the context and the means by which we can understand queerness in relation to our knowledges of lived being is revealed.

What I locate together in the following paragraphs are examples of particular embodied experiences alongside an ontological theoretical perspective. Instead of predominantly engaging with how to theorise sexgendered embodiment (in so far as we might struggle over which theoretical paradigms to work with), I turn to the ways in which kink practices can suggest ways to experience, know and understand the body, and provide a backdrop for the production of a more radical theory of embodiment.

By examining the phenomena of both queer bisexuality and queer kink, a nuanced queer hermeneutics of sexuality and queer being emerges. This is one way of establishing the concept of queer sensibility in advance of the phenomenological theory to come.

I begin with queer bisexuality, and the perspective I offer here is both broad (it has global relevance) and local (drawing on my particular location in Australia to provide specific empirical examples).

Perceptions Of Bisexual Existence, Distinctions And Challenges

Bisexual Distinctions

In this section I introduce the notion of “a kind of bisexuality”. It is one that we can call queer, and it is one that we can use to challenge dominant perceptions.
of bisexuality. My early reflections on queer bisexuality negotiated the question: “How can we discuss and contextualise the term “queer bisexual” as a sexgender identity and articulate what the reality of queer bisexuality might be like?”. An answer to this question begins to emerge by referring to the epigraph above, which may not seem at first glance to be specific to bisexuality or queerness. It does not contain the words queer, bisexual or bisexuality and it speaks predominantly of transsexual embodiment. However, it also speaks of slippage and re-invention, of “sexuality” and liveliness, and it is precisely the notion of sexual schisms, as Y says, “things that fall between the lines” (2005: 1), that this chapter (indeed the entire thesis) explores. Importantly, it is also the suggestion of slippage and transition as “unconfusing” that I want to support. As this section will show, Y’s comment can very well apply to bisexuality.

If bisexuality can be said to fall between homosexuality and heterosexuality (whether we challenge the premise of this idea or not) then an analysis of that hetero-homo binary should include an interstitial reading. As the following paragraphs attest, this will lead to a troubling of more than one binary.

An interesting distinction can be made between bisexuality and queer bisexuality. This simple twofold elaboration of definitions is not intended to create two rigid concepts of bisexuality instead of one, or indeed to play off terms against each other as if they are in competition rather than coexistent, but to suggest a move away from the limits of unitary perspective. Any unrefined understanding (perhaps unitary or totalising) of words that describe sexuality (such as bisexual) needs to be addressed as a problematic within discourses of sexuality.

The first step in a move away from the unitary concept of a sexuality is necessarily binary (the idea that there is “bisexuality” followed by the idea that there is “another kind of bisexuality”); but many more specific ideas create a conceptual multiplication. It is from this heterogenous platform that queer hermeneutics and queer sexgender knowledge dissemination can expand our ways to more fully understand bisexuality.

In my view, there is a need to refine notions of bisexuality – it is a complex category that is much maligned. Is it a sexual category in need of “rescue”? Perhaps so. In the prefatory remarks to the “bisexual” section of the book
Queer bisexuality is in part a response to it. It might seem useful to pose the question: “What is the difference then, between bisexuality and queer bisexuality? However, this question is based on the logic of relationality, a comparison between one thing and another which rests on unproblematised creations of “the other” and “difference”. As I have indicated in earlier passages, I want to avoid this logic and replace it with the logic of interstitality.

The question I prefer to ask is: “What is this idea of queer bisexuality telling us about what we think we already know about (bi) sexuality?” Some answers to this question can be found in an ontological field of inquiry (actual physical practices of being queer, being bisexual) as well as in hermeneutic and epistemological fields (how terms can be interpreted and understood, articulated and known). It is also possible to displace the notion of otherness by privileging the notion of constitutive-ness (the characteristics, qualities and contexts of some thing) so that “ otherness” (as an already loaded and unitary concept) becomes a less totalising feature within analyses of sexualities. In other words, by seeking out a constitutive notion of queer bisexuality to underpin my analysis, the question of what actually constitutes queer bisexuality takes a nuanced precedence (or at least particular focus) over the question of what makes queer bisexuality “different from”.

**Bisexuality In The Media And Its Contestations**

In order to construct new meanings for the term “bisexual”, it is important to establish what bisexual means in dominant popular sexgender discourse and then to challenge those meanings. The following two examples demonstrate how bisexuality, as we see it in the media, is attacked and defended.

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67 For example, see Hutchins & Kaahumanu (1991), Garber (2000), and Alexander & Yescavage (2003).
On the 5th of July, 2005, the *New York Times* published an article in its science section. The headline was, “Straight, Gay or Lying? Bisexuality Revisited” (Carey, 2005). The ensuing controversy stimulated a barrage of responses from bisexual activists, supporters and lobbyists both inside and outside academia. Many of these activists were affiliated with the North American organisations GLAAD, (Gay And Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation), NGLTF, (National Gay And Lesbian Task Force), NYAGRA, (New York Association For Gender Rights Advocacy) and FAIR (Fairness And Accuracy In Reporting).

Individual and collective responses were sparked and continued to emerge after the initial *New York Times* story was published. Points of controversy emerged around the claim that bisexuality as a stand-alone sexual orientation category (specifically in men) did not exist; that people were implied to be lying about their sexuality (which must be either hetero- or homo- sexual); and that the *New York Times* had based its story on a research study which was not then published or publicly available, authored by J. Michael Bailey (2005).

Bailey himself is a subject of much controversy: his research methods and findings on transgender and transsexual identity issues have been critiqued extensively for being unethical and shoddy. Bailey’s research study was soon to be published in an issue of *Psychological Science*; the journal of the American Psychological Society.

The responses by pro-bisexuality activists to the *New York Times* story are interesting, not least for their exposure of both bad journalism and flawed, ethically questionable research. They also raise further questions about how the counter-discourse can be made more effective, notwithstanding the simplistic media interpretation which, now that the dust has settled, remains writ large: that bisexuality as a sexual identity is questionable. Bisexuality might in fact be articulated in a way that not only widens a narrow popular conception, but blows apart the current discursive terrain; in other words, consciously challenging the conceptual parameters which are relied upon and indeed set out by the media.

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On a smaller scale, the local sexual politics of my home town in Perth, Western Australia, mirrors the American example. In the August 2005 edition of *Out In Perth* (a free monthly newspaper servicing, to use *Out In Perth*’s then editorial wording, “Western Australia’s queer community”), a regular columnist launched a critical attack on bisexuals and used Dr Bailey’s “scientific research” as validation for his claims. He spoke of “dreaded bisexuals who hide their true (homo) sexuality behind the mask of a bisexual label” (Morrow, 2005: 5). This personal vituperative against “bisexual” men (the notion of bisexual women was absent from Morrow’s analysis) simply mixed the idea of scientific “proof” with some bigoted statements to make an authoritative claim. In the following month’s edition, the “Letters to the Editor” section was rife with outraged responses to the anti-bisexual article by bissexuals and their supporters.

The similarity between American responses to the *New York Times* and Western Australian responses to *Out In Perth* lie somewhat expectedly in outrage and political stance, but also (and more significantly) in the absence of any articulation of bisexual complexity that might, for example, mention queerness.

Broadly speaking, objections to the *New York Times* story included, but were not limited to: a critique of sexological, deterministic and eugenicist perspectives; an outline of why Bailey’s research study and methodology were shoddy and suspect; a dissatisfaction with press distortion of research; the sidelining of women; and criticisms of the *New York Times* for not providing a context, or background about Bailey.

These sorts of points became part of a twofold campaign: to spread information about the contested *New York Times* article and Bailey’s forthcoming journal article; and to coordinate a response to it. However, whilst reactive criticisms of misinformative media representations of bisexuality are needed and justified, we can also ask: “What else can be added to the reactive framework? What else will create a wide enough channel for the expanded diversity of bisexuality to be cast?”. I suggest that the defence of bisexuality needs to be accompanied by a rigorous bisexual critique of sexgender knowledge dissemination. For this reason queer bisexuality, as one example (conceptual and material) of bisexual

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diversity, must be articulated where possible. This is both a form of sexgender knowledge heurism, and a counter to ideas such as Bailey’s, which are promulgated in the media.

Where bisexuality’s existence is questioned, a counter-argument that says it does exist (which I do support as an ongoing and insistent challenge to ignorant and discriminatory media representations), becomes more potent with the addition of queer sexgender knowledge, the specific aim of which is to expand the limits of an existing, popular sexgender knowledge pool. Importantly, this can also be done outside of a reactive framework, speaking for itself on its own terms. This beckons the interest of interlocutors and avoids relegation to “Letters To The Editor” status.

By implication then, it is necessary to give an account of multiple queer desires/positions, to wrest other meanings than those we get from popular media, to excavate deeper into bisexual sexgender knowledge and thereby “rescue” it from the psycho-/medico-/scientific clutches of people such as Bailey. Whereas sexological or clinical reductionism may be at odds with some queer theory (a position I welcome for the dialogue it solicits), it is with the popular media, perhaps more than any other site of knowledge dissemination, that queer “theoretical muscle” needs flexing.

**Developing A Muscular Queer Theory**

The interpretation of bisexuality as a complex category, with refined sexgender understandings, is part of the deconstructive project of chipping away at the edifices of sexgender hegemony – an ongoing theoretical imperative. However, while sexgender theorists can illuminate queer sexual spectra, links between sexgender theory and public/popular sexgender discourses need to be made, so that a wider “knowledge pool” can assist an easier articulation of sexgender configurations; beyond “hetero”, “homo” and “bi”, or “male” and “female”.

Queer theory (as with any theory) can be turgid with ideas about non-normative ways to “be” in the world. The success of a meeting point between sexgender theories of “the fluid” and “the fixed” can be seen as being “hampered” by medico-scientific discourse. Anthropology, Freudian psychoanalysis, sexology and philosophy have all produced academic discourses which have “validated” the study of the human sexual realm. Unfortunately the promise of such a
concept as “polymorphous perversity”, a groundbreaking term of Freud’s in 1905 (1962: 57), did not lead to a widespread emancipation of ideas about sex acts, sexuality and gender, but instead resulted in the confinement of a multitude of sexgender discourses to oedipal, pathologised and essentialised narratives taking psychoanalytic, sexological and anthropological routes.

As Foucault said:

Until Freud at least, the discourse on sex – the discourse of scholars and theoreticians – never ceased to hide the thing it was speaking about...This was in fact a science made up of evasions since, given its inability or refusal to speak of sex itself, it concerned itself primarily with aberrations, perversions, exceptional oddities, pathological abatements, and morbid aggravations. It was by the same token a science subordinated in the main to the imperatives of a morality whose divisions it reiterated under the guise of the medical norm (1990a: 53).

The narratives of what I today might want to call queerness were popularised by medico-scientific practitioners (in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) as the “truths” of evil (read as moral/spiritual/physical/mental perversions, corruptions and diseases). The early French pioneers of sexology that Foucault positions in relation to an “intentional mendacity” – Garnier, Pouillet, Ladoucette, Rollinat, Charcot and others (Foucault, 1990: 54) – were succeeded by other European “scientists” (such as Krafft-Ebing, Havelock Ellis and Magnus Hirschfeld) and later still, mid-twentieth century researchers (such as Alfred Kinsey in the U.S.A.), who sought instead to reveal the diversity of human sexuality without condemning people who were not heterosexual.

Even though the Kinsey Scale (A.C. Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948; A. C. Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, & Gebhard, 1953) and the Klein Sexual Orientation Grid (Klein, 1993) refer to sexualities, this sexological framework historically stems from what Foucault calls “scientia sexualis” – a scientific search for the “truth” of sexuality (Foucault, 1990a: 58). As such, this reductive framework is not particularly useful for expanding what queer bisexuality means.

The variables in Kinsey’s scale are based on a closeness, or a distance, from homosexuality or heterosexuality. At least the binary is disrupted in so far as it becomes a trinity – there is a sense that there are kinds of hetero- and homo-sexualities which are positions taken up on a linear continuum. These positions seem to be influenced by a persuasion towards a “true” or “pure” sexuality which can be either “hetero-” or “homo-” or “bi-” sexuality.
This sexological accounting work allows, by the very nature of its tablature, for “either/or” identification rather than “neither/nor”. It creates the idea (but not necessarily the lived reality) that to fall in between these fixed categories is to remain unproblematically trapped by nearness only to the trinity of hetero-homo-bi sexuality. This provides a limited epistemological framework. Although Klein (1993) does offer types of bisexuality, these are configured in the sense of a hetero-bi-homo triumvirate, on a somewhat inexact notion of a sexuality spectrum. A sexual orientation “grid” such as Klein’s will by its impermeable geometric structure always limit the ways in which sexgender permutations are understood. This limitation can be challenged by the notion of crossing and re-crossing the structural rigidity of box-like sexgender concepts. This is not to say that sexuality categories must be abandoned (on the contrary, I espouse a proliferation) but most importantly, it is to say that their walls must be understood as permeable – that crossing between and through them is possible. This will allow for both “neither/nor” as well as “this/and” configurations in sexuality paradigms.

**Criss-Crossing #1**

If we look at everyday language, as soon as the term “bisexual” is uttered, a conjuring of notions about what it means emerges, and these notions can only be accessed from an existing pool of sexgender knowledge. Common sense prompts me to acknowledge that although theoretical analysis of, and contribution to, sexgender knowledge is vital and necessary, it has to contend with that “knowledge pool” being largely informed by a popular discourse, manipulated and constructed by heteronormative media. Bisexuality is cast (as I have demonstrated earlier) as an unreliable and questionable sexual category; its putative characteristics are entrenched in wide and far-reaching popular and negative sexgender discourses.

There is little potential for the term bisexual to be recast unless popular sexgender understandings become broadened by an influx of new sexgender language. We can call this a concepto-lingual bloom: a dissemination of accessible sexgender knowledge which will increase the richness of sexuality discourses. If queer bisexuality (as behaviours, acts, sexgender identity, and way of being in the world) is neither homosexual nor heterosexual, attempting to describe it using dominant semantics will be insufficient, to say the least.
The language used by sexual or sexgender radicals (such as omnisexuals, polysexuals, pansexuals,\(^70\) BDSM\(^71\) practioners, and other people belonging to sexgender subcultures) will utilise slang and everyday terminology to articulate their activities, without necessary deferral to heteronormative use.

Within the creative climate of sexgender lexicology, neologisms are constantly invented, code words and signs are used, new language\(^72\) comes into being and there is a sophistication of gossip; these queer ways of communicating all acquire semantic/cultural (particularly sub-cultural) currency. Sedgwick discusses gossip as “nonce” in relation to how multiple differences of what I call “sexgender being” can be articulated. She says:

> It is probably people with the experience of oppression or subordination who have most need to know it and I take the precious, devalued arts of gossip, immemorially associated in European thought with servants, with effeminate and gay men, with all women, to have to do not even so much with the transmission of necessary news as with the refinement of necessary skills for making, testing, and using unrationaled and provisional hypotheses about what kinds of people there are to be found in one’s world (Sedgwick, 1990: 23).

It is unfortunate that bisexuality (as a sexuality category) is so commonly understood through the relational lenses of heterosexuality and homosexuality. Very little hypothesising utilises the more expansive sexual paradigm that also includes, for example, omnisexuals, polysexuals and pansexuals.

Added to this misfortune is the link popularised in the media between infidelity and bisexuality, which provides a significant and telling indication of the extent to which the normativity of monogamy contributes to (bi)sexual hegemony – and I shall presently discuss this.

Using the qualifier “queer”, bisexuality becomes immediately unfamiliar unless an understanding of (or at least a possibility to question) diverse sexgender perspectives is available. The utterance then of queer bisexuality invites analytic discussion: What is queer bisexuality? How can such a thing make sense? Answering these questions will begin to make sense once a wide array of bisexual possibilities is articulated beyond the simplistic limitations of popular sexgender discourse. By queering the category, it becomes a semantic

\(^70\) Note that “pansexual” can describe a space/event where sexual play between people of all genders and sexes happens but that it is also synonymous with “omnisexual” and “polysexual”, which refer to a person whose sexual/object choices are not restrained by dichotomous notions of sex and gender.

\(^71\) BDSM refers to a whole range of practices. These can include sexual, spiritual, sacred, playful, challenging, lifestyle interpretations of consensual, creative and imaginative uses of bondage/discipline, dominance/submission and sadism/masochism. This also known as “kink”.

\(^72\) “Polari” and “lavender language” are examples; see Baker (2002a, 2002b) and Leap & Boellstorff (2004).
heavyweight in ontological and epistemological arenas, which invites an explanation, an interpretation, an existence: a “known-ness”.

Queer bisexuality can be illustrated by understanding the ways in which sexgender identity categories can be and indeed are criss-crossed in people’s everyday lives. As an example I utilise the queering of transensual femme (abbreviated to t-femme as a sexgender category/identity) to make my point.

T-femme as an identity label indicates three sexual identity components. Firstly, trans (in the context of t-femme) indicates FTM (female to male) or MTF (male to female) possibilities, in particular FTM transsexuals and FTM transgender people. Secondly, sensual indicates “attraction to” (something/someone) or “desire for” (something/someone). Thirdly, femme indicates a particular take-up of feminine identity which manipulates dominant normative conceptions of “the feminine”. Sometimes this involves the performativity of hyper-femininity as well as other femme invocations that pitch femininity and power together.\textsuperscript{73} It should also be noted that the term “transensual” (as I have experienced it in Australia) is synonymous with the term “trans-amorous” which is more common in a North American context.\textsuperscript{74}

If the distinct t-femme sexgender category is not already readable as queer it becomes much more so – Y (2005) might call this “unconfusing slipperiness” – when the dynamics of the category change to include not only t-femme, but also “t-femme on t-femme”. In other words, “t-femme on t-femme” is a sexual identity which is formed by attraction to both FTM trans men/butches/boys/bois and also other t-femmes.

This can be described as a queer bisexuality, and it is paralleled by a notion of queer homosexuality which we could understand by a similar interweaving of terms, such as butch-on-butch or femme-on-femme. Of course butch-on-butch or femme-on-femme relations do not automatically or necessarily invoke queerness but for those butches and femmes who do identify as queer, it is important to be able to say so; to have a sense of what their queerness means, to understand and know the “how, why, and what” about them, to “get to grips” with the being of them.

\textsuperscript{73} See Nestle (1987), Hollibaugh (2000) and Brushwood Rose & Camilleri (2002), for comprehensive discussion of “the femme”.

\textsuperscript{74} See C. Davis (2006) for an example of usage.
T-femme on t-femme expands our notions of how desire can be constituted in multiplicities; it adds to our pool of sexgender knowledge. A concepto-lingual possibility is formed with every new word meaning that is used to give shape to different sexgender orientations. At a micro-level “boi” and “boy”, for example, are slang terms used to describe a type of masculine identity adopted by people on a butch and/or FTM or MTF and/or queer and/or genderfuck spectrum. These terms can also be light-hearted colloquialisms that simply imply a sense of twisting, queering or playing with dominant understandings of the noun for “male”. Our sexgender understandings need to be broadened with these sorts of linguistic, sexgender formulations if we are to become open to refining our senses of terms like “bisexual”.

Relevant to queer sexgender knowledge is the phenomenon of genderfuck. Genderfuck is specifically about queering gender rather than sexuality – disrupting conventional dress and behaviour gender codes\(^75\) – but as with queer bisexuality, it also allows a form of queerness to be articulated through the idea of non-normativity. The links to be made between genderfuck and queer bisexuality (which may be tenuous or firm but should in any case, as heuristics, be acknowledged) are to do with sexgender knowledge movement.

Sexgender knowledge dissemination is assisted through the visible practices of genderfuck. In simple terms, if queerness can be “seen”, it can be talked about, and the languages employed may indeed be new, informative, interesting, and useful for people across a range of sexualities and sexgender configurations.

**Criss-Crossing #2**

The idea of movement, transience, or vacillation within sexuality and sexgender subjectivity need be no more confusing than the idea of a fixed heterosexuality. However, sexgender criss-crossing is represented as confusing when fixed and dominant perceptions of sexual normativity work to discount, make weird, or even make invisible, a “sexual other”. Judith Butler refers to a process of “congealing” when she explains the discursive regulation of gender. She says:

\(^75\) Cross-dressing is a colloquial trans*/genderqueer term to denote the wearing of clothes and accessories considered the “opposite” of the perceived biological gender. The term “transvestite” may mean the same thing, but has medical and pathologising connotations that “cross-dressing” does not. Where cross-dressing is logically supported by the idea of binary gender, criss-cross dressing or criss-crossing sexual/sex/gender categories is a term that can be considered a queering of the binarised view. For example, an MTF transgender femme may criss-cross dress as butch or genderqueer.
Even when gender seems to congeal into the most reified forms, the ‘congealing’ is itself an 
insistent and insidious practice, sustained and regulated by various social means... Gender is 
the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory 
frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of 
being (1990: 33).

As a “negatively congealed term”, bisexuality is heavily normalised as 
undesirable. A non-normative sexual category/identity/way-of-being (here 
queer bisexuality) is impacted upon through discursive regulation as well as a 
history of medico/legal/scientific “research” of the sexually marginalised. This is 
one way that queer bisexuality becomes subordinated to the historical 
contingency of dominant norms which, in effect, severely limit the ease with 
which we might envisage sexgender variance.

A more obvious point, but one still worth making, is that not only are there 
socio-cultural and discursive obstacles to overcome when trying to articulate 
sexgender multiplicity, but there is also the plain and simple fact that sexualities 
and genders are in themselves complex. Articulating them requires a willingness 
to embark on some mental arithmetic, due to the infinite number of possible 
sexgender permutations. The example below pays heed to this; the analysis that 
I steer towards is mindful of both the conflation of and distinctions between 
complexity and confusion.

**Sexgender Mutability**

One of the ways to understand how the sexuality of one person can vary – and 
thereby present a challenge to the construction of norms – is to understand how 
gender is also mutable. This is not simply to understand that in theory gender is 
mutable: it is important also to illustrate the ontological and material 
phenomenon of gender mutability, to link it with real-live queer people. The 
very reason for using a term such as “sexgender” is its usefulness as a heuristic 
tool in this sense.

Queer bisexuality – demonstrated in this chapter specifically by t-femme on t- 
femme – becomes a much easier concept to “swallow” when we consider as 
intrinsic to it the way gender impacts on this particular sexual definition. “In 
and out of” or “in between” or “to and from” t-femme on t-femme is quite 
plausible, and is comparable to other queer configurations which involve the 
criss-crossing of both sex and gender.
A selection of these mutable configurations might include, for example, t-femme identity to queer butch dyke identity desiring queer butch or masculine subjects. “Masculine” in this sense would not be limited to its naturalised association with heteronormative biological men: here it is a much broader concept that can be thought of as a position taken up on a masculine continuum upon which positions, or points of location, can be claimed or signified by differently gendered and biologically formed bodies. 76

Another configuration might be: straight to questioning to bi to queer bi to queer femme, desiring transgender butch whilst acknowledging that the transgender butch may or may not criss-cross between or towards queer FTM transsexual butch-sensual butch, or even identify at one time as high femme and another as hard butch. Another aspect of sexgender fluidity might be: heterosexual, “bio” (a shortened form of biological male) to bisexual transgender MTF, to transsexual femme lesbian, to transsexual butch lesbian, to transsexual butch bisexual.

To illustrate the complexity of the last example more clearly, we can acknowledge gender and sexuality distinctions. When using the terms “straight” and “naturalised”, I am referring to the generic term for “heterosexual” and the dominant idea in society that gender and biology are “normal” and “natural” when aligned with sex and gender. This binary alignment situates unproblematic gender and biological “norms” which posit prescribed maleness, masculinity and XY chromosomes together on one side and prescribed femaleness, femininity and XX chromosomes together on the other.

The finer detail of the above example could be read thus: a bio male who desires women (read as straight, having a naturalised form of male biology and a naturalised form of male gender) to transgender female with femme identity who desires femme women (read as: lesbian, has male biology and female gender) to transsexual femme female who desires femme women (read as: lesbian, has female biology – for example, via surgery – and female gender) to

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77 My use of the term “bio” is somewhat reluctant. This term helps to avoid conflating gender with “sex” (as in the generic meaning of sex which refers to biology as well as, that is including, chromosomes); however, the term “bio” is insufficient to separate biology and chromosomes such as is necessary when describing trans or intersex or queer embodiment, where personal and constructed biologies and gender and chromosomes may need distinguishing. I have recently read and appreciated the phrases “oestrogen-based body” and “testosterone-based body” as well as “people with pussies” and “people with penises” in Carrellas (2007).
transsexual female who changes identification from femme to butch and desires femme women (read as: butch dyke, has female biology and masculine gender) to transsexual butch female who changes desire object to butch women (read as: butch-on-but ch dyke, has female biology and masculine gender).

It would not be difficult to envisage explorations, beyond this last point, such as: transsexual butch woman who desires gay men, to gay FTM transman with female biology and masculine gender. Presenting (somewhat reductively, through a corporeal and sexgender lens) this particular movement of sexgender criss-crossing from straight bio male to gay trans-man is, as we can see, a mapping of complexity, and we must not forget the cultural, spatial and temporal aspects of being (particularly in the sense of interstitial being-ness) discussed in Chapter One.

However, the “conversion” of the sophistications of queer lived experience that I have tried to outline here as text on a page should not be dismissed for their inherent partiality and dense appearance. As I will show, they are part of an important method of communication which adds to the careful and patient practice of sexgender knowledge dissemination.

**Desire, Gender And Object Choice**

Gender and sexuality identifications are highly interchangeable, as we have just seen, whilst surgical interventions are less easily (but still can be and in some cases are) manipulated as expressions of changing identity. In terms of manipulation, it is less common for gender reassignment surgery to be “reversed” and “re-reversed”, although some surgical options are available to people who are seeking biological and gender autonomy through surgical interventions, when they are able to find and pay for willing surgical practitioners. 78

Interestingly, we can draw parallels between radical sexgender criss-crossing and what we could call “radical bisexual desire” by looking at “object-choice criss-crossing”.

I will consider two areas regarding the configuration of bisexuality in relation to monogamy, non-monogamy, heterosexuality and homosexuality. They are the

78 See Y (2005).
areas of discrimination and taboo. Specifically, I draw attention to
discrimination against bisexual people by heterosexuals, homosexuals and
monogamists. Also, I highlight the sexuality taboo (the necessity for a fixed,
neat category versus fluid changeability) and the sexual partnership taboo
(monogamy versus non-monogamy).

Taking the first area, of three-way discrimination, I have already mentioned that
bisexuality is much maligned; this is certainly so in cultures where the media
negatively portrays bisexuality. The influential nature of discrimination against
bisexuality from heterosexual and homosexual communities (for example the
New York Times and Out In Perth scenarios) suggests this. However, the third
arm of discrimination (by monogamists) is linked with my second point, which
involves both the taboo on non-monogamy and the taboo on not taking a fixed
heterosexual or homosexual position.

Where these two taboos converge (as they do under the rubric of normativity)
we can tease them out into the following four threads: the privileging of sexual
object choice; the limits of unitary bisexuality; essentialist notions of sex and
gender; and polyamory (polyamory can be read as the preference of having
more than one consensual, sexual and/or loving relationship at a time). I will
spread the analysis of these four threads over the following three sections.

In regard to the first thread, (which more properly means the privileging of
gender as sexual object choice) I turn to Steven Seidman’s chapter “Identity and
Politics in a Postmodern Gay Culture” (1993: 105-142), in which he offers a
critique of unitary gay identity. It is an identity wherein gender preference (that
is, the gender of one’s lovers) has been assumed to define sexual orientation,
and this basic postulate has been even more integral to the evolution of the gay
and lesbian community than the actual ethnicization of the group. Seidman
says:

In discussions over bisexuality and non-conventional sexualities, the privileging of a
hetero/homo sexual definition and the coding of sexuality by gender preference are
questioned – a questioning that goes to the very heart of the ethnic model of being gay (Ibid.: 121).

What Seidman (1993) brings to our attention is the notion that apart from
gender preference, there are plural aspects of desire which are being obscured.
In his example, that obscuration takes place in the particular ethnicisation of what he terms a gay community. Seidman says:

The ethnicization of gay desire has presupposed the privileging of gender preference to define sexual and social identity which, in turn, has been the basis upon which a gay community and politics are forged. Although this ethnic model can claim some major social accomplishments, it reinforces broadly mainstream social norms that devalue desires, behaviours, and social bonds that involve attraction to both sexes. In challenging sexual object choice as a master category of sexual and social identity, the bisexual critique suggests the possibility of legitimating desires other than gender preference as grounds for constructing alternative identities, communities, and politics (Ibid.: 123).

Of course we can extend this logic to broader societal formation; something Jane Litwoman calls a gender-erotic world:

Gender is not just what I care about or even really notice in a sexual partner. This is not to say that I don’t have categories of sexual attraction, that I judge each person as an individual – I have categories, but gender isn’t one of them. I’m erotically attracted to intelligent people, to people with dark/colored skin and light eyes and hair, to people with a kind of sleazy, sexy come-on, to eccentrics. In some of those categories I am homo-erotic (i.e., I’m intelligent and eccentric), in others I am heteroerotic (i.e., I have light skin and dark eyes and hair). To be perfectly frank, I can barely imagine what it’s like to be a lesbian or a straight woman, to be attracted to women because they are female … or to men because they are male. In that way I feel like both of them share a common perception which I will never know – that I am color blind or tone deaf to a gender-erotic world (in Hutchins & Kaahumanu, 1991: 4-5).

What I find interesting about this excerpt by Litwoman is the way it is referred to by both Hutchins and Kaahumanu (1991) and Siedman (1993). It is an obvious choice for Seidman, because Litwoman’s articulation is exemplary of the point he makes about gender and desire. More equivocal is the use by Hutchins and Kaahumanu, who cite Litwoman as an example of someone who says she prefers not to identify as bisexual but whose description of sexuality raises issues about bisexuality. Hutchins and Kaahumanu go so far as saying that “Jane Litwoman expresses one particularly different and unique view of why she herself does, and does not, identify as bisexual” (1991: 4).

Litwoman’s self-declared “honest exploration” of her sexual desires (which I would also call brave and interstitial) gives us much more than just a critique on object choice (Ibid.: 5). What Hutchins and Kaahumanu lift out as “unique” and “different” (Ibid.: 4) are in fact the queer sensibilities that I speak of in this thesis; that so obviously take us away from unitary thinking, and that allow conceptual multiplication.

What are the issues that Litwoman raises with regard to bisexuality? One issue circumvented by Seidman (1993), and by Hutchins & Kaahumanu (1991) is queer hermeneutics. What Litwoman’s message can represent is a glimpse into
those “things” that I propose should be further developed in sexgender discourses: subtlety of identification, highly refined and complex sexgender nuance, knowledge movement and eccentricity. Litwoman casts the privileging of gender preference as a fetish; she signposts a direction for sexuality theory which deserves (especially in my view through a queer lens) our full attention. Perhaps in fact, Litwoman’s position is not so unique, not so different. To suggest that it is may obscure the dissemination of queer sexgender knowledge.

**Categorisations Within Bisexuality/Constituting Queer Bisexuality**

As well as dislodging gender as the main determinant of sexual object choice (for example being attracted to men or women because they are men or women), the expansion of what constitutes sexual object choice also allows distinctions to be made between types of bisexuality where they are otherwise not made. This leads us to the second of the above mentioned threads – the limits of unitary bisexuality.

Predictably, my theoretical leaning is toward queer heterogeneity – gesturing to multiplicity itself, especially the notion that qualities of multiplicity must be as significant as differences between multiplicity. However, there are still other, “differences between” to acknowledge. In broad terms, differences between bisexual men and women are frequently either overlooked or oversimplified. Certainly the implications we can draw from popular and media discourse (again, as we have seen with the *New York Times* and *Out In Perth* scenarios) would have us read male bisexuality as eclipsing female bisexuality in both scientific and lay terms. Where gender distinctions are made, in a popular sense, male bisexuals are often cast as closeted homosexuals who are unsafe on at least two accounts: emotional (they cannot be trusted to be faithful/honest) and healthful (they are vectors of sexual disease). Female bisexuals are routinely cast (and psycho-pathologized) as promiscuous, immature, fence-sitting, marriage-wrecking and closeted lesbians.

It is interesting to note that here in Australia the criteria for donating blood to the Australian Red Cross Blood Service (A.R.C.B.S.) discriminates against bisexual men but not bisexual women, by asking donors whether they have had sex with someone they think might be a bisexual male (Australian Red Cross
Blood Service, 2007). Female bisexuals are not mentioned on the questionnaire. The A.R.C.B.S. (2007) questionnaire also contains discriminatory wording affecting other sexual identities such as gay men and is the subject of a current anti-discrimination campaign by the Tasmanian Gay and Lesbian Rights Group, which is campaigning for the removal of discrimination against gay and bisexual men in blood donation (2007).

As well as the reduction of bisexuality into binarised, illogically constructed gender correlates, there are also differences between kinds of bisexuality, not to mention kinds of “sexuality”, which perhaps fall under the bisexual umbrella but are not explicitly claimed as bisexual positions. In the introduction to her book, Bisexuality And The Eroticism Of Everyday Life, Marjorie Garber makes an important observation about the language that can be employed (or can be hard to create) around the multiplicitous nature of sexuality – particularly bisexuality (Garber, 2000).

Garber notes the uni-linear history of bisexual categorisation by sexologists (including Kinsey and Klein) extending through to:

[A] multidimensional scale of sexuality that measures, among other things, people who have switched from hetero- to homosexuality or vice versa, and bisexuals who have had encounters with both sexes at the same time or who alternate periods of attraction to men with periods of attraction to women. Terms like ‘sequential’ versus ‘concurrent’ bisexuality are probably helpful additions to a language that is still struggling with linear sequence (2000: 30).

In contrast to these terms, which I consider the nascent queer rumblings of a concepto-lingual bloom, Garber also points out taxonomies, discussed by Michael W. Ross (1991) that are based on the logic of the closet, cultural anthropology and, interestingly, a male/female interstice. Garber says:

There are also taxonomies of bisexuality itself. A book of essays on the relationship between bisexuality and HIV/AIDS around the world lists ‘Defense Bisexuality’ (defending against homosexuality in societies where it is stigmatized), ‘Latin Bisexuality’ (the insertive role in certain ‘Mediterranean cultures’ is not regarded as homosexual, so that men who participate in same-sex encounters may consider themselves nonetheless heterosexual), ‘Ritual Bisexuality’ (as with the Sambia of Papua-New Guinea, in which younger males fellate older men in order to ingest their ‘masculinizing’ semen, a practice that is part of a rite of initiation, may continue for years, and is apparently replaced by exclusive heterosexuality after marriage), ‘Married Bisexuality’, and ‘Technical Bisexuality’ (with partners who may be dressed as members of the other sex, or have had some form of gender reassignment: transsexuals or members of a ‘third sex’ in some culture) (2000: 30).

There are understandable motivations to euphemise, re-label, closet and disguise bisexuality, not least the material and structural imperatives that
“allow” particular people in particular communities to live with successful social parity. On the one hand, there are brave, bold sexuality “activists” who will risk their physical and emotional health, their careers and lifestyles (or indeed their lives) as the consequence of being aberrant members of sexually regulated punitive societies. On the other hand, many people do not want to proclaim their non-normative sexual identity, especially if it invites violence and/or social and institutional stigmatisation/discrimination, or if it impacts on their access to basic necessities such as housing, education, employment and recreation. Of particular concern (and certainly here in Australia) are the endemic discriminations which young people face, especially at school.

Technical bisexuality is interesting because it is one term from the list to which Garber refers that approaches a sexuality/gender/biology split. Unfortunately the term acts to very effectively truncate, foreclose and regulate the expansive and queer possibilities it refers to. The word “technical” marks the privilege of “real bisexuality” (neatly aligning and authenticating conventional gender and biology) over an “un-real bisexuality” which is devalued because it “undoes” conventional biological and gender alignments.

Kinds of non-normative sexuality may be considered “technically bisexual” (for instance t-femme and transgender butch) if they do not draw on a dominant sexgender knowledge pool; but of course, they are not likely to (if they are queer) and will continually collide with, and challenge, notions of “realness” when gender is not normatively aligned with biology. It follows that queer bisexual permutations not described by a term such as “technical” effectively rankle with the popularly perceived and unstable limits of bisexuality.

As a further challenge to the limits of a unitary notion of bisexuality, I refer to Marco Vassi’s article “Beyond Bisexuality” (1997). Vassi does indeed embed his analysis of sexuality in a wide, expansive sexgender episteme; however, he “technically discriminates” against bisexuality. I have already suggested that we cannot come to view bisexuality expansively if we do not access the larger pool of sexgender knowledge. Vassi does access this knowledge pool, and in fact he

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80 For an analysis of the representation of bisexuality in Australian school curricula, cultures and communities, and how this can be linked to the health of bisexual-identifying adolescents, see Pallotta-Chiarolli (2005).
contributes greatly to it by articulating the concept of metasexuality. However, Vassi says:

The introduction of the metasexual paradigm is ... a shift in the history of our evolving understanding. The vast majority of the species has not seen past the conditioned strictures of the number two. And even those in the vanguard, having their orgies, still operate from the standpoint of a male-female dualism. The most sophisticated among them proclaim themselves bisexuals, not aware that this is the dead-end of that particular tunnel vision (1997: 75, italics in original).

If we were to compare types of bisexual discrimination, I would place the standard and dominant media discrimination of bisexuality in extreme contrast to Vassi’s marginal one. In this case, however, at the root of these apparent antithetical positions is a similar reduction of sexgender knowledge. I argue that Vassi’s notion of bisexual dead-end-ness can only exist if structures of gender as the determinant of sexuality have not, as Litwoman (1991) and Seidman (1993) suggest, been dismantled.

In a somewhat contradictory line of thinking, Vassi proceeds with this comment: “beyond bisexuality, externals take on a different meaning than when one is caught in the male-female duality” (1997: 75). This clearly ignores queer bisexual positioning. Vassi’s logic of metasexuality is such that once one has obtained the enlightened state of being-in-the-world as a practising metasexual, wherein one does in fact view a monad\(^{81}\) as genderless, one could “return” to the practice of “any form” of sexuality (and I assume bisexuality is one form) as a non dead-end choice. Vassi says:

I am open to whatever is possible, to whoever wants to dance with me. Yet if this is a genuine satori, as I practice the living awareness of it, a specific form may evolve. It is possible that I might one day accept a simple pattern to express my true nature: perhaps an uncomplicated heterosexual linear bond, or perhaps a gay threesome, or a life of introspective masturbation. For, if one has subsumed all forms, then one is free to manifest in any form whatsoever (Ibid.: 75).

I do not wish to take issue with Vassi’s construction of metasexuality, especially when he challenges the prejudice that two people, a man and a woman, make the ideal “natural number for the erotic encounter” (Ibid.: 71). I do make the point, however, that dead-end-ness and bisexuality are not mutually inclusive when we understand that the queering of desire disrupts popular, putatively “true” sexgender narratives which anchor sexgender knowledge to sexgender essentialism. Bisexuality need not be something that one must necessarily go “beyond” in order to challenge rigid sexgender essentialism.

\(^{81}\) Vassi’s word to denote a simple singularity: one person.
**Challenging Taboos**

I turn now to the last thread: polyamory, and posit that queer bisexuality also offers a critique of monogamy. This does not mean that bisexual people are necessarily non-monogamous; far from it, many bisexual people are monogamists, and many kinds of sexuality can incorporate non-monogamy. I do not wish to reinforce the negative association of bisexuality with a negative view of non-monogamy. Non-monogamy does not by default equate to infidelity, and bisexuality does not by default equate to non-monogamy or infidelity. What I do wish to say is that non-monogamous queer bisexuality, as with other non-monogamous queer sexualities, is bound up in the socio-cultural implications of breaking a non-monogamy taboo.

One way to challenge the taboo is by questioning the use of the term “non-monogamy” itself. Starting at the level of semantics, I’d like to suggest a critique within a critique: non-monogamy critiques monogamy; polyamory critiques both monogamy (in terms of practice and ideology) and non-monogamy (the term). Non-monogamy refers to what it is not; other terms like polyamory, pansexuality and omnisexuality refer to what they are.

Non-monogamy privileges the normativity of monogamy in much the same way that “technical bisexuality” privileges the normativity of sexgender “real-ness”. If we are to not address but rather posit (as insufficient) the relational logic that accompanies academic and popular discourses of “the other”, of difference and particularly of the sexually marginalised, then a theory of the interstice, which seeks ways to describe and articulate “the constitutive”, is necessary.

If we were to apply the mental arithmetic involved in creating expanded discursive paradigms about sexgender identity – in other words consciously displacing the ease of saying what a “thing” is not, in favour of the challenge of saying what a “thing” is – then we may have a very interesting starting point from which to disseminate the sexgender particularities and subtleties of love-relationships such as polyamory, for instance.

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82 The example of polyamory deserves a fuller analysis than an analysis of bisexuality can provide. For a breadth of perspectives on polyamory as it relates to bisexuality see Anderlini-D'Onofrio (2004). It is sufficient to say at this juncture that polyamory, like bisexuality, is a complex sexual categorisation in need of introduction to sexgender discursive realms, before stereotypes and negative fabrications come into play, from which it then needs to be rescued.
A practical use of the term “non-monogamy”, however, provides a semantic umbrella, and this is drawn on in instances when words like “omnisexual” fall outside the register of popular discourse. Queers and other sexgender variants the world over are familiar with the role of educating a sexuality/gender-ignorant populace; having encountered it in everyday life: from the family dinner table to the classroom, from the most fleeting social encounter to an ongoing dialogue, from the public realm to the private, from culture to culture. Queers are required to “explain” themselves to the non-queer; some like doing this, some do not; sometimes this experience is enjoyable, often it is not. For queers, their role as educators varies in intensity and frequency in much the same way as queer sexgender criss-crossing does.

The fact that bisexuality is “picked on” for being unreliable – for “messing with” the monogamy taboo – provides at least one reason why queer and non-monogamous bisexuality remain in the shadows whilst a “cleaner” version (monogamous and stable) supposedly wards off the harsh criticism that surrounds it. The consequence of this closeting is such that terms like non-monogamy, polyamory, pansexuality, omnisexuality, metasexuality, polyfidelity, and even pleasure activism, are displaced within sexual discourses. This displacement not only prevents expansive discussion about sexgender heterogeneity (where refinements of sexgender knowledge emerge) but it also prevents access to means of articulation and representation of sexgender identities. The sophistication with which we can all view polyamory and/or bisexuality becomes lost underneath the “rubble” of popular and disparaging maxims that always defer to the synonymy of sexual otherness with abnormality and undesirability.

Queering The Foreground

If we consider a location where the practices of queer bisexuality can and must be read both for their disruption to sexgender norms and their right to a “home”, does it behove queer bisexuals to challenge the straight hermeneutic and foreground that location? For some, I believe so; queer sexgender self-knowledge exists, therefore it can be disseminated. Ways to articulate it must be

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83 In the following chapter the comments of questionnaire respondents reveal most poignantly the tension between explaining one’s sexgender variance to non-judgemental, interested parties; and having to justify it – within heteronormative family/social and workplace contexts especially.
forced through the mesh of popular, disingenuous sexgender thinking. This is no easy task (wading through neologisms being just one small part of it), but it is a task that keeps theory lively; it falls to queer writers, activists, theorists and creative people who can meet the challenge of formulating ontological and epistemological sexgender considerations at both the specific and general levels.

This chapter has begun with the task of making complex notions of bisexuality unconfusing. It has suggested that the interstitial spaces of sexgender knowledge embrace the non-normativity of queer being. By doing so, the notion of queerness as a theoretical tool, as well as a way of being, helps to expose the ontology of bisexuality. This is just as important as the project of deconstructing the unitary perspective of bisexuality which in turn assists in the general critique of any unitary (and normative) sexgender formulation.

Through examples of sexgender criss-crossing and the notion of a concepto-lingual bloom, t-femme on t-femme has been articulated and cast as one form of queer bisexuality. Although this form of queer bisexuality is simply one amongst many others, my analysis demonstrates that the concept of gender variance, when linked to desire, is indeed complex and sophisticated, but is not necessarily confusing.

The discriminations that face bisexuals (especially from the popular media) are realities of everyday life for many people. My discussion of queer bisexuality has emphasised that its “constitution” challenges relationship and sexual taboos. It is precisely because of its radical status in this regard that a forceful critique of bisexual discrimination can be realised. However, as well as making the point that there is a radical and political currency to queer bisexuality, it is important to remember that queer bisexuality is also a vibrant, complex, nuanced sexuality which is full of sexgender liveliness.

I will now move on from the notion of queer bisexuality to that of queer kink, which can certainly also be considered lively, complex and nuanced. I will illustrate how queer kink can also be considered radical; not only as an idea but also in terms of sexual practices and embodiment. I shall examine, by way of example, notions of ageing bodies as sexual subjects. I want to add to carnal and erotic spheres within theories of embodiment and queer ontology, where these
spheres may be perceived as lacking carnal and erotic perspectives. The following section starts with a discussion of this “lack” before turning specifically to kink phenomena.

**Queer Kink**

*A Queer Sex/Gender Interstice*

In Chapter Three of the book *Women’s Bodies: Discipline and Transgression* (Arthurs & Grimshaw, 1999), sexuality theorist and feminist sociologist Tamsin Wilton argued for interventions of feminism, sociology and queer activism to ground embodiment theory in a resistant opposition to assertive male (sexgender) hegemony; specifically because such an intervention, in Wilton’s opinion, was lacking (1999: 48). Wilton focuses on the aspect of male power which organises truth claims around corporeality through discourses of embodiment which discipline and control gender – as Wilton says, “both queers and women are gendered [thereby disciplined] as feminine” (*Ibid.*: 48). (My parenthesis). Whilst this grounding is important to Wilton’s analysis, I argue that at a fundamental level, what Wilton calls for actually excludes the queer body.

Wilton’s major criticisms are of what she terms, “heteropolarity” and embodiment theories which are not oppositional to it (*Ibid.*: 51). Heteropolarity is a somewhat complex conceptual term for Wilton’s rather dense formulation of phallocentric sexgender hegemony. It depends on a particular conception of “the erotic” as an adhesion between standardised, normative understandings of sex and gender.

The methodology behind my use of “the erotic” (which emerges at several points throughout the thesis – variously and including sex acts or carnality) is to demonstrate embodied interstitial sensibility and perhaps a queer poetics of being at the interstice of sexuality and gender. It is also to cast the erotic as an adhesion but in a queer-phenomenological context, of intersubjectivity and queerly embodied self-consciousness. 86 Wilton’s use, as I reveal, is quite

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85 I have valued the process of untangling this concept of heteropolarity for what it reveals about the relevance of my own queer theorisation of sexgender formulations and “interstitality”.
86 In Chapter Five I discuss the interstice as the adhesive space of an onto-epistemic juncture.
different and therefore provides a useful contrast to my analysis. This in turn illustrates how “the erotic” and “the carnal” can be read differently as queer.

One might assume that “heteropolarity” simply means “weighted towards the institution of heterosexuality”, but it is much more complex and actually derives from three interdependent phenomena all combining into the single word.

In my reading of Wilton’s use, heteropolarity is first and foremost grounded in the interstice of biological sex and social gender, into which she inserts the dominant discourse of “the erotic” to assert their actual co-dependence. This co-dependence comes about because “the erotic” (in the general sense of a dominant discourse) takes an unreflexive gendered position; that is, males and females unreflexively use their “appropriately corresponding” male and female genitals heteronormatively. Second, the co-dependency of biological sex, gendered erotics, and socio-culturally constructed gender constitute heteropolarity because of the “charge across two sexes (male and female) seen as polar opposites” towards heterosexuality. Third, the heteropolar paradigm constructs masculinity and femininity according to possession or lack of the phallus, making it intrinsically phallocentric (1999: 51).

In Wilton’s view, embodiment theories must oppose heteropolarity, and in doing so, will recognise the traces of operations of power and resistance that are inscribed upon the body (Ibid.: 50). For Wilton then, it is important to decide whether the body is “a text”, “a palimpsest” or “a conversation” (Ibid.: 50). The notion of the body being all three of these phenomena (as well as many others) is one that I do not find problematic; this is because the notion of the body-as-conversation acts as an umbrella term for all three and can apply to a queer hermeneutics. In a moment I shall utilise “the body-as-conversation” to articulate the queer-kink body.

To begin with, what I find interesting about Wilton’s text is that although it appears several years after many queer and/or feminist embodiment theories emerged (some now regarded as seminal texts or canonical deconstructionist

87 It was for this reason (suggesting ways in which we might “corporally theorise” a sexualisation of the sex/gender interstice) and because Wilton draws on “queer”, by which she means radical political activism and queer theory (see 1999: 48-66) that I was drawn to her analysis.

theories which include analyses of heteronormative “male power”), Wilton still refers to this particular conceptual “lack” in relation to theories of embodiment.

In fact, Wilton indicates two particular areas of lack. For the first one, she laments “that no radical theory of the body has yet coalesced out of theoretical positions of feminists, queers and sociologists”, who she regards as having failed thus far “to engage in any direct way with this [heteropolar] incarnation of hegemony” (1999: 48). (My interpretation in square brackets). In the sense that feminist and queer and philosophical theories of embodiment, which do indeed analyse gendered power relations and corporeal and sexgender discourses (and can easily “cross over” to inform, engage and solicit dialogue with sociological, feminist embodiment theorists), I find myself in slight puzzlement with Wilton. However, I do agree with her secondary criticism that embodiment theories lack radical analyses of erotic sex (Ibid.: 48-49).

This part of the chapter will add to the notion that a radical theory of embodiment (feminist and/or queer) could emerge out of any disciplinary position (transgender, sociological, philosophical, psychoanalytical, literary, historical, medico-techno-scientific, cultural and so on) to include (or rather replace a lack of) explicitly sexual discourses of embodiment.

By seeking different ways in which bodies might be understood (as textual, palimpsestic or conversational), Wilton turns to two specific kinds of bodies: those of “the female body-builder” and “the transsexual” (1999: 50). Interestingly, the “transsexual body” in Wilton’s analysis is often not gendered; it is simply called “the transsexual body” rather than, say, a female, male, female-to-male, male-to-female or criss-crossed body (Ibid. 56).

Wilton’s gender analysis of both the female-body-builder body and the transsexual body is unsophisticated and problematic in comparison to her desire for a radical corporeal analysis. Both these “embodied” examples invite some interesting queer reading.

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89 I refer the reader to the footnote below.
90 Certainly Rubin (1975, 1984), Plummer (1975, 1995), Wiegman (1987), Butler (1990, 1993,1997), Sawicki (1991: especially pages 67-94), Stryker (1996), Roof & Wiegman (1995), Seidman (1996), and Halberstam (1998), attend to this “incarnation of hegemony” (gendered power relations) from a queer and/or feminist perspective, with Siedman and Plummer being sociologists. Perhaps it was not the radical theory per se that was missing but, as sociologists, Gamson and Moon retrospectively note, “sociology was a bit slow on the draw” to incorporate the poststructural insights of queer theory (2004: 48). In my view Wilton rightly noted one area of lack, but it fell amongst other areas of scholarly richnesses occurring in 1999; the restriction seems to be of disciplinary insight rather than theoretical limitation at that time (this is not to say Wilton was not insightful). In the following paragraphs I concur with the subsequent arm of Wilton’s critique: that there is also a lack of “the sexual” in theories of sexuality.
The female body-builder whose muscles, Wilton asserts, will always remain feminine (Ibid.: 57) allows no voice or body-as-conversation for the butch/masculine female body-builder or the transgendered FTM body-builder. Also, there is no comparative reference to the FTM transsexual body-builder (for whom “body-building” has a host of different nuances and motivations from those of non-transsexual, cisgendered bodies), who can certainly transgress and queer (as Loren Cameron’s[91] body does) the popular notion of body plasticity.

Wilton refers to transsexualism as an “alarmingly legitimate child of the marriage between heteropolarity and the late capitalist consumerisation of the body” and quotes Featherstone (1991) rather than referring to any of the established or emerging trans*-embodied, radical trans* theorists, to suggest that the transsexual body can be obtained like any consumer commodity (Ibid.: 56).

Although Wilton does reference the transsexual feminist activist Sandy Stone at a later point in her chapter, it is only to contextualise Stone as an exception to what Wilton regards as the majority of (implied MTF) transsexuals who are in absolute compliance with heteropolar doctrine; which Wilton finds startling. (Ibid.: 58). Wilton turns to Bryan Tulley’s (1992) quantitative sample of statistics on transsexuals who attend a clinic (unspecified by Wilton but one we can assume implies the medico-psycho-pathologised transsexual body) to support her argument that heteropolarity is so thoroughly saturated in Western culture that male-to-female transsexuals (described by Wilton as men) are driven to “castration and life-long indignities ... of what is at best primitive and partial surgical drag” (1999: 59). These “indignities” are undertaken, according to Wilton, in order to “avoid drinking beer, smoking, being confident, mending things, leering at women and being untidy” (Ibid.: 59). What Wilton reveals here is her own discrimination against the “unreal-ly gendered body”. She states that being an authentic man is about “having wet dreams, the need to protect vulnerable testicles, fears of prostate trouble, the burden of cultural phantasms such as premature ejaculation or impotence ...” (Ibid.: 60). If this is the case one

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[91] Photographer and trans* activist Loren Cameron has produced radical texts and images about his own (FTM) body and other transsexual bodies. Through his books, exhibitions, lectures, and audiovisual media, and his own body-as-conversation, he has articulated an erotics and politics of the sexgender/queer interstice. See Cameron (1996, 2001, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c), and his web site http://www.lorencameron.com/. See also Hemmings (2002: 129) for a lucid analysis (inclusive of sexuality) of Cameron’s photograph entitled Self-Portrait # 46A Nude.

can only wonder how any men who do not have such anxieties can be real men. The irony of this logic is that authentic gender is intractably reduced to the biological body – the material object of the body. This is something that Wilton expressly wishes to avoid in order to radically theorise the body as a temporal event rather than a spatial “object-state” (Ibid.: 61).

Wilton’s understanding of authenticity seems to be at odds with her insistence that embodiment theories specify context, body-as-event, a complexity of acts, meanings, interpretations and temporality (Ibid.: 60-61). As the “authentically” gendered and sexed body emerges as non-transsexual in Wilton’s analysis, it becomes apparent that for Wilton, the transsexual body is ensconced (reduced and only explainable) within her heteropolarised paradigm (Ibid.: 56). In this case the queer transsexual body is, like the queer transgender butch body, mute and conversation-less at the expense of a putative “radical” embodiment theory that actually privileges (not just by critiquing but paradoxically by maintaining) a notion of heteropolarity over and above the radical queer theory that Wilton simultaneously hails and disavows.

In this way we can also see how the “authentic” queer bisexual body (discussed earlier in this chapter as the bisexual t-femme) or the concept of “velveteen realness” as we have seen in Chapter One, would also be unregistered. The “erotic” in Wilton’s analysis is only ever cast in terms of heteronormative dominant discourse because heteropolarity relies on this stenosing configuration. Queer kink, as we shall see, disrupts the dominant sexgendar discourse of the erotic by refusing to be saturated by a heteropolar paradigm.

Added to Wilton’s desire for a more expansive and radical theory of embodiment, she also recognises that “the difficulty in making sense of bodies lies in disaggregating the body from both the dubious legacy of biological determinism … and … its ironic position as the discursively constituted pre-discursive ground” (Ibid.: 49). There is also some irony in the fact that Wilton quotes and draws heavily from Judith Butler (arguably responsible for the most

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Wilton applies the same logic to being a woman; the authentic being of which is about “managing the social and cultural pressures which coalesce around the biological ability to become pregnant and give birth, including the significance of the menstrual cycle ...” (1999: 61). Whereas Butler (as we will see in a moment) describes this as a constraint on the material body which can (and more importantly must) be deconstructed, Wilton concretises that constraint as a mark of gender authenticity.
radical theory of sexgender embodiment since de Beauvoir) to make her point that such radical counter-hegemonic theory of the body is lacking (Ibid.: 49).

**The Queer-Kink Body-As-Conversation**

I do not wish to critique Wilton for wanting to expose a perceived lack of radicalism in embodiment theories which pass each other by: my primary aim is to take up her further point; that the “carnality of the body [should not be] played down” and that the sexually explicit fleshy body needs retrieving (Ibid.: 49). The queer-kink body, as one of the many different ways (here, odd and interstitial) of making sense of bodies, is crucial to this task.

I now return to the notion of body as conversation. Myriad descriptions for the body exist: we have already noted some. It can be called a text, a layering (an onto-epistemic palimpsest comes to mind) a surface, a machine, a tool, a container, raw material, a work of art, a sensing device, a metaphor, a creation and a practice (amongst many others, as contemporary embodiment theories have shown).

In order to best illustrate the queering of embodiment in terms of age and kink practices, I want to cast the body-as-conversation “for itself” as a “re-

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95 I do not draw on psychoanalytic, literary or medico-scientific perspectives of the-body-as-conversation, as Irigaray (1993), Boudreau (2002) and Darwin (1999) respectively have done, rather, I maintain a queer hermeneutics of the queer-kink body; interpreting the way in which the body becomes conversant (perhaps we could even term it interlocutory) because of the fact that it is willingly “read”, that is, finely regarded, sensed and conversed with, through
descriptor/inscriptor” – of sexgender corporeality – and hence “describer of” itself. In this sense perhaps we could use the term “re-de-scribing body” to denote a “conversant queer body” of re-inscription as well as re-description. I will regard this body as a socio-cultural phenomenon: even auto-erotic and/or reclusive or isolated sexual subjectivity is formed through the dissemination (always at some point, exchanged from one being to another) of sexgender knowledges.

By utilising notions of kink and age together (particularly as both are rarely combined in academic scholarship) we can expand our thinking from the body as text to include the body as layered and conversing. Although it is nine years since Wilton’s “call” for the emergence of a radical theory of (erotic) embodiment, the analysis in this chapter is one belated response which goes some way to remedying a lack of “the sexually radical” in relation to a feminist philosophical (but also interdisciplinary) theory of embodiment.

Ageism – A Dominant Discourse

Some of the specific ways in which ageing sexual bodies are embraced through kink practice have the potential to dislodge and jar the generic (sex-negative) interpretation of an “ageing body” and I propose that one method of unsubscribing is through the intentional development and refinement of a queer kink sensibility.

In a literal and social sense we start ageing from the minute we are born, we live all of our lives in ageing bodies and yet they are not “read” as ageing until a certain coagulation of “age” indications and signifiers is reached. These indications can exist as neatly aligned myths of normativity in relation to sociability, body image, love partnerships, degeneration, youthism, sexuality and “failure”. A dystopian example of ageing which Dustin Bradley Goltz, discusses is in relation to gay men. He says, “Studies indicate that gay male culture is centred on ‘youthism’ indicating a strong fear and avoidance of ageing” (Goltz, 2007). He goes on to utilise the concept of ageing myths in terms of their function as cautionary realities of everyday (gay male) life, which he casts as an unfavourable, self-destructive existence (Ibid.: n.p.).
This dystopian view is not one that I would easily apply to gay men or heterosexuals, as Goltz does throughout his article. I do not wish to reduce or "construct" either group (or others) to a singular, comprehensive category. However, I do think that the myth of ageing-as-dystopic is a reality. In other words, my response to the dystopic age-myth is not to cast everyday life as consequently hopeless, but to observe that the reality of ageism and youthism lies in the reality of age discourses rather than in the "realness" of mythologised age.96

Feminist scholars have also pointed to socio-cultural myths about the ageing woman’s body. For contemporary theorists of ageing, Toni Calasanti and Kathleen Slevin, the colloquialism “letting oneself go” is utilised as a signification for the “stigma of failure” (T. M. Calasanti & Slevin, 2006: 3), something that they acknowledge Susan Sontag (1972) was analysing thirty-five years ago as “a humiliating process of gradual sexual disqualification” (Sontag, 1983: 102). Even since early second-wave feminist scholars began theorising age, it is still apparent that particular topics are under-theorised: two of these topics are the post-mid-age body and the sexually active old body.97

I pose then, the following questions: What is an ageing body? When do we become ag-ed (read with stress on second syllable) subjects, and how can any of us (who wish it) un-subscribe from a sex-negative subjectivity of age, the reinforcement of which pervades in both broad and specific social contexts in contemporary societies and cultures?

An ageing body, as I regard it here, and following a Butlerian account, is culturally, contextually and discursively produced. We can formulate a view of


97 As Calasanti and Slevin say, “Discussion of old bodies is sorely lacking beyond discussions of menopause” (2006: 2). They point to Laz (2003) as one feminist scholar who extends her analysis of age and embodiment as particular accomplishments beyond the normative rhetoric of menopause. Calasanti and Slevin provide a forceful critique of feminist scholarship about age that is strongly biased to analyses of middle (rather than old) age (wherein menopause discourse is abundant). They add that on rare occasions when feminist scholarship does examine older bodies, it others and distances the actual narratives and realities of older-aged people (2006: 2–3). I would like to note somewhat wryly then that my ensuing and rather lengthy discussion of menopause is done with an awareness of the mid-age bias. However, I also focus on how any and all mid/older-age bodies are hardly ever articulated in queer and/or kinked sexual terms. I certainly do not want to suggest that all women experience menopause, or have bodies that menstruate. This one well-known signifier of ageing is simply a useful heuristic because it is broadly understood as such. I do also use other examples which refer explicitly to very old bodies and younger bodies which can also role-play any-age/any-gender (including very old) bodies.
the ageing body in much the same way that Butler formulated the gendered body in *Gender Trouble* (1990) and the sexed body (read as material not sexual) in *Bodies that Matter* (1993).

When interviewed just before *Bodies That Matter* was published, Butler discussed the materiality of the body as a way to reconsider “sex”, which she “overrode too quickly in *Gender Trouble*” (1994: 32–33). Butler discusses her tactical reasons for privileging the notion of biological constraint on bodies and she illustrates, through the example of “capacity for pregnancy”, the way in which bodies get defined by impositions of norms which actually produce sex. She says:

I still very much believe in the critique of the category of sex and the ways in which it’s been constrained by a tacit institution of compulsory reproduction ... It’s a practical problem. If you are in your late twenties or your early thirties and you can’t get pregnant for biological reasons, or maybe you don’t want to, for social reasons – whatever it is – you are struggling with a norm that is regulating your sex. It takes a pretty vigorous (and politically informed) community around you to alleviate the possible sense of failure, or loss, or impoverishment, or inadequacy – a collective struggle to rethink a dominant norm. Why shouldn’t it be that a woman who wants to have some part in child-rearing, but doesn’t want to have a part in child-bearing, or who wants to have nothing to do with either, can inhabit her gender without an implicit sense of failure or inadequacy? When people ask the question “Aren’t these biological differences?” They’re not really asking a question about the materiality of the body. They’re actually asking whether or not the social institution of reproduction is the most salient one for thinking about gender. In that sense, there is a discursive enforcement of a norm. Somebody might well say: isn’t it the case that certain bodies go to the gynaecologist for certain kinds of examination and certain bodies do not? And I would obviously affirm that. But the real question here is: to what extent does a body get defined by its capacity for pregnancy? Why is it pregnancy by which that body gets defined? One might say it’s because somebody is of a given sex that they go to the gynaecologist to get an examination that establishes the possibility of pregnancy, or one might say that going to the gynaecologist is the very production of “sex”—but it is still the question of pregnancy that is centring that whole institutional practice here. Now, it seems to me that, although women’s bodies generally speaking are understood as capable of impregnation, the fact of the matter is that there are female infants and children who cannot be impregnated, there are older women who cannot be impregnated, there are women of all ages who cannot be impregnated, and even if they could ideally, that is not necessarily the salient feature of their bodies or even of their being women. What the question does is try to make the problematic of reproduction central to the sexing of the body. But I am not sure that is, or ought to be, what is absolutely salient or primary in the sexing of the body. If it is, I think it’s the imposition of a norm, not a neutral description of biological constraints (1994: 34).

This is a way of showing that there is not a natural sex prior to gender; that the construction of “natural sex” is a cultural norm that regulates the material(isation) of the body. Following from this we can see how the cultural norm of de-sexed old-age – old bodies are not erotic – actually enforces (de-sexing through discourse) the materiality of old bodies. Butler would call this being “contoured” or “animated” by a norm (*Ibid.*: 32). In this way, and for the purposes of theorising ageing, we can see how the capacity for pregnancy as a
restraint can be substituted by the incapacity for carnality/eroticism as a restraint. Whereas women’s bodies become defined (thus restrained) by the centralised issue of pregnancy, old bodies become defined (also restrained) by the centralised issue of non-sexuality; if not sexual repellence.

I will be emphasising the construction of age as it applies to a queer sensibility that subverts the popular and uncritical narrative that privileges the marriage of embodied degeneration to linear, chronological temporality and which is heavily regulated by medical and health discourses. “Ageing” discourses are dominated by sex-negativity; particularly in the sense that “intimacy” rather than sex, heterosexuality rather than any sexuality and androcentrism (particularly sex and age in relation to the effect of age on masculinity), are biases in popular, medical, scientific and academic discourses.  

The distinction between an ageing body and an ag-ed body is most noticeable when readable cues of degeneration are materialised as the normative constraint on sexuality. These could be dry, papery and wrinkly skin, unsteady gait, slow movements, muscle weakness, reduced hearing, loss of vision, and so on. None of these materialities (and they do not just exist on ag-ed bodies, given the worldwide variations of embodiment) necessarily precludes a person from being sexual.

One interesting “cue” is the notion that gender neutrality (the gendered features of old men and old women blur into each other and they simply “look old” rather than female or male) marks a distinct phase of embodiment. As Sarah Goodfellow (2007) remarks in her article on medical representations of age-induced gender neutrality:

In 1956, physician William H. Masters, of Masters and Johnson renown, addressed the International Association of Gerontology, and referred to people over sixty as “a third sex or neutral gender” ... [I]t is doubtful that Masters meant to imply that the elderly are either homosexuals or hermaphrodites, his word choice merits examination. Historically, the threat that old age has posed to gender identity has been profound, and the sexual status of the aged has been problematic. For a number of social and cultural reasons, the elderly have not been supposed to have or to want to have sex. As a result, popular and medical literature has widely prescribed an end to sexual activity for the elderly — ostensibly for their own peace of mind and physical wellbeing. Menopause has thus been interpreted as a “natural” mandate for women to cease all sexual activity, and aging men have been assumed to follow a parallel course into impotence and infertility. It was, therefore, a common observation in medical

literature throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that aging women lose their “feminine grace” and grow more “masculine.” The corresponding belief that old men become more “feminine” in behavior, if not also in appearance, was also a mainstay. The fact that echoes of these ideas can still be heard in the twenty-first century speaks to the enduring power of preconceptions of old age as sexless. The de-sexing of the aged body was often quite literal in descriptions of senescent physiology: the genital and reproductive organs were said to shrink, shrivel, and atrophy. Interestingly, there have been two schools of thought with regard to the physiological transformation of the male in old age. One maintained that both sexes display stronger masculine characteristics. The other held that men become more like women. There was no lack of agreement about the transformation of the aging female (Goodfellow, 2007: 1).

If we agree that popular and medical discourses are contributors to hegemonic sex-negativity in “the ag-ed”, I am prompted to fathom and provide an articulation for the ways in which un-subscription from sex-negative age discourse (and thus the sex-negative aged body) comes about. An illustration of queer kink sensibility, as I have indicated, can provide this articulation. An interesting question that Goodfellow goes on to ask is:

What, then, would constitute age-appropriate sexual behaviour for the elderly? While ideas about childhood sexuality changed dramatically after the dissemination of Freud’s psychoanalytic theories, this change in sexological thought did not inspire a (re)examination of the theoretical model for sexuality in old age. Late-life sexuality remained, and to a large extent remains, critically unexplored, and the elderly continue to inhabit an ambiguous sexual space describable as, indeed, “a third sex or neutral gender” (Ibid.: 6).

Rather than propose what constitutes age-appropriate behaviour, I want to doubly radicalise the notion of old-age sexual behaviour. Not only does old-age-sex, in itself, transgress the dominant norm of “age-appropriateness”; but for the old-age body to engage in radical sex acts, it further transgresses normative sex ideals. Not only can old bodies do sex, they can do it queerly, kinkily and sex-positively. Old bodies can “do it dirty”.

This is not to say that to be old and sexually radical has to mean being a queer kinkster, although many sexual acts simply by virtue of being performed by old-bodied people (therein already transgressive) could be read through a queer lens as kink. As Joan Nestle writes, “At sixty-seven my mother still wanted sex and made jokes about what she could do when she didn’t have her teeth in” (1984: 90). What is pertinent for Nestle here is not the possibility of a queer reading. It is the story of the hard-won right to sexual freedom that her working class, Jewish, heterosexual mother carved into existence.

99 This is a way of understanding (and therefore being sensitive to) a distinction between queer hermeneutics of everyday sexual life and a feminist political account of the personal and the sexual which especially stresses the importance of race, class, ethnicity and religion. Queer hermeneutics, in my view, should not (and does not necessarily) avoid acknowledging these fundamental everyday economies of lived experience.
An articulation of ageing bodies as sexual bodies is heavily countered by notions of beauty that are firmly embedded in the idealistic notion of a non-ageing, non-pathologised body. Global consumerist cultures (particularly including advertising media and lifestyle/pornographic/fashion media) ply the everyday messages that valorise young, fit, healthy, normatively-abled bodies which are also raced and classed and categorised to hierarchical capitalist conventions. As Barry Adam says in his article on age preferences of gay and bisexual men:

Even a cursory glance at the images of men that circulate widely in the gay press and in gay pornography shows the overwhelming preponderance of a youth-ful (sic) ideal of male beauty. White men in their twenties and early thirties are predominant in these images ... Brian Pronger argues ... that the continual reproduction of these images constitutes “body fascism”, whereby gay and bisexual men are constantly reminded of and held to a standard that colonizes their desires and negates the diversity of their bodies ... In this respect, of course, gay culture is not much different from the environing society, in which the ideals of youthfulness and body fascism fall especially heavily on heterosexual women (2000: 416).

One could suggest, therefore, that a person reaches a point of consciousness about their own ageing process when the fact of their own body changing (I give specific examples in a moment) becomes noticeably at odds with dominant and normative standards of beauty and sexiness. I call this an interstitial juncture between moments of recognising what “was a sexy body” and “what can no longer” be permitted as one, while simultaneously recognising how the development of a resistant queer kink sensibility will subvert that dominant age-sexuality narrative.

**Menopause – A Kinked Conversation**

A kink sensibility, incorporating the kinked bodies of self and others, requires that the body is conversant; it is in this rich territory of queer corporeal communication that reading and re-de-scribing of the kink body will occur.

People talk in jest about the mind “going” but the body still “being there”; they also talk about the body “going” and the mind still “being there”. This type of clichéd and superficial body-narrative found within popular discourse of age becomes interesting if we pause to consider where the mind and body can actually go, or where else they can be. Also, this disjuncture (of a mind and a body as well as the sexy body and the not-allowed-to-be sexy body) is supported by medical discourse which lays out any number of health-related ageing

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100 In Chapter Five I discuss the term “nunc stans” after Hannah Arendt (1978) in relation to sense perception and self-consciousness. By drawing on the phenomena of human embodied orgasm I reveal how the interstice of knowing and not-knowing one’s body provides a corporeality (or we could say “a carnality”) to the theorising of queer sensibility.
scenarios. These are typically pathologised and have a teleological trajectory beginning with function and ending with dysfunction.

The phenomenon of brain death is one example of how Western medicine, especially, separates the mind and body. As Katie Dobbs says, after Margaret Lock (2002): “Brain-death is “an invention of the West” that developed in response to the increased demand for organ procurement” (Dobbs, 2007: 1). In this notion of what we can call a Cartesian “container-body”, the brain is considered dead but the body and the rest of its organs are (without any apparent conflict between life and selfhood) very much alive.

The “death” of the uterus through old age is a similar but reverse notion of this mind and body separation. Medical discourse also constructs another disjuncture: of body from body, as if the uterus or vagina, for example, have lifespans that are naturally (yet incongruously) “outside” of the lifespan of the rest of the body. In other words, the female (whole) body may have an approximate lifespan of 0-87 years but the uterine lifespan is configured (menstrually only) at approximately 48 years (between around 12 to 60 years of age). The uterus, therefore, is given a half-life in comparison to the whole body, even when it exists within the whole body’s lifespan. The medically inscribed lifespan means that the uterus's “place” in the whole body, as sexual flesh (for example, it is not passive during orgasm) is ignored.

Popular everyday body-narratives also construct certain axioms which connect age and the body in vague, yet easy, uncritical and non-sexual terms. If we consider the phrases previously mentioned, that the mind has gone but the body is still there or vice versa (commonly spoken as idioms: “having, or having lost, one’s marbles”, being “over the hill” or having a “willing mind but weak flesh”), we can ask how the possession of the “dysfunctional” part can be re-de-scribed by, in, on, and through the queer kink body.

To re-de-scribe the supposedly dystopian narrative of the “ag-ed” body that includes, for example: floppy triceps, drooping eyelids, top lips that create  


102 See also Martin (1991) for an analysis of gender bias, atomism and anthropomorphic rhetoric in medical discourse of the egg and the sperm.
perfect channels for lipstick to capillary up, fading or straining eyesight and hearing, memory loss, elasticity loss, skin that offers less and less resistance to gravity, joint stiffness, menopause, gland enlargement, gland shrinkage, artificial body parts, implants and so on, we can utilise the notion of the “describing body”.

Rather than the body being represented solely as surface to be inscribed and re-inscribed (where socio-cultural events and dominant norms discursively and physically do to the body) we can investigate how living in and with an ageing kink body can project another message outwards, converse with self and others, and refuse normative embodiment convention (in this case sexual). In other words, the aged kinkster will un-subscribe from and challenge the unsexy dystopia of ageing norms. A simple example of this is kinking menopause, wherein the actual menopausal body speaks (in functional, everyday, and carnal, sexual or erotic terms) for itself about what it is, what it does and what it can do.

A woman who queers menopause can understand a 45, 65, or 100 day menstrual cycle (or non-cyclic or staggered menstrual events) as normatively as she can understand the “standard” norm of a 28 day cycle. If she is herself menopausal, she can re-describe what medical discourse calls “symptoms” as part of her normal existence. For instance, she may see hot flushes not as being symptoms, but as being personally contextualised bodily experiences that she can interpret in any way she sees fit: differently at different times, and sometimes erotically.

The dominant characterisation of menopause is shrouded with a narrative of “ending”:

- the end of youth
- the end of fertility and of the possibility of being a usefully productive body
- the end of bleeding
- the end of sex
- the end of the life of the uterus and ovaries.

Implications from this are:

- that the pre-menopausal woman will have the temporary-sexual-body
- that the peri-menopausal woman will have the crisis-of-transition-body
- that the menopausal woman will have the tragedy-of-loss-body
that the post menopausal woman will have the not-able-to-be-sexy-body.

I emphasise the word “have” because medical narratives assertively “give”, thus inscribe, the knowledge of the body onto embodied subjects by virtue of medical categorisation and scientific authority. The medically/procreationally scripted life of the uterus and ovaries (running along the lines of: latent, potential, functional, productive, successful, unused, failing, exhausted, useless, redundant and dysfunctional) also annexes the horror associated with “menopausal” symptoms (such as vaginal dryness) which also represent a teleological end point for other associated aged body parts such as (in the example of dryness) the once functional but medically/procreationally constructed vagina.

The dissenting, sexually radical menopausal body becomes one which has a “conversation” with social forces and expectations and refuses the medical narrative. It will not have a body; it will be a body. The radical menopausal woman may in the first instance do away with pre-, peri-, and post- anything. She might refuse to have a medical body given to her and prefer to be the body that allows for an expansive self-scripting as it evolves rather than be narrowly inscribed upon. A queerly kinked perspective of menopause allows this and disrupts the Western teleological and linear narrative of medical discourse; there are bodily happenings which can be re-narrativised in this way. Instead of a hot flush being the moment when an uncontrollable bodily otherness occurs as a temporary disabling or unwanted signification of sexual “over-the-hill-ness”, the flush can be eroticised, fetishised, welcomed.

The flush, flash or power surge can be embraced, and even controlled to a certain extent by the menopausal kink-sexual subject, who can disclose the fact

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103 The “horror” seems to me to be a product of a medical discourse that is wedded to a privileged heterosexual male gaze; one in which hegemonic hetero-masculinity is constructed in part by having to bear little or no responsibility to ensure sex acts are well lubricated, but every investment in reading women as feminine and sexually attractive. For whom does the horror exist? Certainly Robert Wilson’s book *Feminine Forever* (1966) is a well-cited source for circulating the horror narrative which has been critiqued by many feminists. See McKinlay & Jeffries (1974), Seaman & Seaman (1978), Reitz (1977) and Zita (1993: especially page 62). The notion that a pre-menopausal vagina will be slippery because it is pre-menopausal rather than because its “owner” is sexually aroused is somewhat myth-like considering the innumerate and individual factors which induce a vagina to produce its own lubricant. Why is it that a vagina should in any sexual event be expected to produce enough lubrication, for comfortable penetrative acts (for the vagina owner especially) to occur? It may not, which begs the retort, “And so?...” Vaginas of bodies that are active in sex over hours will not keep producing copious amounts of lubrication nor will vaginas that have been surgically constructed. There are many ways in which a vagina could be considered “dry” but none which a bottle of artificial lubrication will not aid. Of all the “menopausal symptoms” which are widely registered in a cultural context, it seems that vaginal dryness is the most monstrous yet the easiest to alleviate. Having said this, no amount of lubricant will induce a vagina to be receptive to penetration if the person being penetrated is not consenting.

104 Claiming one’s own non-pathologised words for menopausal phenomena that are utterly personal, self-embodied, powerful (emotional, physical, spiritual, mental) experiences or “body events” is one way of literally re-describing the
of having a flush within a kinked erotic play-scene. In this setting, being in a regulated sexual realm has consequences for the menopausal flusher, which will ensue depending on the “rules” of the game.

To explain, I first turn to the “sex wars” within feminist theory. Emerging from that dispute was a pro-BDSM articulation of the ways in which power was “played with”. One of the early examples of this is written by Susan Farr in her discussion of how household chores become much more exciting when domestic labour is negotiated within a kink context. Farr says:

Another playful use of discipline in our relationship is as a motivator. It can convert drudgery into cheerful slavery: ‘You wash the kitchen floor today or else…’ What was simply onerous is now erotic. And it can highlight the importance of doing some task long postponed: ‘I want you to renew your driver’s licence by the end of the week or you’ll face a licking’. What was a lonely burden is now shared. The expression of dominance is also an assumption of responsibility. The acceptance of submission is also an agreement to act (Farr, 1987: 186).

The theorising of power relations in a sexual context has centred understandably on the dismantling of hetero-patriarchal conceptions of power, and theorists such as Tania Modleski have used Farr’s commentary on the use of BDSM power exchange in a domestic context to discuss the issue of consent. Modleski concluded:

It seems obvious that in the context of a same-sex relationship the playful threats ‘enforcing’ the completion of domestic duties, everyday tasks, etc., may take on a different meaning from the one they would posses in the context of most male/female relations where such threats, if uttered seriously, would have the weight of male physical and economic power behind them (Modleski, 1991: 154).

If we take Modleski’s use of the notion of a different meaning (read un-subscription) and relocate it towards the sexual hegemony of medical discourse, it is easy to follow on from Farr’s domestic illustration and envisage how a kinked sexual game of menopause could be played out and articulated. Even in the most simple, didactic sense, a comment like, “If you have another flush again and sweat all over that clean shirt you’ll be in trouble,” allows sex-positive “flush dialogue” and importantly, an other (than normative) mode of expression about menopause.

dominant norm. The term “power surge” is prominently “spoken” on the front cover of the book Menopause: A Mid-life Passage (Callahan, 1993).

The “sex wars” is a term used to describe the particularly intense feminist debates, that took place in the nineteen eighties. The seminal moment occurred at the 1982 Barnard Conference on sexuality. (The Scholar and The Feminist 1X Conference, “Towards a Politics of Sexuality”, April 24 1982 at Barnard College, New York City). The debates centred on two main issues: pornography and lesbian S/M sexual practice. For historical accounts of this “war” see Creet (1991), Jay (1995: especially page 7) and B. L. Ross (2000).

Agency in submission is assumed here; the comment could be articulated a number of ways, however, both dominant and submissive. For example: “If I have another flush and sweat all over this shirt will I (read as can I) be punished?” Or, “If I wreck this shirt with hot-flush sweat you’d better get it laundered back to perfection.”
**Kinking The Wrinkle**

As previously noted, I utilise “queer” as a qualifier to kink in this chapter. Although kink can be defined as a psycho-sexual-erotic playing field which is associated with BDSM and sex activism or sexual exploration or sex radicalism, there is nevertheless a way of looking at its conceptual borders (as we have done with bisexual and queer bisexual meanings) that assists with a deeper examination of what a queer qualifier means and how a queer qualifier can be discussed.

There are rigidities within the kink communities, in the sense that there are in fact practices of “normative kink”. A kinkster may be into a particular kind of kink practice, such as water sports\(^{107}\) or spanking or piercing,\(^{108}\) but they may also not extend their stretching of sexgender boundaries any further than that specific practice. This in itself is a comfortable, stabilising way to “be” in the world, for some people.

The emphasis I place on *queer* kink relates to its conceptual location: added to those fixed practices and emerging from the normative borders of kink culture is an interstitial knowledge space. That space allows the development and refinement of a queer kink sensibility. Thus the qualifier “queer” produces the conceptual space to question and challenge orthodoxies of knowledge. It also acts as a pointer to the sourcing, or the “where to know”, and “how to know”, about threshold knowledges of kink.

The further “away” from normative constructions of sexgender, sexual relationships and embodiment that kink practices can be cast, the more queerly kinked they become. There are, then, expansive continuations of *knowledge* (concepto-lingual blooms) that can influence the way a person approaches and understands their kink.

One of the endearingly creative features of kink practice is the use of role play and the fetishisation of cultural-sexual taboo. In popular sex-discourse the ageing body is sexually antithetical to the youthful one. An age kink – a fetishisation of the ageing process and its signs on the body – deploys a beauty myth critique par excellence, and for this reason I use it as an example here.

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107 “Water sports” is a kink/BDSM colloquialism for micturition and urine play.

108 Such as the temporary insertion of up to hundreds of needles in a play session.
Despite the overwhelmingly sex-negative portrayals of the ageing body, there are BDSM, fetishistic and kink celebrations of the body which will offer ways to rethink, see and perform the sexual body, particularly the ageing one.

Ag-ed patrons of professionally owned dungeons might use (or have put to use) their explicitly ag-ed features as the sites through which the ag-ed sexual/erotic body attains pleasure. Deafness and weak knees, for example, can be used as fodder for D/s\textsuperscript{109} dynamics.\textsuperscript{110}

As well as a radical politics of menopause, other examples of re-describing ageing body processes can be located around narratives of the horror of dry skin, and dryness in general, and saggy skin. If we take sagginess first and look at the saggy triceps, in a kink context, one could find the instance of saggy triceps to be highly valued. The common BDSM practice of applying clothes pegs to the underside of the upper arm is easier on an “ag-ed”, loosely-skinned arm than a youthful, taught one.

Sagginess of any body part can be eroticised, and in a kink setting this can take the form of over-exaggerating the negative connotation as a means of humiliation in a D/s scene, or it can be in the form of overt admiration for the saggy part. This of course may also be a humiliation tactic which plays on a mixed message, given that few of us are unaware of the dominant beauty myth that sagginess is a “shameful” thing to have.

Outside of a D/s framework, kinksters who are well-used to playing with the materiality of the body in this “role-play” way are particularly suited to then read the conversant aged body as sexy and/or erotic. A set of values which at heart centres on trust, is what kink practitioners utilise.

Kinksters have to be especially “tuned-in” to a notion of connected-ness and the spiritual energy of selves that take physical, sexual and emotional risks. Heightened use of the senses, awareness of conscious states, communication and play-partnership are so important in kink relations (which include the

\textsuperscript{109} In BDSM and kink culture, D/s is the common abbreviation for dominance and submission.; the capitalised “D” and lower-case “s” literally signifying the dynamic.

\textsuperscript{110} See Klehr (2004) for a real-life example of the ag-ed corporeality (the deafness and sore knees especially) of an eighty year old, which itself becomes the play material for a BDSM scene.
possibility of being stripped bare)\textsuperscript{111} that only a scant or utilitarian regard for the dominant sexy body-norm is afforded.

The simple movement of a saggy body part can also be seen to have extra pendulous properties or new possibilities for elasticism, which means that possibilities for stretching and manipulation are more available. What is lost in elastic retractive (the springing back of skin into place) is made up for or gained in sagginess. Given that there is a taboo on the imperfect (for example “old”) body being involved in sexual and erotically charged situations, a kink culture will galvanise a re-description of how that body can enjoy itself and be enjoyed.

The ageing of skin provides play material in kink settings. There are well-known changes of the skin as it gets older – blemishes and growths, wrinkles, loss of elasticity and dryness, to name a few. Skin is a very readable surface, one of the immediate visual signifiers of age. I have already discussed this in terms of medico-biological discourse. From a cosmetic perspective, dryness seems particularly disturbing and moisturising products are not just jars of cream, they are sophisticated technologies. Michelle Henning writes about skin in her book chapter titled “Don’t Touch Me (I’m Electric): On Gender and Sensation in Modernity” (1999). She says:

Apparently I’m at risk. The stresses of a busy urban lifestyle, pollution and holes in the ozone layer are undermining the protective role of that important bodily organ – my skin.
Unprotected, I start to display the symptoms of an illness called ageing (1999: 17).

She goes on to say (with ironic tone) that according to contemporary cosmetic literature (advertising and women’s magazines) she can be saved just in time – she’s just about to turn thirty (\textit{Ibid.: 17}). Given the anxiety-producing popular narratives of ageing skin, the following anecdote from my own childhood falls into neat alignment with dominant ageism.

Childhood experiences of old people are ambiguous. At the same time as being informed by positive notions of old people (of loving grandparents or friendly neighbours for example), there are conflicting notions about the old body which, when associated with dryness, gesture towards the fearful world. The fleshy or

\textsuperscript{111}I do not mean literally bare (as in naked, although this is certainly a likely occurrence) but more fully “revealed” as one might be when brought to the brink of a personal limit. The intensity of kink and BDSM situations and play scenes means that vulnerabilities, strengths, capacities and erotic or carnal knowledges are shared (in profound ways) through interrelating bodies.
sexual old body may be read as decaying, but is elided in favour of its covered-up-clothed state in order not to reveal any fact of actual flesh. In Western cultures, the most common sight of old bodies in the flesh is at the beach or the swimming pool, where the dry body is displaced temporarily by an active, shining, wet, oily or creamy body. Beyond this outdoor/healthy lifestyle/shared leisure context, however, there are less active dry bodies that are not unclothed in public.

I remember staying at my step-grandparent’s, house in the school holidays where my siblings and I had a standing fear/joke linked to the octogenarian great grandmother who dwelled mostly in isolation upstairs – none of us wanted to go into the bathroom after she’d been in there because she would leave the toilet seat speckled with pale flakes of dry skin. Our own youthful, skins would crawl at the sight of it and yet we’d all clamber up the stairs to have a look if we knew she’d been in there! We had a morbid fascination for the body that in our view was literally falling apart.

Strong negative connotations about the ageing body that abound in popular culture and everyday experience merely become fuel for the queerly kinked erotic realm; the “worst” popular narratives providing the most obvious space for counter-narrative. When is the notion of dryness an incentive to be creative about ways to get slippery, if indeed dryness itself is not utilised as a vehicle for the erotic? If dryness itself is not used as a vehicle for the erotic, it provides an incentive to be creative about ways to get slippery; conversely and equally however, is the possibility to view dryness as preferable to clammy, dank, sticky alternatives.

Role-play scenarios that include (for example) mummy/girl or granny/girl kink dynamics can also broaden our understandings of aged bodies as sexual bodies. The way age can be configured in kink role play is interesting for the complex tensions it creates around dismantling conventional understandings of the aged body.

112 Countless role-play scenarios can be employed in erotic and sexual settings. The roles of family characters that are utilised in kink culture are numerous and the configurations are only limited by the imagination. For recent cross-disciplinary analyses of kink and BDSM which include perspectives on role play see Langridge & Barker (2007) and Kleinplatz & Moier (2006, 2005).
In the mummy/girl, or granny/girl dynamic, there are two main taboos being toyed with: the incest taboo and the inter-generational sex taboo. With this dynamic the generational gap can be as wide or as narrow as the players wish. A mummy/girl scene, for example, brings into the foreground an eroticised and/or sexualised combination of youth and old age. And common to much kink role play the out-of-role-body becomes displaced by the in-role-body through which a scene is acted out; the out-of-role-body, by necessity, being displaced by the in-role-body.

This kind of kink practice disrupts the normative notions of “age parity” between the out-of-role body and the in-role-body, allowing pre-play bodies to become and occupy any of an infinite range of role-play bodies, all of which are eroticised. That disruption is productive in that it transmutes the body; from being written on (via sexual hegemony), to being written by and with.

Apart from the literal older body in mummy/girl dynamics where the “mummy” is in fact played by a pre-play older body, one must remember that young bodies can also take on the role of aged person; likewise the older pre-play body can take on the role of younger person or even child or baby. In this way the eroticised performance of age codes becomes a skill or queer art form in which age is represented not by the out-of-role-body but by the action, attitude, sense, energy, movement, dialogue and so on of the in-role-body.

The displacement of the out-of-role-body dispenses with the normative correlation between a person’s birth-date age and their body, and this creates a conceptual space in which birth-date age is irrelevant, as well as an ontological space where being any age can be adopted by the body. Another conceptual tension that the role-playing body elicits, is that an old pre-play body (role-playing a young body, that interacts with a young pre-play body (role-playing an old body) can just as easily, in another play scene, become two old bodies or two young bodies.

Of course, other dynamics can include daddies, granddaddies, aunties, uncles and other family relatives. Any construction of aged persons that has potential for taboo can be utilised in queer kink.
With these skilled, age-role-play methods, kink sensibility combines the body as erotic material with an insistent and radical disruption of normative ways to appreciate the body. It is upon, through, within and from the body that the beauty/age myth is expelled in favour of another construction of age that is tailored not to societal norms but to individual design and desire.

Although I have been careful to separate beauty and sexiness to avoid a conflation between the two (whereby the dominant assumption is that a sexual/sexy body must be beautiful and/or functioning to norms of standardised able-bodied-ness or non-pathology), it is also useful to combine them. For instance, in dominance and submission it doesn’t really matter where the out-of-role-body sits in relation to a standardised notion of beauty; beauty itself is displaced by the charge\footnote{This forms what we could call the poetics of queer interstitial sensibility. In Chapters Five and Six I examine other sexually and/or erotically charged scenes that further articulate the notion of interstitial sensibility. In Chapter Seven I illustrate how a poetics of being and queerness are elements of queer askesis – a transformative queer self.} of the play scene.

The submitting or dominating body, whether it is weak, flaky, dry, quivering, strong, stern, wet or embodied in any number of ways, can “speak itself” as beautiful (if it desires to “speak” this at all) through these flesh states but certainly it “speaks itself” as sexual on its own terms. In other words, the normative location of sexiness in and by the body is translocated through queer sensibility into the powerful kink or BDSM play relationships, dynamics, and processes of embodied carnal challenge.

I will return to queer kink sensibility in Chapter Five in order to make conceptual links with the “grounded” sense of queer kink practices as I have demonstrated them here. The following chapter provides an empirical basis for the consequent theory of queer being which will apply the notion of real, queer, embodied, social practices to a wider concept of an ethics of self.
CHAPTER THREE
A Grounded Approach: Queerness And The Everyday

This chapter has a somewhat mnemonic function in the thesis. Before further developing the phenomenological, epistemological and metaphysical theories of queer being (that begin in Chapter Five), this chapter serves another purpose. It acts as a reminder to look out for, and to remember, the practical and lived foundations which are a useful precursor to any theory of being. Supported by the realities of everyday non-normative sexgender existence, this chapter grounds notions of oppression\(^{114}\) and personal politics, as lived hardships, challenges and practicalities, for non-heteronormative people.

As I wrote in the introduction, I had always understood queer theory as a liberationist theory. The implication of this (at least in my own view), is that people in queer (and/or LGBTIQ*) communities are “especially” knowledgeable (or cognisant in particular ways), about homophobia and discrimination (which can be read as two elements of oppression). It follows then, that they are also knowledgeable of (and have an affinity for) ways to live – to “be”, and more importantly, for my analysis to come, to “be queer”– in these everyday oppressive conditions.

In order to translate this cognisance, the signs of which emerge commonly in everyday language (gossip and phatics are examples), from being a phenomenon that I individually noticed (as a queer person moving freely in many of those “communities”), to a more general and collective account on which a theory of the queer interstice could be built, I collected the personal narratives of a range of people within LGBTIQ* communities. By acknowledging and interpreting those narratives, this chapter shows how general responses about non-normative sexgender issues can also be read for the possibilities from which a development of queer being may occur. This “development” will be extended in the next chapter, but first I will illuminate the general responses, in terms of what they record about an ontology of queer* everyday experience.

There is a common-sense yet poignant acknowledgement to be made here: that “the general” or self-evident, obvious, ordinariness of being underlies (or indeed

\(^{114}\) The term “oppression” is not used to simply imply that queers are always downtrodden. Rather, the terms “oppression” and “survival” are both elaborated upon during this chapter in relation to an activist or strategic way of living in the everyday.
surrounds or interweaves with), “the specific”. That is, the special and particularly unique experience of the specific. The relevant generality of oppression and queerphobia (queers are similarly discriminated against) runs axiomatically throughout this thesis in tandem with the specificity of queer difference (queer people are also different from each other). Hence, I turn to Eve Sedgwick’s introduction to _Epistemology of the Closet_ (1990), which gives a precise articulation of the self-evident fact that people are vastly different from each other, even when they are seemingly alike. Sedgwick points out that the lack of conceptual tools to understand the differences between us, casts each of us as (almost) a different species – something which must be learned, survived and known in particular ways in order to map our social landscapes (1990: 22-23).

I do not want to cast queers as a different “species” from a “general” community (the “gay community”, for example) but I do want to highlight the specificities of queerness even when the closet (for example) exists for “queers” and “gays” alike. Sedgwick says:

> It is probably people with the experience of oppression or subordination who have most need to know it; and I take the precious, devalued arts of gossip, immemorially associated in European thought with servants, with effeminate and gay men, with all women, to have to do not even so much with the transmission of necessary news as with the refinement of necessary skills for making, testing, and using unreasoned and provisional hypotheses about what kinds of people there are to be found in one’s world (Ibid.: 23, italics in original).

I have always been struck by the demonstrability of this obvious phenomenon, and have considered it a good reason to theorise sexuality, identity and multiple “kinds of being”. However, when Sedgwick uses the term “probably”, we can see that the self-evident fact of oppression does not always have to be systematically argued, but can simply be explained and revealed. This chapter acts similarly: to divulge and impart the notion of a generality of oppression. Sedgwick makes use of the general, and the probable, in a way that is nonetheless wary of making generalisations about groups of people. I think of this as a necessary tension in queer theories.

In her book _Tendencies_ (1993), written cotermously with _Epistemology of the Closet_ (1990) – they were published three years apart – Sedgwick speaks of the broad denial (in the USA), of knowledge about queer life; and death. She uses the example of suicide among lesbian and gay adolescents, to make the point.
that “seemingly this society wants its children to know nothing; wants its queer children to conform or (and this is not a figure of speech) die; and wants not to know that it is getting what it wants” (1993: 2-3). We can see from Sedgwick’s following remarks, how this single phenomenon relates to the “general and probable” notion that queer* being is inexorably tied to “survival” – not just shrouded in a sad and risky viewpoint, but also in gleeful, creative, defiant and complicated ways. Sedgwick says:

This history makes its mark on what, individually, we are and do. One set of effects turns up in the irreducible multilayerdness and multiphasedness of what queer survival means – since being a survivor on this scene is a matter of surviving into threat, stigma, the spiralling violence of gay- and lesbian-bashing, and (in the AIDS emergency) the omnipresence of somatic fear and wrenching loss. It is also to have survived into a moment of unprecedented cultural richness, cohesion, and assertiveness for many lesbian and gay adults. Survivors’ guilt, survivors’ glee, even survivors’ responsibility: powerful as these are experienced, they are also more than complicated by how permeable the identity “survivor” must be to the undiminishing currents of risk, illness, mourning, and defiance. Thus I’m uncomfortable generalizing about people who do queer writing and teaching, ... but some effects do seem widespread (Ibid.: 3, first italicisation added).

The tension around using generalities is explicit in this chapter although it is not theorised; it surfaces here as the “probable” backdrop (unfortunately reliable) which is explained and revealed as a “scene” in which queers are oppressed generally, and also in specific material ways. This grounded premise supports a theory of queer askesis that situates “survival” as a strategised way of being, or an art form: it is a theory of that phenomenon, which will emerge subsequently.

The tension around using generalities is also the reason why I must situate the more abstract theoretical claims in this thesis, in the diverse specificities of queer realities as they are lived by individuals doing the work of surviving in a queer-phobic world.

**Queer* Voices: The Questionnaire**

I will now outline the research methods that were utilised in this qualitative part of the analysis. Following this, I shall briefly map out the context of sexgender non-normativity, as it will relate to the empirical material, before moving on to the details of questionnaire responses themselves. As I have already stated, this empirical material was not intended to supply statistical or quantitative data for testing, but a breadth of viewpoints to inform a theory of being.

The aim was to elicit general responses about sexgender issues (which are discussed below) from two target groups which I have separated into this, and
the following chapter. In this chapter, I focus on one target group: the attendees of pride fair days from six different Australian states or territories who were asked to fill out a take-home questionnaire. Pride fair days or “fair days” as they are often termed here in Australia, are events that attract large numbers of people from the LGBTIQ* community/ies to come together in a “safe space” to enjoy the freedom of attending a large scale public event. For this reason I considered them a good site to collect a breadth of viewpoints.

Fair days are often patronised by particularly diverse gatherings because of the wide range of leisure/political activities that are available. In major cities (such as Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Perth) these day-long events are provided annually in a designated central metropolitan park. The activities range from picnicking with friends and families, to staged entertainment (music, shows, competitions, political speeches and so on), merchandising, the sale of food and drinks, leafletting, community surveys, community support, displays and promotions of specific clubs, groups and associations and so on. The atmosphere usually has a festival, and goodwill, “feel”. Always popular are events like the dog show in which it is not uncommon to see fluffy pink lapdogs, bandana wearing mongrels and dressy owners parading to the crowd. But also popular, are the give-away condoms and safe-sex packs, or the children’s animal petting arena. There is a seemingly unproblematic contrast between the ostentatious and the subtle, the sexual and the non-sexual, as well as politics (the reason for “pride” itself is the political reminder of “oppression”) and

115 Without specific research funding to include a wider selection of groups incorporating all eight states and territories of Australia (especially that could include remote or rural communities) these target groups were selected on the basis of per capita mass, and/or accessibility, and the thesis research schedule. I did not want to exclude any fair day events, and neither did I wish to make my selections arbitrary. I was particularly limited however, to researching the communities that were at my disposal in a practical sense. I devised the questionnaires for approval by the Murdoch University Ethics Committee in 2004. During 2004/5 the questionnaires were given out. Tasmania and the Northern Territory could not be included for two reasons. One was that their long distance from Western Australia contributed to my own lack of local knowledge of their LGBTIQ* communities. This was significant in terms of my ability to establish contact with organizers of fair days. My use of email contacts, and web sites, that were available through the internet, were successful in establishing the fact that actually, there were no specific organizing committees for GLBTIQ* fair days. Tasmania and the Northern Territory (at that time) did not advertise fair day events although there were some GLBT support groups who organized political and small scale social events. The second reason is that large metropolitan LGBTIQ* communities are well established, and have secured to varying degrees, the financial support of public sector or state funding. They are able to promote large-scale fair days in ways that smaller, rural and/or isolated communities are not. The Canberra fair day for example, is a very small event compared to the Melbourne or Sydney fair days. The city of Canberra is situated in the smallest of the nation’s states or territories (the Australian Capital Territory), and its Queer* population is small. The reason I was able to canvass the Canberra event was that it coincided with the timing of other East Coast events that I was scheduled to attend and it was also en route (travelling from the West coast to the East, through Canberra, is not a detour). I also had local knowledge of the LGBTIQ* community and was able to ascertain the exact nature of the event before I travelled there (for example that it was going to take place even in the event of rain, and that the venue was accessible). Had the location of the Canberra fair day been as distant from Western Australia as Tasmania or the Northern Territory, it is likely that it too (because of its small sized fair day event) would not have been included. The Brisbane fair day research offers a contrasting practical perspective. The Brisbane fair day is held in Queensland, and is several thousand kilometers away from Western Australia (in fact it is the furthest away from Western Australia, than any other State or Territory), but on this occasion, I was fortunate to already have contacts there. Thus I was able to establish that the Brisbane fair day was a large-scale event: well organized, well supported and vibrant, where I could expect several hundreds of people in attendance.
pleasure (the enjoyment and freedom of a visible “family” – queers* of many ages and types, at leisure, en mass).\footnote{116}{One particular moment I remember at the Perth Pride Fair Day in 2006 was when a drag queen, holding hands with his young son, walked down the pathway to buy an ice-cream. This in itself is not an especially remarkable incident at a fair day (lots of people are in drag and there are lots of differently aged family cohorts ranging from babies to the very old) but when the two walked back, it was the young boy who wore the wig, and the large fake pearl necklace and clomped along in over-sized, high-heeled shoes while he ate his ice-cream. Again, this is still not especially remarkable for what it actually was (two people going to get an ice-cream, wearing whatever they liked) but it is a way of revealing and understanding how queer family practices (which may be considered freakish or non-permissible in a heteronormative space of “elsewhere”) are normalised as “everyday-ness-es”, and legitimated at fair day.}

**The Questionnaire**

Nine hundred questionnaires were handed out and there was a ten percent reply rate overall\footnote{117}{See Appendix i for a duplicate of the questionnaire.} (that is, I am drawing upon ninety questionnaires). Two hundred each were distributed in the more highly populated cities of Sydney and Melbourne. One hundred and fifty each were distributed in Perth, Adelaide and Brisbane and fifty were distributed in Canberra which held a very small event. All respondents could answer anonymously and all had the option to fill out the questionnaire privately in their own time.\footnote{118}{See appendix ii which provides the return rate figures and the basic demographic statistics.}

As I have stressed before, numerical and demographic statistics were not intended to be analysed as part of this research, and there are numerous ways in which this data could be contextualised and interpreted. Having said this, it is interesting from a methodological point of view, to note that that Canberra’s return rate was the highest at twenty six percent. The opportunity to talk in depth, with people who took the questionnaire, was a result of attending a small event. This may have influenced people’s willingness to complete and return the questionnaire.\footnote{119}{At the Canberra fair day, I had the time to engage people in conversation about my work and attract their interest in the project in a way that I was not able to do at the other large-scale events. Having said this, there were other factors that could also have influenced the overall return rate, such as the sudden downpour of rain at the Sydney fair day which meant people were leaving in droves as I was giving out questionnaires, or the fact that at some events the consumption of drugs and alcohol was a more common practice than at others and, like the rain, dampened people’s enthusiasm for a university research project. For example, there was no bar at the Canberra event, but in contrast, the Perth fair day raises considerable revenue from a well-attended bar facility which helps to offset the huge costs of organising the event in a city-central location where municipal and insurance regulations require a massive financial outlay. Also the fact that the questionnaires were handed out at random, meant that there was no specific methodological bias affecting the return rate in relation to demographics.}

The questionnaire consisted of 36 questions about sexuality, gender, identity, LGBTIQ* rights, public and private space, culture, sexual practices, embodiment, terminology, and the notion of community. Participants were invited to make their answers as fulsome as they wished and this was significant in terms of the overwhelmingly common feature of the responses: most people
gave confidently “languaged” descriptions of their feelings and experiences of oppression and discrimination, yet (and I will come back to this issue in the discussion), there seemed to be a less willing (certainly discomfort about), use of available language and knowledge about the diversity of queer, radical, or non-normative sexuality and ways of being.

The questionnaire research provides a critical point of entry into a sexgender “conversation” about how sexgender regulation within Australian (and more generally, other Western) societies is perceived within LGBTIQ* communities. What the questionnaires partially revealed are the personal views of LGBTIQ* people and their allies; this acts as an invitation to consider how these people may understand or have knowledges of a queer periphery or conceptualise non-normative margins. The extent to which some communities might be considered sub-cultures (for example, transgender, queer, transensual and kink) and how they manifest as “real” (or not) is revealed in the general responses from people attending the LGBTIQ* fair days. The ensuing discussion of these responses illustrates how complex and sophisticated concepts of, from, and about, marginalised groups of people, operate within a Western social climate that continually discriminates against non-normative expressions of gender and sexuality. This provides at least one reason to emphasise the notion of a concepto-lingual bloom as a practical heuristic. Articulating queer bisexuality (as we saw in Chapter Two) is one example of the practice of adding to a sexgender “knowledge-pool”.

Since the “data” (which I prefer to read as moments of personal comment) has not been collated for quantitative statistical testing, I have concentrated on particular issues about lived reality that emerged as significant themes in the questionnaire replies.

Two main issues are:

- A “living knowledge” of queer*-phobia (that is, a fear of otherness where “otherness” can be perceived generally and specifically, as any identity on the LGBTIQ* gender/sexuality spectrum.
- Normativity in relation to sexuality and sexual behaviour.

The contexts of these two issues relate to the “being of everyday-otherness”. The lived-in sensibility of what otherness feels like and means, can be revealed through the everyday language that people use (for example, in anonymous
questionnaire replies), which enables a general understanding of the vacillations of non-normative subjectivity.

**A Living Knowledge Of Homophobia, Transphobia And “Fear Of Otherness”**

Within all queer*-phobic societies there are particular “living knowledges” and “living conditions” of people who are sexgender non-normative. These particularities vary considerably but they are especially distinguishable when we consider the everyday landscape that connects to political consciousness and sexgender knowledge dissemination.

Queers* are oppressed everyday by a queer*-phobia that is grounded in the popular fear of (sexgender) otherness. As we shall see in a moment, comments made by questionnaire respondents illustrate this very clearly. But this is an “oppression” that exists because discrimination exists, not because queers* especially recognise and/or assume a position of subordination. In this sense we can understand a distinction between “being oppressed everyday” and an “everyday oppression”.

The term, “everyday”, has become so “everyday” that its literal reference to each and every separate day has become attenuated by the generalisation of its own specificity. The “everyday” can simply mean the general, and this is not explicitly an every day phenomenon. When queers experience everyday oppression, they do experience it every single day by virtue of simply existing in a queer*-phobic world.

As I have noted, this is not to say that knowledge of oppression each day means feeling oppressed (in the sense of feeling downtrodden), all the time, though certainly some queers* can feel this. It means that when queers* wake up each day, their very being-ness always already knows certain things: they know that everyday social life is structured against their ease of being.

Queers* know, for example, that if they cross-dress they will be unsafe on some streets, on some public transport, at certain times of the day (which are not necessarily quiet, dark, and thinly populated). They know that the popular media will negatively stereotype and ridicule them; they know that there is national debate about same-sex marriage and the suitability of gays and lesbians
let alone “queers”, to raise families; they know that heteronormative people are bemused by their existence - if not ignorant or prejudiced against them; they know that the discourse of their otherness threatens many people; they know that in some countries, people are tortured and murdered for being queer*, trans* or homosexual, and they know that here in Australia – where the legal rights of LGBTIQ* people have improved thanks to the tenacious efforts of queer* law reformers and lobbyists and activists – the closet still operates with a vengeance.

Queers* know what energy it takes to articulate their queer* sexgendered selves. For some queers*, this articulation is a relentless battle with heteronormativity and queer*-phobia. But it is an engagement with a shifting terrain that calls for strategised or negotiated everyday being and uses the “tools” of everyday language to assert (for example) the queer* occupation of space. Such an example might be the “coffee table chit chat” of a professional domme who might easily include a sentence like, “a normal session in a dungeon”. Another example could come from group discussions by discerning female punters of gay-owned-and-run, on-sex venues who make “sexual language” become “everyday language” when they gather information from each other about their use and patronage of the venue which typically caters to gay men. The ascertaining of whether such a venue might be accredited with an AIDS Council or not, and how this may or may not impact on their attendance, can sit alongside discussions about whether venue owners should be obligated to provide safe sex products (for example lube, condoms, gloves, dams) or whether the onus for sexual safety is on the individual. The everydayness of discussing equipment and facilities that are “girl-user-friendly” means that the female use of gloryholes and condoms which may be unexpected by the venue owners gets forced onto a wider conversational, everyday arena.

In the last example it is not the switch from “overarching and ever-present” heteronormative space to queer* girls’ space that is specifically addressed, but the switch from gay male space to queer* girls’ space. The point to make here is about our sexual radar. The idea of queer* women using glory holes to do sexual
things with each other who can then discuss it with as much lightness as having afternoon tea together is off whose sexgender knowledge radar? 120

What queers* do with “everyday knowledge” is important, and the relationship between sexgender identity, a joyful sense of queer* being-ness, and a knowledge of oppression (which has and does lead to suicide, fatal bashing and capital punishment in the worst instances) must be underscored as one that is always contextualised by the self-evident requirement to strategise one’s living. As we have seen, this being-in-the-world can be cast as a matter of survival; the extent to which queers* can be creative (or political or knowledgeable) about that survival is shaped by the dissemination of queer* knowledges (the sharing practices of people who “most need to know” how to map their social landscape). This kind of expediency (to queer* everyday-life-being) means that queer* sexgender identity, as a topic of inquiry for the theorist, must always be rooted in the everyday and embodied “realness” of being queer*. In a general sense, we can make the claim that there is a need for activism that advocates for the sexually marginalised. The advocacy I refer to here is about hailing the possibility (akin to a gathering-us-in), to more fully and deeply understand queerness, that is to say, a queer, odd, eccentric sensibility, through an articulation of being.

Rising to the challenge of this knowledge of oppression are the educators, the risk takers, the artists, the visionaries, the political ones, the un-silenced ones, the brave ones; and amongst them are the radical queers. Queers* know that legal, social, cultural and public institutions explicitly and implicitly discriminate against them, this is a contemporary and transhistorical fact, but as I have stated, feeling oppressed and being oppressed are different to knowing everyday oppression.

Certainly, being discriminated against constitutes a form of oppression which is imbibed, as I say, in the sense of the everyday. This is simultaneously the general and explicit day-to-day oppression. The way in which queer* being-ness

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120 Two other kink, queer, or BDSM examples of this might be: 1) At a BDSM play party it may be just as easy to go up to someone and ask to be flogged, as it is to go up to someone else and ask them to pass you a drink. 2) Users of kink/BDSM sex spaces have developed standard, everyday behaviour and dress protocols, specific techniques regarding safety and behaviour so that BDSM practices are made easy in a practical and risk aware sense. A general but specific knowledge is transmitted: taught in workshops (just as easily as one might attend a heteronormative first aid course) or passed on by “learning the ropes” which could include information about safe words, hand signals, knots, bondage, circulation, states of consciousness and so on. These, and the examples above, give us a sense of the ways queer space is negotiated.
includes knowing and feeling, or sensing this everyday, is divisible of course by the infinite impersonal generalities of life, as well as personal particularities. Some of these generalities and particularities were voiced in the questionnaire responses. The following list of comments shows the variation of opinions in relation to the question, “How do you feel about GLBTQ representation in the media?”

“They always represent lesbians as super-butch”. “Voyeuristic but becoming better”. “Stereotyped”. “Mainstream depictions of lesbians tend to depict them as feminine and for the str8 male gaze”. “Under and misrepresentation”. “We are entertainment”. “If mentioned it is either weird, a male sexual fantasy or 2 women wanting to have babies together. Not all dykes want to just procreate”. “Stereotyped and derogatory”. “Exploitation”. “Anything for awareness is good, provided it is the truth”. “There’s a lot of neat lines, black and white”. “Increasingly accepted but gay characters on TV and movies are tragic, disturbed or evil characters”. “We are the ‘other’. I want to be accepted as the norm.” “Often misrepresented as the ‘acceptable’ view of gay people i.e. young, attractive, effeminate, cultured”.

These responses (as I have said earlier) reflect the general viewpoints of people attending GLBTIQ* fair days, they are not the views of specifically “radical queers”, they are however, all viewpoints from people who have an everyday knowledge of oppression. The desire for “ease” is sharply reflected in the comment, “We are the other. I want to be accepted as the norm.” Although the ubiquity of queer*-phobia makes this comment understandable, it contrasts to a queer politics which regards assimilation to hetero-norms as anathematic.

**Oppression**

If GLBTQ* people know personally about oppression, this is a way of being which involves the tensile quality of interstitial space. This is a lived reality of living in queer* sexgender space and it provides us with an important reason, in theories of being, to consistently de-neutralise (therein oppose heteronormativity) and to queer that space. Knowledge of oppression does not, on its own, ensure that queers* will by default possess a fully equipped critical thinking tool kit with which to furnish a political consciousness. However, there is by default, a threat posed by the queer subject whose act of existence or being, challenges heteronormative ideology.

A queer* person lives with this popularly conceived hetero/homo\textsuperscript{121} tension (or challenge) with or without a political consciousness so it should not be confused

\textsuperscript{121} Sedgwick challenges the general knowledge of this binary in much of her work. She calls it a “presiding master term” which permanently marks multiple social categories (1990: 11). And she also terms it “a presumptive understanding”
with the different challenge which is associated with queer political consciousness; one that explicitly challenges sexgender binaries, homo-, trans-, queer*- phobia and other sexgender-based discriminations and norms.

The popular idea (perhaps because of queer* visibility in the media, or openly queer* citizens with public profiles, or legal reform that allows some LGBIT individuals, to, for example, adopt children, or claim “same-sex” spousal privileges), that in Western culture, “gays have it good now”, conceals the ongoing continuous discriminations against queers. Discrimination is institutionalised and entrenched. What does it mean that there is “queer content” on television, that some members of parliament are “openly gay”, that homosexuality is no longer a crime in this particular Western country? As we can see from the following list, LGBTIQ* people still feel, and are acutely aware of, the continuous discriminations against them.

Below are some responses to the question, “What do you think the everyday main issues are that face LGBTIQ people today?

“Marriage rights, children and adoption”. “The closet”. “Bigotry and hypocrisy especially in the church”.

“Superannuation rights” “Homophobia – government church and community. John Howard”. “Hypocrisy in the GLBTQI community e.g. sexism, transphobia, biphobia”.

“Straight society, religious fundamentalists, violent homophobes, stupidity, fear, anxiety”. “Integration – being accepted by the mainstream community, personal safety, discrimination in all areas of society”. “Recognition of relationships – custody, hospitals, wills etc”.

“Equality – IVF access, civil partnership”. “HIV”. “Suicide”.

(1994: 115). In the former she suggests that (or hopes for some profitability from) the operations of ultimately incoherent binary definitions. In the latter, she aims to denaturalize the popular concept of the hetero/homo binary particularly because of the presumptions about what “hetero” and “homo” are; “their symmetry, their mutual impermeability or, even of their both functioning as ‘sexual identities’ in the same sense” (1994: 115). Likewise, Diana Fuss has called for “nothing less than an insistent and intrepid disorganization” of the structures which produce that inescapable logic (1991: 6). The logic that Fuss was referring to, was that homosexuality was always read as transgression against heterosexuality, and that heterosexuality was always read to be central by virtue of the fact that its authority must be resisted.

122 A local Western Australian example of putative equality (one accompanied by virulent homophobia) highlights this point. In 2005 two gay men, who even though they were granted the right to adopt a child (under the new adoption laws that granted them this right), sparked off a state-wide debate when they pursued and succeeded in this right to adopt. Media exposure of this case constructed the space for a public discourse in which the widespread opposition to this adoption was aired as a serious public and moral issue that threatened the sanctity of the “traditional family” and, “the right for a child to have one mother and one father”. The two gay men certainly did not “have it good” in the sense that the law, and the lived reality of (same-sex) parenting were not an easy match. For the details of the public debate around this issue, and other similar instances of the difficulty (because of a queer* phobic world) of implementing legal rights into the practice of queer* everyday life, see the media archive pages of the Western Australian political rights lobby group known as GALE (Gay and Lesbian Equality) at www.galewa.asn.au. (Accessed February 10th 2008). We could say that “homosexuality” in mainstream popular culture, merely provides a smoke screen of “hetero-palatable tolerance” that is easily disrupted by generally queer phobic injunctions. Television shows such as Will and Grace (Burrows, 1998-2006) or Queer Eye for the Straight Guy (Collins, 2003-2007), are examples of this “homo-acceptance”. A neologism, also adds weight to this point: the television and film genre “heterotainment” has been coined as a colloquialism in recent months. This slang term, used in GLBTIQ* communities wisely acknowledges the commodification of queer* culture for the benefit of heterosexuals who get a “kick” out of exoticising and othering queers*, it is also a wry comment on the inherent cynicism of any glib notions of homo-to-hetero equality.
Politics Of Otherness

The questionnaire comments demonstrate that there are a range of opinions about discrimination towards LGBTIQ* people. If we return to the statement, “I want to be accepted as the norm”, we can make a distinction between normative assimilation and queer anti-assimilation. The statement, “I want to be accepted as the norm” is not simply or merely the expression of assimilationist desire necessarily in ignorance of the queer critique; it could also express a desire to be able to relax, to rest awhile from the tiring queer fight, to literally centre oneself in the comfort of norms. In the sense of interstitial space, this “resting” may not be permanent, and it need not comprehensively indicate a politics of assimilation but instead it can be an indication of how alluring “normative obscurity” can seem. The ubiquitous grinding down of non-normative personhood which has its basis in heteronormative sexgender hegemony has the highly effective consequence of provoking a need (in some people) for an ease of being.

Alternatively, another person (or the same person in another moment) may steadfastly oppose assimilation to a perceived heteronormative mainstream. Queer being involves the flexibility to alter political sensibilities according to context (this might seem whimsical or fickle but it may be more accurately described as a strategic or considered means of survival/being). For example, a public display of affection123 in designated queer space is negotiated differently from how it is negotiated in non-queer space. That negotiation is informed by awareness of safety, perhaps, or one’s radical bent, but routinely, the act of queering space and the negotiation of that act (which can be mental, physical, dialogic, emotional and so on) requires expending energy. In an everyday sense, this energy expenditure can simply mean that queerness can be a drag; it can be tiring. Hence my earlier note about normalising queer acts as “easy everyday acts” at fair days: in those spaces there is simply room to relax.

Feeling Queerness Feeling Oppression

Without wanting to labour over the notion of fatigue, there is a more uplifting sense of being queer which must also be strenuously acknowledged. The disruption of normative sexgender conventions (queering) by choice rather than

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123 This is commonly termed a “PDA” in queer* slang. In Chapter Five I discuss this in further detail in relation to a drive to inhabit and occupy the “living space” of queer interstitiality.
by default (that is, from simply being queer), often occurs at the level of the everyday. This is fuelled by a desire to privilege and affirm queerness itself and also to affirm a general dissatisfaction with continuous discrimination against non-normatively sexgendered people. It is at the interstice of “a way of being” and “a way of knowing” that this privileging of queerness in and of itself (that relates to *queer being-ness*) as well as an activism of *being queer*, are interwoven.

A threading of thoughts between epistemological and ontological perspectives is not an attempt to blur them from their necessary places in a theory of queer being. I do not wish to validate one more than the other (for example, hierarchising knowledge over experience) or to create a sense of a “chicken and egg” conundrum (that a conscious knowledge shift must pre-date an experience or vice versa). What matters at this empirical point of the analysis, are *ways* of having a sensibility: that an experience of kinked sex for example can create a knowledge shift about vanilla sex, or that a knowledge of one’s sexgender identity is at one time learned through reading books or having theoretical/hypothetical dialogue, whilst at another, through the actual embodied experiences of queer acts and behaviours (perhaps even, simply being at fair day – absorbing, sensing and discerning the self and others’ affinity for queerness). In other words, knowledge and experience of everyday oppression can lead to a need or desire to rest or even hide, and/or it can lead to resistance and challenge. It matters that these knowledge movements can and do occur, that theoretical and embodied knowledges are disseminated in a variety of ways. This can be partially understood through the phenomenon of “coming out” which certainly incorporates the need and multilayered search for non-normative sexgender knowledge.

**Coming Out**

Coming out implies a transitional moment: from a confinement of some sort (commonly “the closet”) to an openness of some sort (commonly a “safe” space within a “GLBTIQ* community”). There is a distinction to be made however, between coming out to others and coming out to self. The notion of coming out to *others* (family, friends, colleagues and so on) emphasises a notion of disclosure that is affected by popularly perceived consequences: rejection, tolerance or acceptance. The following comments are examples of this. There is
also, another kind of coming out: in which the emphasis is on spatial or occupational terms (that is, coming out as a presencing of self somewhere – as a self-conscious way of being and as a knowledge of “self”), this is different from the always/already risky form of disclosure to the world which is predominantly queer* phobic.

Ninety five per cent of questionnaire respondents answered the question, “Do you have any coming out, or closet experiences that you could describe”? Most answers focus on the immediate family and the workplace. I have separated the responses into four sections in order to view some possible demarcations between practical and sensed notions of everyday being. From the lists below are self-evident remarks which indicate that non-normative sexuality or gender involves (indeed is for many people) an emotional, financial and social risk. The following statements taken from the questionnaire responses clearly show this.

(Emotional and financial risk)

“Came out to my family at age 29 after being with an out partner for 1 year. Also told friends - seem to be accepting. Dad indicated if I wanted to throw my life away, it was up to me”. “Family encouraged me to stay with husband and live a ‘separate life’, threatened to disown me etc. if I choose a female partner”. “My mother astounded me and won the astonished admiration of my friends when she told me she knew I was gay and listened as I answered all her questions, without any attempt to make me change my life”. “The state super fund discriminated against me and tore my life apart”. “In my first workplace there was a division of 30 people. No one was out. I later discovered 7 were gay. Some of those people now hold positions of considerable power and are still closeted. The only homophobic comments I have had in the workplace came from closeted gays. Outside work I am called names and people make assumptions about me because I am gay”.

“I came out to my mum when she was giving me a back massage ... I was in year 12, I hummed and ahh’d and eventually she said, “what do you have a girlfriend? I had a feeling ... you know you can tell me anything”. It was a nice sweet experience, but my family believes that my relationship is less serious than my brother’s hetro relationship, that I’m going through a phase, that I’m just passing time till I find the right man”. “In the workplace I’ve generally experienced a good reaction/response. My mother cried when I told her (I was 18) and wouldn’t speak to me. She’s fine now. I am 35”. “The worst was telling the local pastor I was in love with another girl. He closed every door and window to the room so his wife and kids would not hear”. “Still not out with my family. It’s one of those things, I know they know. They know I know but neither prepared to confirm. We are all happy in this situation”.

“Every now and then someone shows they don’t approve, mainly my family. I no longer consider these people to be my real family”. “I lived in a small country town and thankfully found a guy my own age to express my and his sexual needs. He committed suicide, I was unable to go to the funeral. All of this has made me very closeted about my sexuality, simply no-one understands. Basically if you’re labelled a poof or gay you can’t get girls to fuck which in turn prevents you from meeting guys to fuck cause none of them want to be seen with a fag”. “Straightening up my flat before my parents would visit. This meant taking down anything gay related”. “Getting sprung by my mum with my first girlfriend. She wasn’t happy and it was the start of a very challenging time”.

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(Liberation and relief)

"Took me a long time. My family and friends were very accepting. I'm glad I came out because I hated the deceit and lies involved with being untrue about your sexuality. My partner is not 'out' this makes things awkward and difficult at times."

"Humiliated and abused because of coming out at workplace – resulted in resignation. I had difficulty with my parents when I lived with them overseas because they are very religious and think homosexuality is a curse. They can't control me now because I am here. I feel happier and free for the first time."

"In general my whole coming out experiences have been liberating, emotional but liberating. I just got to that point where I had to take that leap of faith and step out into the unknown in order to truly be me".

“Coming out is a continual process as you are continually meeting new people and circumstances change. I have not had many problems coming out, usually once it is done, things normalise quickly”.

“Being closeted was...well...claustaphobic...suffocating. Being out is so liberating. My identity is not closeted except... my kink identity is closeted from my parents and two youngest sons. That doesn't bother me. The rest of me is totally out and as above... it is so refreshingly liberating being out of that stuffy old closet. My life has been made richer and more rewarding by being out”.

“My mother asked me during a family gathering, “are you a lesbian” and I said “yes”. She said, “then you are not my daughter any more” and I said, “ok then treat me as your next door neighbour, it makes no difference to me”. I think it shocked my mother and she went quiet. Today she accepts that I’m a lesbian. Sometimes it takes a lot of courage to stand my ground and not to deny myself”.

“How much knowledge one has about sexgender non-normativity at the moment of coming out (as just one example of a transitional moment) is obviously variable and there is a tension between the interrelation of two forms of knowledge: the 'knowledge of oppression' and the 'knowledge of non-normative being'.”

(Personal safety/tension)

“Mostly I am ‘out’ but occasionally we choose to act neutrally - when out in public rather than walk holding hands or showing affection. This annoys me a lot when I think about the injustices, but I guess we have grown accustomed to hiding our feelings in public and do not ‘offend’ people or draw attention to ourselves”.

“Verbal and some physical harassments by young males towards me being transgender/goth in public”. “Too complicated. I am considered a freak and a joke by people who hold heteronormative views”.

“I always thought/felt I was 'really' a girl. I hid this. I went through the fairly standard denial/avoidance phases and eventually ‘came out’ to friends and family and transitioned in my mid-40's. I was very fortunate in that my friends and family stood by me”.

“When I came out at 38 with 15 years of marriage behind me, I came out with a bang, straight into the leather community; it was a huge change from conservative Christian church to an out and proud gay leatherman. My friends said I blew the closet away!”

“My girlfriend is in the closet with her religious family. I have met them but not as her partner (3 year relationship)”.

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As soon as a person seeks more sexgender knowledge the question of access to the sexgender knowledge pool arises. Any point of transition will have a knowledge start point: a person might know that they are queer* and gender questioning for example but in order to know more about what that means and how it can affect daily life in a way that is not just about being oppressed, they need access to the queer* sexgender knowledge pool which is constantly being produced and enlarged by queers*.

This access takes many forms: being “out” in a queer* community, reading queer* texts, meeting and talking to other queers*, claiming queer* space, queering heteronormative environments and so on. A to-ing and fro-ing of information about the complexity and sophistication of queer* life aids individuals’ understandings of, and rights to, queer sexgender identification.

In a utopian sense, anyone’s individual queer* expression would tap into this welcoming community and expansive knowledge pool, however (and especially for emergent radical queers) the threat posed by non-normativity means that creative transitioning from one knowledge space to another is needed, because unlike the sexgender knowledge of heteronormativity (which is ubiquitous, institutionally prescribed and easy to find), queer* non-normative sexgender knowledge is not readily available, it is proscribed and can be hard to find. Queers* therefore make micro queer* “homes” (dwelling places on hyphens) of their own design, and queer* networks become important sites for the dissemination of queer* knowledges.

Some coming out narratives are despondent, “simply no-one understands”. 

(A need of and search for knowledge/community)

“I found being open in a relationship with a woman surprisingly easy as a result of being part of a diverse community that was open to life in all its variations. Prior to this I was too terrified to even talk about feeling attracted to women. It was important that I became comfortable with this myself and found a supportive community”.

“Getting accurate info on trans once I had come out was the most exciting day of my life”.

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In the case of identifying, or wanting to identify, as non-normative (not easily defined as gay or lesbian for example but something else which is more radically non-normative), there is much need to expand and disseminate many forms of non-normative expression, discussion, and dialogue. This is to say that an articulation of the interstices of sexgender identity categories is not simply an unwieldy outcome of political correctness (as is often claimed when for instance the abbreviation GL grows to GLBT and then further, to the extent of LGBTIQQQN2SAPP for example), but originates in the “real” need that living people have, to understand themselves and be understood by others as “readable”, even before grappling with issues of coming to harm, or suffering discrimination. In the following chapter, that readability will be demonstrated, but for now I want to continue with an examination of everyday identity.

**Identity Labels, Categories, And The LGBTIQ* Abbreviation**

As I noted in the introduction to the thesis, the abbreviation LGBTIQ* is disliked for obvious reasons; as a verbal utterance it sounds clumsy, in print it can be confusing without its qualifiers, as part of the layout for posters and advertising material it can look ungainly on a page, and as a word it doesn’t make sense (although when written as LGBTI, some people do pronounce it as a whole word saying “legabyte”). However, there may be culturally specific terms that have currency in some contexts and for queer* folk who organise, go to, or write about inclusive queer events and create advertising posters and leaflets which not only inform people of event details, but also of ways to articulate and name putatively un-nameable ways of being, it is important to be able to welcome those people who may feel that they don’t “fit”, or belong, in what may be perceived as a generic LGBT community. It is also important to write about and share knowledges about what NN2SAPP (for example) might mean, especially to those who do not know, or are curious to know more than they already do.

As a form of clear communication, the sexgender/community abbreviation has drawbacks. With this in mind, the use of very long abbreviations that include identity categories must be used with some strategy and there are different contexts and occasions for its use when many or few letters are useful.
An important point to acknowledge is that the growing LGBTQ* abbreviation be understood for what it is (in the sense of all the things it is); it does have a limited use but what it represents is a spectrum that includes “the fixed” and “the fluid” which needs articulating in as many ways as possible (to avoid ignorance, and the invisibility of non-normativity), even if some of those ways risk being clumsy and difficult.

The use of just G and L, or Q as umbrella terms for a range of non-normative categories, evades the explicit naming of many specific sexgender categories. As I will argue, the explicit naming of queer ways to be, and the use of what we can call “nonce taxonomy” (after Eve Sedgwick, 1990: 23) is an essential component of queer knowledge sharing that bi, trans, queer, questioning (and more) people rely on as one method of ‘being real’ in an everyday way.

Interstitial space “can” be thought of as the simple idea of spaces between letters in the abbreviation GLBTIQ*. This logically leads us to a more complex discussion about naming practices in relation to queer interstitial space and a queer ontology. At the everyday level, the use of labels to describe one’s sexgendered identity is commonplace. Notwithstanding the regulations on “ways to be”, made evident by a politics of naming, the polarisation of a naming debate (to name, versus to not name), \(^{124}\) can be displaced in order to explore what might be attractive about the complexity of naming. A plethora of terms/categories for sexgender identity is politically and personally useful.

We’ve all come across label strings; from the moment we are born we are labelled in particular but precise and fixed ways. The label string white, middle-class, heterosexual, male, for example, does not complicate the sexgender norm (indeed, it reinforces it). For straight white heterosexual males, the label (as a seemingly self-evident norm) does not require much thought; it is a “generally” unchallenged and solipsistic standard. But other label strings do complexify the norms of naming. The writer Audre Lorde famously described herself as a black, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet (1984: 41-42) and her example of self-naming

\(^{124}\) A naming debate is an ongoing feature within LGBTQ* communities. Personal politics vary about whether, or where to, draw distinctions between sexgender “representation”, sexgender “categories”, sexgender “subjectivities” and sexuality and gender, as well as whether to self-name, be named, refuse labels, or use a naming strategy. Although this debate is discussed here in relation to the empirical material, there is an extensive body of work from second wave feminist, cultural studies, sociological, postcolonial, and LGBTQ* theorists from the late twentieth century onwards that provides rich analyses and examinations of the politics of naming. For some examples see Hooks (1981), Weeks (1995), Hall (1997), Halberstam (1998), Bowker & Star (1999), Stein (2004), Spade & Wahng (2004).
serves as a forerunner to the contemporary and explicit naming practices of self-identified queers who participate in their forms of everyday activism, by insisting on ways to articulate and signify their non-normative existences.

Queer self-naming which is precise and specific does not exclude the mutability of labels, nor does it exclude the possibility to make political use of one’s “label string”. Precision about naming does not need to imply essentialist or reductive logic. For example, the terms which a colleague of mine used, to answer the question, “How do you describe yourself?” were at one time, queer, polyamorous, pansexual, transsexual, feminist, pleasure-activist, witch. This has now changed: they have dropped the label “pansexual” to make way for “bisexual”. This change was not made because the term “pansexual” was technically incorrect, but because of a political attempt to resurrect the meaning of “bisexuality” from the kind of careless, inaccurate and maligned media accounts and popular perceptions that we have seen in Chapter Two. Activist queers can, and routinely do, defend the existence (burgeoning or established) of a rich and expansive sexgender language which escapes the narrow confines of heteronormative discourse.

Some labels are invested with very dense sexgender meanings. My interpretation of this is to see it as a case for emphasising labels. Having said this I do not disregard the discriminatory use of naming, but the anti-label idea becomes qualified by the usefulness of being able to articulate a precise identity which does not fit a neat set of hetero-norms. The inability to say who you are and what that means because (for example) straight, gay, lesbian and bisexual “doesn’t fit” can be viewed as a disheartening and dystopian paradigm by those “would be” or “could be” queer interlocutors who are limited by a generally reductive understanding of complex queer identities. The implication of such a reduction is that specific naming equals fixed categorisation. Refusing to name by choice is a form of political activism which is not bound by the same constraints.

If we return to the notion of changing the way we might read a label-string, we can further develop the simple example of criss-crossing sexgender codes. The wearing of an orange hanky in the right back pocket or the claiming of genderfuck activism, both employ a criss-crossing of sexgender knowledges.
They both do more than simply agitate against fixed sexgender positioning. They serve to destabilise the function of binarising logic which depends upon the relational difference between, the normative (read not queer) and the queer (read non-normative) each position being characterised by what it is not. The logic here that is broken (by criss-crossed sexgender knowledge), is that “the other”, is not defined by what one position is not. In other words, as I have already argued in the thesis Introduction, queer sensibility can be characterised by what it is, rather than what it is not, because it does not occupy one necessarily fixed position. For this reason we can examine more closely what can be born out of the gaps between “fixed” positions represented by the letters LGBT.

Just as L and G and B and T are not simply letters when they are collectively grouped together, Lesbian and Gay and Bisexual and Transgender are not just unitary sexual categories. However, this complication of the same/not same axiom is further complexified if we consider additions to LGBT. There are for example, the less familiar additions of I (for intersex), NN (for non-normative), Q (for queer), another Q (for questioning), and 2 (for two-spirit). There are some people for whom these additions are just superfluous extras (perhaps being readable as letters of the alphabet only, rather than representations of real identities – especially if ignorance, as we have seen Sedgwick cast it, is not challenged.) For others, these letters go to the heart of how an LGBTIQ* community is named: there are various and different social contexts for the use of abbreviations such as LGB, LGBT, LGBTIQ and so on, or the umbrella terms “gay” or “queer”.

I suggest that a radical dislodgement of the generic interpretation of non-normative sexuality happens when more, rather than less, descriptive opportunities manifest themselves. This occurs through the emergence of specificity from so called foggy areas. The fact that the letters – QINN – can be added to LGBT, has allowed some people to become as familiar with the words intersex, or non-normative, or queer, as they are with the word lesbian. However, as the following comments demonstrate, LGBT, as a generic abbreviation (familiar, practical, comfortable and un-confusing) does not, in its function as a representation of sexual identities, allow the limits of sexgender specificity to be expanded. In several questionnaire responses, there was a range
of inaccurate, confused, or unsure responses to (for example), the terms “intersex”, and even “queer” which, as we know, has a popular generic usage.

Examples are:

**For intersex**
- “No idea”.
- “Never heard of it”.
- “Interracial sex between two people of different races”.
- “Sex on the internet”.
- “Born with both genders”.
- “Wish I knew more”.
- “Don’t know”.
- “?”
- “Different races of people (e.g. black/white) who have sex”.
- “Transgender”.
- “Not sure”.
- “Transitioning from one sex to another via surgery or drugs”.
- “A few options”.

**For queer**
- “Don’t like the word”.
- “I don’t care about this”.
- “I guess a gay person, they use it too, not only homophobic heteros”.
- “Confusing, so I don’t know”.
- “Don’t really know, not straight, fine to use in the community but when used by others it can be disrespectful”.
- “Don’t understand and don’t like this term”.
- “Weirdos – probably bi’s”.
- “Challenging. Difficult to define”.

As I have already said, there is a range of comprehension about these words.

The fact that they are on the “language landscape” at all, is a promising sign, and some questionnaire responses gave articulate and considered definitions of sexgender terms. In contrast to the responses above, different definitions and opinions about the terms “intersex”, and “queer”, are given below:

**For intersex**
- “When one is born with genitalia, reproductive organs, or chromosomes that are not exclusively male or female”.
- “Person born with a condition, either genetic or physical, which is not easily definable as male or female. E.G. Hermaphrodism, Klinefelter’s syndrome etc”.
- “A range of genetically identifiable conditions differing from socially and medically dominant definitions of male and female”.
- “Someone born with non-specific genitalia and therefore needs to choose their gender or neither gender”.
- “Courageous person on a difficult journey”.
- “A person born with indeterminate genital organs. I.E. Neither solely assignable as ‘male’ or ‘female’”.

**For queer**
- “Non-hetero usually, with political connotations. Also tends to be inclusive of bisexuality. Personally not a preferred term”.
- “Umbrella term for not straight”.
- “Not conforming to the accepted practice of one’s birth sex or gender”.
- “A synonym for homosexual”.
- “All spectrums of the rainbow”.
- “Politically gay. Reacting against earlier gay and lesbian identity politics. A need for a broad label”.
- “More than just sexuality – lifestyle. Not playing by the sex and sexuality rules. Linked to homosexuality and bisexuality”.
- “A political term to celebrate and encourage non-straight expressions of sexuality. I enjoy the challenge this brings to straight society and also to dualistic notions of lesbian and gay sexuality as the only alternative to heterosexual”.

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Whilst letters such as Q, I, and NN, are slowly being absorbed for various modes of consumption, there are others, such as T (for transensual), K (for kinkster), another B (for butch), and an F (for femme) which are still further along in the list. For that reason we should delve even further into them. I take the questionnaire responses to the term “femme” as case in point here: out of the ninety returned questionnaires, twenty five percent did not describe the meaning of “femme”. Of the seventy five percent that did, only two gave a nuanced articulation of the term, the other responses offered descriptions that centred on uncritical notions of femininity (often as a characteristic of feminine lesbianism). Some examples are below:

“Feminine looking”.
“Having feminine traits”.
“Passive lesbian”.
“Stereotype ‘girly’ feminine lesbian”.
“Soft, girly lesbian”.
“Petite girls”.
“Feminine type of gay woman”.
“A stereotypical, petite, dainty woman”.

“Feminine lesbian identified woman”.
“Type of dyke – hyper feminine”
“Feminine looks and behaviour”.
“Feminine lesbian woman. Bottom/dress-wearing/soft”.
“Opposite to butch”.
“Stereotypically feminine”.
“Gentle, light and easy”.

“Lipstick lesso’s. Feminine, often pass as straight”.
“Long hair, long dresses, and make-up”.
“Looks great”.
“Typically a lesbian who passes as straight. Often with long hair, nails, make-up, dressing in skirts or dresses”.

We can see in contrast, the two more detailed responses:

“A queer and or lesbian woman.
My experience of being a femme is equated with being assumed as straight by both communities. Femmes, although often not physically challenging the socialisation of girls, fuck with society’s, and mainstream media’s, confines in a different way to butches”.

“A woman who is outside the heteronormative framework but in the lesbian community utilises some of the heteronormative characteristics ascribed to women as stereotyped by that framework”.

If we consider that “femme” as a queer subjectivity is privileged as a political and powerful identity at international conferences and seminars, written about in both academic and popular texts, and is a visible presence at queer

venues within Australian GLBTIQ* culture,\textsuperscript{127} we can see that expansive sexgender knowledges of “femme identity” have not filtered through, to influence or inform a general (Australian, fair-day-going) GLBTIQ* community, that regards “femme” as a mere heteronormatively-constructed stereotype of femininity. It is important then, that the addition of more queer terms to the margins of a sexgender knowledge pool, should increase the accessibility or familiarity of those terms already in use. Thus the “pool” gets bigger by degrees.

Also, the diversity of queer “ways to be” is explicitly signalled and privileged in the production of such additional terms. In order that we may speak about relationships such as femme on femme, or butch on butch, or the desire preferences of transfags, or transensuals (as they relate to ways of being) it is necessary to take notice of the relationship between the array of queer sexgender multiplicities (articulated through specific terms such as, stonefemme, or queer bisexual for instance), and the more familiar generic terms which surround them. The imperative for queers is to expose and disrupt that relationship in order to weaken the effect of “the generic”, which results in the comfort of sexgender ignorance.

The “unfamiliar” sexgender terms themselves, obviously cannot do the work of disseminating knowledge, their existence provokes people to speak, and it is this work (the sharing of ideas with each other, the conversations we can enter into about sexgender diversity and complexity), that ultimately succeeds in forging a concepto-lingual bloom. Had the keynote speech of Hanne Blank (which she gave at the \textit{Femme Conference 2006}), been heard by members of the GLBTIQ* community in Perth or Brisbane or Canberra for example, the general knowledge of the category femme would undoubtedly be far richer than it is now. I am aware that the quotation (from Blank’s keynote address) that I am about to give is rather lengthy, but I consider it justified here, as an example of an expanded definition of femme, that is presented \textit{so easily}.\textsuperscript{128} Blank says:

\textsuperscript{127} The event “Femme Fever” which has run over the last two years at the Misumma Festival in Victoria, provides spoken word performances which are specifically “femme” themed. Interestingly, in terms of the lesbian-identified femme that dominates the questionnaire responses, the Femme Fever event was advertised in the Midsumma festival guide thus: “Readings about femme and femininity across a variety of identities. Readers are bi, straight, gay, trans and queer” (Midsumma Festival inc, 2008: 49). See also (K. Fox, 2006) for a journalistic review of “femme” identity which gives an insight into “femme” as it is perceived/enacted in the LGBTIQ* communities of Sydney, New South Wales.

\textsuperscript{128} Note that although Blank goes on to say that being femme is not easy, my meaning of easiness here, is that Blank’s articulation is easy. She has no difficulty in sharing her comprehensive and rich description of “femme”. (The quoted excerpt is just a fraction of the much longer articulation of femme).
I love the word femme. This is the real F-word, a word that makes people want, wonder, and worry. It’s a cool word, a French word, a pretty word. It doesn’t give away too much, but suggests a great deal. It hints at “female” and “feminine” and “femininity” and “femme fatale” without specifying any of those things or to what degree. It’s indefinite but not ambiguous. It’s sexy ... Our femmeness, and the ways we do it and live it, shapes our lives for better as well as for worse. It is not simple. It is not easy. It is a subversive, complicated, tricky, potentially explosive variable in a calculus that goes on every day of our lives. Femme is subversive. And what is most subversive about femme is that femme refuses to accept the looming insistence of our male-supremacist culture that femininity is inherently inferior. We’re not femmes because that’s all we can manage, or because that’s just what happened to us because we happened to be born with a particular set of genitals. We’re not femme because being androgynous or butch is too much for our delicate little constitutions. We’re femme because that’s what feels honest and true and right to us, because it’s worth doing, because femininity is good stuff. It requires great resolve to be femme. It requires boldness and firmness of purpose. It requires a certain degree of ferocity ...

We also know that paying attention to surface and style does not in any way mean that we fail to see and comprehend what is beneath the surface. Woe betide the unsuspecting person who for some reason believes that searing intelligence can not coexist with a penchant for cute shoes. Femmes are forged in the hot fire of our culture’s general everyday devaluation of all things female and feminine, and as a result we are made of very sturdy stuff indeed ... Femme is not easy. Neither are femmes easy. We’re rarely what you expect. Not even our femininity is, because it’s not just one femininity, it’s hundreds and thousands of femininities, each carefully and lovingly customized over the weeks and months and years. There are femmes who wouldn’t hammer a nail if they had a pink rhinestone-studded hammer to do it with. There are femmes who love their belt sanders ... There are femmes for whom butches are the alpha and omega of their sexualities, and femmes for whom other femmes are. There are femmes who top and bottom and switch. There are femmes who love men, or transmen, or androgynes, or who have pledged their hearts to the most outrageous gender pirates. There are femmes who are dykes and queers and queens and trannies. There are femmes who are lesbians ... I am witnessing femmenesses that make me thoughtful, that make me want to know more, that leave me open-mouthed with admiration and gender joy (Blank, 2006: 1-6 and 17).

As asked from the rigid confines of a narrow “normative perspective” (one that can exist within queer* communities when access to, and interest in, queer* events and literature is displaced), questions about terms other than gay and straight, gravitate towards befuddlement or else a very clear (yet ironically still unknown) sense of the overly complex “other”. In response to being “confronted” with words like femme, vanilla, queer, polyamory, trans, butch, kink, or BDSM, questionnaire respondents articulated their concerns about not knowing (or feeling that they were required to know), what those terms mean, and why they exist:

“Don’t have extensive knowledge of these terms but here’s my ignorant ideas ...”
“Can’t define much but my overall opinion is that consenting adults who keep it safe can find pleasure in all sorts of ways”.
“Not sure it’s helpful to create another set of fixed identity

“These are all guesses”.
“No idea. Have heard terms before but never investigated their meaning”.
“Don’t have strong opinions about these terms”.
“There are heaps more than I knew”.
“I much prefer enjoying sex than classifying it”.

“What ever happened to the words sex and gay?”
“I have a half formed idea of BDSM. Why do you ask a general knowledge quiz? I guess these are private sexual peccadilloes about which I know little and care less.”
“They obviously mean

129 Thirty terms were used. See appendix A for the full list of terms used in the questionnaire.
I once knew someone who referred to themselves as ‘it’, and preferred this to ‘he’ or ‘she’. But deciding there’s male/female/it/trans/bi-gender etc is no better than deciding we’ve only m/f. The point for me is that there are more things than we have language to describe”.

“A dislike of navigating unfamiliar queer lexicology and ideas (perhaps based in the hardships of also, and generally, navigating rigid, yet familiar, identity politics), means that when people utter such comments as, “Why so many terms?” or “What happened to just gay?” a challenge is needed. This challenge should encourage people to think more deeply about sex and gender issues, in order to soften the boundaries that limit uncritical and uninformed viewpoints. It also requires that sexuality and gender be taken seriously as aspects of personhood, and it requires that sexuality and gender be recognised as political terms in relation to a normative/non-normative discourse.

We could say that reactionary questions are not offensive in themselves. They are questions that are asked for different reasons: as a reaction to a perceived paucity of “language” to “cope” with sexgender diversity; the difficulty of having to think about complexity; or the possibility that sexgender knowledge is important enough to be talked about in depth, and at the level of the everyday. These questions ask for information about sexgender meanings, even if they are asked through a filter (of a desire for, or bias towards, stable norms). However, the reasons to name, or not name queer identities and behaviours (which always depends on a political, social, cultural and personal context), are significantly located around issues of knowledge, ignorance and power. For this reason, interest in sexgender issues, and access to sexgender knowledges, should not be willingly displaced.

It is possible, even if unlikely, to be charged under Australian law for engaging in queered sexual practices. It is also significant that, despite prudence on the part of sexually marginalised queers*, there is a sinister aspect to everyday queer life should the full weight (read institutionalised power) of legally and medically sanctioned processes be applied to (queer*) people going about their (queer*) everyday lives. For this reason amongst others, the project of sexual
knowledge dissemination is to be taken seriously. Queers* as much as anyone (especially if we consider a “survival-imperative”), need to be aware of their own sexgender ignorance (the knowledge movement of interstitiality comes to mind here), in order to move through social discriminations, and find strategic, creative ways, to negotiate the institutional dangers of living in a queer phobic society.

The notion of GLBTQ* communities as tangible, reachable entities is certainly realistic in many ways, for example pride fair days and festivals, counselling services, internet and telephone support, collectives, queer media and literature, community organisations, political lobbyists, advocacy groups and so on all provide points of contact, information, “protection” and support for many different groups of people on the sexgender “rainbow”. Even more certainly, this very large “community” bands together politically and symbolically in the sense of having a collective camaraderie, which operates against heteronormative discrimination and oppression. To use Toni Cade Bambara’s terms again, we might say, that without that “gathering-us-in-ness” or “midwifery of mutually wise understandings” (in Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1983: vi), concepts of pride (as a political and social phenomenon), could not exist.

However, although there are ongoing tensions (between political/apolitical, and assimilationist/anti-assimilationist groups, and their ideas about fixed and fluid, or queer and non-queer sexgender categories), the community’s fault lines do not lie there so much, as they do between the incoherent distinctions of normative and non-normative people residing within the GLBTIQ* spectrum. Hence our reasons for understanding that the significance of emotional risk, and difficulty for queers* “coming out”, are bound up in the realities of such phenomena as survival and suicide. As we have seen in the previous section on “coming out”, the person from a country town who despairingly states, “simply no-one understands”, turned to a survival mechanism (after having experienced the loss through suicide of a lover, and a sense of utter isolation), which was to become, “tightly closeted”.

130 The rainbow flag operates internationally for GLBTIQ* communities. Both globally and locally it is known as a symbol of freedom, hence the use of rainbow flags at political marches and rallies and the consumption of rainbow merchandise (from car bumper stickers and dog collars to jewellery) at many pride events. The rainbow as a concept is also used as a reference to a spectrum: GLBTIQ*, metaphorically resembles the colour spectrum ROYGBIV.
A general allegiance that forms under and against conditions of sexgender hegemony is a resistance to the powerful discourse of heteronormativity. That generality does not specifically help non-normative queers to emerge from isolation; their battle rests not only with a perceived heteronormative mainstream, but also with a lack of access to non-normative queer sexgender knowledge as well as queer phobia anywhere, and that can be found within sections of the LGBTI* community itself. As I highlighted in Chapter Two, coming out as bisexual in some gay and lesbian communities can be very difficult, coming out as a queer bisexual in that context can be even harder.

The notion of “coming out” has a broad semantic reach. In sexgender discourse it is a rarely disputed term of queer and non-queer everyday parlance, “everyone” seems to know what it means and thus it provides us with an insight towards sexuality and sexgender binary problematics. But to what extent has this knowledge of a closet, helped resolve the problem of oppression? As Sedgwick has asserted in blunt terms, “the closet is the defining structure for gay oppression in this century” (1990: 71), and it continues to be a markedly poignant feature of many LGBTIQ* personal narratives into this new century. The coming out narratives of contemporary non-normative queers, who do not fit discrete and binarised categorisation (for example hetero/homo, male/female, gay/lesbian) force us to think harder about sexgender identity, to keep reiterating what the challenge to sexgender binaries means and why it is so important to people at the everyday level.

**The Issue Of Normativity In Relation To Sexuality And Sexual Behaviour**

We could argue that queer sexual non-normativity directly challenges traditional sexual mores. But how is this challenge made exactly? By what means can we learn how this challenge operates? Sex acts, after all, are not commonly performed in public. An outline of traditional sexual mores may establish a notion of what non-normativity is, but beyond a rudimentary answer which notes the prescriptions of “mainstream society” (a society of putatively obedient adherents) – “correct” hetero-genital contact, procreational outcomes and risks, vanilla orientation, reciprocity and monogamy – it may be more effective for queers to ask: “What precisely is it, that is problematic about the widespread popular discourse about normativity, non-normativity and sex?”.
This question might be easily answered in the first instance by raising concerns about the obvious discriminations mentioned previously – that everyday discrimination of queers takes place fundamentally because of what they are supposedly doing with their genitals and hence their supposed sex acts and hence their supposed sexuality.

But there is a parallel circuitry of popular sexgender logic which can be written thus (and for the sake of clarity in what follows) sexual normativity (the prescribed norms) is x, and sexual non-normativity (proscribed behaviours) is y. Although x is prescribed, it takes place in private; therefore x is in large part popularly imagined and is, in reality unstable and unknown. This means x could in fact be practised in contradiction to the normative social prescription, it remains putative. Its very putativity therefore, makes “normativity” in sex questionable, but this unstable idea of normative sex is not challenged. For this reason, there is an unwarranted reliance on reading heteronormativity from that which is visible as a mode of life (we shall come to Foucault’s use of this term in a moment) structured by, for example, the normalising “opposite gender” of object choice.

Y is proscribed and also takes place in private, therefore y is also popularly imagined and therefore y is, in reality, equally unknown and also remains putative. The unknown qualities of both x and y brew a popular imagination of massive proportions; sexgender discourse acts as the receptacle and producer of that large set of imagined knowledges. Y is morbidly imagined as a set of prohibited perversions. X is a healthy, wholesome set of “natural” acts. The stark contrast between the two (and we can think here of Sedgwick’s phrase “presiding master terms”) (1990: 11), ensures the mutual exclusivity of the one (as normative) and the other (as non-normative), because they cannot be each other.

Whilst this popular logic insists that x is normative, despite the putativity, it means that x could actually be just like y, but the (ignored) putative quality of x is rescued (as in elided) by the (vicariously enjoyed or self-satisfying/reassuring) putative quality of y, thus x remains x. Yet oddly, because x is in reality a

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131 A public/private distinction to make here is that radical, queer, public sex (which could range from a particular kink, to using “the beat”) is often done “in private”, in a public place in which associated risks are taken. That is to say; the risk of discovery and possible consequences, such as punishment (legally or privately enforced).
putative category, the imaginations of x and y can be just the same and also the opposite.

“Normal” sex, if there is such a thing, as an act is in itself innocuous. The problem of “normative sex”, as a socially shared idea is that it creates, by implication, the possibility of non-normative sex which thus makes non-normative sex a problem. If normative sex as a reality is questionable then so too is non-normative sex.

One might also say that ideas of the mainstream and the margin operate under the same logic. The “mainstream” and “the margin” are unstable for the very fact that “ideas” about them are often assumptions and imaginations of fixed dualistic categories. The foundation of this binary cannot be both fixed and imagined as true, if it is to be a stable foundation of knowledge. As I discussed in the introduction to the thesis, if we think of the mainstream/margin binary itself as a problematic construct, another way to articulate “queer spaces” is to cast them as interstitialities with queer particularities, specificities, sophistications, and richnesses.

The idea for queers, of inhabiting a place (one in which to “be” – as a thinker and doer) comes with the material reality of having to carve out a right to inhabit that space. In queer practices of being, modes of occupation (everyday lives, feelings, embodiments and queer sensibilities), are negotiated to varying degrees that involve tactics and strategies as methods of survival. For radical queers, who refuse assimilation to sexual and gender normativity, that negotiation is not always easy.

This makes theorising queer sex difficult. If we challenge popular binarised sexgendar logic we can deconstruct the idea of normative sex (in which case there is no non-normative sex) but in doing this we must then be mindful of how to theorise the notion of “normativity” with substantial critical leverage. For this reason the “reality” of a phenomenon called normative sex, should be highlighted for its existence in the world. And also, not least because of the slippage from “normative sex” to “normal sex”, which conflates to natural sex, and in turn upholds the notion of mainstream sex. (Hence “the mainstream” exists as a “natural” state of affairs). Although “normal” and “natural” are imagined phenomena, they are also made sharply real by cultural, social,
governmental, and legal discourses. Normativity therefore, is hegemonic grist to the queer mill. The questionnaire response which defined the term queer as “not conforming to accepted [sexgender] practice”, precisely articulates this “grist”. In an everyday sense, there is a general idea of resistance (as a mode of life); we can think of it here, as a resistance to sexgender hegemony.

The possibility, for people at the everyday level, to give reasons for their non-conformity and to clearly understand how norms are implicated in their everyday lives (in relation to politics and being), is in part, assisted by exposure to the richness of queer sexgender knowledges. The questionnaire comment (also in relation to the term queer), that said, “I enjoy the challenge this brings to straight society, and also to dualistic notions of lesbian and gay sexuality as the only alternative to heterosexual”, is an example of someone, who at the everyday level, is aware of, and appreciates, the epistemological challenge that non-normativity (expressed in terminology, and as an interstitial way of being) creates.

At this point, a particular Foucauldian perspective comes to mind; one that references the divide between homosexual identities and their others, and one that I also suggest, makes a subtle gesture or tacit reference to the occupation of interstitial space. Foucault says:

One of the concessions one makes to others is not to present homosexuality as a kind of immediate pleasure...there you have a kind of neat image of homosexuality without any possibility of generating unease... I think that’s what makes homosexuality ‘disturbing’: the homosexual mode of life much more than the sexual act itself (1989: 205).

Here Foucault is suggesting that it is not the idea of queer sex that threatens (because the status quo relies upon and is familiar with the notion of queer sex being a perverse other) but the idea of homosociality and of love; the idea of homosexuals loving each other in ways that are not reduced to an imagination of immediate pleasure such as, and as Foucault describes it, “two young men meeting in the street, seducing each other with a look, grabbing each other’s arses and getting each other off in a quarter of an hour” (Ibid.: 205).

Foucault is raising an obvious but important point, that there is a highly contradictory quality to normative ideas about sex, love and sexuality. He goes on to say. “The institution is caught in a contradiction ...Look at the army, where love between men is ceaselessly provoked and shamed. These relations short
circuit it and introduce love where there’s supposed to be only law, rule or habit” (Ibid.: 205).

In response to this line of reasoning I point out two areas for consideration (in my view, Foucault’s notion of homosociality is not immune from these considerations): one is that the homosocial mode of life, when cast as distinctly separable from homosexuality, creates a problematic binary because homosexuality is always also bound up in the social, in the same way that sexual acts, and sexual identity, are simultaneously separated and interrelated. Secondly, this binary (particularly in regard to the notion of “love” as opposed to the notion of immediate pleasure), should be examined for the ways in which it constrains an epistemology of queer sexgender space.

This kind of sexual/not sexual, or “love sex” and “lust sex” binary is problematic if we want to think of queers having both kinds (and still more kinds) of relations interchangeably, and without a value laden hierarchy which places the social over the sexual. It is also problematic in terms of assimilation to heteronorms, and it is problematic if we want to distinguish between the everyday and the exceptional or specific. For these reasons, the queer occupation of interstitial space, must not be overlooked in sexgender theorising.

Foucault gives two reasons why the “neat image” of a homosexual (for example the non-conformist, lustful homosexual with a predilection for casual, quick, flesh-gratifying sex) is undisturbing. One is that “it responds to the reassuring canon of beauty” (Ibid.: 205), and the other is that,

[I]t annuls everything that can be uncomfortable in affection, tenderness, friendship, fidelity, camaraderie and companionship, things which our rather sanitised society can’t allow a place for without fearing the formation of new alliances and the tying together of unforeseen lines of force (Ibid.: 205).

One of the points to be made about the love/lust divide (certainly one we see here in Foucault), is that when that binary operates as a particular division of hetero/homo-sex or as a normative/non-normative division (rather than a division of sexual acts and sexual identities), the filling of the “in between space” of that divide, can be thought of in terms of queer interstitial occupation. Such a filling of that space does not enter into only two options: of assuaging or subverting the canon of beauty, and the sanitisation (“clean” and heteronormative) of societal affection.
In other words, that occupation will involve love sex, friendship, and camaraderie, but also it will strenuously make room for non-normative sex and radical queer behaviours as well. Instead of a sexuality-as-identity/sexuality-as-act binary or a love-sex/lust-sex binary, the queer interstice provides for a range of multiple love-lust-sex possibilities.

What is achieved by saying that the heteronormative or heterosexual institution is not made uneasy by radical queer sex? One answer is that that institution can punish and regulate the neat image of homosexual other (seeker of immediate pleasure) and thereby, as Foucault suggests, make a space for it (which maintains the safeguard of a clearly defined sexgender normative/non-normative binary). But is the fear of a concession-making homosexual really based in the fear of non-sexualised sameness? Is it that the loving homosexual is too similar (indeed the same – tender, affectionate, companionable, and so on) to the loving normative heterosexual? Perhaps a partial answer to this should address the permanent mark of “sexual” which touches all queers; the notion (popularly/publicly and morbidly imagined), of a non-sexual queer is considerably oxymoronic (even in the case of queer celibacy) and so a place for a “loving queer” is in fact the same thing as a place for a “lust-sex queer”. This notion underwrites the logic of heteronormative unease. X simply cannot be y.

One might say that the paradoxical logic, that accompanies the social construction of “the disturbing, fear-generating homosexual” (or queer or non-normative person), rests on two bases. On the one hand, it lies in the challenge to heteronormative sexual mores, which does not happen at the sexual level but at the social (popularly imagined) level. On the other hand, it lies in the very sexualised idea of a “homosexual”, that is even imbedded in the non-sexual aspects of the homosexual’s social life, and which can also be defined as a mode of life always and already predicated on (sexual) desire. I will return to the analysis of a queer being that disrupts the “love-sex/lust-sex” binary in the following chapter. For the moment, I want to return to the complex relationship between notions of identity and sexuality.
The following comments are taken from questionnaire respondents who answered the question; do you associate your sexuality with your identity? We shall see in Chapter Four, how these comments differ from the personal narratives of self identified queers that demonstrate some expanded notions of queer being-ness as sexual identity.

“No, there is more to me than my sexuality"
“Sexuality is an aspect or part of my identity”
“I am a white, anglo-saxon middle aged man who’s also homosexual. My sexuality is a part of me, but it is only one facet of my identity”
“To some degree yes”
“Not generally”
“Sometimes I do and often times I prefer not to. This is a source of difficulty and confusion for me...”

“Most definitely, my sexuality defines me and I socialise almost exclusively within the gay male community, it’s ingrained”
“My sexual orientation defines who I am both internally and externally in the world”
“Yes but not with my gender identity, my GI is not connected to who I find desirable”
“Only when engaging or pursuing sex”

“Sexuality is part of my spiritual identity”
“Yes. I feel like you can’t avoid it. Society defines it as your identity”
“Yes, it isn’t the sole fact of my identity but it is inseparable from it”
“No”
“People’s private lives are none of my business; apart from idle curiosity, I’m not interested either”

In these remarks, the general ideas about sexuality and self-identity are varied.

When a person says “no my sexuality is not my identity” this could be taken to mean that identity is something which (like heterosexual identity), does not require explicit declaration of its sexual-ness; it is something seamless with sex outside of it. In this vein, sexuality is apportioned separately and contextually in regard to the notion of how it fits with identity rather than how it is identity.

The remark, “I am a white, Anglo-Saxon middle-aged man who’s also homosexual. My sexuality is a part of me, but it is only one facet of my identity...” implies that sexuality is an adjunct, an accessory that is only

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132 My meaning of the term “identity” here is in relation to its use as a generalised term common to GLBTIQ* communities. A distinction should be made between what “identity” means in general (often with humanist/universal implications – core being, essential self, immutable center), and what “identity” means, in theories of being, or of sense of self, especially in relation to sexgender discourses and theories of the subject. The popular take-up of Foucault’s theory of how the subject is “made” (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982: 208-226) and Butler’s, that identity is a “necessary error” (1993: 230), although existing in academia, should be relevant in some real ways to the actual lives of people who experience everyday oppression. But the insights of popularised academic theories about “identity” are generally lacking from everyday sexgender discourse. This is not to say that highly theoretical debate should be freely or necessarily articulated at an everyday non-academic level. It is to say that informed arguments or intelligent debate about “identity” or the “subject” (which may include issues of autonomy, location, constituency, or representation) are as valid as intellectual arguments about (for example) gay marriage or adoption, and that they will be more forcefully applied if they continue to be expressed explicitly in relation to the day-to-day reality of queer being-ness. This would be a heuristic task for people who wish to disseminate sexgender knowledge: activists and people who are passionate about the world they live in, people who, as Sedgwick might say, experience “survivor’s responsibility” for passing on critical and creative queer life-arts and intelligent wisdoms. Everyday being-ness has a proximity to the highly complex relationship between knowledge and ignorance and as such, the possibility of the theoretical take-up of ideas about being and self-hood, at a general level, can (even if simplified), be well positioned (specifically because of the relationality between theory, critical thinking and lived experience), to reduce the lack of sexgender knowledge. See Sedgwick’s analysis of “ignorance”, a term that she suggests we should try to “pluralize and specify (as we now do with the term “knowledge”) in order to reveal its complex relationships with privilege, power, silence and knowledge” (1990: 8 and 1994: 25). (Note there is an overlap between these sections of text in Epistemology of the Closet and Tendencies).
important in a specifically sexual context. This creates divisions between sexuality and everyday life and the personal/the private. Sexuality, by virtue of its association with sex acts and not by its association with a mode of life, becomes extra to everyday life in the same way that popular thinking of heterosexuality, as sex acts, is not part of everyday life.

The consideration of sexuality as singularly private – “people’s private lives are none of my business” – upholds this distance between sexual being-ness and non-sexual being-ness. The non-sexual component of the “binarised subjectivity position”, if we can call it that, preserves what a person knows (and what they don’t know - their level of ignorance) as a form of knowledge stasis. Even when there is more to know (“apart from idle curiosity, I’m not interested either”) the distance between sexual and non-sexual subjectivities is maintained and so too is the level of ignorance. Another, more nuanced term used by Sedgwick for this form of ignorance, is “unknowing” (1994: 23-51), which implies some agency or a stake in a knowledge ignorance or stasis. As I discuss shortly, that agency is implicated in the relationship between truth, knowledge and power.

Resistance to gaining new sexgender knowledges can also be seen in the comments people make about sexual terminology. Sometimes queer* sexuality is termed, “a lifestyle”. This has the effect of taking attention away from the idea of identity-defining sex acts, making sexuality seem more natural and normal (that is – normative). We could consider this use of the term “life-style” an assimilationist micro tactic. In the comment “I would not consider my lifestyle a subculture” (in response to the question, “Do you consider yourself to be part of a subculture?”), “lifestyle” is an attenuated version of “gay” sexuality, which is itself often used “politically” (perhaps strategically is more accurate), as a less sexually overt word, for “lesbian”; at the same time, “gay” always already means “homosexual man” (which does resonate more sexually).133

133 The word “gay” as in “gay lady”, has been a prominent feature of conservative or normative sexgender discourses which do not want to signify non-normative sexuality as sexuality (that is, directly linked to the “sex act indicators” of sexuality rather than the “lifestyle indicators” of a “same-sex” relationship) or as a political term, and/or as a possibly feminist term. This replacement for the word lesbian has itself been usurped by another, as this recent newspaper column in The Daily Telegraph attests: “A group of lesbians who are unhappy with the title have launched a world-wide movement to change the name of their sexuality to “gayelle”. Websites devoted to the change are springing up, with the motivation said to be a “persistent distaste for the word lesbian.” Gayelle, denoting anyone gay and female, is made up of the words “gay” and “elle” meaning “she” in French. Supporters, who are hoping it takes on world-wide, say the new term is less derogatory than the word lesbian, backers argue, who believe a change of moniker would take the offence out of the term, “The invention of “gayelle” is with the idea and hope that it will have a worldwide appeal, and ultimately, supersede the word lesbian; a suitable replacement is necessary for positive language and the healthy self-esteem of the gay-female-population.” One website states, “The word lesbian is antiquated; it is not representative of modern times,
This tactic of resistance preserves the purity of non-sexual subjectivity/identity, where sexuality is thought of as a liability if expressed in explicit terms. The risk is in being exposed as non-normative which, as I have already emphasised, happens by default and by the construction of popular imagination. The non-normative other is continuously marked as undesirably different because of the stigma of an identity-defining sexuality.

As part of heteronormative discourse, “lifestyle” might mean, boating on weekends, having material wealth or a particular leisure pursuit. It is rarely if ever interpreted as “sexuality”. Within GLBTIQ* communities “lifestyle” is popularly understood as meaning gay or lesbian life-style and is somewhat akin to Foucault’s meaning of homosexual “mode of life”. Unlike a Foucauldian mode of life however, “lifestyle” has been discursively adapted through popular use in GLBTIQ* communities as parlance that excludes the sexual, whereas “mode of life” has been used in theoretical discourses of sexuality in terms of an acts versus identities debate.

In contrast with theoretical debate about the distinction between identities and acts, the political use of language at the level of the everyday shows that the reduction of sexuality, as we know it today, to an identity accessory invested with modern risks, constructs a limited paradigm with which to understand, for example, queer being. The term “lifestyle” (as part of the generic language of LGBTIQ* communities) is popular because it does not emit any radical political signification. This is the case even when it can be understood by others in the community, as a sexual qualifier (for gay, lesbian, kink, BDSM and so on). Other terms which are “tainted” with a more obvious political label are subjected to much more scrutiny. The previous comments that were given in response to a range of queer sexgender terms, demonstrated this (“They

and or, of persons with modern views. Lesbian does not sound cheerful and fun, nor does it mean merry, like the word gay does; rather, it sounds more like loner, loser, and less. Gay females deserve more, not less. Moreover, the word lesbian is so frequently used derogatorily, that to be called a lesbian is almost tantamount to being called an offensive name.” The team also argue that gay does not aptly reflect their sexuality as it has become associated specifically with homosexual men. “By choosing gayelle, the feminine factors in “the equation of who is gay and who is not” can reassert their interest in the word gay, as well as, assert a displeasure for the word lesbian,” the website reads” (“Lesbians Turn Gayelle”", 2008).

135 This debate stemmed from the Foucauldian description of the sodomite/homosexual distinction in which sexuality as a modern construction became linked with “identity” rather than act. The key point being that homosexuality became understood (“invented”) as not just what you do but who you are: a “homosexual” (a species) rather than someone who has homosexual sex. Foucault’s historical extrapolation on the invention and conceptual placement of the homosexual as a species sparked off a subsequent debate about whether he intended to separate sexual acts from identities. See Foucault (1990a: 43) and Halperin (2004: especially pages 24-47).
obviously mean something to the people who care about such things: however, I
don’t care and I don’t know”).

Part of people’s political identity is displayed through their use of, and opinion
about, sexgender terminology. We could focus on differences between people
who want to express their politicism at the level of everyday language and those
that don’t, but I turn to another analysis: the difference between politicisms.
The non-use and resistance towards “political” (politically correct, or radical)
sexgender terms is ironically just as much a political act as the use of those
terms except that the political force is weighted differently.

The difference in terms of sexgender knowledge dissemination is that the
adoption or development of a political consciousness which is concerned with
notions of visibility, anti-discrimination and issues of social justice, tends to
allow for a nuanced appreciation of why there are so many different sexgender
terms: why they originate, and why abbreviations like LGBTQ* and terms like
gender-queer and pansexual for example, are not mere descriptors and simple
identity labels but references to power relations between dominant and
subordinated groups which are ultimately sexgender related.

Without a sustained effort to articulate the personal and the political
experiences of queer life, words that enable that articulation are sequestered
into a distant, marginalised sexgender-language. This marginalisation means
that non-heterosexual and non-normative neologisms and language, remain
enigmatic and othered; this in turn (as we have seen here, and in the previous
chapter), lends them to discriminatory and queer phobic interpretation.
CHAPTER FOUR
Radical Queerness And Personal Narrative

Places are fragmentary and inward turning histories, pasts that others are not allowed to read, accumulated times that can be unfolded but like stories held in reserve, remaining in an enigmatic state, symbolisations encysted in the pain or pleasure of the body. ‘I feel good here’ the well being under expressed in the language it appears in, like a fleeting glimmer is spatial practice (De Certeau, 1988: 108).

The questionnaire responses in the previous chapter provide a broad range of LGBTIQ* sexgender knowledges that coalesce around, and emphasise, the reality in people’s lives of homo-/trans*-/queer*+-phobia and societal discrimination. In this chapter, I will draw on interview material that provides a closer and specifically queer insight about the enactments (but also and again, the lived reality) of radical sexgender “ways to be”. In this way, this chapter provides an empirical basis for my claim that queerness is formed as a sensibility of, and from, the interstice.

One of the aspects of queer being that I shall emphasise is that of the development of a sensibility. I will be speaking of a development which occurs through subtle or explicit variations in life experiences, with special regard to the subtle, that cause people to change the way they think about self and other, the material and the abstract, and the resistance to norms. My interests are twofold: to illuminate that notion of development by drawing on the interview data, and also, to deepen my argument that a queer sensibility is interstitial. Although this idea of queer sensibility is revealed in the following chapters through an increasingly philosophical discussion, it is revealed here in relation to specific everyday knowledges, which serve to foreground queer ontology.

Queer sensibility is not only a critical insight into the social landscape (one developed in relation to the assessment of social phenomena), but it is also a way of being that is marked by a critical self-consciousness. To develop an epistemological basis for critical insight is evidently not the same as developing an ontological basis for a way of being in the lived world. If the two forms of development are connected (as I suggest they inherently are), it is my assertion that queer sensibility is inherently about an affinity for their adhesion. In this chapter, that affinity is highlighted through the use of personal narrative, which,

136 My use of the term “radical” is in the sense of an explicit personal politics which especially critiques sexgender normativity. It also refers to different forms of queer activism such as the production of, or involvement in, queer events, queer art work, queer theory and even queer conversations that aid the proliferation and dissemination of sexgender knowledges.
(in a similar way to Anzaldúa’s writing), oozes with the significance, for self identity especially, that the everyday experience can have on threshold knowledge space – if it is read through the lens of a “sense perceptivity”. Anzaldúa (1990) has called this “la facultad”; I call it queer interstitiality, and later still (in Chapter Seven), we can understand it as an “etho-poetic moment”.

Before we read much more into the finely nuanced concepts of queer ontology, I want to further consider the notion of “developing queer sensibility”. There are knowledge shifts which allow non-queer people to develop a queer critical consciousness; we could say that the occurrence of knowledge shifts (which may for example change an assimilationist perspective to a queer one) will only take place when an assumed knowledge, or truth claim, is challenged. Although this will be analysed in depth in chapters five, six, and seven, I frame the idea of knowledge shifts more simply here, in order to focus on the empirical material about “the everyday” without which, the theory to come would be less clear and meaningful.

The desire to be “normal” (as we understand it from Chapter Three) may be challenged by experiencing – gaining a knowledge of – someone else’s express desire to not be “normal”. Although this is a rather simplified way of thinking about knowledge shifts or the changeability of everyday events, and people’s lived-world-materiality, it allows us to start questioning how knowledge shifts can occur subtly, at differing speeds, and in relation to context. A queer critical consciousness takes time to develop and as I have said in Chapter One this is part of the complexity of dwelling in interstitial space.

The characterisation of queerness that I focus on in this chapter cannot be demonstrated through the previous analysis of questionnaire data, but the speculations that the questionnaire responses provoked can be observed so much more sharply now. We can begin the analysis of this chapter, with a return to the abbreviation LGBTIQ*. I want to think for a moment, about the inhabitants of the queer interstice, in two spatialised ways, in relation to “LGBTIQ*”: either disjuncturally (between letters such as L, G, B, and T), or as additions to the list (Q, NN, SA, and so on). Thus, the abbreviation LGBTIQ* can now be thought of in terms of the “spatial practice of being”, displacing but not ignoring, the other notions of identity and representation.
In other words, we can look at what the practice of being kinked or butch (for example) might involve (as knowledge processes and sensibility development), rather than that K and B represent categories. I previously stressed that identity categories are utilised in the everyday sphere, and it is therefore important to realise and be aware of the possible hierarchies of their meanings and usages within heteronormative, homonormative and non-normative sexgender discourses. However, there is another provocation that has not yet been considered which I shall explore now.

The provocation is to question how a queer concepto-lingual space (one that opens a space for infinite utterances of being through the expanded articulation of naming practices) once privileged, can be valuable (in opening even more theoretical space) to enable the articulation of fertile, queer, discursive pathways. To draw on the epigraph above, from De Certeau, the question I now ask is, “How does a spatial practice, such as feeling good (for example, about one’s queer, odd, eccentric, or transformative being), that is only a “fleeting glimmer”, because language under-expresses and cannot grasp the sensibility of such a feeling, become concrete and bold, because language supports it?” In my view, the interview narratives that I am about to turn to, are the language support, they are the concrete and they speak of a queer spatial practice. I will situate these queer narratives at the interstices of a generally strategic, and specifically threshold knowledge articulation, but before continuing with that analysis, I shall give an outline of the interview research methods.

**Queer Voices: The Interviews**

In 2006, at different stages within a six month period, ten semi-structured interviews were conducted with self-identifying queers. Five of those interviews, which demonstrate contrasting viewpoints on the radicalism of queer being, are used here as case studies which provide rich accounts of specific and personal lived experience. In a move toward the specific, they illustrate the perspectives of: a queer performance/body modification artist, a queer-femme-identifying list moderator, a political genderqueer transgender activist, and two queer-identifying academics.

The interviews were open-ended, encouraging a conversational exploration of queer identity practice as it is lived in the real everyday world. The interview
method was not employed as a scientific basis from which an objective notion of truth about queerness would be extracted. Instead an interviewee-centred method was adopted, which acknowledges the importance of subjectivity as a means to develop ways of knowing queer lives. This method draws on the significant feminist theoretical legacy, which has over many years, scrutinised the scientific objectivism of data collectors and the objectification of data providers.\(^{137}\) The interviewees were asked to talk about their lives in relation to being queer and “negotiating” the everyday. This includes the interviewees’ concepts of queer ways of being that have developed in the social world. The queer experiences that include relating with friends, lovers, colleagues, acquaintances, and family members, or spontaneous, unplanned social experiences, or the experiences of reading texts and so on, all impart elements to a way of being, these phenomena were invited rather than especially required in the open-ended interview process.

Out of the ten interviews that took place, two were by conducted by telephone, three were face to face, and five used email format. Interview subjects were not hard to find because of my professional and personal participation with GLTIQ* communities and organisations nationally. I identified an interview pool of ten people originally although many more could have been utilised. As this thesis was not relying on empirical research in order to present quantifiable and targeted findings, (in fact the decision to use any empirical data was problematic considering that my project is theory based and used the method of theory based argument), I considered ten interviews would be a sufficient number for use in one empirically based chapter. Ultimately, the empirical data exceeded the partial need of this project (to ground a theory of being in “the real”) and my choice to use the five email interviews was influenced by the style of data that was produced. As the interviews were open-ended, the email exchange could continue over days. I was struck by the “space” that the email format allowed: the telephone and face-to-face exchanges, although relaxed and engaged, did not allow the process of personal narrative to emerge, over time, in the fulsome way that the email method did. Hence my choice to draw

\(^{137}\) For example it was over thirty years ago that Ann Oakley commented that objectification “undermines the very importance of subjectivity in the mapping of social experience” (1985: xi) See also Gilligan (1982) and Reinharz (1992) for analyses of research methods in the humanities and the social sciences from feminist perspectives.
specifically on five email interviews as case studies which took place between June and November 2006.

All interviewees were asked how (in a queer sense) they negotiated different aspects of the everyday and how the everyday interweaves with their own sense of being. To distinguish them from my own text, and to preserve the context of interviewee authorship, the personal narratives are all italicised. The italicised reproduction records the narratives as they were written by the interviewees, and should not be read as an abridged interpretation. The italicisation works to present each narrative as a story.

The first narrative gives an account that outlines T-femme identification in relation to theory making, and is noteworthy for the consideration of degrees of privilege afforded to issues of physical and mental survival, and discussions of identity. In the second account, by a performance artist, there are disruptions to conventional trans* narratives and the norms of embodiment. The third account problematises the notion of transgender identity from the perspective of an everyday commitment to grass roots activism. The fourth and fifth accounts are those of two academics who discuss how queerness is integrated into their “everyday”.

**Spatial Practice As Queer Sexgender Enactment**

In order to align the personal narratives with the notion of everyday (queer) spatial practices, and sexgender enactments, we could think of spatial practice as the practice of dwelling, and being at home in the interstice (in all its senses – as a space, a feeling, a sensibility, a concept – as the qualified phenomenon that I have analysed in Chapter One). “Dwelling”, as we have also seen, does not necessarily imply the stronger sense of claiming a space; but tactics, strategies,
trajectories and ways of operating and utilising space (including the language space of naming sexgender categories) do.

Let us return for a moment to the sexgender naming space of “LGBTIQ*” (if the previous chapter has a mnemonic function it surfaces here in this chapter, as it should in all the chapters that succeed it). This chapter (which has an interstitial function, leading-off from the edges of empiricism, gesturing towards the horizons of theory making) continues with the analysis of the LGBTIQ* abbreviation. I hope this intellectual trajectory is not too worn by now, but we shall soon move beyond it, here I return to “LGBTIQ*” in order to illuminate queer sensibility.

Some sexgender categories are well known already, but with a queer qualifier (queer femme, queer butch, queer kinkster, queer transensual and so on) the mechanisms by which sexgender interstices are filled and elaborated upon will partly depend on the word queer being understood in its oddest senses. This we already know, but queer sensibility can develop out of the point of rupture when one sexgender category becomes insufficient and a broader queer language and knowledge base is needed. The insufficiency of generic sexgender terms becomes apparent when people articulate (more relevantly when they narrate) non-normative desire lines. These terms are not sufficiently accurate as descriptors, nor do they hold sufficiently meaningful conceptual “clout”: in short, their currency is weak.

In Chapter Two, Jane Litwomans’s self-articulation demonstrated this, “I am color blind or tone deaf to a gender-erotic world” (in Hutchins & Kaahumanu, 1991: 4-5). Another way to cast it (which in a moment, our first interview narrative will demonstrate in terms of knowledge movement) is thus: an expanded sexgender articulation swells the node of meaning for the generic idea of a category until the category is actually breached.

In a practical sense, an example might be that a lesbian has sex with a man or men (or more queerly, she will have that sex in certain queer contexts only, and with a kind of man who may not be heteronormative). Having breached one familiar category, a new queer one may be sought. For queers, the queering of LGBT is critical. The queer concepts of what it means to be butch or femme for example, twist the insularity of sexual categorisation. Just the letter T stands for
so many things: trans, transsexual, transgender, transvestite, transensual, T-man, T-woman, T-fag and so on ... and somehow, T even means intersex (which is erroneous) but it frequently gets subsumed by all things trans*. The “T distinctions” alone provide a host of meaning that is hotly contested by some trans* people. Added to this there are queer trans* people who proliferate the T category even further.

As well as queering categories that represent sexgender ways of being, certain kinds of sex acts can also be queered. Some sex acts are certainly more challenging than others. For example, queer sex practices that challenge the limits of embodiment and desire (kink-, fetish- and BDSM-based for example), draw upon a different set of sexgender knowledges from those which vanilla love-making might. The challenge (to an imagined set of people having normative sex), of an imagined queer sex, can be adjusted by inquiring into the challenges of queer sex itself: as it is faced by queers – by their bodies, their intellects and their consciousnesses – and by asking how queer sex is, and becomes, onto-epistemically interwoven with queer being-ness and being queer.

It is not unlikely that people who embody queerness (in behavioural but underarticulated ways) will also inhabit the queer knowledge spaces that promote and foster possibly genderqueer, kinked, sexually explorative ways of being, and as Alan Sinfield says, have “a primary sense of self that is grounded in dissidence” (2004: 269). We can call this an aspect of queer sensibility; we have already seen in Chapter Two that “criss-cross dressing” queers the generic terrain of self-identity possibilities in this way.

Queer narratives do not have to repeat the “given” knowledges about sexgender identity, they can problematise them. These narratives speak of less well known non-normative experiences and ways of being – they are radically queer. One way to intervene in and understand the paradoxical and sometimes contradictory normative sexgender discourses, that simultaneously deny and raise up the queer other, is not to search for heteronormative meanings of the non-normative other but, to investigate and search instead for the particularities of non-normativity. In this way the sexual and the social do not remain distinctly separable, and neither for that matter do the hetero/homo categories which can in fact be both normative and non-normative.
Rather than deny queer sexuality from discourses of queerness, otherness and non-normativity (wherein queer sexual being-ness is left to be popularly imagined), we can displace the imagined popular belief by instating specific accounts of queer sexual being-ness. We can privilege the notion of desire and sex acts as important aspects of our everyday being.

The “stories” in this section of the chapter emphasise the everyday realities of the queer radical subject as material and embodied. Queerness can be theorised as an orientation at extreme distance from sexgender norms but it is inherently and “really” about a particular way of being which persistently engages with queer knowledge production and queer experience in close proximity to the quotidian.

A Story Of Jo

_I have wondered for a long time now whether conceptualising one’s own identity is something of a luxury. Many live in a world where war, hunger and disease make simple survival the necessary site of struggle. My experience with major depression has demonstrated to me how rapidly self concept recedes when there is a preoccupation with self annihilation. Any notion of identity is at that point irrelevant. I believe that you have to be free of any source of desperation in order to have the space and time – and perhaps the luxury – of conceptualising your own identity._

Jo raises an important point in her opening statement which questions the ontological and material premise through which articulations of self identity may occur. As we have seen in Chapter Three (examples of coming out narratives), an analysis of queer being needs to consider who has what privilege and to what degree they have it, at least in the sense of accounting for easy access to knowledge, an existing ease of being (rather than an already desperate or difficult one), the luxury to conceptualise queer being, and a readiness or stamina to negotiate the multilayered effects of everyday oppression. Jo’s comment is reminder to not get “lost” in abstract concepts of being.

_When I first came out as a lesbian in the late 1980s, in my late teens and early twenties, I believed that my sexuality was fixed for life. My only thoughts about gender were that there were two - male and female – and I wasn’t particularly interested in having anything much to do with anyone of the male_
gender. I was immersed in grassroots lesbian feminist politics and read publications such as Lesbian Network which restricted its readership (as far as it could) to women. As a matter of principle and comfort, I directed my commerce toward lesbian owned or run businesses and service providers where this was possible. In order to function with this seamless notion of identity, I constantly repressed my desire for masculinity as it was so powerfully embodied by butches. The constant hysteria about lesbians who aped traditional gender and heterosexuality in their choice of partner, sexual practice and personal appearance had me living a life split between elaborate fantasy and an increasingly unsatisfying reality. In one part of my life, I was guilty of false consciousness, while in the other I was bored and frustrated.

Having set out a particular material awareness, upon which an epistemological account of identity can take place, Jo describes a process of knowledge movement. That movement is a means by which knowledge stasis or production can happen and (in terms of a living knowledge) there is always a starting point from which a person’s level of sexgender knowledge is built. Jo goes on to articulate a means by which the queer sexgender knowledge pool is accessed.

If reading and meeting new people had lead me into that split existence, then it would be reading and meeting people that lead me out of it. I had become the only female volunteer at the Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives at that time. Sometimes I would be offered duplicate lesbian books that there was no room to house. One night, I took home a well read copy of Joan Nestle’s “A Restricted Country”. This book was a feast to a starving femme. As I read, I felt lighter. Nestle illuminated for me the eroticism of power. The key dynamics of difference she brought to life were those between butches and femmes, Tops and bottoms, older and younger.

As we are aware, the queering of generic sexgender categories is important: Jo speaks explicitly about how her concepts of these categories changed over time; we can call this the development of a sensibility of the interstice. These examples of knowledge accumulation and dissemination relate to the ways in which queer knowledge is gathered-in and utilised in practical ways to articulate a sense of (queer) self. The working operational context (by which we ask what
relations, and what enactments are performed) is clearly shown in Jo’s next segment.

I joined LOIS (Lesbians Organising in Solidarity). It was fairly short lived, activist organization in Melbourne which was very conscious of butch/femme, SM, transsexuality and differences of race and class. For the first time, I met someone who was transsexual (MTF) and could not reconcile the descriptions of men infiltrating the lesbian community by stealth with this new friend of mine. The process of accepting and projecting myself as a femme and expressing my desires was fairly slow and I was about 30 before I felt that I could integrate my fantasy life into my real existence. I felt that I had found my true self. I was determined not to settle for anything less than a butch-femme relationship. It was then that I fell in love with a butch who became a transgender butch and who would go on to transition from female to male. I had never met an FTM before but somehow instinctively I anticipated each of these shifts in identity. I found it far easier to accept my partner than work out what this meant for my identity, myself. At that time, conceptualizing identity in a fixed way was still compelling. I remember finding a link to a website called Transensual Femme and feeling both elated and relieved. It was unclear to me just what my “natural” community might now be. I imagined this whole world of FTMs and Transensual Femmes. The reality could not have been more different. As I became aware of and open to my desire for transgender butches and FTMs, I struggled with my place in the lesbian community. I wanted to honour my partner’s identity by using masculine pronouns and by referring to him as my boyfriend. This was easy to do within our relationship and with people close to me but language makes it impossible to excise gender and when I committed to the masculine I would sometimes feel a sense of loss. In that one instant where I used the masculine, I felt my lesbian history and my queer present being collapsed into one seamless heterosexual history. I felt misrecognised and misunderstood but to explain would be to reveal my partner’s trans status. I don’t think that trans people understand the losses sustained by their partners. Amidst the cheerleading and the focus on my trans partner’s struggles, I often ignored my own.

In the introduction to this chapter, I spoke of an affinity for the adhesion of epistemological and ontological bases, for critical insight, and a way of being in
the world. In my view, Jo’s narrative reads as more than that. Developed from an “affinity for ...” Jo’s story indicates a direct inhabitation of the interstice – less pulled towards it than already immersed in it.

Having developed a consciousness of queer sexgender knowledge which considers the sophistications of trans identity and queer desire, Jo again grounds her comments in the real material consequences of challenging fluid and fixed notions of identity. She could “no longer reconcile descriptions” of men (who were actually transsexual women) as infiltrators of lesbian communities, she found it “easier to accept” the identity shifts of her trans lover than her own, and yet she was still compelled by notions of fixed identity. Her own transitional moments (from lesbian, to queer transensual femme), were unclear; even elided, in relation to (at least): her perceptions of the lesbian community, the dominance of heteronormative meaning for pronoun use, and the trans* community. Jo’s discerning narrative continues to strike a balance between material, ontological consequences of her own queer identity, and the theoretical outcomes of her sexgender knowledge creation without recourse to the easy “privilege of unknowing”, whilst in her everyday there is a state of unease to be encountered.

For a number of years, I was a contributor to a community radio show called Dykes on Mics. I used to present lesbian gossip from popular culture and do television and cinema reviews. From the time I met my first trans partner, my content became progressively queerer and included more bisexual and trans content. Eventually, though, I could not reconcile having a boyfriend with being a Dykes on Mics presenter and I left the show. I met my first trans partner online and the online communities can give you a sense that your community of FTMs and femmes is much larger than it actually is. Fortunately, towards the end of our year long, international relationship, I created an online group for transgender butches, FTMs and femmes in Australia. In time, through that group, I came to meet some local transensual femmes and enjoy some wonderful friendships. When my relationship with the transguy in the US ended though, I found that the friendships my partner and I had nurtured online with people in the US, some of whom I had spent time with in person, accrued to my partner. When my relationship with my partner ended, I discovered that my membership of that community was not mine in
my own right but tied to my relationship with my partner. Femmes are contingent members of the FTM community despite commonly being constant sources of personal and community support; fierce defenders and protectors; self-educated on subjects such as FTM history, current affairs, medical interventions and procedures, current legal rights (or voids) at state, federal and international level; open, respectful and affirming in our expression of desire. If the community was larger, then it might better accommodate both the FTM and his ex-partner but I believe that the support usually goes to the FTM, leaving the femme quite isolated. In some ways, it seems that a femme only becomes a legitimate member of the community through her partner.

When my relationship ended and I tried to make connections with FTMs in my own city, I unexpectedly encountered some suspicion, especially when I tried to explain the identity marker transensual femme. It was as if it was ok to meet FTMs accidentally or unknowingly, but to actively and purposefully seek out FTMs left you open to charges of fetishism.

The relations created around queer transensual femme identity which privilege the trans man and a “particular notion of acceptable desire”, limit the many articulations of t-femme desire which exist. Jo challenges those power relations by voicing the notion of “active desire”.

While single femmes who desire FTMs are often regarded with suspicion, at the same time there are FTMs who desire a partner and despair that they’ll never find a woman who will accept them as they are (whether that be before, during or after transition). In many ways, accidental, incidental or eventual desire is privileged over actively expressed desire (by which I mean desire that knows and seeks out its object). Some of this tension echoes that of the everyday man who wishes to pursue but is uncomfortable being pursued. Is accidental desire more romantic or simply more conventional?

The reduction of active t-femme desire to a fetishism (that t-femmes seek out and thus exoticise or “other” the transmale subject) is a disingenuous and simplistic discursive erasure of a “troublesome” sexgender identity category which is actually, but simply, a sophisticated queer way of being. In the next two chapters, I complexify the discussion of queer desire in relation to penetration
and the notion of troublesome (in the sense of how desire is or is not interpreted as queer) sexgender identities.

As a closing comment on the notion of queer identity in relation to the everyday, Jo points to another point of equal importance to the one she opened with: that if we expect accurate readings each others’ identities we must recognise each others’ responsibility to remember that ‘getting it wrong’ is possible for all of us. There must be room outside of the rhetoric of queer identity politics which allows space for non-judgemental knowledge exchange. Jo gave this response after I invited her to comment on the article by Eli Clare which has been discussed in Chapter One:

It usually takes only one long glance at the gawkers - kids on their way home from school, old women with their grocery bags, young professionals dressed for work. Just once I want someone to tell me what they’re staring at... But typically one long steely glance, and they’re gone (2003: 261).

What if one of those kids on their way to school was battling with their parents and their school to be accepted as and live as the only other available gender? What if one of those old women with their grocery bags was a kinky, high femme hot with desire? What if one of the young male professionals was a bear and had a sister who lived with cerebral palsy? What if some of, a few of, the gawkers got it about right? What if they were glared at, gawked back at, dismissed? What if Clare didn’t get it right? What if none of us ever “get it right” - about anyone? Is partial, global recognition of another’s identity/identities possible? By glance? By touch? By conversation? Are the complexities of our identities ever fully recognised or understood? Are we not schooled in partitioning, packaging and (re)presenting our various identities for some, most, or all of the time depending on our audience? Do we not choose carefully to whom we reveal all of the complex, contradictory elements of our identity? Can people in the street, in our communities, at work, ever truly apprehend any, all, some of the elements? What about the shifting and changing that occurs over time? And do we stand to lose potential friends, teachers and allies when we expect instant recognition of a complex whole that language necessarily fails to adequately describe?

Crucially, Jo highlights the flexible minutiae of self identity which are part of our everyday modalities and warns that the expectation of instant recognition can result in losses (potential friends, teachers and allies who may or may not be
queer) that also impact on our everyday ways of being. In this way she reiterates one major theme of this chapter: that radical queerness is not only about extremes of being (away from sexgender norms) but that it persistently engages with queer knowledge production and queer experience as they intersect with quotidian realities of normative being. This can also be thought of as sense perceptivity. From Jo’s narrative, we can understand the oozing significance of everyday experience: it affects threshold knowledge space because of the way it is read, as an interstitial sensibility or a “facultad”. Sitting on a bus can be an “unknowing”, prosaic event; it is also an opportunity to be sensitive, alert and open, to the subtleties and challenges of interpreting and thinking about queer, self and other relationships, dynamics or desires.

The following narrative also places emphasis on “being” (on queerness). It is not one that stresses notions of how the “self” interrelates with notions of queer desire but one that explicitly and queerly defines physical parameters.

**A Story Of Y**

*I am an artist. I work with performance, installation, video and sculpture. My work is driven by notions of identity, ethnicity and gender; the social, spatial and political.*

*In 1971 I was born a baby and labelled a boy. On reflection like most male children the only visible sex markers I had was a small and then functioning penis and two testicles. With no concept of sexual differentiation until I was five I was still so connected to my mother I wore her clothes incessantly and exhibited behaviour just like any other transvestite toddler. Repeated visits to child psychiatrist and psychologists my parents were assured if a closer relationship were fostered between my father and I would not become a homosexual. That was the mid 1970s, of course. As a teenager I was chubby, ample breasted and round faced. With a full head of long hair, smooth faced and pretty, I was mostly mistaken for a teenage girl, which gave me both a sense of delight and fear. Not fear of being girl but my parents finding out that I like being one. So who was I and what did I really want to be when I grow up. The German clinician Carl Westphal’s in the late 1800s describes my now evolving gender play as having an anti-pathic sexual instinct related to sever mental disorder. But was this it?”
Y’s genealogical snapshot is punctuated by moments of supreme ease in which the trans narratives we have become accustomed to are transcended. The comment “just like any other transvestite toddler” inserts into our consciousness, the simple but forceful idea of transvestite toddlers (plural) ordinarily toddling around in their parent’s clothes. Transvestism itself is made “normal” by the words “just like any other”. This pluralizing and generalizing of transvestism is a micro-tactical move from the minoritising logic with which transvestism is associated. Y queers the notion of childhood dress-ups which can work to erase childhood transvestism by not acknowledging (and thereby giving permission for) the children that may fetishise and feel good or sexy in the “wrong” clothing. The fair day “ice-cream walk” noted in Chapter Three, resonates with this ordinariness that Y places onto the phenomenon of transvestite toddlers.

I have come to many positions, but my favourites still remain .... So amongst the varied nomenclature ridden terrain of identity politics it took some time but I worked out I was a ‘homosexual with social exhibitionistic transvestite tendencies’. But by then I was something else entirely. Over two years from 1992 I randomly took female hormones and battled substance abuse, again sprouted breasts, lived as a woman some days and grappled with my desire to become a transsexual woman. I had become a gay male transsexual bodied fag experiencing gender identity euphoria and living with the stigma of a psychosexual disorder. I was finally content when in 1996 I became a Queer with fetishistic tranvestitic behaviour but was now ‘trapped’ in a transsexual body. These are manifestations of my own sensibilities. The type that always change and looking for critique and redefinition. I like to present what fascinates me about becoming this or that. It is a vital way for me to understand my experience of the world. To explore and expose what I now see as the masquerade of persona. Cosmetic surgery always offered something. Its promise of re-creation is one possibility. Transformation definitely Refreshment and renewal. That our bodies are plastic and mouldable.

When Y says, “I had become a gay, male, transsexual-bodied fag experiencing gender identity euphoria” we could infer that he is challenging the orthodoxy of
trans* sexgender discourse; specifically, the medical term which pathologises trans* people known as gender identity disorder or gender dysphoria. Y continues the transcendental disruption to trans narratives when he says, “I was now trapped in a transsexual body.” The popular comment, “I am trapped in the body of a man/a woman” is a familiar statement of trans* sexgender discourse (we have seen this in Chapter One where Ben Singer notes it.) In this statement there are two specific notions at work; one is the possibility itself of “being ontologically trapped”, and the other is that entrapment is firmly entrenched on one or the other side (only), of the normative male/female binary. Y’s story gives us a queer insight into enactments and lived realities of radical sexgender ways to be, in doing this, the story also acts as an empirical foreground that serves to elucidate the queer ontology ahead.

In Y’s statement, a different notion is at work: the idea of sexgender queerness as a process of onto-epistemic discovery which can envisage even the transsexual body as a site of entrapment. Although this can be read as a reference to the despair associated with bodily entrapment, Y is not reinforcing such a notion and indeed expresses a sensibility of “contentment, fascination, and exploration” at the ongoing possibilities of bodily re-definement.

However emblemised and needed the idea of being trapped in any body is, and although it can serve to challenge the idea of a normative body being the one which is “wrong”, Y is offering yet another perspective. His critique of entrapment is subtle; he is not trapped, and he demonstrates that entrapment can be read as the means to freedom: as the site at which movable, somatic demarcation, can be envisioned and applied.

In 2004 I had my first 2 surgical procedures, a double incision /bilateral mastopexy and nipple grafts (to remove my breasts and relocate my nipples) and an abdominoplasty.

Last week when I measured the scars on my body from the surgeries I have had. They measure 104cm. I undertook the surgeries to reconfigure my body

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139 The term GID and its usage has a controversial history of usage. GID is a psychological classification found in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) published by the American Psychiatric Association. As such many trans* people who require access to surgery or hormones are deemed mentally ill (that is clinically diagnosed as such) order to receive “treatments”. For in depth discussions of the term GID and other pathologising terminology such as transvestic fetishism see: Spade (2006), Karasic & Drescher (2005), Paul (2001) Nangeroni (1996), and the website devoted to reforming psychiatric policies which discriminate against mentally healthy trans* people: http://www.transgender.org/gidr/index.html (accessed 23/1/2008).
from one form to another. Surgery is not new for artists. I look at the markers on my body. Biologically the things that give me my femaleness. My breasts, my hips and the supple nature of my belly. These are markers that were both natural and induced. I’ve now had my breasts removed. The nipple sensation is gone and the way I could make my breasts grow and shrink just by thinking about them is now a thing of the past. My own experience with cosmetic surgery is a personal one and a private one. However my artwork is made public. How do I reconcile these two things?

My own experience with cosmetic surgery is a personal one & a private one. There is pain and blood, cuts and stitches, Drains, Morphine and Risks that are very real. But the surgery and procedures are not the work. These are everyday experiences of 10s of thousands of people, each with their own story. It is the actions I carry out in response to these happenings. The photographs and installations, the objects and video. These things, that I open to public display and scrutiny. These things that give visibility to these everyday experiences and shed some new way of sensing them. Seeing them feeling them, even enjoying them. Although The surgery is not the work. The site of the art is my body. I do believe that my surgeries are performative though. Indeed surgery is. Doctors believe in The art of surgery For some artists use surgery as art Like Orlan my plastic Surgeons are hire hands used to execute predetermined tasks. Skilled labourers if you like. But my performances are without theatrics.

If we look at Y’s queer sexgender identity in terms of spatial practice, or a series of enactments and the relations they create, we can see that surgery as Y uses it, works as a performative act, as well as creating queer relationships. The surgery and procedures are not in themselves essentially meaningful, they are for Y, like the “everyday experiences of tens of thousands of people”. The relationship between surgeon and patient (by default this power relation favours the surgeon) is articulated by Y as a relationship between a client and a hired

140 Feminist scholarship in particular has analysed this dynamic/power relation; historically “the woman’s body” as a site of intervention by male medical professionals has resulted in a lingering and global violence done to bodies which because of their perceived passive gender are now traditionally and naturally “operated” upon (disciplined and regulated), with the full weight of scientific and medical technologies which can “better” them. There are also disability, intersex, queer, trans*, socio-legal, anthropological, medico-historical, psychoanalytic, sociological and other theories or texts (such as Y’s in this chapter, or Orlan’s Carnal Art Manifesto that analyse or comment on the “doctor/patient” relation. See an excerpt of this manifesto at http://www.fdcw.unimaas.nl/cwsiof/shopwindow/art/persoons%20van%20der%20leeuw%20(orlan)/page1%20carnal.htm) (accessed 23/1/2008). For other examples that critique the “doctor/patient” power relation, or dynamic, see Rendell (2003), Waldby (1996), Stryker (1996) and Haraway (1991).
hand, which alters the default power relation; the patient becomes client and
surgeon becomes a skilled labourer. However, the point Jo makes is important
in this regard and the context of privilege should not be overlooked. For many
people who undergo surgery for non-everday reasons, the ability (or possibility
for a willingness) to understand surgery in the way that Y does (as essentially
meaningless) is complicated by such phenomena as the “doctor-patient”
relationship or the different material factors that affect an “ease of being”.

**The Art Of Y**

When I am asked to outline my research, until now I have said: Surgery In
Art. Plastic Surgery And The Affect It Has On The Re-Formation Of Identity.

Y made this statement in a 2004 presentation,\(^1\) where he framed his own work
in relation to the avant garde work of artists who push the boundaries of the
body itself as an art medium; John Duncan, Orlan, Zoran Todorovic, Amanda
Lapore and Jocelyn Wildenstein. The progress of Y’s own artistic project has led
him to formulate a more specific statement,

*For the future I am working at having my ear removed and reattached but
again that another session altogether and a deviation from the rigour of
Plastic Surgery. It’s nothing really radical. It’s a performance again acting out
the role of the mad artist. Remaking Van Gogh’s myth in a new age. So now
when I am asked to outline my research I can say ‘Surgery In Art With A Focus
On Plastic Surgery: Its Reshaping Of The Body’s Borders And The Affect It Has
On The Re-Formation Of Identities.*

Y has created performance works, and installations which we can again
reference to the creation of queer relationships, for example between the artist,
the artist’s work, identity, audience and the onto-epistemic interstices in which
those relationships are complexified. The following six art projects, demonstrate
how Y disrupts dominant notions of the body – as a signifier of age, beauty,
performance, erotic and socio-cultural function.

**Shocking Stocking Dolly**

*In 2003 I created the Shocking Stocking Dolly. She is both disturbed and
disturbing. I am near nude clothed only in a sheer nylon outfit; it is dirty and*

\(^1\) The Body Modification Mark II conference at Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia.
gets dirtier.

It was US Psychiatrist Robert Stoller’s posturing that transvestism is inherently fetishistic driven by the eroticism of the clothes of the other. ‘Items such as stockings, especially for the male have a magical erotic value’ he said. For my performances stockings and their perceived erotic charge seemed a perfect starting point. But there was also a further simulation of skin with body parts like fake breasts, and vagina also charged with libidinal value. Removable and rubber they look ‘real’ and slip around under this fine nylon skin. Shocking stocking dolly was new ground. I asked where does the costume begin and the skin end? With SSD I also devised a way to tape a hose into my genital area so a tube could simulate urination. She was unruly. And pee she would, on anyone in the way, in fact on anyone not in the way.

Old Dear

In Old Dear I begin to develop what SSD had started, here I created an aging hostess. Glamorous and Old. A victim of too much surgery or not enough. Who was she? Old Dear was performed at a Gala Drag event @ Sydney’s Town Hall. The Diva Awards are a kind of Oscars for the Drag Queen of Sydney. Her presence is a proposal for how glamour driven drag queens may see themselves in retirement and I wished to confront them with that. The old dear is gorgeous and like Shocking Stocking Dolly has a weak bladder too.

Amanda

With Amanda, I present a homage to the international Superstar, muse, model, make up counter attendant and transsexual. Amanda Lapore shown in the earlier slide. Big lips, gorgeous hair. A barbie doll. But what of my own transsexual body.

The questions Y raises, are not just for the audience, or reader of his work, but particularly for Y himself, as he illustrates below in his self-portraiture.

Self Portrait and Installation

Nipple Graft - a series of self portraits where I wanted to document a body I had grown to enjoy. It was about representing something I was going to erase. I now reflect and consider my self as having been a non operative transsexual to quote gender outlaw and theorist Kate Bornstein. Like SSD and the Old
Dear, my body is still presented with transsexual value. Sexy and changed. Scarred with the markers common of female to male bodies.

**Installation View**

In 2005 I exhibited some printed panels of various sizes inspired by sketched diagrams I originally created to rank and evaluate scar patterns. I had used these diagrams to discuss with my surgeon what I wanted as scar residue inscribed on my chest. They are pastel, soft and approachable. But they conceal the bloody nature of surgery. I indent to re create these diagrams at quilts using the finest silk. They will all be 104 x104cm. Skin can be soft as silk, fine, desired.

As we can see, the integration of Y’s own body into art work and queer trans identity complicates simple and orthodox notions about both body modification and transsexual embodiment but also Y’s work is part of his identity; part of his everyday life. He continuously works to re-shape and re-define his body and this does not occur in isolation from his relationships in the world as a queer person being queer.

**Abdominoplasty 2006**

From my latest procedure I’m working with the flesh and fat that was removed. My friend mistress em suggested I make take my skin, roll it up and then fuck myself with it. So bent i feel like im going to burst a stitch.

In my reading of this comment, the “bursting of stitches” would be through laughter and Y’s humour references the endless possibilities that there are, to “play” with the body.

I love life and I celebrate its richness and diversity. Indeed I like to somehow live with diversity. I want to be people, but I also know this is me. This pluralism is to express who I am as an integrated entity. I also try and defy my own individualisation, I believe in the connectedness of the planet as an organism and our being is all woven together in this web called life. But for practical matters I don’t have a pigeonhole. Instead I am a ethereal hive with lots of little boxes I skip around in. Stretching in many directions and into the future. I skip from one to the other. Having fun.
The Everyday Of Y

My everyday experience is queer. I speak with a voice that falls outside of heterosexual expectation. I sometimes speak with a voice that draws from women’s language, men’s language and the voice of the mother and father. I find my identity is too complex to keep out in the open in all its facets all of the time. It taps into the idea of the performance of gender and the experience of the everyday. For instance, This morning i had sex with my boyfriend, a quickie entailed me tying him up, spanking and forcing him to orgasm in an uncomfortable positions whilst being handcuffed, feet bound, blindfolded and extreme nipple play. An Hour later I was at work at my job as a teacher wearing a mild manners outfit of jeans and a light jacket.

Last Saturday I went out with my friend Della. I’m keeping a full beard at the moment. I wore my G cap and a san Francisco police uniform. I looked like someone out of the village people or s 70s porn star. It was pure performance. Now the story continues... My friend Alex was due to arrive from Lismore, unfortunately he had a bad burn on his foot and had to postpone. Originally Della, Alex and I were to go out together.

Della who’s full name is Della Deluxe rarely comes out as a boy and is usually in full drag. this time however she was to go out as a pimp for Alex and I. Alex also known a Yunka (an Israeli super model) was going to go out looking like a hooker and spend the night catwalking, I however now very happy with the beard I have grown over two months was intending to go out as a hairy lady. A fifties frock and very hairy legs. I planned to spend the night at the bar shaving my legs progressively during the evening and rinsing my razor in my half empty beer glasses.

Y is explicit about the everyday variations of queer being-ness. The acts of “the everyday”, such as kink sex, teaching, and disruptive drag performances in themselves, are not remarkable; we can all list the different “hats” we wear each day. But in the doing of (and being-in) these acts and the self-conscious understanding of their oddity or sexgender diversity, they represent the interstitiality of everyday queerness. This is the space in which queer sensibility can emerge because in the normative (naturalised) everyday, such acts are always already loaded with the prerogative of un-self-consciousness. In other words one cannot be un-self-conscious about bondage and drag in the same way.
that one can be about normative “before and after work” routines. It is through such everyday experiences that the development of queer sensibility occurs. There are subtle and explicit variations which are always being juxtaposed, thus they are always noticeable to the self-conscious queer who aligns the variations in life experiences, with the interstices of thinking and doing, the general and the specific, and the sexual and the non-sexual.

So what can I say? I take a fluid approach in how I represent myself (given that we accept the masquerade of gender). I was happy just to go out and disrupt the expectations of who I am, this I do both for myself and to experiment with the environment in which I perform the masquerade. I don’t always know how people will react. I do however test some limits and respect others. For instance I would not deem it professional or appropriate to attend my workplace in full drag. I do however wear long robes or a man dress I had made some years ago. There is a time and place for things, I would not challenge the street-scape if I felt it would endanger my life or give cause to those that hate to continue to do so or hate even more. There sometimes is no valuable purpose in challenging those who will only respond to it with violence.

I live my whole life as an act that is read by others. I don’t act in my life but I live it. The way I behave seen and interpreted by those around me. I take that as a powerful motive to cultivate those perceptions and toy with them. This is a manipulative act. But life is a manipulative act, and manipulation is not always bad. E.G. to express love or generosity without the desire for it to be returned has this effect.

Y presents an interstitial nexus; a dense, complex and nuanced approach to everyday queerness. He is attuned to the “reading” of queerness and strongly connects performance art with the articulation of his relationship to embodiment and the limits of sexgender knowledge. The next narrative also discusses being trans* and queer identified although unlike Y (as an artist who “uses” the body to disrupt normative sexgender expectations) this following narrative discusses gender non-normativity which is not specifically linked to surgical manipulation/crafting/design.
A Story Of Ash

I don’t really have a solid identity in the way that most people would use identity. I find that the only time I have to identify as anything is when I am justifying my existence for being somewhere. Whether that’s in a gay space or in a trans space I still feel like I kinda have to prove myself. I guess the only words I never take off are queer and trans – sometimes I feel like the word transqueer is as good a sum up of all the different parts of me that I can get. But I don’t use words like FTM or transsexual. I don’t want to subscribe to this forced binary understanding of thinking. I want to mess with peoples heads as much as I can. I don’t use the word ‘transition’ to explain where I’m at either. I’m not going from A to B or B to A. I’m not male but I’m not female either. I am many things; queer, trans, vegan, butch, anti-capitalist, I am a freak. I don’t see transitioning as something with a clear beginning and end but rather a journey that I hope is continual. I don’t want to get to a certain time in my life and feel like this is where I stop growing or changing or learning or whatever. I feel like that rather limiting really. What’s the point of living if we stop challenging ourselves or stop learning. Transgender comes from the word transcend and that’s what I want to do. Transcend this forced binary idea of gender being limited to only male or female and then that male and female have these strict understandings that everyone must adhere to. There are so many people that can benefit from this.

The issue of a forced gender binary for someone who does not identify as male or female, who is gender variant, and queer, and very clearly occupies a “space of refusal”, calls for, as Ash does, “a challenge”. The challenge rests in the queering of and transcendence from the dominant form of thinking about gender as a fixed male/female binary. What Ash terms a “grey area” is the interstitial space of queer trans subjectivity and as an occupant of queer interstitial space, who is dedicated to a particular trans activism, this means being engaged in the complex relations of knowing and unknowing, and an awareness of the difficulties of articulating a gender interstice. Where the homo/hetero sexual binary has been more successfully deconstructed, the entrenchment of male and female gender is practically, in an everyday way, very hard to dismantle. Ash’s multi-faceted label string is similar in it’s range, to that of Audre Lorde’s. In Ash’s text, there is a clear tension (read as the tensile
quality to interstitial space) between summing-up oneself (as transqueer) and maintaining a freak identity that remains provocatively fluid.

Queer theory set the scene for people like me to exist in this grey area of gender. In the same way that it made a space for people who said that sexuality was not as clear cut about being gay or straight. Queer theory is about seeing beyond this and to me it makes sense that the next thing to deconstruct is gender. Words like FTM and MTF are subscribing to this gender binary way of thinking and make it easy for people to undermine trans* as being ‘trapped’ in the wrong body. That’s not enough for me. We need to think outside this way of thinking as it is really limiting. There are so many things in the world that are dependant on this male/female thing though – pronouns, public bathrooms, schools even some queer people’s perception of ‘drag’. Drag queens and drag kings are about fucking with gender but some people freak out about the thought of a guy being a drag king. Sure it would be easier if I just subscribed to either male or female instead of pushing those boundaries of what it means to be in this world. I’m not at all confused about who I am but I feel like sometimes the world isn’t quite ready for me. But fuck that. Being angry is what makes me keep going, what wakes me up in the morning. Anger can be a huge driving force and a really positive one at that.

Ash’s negotiation with the practical everyday, clearly describes qualities of interstitial space discussed in Chapter One; a quality of de-teleogised liminality (“I’m not going from a to b or b to a ...”), and tensity (“sure it would be easier if I subscribed to either male or female...”). Similarly to Y’s narrative, we again come across the idea that sexgender transitioning can be thought of in ways which do not confine trans identity to ontological entrapment.

In terms of political activism, Ash directly links the forced gender binary with capitalism, patriarchy and political apathy. Second wave feminisms have long recognised and declared these as sites of enmity, but for Ash, who hopes for a coalition politics between feminist communities and trans communities there is a disappointment.

My friend has this patch on ze’s jacket that reads “It we live apathetic, we die pathetic”. Getting drunk everyday numbed my brain for a while, alcohol and other drugs breed apathy. I don’t really drink anymore because I want to be
around to fight the fight. I see the fight for trans rights as something that benefits all people not just us trannys. Everyone regardless of gender identity is affected by this gender binary way of thinking. There are boys that want to dance and girls that want to play football – by smashing these preconceived ideas about what it means to be male or what it means to be female we make way for endless opportunities for people to carve out their own existence and be who they really want to be. Capitalism is dependant on a patriarchal society and a patriarchal society is dependant on strict binary ideas of gender and sexuality. Capitalism is at the root of it all. I find it really disappointing that there is such a divide between the feminist community and the transgender community. Both are fighting against the myth that biology equals destiny. Women’s Liberation is about saying ‘just because we are women does not mean that we are subordinate to men and deserve to be treated unequally’. The trans community is saying ‘we have the right to live as the gender we feel we are and to be free of discrimination’. I think there are huge similarities between the two, in fact it’s all the same fight. Even though I don’t identify as a woman anymore I sure as hell still see the importance of feminism. To me this is the same fight but people like Sheila Jeffrey’s want to divide rather than unite and fight this together. Transguys are not duped by the patriarchy and by the thought of gaining male privilege. Trans people suffer so much discrimination in this world that surely there are easier ways to get ahead in the world. There’s too much hatred when really we should be banding together to fight the enemy not fight ourselves.

At the same time as pressing for coalitional success, something that Ash speaks passionately about, there is also room for individual activism. In my reading, Ash’s passion resonates with Anzaldúa’s plea which was discussed in Chapter One: “People, listen to what your jotería (queer) is saying” (1999: 107). In the case of pronouns there are many individual strategies which attempt to redefine the linguistic constraints of a forced gender binary.

Pronouns are the bane of my existence. A few years back I held a poll with some friends about what random, non-gendered word I could use to replace the more popular he/she options – ‘robot’ came as the top choice. Robot’s are pretty non-gender specific and so I informed all my friends that from now on I would prefer them to replace pronouns with the word ‘robot’. It never really
took off too well. But the other gender specific pronouns like hir or ze are not very easy to use in everyday language. And I liked the idea of everyone choosing their own pronouns. These days I still struggle to answer questions like ‘what pronouns do you prefer?’ Most people I know use male pronouns for me and I’m fine with that. I like it when people mix pronouns up, i.e. in the same sentence using male and female ones. I don’t really mind what pronouns people use as long as its not only ever female pronouns - so either male pronouns or a mix of pronouns or gender-neutral pronouns is fine. I’m not confused about who I am but I feel like sometimes the world isn’t quite ready for me.

Such an obviously difficult campaign would burn out were it not for the humour that emerges when choices for pronoun words, such as robot, are made. The irony of the humour is made somewhat more realistic by the possibility that perhaps one day the world will actually be ready for a proliferation of personal pronouns. Adding to the irony however, is the history of the word robot. There are parallels to be made with the possible twenty first century development of pronouns. The noun robata and the verb robotovat preceded the modern Western notion of a robot by several “quiet” centuries but in a seminal moment due to Karel Capek’s play RUR written in 1920, it entered popular world-wide usage. Perhaps the space of information and communication technology (whether it is associated with “the arts”, or academia, or techno-science for example), will again provide a discursive threshold knowledge moment (later, in Chapter Seven, this will be referred to as an epistemological thaw), such that the “he” and “she” of today do indeed precede something more to come.

A more obvious link (metaphysical rather than linguistic) between the robot, and the trans subject, is the human fascination with the “man-made”, created body, which explores the issues of realness and identity. Given the increasing amount of contemporary literary publications about trans* issues, the trans* pronoun campaign may indeed forge a new linguistic and possibly velveteen

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142 The *Barnhardt Dictionary of Etymology* explains the word “robota” as meaning work or labour. It is “related to Old Slavic rabu slave, from Proto-Slavic “orb-”, cognate with Old High German arabeit work, from Indo-European “orbh-“ (R. K. Barnhart & Steinmetz, 1988: 933).

143 See Jerz (2003) for an historical outline of the publication and performance of R.U.R.

144 For further theorisation of this issue, particularly in relation to “the monstrous” versus “the natural” body, see (Stryker, 1994, 2004).
moment into popular consciousness. In my view, the interstices of gender enactment and gender language are identified in Ash’s story as aspects of being; this is a narration of interstitiality. Again, we see an oozing: between everyday experiences, threshold knowledge space, and sense perceptivity.

Despite the fluidity of my gender expression/identity, it is not something that I take off and on depending on where I am or who I am with. Over the last few years I have been working towards creating a space for myself in my work, my family, my home life, my relationship, my study, my friends and social networks etc. Negotiating these areas of my life have not been too difficult thus far. Though having said that, my gender expression is not easy for my family to understand and come to terms with and is an area that is a work in progress and will probably take several years. Public spaces continue to be an area that is difficult to negotiate as a gender variant person who refuses to conform to the male/female binary. There are many difficulties including public restrooms which are mostly male or female; forms continue to only have male and female options and demand a widely recognised title (though I use Mx wherever possible) and there are so many more day to day things that many people would probably never think twice about. Tranny bashers and queer bashers have a lot in common and sometimes safety is something else I think about - sure the threat of physical safety scares me sometimes but I try not let it limit myself too much as living in fear sucks and as a feminist and a queer and a tranny I refuse to do that. I want to live in hope not fear.

This is the sort of personal articulation that references the tiring and continuous work of being queer; the possibly years-long project of battling for and creating a space for the queer self in the everyday arenas of work, family, home, relationship, study, friends and social networks. For Ash, this is clearly not a reason to rest in the ease of un-knowing or an assimilationist compliance; it is a battle to fight. The fourth narrative also articulates a sense of what that battle is.

A Story Of Dean

I am not sure that ‘negotiated’ is a good word to describe how I work to integrate queerness into my everyday. It appears to be a rather tame way of describing what I—and possibly many other self-identifying queers—do. Perhaps this is the fault of academic attempts to not be seen to alienate queers
at the same time as most academics don’t really understand the struggles involved in being queer. I would think that ‘battle’ is much more of a relevant term, certainly for me anyways.

For me, being queer is always hard (every pun intended). I don’t mean this in the sense that I consider myself a sexual/radical victim in a predominantly heteronormative/conservative world. I am not the repressed fighting an oppressor. Sometimes being queer and acting out queerly involve choices that I do not have to act upon in order to liberate myself from some sexual/social tyranny; but I do make these choices because kicking ass (and doing other things with ass) is what I find most pleasurable and exciting. It relieves the boredom of having to live in a world that appears to be turning into one large shopping mall filled with plastic disposable crap where the greatest issue of concern is a quarter percent rise in the cost of our lives while vast proportions of the animal and human world continue to suffer to ensure we never have to.

I see that being queer and acting queerly are in themselves always confrontational. (There is perhaps a dangerous essentialist element to this claim, but being accused of being an essentialist is surely one of the least offensive labels I might be forced to bear.) It doesn’t really matter what kind of society exists around me. If I am to be and act queer in that realm, I have to be confrontational, controversial, and often angry. I have to strive to upset the status quo in order that I might be able to expose the constructed normality of this status quo, whether that be in my academic work, my attempts to investigate social practices, being a co-parent in a same-sex relationship, having an evening out at a gay bar, chatting on gaydar, or dealing with some homophobic attack on the street.

Again we see a reference to what I have termed the un-easiness of being queer. For Dean being queer and acting queerly is always hard and always confrontational. As with Ash who wants to mess with people’s heads, Dean wants to upset the status quo. Both of them acknowledge anger as a component of their desire to do this.

There is also often a feeling of dislocation that accompanies this everyday attempt to continue to become ever more queer and then queerer still. While at the same time as I desire to be seen as something ‘other,’ there are at times
feelings of despair that I will never be a part of the world in which I exist. And yet, simultaneously, I have no desire to be a part of that world, for it is the very structures and systems of that world that drive me to queerness to begin with. There is therefore a certain contradictory sense of dislocation that comes through being queer; and while I recognise that some of this is the result of society’s attempts to discipline all evidence of queerness out of every body, I also understand that my own everyday practices of queerness perpetuate and often increase this feeling. Not that I am sad about this. I think I thrive on it. Without this feeling of being somehow different—a feeling that is arguably constructed as a result of my dealings with all things queer—I don’t think there would anything queer about me. As such, I am reluctant to psychoanalyse this feeling of dislocation to the point of a cure. I don’t want to belong. I want to be seen as something always queer. If only to ensure that I don’t spend my life shopping.

There are difficult and different spaces in which to ‘be’ homosexual. Dean acknowledges a contradiction in terms of the despair at never being part of the world, and yet the desire to also not be. Described by Dean as dislocation; the occupation of queer interstitial space in his narrative includes a recognition of society’s disciplinary practices and the means (through personal choice to reject certain constructions and not others) to maintain a sense of queerness through the very structures which regulate queerness as otherness.

In contrast to Dean’s and Ash’s articulation of anger and the notion of a “battle”, the fifth narrative does not articulate a passionate ‘fight’ against such phenomena as ‘dislocation’ or discrimination (although these are acknowledged) but it refers instead to the practical realities that affect an academic who works within the field of education. This is not to say that there is no “queer passion” in this narrative, there is, but it exists in response to the openings that do exist for queers to carve out spaces of habitation rather than as a radical response to injustice or regulation. This final narrative explains the “negotiation” of queerness in relation to the concrete spatial context of venues: the public toilet, the conference, the queer scene, and the university work space.
A Story Of Mary Lou

My research over the past 10 years has focused on aspects of queer research in education. I have enjoyed doing this work and the relationships it has enabled me to develop (professional and social) with colleagues in Australia and overseas (especially in the US where I lived for several years before completing my PhD in oz). Every two years I go to a big conference in the US (AERA – American Educational Research Studies Association) where I meet with people interested in similar aspects of research in education. The first time I went I was blown away by the encounter: who knew that somewhere there was a whole room of people discussing research on queer theory in education? It was a bit like the experience of going to your first queer bar.

Here again we read of a threshold moment. In Jo’s story, the revelatory insights came through reading a particular queer text (“a feast for a starving femme”). In Mary Lou’s story, it was the gathering-in of queers (a roomful of similarly interested folk) that was revelatory. Differently, but also referencing a quality (exhilarating or exciting) of queer interstitial space, are Ash’s and Dean’s comments that the dislocation from, and a knowledge of, a “disciplinary world”, are social phenomena that can be “thrived on” or that fuel the anger for a “driving force”.

Within the group there is no agreement about what constitutes a queer research project or queer academic, it’s a fairly loose association of folks who opt-in because being part of that group is something they enjoy. Like any conference, the quality of the research varies enormously – what is being presented feels somewhat secondary. It is the act of attending the meetings and paper sessions of the Queer Theory Special Interest Group that makes AERA worth the trip.

This sense of what we could call, “queer* camaraderie” is suggestive of the validating fair day atmosphere that I referred to in Chapter Three; it is a space for collective “special interest” (being queer*, supporting queer* rights and so on), which gathers queers* together. However, Mary Lou also speaks of how the designated queer* space (within the broader organisation of the AERA) is marginalised, and one gets a sense of how this space is a precious one to be cherished and nurtured. The exclusivity of this queer* space is made sharply
evident for Mary Lou once she steps outside of it, into the “heteronormative world”.

Attending the conference is always something of a mixed bag. Judith Halberstam has noted women’s tendency to police gender in the restroom is particularly acute within the space of the airport. If gender is policed acutely in airports, and this is also my experience of air-travel, it is also acutely policed within some schools, and at some conferences. AERA, at least in my experience, seems to be a particularly challenging week in terms of what Halberstam terms “the Bathroom Problem”; a place where the gender ambiguous bathroom user is not-man and not-woman, and therefore gender deviant (1998: 21). My experience of the most recent AERA in San Francisco involved feeling gender deviant by day, and feeling decidedly unremarkable in terms of gender while navigating San Francisco’s queer scene by night. One minute I was constantly being questioned as to whether I was in the right bathroom; the next my lack of tattoos, piercing and facial hair marked me more as tourist than participant in the queer venues I happened upon.

It is the notion of policing that Mary Lou pinpoints as a site of tension in regard to her experiences in San Francisco; feeling “gender deviant” in heteronormative space and non-queer in a particular queer space. As we have seen, this difference of acceptability in different spaces is a self-evident aspect of queer being. There are however, differences in the contexts of policing. Being marked as a tourist, as distinct from a “legitimate” queer participant in a San Francisco queer venue is different to being policed in public toilets at the AERA conference. “Happening upon” a queer venue is something a tourist might well do; choosing a venue (which is specifically suited to one’s social and cultural expectations as a queer person) is made possible by local queer knowledge or one’s ability (or time or inclination), to find information about queer resources, networks and venues. Having said this, local knowledge may well produce discerning critical insights into the availability, and hence possible limitations of “suitable” venues: there may not (even in San Francisco) be a venue in which some queer* folk can readily feel at ease. Out of the three spaces that Mary Lou discusses (the AERA queer group space, the AERA public toilets, and the queer

145 See Gayle Salamon’s phenomenological analysis of trans* rhetorics which includes as it’s opening statement, “San Francisco, historically and practically the epicentre of North American queer culture, has exactly one lesbian bar” (2006: 575).
venue) it is the AERA public toilets for which there is no choice (other than the
heteronormative male/female option) for a genderqueer person to avoid being
policed.

As Mary Lou goes on to say, she does not have an everyday sense of feeling
queer; her queerness rests on being involved in such activities as her attendance
and involvement at AERA and in the perception that others have of her work as
marginal, queer work.

On a day to day basis, my life in academia doesn’t feel especially queer - I
suppose that attending the AERA conference is about as queer as it gets
nowadays. I find going to community events a challenge work-wise (finding
time) and geographically (I live out of town on weekends) and emotionally (I
don’t feel especially turned on by the thought of ‘queer’ community events - I
enjoyed these much more when I lived in Adelaide - Feast seemed to offer more
in the way of talking and thinking provocations than Midsumma).

It is interesting to know that the different state-wide events that are organised
by the larger Australian cities especially can be markedly different in terms of
their appeal to attendees who might desire the challenge of thought-provoking
queer content. Certainly the South Australian LGBTIQ* festival called Feast, has
a recent reputation for hosting and organising diverse/queer/fringe events. Mary Lou
does not claim an especially queer identity, yet she is discerning about
what could be considered queer versus generic queer* festival events. There are
many reasons why the different GLBTIQ* festivals may or may not include
radical, queer, or non-normative content: these may range from the ability of
volunteers to secure (or have the financial support to organise) a diverse festival
program, to the political or popular interests of exclusive or dominant groups in
LGBTIQ* communities. Differences between festivals and how they are
organised and programmed are often commented upon in what is known as the
gay press (local LGBTIQ* newspapers and magazines), or in emails to the
organisers of LGBTIQ* festivals. Also, it is within queer sub-cultures where
criticisms of non-queer/-kink/-BDSM/-fringe/-non-normative/-radical content

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146 See the Feast website for details of reviews of Feast and the content of previous festival programs. http://www.feast.org.au (accessed 23/1/08).
147 For example, the importance of the instability and uncertain future of the West Australian LGBTIQ* organisation, Pride WA Inc., was (in January 2008) being publicly debated in such forums as the Pride AGM, and the Out In Perth newspaper website. See http://www.outinperth.com/index.php/news/local/60-days-until-the-end-of-pride (accessed 23rd January 2008).
are expressed. Bearing in mind Mary Lou’s comment about the Midsumma festival, there were in 2008, some provocative queer events that were organised specifically to create dialogue about, and the thinking space of, queer and radical sexgender issues.

In relation to queerness and the university environment, Mary Lou comments on the obstacles to a career path that the label, “queer academic” can cause.

*I suspect that colleagues perceive the work I do as queer work – and this can be problematic in trying to develop from a early career researcher into a mid-career researcher who can win grants, examine theses etc. Recently a reviewer of a grant application I wrote commented as follows about by track record:

*It could be argued that she is highly productive, but in a somewhat marginal field (queer studies, Foucault, Butler etc.) in relation to both mainstream pedagogical/educational research and empirical social-science sexuality research. This would not be a problem if there were a co-investigator.

My suspicion is that the work I do will always be viewed by many within education as somewhat marginal. While I may not feel queer on a day to day basis this perception of me or of my work isn’t necessarily shared by peers. Others have encountered similar constraints in recognition of the significance of their research, so I know the problem is not new. On the whole academia has been incredibly welcoming of me and it is a great place to be. Colleagues are overwhelmingly supportive, students (undergrad and postgrad - continue to question and challenge my assumptions) – everyday is different. I love that about my job, and I recognise that getting paid to do the work I do is an enormous privilege. And, if some people didn’t think my work was somewhat marginal what sort of queer academic I would be?

As we can see, for Mary Lou, everyday queerness whether she feels queer or not is premised on her negotiation of space and the careful consideration of how to present her research in a broad academic context. How the use of Foucault signals “marginality” is problematic, since his work is taken up in all major humanities and social sciences disciplines. Perhaps as soon as the name Judith


For example see the programme details for the Gasworks Art Park which hosted several queer events as part of the Midsumma festival http://www.gasworks.org.au/festivals/Midsumma2008.php (accessed 23/1/08).
Butler or the term “queer” is associated with any academic’s work, the ignorance (and in worse cases, discrimination) of a heteronormative academic milieu becomes more evident and significant than either that academic’s own queerness or their scholarship?

In summary, the links between all five narratives demonstrate certain qualities; they are not essential definitions of queerness, they are demonstrations of how sexgender interstices are articulated in everyday ways by queers. They are stories that offer ways to know queer lives.

If we consider Jo’s gesture towards the notion of privilege one might say that Y speaks from a position of privilege; that he can and does access surgery (unlike many transgender people who cannot) in the face of moral, institutional and financial restrictions, but I do suggest that in the context of Y’s queer practices, queer radicalism is not offering any great personal benefits of privilege as “returns” for his work done, or his queer being-ness. Gender non-normativity, radical queer performance, and surgery as art, battle with the very real everyday risks that accompany a queer-phobic world.

A crucial point that Jo makes is to recognise when the rhetoric of queer identity, or discourses of otherness, do not acknowledge that the “others” of “the others” can be lost as potential allies if the framing of them does not look out for its own potential to misread. In other words (after Sedgwick) a position of originary ignorance for example, may in itself be harmless; it is the explicit desire to remain in ignorance (the ease of unknowing) which might be better tackled, especially when this is also accompanied by the explicit desire to find out what the actual terms of relationship are or have the potential to be, between people (sitting on public transport for instance) whose empathic propinquity may remain undisclosed in the face of “one steely glance”.

But also, the anger that fuels some queer activism is there for a reason, blatant discrimination of queers at all levels of society exists and as Dean says, it is a matter of personal choice how any queer person challenges that discrimination. These choices can differ from day to day: the minutiae of experiences (which include the ease/unease of ignorance and our material realities) do, to a large extent influence the ways in which being queer and queer being-ness is onto-epistemically charged.
In this chapter, I have continued to draw on an empirical foundation to support the deeper analysis of queer being which now follows. The five contemporary Australian personal narratives have illuminated particular and differing ways of having (and importantly developing), a queer sensibility. The illustration of negotiated, battle-worn, strategic, humorous, passionate, critically aware, interactive, practical, spatialised, queer existences, has provided us with a link to the previous chapter (that situated general knowledges in relation to a queer phobic world and queer identity) and the following one, which moves even further into a discussion of queer being in relation to self-consciousness and interstitiality.

The departure from the empirical to the theoretical, takes up an analysis of being which is philosophical (more precisely, phenomenological), and throughout the next four chapters, there will be intermittent references to the “everyday realities” of queer sensibility. Some of those realities include sex acts and desire formulations such as Jo and Y have narrativised. In the following analyses I do not especially separate or exclude the sexual self from the non-sexual self, that binary distinction is mostly effaced. What will surface next, is queer being as an ethics of the self; we could call this “queer being” (as a transformative self-consciousness) through “being queer” (as non-normative enactments).
CHAPTER FIVE
Queer Being/Self-consciousness

In this chapter I want to extend my analysis of the queer interstice that began in Chapter One, and make a case for considering it from a phenomenological perspective. Following this I offer a queerly defined hermeneutics of penetration as a way of illustrating the onto-epistemic juncture in relation to queer being. This will pull together and align a theoretical abstraction of queer interstitiality with a grounded referent. The theory of penetration (which will more properly become interpenetration) provides this alignment through the associations which link sex, bodies, thoughts and ideas.

I shall utilise two inherent dichotomies of phenomenology in particular, as a means to expose their interstices. A queer theory of the interstice should not disregard these dichotomies, but it can circumvent or weave an oddly particular course through them. In this chapter, the analysis of an interstitial sense of being will be more sharply illustrated by displacing the lens of oppositional logic (also known as dualistic thinking) through which traces of interstitiality are read.

I have reiterated throughout this thesis that it is the “queer space between” and how it is both occupied and theorised that concerns me. This has invoked particular and obvious questions: for example, “What is meant by queer?” “What is meant by space?” And the most obvious question, “Between what?” In earlier chapters I have articulated responses to these questions in terms of queer interstitiality, through an onto-epistemic paradigm, and in terms of spatial quality and occupation. This has consistently turned and returned me, to the notion of being. For this reason, the space between subjectivity and objectivity (we cannot theorise being without confronting subject and object) conceived as the merger site and the notional space between perceived theoretical opposites which arise out of their merging, is the explicit terrain (thus not so unusual “ground”) from which I will build this chapter.

Although I am seeking out “traces” of the queer interstice within philosophical discourses of being, I do not intend to embark on a comprehensive historical analysis or locate particular “origins” of knowledge which might serve a

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150 I am referring here to the dialectic of nineteenth and twentieth century Western philosophical thought which strained continually against two inherent problematics: object(ivity) and subject(ivity), and the conflict of oppositions.
contemporary queer purpose. My intention instead is to focus on some phrases and terms that have arisen out of nineteenth and twentieth century philosophical discourses of being which (I suggest) lend themselves directly to a queer theory of interstitial space and queer being-ness.

The particular traces I identify have two meanings; they obliquely reference the mapping of a course of knowledge production through time but also, they expose possible reassemblies of knowledge phenomena themselves. The traces I seek therefore, are on an historically locatable path, and are inlaid and overlaid by their own characteristic affinity to the interstice.

The theoretical terrain in this chapter is necessarily complex. This is fundamentally due to the task of theorising “in-betweens” of the stated dichotomies (dualisms and phenomena which include thinking/doing, physicality/mentality and abstraction/grounded reality). My approach is gradual: it follows a series of finely meshed steps that are connected to philosophical discourses of being. These are organised such that queer being-ness serves as the theoretical gateway to queer askesis; the concept towards which the thesis is driving.

The terms which I listed previously in Chapter Two (fault-line, crack between worlds, punctum, abyss, silent zone, fringe and so on) can be thought of as descriptors of “interstitiability”. The terms I employ in this chapter (as with the key terms in the subsequent chapters), direct us to a phenomenology of interstitiality. In the following two chapters, these terms will be linked to a notion of askesis, but as a precursor, this chapter will look specifically at ways to understand (queer) being that can be utilised to further illuminate the notion of queer interstitial space.

**Penetration (i) – Motion Of Being And Embodied Consciousness**

The terms “drive to inhabit”, “understanding” and “intersubjectivity” as used by Susan Stryker, Hannah Arendt, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, resonate with, and gravitate around “being”, they also point to a quality of being.

“Drive to inhabit” was used by Stryker in her 2004 discussion of the theoretical moments which informed some of her earlier academic work. One of those
moments referenced Leslie Feinberg’s pamphlet *Transgender Liberation* in which the term transgender, as a new hermeneutic creation, and heuristic tool, had significance. Stryker said:

Feinberg took a pre-existing term, *transgender*, and invested it with new meaning, enabling it to become the name for Stone’s theorized posttranssexualism. Feinberg linked the drive to inhabit this newly envisioned space to a broader struggle for social justice. I saw myself as a fellow traveller (2004: 212, italics in original).

Stryker uses “drive to inhabit” as a way to describe an occupation of space – a newly envisioned space situated in the context of what she later calls the “early utopianism” of queer theory, in which new narratives of transgendered selves can be formed. The idea of “habitation” and “new envisioning” are consistent realities of everyday queer life and queer being-ness; they are bound up in the work of making queerness thoroughly liveable. The space (the living space) in which queerness can comprehensively unfold, takes forms of intellectual, physical, philosophical and political creativity. It is in this notion, of creativity, that we can see queer sensibility in operation. For instance, an example of how part of that sensibility is formed at the micro social level is illustrated through a simple activity such as a PDA\(^{151}\) in a shopping mall, a waiting room, a check-out queue and so on. And there are ways in which the “creativity” I am speaking of is borne out. The physical act of kissing in public *creates* a disruption to heteronormative space, it also *creates* non-normative space (an interstitial space in which queer acts are carried out) and it also becomes creatively envisioned by queers who refuse to engage with the regulatory gaze in the subordinated way expected of them when they are under public surveillance.

There is, as I have said before about interstitial space, an environmental space (a location); a physical space (in which acts can take place), and an internal but interpenetrative space (in which the senses and thoughts of selves and others are experienced and processed).

As discussed in Chapter Two, the occupation of queer interstitial space involves an awareness of at least four characteristics: some degree or particularity of *movement*, a *quality* of some kind, a *potential* for something and an *occurrence*.

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\(^{151}\) A PDA is a slang term used by sexual minorities which stands for public display of affection. It generally means to kiss or hold hands; acts which are routinely privileged and invisible if performed in public by heteronormative people. The same acts when performed by queers* are subject to much stronger operations of sexgender hegemony such as the massive deployments of micro-techniques of surveillance, scrutiny, judgement, punishment, regulation. A queer* kiss in a public space is rarely regarded neutrally, or as innocent or appropriate. A brief kiss hello or goodbye, enacted by queers* is not routinely unnoticed. Queer* pda’s are excluded from the available matrix of “invisible” public, heteronormative social relations.
or a happening. In terms of Stryker’s “drive to inhabit”, the occupation of queer interstitial space can be linked with a happening. The “drive”, as the term implies, is not static. It is a propulsion of energy and it is linked to the quality of “sensing” that, and “being aware” that, one’s queerness needs and deserves a place (a home) in which to dwell. But also and interestingly, Stryker’s use of “drive to inhabit” which emphasises “the emotive” and “the spatial” (desire to be “somewhere” that can be called a home or a dwelling place) is a space of potentiality that runs parallel to Hannah Arendt’s articulation of “understanding”. Arendt expresses it thus: “Understanding ... is an unending activity by which in constant change and variation, we come to terms with and reconcile ourselves to reality, that is, to try to be at home in the world” (1994: 307-308).

In another of her earlier works (the 1998 introduction to a special transgender issue of the journal GLQ), Stryker used the term “post-modern condition” (albeit with reservations), and distinguished her historicised use of the term from what she describes as Lyotard’s aesthetic one (1998: 147). In the same way that we can compare Stryker and Lyotard in relation to the notion of a post modern condition, we can also compare Stryker and Arendt in terms of a “human condition”. In this case, my queer reading of “drive to inhabit” draws on Arendt’s analysis of “being in the world” as a highly compatible one that is also readable as queer.

By borrowing the term “understanding” as Arendt used it we can see that “understanding” lends itself to the idea of a motion of being: a drive towards (Stryker), an unending activity (Arendt). This motion can be thought of as transformation of the self, and for queer thinkers and doers, it is what we can call queer askesis. But before I engage with queer askesis in depth I shall continue linking other terms.

If we turn our attention again to interstitial space, and remember my earlier claim in Chapter One that there are qualities of “interstitial subjectivity” (domain-like, hybrid and liminal), we could also position these qualities in relation to Merleau-Pontian “intersubjectivity”. This section will explain how

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153 Although the Merleau-Pontian term intersubjectivity refers to intercorporeality – a penetration of embodied consciousnesses between self and other – there is a deeper, more tangled interpretation (Merleau-Ponty’s notion of
we can understand qualities of being “interstitial” through the notion of intersubjectivity.

**Inter[stitial]subjectivity**

Merleau-Ponty circumvents a subject/object problematic by theorising a non-dualistic reversibility of the visible and the invisible. To reach that position, he argues that the mind and the body cannot be separated – that the mind is embodied – and so the differences between having embodiment and embodied being-ness, are explained through the interconnectedness of the material realm (sensing bodies) and the realm of thought (meanings/ideas).

Positions of subjectivity and intersubjectivity displace the purely objective realm. Rather than make increasingly abstract arguments about how to sharply distinguish subject(ivity) and object(ivity) it is useful to remember the reason for Merleau-Ponty’s challenge – it was to understand lived experience through the lens of corporeality, an investigation of which a queer theory of being must also be a part. As Elizabeth Grosz puts it:

> It is the body as I live it, as I experience it and as it shapes my experience that Merleau-Ponty wishes to elucidate. Phenomenological reflection on the body reveals that I am not a subject separated from the world or from others, a mind somehow cut off from matter and space. Unlike Sartre, whose idealism grants a primacy to mind or consciousness, Merleau-Ponty claims to reveal a subject as a “being-to-the-world” a “subject committed to the world,” a subject of perception and behaviour as well as cognition and reflection. I am not able to stand back from the body and its experiences to reflect on them; this withdrawal is unable to grasp my body-as-it-is-lived-by-me. I have access to knowledge of my body only by living it ... For Merleau-Ponty, although the body is both object (for others) and a lived reality (for the subject), it is never simply object nor simply subject (1994: 86-87).

In this sense we can readily implant the word queer into such a theory of being. The body as a queer person lives and experiences it gives rise to the queer mind which is neither cut off from nor separable from queer matter: that is, the queer body.

The dichotomous logic of a hetero/homo binary (which consists of two unitary perspectives supposedly at unavoidable odds) can be contrasted with other binary distinctions. “Homo to queer” or “bisexual to queer-bisexual” for example, consist of unitary and multiple perspectives that shift the notion of reversibility which I utilise that allows for queer being-ness (as embodied) to interpenetrate with the space of being itself. This includes the relationship between the environments of both the mind and material structures – such as architecture – which together are mood-creating atmospheres (thus knowledge sites) not dependent on another body. In this way the body-to-body relation of self-to-self as well as self-to-other is included. This provides an important link with the later discussion of askesis. Additionally, this is not a move on my part to re-establish “the object” into a subjective paradigm; this chapter aims to push the theoretical limits of interpenetrative ideas.
mutual exclusivity. By extension – and further away from dichotomous logic – other queer differential relations will compare multiplicity with multiplicity; this is a form of intersubjectivity. The intersubjective and interstitial vistas are simply not available through the lens which is focussed on (and also creates) discrete structures of separate antithetical categories. As Merleau-Ponty says:

We have to reject the age old assumptions that put the body in the world and the seer in the body, or, conversely the world and the body in the seer as in a box. Where are we to put the limit between the body and the world, since the world is flesh? Where in the body are we to put the seer, since evidently there is in the body only “shadows stuffed with organs,” that is, more of the visible? The world seen is not “in” my body, and my body is not “in” the visible world ultimately: as flesh applied to a flesh, the world neither surrounds it nor is surrounded by it...There is a reciprocal insertion and intertwining of one in the other. Or rather, if, as once again we must, we eschew the thinking by planes and perspectives, there are two circles, or two vortexes, or two spheres, concentric when I live naively and as soon as I question myself, the one slightly decentered with respect to the other...we have to ask ourselves what exactly we have found with this strange adhesion of the seer and the visible... It is this visibility, this generality of the sensible in itself, this anonymity innate to myself that we have previously called flesh, and one knows there is no name in traditional philosophy to designate it (1968: 138-139, italics added).

It is the subtle and enigmatic sense of intersubjectivity as a “strange adhesion” (perhaps we could call this a queer interstitial trace) that compels me to emphasise the word adhesion (which is not usually combined with the notion of de-centring). Indeed, the putative theoretical murk of “strangeness” adds precise cohesion to articulations of interstitiality that can be understood as conceptual interpenetrations of intersubjectivity.

In relation to the specific circumvention of the difficulty of the subject/object dichotomy Merleau-Ponty says:

We will get out of the difficulty only by renouncing the bifurcation of the “consciousness of” and the object, by admitting that my synergic body is not an object, that it assembles into a cluster the “consciousnesses” adherent to its hands, to its eyes, by an operation that is in relation to them lateral, transversal; that “my consciousness” is not the synthetic, uncreated, centrifugal unity of a multitude of “consciousnesses of...” which would be centrifugal like it is, that is sustained, subtended, by the prereflective and preobjective unity of my body (Ibid.: 141-142, italics added).

The dichotomy is only “difficult” for those who refute a mind/body dualism. As this chapter espouses a phenomenology of queer being in terms of differential relations and ways of understanding (rather than dualisms) Merleau-Ponty’s analysis is useful, especially that of intersubjectivity in his later work.154

154 I am especially drawing on the book The Visible and the Invisible (1968).
Although Merleau-Ponty offers different accounts of intersubjectivity,\(^{155}\) there are three particular senses of “intersubjectivity” that I make use of and elaborate on:

- intersubjectivity (as we have seen) problematises the subject/object dichotomy
- the emphasis on embodied existence implies an always already intersubjective world
- queer accounts of embodiment extend Merleau-Pontian intersubjectivity because they are not neutral bodies. They are examples of actual, *particular*, real-life instances of Merleau-Ponty’s chiasmic ontology.

In seeking out the interstitial trace through the theory of intersubjectivity; we can follow the accompanying conceptual trace. One that takes us from a notion of the primacy of a perceptive body in the way Merleau-Ponty articulates it, to the perceptive primacy of a specific/particular (in this case queer) body.\(^{156}\)

Through three examples, that I come to shortly, I will illustrate queer interstitiality alongside Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of body parts and body senses (hands, sight, visibility, touch, and the infinitude of hinged experiences). Before this, I briefly acknowledge some limits to Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology.

The critiques of several feminists that I point to in a moment, illustrates the shortcomings of Merleau-Ponty’s work in relation to “the gendered” and “the sexual body”. In Merleau-Ponty’s earlier work he enlisted a psychoanalytic explanation as part of his own phenomenological analysis of the body in order to discuss the conditions of our embodied meaning-making abilities. In parts of *The Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty theorised the connection between mind and body, body and space, subjectivity/objectivity and meaning in relation to the case-study of a man called Georg Schneider. Schneider was a brain-damaged\(^{157}\) patient who was examined by two neuro-psychologists, Goldstein and Gelb in 1916.\(^{158}\) Merleau-Ponty introduces him thus:

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\(^{155}\) See Katz (2002) for a discussion of two accounts – “developmental” and “ontological” – of Merleau-Pontian intersubjectivity. And again I refer the reader to Sobochock’s book *Carnal Thoughts* (2004), which was noted in the previous chapter, for an engaging discussion of intersubjectivity which also draws on Merleau-Ponty in relation to a theory of real, lived embodiment.

\(^{156}\) Not necessarily an easy path to follow – there is some difficulty to be acknowledged here: Merleau-Ponty provides a useful non-dichotomous object/subject theory whilst simultaneously constructing (as immanent in his analysis of embodiment and being) an unhelpful problematic of particularity.

\(^{157}\) Described by J. J. Marotta and M. Behrmann as suffering from, alexia, form agnosia, loss of movement vision, loss of visual imagery, tactile agnosia, loss of body schema, loss of position sense, acalculia and loss of abstract reasoning (2004: 633-638).

\(^{158}\) Goldstein and Gelb published what was to become a famous case-study of Schneider’s neuro-psychological impairments. See Goldstein & Gelb (1918).
A patient ... is unable to perform ‘abstract’ movements with his eyes shut; movements ... such as moving arms and legs to order or bending and straightening a finger. Nor can he describe the position of his body ... [W]hen his head, arm or leg is touched, he cannot identify the point on his body; he cannot distinguish two points of contact on his skin ... and he cannot recognise the size or shape of objects placed against his body. He manages the abstract movements only if he is allowed to watch the limb required to perform them ... (2002: 118).

It is this difference between being both able and unable to perform precise physical movements in relation to consciousness of bodily space and abstract movement that Merleau-Ponty wishes to examine. He goes on to say: “Concrete movement and acts of grasping therefore enjoy a privileged position for which we need to find some explanation” (Ibid.: 118). And further,

[S]ince consciousness of bodily space and abstract movement, which has potential space in view, are almost totally absent, we are inclined to conclude that the sense of touch alone gives us no experience of objective space ... The patient tries to provide for himself a ‘kinaesthetic background’ by means of preparatory movements and is successful in thus ‘marking’ the position of his body at the outset and in launching into the movement, yet this kinaesthetic background is precarious, and could not possibly equal the visual background in constantly relating motion to its points of departure and arrival throughout the movement’s duration (Ibid.: 133).

Merleau-Ponty challenges the inductive method and causal thinking of physics and psychology, which also lead to the questionable (as he claims) justification that automatic movements (such as projected vision, scratching an itch, sex acts) are unconditional and causal. He explains,

[I]n order to be justified in relating, in psychological blindness [read Schneider’s disease] the motor to the visual disturbance, and, in the normal subject, the projective function to vision as its invariable and unconditioned antecedent, then we must be sure that only the visual data have been affected by the disease and that all other pre-conditions of behaviour, particularly tactile experience, have been left exactly as they were in a normal person. Can we confidently maintain this? (Ibid.: 134).

At this point Merleau-Ponty casts the data as, “ambiguous and questionable, no rigorously exclusive interpretation is possible in psychology as in physics” (Ibid.: 134). It is all the more interesting to note then, in relation to sexuality, how Merleau-Ponty’s soon to follow chapter, The Body In Its Sexual Being begins with Schneider again acting as a crucial reference for Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of sexuality (albeit “situated” rather than driven), which he locates in the affective realm of our lives and defines in relation to heterosexual love and desire. As Grosz points out in relation to “situatedness”:

The relations between immanence and transcendence, between owning and being a body, between subject and object, or one subject and another, are not the same for women as for men, in ways that Merleau-Ponty seems unaware of... Significantly, Merleau-Ponty opens his discussion of the sexuality of the lived body with reference to the breakdown of sexual interest and activity in the case of Schneider (1994: 108).
In addition, those relations are also differential along other axes including the non-normative subject positions of queers. A passage in Merleau-Ponty critiqued by several feminists,\(^{159}\) including Grosz, reads:

One patient no longer seeks sexual intercourse of his own accord. Obscene pictures, conversations on sexual topics, the sight of a body do not arouse desire in him. The patient hardly ever kisses, and the kiss for him has no value as sexual stimulation. Reactions are strictly local and do not begin to occur without contact. If the prelude is interrupted at this stage, there is no attempt to pursue the sexual cycle. In the sexual act intromission is never spontaneous. If orgasm occurs first in the partner and she moves away, the half-fulfilled desire vanishes. At every stage it is as if the subject did not know what is to be done. There are no active movements, save a few seconds before the orgasm which is extremely brief (2002: 179).

Gross’s wry response draws our attention to the oddity of Merleau-Ponty’s example, whilst valuing his primary aim.

Exactly how and why a man who has no interest in sex has an orgasm, however brief, neither Goldstein and Gelb nor Merleau-Ponty explain. But leaving that aside, Merleau-Ponty uses Schneider’s case to argue against the prevailing beliefs that sexuality is an instinct modelled on the reflex, in which sexual organs respond to appropriate stimuli, as it were, automatically (1994: 108-9).

Where Grosz leaves aside the incongruity of Merleau-Ponty’s sexual theory, Judith Butler’s critique of the same passage takes another theoretical tack:

In Merleau-Ponty’s view, evidence of Schneider’s “sexual inertia” is to be found in a general lack of sexual tenacity and wilfulness. Deemed abnormal because he “no longer seeks sexual intercourse of his own accord” Schneider is subject to the clinical expectation that sexual intercourse is intrinsically desirable regardless of the concrete situation, the other person involved, the desires and actions of that other person. Assuming that certain acts necessitate a sexual response, Merleau-Ponty notes that Schneider “hardly ever kisses, and the kiss for him has no value as sexual stimulation”. “If orgasm occurs first in the partner and she moves away, the half-fulfilled desire vanishes”; this gesture of deference signifies masculine “incapacity,” as if the normal male would seek satisfaction regardless of the desires of his female partner. Central to Merleau-Ponty’s assessment of Schneider’s sexuality as abnormal is the presumption that the decontextualised female body, the body alluded to in conversation, the anonymous body which passes by on the street, exudes a natural attraction (1989: 92).

It is Butler’s attention to clinical expectation and abnormality which come closest to a queer reading that I want to pursue. In particular I take up this notion of “de-contextualisation” in the following chapter which expands a discussion of passive/anonymous sexual partners in relation to the term sexual rearrangement.\(^{160}\)

\(^{159}\) For example, Butler (1989), Sullivan (1997), Diprose (1998) and Allen (1982).

\(^{160}\) Also, the binary of normal/abnormal is another problematic construct in Merleau-Ponty’s sexual analysis which for me is a rather unsettling de-valuation of disability. As I see it, the theoretical “currency” of intersubjectivity, in relation to physical and mental ability is that the dualistic/oppositional thinking of normal to abnormal is displaced by a non-hierarchical sensed/sensing inter-reversibility.
It is not ironic then, that I do not draw on *The Body in its Sexual Being* as a useful connection to queer sexual intersubjectivity. Merleau-Ponty’s immediate reduction of “the sexual” to heterosexual, affective and psycho-pathological explanations⁠¹⁶¹ is not a theoretical trajectory I can usefully recruit in terms of queer sexual specificity. If Merleau-Ponty ignores women, as Grosz points out: “clearly representing sexuality on the model of male sexual experiences” (1994: 108), he also ignores queer sex and queer sexuality by referencing a limited heteronormative model.

The feminist debate which critiques Merleau-Ponty’s “neutral” body (as androcentric and short-sighted in terms of women’s experiences) relates also to any particular subject and, although I find the lack of queerness a problematic of logical and theoretical concerns it is not a point I feel compelled to press home as it deflects from the analysis at hand.⁠¹⁶² I return then, to Merleau-Ponty’s later work, specifically the chapter *The Intertwining – The Chiasm*, (1968: 130-155) and utilise that ontology as a means to interpret three contemporary examples of penetrative scenarios.

**Penetration (ii) – Intersubjectivity And Being Interpenetrative**

At the popular and general level of the everyday, the notion of penetration has maintained remarkably fixed associations with masculinity, men, and power. This needs queering, as does the over-determination of “sex” as *the* site for “penetration”, as well as “sex” and “penetration” being a mutually inclusive pair of synonyms. However, I am not attempting to de-link penetration from sex, my main aim is to make that link a queer one and proliferate ideas of how penetration can be represented.⁠¹⁶³ In terms of a queer sensibility, to understand sexual penetration as *interpenetration*, already dispenses with the notion of a singular “going in-ness”. Penetration that involves the complexity of reversibility reaches what we can call an “ontological depth”. In itself this depth need not be queer, but in relation to queer interstitiality there are ways to describe it that serve as explicit examples and correctives to the over-reliance on

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¹⁶¹ Butler calls this a “curious appropriation of psychoanalysis” (1989: 88).
¹⁶² See Stoller (2000) for a defence of Merleau-Ponty’s neutral body (she says he does not ignore gender) especially in relation to Sullivan’s criticism of Merleau-Ponty. See also Grosz (1994), for a discussion of what kind of human body Merleau-Ponty discusses, and the usefulness or otherwise of phenomenological descriptions in relation to feminist critique.
¹⁶³ In relation to sex acts, unless otherwise stated, I am specifically discussing consensual penetration.
norms (as the desired models of sexuality) created by the dichotomous logic of the non-normative/normative binary.

A queer perspective will not privilege sexual norms but perceive, and operate with, a multitude of non-normative environments or ways in which queer sex acts are performed. This includes the specificity of (or at least the unwillingness to ignore) kinds of bodies and kinds of acts. These may include modified bodies, variously appendaged bodies, or bodies being pushed to test limits, that are open to this ontological depth.

In sex, there can occur a corporeal threshold moment when one comes to be “inside someone”, (with a fist, a tongue, a strap-on, with energetic focus, eye contact, any body part or surface, a prosthesis or object as extension of the self, even through utterances, or the draughts of breath onto skin, or into hearing). In this moment one cannot tell exactly which body parts are one’s own or another’s. Penetration becomes interpenetration; sensed as touching someone, whereupon one “feels” and one is “felt” (as in touched by the surface one is touching) – one “loses sight” of which sense is which. In this threshold state one penetrates and cannot be anything other than also and simultaneously penetrated; possibly doubly-so if the other person/s also intentionally penetrate/s.

In other words, one’s own act of penetrating equals touching – and thus feeling also touched – also one may be being touched by another, thus penetrated by their bodily action. As Merleau-Ponty says,

How does it happen that I give to my hands … that degree, that rate, and that direction of movement that are capable of making me feel the textures of the sleek and the rough? Between the exploration and what it will teach me, between my movements and what I touch, there must exist some relationship…according to which they are not only…ephemeral deformations of the corporeal space, but the initiation to and the opening upon a tactile world. This can happen only if my hand, while it is felt from within, is also accessible from without, itself tangible, for my other hand, for example, if it takes its place among the things it touches, is in a sense one of them, opens finally upon a tangible being of which it is also a

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164 Possibly sexually reassigned, surgically modified, scarred or marked, hormone-pumped, prosthetised, freaked, weirded and queered as sexually desirable.
165 Possibly phalloplastied, implanted with breasts or testicles or other objects, vegetable- dildo- device-wearing or wielding, animorphed (for example, pelt and mask-wearing).
166 Actively involved in BDSM and kink practices.
167 Ontological depth also includes “sex magic”. Sex magic, also spelled sex “magick” or sex “magik”, is a term that references various forms of sacred, or ritualised or spiritual sex. For discussions on sex magic and magic in relation to history, and contemporary practice see Urban (2006) and Styers (2004). For a discussion which includes BDSM in relation to spirituality see Pearson (2005). For specifically queer, sex positive discourse that relates to sex magic see Sprinkle (1998) and Sprinkle & Cody (2001).
168 Bear in mind that dyadic sex is not necessarily being privileged. Penetration by multiple interrelating bodies is equally suited to the complexity of reversibility in sexual penetration.
part. Through this crisscrossing within it of the touching and the tangible, its own movements incorporate themselves into the universe they interrogate, are recorded on the same map as it; the two systems are applied upon one another, as the two halves of an orange (1968: 133).

Added to this reversibility is another penetrative notion that I cast as inverted penetration (later in the chapter this is also termed “oscillating penetration”). It is the sense of being inside someone (that is, having penetrated a person with one’s embodied being) and then, once inside, being subjected to the wider, overwhelming sense of being wholly enclosed, wrapped or contained by them. The penetration is thus inverted. The locality of interpenetration (such as the specific, local senses of the touching/touched part: a finger or tongue for example) becomes holistic; the part becomes transposed (thus penetrated) as part of a total, whole, body-mind experience.

We can return to Arendt as well as Merleau-Ponty here. Although we have already utilised Arendt in terms of a motion of being, we can encounter a different mode of “understanding” which I interpret through intersubjectivity. Arendt gives us a conceptualisation of mind/body duality (which nonetheless exposes the interstice) when she discusses “thinking” as an activity in its spatio-temporal relation. In order to answer the question, “Where are we when we think?” Arendt delineates between the spaces of the mind and the body. She says:

Though known to us only in inseparable union with a body that is at home in the world of appearances by virtue of having arrived one day and knowing that one day it will depart, the invisible thinking ego is, strictly speaking, Nowhere. It has withdrawn from the world of appearances, including its own body, and therefore also from the self of which it is no longer aware (1978: 11 Part Two).

One might ask how we can relate this statement to Merleau-Ponty’s chiasmic ontology, in which the invisible ego cannot withdraw from its own body. The answer I will give is through the queer interstitial trace and a concrete example of this can be directly related to the deep ontology of sexual interpenetration.

Arendt goes on to cast the mind in an Aristotelian sense,\(^\text{169}\) in terms of “\textit{nunc stans}” (literally, “standing now”), which involves a suspension of time’s motion. Arendt draws on Aristotle’s \textit{Nicomachean Ethics}:

\[\text{[I]n his discussion of pleasure, } \textit{hēdonē}, \ldots \text{ “pleasure,” he says “is not in time. For what takes place in a Now (sic) is a whole” – there is no motion (\textit{Ibid.}: 12, italics added).}\]

\(^{169}\)This sense is appropriate to the contemporary queer theory of penetration that I provide here because it is linked to intersubjectivity which in turn, as we see below, is linked to queer experience.
The “now” of sex magic is a whole. So too is the “atemporal orgasm” – a fractional but whole moment of not knowing time. The question, “Where are we when we think” is a question of spatiality to which we can retort where are we when we don’t think, especially as Arendt problematises motion of the mind? But if we also ask, “What is happening?” “What do we do (with our mind-body relation) when we think?” Or, “What is it like when we engage in interpenetrative sex or are in the throes of an orgasm?” The question is not exclusively spatial or temporal, it is existential. The obvious answer is simply “being in the body” (profoundly deeply), but this partial and simplistic answer displaces “the world” and is the wrong “nunc stans” in relation to both Merleau-Ponty and Arendt. For Merleau Ponty the world is not what we think but what we live through; for Arendt the activity of thinking is being (in unending pursuance of habitability) in the world.

A more sufficient answer to Arendt’s question lies in Merleau-Ponty’s revelation of intersubjectivity,

It is said that the colors, the tactile reliefs given to the other, are for me an absolute mystery, forever inaccessible. This is not completely true; for me to have not an idea, an image, nor a representation, but as it were the imminent experience of them, it suffices that I look at a landscape, that I speak of it with someone. Then, through the concordant operation of his body and my own, what I see passes into him, this individual green of the meadow under my eyes invades his vision without quitting my own, I recognise in my green his green, as the customs officer recognises suddenly in a traveller the man whose description he has been given (1968: 142).

What we can call nunc stans in this passage is indeed the suspended temporal moment but it is also in the “it-doesn’t-matter-where-we-are-when-we-think” of the visual and spoken “worlds” that entwine the reversible senses and consciousnesses.

If our idea of time becomes suspended during the liminality of ontological depth, we can examine how a state of pleasure (let’s say embodied interpenetrative sex) entwines mind and body. The mind does not leave the body; it is still aware of (sensing) in atemporal fashion, the body sensations which seemingly dissolve the notion of time. Merleau-Ponty uses the perceptibility/perception of the senses to articulate this, not in terms of suspending the mind, which would involve a clear-cut mind/body dichotomy, but in terms of the self-to-self relation and also, importantly, the self to other relation. Arendt’s analysis of the mind’s activity and its relation to space and
time is complicated and extended by the possibility in Merleau-Ponty’s work of a hinged inter-twining. He says:

I experience—and as often as I wish—the transition and the metamorphosis of the one experience into the other, and it is only as though the hinge between them, solid, unshakeable, remained irremediably hidden from me. But this hiatus between my right hand touched and my right hand touching, between my voice heard and my voice uttered, between my tactile life and the following one, is not an ontological void, a non-being: it is spanned by the total being of my body, and by that of the world; it is the zero of pressure between two solids that makes them adhere to one another (Ibid.: 148).

Here we have a sense of the interstice, not as a space of non-being but of being. In order to propel the abstract modes of existence (mind-wise and embodied in Arendt and Merleau-Ponty) into specifically queer terms we could provide other examples than neutral, touching, weaving bodies.

A BDSM sexual encounter between (for example) two gender specific trans* people and a queerly identified person can serve as a model for sexual experience, so too can the experiences (as alternative examples from an infinite sexgender realm) of trans-sensuals or furries.

Likewise, the non-specifically sexual scenario (although it could be fetishised) of my own experience of being scanned at a men’s-only anal-sex workshop can serve as another model for penetrative experience.

In this scenario, I was (by virtue of being transgendered – FTM) concerned to pass sufficiently to gain access to the event and sit through the workshop. Penetration was occurring at two particular levels:

- being xx chromosomal and biologically female, penetrating a men’s only space;
- being scanned (a penetrating gaze searching for signs of sexual availability and/or male authenticity) by other workshop participants.

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170 Furries is a term used to describe people who in some way identify with anthropomorphic characterisations. This can involve sexual proclivities and/or fetishes, and it can involve participation in furries' subcultures which may or may not be related to interests that range from art, cartoons, magazines, chat lists, fandom, spirituality, virtual reality, convention meetings and so on. Queerness and furry identification are elements within very broad-ranging sub-cultural phenomena. Gerbasi et al (2008) has published empirical research on furry phenomena and although she critiques popular media sensationalist accounts of furry sub-cultures, there is little social science or humanities-based scholarship that is not anthropologically or psychoanalytically based and which theorises queer and/or sex positive aspects of furry identification. Having said this, see (Nast, 2006) who gives a nuanced commentary on the parochial demographics of academic writing in this area and provides her own analysis of animal-human relations which takes into account what she calls dominance-affection-love (DAL) relations with pet animals. Nast does acknowledge what she interchangeably calls either “queer” or “gay” culture, but to the best of my knowledge there is little specific queer theory writing that exists in this academic lacuna. For a brief mention of “furry sex” with an historical and multi-sexuality perspective see (Sisson, 2007: 30).

171 Although it was called a workshop (which could imply the sexual activity of practical demonstrations), the terms “seminar”, or “information evening” more accurately describe this event.

172 I do not primarily identify as transgendered although gender-queer can certainly be applied to me as variations of queer, queer-femme and queer-butch also can. An exclusively transgendered FTM person will have identified as male at this event in a way that I do not, hence my “penetration” of men only space.
This scenario as a model of psycho/social penetration, shows how interpenetration existed (in the sense of my returning “the gaze”), but was partial (held back) by my level of discomfort at being scanned in a specifically gay public space (rather than a specifically queer space which might have included trans*, drag and genderqueer expressions). The tension and possibility of danger at being revealed as “inauthentic” makes this form of penetration an eccentric or at least uncommon one.

The intersubjective scenario below offers an even more complex notion of interpenetration and it is taken from a fictional story written by Raven Kaldera (2003) a transgender writer. The story is set in an anonymous gay leather bar and revolves around a trans* FTM protagonist who challenges a gay man (biologically male) to a pierce off. The winner gets to anally penetrate the loser in a toilet cubicle. The loser agrees to be topped by the winner. The trans* protagonist knows in advance he will win because the challenge is specifically to pierce the nipples; and having had chest reconstructive surgery, he has no feeling in his nipples.

Kaldera writes,

OK then, he said desperately. I challenge you to a duel. The suspicions of lechery turned to suspicions of insanity. What! With these. He tapped the table next to the jar of play needles. Through the nipples. Until we run out, or somebody gives in. A flicker of interest was starting in the guy’s eyes. And the winner? Gets what he wants, within reason, Jack said. Like what?
Like an asshole on his dick, in the little boy’s room, Jack said, anger and resentment giving sardonic edge to his voice. The guy grinned, and leaned over Jeremy’s table. I’m Neil, he said, and you’re on (2003: 10).

After having successfully won the challenge, the protagonist Jack says,

Go buy me a drink … Seltzer and lime. Then report to the john. His voice cracked on the last word, but Neil was too high on endorphins to notice. Jack let go of him and hurried to the bathroom, locking himself in a stall and getting his harness and cock out of his jacket pocket and onto his body in record time. Put it down over there, Jack ordered. I’ll get it on my way out. I want you bent over the can in there. Ok, Neil said can I lube myself up first? Yeah, sure. Face the wall and don’t go looking at me (Ibid.: 13).

This story points to further complexities of penetration and although it is fictional, I utilise it to open a theoretical space. The story acts as a platform from

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173 A leather bar is a BDSM venue. The term “leather” relates to BDSM “leather culture” or “leather community” and is synonymous with the BDSM/fetish community. For historical accounts of the emergence and continuance of Western leather cultures see Townsend (1972), Rubin (1997, 2000, 2003) and Califia (1981, 1994). For a queerly sexgendered perspective on leather culture see Queen (1998).

174 In this case, a dual-like challenge to see who can pierce their body the most number of times within a given set of criteria to which both parties agree.

175 “Topped” in this story relates to the BDSM slang “top” meaning dominant. “Top”, “bottom” (submissive) and “switch” (as the term implies, switching between dominance and submission, or playing with the top bottom codes), are terms used to identify play preferences in BDSM activities.
which I can comprehensively discuss penetration (using the three specific real life scenarios mentioned previously) as “interpenetration”.

The public toilet operates historically in non-normative cultures as a site of sexual activity, penetration, and surveillance.\footnote{176 For a fascinating and detailed historical analysis of the sexual and socio-cultural use of public toilets in New Zealand see Ings (2007).} Penetration in relation to toilet cubicles exists spatially, mentally and corporeally. The “normative” space of a public toilet facility is penetrated secretively (and riskily: most especially by beat users), for the purposes of taking part in sexual (thereby non-normative) acts. In the case of the above story, the normative use of the toilet cubicle is less sharply defined; sex or a play scene in a toilet cubicle would not be uncommon in a BDSM venue, however, there is still tension around the illicit use of public toilets which are also simultaneously used for normative purposes.

The three forms of penetration that I highlight from Kaldera’s story (mental, spatial, and corporeal) allow us to think about penetration in terms of what I have previously discussed as knowledge movement. Here we see this movement as a form of mental penetration which occurs through knowing that one is actively engaged in non-normative activity; the mind is penetrated by both the knowledge of one’s impending risky and sexual circumstance and the knowledge of being in a physical location that is detected by the body’s sense mechanisms. We could call this “ontological consciousness” and I return to this concept in one of the scenarios below. We can also think of penetration as corporeal penetration, which occurs with the embodied experiences of sexual acts, but also through a direct physical relationship with the space of the cubicle. Again this is explained (specifically and phenomenologically) below.

When the protagonist Jack does not explicitly reveal himself to be a FTM trans person he penetrates gay male space in a similar way to my own local experience at the gay men only anal-sex workshop. However, Kaldera’s story reveals more penetrative elements by casting the story through a BDSM framework. In and of itself, piercing is a literal and intense form of bodily penetration, and when this is combined within a BDSM setting, (penetrating psyche, body, mind, and socio-cultural/geographic space) it relates to the form of interpenetration which I have discussed in Chapter Two as age-kink.
I focus now on the three penetrative scenarios mentioned earlier: three outlines of lived-in space that serve as case studies; starting points into which are woven two theoretical threads: one of these threads is the abstract notion of the queer interstitial space; the other is a concrete queer hermeneutics – a queer viewpoint of how we might interpret “everyday” (putatively non-sexual) space.

It shall be through using real-life cases of intersubjectivity that a queer theory of interstitial space will emerge as a particular standpoint. Furthermore, it is through the notion of queer interstitiality that queer ideas, habitations and penetrations are illustrated.

The three scenarios relate to: a scandalous subterranean public toilet facility in Vienna which appeared in the news media outlets of Australia in October 2006; an underground connecting passageway that serves as a staff shortcut underneath a main public hospital in Perth, Western Australia (which became operational in the same year); and, a Melbourne International Arts Festival performance which took place again in October 2006 and was underground, in passageways directly underneath Federation Square.  

I shall look at each of these scenarios from a queer penetrative viewpoint which is at once intentionally sexualized, political, philosophical and theoretically troublesome. It is troublesome in the sense that my central question asks: In what ways can we understand these spaces differently from how they are presented to us through what some people term “the mainstream”, but what I prefer to articulate (as illustrated in Chapter One) as a sense of “peripherality” which filters normative and dominant understandings?

And so, in the examples I give here, the questions become specifically about what problematic issues there may be, or what new knowledges can be articulated, through queer “readings” in each case. The various answers that I give cast aside mainstream/margin binarising, and disrupt normative thinking by seeking to penetrate and rearrange heterosexual and naturalising norms. This privileges a rightful space for queer inhabitants – who may read “the news media”, “public space” and “performance space” in innovative and curious ways.

177 “Fed Square”, as it is known colloquially, itself a prized “above ground” architectural treasure of Victoria’s capital city, is managed by Federation Square Management Pty Ltd. See the “Fed Square” web site: http://www.fedsq.com/ (accessed November 5 2006).
These ways create in-between sexgender knowledges as locations for queer sensibility and queer occupation of space.

**Sub-Space #1**

The following are brief descriptions of the three scenarios. I begin with a newspaper report in the “What in the weird” section from *The Australian*, sub-headed “Potty Mouths”:

Urinals shaped like women’s mouths have outraged female politicians in Vienna. The privately owned public urinals feature thick, lip-sticked lips, teeth and a bright red tongue. Sonja Wehsely, city councillor for women’s affairs, said the toilets near Vienna’s State Opera were “disgusting, misogynist and tasteless without comparison”. Austrian businessman Neuhold Gerhard said he would order their removal after the backlash by female politicians, but said the urinals had been in use for three years without complaint from any male (Nationwide News Ltd., 2006b).

The media release of this story (from the Associated Press and Reuters) became available to the world at large on Thursday 19th October 2006. The story became noticeable the following day in the Australian national media as a mere article of quirky world news but it was one that caught my attention in terms of penetration and space.

After seeing many photographs of the urinals on web sites, and reading more stories about “the scandal”, the graphic nature of this incident became more tangible to me in the sense of how a richly erotic/sexual aesthetic combining architecture, art, sex, gender, fetishism, politics and queerness was indeed located for its newsworthiness within the realm of “the weird”.

Two weeks later the scandal again became newsworthy; it was reported in *The Australian* that, “four offending urinals ... were sold on eBay for $8976 AU” to two undisclosed recipients (Nationwide News Ltd., 2006a). There is a mystery now as to where the urinals are and in what capacity they are being used. According to Reuters (Vienna), a single red lipped urinal was sold to one bidder, and the three others (another red, the blue and the yellow) were sold to one other person. They are all purported to still be in Austria. The mystery is not my concern here; rather, it is the way in which we might interpret the urinals in different contexts.

The local Australian context is both broad and particular although more specific interpretive frameworks that I use are queer, feminist, sexual, spatial,

178 Austrian party politics and in a general sense, feminist politics.
ontological and epistemological. But before venturing into a queer hermeneutics, and deeper, penetrative notions, I shall quickly describe the other two scenarios.

**Sub-Space#2**

Underneath the Royal Perth Hospital which is situated in the central business district of Western Australia’s capital city, there is an underground walk-way. In fact there are several, as well as many back doors and semi-secret exits and entrances to various corridors and passages. These spaces can be public, semi public and highly restricted in terms of access, and there is one tunnel in particular that I have experienced personally, at first hand, as well as vicariously through a second-hand anecdote.

This tunnel is entered through a door which is rather like the magic portal-space in the back of a “C.S. Lewis wardrobe”. By being part of a particular minority group (staff, non-staff members – perhaps volunteers or regular frequenters who are “in the know” – and those who enter by mistake or by dint of curiosity), one can leave behind a host of sensory bombardments emanating from the “hospital proper”, and experience an entirely different set of sensations. Upon opening the door to the shiny polished floors, the brightness of window or neon light, the noisy distracting confusion of people, the surrounding signage that controls and directs behaviour (posters that announce a zero tolerance policy toward violent attacks on staff are mixed up with “radiology ahead” and “clinic one downstairs”), “all disappear”. One steps into the dusty monochrome concrete passage, and notices how the lighting is suddenly dim, the ceilings are very low and the air is still. Exposed pipes of differing thicknesses line the walls and speech is slightly echoed.

This entry might seem unremarkable at first; it could seem purely functional in a very plain way. There are no familiar signs for direction except those provided by the space itself; the limited uni-directional possibility of movement (backwards and forwards or simply, along) becomes more immediate than other more formal spatial correlates of direction (north, south, east, west, up, down, left, right). There are no other people; there are a very different set of noises and

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179 From the well known children’s stories *The Chronicles of Narnia* by C.S. Lewis. See particularly, the first book of the series: *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, (Lewis, 1950).
suddenly a shift in the ontological consciousness occurs: the sense of interiority increases, both of the self (the body’s physical interior) and of the external enclosing space (the tunnel-like passageway). The smell lifting off thick concrete lingers, the floor surface is gritty and dust crunches underfoot.

**Sub-Space #3**

Over six days in October 2006 members of the public could purchase a ticket to attend an event called Schallmachine 06 which was part of the Melbourne International Arts Festival. This particular event incorporated a very specific combination of architecture and sound with regulated space and very small audiences. The performance of this event was put together by a three-fold collaboration: two Melbourne based companies worked in conjunction with the Swiss two-man partnership of percussion specialist Fritz Hauser and Boa Baumann, an architect. The space for this cross-media project was negotiated with particular architectural aims and the performances took place directly underneath Federation Square.

Three percussion artists sequestered in three separate underground locations named trench, labyrinth, and blue room, performed solo for 25 minutes to an audience of only three people at a time. Every 45 minutes a new audience of nine people would be divided up at random into three groups and ushered to their designated locations.

The performance space integrated music, art, theatre, unfamiliar building structures and underground-ness (amongst other phenomena), with the audience experience. At the entrance to the passageways underneath Federation Square, another “portal-like” door acted as a conduit from the familiar to the unknown world, and a new set of ushers acting as gatekeepers (each costumed in “out of the ordinary” attire) received their three audience members and escorted them to the inner performance chamber.

The audience members were subtly moulded into passivity, being led by a series of controllers (ticket collectors, group assigners and different sets of ushers) along an unknown route which took them eventually to the performance space in which the usual use of the underground tunnels (which remains mysterious

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180See www.aphids.net and http://www.speakpercussion.com/ (accessed November 5 2006) which include reviews of the *Schallmachine 06* event.
to most of us) had been displaced temporarily and converted into small, boxed-in theatrical sites where the percussionists performed.

**Discussion Of The Three Scenarios**

The three scenarios involve semi-private underground spaces, and have been experienced with varying degrees of regulation. Before I go on to analyse them, I want to draw attention to the fact there is already a problem to articulate how these scenarios have operated. In contrast to discussing how they work in terms of an interstitial and penetrative opportunity we could relate these scenarios to the obvious notion of a public space / private space dichotomy. But distinctions between what constitutes private spaces and public spaces will not be especially deconstructed here. In these examples, those distinctions are blurred. It is within that blurriness that other distinctions shall be made in order to disrupt the oppositions, and/or inflexibilities, that may exist between what we could call “aspects” of spaces – between the sexual/erotic and the political, between subjectivity and objectivity, and between aesthetics and function.\(^{181}\)

I suggest that hybridity or peripherality as an aspect of queer being orients itself not so much in relation to the overarching omnipresence of a notional “centre” but in direct relation to the infinitely differential micro events which criss-cross and take place in everyday life as interstitial moments. This brings to mind Foucault’s 1967 discussion of places – “spaces” of particular oddity that he calls heterotopias. He says, “We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed” (Foucault, 1986: 22).

We can also relate this side-by-side-ness to Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of touching-touched reversibility. Rather than “chiasmic ontology” we could perhaps call it “chiasmic topology”. Foucault’s “side-by-side-ness” is not

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181 A notable critique of “public” in the sense of a public sphere (especially in relation to ambiguous and/or fictional cultural formation which is challenged by a queer socio/cultural environment) is in Michael Warner’s essay, “Publics and Counterpublics” (2002). Warner rigorously analyses what a public is, how it is constructed and what constitutes it. He offers a notion of “counterpublic” as a site for different circulatory discourses in which interpretations of “public” space, as readable text, can be (amongst other readings) poetically expressive. This can be thought of as another salient feature of the queer interstice. See also Arendt’s discussion of public space in her book *The Human Condition* (1958: 28). I would like to add however, that there is a considerably large feminist critique of Arendt, especially in relation to her configuration of “the public” and “the private” as realms in which the role of “woman” is reduced to a relationship with “the private” in a way that it certainly is not for men. As I note at various times throughout this thesis, there are embedded discriminations and biases (such as androcentrisms, heterosexism, and anti-feminism) in the existential philosophical writing that I draw on to theorise queer interstitiality. Where possible, I raise concerns about their limiting effects on the general efficacy of theories of being that disregard, erase, or make invisible, particularities of existence. Here, I do not engage with Arendt’s notions of women or feminism; I am restricting my focus to her use of the term “understanding” in relation to knowledge movement and other key terms used in this chapter. Sophisticated feminist analyses of Arendt’s philosophy can be found in the work of: Honig (1995) and Dietz(2002).
stressed in corporeal, but rather in spatial, temporal and particularised terms.

He goes on to say:

We are at a moment. I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein ...

In the so-called primitive societies, there is a certain form of heterotopia that I would call crisis heterotopias, (sic) i.e., there are privileged or sacred or forbidden places, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis: adolescents, menstruating women, pregnant women. The elderly, etc. But these heterotopias of crisis are disappearing today and are being replaced, I believe, by what we might call heterotopias of deviation: those in which individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed. Cases of this are rest homes and psychiatric hospitals, and of course prisons, and one should perhaps add retirement homes that are, as it were, on the borderline between the heterotopia of crisis and the heterotopia of deviation ... (1986: 22-25).

I want to posit the interstitial (rather than purely peripheral or marginal) queer space as both a heterotopia of crisis and one of deviation. Foucault speaks of borderlines between crisis and deviant heterotopias. I read this border line as an interstitial space and additionally suggest that it exists (especially in relation to the three scenarios) as a threshold space. Combined with interstitiality, the unfamiliar, “dis”- and “re”-orienting underground and performance space (which provides elements of “threshold”) is also heterochronistic - from Foucault’s idea of temporal festival heterotopias 182 in which time is experienced fleetingly and/or compacted; abolishing or suspending for a while, our usual registers of traditional time. We see here a connection with both the “nunc stans” in Arendt’s analysis of thinking and Merleau-Ponty’s hinged, “adhesive” interstice of experience.

As we shall see, time and space are indeed layered/suspended/sliced/juxtaposed in the Toilet Bar, the hospital walkway and the festival passages. As such we can interpret Foucault’s heterotopic, heterochronistic space as a liminality of queer interstitial space.

The way I link the three scenarios and discuss possible interstices of heterotopias is very simple to begin with; it is to ask in broad terms, “What informs our understanding of these scenarios?” We might acknowledge that the dominant understandings are heterosexual, non-sexualised and uni-functional; that they are socially and culturally scripted.

182 Foucault describes six principles of heterotopias. The third principle juxtaposes contradictory sites and the fourth principle discusses slices of time. Both of these principles are evident in the three scenarios I give. See Foucault (1986: 22-27).
It is assumed that within these spaces we will behave in a certain way: by default we have all been taught that a public urinal is for men and boys to urinate in; an access tunnel is to move from A to B, and a festival art performance is to be attended by an observant audience with performance as object of focus. We can also make further assumptions about “users” themselves but it is also interesting if we challenge those normative assumptions and ask what else can actually occur in those spaces, and what the occurrences (human senses, actions, thoughts) and spaces themselves can mean, especially in the context of queer sensibility. At this point we can begin to speak specifically and minutely about interstitality, penetration and queer sensibility.

**Aesthetics/Politics/Sex**

A queer hermeneutics of the Vienna Toilet Bar provides a provocative set of connections between queer ontology and feminist, sexual, and spatial epistemologies. The focus in the news reports (taking *The Australian* as my local example) was on two things: open mouths and female outrage. Critical parameters were not extended beyond a rudimentary and narrow explanation of the aesthetics of the Toilet Bar and a gendered (female) politics. I would like to broaden the critique by asking, “What else can we know about this toilet facility and what else we can say?”

Taking the aesthetic realm first, the photograph in *The Australian* did not illustrate the structural/environmental/architectural context of these toilets. The Toilet Bar was a themed venue, to which there is no obvious local comparison (as far as I can determine there is no similar men’s public toilet facility in Australia). As with the other two scenarios, a portal-like entry was created; to enter the facility, one had to pass through a small old fashioned coin operated turnstile and once in the room itself – which was designed to look like a bar – one was faced by a lavish spectacle of theatrical proportions: a piano complete with stool automatically played opera music (the toilets were situated in the underground passageway which connects the train station with the Vienna State Opera House), and the four handmade urinals lined the walls of a look-alike bar, complete with rows of shiny coloured bottles behind glass frontage.

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183 The news reports consistently stated that female (rather than male and female politicians) were outraged.
Displacing for a moment, a political stance about the use of open mouths to urinate in, there is little room to doubt that this facility was intentionally designed with artistic intent. But the sexual politics are important and a feminist/female argument deserves a very full expression. Wehsely commented: “The faster this tastelessness will disappear the better. I hope that the public discussion on the toilets aids to sensitise manhood, who obviously took three years to take offence at it” (Wehsely, Oct. 2006).

Like Wehsely, I would emphasise that three years of undisputed use in a public men’s toilet speaks volumes about men, rather than the urinals. In my view there is more to say: it is not that the urinals as objects are misogynistic; rather it is their use in this context that is. In other words every man who voiced no concern (and every boy who learned – through patriarchal endorsement – that pissing in a woman’s mouth in the normal course of a day’s events was OK), represents in this context, a defilement and abjection of women’s bodies and as such, is slack-minded and shameful misogyny. In this sense I can understand the desire for a disappearance of the urinals; they simply should not exist in the context of a public facility at a time (our contemporary era) when dominant cultural readings of such objects can only be narrow, and heteronormative. Added to this, is the concern we should have over the wider context of the commercialisation of “mouth urinals”.

184 Wehsely pointed out that, “Viennese politicians regardless of their political background announced that these urinals have not to be seen (sic) as a work of art but as misogynistic objects” (2006). The fact that these four differently shaped and coloured urinals were made by an independent artist (see the website for the artist Rudolf Scheffel at http://www.viennalive.com/de/scheffel/index.htm) (accessed October 25 2006) in his artist’s studio among the making of many other “weird” art pieces: sculptures, stage props, everyday objects, is less worrisome to me (in the sense they can be called works of art) than the more sinister implications of the 2004 Virgin Airline and 2006 McDonald’s hamburger restaurant initiatives to install similar (more simplified but sexy and red-lipped) mouth urinals for their male customers. These mass marketable urinals, labelled “Kisses” and designed by a woman, have been in production by a Dutch bathroom design company since 2001. After Virgin Airline’s plans to install kisses urinals in 2004 were abandoned after they received complaints, the designer, Mieke van Schijndel (2006) said her company, Bathroom Mania, “was inundated with orders after the Virgin Airlines controversy” and that orders were “flowing in from all over the world and the US in particular”. She went on to say: Soon my “kisses” urinals will be all over New York — in bars, clubs, offices and in private homes” (2006). As a response to the criticism levelled at her product van Schijndel said that, “the idea her urinals represented a man peeing into a woman’s mouth never occurred to her ...” (2006). Paradoxically the Bathroom Mania web site contradicts van Schijndel’s putative naiveté by using overt sexualisation to advertise the Kisses. The video promotion for Kisses urinals shows multiple Marilyn Monroe faces (the eyes replaced with open red lips) and states that the Kisses urinal “adds a touch of sensuality”, and that “Kisses! The sexy urinal ... Transforms a daily event into a blushing experience! It works better than aiming at the fly! This is one target men will never miss!” See http://www.bathroom-mania.com/en/enhome/enfshome.html (accessed October 25 2006). One can only speculate upon which part of “woman”, “face”, “open-mouth”, and “sexy”, van Schijndel fails to recognise. Adding to the paradox is the simultaneous negation and promotion of this product as a sexy one. The Kisses urinals are not directly marketed at gay men, (in which case we could assume the mouths as sex objects were not female) and use of the word “kiss” itself as a product name, which, at least in relation to the red lipstick-ed mouth of Marilyn Monroe (an ironic sex symbol) means sex with a large “S”. Ironically it is not van Mieke’s refutation of an idea of a sex act (the act of a penis, whether or not it is micturating, in a woman’s mouth) that dispels the idea of sex but the subtle erosion of the idea of sex by the product’s status as a simple, easily obtained item of mass produced consumerism. In other words, the fact that a kisses urinal can be bought like a plastic toy that comes with a McDonald’s meal (and is marketed as such); see the McDonald’s advertising poster http://www.bathroommania.com/en/enhome/enfshome.html (accessed October 29 2006). This helps to normalise the “sexy” urinal so it becomes a quirky, fashionable, politically neutral, popular and fun urinal.
But the debate which constructs and labels the urinals as “misogynistic objects” will be limited by its own conceptual rigidity. This suggests a couple of points: one, that misogynistic use is not critiqued; and two, that “going into private ownership” (read hidden and protected from angry “female” attack) will make their use secretive and possibly reinforce misogynistic use. The viewpoint I illustrate here differs from Wehsely’s in the sense that a forceful challenge to misogyny need not exclude a deeper analysis of differing contexts in which such urinals may exist and some of those contexts (which might be differently received by different people) are playful, sexual and kink.

Moving from “the political” and the “neutral” consumer product to the intentionally sexual, I now present a queer hermeneutics which suggests that there is a place for the urinals and it is within an explicitly sexual context. If one looks at all four Toilet Bar urinals, one may be hard pressed to identify them all as female mouths: a queer reading may indeed not. The blue lipped mouth looks decidedly “Mick Jagger”, and the emblazoned hyperfeminised look of overglossy, painted lips with saturated colours suggests a theatricality that might be seen on a glamorous drag queen performer. This is not to argue that most men using the Toilet Bar (as I have stressed before in terms of a contemporary epoch) would have understood the urinals as something other than “women’s” mouths; it is to say that in another context and with different readers (where for example the interstices of queer, feminist and sexual politics combine with the interstitiality of, for example, transgender/transsexual/intersex perspectives) the open mouth urinals take on different meanings.

This is not to say that “the sexual” and “the political” should be separate or are mutually exclusive; it is to say that I draw “the sexual realm” to bear on an insufficiently sexually theorised political debate.

Although such a drag example can be thought to still re-enforce the notion of a “woman’s” mouth, the hyper-femininity of a “a made-up” mouth can also be read as feminising not femaling. The point of drag is that we all know there is a different gender “underneath”, than the one being performed. Drag performance has a long and interesting history. In the twenty-first century, drag performance can be read in vastly different (and queerer) ways from the early public drag performances which emerged in the West in the nineteen sixties (particularly the USA and Europe). Early drag performances, especially MTF ones, were predominantly interpreted and presented as “female impersonation”. Contemporary drag acts can now be read for their performative excess as drag itself. The widely nuanced and varied drag acts (that today include multiple and queer genders) may not represent glossy red lips as female. Faux queening or kinging (for example a female bodied, drag queen) would obviously support this reading. For discussions of the history and development of drag culture, representation and interpretation see (Newton, 1972), Halberstam (1998), (Volcano & Halberstam, 1999) and (Troka, Lebesco, & Noble, 2002).
If these urinals were all lined up in my own bathroom at home, I would probably give them identity labels, naming them John, Mutt, or Mick for instance. In a kinked sexual sense there are BDSM practices which in a consensual context obtain a great deal of “play leverage” from the ideas and acts of urinating into/onto someone’s mouth or other body cavity/part. If we imagine the Toilet Bar within the context of a kink nightclub or a private BDSM club they would not have to constitute misogyny or bad taste\(^\text{187}\) – they would represent the explicit validation of oral penetration – and if we imagine further, they would not look out of place among other urinals: perhaps hyper-masculinized or hyper-transgendered ones, or others shaped like anuses, ears, nostrils or any other body part that can be penetrated in a specifically sexual/kink/BDSM setting.

Queer readings may also not fix a gender to these mouths, and names like Mick, which may seem gendered in a binary sense (to those who read gender in only two ways) may instead, or also, represent other trans, multigendered or intersexual meanings.

In terms of physiology and the biological needs of urinating bodies, a queer reading may also appropriate the use of the open mouth urinals from the traditionally male preserve. Although “women’s urinals” do have an interesting manufacturing history\(^\text{188}\) (commercially, privately and publicly) it follows – if function follows form in this instance – that the Toilet Bar urinals may be more effective as devices for women to wee in by sitting on them. In this situation, the notion of penetration becomes double-ended. The tongue can operate as a symbol of penetration and the notion of sitting on a mouth allows another oral sex possibility. Also, the more solid matter of faeces as well as urine becomes another penetrative possibility.

I now turn to the other two scenarios in order to make links between all three which point to the entanglement of body with mind specifically, queer body with queer mind.

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\(^\text{187}\) Having said this, if installed in a “gay” (in the generic sense) venue (which should not be assumed to be BDSM, kink, or non-normative space) the open mouth urinals could, as I have mentioned, be read as drag queen’s mouths. In this case, without the explicit context of a BDSM venue for example, their use would again represent extreme poor taste and the sexual defilement of drag queens. We can see here that an analysis should be made about how the urinals operate as signs. Although I do not attempt it here, I suggest that a semiotic analysis of the mouth urinals would result in an interesting study which could distinguish between non-normative and dominant meanings.

\(^\text{188}\) For in-depth discussions of women’s urinals, see Penner (2001, 2005).
The Forbidden Passage

In terms of the underground hospital walkway, it is the site of its borders as thresholds that beckons a queer hermeneutics of the space. The passageway’s entry/exit points are implicitly and explicitly marked (unnoticeable yet needing to be controlled in a physical environment that already and only uses blaringly clear delineations of space). The officialdom of signage and uniformed nurses, porters, security personnel and so on becomes as much a part of the regulatory machinery of “institutional Australian public space”\textsuperscript{189} as the building structure itself.

It is not penetration of this space as a constructed threat to “Australia/ns” that I wish to pursue here.\textsuperscript{190} Instead I seek an epistemology of penetration, and a queer hermeneutics always and already indissoluble from the ontological realm; it is to make micro and partial knowledge claims about the nature of queer being; interpreting this space away from the obvious political function of the mainstream/margin binary. Whilst niggling away at this binary I do want to gesture toward its possible pliability and if we reformulate margin/mainstream as center/periphery it can be read in this scenario as reversible:

- The center is the inner passage: existing as structure (the underground passage) and function (the passage of a body through a tunnel). This also works as a metaphor for the body’s inner alimentary passage but beyond a simple analogy, the metaphor also has some theoretical significance as we shall see below, in terms of intersubjectivity.
- The periphery is the external: the authoritarian institution, the public space which (rather than being the central locus of norms) is marginal.

However, notwithstanding a pliable binary, this reversibility is still dialectically bound. An examination of the interstitial trace here; a queer hermeneutics of this underground hospital space, still circumvents (through interstitial theory) the mainstream/margin binary.

My first thought on entering the underground hospital passageway was not about the impending CT scan results that I’d receive on emerging at the other end of the tunnel but what a sensual space it was, lending itself to the idea of

\textsuperscript{189} For a critique of Australian space in terms of a contemporary political and popular “threat discourse” see Baird (2004: 67-84) and Offord (2001: 155-179).

\textsuperscript{190} Metaphors to do with the threats posed by the socially constructed nature of, for example, “illegal immigrants”, “terrorists”, “ paedophiles”, “land-rights-claiming indigenous communities”, “queer activists” and other “others” as penetrators of the space of the “Australian nation” easily spring to mind, in the sense of how a “threat” is popularly constructed. For an excellent queer reading of this type of construction, see Durber (2007).
performance as an example of the lived interstitial potential of a space that is semi-public (that is, the *fleshy realisation of a space*, and a weaving of subjectivity and objectivity).  

There are obvious links between the passage of substances or objects into, through, and out of the body, and the idea of the body as a passageway. The alimentary passage runs through our central core from head to tail, and the reproductive tract although much shorter in length, has an explicit relationship with bodily entry/exit points and the possibility to “link” with other bodies. Clinical sounding euphemisms (back passage and front passage) link the idea of interiority as a passageway which can be navigated or mapped. Apart from medical or physiological paradigms, we can transpose (as part of the process of “fleshy realisation” of space) the idea of walking through an enclosed passageway, as walking through our own gut.

As a loosely controlled space with authorised access, the hospital tunnel is only open to a small section of the hospital population. The entry points are regulated, but the inner space itself is not patrolled. The limitation of access means that an awareness of infiltration of what then also becomes a partially forbidden zone invites a creative and/or hyperealised reading.

Elizabeth Grosz discusses hyper-reality in terms of the way in which bodies and their environments always already produce each other as hyper-real simulations. She says: “The body and its environment ... produce each other as forms of the hyper-real, as modes of simulation which have overtaken and transformed whatever reality each may have had into the image of the other” (1992: 242). We can translate this in terms of the hospital tunnel and the festival performance, where the space becomes constructed by the experiencing body (interpreting and sensing it) and vice versa; the body being especially affected by sensations of “fleshy realisation” and the performance/performance space.

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191 The hospital passageway is simply used as a real first-hand example through which I can offer conceptualisations and queer interpretations of public spaces. There is no inherent particularity about this example (except perhaps the nature of regulation) for which I choose it. What I am emphasising here resonates with both Anzaldua’s term, *la facultad* and Merleau-Ponty’s adhesion of self and world. Remembering that the facultad is the “capacity to see ... deeper realities ... an instant ‘sensing’, a quick perception arrived at without conscious reasoning” (Anzaldua, 1990: 60), this concept (as with queer sensibility which we must also remember is about a willingness for oddity) illustrates the adhesive quality of the interstice.

The penetration of regulated or secret space (such as my walk through the hospital passageway) is not necessarily remarkable but what makes it *queerable* in the sense of an interstitial sensitivity, is the idea that even though we all at times venture into semi-secret places, and although they often border, quite closely, our everyday space, a queer interpretation (as a form of knowledge penetration of the normative realm) of this nearness of the everyday to its own limits, *does not privilege* that normative realm. Thus, a queer hermeneutics of penetration does not border normatively filtered consciousness as readily as our spatial and ontological physical reality might.

Put differently; the penetration into semi-public space – such as attending a twenty five minute festival performance in the middle of your lunch break or even just turning off a busy thoroughfare into a suddenly quiet offshoot (emergency exits from shopping malls, back exits from cinema complexes to car parking lots, hidden stairwells on university campuses, are all examples) – is so close to the everyday (the hustle and bustle of shopping and working and travelling) that the contrast is sharp enough to elicit senses which do not “fit” the normative quotidian role. This is the territory of queer, perhaps we could say eccentric, or other-worldly interpretation. In other words, the spatial ontology reverses then oscillates the penetration. One penetrates a “secret” space and is then penetrated by it. The two forms of penetration are not mutually exclusive but oscillate, entangle and interconnect. This sensual, mind-body relationship to spatiality and embodiment can be resisted or embraced; it is a mode of interpreting one’s place in space through a deeply inter-subjective process.

It is at this point that I turn again to Merleau-Ponty’s work, which articulates two ontologically distinct realms as inter-twinable. Although not a queer* text, Merleau-Ponty’s analysis is one that suits a queer interpretation of penetration as a twofold penetration: of simultaneously penetrating and being penetrated; and of an oscillating, entangled, interconnection. It is this inter-connectedness between self and space, between penetration of self into space and space into self (as with Grosz’s notion of hyper-reality) that characterises interstitiality.

Merleau-Ponty discusses the “bond between the flesh and the idea” and in relation to a phenomenology of the horizon he states:
When Husserl spoke of the horizon of the things – of their exterior horizon, which everybody knows, and of their interior horizon that darkness stuffed with visibility of which their surface is but the limit – it is necessary to take the term seriously. No more than are the sky or the earth is the horizon a collection of things held together, or a class name, or a logical possibility of conception, or a system of potentiality of consciousness; it is a new type of being (1992: 148-149).

In my reading, this sense of “potential consciousness” can be a precisely queer interstitial one; the horizon, cast in terms of the underground passageway, is obviously not its far end or low ceiling but its limits of meaning. Merleau-Ponty goes on to say that the new being is:

[A] being by porosity, pregnancy, or generality, and he before whom the horizon opens is caught up, included within it. His body and the distances participate in one same corporeity or visibility in general, which reigns between them and it, and even beyond the horizon, beneath his skin, unto the depths of being (Ibid.: 149).

What we can call a queer “new type of being” exists by challenging those horizoned limits through non-normative subjectivity and consciousness; the final example expands this notion.

The Palpable Inner Passage

In terms of everyday physical reality entwining with abstract knowledge processes (the onto-epistemic juncture), the festival performance in Melbourne has parallels with the hospital passageway and the Toilet Bar. All three have elements of heterochronistic spatiality which combine in one place, as Foucault suggests, “several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible” (1986: 25). This notion of combinations of contradictory and changeable sites is close to the notion of queer interstitial space that I employ in relation to a queer sensibility.

In relation to the Schallmachine 06 performance, the “free” body (read as a form of “hitherto freedom” – prior to involvement with the event), becomes confined, consentingly (perhaps hesitatively or nervously) almost trapped within the structures of the performance and the performance space. Here again is an aspect of oscillating penetration; the audience member penetrates by entering but is also penetrated-in-return by the space.

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193 A more literal reading, prior to a sense of “potentiality” is illustrated through my second-hand knowledge of this tunnel which is interesting in terms of an intergenerational reality of everyday experience. I heard of an eight year old girl who walked through that passageway; she was not impressed like I was (her horizon not yet free of the entirely concrete), and complained to her mother: “humph, it’s a bit daggy down here isn’t it? They haven’t done a very good job of this corridor. It’s not very nice.” She had an expectation of a public building; private passageway or not, it “should” function architecturally and aesthetically as “pleasing” and “they” should make it look nice.
It is important to develop the notion of heterotopic space as one in which queers dwell, not only in moments of crisis (although one could argue that there is a perpetual crisis of worldwide queer phobia) but in “the everyday” which houses a range of easinesses and challenges of being. For the audience member at Schallmachine 06, the experience of its staggered borders as thresholds (the portal-like entry from above to under ground, the second entry point with the hand-over to a different usher, the emergence into the artist’s tiny performance area, and the final exit from “festival space” back to quotidian reality), beckons a queer subjective interpretation of the delineations (temporally fractured) of institutional space.

Underground passageways are not uncommonly known, as “the bowels” of places; as places of foreboding or mystery, and certainly the passageways underneath Federation Square rumble mysterious and bowel-like in the immediate vicinity of Melbourne’s train and tram transport systems.

The liminal, new-being, non-normative and everyday aspects of the Schallmachine 06 performance that I want to convey are from the writing of queer author, Lura Szudinska, who experienced the performance. It is not about the performance per se, it is about queer sensibility and how queer readings of festival spaces can operate as knowledge heuristics; as points of departure from normatively filtered readings. Szudinska comments:

We walked past a door that had a sign that mentioned “panic bolts”... The headroom was low. The sound of trains was part of the performance. And distant human sounds (too remote to identify). There were cameras everywhere. The hidden spaces are kept secure. The banal was, down there, suddenly novel. The cyclone-wire cages of bottled gases, the many-white-doored passages. The red metal pipes, or the blue. Primary-coloured things; everything bright until you go in to a room, which always has a lip, a watch-your-step. ...He was weird. Dour. grey. bald. thick-fingered. unsmiling (sic) (2006: 2).

Apart from observing the performance, there was another experiential moment in this example which relates (as does the 8yr old in the hospital passageway) to aesthetic expectation in which Szudinska spoke of “a couple” who had come to see the performance,

I think of him still down there and the couple who refused to be separated. I said to the usher, “I wouldn’t choose to be with anyone” and they said “It’s the only half hour we’ll be able to spend together all day (Ibid.: 3).

194 Also the notion of descent into the underworld particularly through regulated or mysterious passageways is a frequent theme in mythology, literature and art. See the work of Evans Lansing Smith (1990, 1997a, 1997b, 2001, 2003). For an analysis of the bowel in relation to penetration and the threat/death of heteromasculinity see Leo Bersani’s canonical article, Is The Rectum A Grave? (1987: 197-222).
Szudinska alludes to the tenacity of normative coupledom, further on in her text, she describes how a couple of lovers were separated and placed into different groups of three; about how they complained at the separation insisting that they must watch the same performance and be together (2006: 3). We can read this observation in contrast to Szudinska’s preference for an experience of the self in which “being alone” with strangers enhances the uniqueness of the experience (perhaps we could think of this as “otherworldliness”). The “individual” yet intersubjective processes arose through the challenges of being an audience member of this unusual event: of going into the unknown – into a space of intimacy – being confined underground in close proximity with unknown people and surroundings, and having an exclusive group/singular experience that included the self, the artist and the other audience members. To a queer reader this space of tension, of charge, is a desired threshold space.

A form of aesthetic and intellectual solipsism – the expected function of a space or thing (“it should look nice”, “we, as a couple, will go to see a show keeping our togetherness impenetrable and our notions of comfort firmly intact” or “I am a woman therefore I will not experience using “men’s” urinals”) – can override the possibility to think more creatively about particular spaces and things: that mystery, curiosity, imagination and discomfort are in themselves as worthy of our attention as the perfunctory.

This is a manifestation of everyday queer interstitiality which links to an individual and sensual/sexual experience. This might not have been experienced had Szudinska been accompanied by a lover; and is evident when she says:

Walking out along the long white corridors with their metallic attachments and strange smells, I had a sense of him still under the ground, in the metal room with blue fibrous wall-fill, a grille, the rumble of trains thick under the floor and in the walls, and the slide of the rough pads of his fingers, the final slide of them across the box (the box its own labyrinth). But the slide, the soundless end to it, it was sensual, like he touched me. He, with plain face and grey dust jacket, like an old book, but what connectedness with his materials. The smell down there was unfamiliar, the little room opened up with a trough and a chute and fluorescent light. He didn’t have the energy of an artist. He was like a piece of clockwork, a watchmaker, he elevated the mundane to the level of echo, of spirit. It is as though there is no skill, no art, except in the listening. And practice. So that when he ceased to play, becoming fainter and fainter towards the moment of that caress on wood, which I saw up close like stroked flesh, it was extreme, sexual – but only to me. He was as implacable as placard – then again, in that moment perhaps he was feeling something. It was a moment of tension, at least (2006: 4).

In this “solitary” moment, there was a potential for Szudinska to read any or all elements of the performance as sexual and erotic. Three aspects of this literal
festival heterotopia – a sense of interstitial subjectivity, aesthetic interpretation and erotic tension – are all consistent with a notion of queer being which is at once poetic, creative and innovative.

The reversible inter-penetration of a body into space and vice versa, and the queer reading of what can constitute intimate sexy space in relation to the everyday, represent subtle inroads which wrestle obscure meanings about the non-normative subject, as an interstitial dweller.

It is by thinking of a mainstream/margin binary itself as a problematic construct of localising and universalising discourses that another way to articulate these “marginal spaces” as interstices is contextualised: in these scenarios I have alluded to queer spaces as ideas and occupations between an array of structures of normativity. These spatial constitutions have material particularities, specificities, sophistications, and richnesses. For queers, occupying such places comes with the physical reality of having to carve out a right to inhabit them; this manifests as a phenomenological and political entanglement. The links between the three scenarios, which point to this entanglement, chiefly reside in the tension between complex/sophisticated and obvious/simple queer sexgender knowledges.

The three scenarios give only a glimpse of what I call queer sensibility: the narrative produced is partial but located. It is located in the questions we can ask of normativity and in the interpretations of particularities of queer being-ness which have an intimate relationship with space and self-identity. Fundamentally and poignantly entangled within the queer interstices of physical and knowledge spatial occupation, “being queer” and “queer being” always also reside within “sexually designated” space. This is not to say that queer space, unlike non-queer space, has to be especially sexual space; but it is to say that queer designation of that space which adds, importantly, specific articulations of non-normative space, must be heard as valuable queer knowledge production.

In the next chapter I make a theoretical shift towards Foucault’s later work. My engagement will remain with the interstices of “bodies”, “intersubjectivity”, “interpenetration” and “being” but it will lead us through a phenomenology of being and further, towards the concept of queer askesis.
CHAPTER SIX
Queer Being/Being Queer

My intention in this chapter is to emphasise a quality of queerness which connects the intertwining of knowledge movement with self-change. I introduce this here as self-transformation. This will be further extended in the following chapter in specific relation to askesis, but in this chapter we shall begin by segueing from Merleau-Ponty’s examples of embodied consciousness (as hinged, inter-twining, woven, and chiasmic) with an exploration of a new term, “newly-born” which I utilise after the title of Cixous’ and Clément’s joint publication *The Newly Born Woman* (1989, first published in France as *La Jeune Née* in 1975). From this juncture we shall arrive at the notion of moving through self-knowledge. My first illustration of this movement is to extract from *The Newly Born Woman*, Hélène Cixous’ use of “sortie” as a form of “liberation” and combine this notion (of a way out, or a foray) with ideas of newness and birth which are in themselves complexified by queer theories of being.

Newly-born-ness gives us a particular self-reflective consciousness and I propose that it is through this consciousness of our selves (as interpenetrating and newly situated) that we develop a volition (ongoing, not static or passive), a will to know, a perpetual agency of critical thinking, being, and doing. This will to know (as *queer sensibility*) actively wills to know “the odd”, “the not-yet-known”, “the unfamiliar”, “the eccentric”, “the creative”, “the distant” – the movement of knowledge horizons. Cixous refers to this distance – a far away place to which women have been relegated over centuries – in relation to what she terms “phallo-logocentric” history and literature and philosophy:

Phallo-logocentric *aufhebung* [suspension/abolition] is there, and it is militant, the reproducer of old schemes, anchored in the dogma of castration. They haven’t changed a thing ... too bad for them if they collapse on discovering that women aren’t men ... They, the feminine ones, are coming back from far away, from forever, from “outside,” from the heaths where witches stay alive ... from the nearside of “culture” ... But the signs of unrest down there! How hard the sex cops have had to work, always having to start over, to block women’s threatening return. So many forces have been deployed on both sides that the struggle has been for centuries, balanced in a shaky standstill (1989: 68-69).

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195 In reality, I am turning exclusively to Cixous’ essay in that book because of her use of the term “sortie” (read as a necessary activity of the “newly born woman”) upon which I confer a queer reading and within which (as I discuss in the chapter) she tackles the problematic of dualistic forms of thought particularly throughout the history of philosophical and literary writing.


197 Although “liberation” is a very broad concept, I shall clarify and complexify it in the following pages as a term of transcendence in which freedom for the self, is related to queer experience and queer self-transformation. Use of the term “liberation” in this way, as we shall see below, is not without some nuanced problematics.
The “old schemes” are more explicitly referenced when Cixous articulates her critique of metaphysical dualism:

Thought has always worked through opposition, ... Through dual, hierarchical oppositions. Superior/Inferior. Myths, legends, books. Philosophical systems. Everywhere (where) ordering intervenes, where a law organizes what is thinkable by oppositions (dual, irreconcilable; or sublatable, dialectical). And all these pairs are couples. Does that mean something? Is the fact that Logocentrism subjects thought – all concepts, codes and values – to a binary system, related to “the” couple, man/woman? ... Organization by hierarchy makes all conceptual organization subject to man. Male privilege, shown in the opposition between activity and passivity, which he uses to sustain himself. Traditionally, the question of sexual difference is treated by coupling it with the opposition: activity/passivity ... Consulting the history of philosophy – since philosophical discourse both orders and reproduces all thought – one notices that it is marked by an absolute constant which orders values and which is precisely this opposition, activity/passivity. Moreover, woman is always associated with passivity in philosophy ... Either woman is passive or she does not exist. What is left of her is unthinkable, unthought ... Which certainly means she is not thought ... And if we consult literary history, it is the same story. Now it has become rather urgent to question this solidarity between logocentrism and phallocentrism – bringing to light the fate dealt to woman, her burial ... (Ibid.: 63-65, italics in original).

I understand Cixous’ epistemological critique of metaphysical dualism (and Merleau-Ponty’s chiasmic ontology) as an invitation to keep developing a theory of the self as an incomplete (always forming) subject. At the very least, this is because in a broad sense both theoretical positions are questioning the notion of “a subject” from either epistemological or ontological parameters. In due course, this “invitation” will logically lead us to Foucault and the added concept of “askesis”, but first I want to extend the analysis of newly-born-ness.

Newness/Born-Ness: Ways Of Being Out

The concept of being newly-born can be interpreted as Cixous and Clément used it (in the sense of re-covering woman, re-turning woman, exhuming woman) through feminist psychoanalytic, or feminist Marxist or structural forms of theory making. But queer theory that is not founded on either psychoanalytic, Marxist or structural theory (as mine is not) can also take up the very valuable notions of new-ness and born-ness in relation to a queer sense of being. Queer being requires the imagination, the will power, the tenacity and the creativity to find “sorties” – ways out – from sexgender hegemony. It is significant that what Sandra Gilbert (in Cixous and Clément, 1986: x) noticed as a “brilliant imagining of liberation” by Cixous, is what I also recognize today as relevant to the liberating and transforming aspects of queer being-ness. For today’s queer subject sorties can draw upon, as Cixous’ sorties gestured towards, the notion of

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transformation (this is partly how we shall later arrive at the notion of “askesis”).

For Cixous and Clément (writing in France in 1975), that transformative vision was created through language and literature. For queer theorists (like Stryker in the USA, who experienced the emergence of a newly-born queer theory in the early nineteen nineties), that transformation was also envisioned through a multiplicitous sense of politics and theory. For many queer writers and thinkers we can also add art, sex acts, and embodiment as vehicles of knowledge transformation and dissemination. As Stryker writes:

[I] perceived a tremendous utility, both political and theoretical, in the new concept of an antiessentialist, postidentitarian, strategically fluid “queerness”... Looking back a decade later, I see that in having chosen to speak as a famous literary monster, I not only found a potent voice through which to offer an early formulation of transgender theory but also situated myself (again, like Frankenstein’s monster) in a drama of familial abandonment, a fantasy of revenge against those who had cast me out, and a yearning for personal redemption. I wanted to help define “queer” as a family to which transsexuals belonged. The queer vision that animated my life, and the lives of so many others in the brief historical moment of the early 1990’s held out the dazzling prospect of a compensatory, utopian reconfiguration of community. It seemed an anti-œdipal, ecstatic leap into a postmodern space of possibility in which the foundational containers of desire could be ruptured to release a raw erotic power that could be harnessed to a radical social agenda. That vision still takes my breath away (2004: 213).

Stryker goes on to acknowledge that a queer revolution did not radically transform society or the academy. In my view this only adds weight to her suggestion that through transgender studies an important point of departure exists for “a lively conversation, involving many speakers from many locations, about the mutability and specificity of human lives and loves. There remains in that emerging dialogue a radical queer potential to realize” (Ibid.: 215).

An important point to make is that Stryker presses home the notion of “potentiality” and “utility” of conversation. However, looking at this notion of emergent dialogue, in relation to what we can call the transcendentalism of the newly-born woman (which expressly requires us to take “sorties”/“ways out” from unsatisfactory places) we can see that there is a danger of losing it, or at least not illuminating the “extended reach” of such dialogue. The reason for this (and I explain this problematic in depth here), is not because a

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199The work of Y (as discussed in Chapter Four), is a case in point. See also the work of Jordy Jones (1997), Monika Treut (1999), Eli se Mbessakwini (2002) and Eliot K Daughtry (2003) as some examples of queer knowledge producers in the areas of performance, and/or art and/or visual media and/or sex radicalism. See also the website of Fresh Meat Productions, a queer, trans* arts organisation that “builds community through the arts by creating, presenting and touring original transgender and queer arts programs” (http://www.freshmeatproductions.org/about.html (accessed March 9th 2008).
transcendentalist perspective, such as the one I will draw from Cixous necessarily invokes the dominant philosophical problematic of transcendentalism (that creates but cannot resolve a mind/body relation – the very thing Cixous critiques), but that emergent dialogue needs to be cast as queer, in such a way that through its relationship to a solipsistic standpoint (such as a patriarchal, or heteronormative one), the emphasis shifts from “ways out from”, to “ways of being out”.

In other words, while dominant philosophical “blind spots” (such as logocentrism, androcentrism, and heterosexism) that Cixous would acknowledge as unsatisfactory entrenchments, (in simple sexgender terms, men don’t “see” women, and straight men don’t “see” queer women), that acknowledgement itself, must not overshadow comments (like Stryker’s above) that insist, for example, on ecstatic leaps into unknown spaces of possibility. These new (transcendental) comments come from queers whose material reality is (as I have been at pains to point out in previous chapters) politically and particularly grounded, and furthermore, these “leaps” require that we are prepared to “see” nothing (as being especially originary, essentialised and/or fixed). In relation to Cixous, this includes either the birth or burial of “woman”.

There are some points we must consider here in relation to what we can extract from Cixous’ use of “newly born woman”.

- There is a difference between not being able to know “woman” (a postmodern view) and ignoring “woman” (a traditional androcentric view), just as there is to not know, or ignore, queers. Cixous makes the “burial” of woman explicit and it is fundamental to her thesis, I make a different point extending from this: that not being able to know, rather than being able to ignore, is also a basis for theorising existence.
- There is a difference between the notion of giving birth (in and of itself), and the notion of what it is we give birth to (“woman”). For Cixous, the birth of “woman” is (as above) fundamental; the queer perspective I want to illustrate, again extends the Cixousean parameters to focus on the onotology of birth itself.
- There is a difference between re-placing “woman” (which literally sets her down – places and locates “woman”) and freeing “woman” (which could include being freed from her own self; a universal and perhaps “archetypal”, that is, essentialised feminine self). This tension between being placed, and being free, is one of nuanced contradiction; because of this, it is suited to a deconstructionist, existentialist, queer phenomenology: it gestures towards the complexity of intersubjectivity.
We can draw on two senses of “liberation” from the term “newly born woman”: while Cixous’ work is viewed as a valuable epistemology of freedom, the above points lead towards my proposal of her work as also being a valuable epistemology of transformation.

I am going to emphasise in a somewhat perverse way, (considering that “newly born” is my primary key term) that “sortie”, should be privileged (in my extraction from Cixous) over “newly born”. “Newly born-ness” is vitally important: it is the illumination of new being, but “sortie” will be framed by something other than what we emerge from or how our newly situated-ness is fixed. In other words, it is “newly born woman” that complicates and also stimulates a queer reading of “newly born” by revealing its own horizons: as I have said, it does gesture towards “the transformative”. My reading of Cixous’ essay marks out an oblique corruption of the term “newly-born woman” that is transposed into the term “newly-born-ness” which I link to strategised – sortie(d) – being.

I am certainly not saying that Cixous’ transcendence should “look out for” all beings (and therein men) as a logical extension of existential “freedom”; rather, I am saying that transcendence from normativity and sexgender hegemony must “look out for” the opportunity for self-transformativity. As I said at the outset of Chapter Five, by way of circumventing the usual terms of a traditional transcendental problematic, I shall weave a “particular” course through it. In the next chapter I investigate self-transformativity in more depth; here I preface that discussion with an examination of queer transcendence that pays homage to Cixous’ “newly-born-woman” whilst also queering it. Indeed, it is Cixous herself who alerts us to what I want to clarify. She says:

What is the “other”? If it is truly the “other”, there is nothing to say; it cannot be theorised. The “other” escapes me. It is elsewhere, outside: absolutely other. It doesn’t settle down. But in History of course, what is called “other” is an Alterity that does settle down, that falls into the dialectical circle (1989: 71, italics added).

Where Cixous takes up a critique of history, of literature, of philosophy, of organised, binarised, phallocentric systems of thought, I want to delve further into what “escapes her” and say that otherness that “doesn’t settle down” is a

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200 This particularity can be understood as a queer interdisciplinarity; an approach that I choose to name as odd precisely because it seeks to delve into and open up the interstitial terrain of theory making. A terrain which is itself (as fluidly formed), existentially problematic. This particularity acknowledges it’s parameters: the work of Deleuze (1987, 1989) would be useful for further illuminating a subjectivity/identity distinction. A future project could usefully recruit this avenue as, indeed, a sortie from Cixous.
rich, exciting, interstitial phenomenon that can indeed be theorised, and that there is something to say about it. It is this aspect of Cixousan transcendentalism that we must not lose; that a queer reading retrieves. From being prepared to “see” nothing as fixed or originary (we can almost read this in Cixous’ comment above), a queer reading can actually begin to theorise a putative nowhere-ness of being. Stryker has brought to our attention the potentiality and utility of emergent queer dialogue; we can expand on this notion by thinking of transcendent and transformative dialogues and ways of being.

**Queer Transcendence**

To begin theorising the putative nowhere-ness-of-being, in terms of transcendence, I want to return to Merleau-Ponty in order to connect the term “newly born”, which suggests a motion of being (birth), with the terms from the previous chapter that also conveyed that sense of motion (as a drive to inhabit, and as an activity of the mind). I am recalling here, the notion of embodied consciousness (as interpenetration of senses). This is a perspective that will (a little further on in the chapter) assist our reading of specifically sexualised embodiment as unproblematically queer.

The key terms used thus far can be thought of as occupying a gap which is not, “an ontological void” between subject and object (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 148). Merleau-Ponty is at pains to stress that there is no state of non-being in in-between-ness; that between each of the physical (tactile) moments of our lives, our bodies (along with the total world) span the gap precisely because zero pressure is adhesive (1968: 148). In other words, intersubjectivity is the state of a sucking together of “the self” and “the world” thus dissolving the distance between them. But what is the nature of this adhesiveness and how does a connection occur?

To understand the queerness of an interstitial theory which says that there is no void between things as well as the in-between-ness (an interstitiality) of being and knowing as an adhesive space; it is necessary to look further into the

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201 Things can obviously be any thing. My use in relation to queer being (as self-consciousness) is that they are the fabric of intersubjectivity; knowing, intuition, sense perception, pre-reflection, reflection, states of consciousness, states of embodiment, states of feeling. In a concrete queer adaptation, they become the things of self-knowledge and behaviour. Illustrating queer askesis is a way of demonstrating how a phenomenology and hermeneutics of consciousness relates to the queerly-lived world.
concept of transcendence. Movement between the distinct paradigms of epistemology and ontology will have to disrupt the orthodoxy of those paradigms and stimulate interest in the possible proximity of discrete knowledge structures. One cannot simply blur the subject/object distinction by just saying that there is an interstice between them; for Merleau-Ponty a theory of intersubjectivity explains the adhesive edges of subject and object; likewise I draw on the knowledge movement of queer self-consciousness located in the transcendent space of a mind/body relation.

Rather than theorise transcendence as a solely abstract, disembodied phenomenon, the queer mind/body relation can be illustrated through the lens of queer sensibility. As such (and Lambevski’s text which we come to in a moment, gives examples of specifically embodied, actual queer behaviour), I shall retain the connection with material reality.

For the moment, I want to think of “queer transcendence” in two ways. One is in the core sense of simply “going beyond” (which will obviously need qualifying philosophically in the sense of going beyond what?), and the other is in the sense of “coming back” or “return”: that which takes us beyond ourselves, but only and ever back to ourselves. The distinction is not just that one sense is broad, and the other specific; these distinctions are somewhat complex. I shall briefly illustrate them as distinct, but also situate them as mergeable components of queer self-transformation.

The core sense of “going beyond”, in relation to philosophy, is usually related to theories of knowledge, consciousness, and being; where transcendence is that which is beyond the limits of any possible experience. As Kant said,

Our reason (Vernunft) has this peculiar fate, ... one class of its knowledge is always troubled with questions which cannot be ignored ... and which cannot be answered, because they transcend the powers of human reason ... It begins with principles which, in the course of experience, it must follow, and which are sufficiently confirmed by experience ... Thus, however, reason becomes involved in darkness and contradictions, from which, no doubt, it may conclude that errors must be lurking somewhere, but without being able to discover

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202 Foucault calls this “a returning” as we shall see in the next chapter. Even though I will use the idea of “coming back to oneself” in this chapter, I do however, acknowledge this notion of “return” as a problematic one. In Chapter Seven, I prefer to characterise the knowledge movement as simply “coming to” oneself.

203 “Going beyond” as a concept in and of itself, is also wonderfully vague. I say this because even though qualifying it is necessary here, there is something inherently freeing about the concept as it stands. What I mean by this is “going beyond” as itself (en-soi) allows us to attach any subsequent meaning. But as importantly, this free conceptual space also gives us room to pause; to absorb and ponder something of the enigmatic sense of “going beyond”. In this thesis I do not attempt to explore essences, I spend a lot of time avoiding “essence” and “singularity” in favour of “characteristic” and “multiplicity”. However, in relation to “going beyond”, en-soi I find the theoretical problematic of a root sense (which may be adhesive and magnetic) appealing.
them, because the principles which it follows transcend all the limits of experience and therefore withdraw them-selves from all experimental tests. It is the battle-field of these endless controversies which is called Metaphysic (Kant, 1902: xvii-xviii, italics in original, second italicisation added).

There are differences between the terms transcendent, transcendental and transcendence and there are differences between philosophical theorists who discuss them. Out of those differences, I shall focus on the single term “transcendence”, and use the phenomenological strand developed by Husserl and further by Heidegger and Sartre, to qualify “going beyond” as “going beyond our given-ness” which I will later tie to queer askesis. Sartre provides a neat encapsulation of some of those theorists’ viewpoints (including his own move away from the Kantian privilege of knowledge over being) when he says:

> Consciousness is consciousness of something. This means that transcendence is the constitutive structure of consciousness … no doubt someone will reply that the existence of the demand of consciousness does not prove that this demand ought to be satisfied. But this objection can not hold up against an analysis of what Husserl calls intentionality … Absolute subjectivity can be established only in the face of something revealed; immanence can be defined only within the apprehension of a transcendent. It might appear that there is an echo here of Kant’s refutation of problematical idealism. But we ought rather to think of Descartes. We are here on the ground of being, not of knowledge … Certainly we could apply to consciousness the definition which Heidegger reserves for Dasein … But it would be necessary to complete the definition and formulate it more like this; consciousness is a being such that in its being, its being is in question … this being implies a being other than itself (J.-P. Sartre, 1974:xi-xii).

In relation to going beyond and to ourselves, I am also specifically drawing away from theories of the structure and scientific truth of consciousness and knowledge. I intentionally move towards the concept of situated, “real” queer practice – as an exercise of challenge and the experiencing of one’s limits. Queer transcendence in this sense is not an idealised journey separate to our fleshy

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204 I trace a twofold concept (of the world, and of the self) of “given-ness” particularly to twentieth century phenomenology originating with Husserl’s work at the turn of twentieth century. The concept of “intentionality” as it was formulated by Husserl (after Brentano) can be understood at the most uncomplicated level to mean that all consciousness is “consciousness of” something. In relation to Brentano especially see Husserl’s Logical Investigations Vol II (1976: original publication 1900) and for an analysis of intentionality and “consciousness of” see The Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness (Husserl, 1966: especially page 157). This crucial concept in phenomenological accounts of the structure of consciousness makes my usage of “given-ness” relevant because it can be seen to contain a trace of the interstice. “Given-ness” as I employ it here acts as a pivotal point between phenomenological theories of consciousness, and transcendence as knowledge movement (which includes the intentionality of queer self knowledge). Intentionality is linked to another of Husserl’s key concepts known as “reduction” or “bracketing” see Husserl (1962, 1973). Husserl’s idea of phenomenological reduction is characterised by “bracketing off” the natural world. It means that our “natural attitude” (our everyday interaction with the world – for Husserl the “Lebenswelt”) is to be parenthesised in order to apprehend the pure or fundamental structure of experience/consciousness. Although Husserl’s idea of setting aside the everyday lived world (which can be read as given to us) is problematic (a problematic taken up by such theorists as Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre), it forces our attention to consider the possibility or circumstances of transcendence in relation to the lived world and our being-ness: our consciousness. My circumvention of traditional theories of the structure of consciousness is characterised by picking out a theoretical path which will lead us to notions of “the self-conscious queer self”. This filamental path picks out the interstitial trace, which wends its way from Husserl to Heidegger, to Sartre and on further, to Foucault. Heidegger’s concept of “thrown-ness” (which proposed that the conditions of existence are a thrown project, that we are thrown into this world) began the existential turn in phenomenology; this can be thought of as extending Husserl’s phenomenology as can Sartre’s notion of “given-ness” which he calls “ipseity” (2003: 126), this skews (goes beyond) the given-ness of “the lived” and “thrown” world to the given-ness of the “I” (the self, the subject) as reflective awareness, even self-given-ness. It is this concept that extends my analysis from traditional phenomenology to a queer existential and, interstitial theory of the self. 

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(and political) human selves, but a journey from one state of human knowing/being-ness to another; located as a real movement (and awareness of that movement) in the mind and the body.

Queer transcendence is fixed to physical reality through ideas of knowledge movement and transformation (such as queer sorties, strategies, and desires) which are always already located in the material. Queer transcendence is also tied to queer sensibility; it is the self-conscious, transformative self.

**Going Beyond**

The transcendence I speak of is not to “go beyond” ourselves in the sense that we lose ourselves altogether and do not know who we are (that is, we lose all consciousness and recognition of ourselves; perhaps a psychosis, a trance, or a brain injury). Nor does it mean we go beyond a surface materiality to discover an essential underlying human core (such as the tacit cogito, the universal mind) and nor is “going beyond” reliant on the impossible yet tidy Cartesian split: an awareness of reaching the epistemological limits of consciousness is not, in my analysis, divorced from the particular (queer) body.

A “going beyond” as movement through knowledge, is linked to the will to know, the senses of perception, embodiment, critical thinking, self-reflection, and dialogue. A queer example (as we have seen in Chapter Two) is the way in which an ageing person with a queer sensibility can give new meaning to bodily processes, to re-articulate dominant or familiar pathologised or beauty narratives in such a new way that once disseminated, it can be understood by the self and others as shareable (it can be articulated) knowledge.

In previous chapters I have given examples of knowledge movement that related to the understanding of queer self knowledge as a particular sensibility or as identity; as a shift in knowing oneself as bisexual for example and then knowing oneself as queer bisexual, or knowing vanilla sex and then knowing kink or

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205 Quite plainly this is at odds with the Kantian notion of knowledge forms (a priori and a posteriori) and of the transcendent which is not and can never be empirical knowledge. As Kant says, “[A]lthough the highest principles of morality... are a priori knowledge, they do not belong to transcendental philosophy, because the concepts of pleasure and pain, desire, inclination, free-will, etc., which are all of empirical origin, must here be pre-supposed. Transcendental philosophy is the wisdom of pure speculative reason” (1902: 12). However, the problem in Kant’s analysis is in the sense that an object of consciousness cannot be real and there is an “unproblematic” division (necessary for the “unity” of consciousness) between mind and matter, sensuous knowledge and intuition. This is where twentieth century phenomenology especially, provided the theoretical space (which operates in my explanation as a queer interstitial trace) to articulate consciousness ontologically.

BDSM. I also stressed the notion of spatio-temporal location, and movements of queer embodiment and sexgender fluidity. These examples can be made even clearer now, as they are linked to the notion of queer transcendence.

The next two terms I draw upon can be used to illuminate meanings and hermeneutics of newly-born queer experience by invoking the kinds of theory making that allow for a “sexual rearrangement” after Lambevski (2004) and an “impulse of virtuality” after Massumi (2002). They serve specifically as examples of embodiment, but before turning to them, I want to briefly acknowledge two textual counterparts which can also be linked to a sense of going beyond: they indicate another way of understanding transcendent knowledge movement.

One of these counterparts is Stryker’s reading of Feinberg’s text, in which the new, written representation of “transgender” operated as Stryker says: “to become the name for Stone’s theorised posttransexualism” (2004: 212, italics added). In this example, one meaning of transgender is transcended to become something else, something complex with a different “readability”. The other correlation is made in the way that Gilbert understood her experience of The Newly Born Woman: as “going to sleep in one world and waking in another” (in Cixous and Clément 1986: x). In both these examples, the impact of reading the texts is that a new awareness of one’s relationship to the self, to one’s subjectivity, is created and one has gone beyond being what one was before, and knows and encourages this.

But the same knowledge movement can occur in our “reading” of concrete behaviours. One example is how we understand sexual acts that are new to us and how they become familiar through a set of queer knowledges. There is a corporeal trigger to this knowledge movement. The automatic bodily functions of a sensate body (a hot flush, a palpitation, an ache, a shiver, a skin crawl, a gasp, a wetness, a dry throat, a pain, a tightening or widening of sphincters and so on, as well as feelings of desire that permeate the very flesh) interplay with what the mind is learning and vice versa.

One way to develop this notion of “going beyond” in a queer and bodily context is to recruit Sasho Lambevski’s term “sexual rearrangement”. In his examples which follow, we get a sense of how the mind and body interpenetrate their
sexual limits. As much as I disagree with his argument against a subject position (for him this includes a queer one), his comments do illustrate how a form of transcendence can be articulated away from the philosophical dichotomy of subjectivity and objectivity. Lambevski describes “unpredictable, micro-social, sexual rearrangements” (2004: 304) as a way to enter a discussion of how transformations of our sexual acts and our perceptions of other’s sexual acts, can be interpreted as subjective disjunctions. Lambevski says:

Once I saw a beautiful, muscular, exclusively gay man throw himself passionately into an erotic act with a plain looking, overweight woman at a big dance party. This freaked out both his ex-boyfriend and his other gay male friends. Another time I saw a beautiful, twenty-something, middle-class, lean, athletic, blond, WASP gay boy – a well known in Sydney’s gay sex subculture for his vanity, his nonnegotiable sexual interest in guys who were almost spitting images of himself, and his cruising attitude – furiously plugging his ass and mouth with the white, Asian, black, working class, and middle class dicks of ugly older men with grotesque bodies in front of the stunned and disgusted gazes of the body beautifull of his class and ethnicity at a Sydney gay cruise club (2004: 304).

Notwithstanding the problematic use of the term “beautiful,” alongside “overweight woman” or “older man” (which many of us with a queer sensibility could already situate as synonymous, and to which I shall return in a moment) the events described are interesting for my analysis, as examples of a subjectivity which I read as a manifestation of interstitial queer sexual being-ness. In my reading this is not a “sexual re-arrangement” but a “sexual arrangement” – a queer one.

Lambevski does not see it in this way, he says:

In both scenarios I saw years of corporeal training vanish in a movement from a body solidly placed on the sociocultural map to a febrile flesh full of surprises. The conceptualizations of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari offer me a framework for interpreting such transformations (Ibid.: 304).

To write about these (re-) arrangements within such a framework, Lambevski is specifically referring to the concepts of Deleuze and Guattari (1977) which provide a political analysis and critique of psychoanalysis, thought, and desire

207 None of the aesthetic and identificatory descriptors that Lambevski uses to describe the people in the scenarios have been emphasised with punctuation, nor been footnoted to indicate that Lambevski acknowledges them as problematic. In my view there are two problems with this, firstly, the uncritical use of these terms allies overweight-ness and age for example, with negatively loaded terms – ugly and grotesque. People who view themselves as fat, or old, or plain-looking, may also see themselves as sexy and desirable and beautiful; not ugly at all, as may others who look at them. Secondly, the unproblematised “positioning” of these people remains paradoxical (whether it is intentional or not) despite Lambevski’s argument for the insufficiency of classificatory “positions”.

208 See the book Loaded (Tsiolkas, 1995) for a different portrayal of inter-generational, casual sex which casts aesthetic and sexual sensibilities in terms of what I would call a queer sexual arrangement. In particular note the scene in a back alley to a night club where a young gay man performs fellatio on an older, overweight man who reluctantly reciprocates a sexual favour (1995: 54-59).
(amongst other phenomena) in Western society. By drawing on the work of Brian Massumi (a scholar of Deleuze and Guattari especially), Lambevski articulates these sexual scenarios in a way that disengages them from any subject positionality. He draws on Massumi’s coinage of the term “impulse of virtuality” to explain these scenarios structurally; beyond “apparatuses of social actualization” which he names as the “capitalist economy, the family, the school system, the media, the state, ... systems of knowledge and so on” (2004: 304). Lambevski makes the point that these scenarios are the stuff of transformation; I agree with this (although my analysis of transformativity, shown below, differs from Lambevski’s). To me, these scenarios speak plainly as examples of what we can again call a “going beyond,” or a “sortie,” or a “newly-born-ness”.

The two scenarios Lambevski describes do indeed relate to a form of transformation which I understand to operate as “new ways of seeing” – a term after Nietzsche derived from the term “Übermensch” – which I shall come to in the next chapter. However, my interpretation of the scenarios diverges considerably from Lambevski’s who goes on to say:

In a state of freakish desiring, however, a subject node implanted by these apparatuses reaches a level of criticality at which it temporarily experiences a phase shift to another mode of existence, in the same way that frozen water becomes liquid...Suddenly there is an “impulse of virtuality”, a “transmission of a force of potential that cannot but be felt, simultaneously doubling, enabling, and ultimately counteracting the limitative selections of apparatuses of actualization and implantation (2004: 304-305).

And like the modernist philosophers who also disengage the subject from a position (that is, they must say that existence is prior to experience in order to isolate and study existence in and of itself), Lambevski also makes a subject/position separation, even though he follows another tangent to establish non-positionality. This further distances Lambevski’s interpretation from that of my queer interstitial one. He says, drawing on Deleuze and Guattari:

These examples hint at the existence of an erogenous composite body that is an unpredictable collection “of passive syntheses that engineer partial objects [limbs, dicks, butts, skins, muscles, fat tissues, viscera, sound machines, light machines, built spaces and interiors, props of all sorts and descriptions, foods, chemicals] flows [of affect] and [monstrous, composite] bodies and that function as units of production [not meaning]”. This body works according to regimes of synthesis that have little to do with how the relations between the large aggregates – genders, sexes, sexualities, races, classes, nations, age groups – are organised on a molar level.

The existence of this body poses serious epistemological challenges to how contemporary

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209 See Deleuze’s and Guattari’s now canonical *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1977). Also, for an in depth reading of this work see Massumi (1992).

210 This links directly to footnote twenty eight in Chapter One, and Heidegger’s comment that: “any uncritical lapse into a particular interpretation of existence ... ought to be avoided from the start ...” (in McNeill, 1998: 9, italics added).
cultural theory continues to think about human corporeality, gender, sexuality, desire, and pleasure. Contemporary academic discourse needs to move away from the idea of sexuality as a subject position, nicely and relatively stably wrapped under the epidermal cover of an individual human body, and develop instead a vocabulary about affective intensity, flux, and the sensual assembling of human and non-human elements into a pleasure machine. A concerted move in this direction would precipitate a collapse of the paradigmatic obsession, deconstructive or otherwise, of current cultural theory of sexuality with the subject positionings articulated by regulatory discourses like psychology, sexology, and psychoanalysis ... (2004: 305-306).

I also agree with Lambevski, that certain discourses of the body (such as those provided by sexology, psychology and psychoanalysis) are regulatory, but crucially (in terms of a logic of non-subject positionality) those discourses confine notions of the body and sexuality to classifications which can only relate to, or be positioned within, the binarised schema of “normativity” and “non-normativity”. There is no position-less void for fleshy human “being” to be cast into and as such, category positions (such as normative or non-normative), through a queer reading must also have their interstices. Other discourses (queer, transformative, and non-normative ones), can make use of these interstices and still utilise a subject position as a way out of the putative impasse (created by the idea that a subject position defaults to an unrealistic or useless paradigmatic obsession), by asserting the impossibility of non-positionality.

I would like to suggest another way (illuminating the queer interstitial trace) to understand these scenarios. The “unexpected” sexual acts: “shocking, temporary and freakish”, points stressed by Lambevski, can be described differently from “impulses of virtuality”. This term implies an absence of responsibility and reality (which somewhat precludes the possibility of going beyond) and it signifies a moment of transcendence which we return from – but “back to normal” so to speak. Instead, it could be cast (as an incorporation into “everyday queer subjectivity”), as an impulse of queer subjective transcendence which is not necessarily framed in terms of transience, temporariness and other-worldliness; as acts which shock, but as plain and simple queered acts of sex – queer sexual arrangements.

A Queer Arrangement

Lambevski does not encourage us to follow the gaze (or imagine the lens) of “the ugly”, “the old”, “the plain” or “the fat”. Neither does he question their status as agents – as subjective beings – they are at once passive, abject and monstrous sexual freaks with no interpersonal relation to the object of analysis; the
analysis is one-sided. Only the beautiful and gorgeous have subject positions which they shockingly transgress through their associations with “the other”.

It is here that I want to make use of the point by Judith Butler, referenced in the previous chapter, which related to the feminist critique of Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of Schneider’s sexuality and sexual function. Butler pointed out that we must pay attention to the “other body”; the body with whom the subject of analysis will be engaged in some way (will have sex or be sexual with). She termed this (female) body as “de-contextualised” (1989: 92), and this is closely aligned to what Lambevski’s analysis does to the “undesirable” other bodies in his scenarios. The “other” bodies for Lambevski are contextualised only as points of negative reflection; they are spatially and temporally located but in terms of sexual subjectivity they are reduced to a displaced status.

Unless Lambevski narrows his analysis of virtual impulse and sexual rearrangement to the strictly auto-erotic sex act then the positional aspects of socio-sexual relations must be considered as equally valid. To privilege the “fat”, “old” or “grotesque” body with a sexuality and sexual agency, as a matter of course, would be an important place to start; as would a shift (a “queering”) of the negative value of those particular bodies.

By overcoming not just the sexual de-contextualisation, but the displacement of other bodies which are in fact key figures in the sex acts (without them these scenarios vanish), the thorough recognition of various possible perspectives and “positionings” in the scenarios is provided. These key figures include Lambevski as a narrator, explainer and creator of text, as well as the “ugly”, “old”, “beautifully bodied”, “grotesquely bodied”, “white”, “Asian”, “black” “working-class”, “middle-class” and “dick-receiving/giving” participants. The question to ask once they have all been re-placed is are they all free-floating, and lens-less? The answer to this question becomes much harder to answer if there is still an insistence on the non-positional subject.

Lambevski’s years of corporeal training, he says, were undone (2004: 304), whence does one travel after such undone-ness I wonder? Lambevski concludes that such scenarios are the outcome of flows attached to nomadic desire, that such sexuality does not belong to the subject and is therefore not own-able, qualifiable, or recognisable and not amenable to critique (2004: 308). This
suggests another question to me, what was really undone for Lambevski, precisely, and for how long did this state of undone-ness last? I suggest that “years of corporeal training” (Ibid.: 304) means “normative corporeal training” to which (for Lambevski) we repeatedly return, but my real answer rests in promoting the critique that Lambevski precisely skirts; one of a queer hermeneutics. I claim that there is no ontological or epistemological impasse and no lack of concrete understanding to be had about these two sexual scenarios. In my analysis, the notion of a flowing connectedness need not exclude the notion of subject positionality, particularly a queer one.

The ascribing of queer sensibility co-ordinates to people; in other words, positioning subjectivity as queer, is a way of adding to or displacing normative corporeal training so that queer sensibility can also be recruited for the purpose of representing and interpreting queer sexual and erotic acts as non-shocking and deliberate.

To interpret the sexual acts described by Lambevski, in the way that he does (in terms of disbelief, in terms of a “non-participant”\textsuperscript{211} gaze, in terms of virtual reality) occludes another possibility; the jump from “virtual” to “everyday” reality. Lambevski’s theoretical framework reduces the impulse of queer transcendence to a freak show status, wherein “freak” or “freakishness” is not embraced. This is far removed from the notion of claimed freak identity that we saw in Eli Clare’s discussion of “the freak” (2003: 257-261). Representation of a specific body in Lambevski is at odds with my theoretical bias towards particularity.

Lambevski points his interpretation of these sexual events in a direction that problematises the narrow semantic field. My perspective is different in that the issue of specifically named bodies (about which I resolutely wish to find more and more queer articulations) is not problematic. Queer transcendence as I enlist it, insists on conferring meaning to the body and its sexual encounters because of its political and self-conscious specificity. The real people that Lambevski theorises about are configured as erogenous composites: “unpredictable collections of objects, flows and bodies, which function as units

\textsuperscript{211}Except that being present, can in some ways, constitute participation. The fucker and the fuckee may enlist, as part of their own pleasure, the other bodies in the space – onlookers, “horrified, excited voyeurs”. And indeed the “horror” of non-participant observers may also be recruited privately (sequestered somewhere in or about the mind and body) as sexual fantasy.
of production *not meaning*” (2004: 305, italics in original). In my view, a theory of impulsive transduction,\(^{212}\) which in principle I certainly do not exclude from queer transcendence, can be more fruitfully applied to a logic of interstitiality in which the (queer) body and its sexual encounters remains available to (and creates) infinite meaningful subject positionings.

While the meaning of bodies might be argued in Deleuzeo/Guattarian terms as having “little to do with how the relations between ... sexes, genders, sexualities, races, classes, nations [and] age groups are organized on a molar level” (2004: 305), a queer body has not yet had enough grounded everyday privilege for its specific meanings to be articulated and disseminated widely and publicly. As soon as a body is specific, (rather than just a collection of skin and bones and blood and guts which has been transcended by an impulse of virtuality) and even if it is often differentiating (a point with which I agree) it can be interpreted through many knowledge categories, some of which are newly-born queer creations, and *that* is most especially meaningful.

\(^{212}\) Transduction is a term used by Lambevski to define a transmission of a force of potential; this notion is developed by Massumi (2002) in his book *Parables For The Virtual*. See Lambevski (2004: 304-305).
CHAPTER SEVEN
My intention in this chapter is to make a specific proposal: that the potential for self-knowledge and the productions and movements of it which result from queer interstitiality and being-ness, can be clearly illuminated through the concept of askesis, which I borrow and transmute from Foucault’s later works. I understand Foucault’s notion of askesis in three main ways: as a testing, a cultivation, and a disclosure, of the self. All three, however, do focus on the general notion of transformation of the self and it is through this sense that I will interpret askesis as queer phenomenon.

One meaning of askesis is based on the distinction between the Greek /Greco-Roman sense of “askesis” and the later, Christianised sense of “ascetism”. This distinction relates to forms of relation to the self, that are negotiated through what Foucault terms “ethics oriented” and “code oriented” moralities (1990: 29-30). In Greek antiquity, the term askesis denoted “training” as praxis – an exercise to push one’s limits, to challenge, master, and test oneself, to maintain a way of life that is self-disciplined. In ancient philosophy it was taken up (as Foucault points out) by Plato as a “Socratic principle”. This usage is different from the Christianised, and also the contemporary and popular meaning of Ascetism that is read through self-denial and codification of conduct.

Another way that Foucault speaks of askesis is epistemologically. In this interpretation, self knowledge through askesis occurs as an exercise of oneself – of transformation of the self – in or through “the activity of thought” (Foucault, 1990b: 9). This same activity can also be called an “art of living”, whereby the cultivation of the self occurs through self-conscious examination, as an ethics of being.

A third meaning is different again, and sits somewhere between the previous two. Foucault speaks of two principle features of askesis that the Greeks termed “meletē” (read as philosophical meditation) and “gymnasia” (read as to train oneself) (in L. H. Martin, Gutman, & Hutton, 1988: 36). We can think of these activities (as Foucault suggests the Greeks did) as polarisations of thinking and physical reality. Foucault says: “Epictetus provides the best example of the middle ground between these poles. He wants to watch perpetually over representations, a technique which culminates in Freud” (Ibid.: 37). What
Foucault places at an intermediate position between these poles, is curiously characterised by what he calls Epictetus’ “pre-Freudian machine of censorship” ([Ibid.]: 37-38). This form of “watching over”, I suggest, should not necessarily privilege self-examination as censorial and pre-Freudian. Although the middle ground between these poles is in effect an interstice, that interstitiality itself is not further developed by Foucault, it is one other position (albeit midway between a polarised schematic) that is reduced to a brief association with Freud, one that might leave us thinking of self-control, self-mastery, guilt, repressed desires and so on.

Through the interstitial paradigm that has been set out in this thesis, we can re-interpret the intermediate position as one that does not especially need to “dodge” a regulating censor but focuses on creative forms of a self-to-self relationship. This complicates the notion of meletē, gymnasia and Epictetus’ middle ground as “masteries” of the self. Through a queer reading, the notion of askesis can be understood, always, as an occupation of the intermediate (interstitial) position.

I find the notion of mastery, or rather, the notion of “mastering the self” a problematic on, especially for a phenomenology of consciousness. “Mastering the self” implies a mediation of the self which is deterministic. In other words, the self is being determined by the notion of separable elements of self. This is not the problem per se. What is problematic is that one element of the self (it might perhaps be called originary, primary, or transcendent), is somehow impossibly, an epiphenomenal self or non-presence of self in order that it may control, overview and “master” the self.

Rather than “master” the self (which at the least is a rather harsh-sounding method of transformation) queer self-consciousness can allow self-disclosure to operate as a mechanism by which transformation of the self can occur in “a

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213 Here, I am illuminating an analysis of self-mastery which is problematic in a way that it might not be, for example, in kink or BDSM practices. Here I am giving a “partial” and specific account of the problematic notion of mastering the self. Thus my analysis here does not include other examinations (of “master”, “mastery”, “master/slave” and so on) which would also offer rich and interesting ontological insights.

214 I think of this transcendence as a separated abstraction of the self, not the queer transcendence of going beyond as a lived experience. This is a different meaning to the queer transcendence I have already discussed.

215 For a more complex phenomenological analysis of self consciousness which engages with this issue, (and in relation to a contemporary extension of the Husserlian perspective of pre-reflective self-consciousness), see Zahavi (2005: 72). See also Sartre’s analysis of the structure of pre-reflective self-awareness in which “presence to self … supposes that an impalpable fissure has slipped into being. If being is present to itself, it is because it is not wholly itself” (2005: 101).

216 Foucault also describes other historical and spiritual/religious technologies for the “disclosure” of the self. Examples are, Greek and Greco-Roman “stoic”, as well as first century Christian “exomologesis”, and fourth century Christian “exagoreusis” (1988: 41-43).
gentle wash”. This occurs in subtle, poetic and organic ways; ways that are not forced, or controlled by a “higher will”, but which are allowed to develop in the context of the meaningful-ness of everyday lived experience, through a sense of queerness. This will be made clear as the chapter develops. It is through the previous theorising of the quality and habitability of queer interstitial space that I now want to “push ahead” with our understanding of queer, onto-epistemic askesis.

Two terms I have not yet utilised in the analysis thus far, are “Übermensch” and “epistemological thaw”, after Nietzsche (1968: Original publication 1883-1885) and Foucault (1995: Original publication 1975) respectively. Their combination with the previous terms (related to real life scenarios, and the queer interstitial trace as genealogical elements), completes the complex mapping of the theoretical terrain that shortly forms the conceptual ground for an analysis of askesis.

I want to look at the term Übermensch as overcoming “überwindung” and think of it in an abbreviated sense, as self-overcoming “Selbstüberwindung”. In this way Übermensch can link retrospectively here to the previous terms: “newly-born-ness”; “going beyond”; “understanding” and so on.

The word Übermensch is not easy to translate into English and as such I retain the German form, in fact it is listed as “Übermensch” in contemporary editions of English dictionaries. It is in the book Thus Spoke Zarathustra that Nietzsche’s first coinage of “Übermensch” occurs (1978: 12). The literal translation of Übermensch is “overman” or “superman” but the way in which “Über” is understood in English speaking cultural contexts is less likely to have absorbed the particular nuance that formulates the meaning of “over” into a conceptually laden “Über”. I especially align my understanding of Übermensch with Walter Kaufmann’s translation, because of the specific note that he makes regarding the use of “over” rather than “super”. He says:

Shaw has popularized the ironic word “superman,” which has since become associated with Nietzsche and the comics without ever losing its sarcastic tinge. In the present translation the
older term, “overman,” has been reinstated: it may help to bring out the close relation between Nietzsche’s conceptions of the overman and self-overcoming, and to recapture something of his rhapsodical play on the words “over” and “under,” particularly marked throughout the prologue (Kaufmann, 1978b: 3).

In terms of askesis, it is the Selbstüberwindung (self-over-coming) which Nietzsche was “preaching” through the words of Zarathustra that is used in this chapter.

**Towards Askesis – Übermensch**

“Über” can mean super, excessive, saturated, infused, bursting with essence, and full of something. “Mensch” means human being. However, the general meaning of what Nietzsche meant by Übermensch can be understood in two ways: as a being and as a quality of being. In grammatical terms there is a concrete noun; “the Übermensch” (which refers to a tangible thing, in fact a person – a being) and there is an abstract noun; “Übermensch” (which refers to necessary qualities through which humans could overcome their state of nihilism (as Nietzsche perceived it). This latter use has close associations with Nietzsche’s concept of the “last man” (1978:17-18).

The term Übermensch could have been incorporated earlier in this thesis if we were to look at it in the same hermeneutic vein that I utilised for the other terms; to extract, read and follow the fine queer trace. But this term also explicitly leads us to askesis, hence its later inclusion. Nietzsche, like the other theorists I have utilised, was not a queer prophet, and a solely hermeneutic excavation of Übermensch will not therefore give us a “queer” askesis. Nonetheless, it is a queer term if we accept its deconstructive potential. This includes the defiance of norms in multiple ways, as for example the term Übermut demonstrates. Übermut (generally meaning high spirits, insolence or arrogance), can also be read as a component of Übermensch: it relates to a special human quality, a form of courage. It is such a quality that exemplifies Übermensch, in my partial usage of the term.

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219 As Nietzsche himself says, he is not preaching at all. See the foreword to Ecce Homo which explicitly declares Nietzsche’s requirement to not be read as a preacher, a sage, a saint, a world redeemer, an improver of mankind (1979: 35-36). It is through Nietzsche’s dithyrambic and free-willed writing style in Thus Spoke Zarathustra that his choice of mimicry parodies the preachings of religion (particularly Christianity).

220 The “last man” embodies Nietzsche’s notion of slave morality. The “last man” exemplifies herd mentality, slavishness towards conformity and towards dominant moral standards. The “last man” is a contemptible state of being; he is “blinking” and goal-less (1978: 17-18).
Kaufmann defines Übermut as both “hubris”\textsuperscript{221} and “prankish exuberance” (Kaufmann, 1978a: xxi). Both of these qualities will lead to some form of self transformation: the former through a risk, or invitation to shatter the known self (that is, one cannot defy the gods and be so overconfident that no hardship or downfall will prevail), and the latter, through an uncontained lightness-of-being. We can call this eccentricity, an embrace of the oddities of life, or an irreverent fun-loving-ness and it is a quality that will keep the heart, soul, mind, and body open to change.

I do not wish to attempt a complete definition of what Übermensch means.\textsuperscript{222} Rather, it is the process involved in striving for Übermensch status – Selbstüberwindung (self-overcoming) – that interests me here, and that will lead us to askesis.

The specified emphasis on “self” that I am extracting from Übermensch is poignantly revealed in the way Nietzsche describes “man” as an overture and a going under. He says (in the words of Zarathustra), “What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not an end: what can be loved in man is that he is an overture and a going under” (1978: 15, italicisation added). (These two terms are worth considering in detail because they invite an interstitial perspective. Let us start with “overture”.

Overture in a general sense is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as “an introduction to something more substantial” (Pearsall, 2001: 1325). In the sense of “man” being an overture then, we are invited to think of “him” as always and only ever “becoming”. Nietzsche refers to “man” as a bridge, and here we have a comparison with the Latina, and women-of-colour feminists, and Heidegger, whose work was discussed in Chapter One. They spoke of “a bridge to nowhere” (Rushin, in Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983: xxi), “living on the hyphen” (Hull, in Lugones, 1994: 470), “a dwelling place” (Lugones, 1994: 470) and for Nietzsche, like them, the bridge is not necessarily a metaphor for a possible crossing between two points, but for the between-ness itself. We can draw from this the notion that “man” has no end; he is an endless-ness which gestures to a more

\textsuperscript{221}Not especially as excessive self-confidence, but in the sense of Greek tragedy, tempting the consequences of one’s presumptive behaviour towards the gods.

\textsuperscript{222}We could, for example, also think of Übermensch in terms of pre-dating postmodern theory. For interesting discussions on the Nietzsche/postmodern debate (which argues whether or not Nietzsche’s work can be cast as postmodern) see for example Vattimo (1988), Van Der Will (1993), and Koelb (1990).
substantial being (Übermensch), continually on the way, and coming to, the self. A parallel also exists here between “Nietzsche’s overture” and “Foucault’s askesis”. As Foucault says, “Ascetism as the renunciation of pleasure has bad connotations. But the askesis is something else: it’s the work that one performs on oneself in order to transform oneself or make the self appear which, happily, one never attains” (in Lotringer, 1989: 206).

If we look at the term “going under,” we can see a very different aspect to being, but one which is paradoxically and essentially connected to our being as an “overture”. “Going under” in the sense Nietzsche meant it, is best described in its German form, as “untergehen”. The English counterpart, “going under” has broad applications and it is a phrase which either needs a grammatical subject (going under some “thing”), or it refers to the colloquial metaphor for failure (for example, “my business is going under”). Neither of these are especially helpful to my explanation here and although I will presently return to the English form “going-under”. I want firstly to elaborate on the concept of untergehen.

As an ordinary word in German, untergehen can mean the setting of the sun, but it also means to perish, to sink, to go down, to founder, and to be destroyed. Nietzsche uses the conceptual fullness of untergehen which contrasts with the “heights” of Übermensch. It is only possible to rise up to the Übermensch from one’s perished state (man as overture is somewhat phoenix-like) but this overture can only be realised by the actual desire for Selbstüberwindung through untergehen. In the prologue to Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Zarathustra lists eighteen reasons for loving the “man” who overcomes “himself”; each reason involves an element of untergehen. Here are two examples:

I love him who lives to know, and who wants to know so that the overman may live some day. And thus he wants to go under....I love him who loves his virtue, for his virtue is the will to go under and an arrow of longing (1978: 15).

In the second part of the book, when Zarathustra is scolding the “modern eclecticism of education” (Ibid.: 81), he chastises the “motley”, educated men of his day. In doing this, Nietzsche reveals for us the depths of untergehen:

If one took the veils and wraps and colours and gestures away from you, just enough would be left to scare the crows. ...Rather would I be a day labourer in Hades. ...Even the underworldly are plumper and fuller than you... You are half-open gates at which the gravediggers wait. And this is your reality: “everything deserves to perish (Ibid.: 120, italicisation added).
The interstitial quality of being both an overture and a going-under is fairly obvious. The adhesion of these two qualities of the self creates a transcendental threshold space that because it beckons one’s own transformation (the awe-inspiring/stirring appeal of self-betterment) through destruction (the awe-inspiring/stirring appeal of self-shattering or de-composition/re-composition), could be considered sublime. At one and the same time we are a being which aims for the depths and the heights. As Nietzsche has Zarathustra say, “Verily, like the sun I love life and all deep seas. And this is what perceptive knowledge means to me: all that is deep shall rise up to my heights” (Ibid.: 124).

There are two senses of self that I am drawing on in “Nietzsche’s asksesis” (remembering that he did not ever use this term). One is about negotiating becoming or self-overcoming and the other is the actual becoming.\(^{223}\) The queer trace is certainly identifiable in Thus Spoke Zarathustra, especially if we agree with Bernd Magnus the author of Nietzsche’s Existential Imperative, who describes the spirit of Übermensch as, “extraordinary rather than strange, exceptional rather than everyday, rare rather than commonplace or common” (Magnus, 1978: 33). These qualities can be read as qualities of queerness in much the same way that “the odd” and “the eccentric” can be read as queer; they can all be aligned with a “new way of seeing” just as “Übermensch” and “epistemological thaw” (as we shall see in a moment) can also be.

A Queer Trace

Another way of excavating the queer trace in Thus Spoke Zarathustra is to understand that Übermensch is linked to the establishment of new thought, as an upturning of traditional and dominant knowledges.\(^{224}\) The Übermensch is structured by Nietzsche to provide a critique of the Western metaphysical tradition. Nietzsche speaks of the “famous wise men” (which we can read as Platonic philosophers) and says,

You have served the people and the superstition of the people, all you famous wise men – and not truth. And that is precisely why you were accorded respect. And that is also why your lack of faith was tolerated: it was a joke and a circuitous route to the people. Thus the master lets his slaves have their way and is even amused by their pranks. But the free spirit, the

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\(^{223}\) In Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Nietzsche describes this becoming as a three phased metamorphosis, using the “burdened, kneeling camel”, the “self-asserting lion” and the “innocent child” as metaphors for distinct phases of self-change (1978: 25-27). For a succinct interpretation of this process, see Magnus (1978: 36).

\(^{224}\) It should be noted that in his book, The Gay Science Nietzsche particularly criticises the traditional and dominant knowledges of Western culture, and this critique can be considered nihilistic, see Nietzsche (1974). Also see Magnus for a particularly lucid account which links the concept of nihilism with an aimless relativity or “being set adrift” which is what Nietzsche’s abolition of the “true” world amounts to (1978: 10-11).
enemy of fetters, the non-adorer who dwells in the woods, is as hateful to the people as a wolf to dogs. To hound him out of his lair – that is what the people have ever called a “sense of decency”; and against him the people still set their fiercest dogs. “truth is there: after all, the people are there! Let those who seek beware!” – these words have echoed through the ages. You wanted to prove your people right in their reverence: that is what you called “will to truth,” you famous wise men. And your hearts ever said to themselves: “From among the people I came, and from there too the voice of god came to me”. As the people’s advocates you have always been stiff-necked and clever like asses. And many who were powerful and wanted to get along smoothly with the people harnessed in front of their horses a little ass, a famous wise man (1978: 102-103, italics in original).

Nietzsche’s critique was not only aimed at the Western metaphysical traditions; he comprehensively condemned Western morality and religion for its cloaking of human being with the fetters by which humans are seduced into the “contentment” of not having to challenge and go beyond themselves (Ibid.: 13). Such a challenge obviously calls for Selbstüberwindung.

In a summation of his works, Nietzsche says:

Philosophy, as I have hitherto understood and lived it, is a voluntary living in ice and high mountains – a seeking after everything strange and questionable in existence, all that has hitherto been excommunicated by morality. From the lengthy experience afforded by such a wandering in the forbidden I learned to view the origin of moralizing and idealizing very differently from what might be desirable: the hidden history of philosophers, the psychology of their great names came to light for me… [E]very step forward in knowledge is the result of courage, of severity towards oneself, … I do not refute ideals, I merely draw on gloves in their presence … Nitimur in vetitum: in this sign my philosophy will one day conquer … (1979: 34, italics in original).

Again the queer interstitial trace is evident in this passage, in the embrace of “the forbidden”, and the self-consciousness of being in a world in which there lies a wealth of “strange” and “questionable” epistemological avenues to explore. Ovid’s phrase, “Nitimur in vetitum” (Ovid, 1968: 132), is in this respect (as a seeking of the forbidden) utilised by Nietzsche not so much to obtain the forbidden but to expose it, in this way we can see a relation between illicit love (in Ovid) and philosophical endeavour (in Nietzsche), both of which apply to contemporary queer being if we consider that queer sexual desire, and queer askesis, both employ challenges to dominant sexgender narratives and to the transformative self.

Poetry Of Being

The similarity of Übermensch to queer askesis is in the intentionality to seek self-knowledge, and it is also in (what I consider to be), the very beautiful “poetry of being” in which “man” is positioned simultaneously as both an overture and a going-under. However, as we shall see presently, I am not trying to suggest a wholly neat commensuration of three “asketic” formulations (from
Nietzsche’s to Foucault’s to twenty first century queer practitioners’) but simply a
genealogy, a lineage, a possible tracing of their development. Nietzsche’s “process” of Selbstüberwindung includes certain extreme and/or severe
privations (albeit metaphorical in most part): icy climes, mountainous terrain, and social exclusion (as “terrible” solitude) the necessity for which I shall presently question (1979: 34).

Nietzsche identified himself as “an opponent of Christianity de rigueur” (1979: 48), and as well as “wise men” being asses, “religious men” are cast as poison-mixers, decaying despisers of life. Zarathustra says:

Behold I teach you the overman. The overman is the meaning of the earth. Let your will say: the overman shall be the meaning of the earth! I beseech you, my brothers, remain faithful to the earth, and do not believe those who speak to you of otherworldly hopes! Poison-mixers are they, whether they know it or not. Despisers of life are they, decaying and poisoned themselves ... (1978: 13).

In Ecce Homo Nietzsche reinforces this view on religion (again he stresses that his message in Thus Spoke Zarathustra is not of himself as a religious preacher). He says about that book, “Here there speaks no ‘prophet’, none of those gruesome hybrids of sickness and will to power called founders of religions” (1979: 35). And further on, he characterises Christianity itself as a “pitiable” thing (1979: 46).

A political parallel we can make between contemporary queer being and Nietzsche’s Thus Spoke Zarathustra is in the substitution of “Christianity” and “nihilism” (as Western phenomena) for other phenomena. These could be: modern neo-liberal conservative discourse (which is both secularised and religious), or an uncritical, spiritually aimless, materially privileged, capitalist consumer (especially in Western but also global terms). We could therefore set our queer critical sights on dominant neo-liberal politics and moralising discourses as our targets. Popular sexgender knowledge and what Nietzsche calls herd or slave morality, in the books Beyond Good and Evil (1990: Original publication 1886) and The Genealogy of Morals (1956: Original publication 1887) do not need contemporary substitutions, in my view their relevance is still extant.

Nietzsche provided the framework for a concretely embodied and real “living-in-this-world” human transformation (or transformative vision) . This is
poetically framed when he speaks of falling, splitting figs. He encapsulates what
he terms “the gift” of Thus Spoke Zarathustra in a moment of poetic lyricism:

Within my writings my Zarathustra stands by itself ... The figs are falling from the trees, they
are fine and sweet: and as they fall their red skins split. I am a north wind to ripe figs. Thus,
like figs, do these teachings fall to you my friends: now drink their juice and eat their sweet
flesh! It is autumn all around and clear sky and afternoon —
Here there speaks no fanatic, here there is no ‘preaching’, here faith is not demanded: out of
an infinite abundance of light and depth of happiness there fall drop after drop, word after
word – a tender slowness of place is the tempo of these discourses (1979: 35).

One might ask why this poetics is important. I cast it as such for three reasons:
it is utterly readable as queer, it is utterly commensurable with interstitiality
and it is utterly commensurable with “epistemological thaw” as we shall see in a
moment. Two of Nietzsche’s most beautifully crafted sentences can be added to
the falling figs metaphor (although they precede it in the book). “It is the stillest
words that bring on the storm. Thoughts that come on doves’ feet guide the
world” (1978: 146). We can understand this message as a reminder to staunchly
oppose faith or a doctrine being preached in “granite sentences” (Ibid.: 98) in
favour of stiller words and messages: thoughts that arrive gently, without pre-
conditions. These messages (more especially, their mode of arrival), stimulate
one’s will to knowledge – to take notice and “suck” from the “ripe fruits” of
Selbstüberwindung. Stiller words and messages (such as we might find in
Heidegger, or Singer, or Foucault, or the Story of Jo), can be thought of as a
queer interstitial trace, and also (in terms of their difference from the harsh
sounding notion of self-mastery), a gentle wash of self disclosure.

For anyone who has picked up a ripe fig, freshly split, fallen from the tree
(transposing the metaphor and the real), the wonderment at it for itself (as an
amazing-looking/tasting part of this present and living real world), stands in
contrast to our own self, an equally real but also self-conscious being, whose act
of holding the fig is paralleled by the act of holding (caring for, transforming,
going beyond, over-coming) the self. That is, if we dare. And queer being is that
daring. Queer being is related to “Übermut”.

A specific example of how we can make sense of the “abstract metaphorised fig”
in relation a contemporary queer reading can be found in this twenty-first
century queer text by Dawkins which critiques the “butch resistance” to what we
can call self-overcoming in the butch-femme relationship:
The butch doesn’t eat strange fruit. I hold out the softening fig and she is faintly, perhaps fervently repelled; takes a precarious bite, under sufferance. I do not press her – and now I am become that flesh-filled fruit that she refuses, seeds pushed down into damp clay and the nutrient flesh long decayed (2005: 19).

The fig in this story is a metaphor for that which the butch will not risk emotionally. It critiques the “traditional” notion of the butch who can “handle everything” by exposing her to an exotic, sensuous, unfamiliar challenge. The butch does not step out of her comfort zone to enjoy the fruit, she denies it. The academic analysis of traditional butch-femme lesbian relationships (for example as histories and post-modern critique) is certainly not unfamiliar to contemporary queers who will also write about, the queer femme and the queer butch.  

It must be noted that Nietzsche did specifically speak of women, and in this regard there is no queer trace to follow. My intention here is to provide an analysis of askesis and as such, a feminist analysis of the possible misogyny in Nietzsche would detract from the direction of this chapter. However, as I have noted in previous sections (regarding what we could now call anti-feminist work in Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Arendt) I do want to make the point that Nietzsche often does not make positive remarks towards women. He casts “the soul” as a destructive female force in opposition to the presumably male-by-default-body (1978: 13), and woman are by nature, weak, revengeful, and susceptible to the distress of others (1979: 47).

I am reminded here of Cixous, whose extension to “Nietzsche’s critique” (of Western metaphysics) ninety years later, in The Newly Born Woman, firmly re-orient (un-earths/re-births) women in ways that refute Nietzsche’s misogynistic claims, whilst simultaneously critiquing the history (blind, untruthful and androcentric) of a Western philosophical tradition. Cixous says,

Consulting the history of philosophy – since philosophical discourse both orders and reproduces all thought – one notices that it is marked by an absolute constant which orders values and which is precisely this opposition, activity/passivity... As soon as the question of ontology raises its head...you are led right back...to the father. It is even possible not to notice that there is no place whatsoever for woman in the calculations. Ultimately the world of “being” can function while precluding the mother....Now it has become rather urgent to question this solidarity between logocentrism and phallocentrism – bringing to light the fate

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225 Dawkins’ example brings to bear the notion of self-overcoming through a provocative questioning of normative butchness. For a range of works which illustrate differing perspectives of “femme” and “butch” or “butch/femme” (as a sexgender category, a phenomenon, a dynamic, a history, a way of being and so on) see Nestle (1987), Faderman (1986, 1991, 1992), Kennedy & Davis (1993), Pratt (1995), Feinberg (1993), and Hollibaugh (2000).

226 For discussions from a range of theorists about the merits and problems of Nietzsche’s work in relation to women, see Diprose’s book chapter, Nietzsche Ethics and Sexual Difference (2002), and Feminist Interpretations of Friedrich Nietzsche (Oliver & Pearsall, 1998).
dealt to woman, her burial – to threaten the stability of the masculine structure that passed itself off as eternal-natural, by conjuring up from femininity the reflections and hypotheses that are necessarily ruinous for the stronghold still in possession of authority. What would happen to logocentrism, to the great philosophical systems, to the order of the world in general if the rock upon which they founded this church should crumble? (1986: 64-65).

There are, as I have noted, different feminist interpretations of Nietzsche’s work. The project of making explicit the erroneous nature of any solipsistic, androcentric and sexgender “inventions” in philosophical work is important. I am content in this instance to consider Nietzsche through my own contemporary and queer view in order to extract the queer trace and focus on askesis. Nietzsche is himself a product of social construction and historical contingency that is not especially analysed in this thesis.

Towards Askesis – Epistemological Thaw

As a supplement to the extraction of a queer trace from Nietzsche, we can add the connection of Nietzsche to Foucault: historically, as an antecedent and as an inquirer of how we become ourselves. The full title of *Ecce Homo* incorporates *How One Becomes What One Is*.²²⁷ It is through the concept of self-overcoming – *Selbstüberwindung* – that we can link Nietzsche’s concept of “Übermensch” to “Foucault’s askesis” as it relates to an epistemological thaw and care of self, or “going beyond” one’s self. Significantly, Foucault’s own genealogical method and critique of metaphysical tradition were inspired in part by Nietzsche. As Foucault says:

Nietzsche was a revelation to me. I felt that there was someone quite different from what (sic) I had been taught. I read him with a great passion and broke with my life, left my job ... left France: I had the feeling I had been trapped. Through Nietzsche, I had become a stranger to all that (in L. H. Martin, Gutman, & Hutton, 1988: 13).

“Epistemological thaw” is, in its most basic sense, a descriptor of knowledge movement. It is in an oddly appropriated sense which relates to “Nietzsche’s falling figs” that I utilise it. Epistemological thaw can be applied to many scenarios and it is related to the occurrence of new knowledge (as are all of the

²²⁷ It is interesting to note that according to R. J. Hollingdale it took Nietzsche 21 years to formulate what would become the title, *How One Becomes What One Is*, as a philosophical phenomenon/translation of the admonition "*genoi' hoios essi*" (become what you are) after the ancient Greek poet Pindar. See *Ecce Homo* (Nietzsche, 1978: 14-15). As classical scholars such as Dunn (1998) and Oates (1963) point out, the maxim in full is "*genoi' hoios essi mathon*" (γένοι, οίος εσσί μαθων) which can be translated as "be what you are having learned what you are" (Oates, 1963: 382, italics added), or "become what you are having learned" (Dunn, 1998: 630-631, italics added). Heidegger has also translated it, as “may you come forth as the one who you are by learning” (2000: 106, italics added). Whilst having roots in classical antiquity, this notion has been attractive to scholars like Foucault, using *mathēsis* and *askēsis* (2005, 2001), and Heidegger using *praxis* and *poiēsis* (1992, 1995). Each of these scholars has drawn upon Nietzsche’s work and also many Greek terms and concepts, in order to theorise being and becomingness in their own formulations. We could say that Heidegger and Foucault both formulate *techne* (a crafting of life which complicates the distinctions between theory and practice) in their individual ways, but that “Geschick” (Heidegger, 1984: 68) as skill towards being, and “souci de soi” (care of self) as art of living (Foucault, 1988: 67) are commensurable because of that very complication.
key terms I have employed). However, I am particularly drawn to what the notion of “thawing” can imply: that unfolding knowledge has a pace (and is therefore an explicit and characterisable temporal occurrence), that a transformation of concepts happens as a melt (perhaps arriving on doves’ feet), and that there is an organicism, and a length of time for awareness, of a knowledge shift.

The term “epistemological thaw” is almost poetic, and yet it is succinct and theoretical. My use of epistemological thaw acknowledges this hailing of poetics, and adopts it to suggest a queer potential. This is because the interstices of theory and empiricism can be considered creative, poetic spaces, and that the “poetic space” can be thought of as an interstitial space that brings together (in adhesive fashion) the known and not-yet-known of an epistemological thaw.

Unfortunately, I cannot claim that “epistemological thaw” has a poetics that Foucault intended. The term only exists in English translations of *Surveiller et Punir* (Foucault, 1975) and should properly be attributed to Alan Sheridan’s translation (Foucault, 1977). Foucault actually spoke of an epistemological unblocking, a freeing: a “déblocage épistémologique” (1975: 187), which although undoubtedly is still about a knowledge movement, can certainly not (in my mind) be utilised in the vein of a paced, organic thaw. A déblocage is more akin to a mechanical un-jamming, a release. However if we place poetics aside for the moment, it is still the emphasis on knowledge movement, or change that I want to articulate in relation to a knowledge movement of, and for, the self.

Although “epistemological thaw” (as with “Übermensch”) links retrospectively to the previous terms used, it also provides the link to askesis that this chapter now develops. Foucault originally used déblocage épistémologique to describe the transformation of knowledge into the political investments of late eighteenth century medicine (1975: 187). My use of “epistemological thaw”

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228 Somewhat ironically (considering the association of the term “discourse” with Foucault’s name) it is Nietzsche, as we have seen, who speaks of a “tempo of discourses” (1979: 35).

229 There is an idiosyncratic use of the key terms employed in this thesis. Epistemological thaw is invested with a meaning which falls outside of Foucault’s or Sheridan’s original context; it ‘happens’ to also signal the interstice between poetry and theory.

230 I am grateful to Anne-Marie Medcalf (French anthropologist at Murdoch University) for assisting with (and confirming) my French-to-English translation of the term “déblocage”.

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indicates the notion of creative processes of queer self-transformation by way of the queer self which is, quite obviously, self-reflective and organic.

We have now reached a threshold moment, an interstice, a juncture, at which I begin to collapse the search for a queer trace within discourses of being. I shall briefly define the basic Nietzschean parameters of “Übermensch-as-selbstüberwindung” in order to extend them towards the locus and starting point of a different theoretical trajectory: one primarily concerned with illustrating “askesis-as-self-becoming”.

**Self-Becoming**

Nietzsche’s *Übermensch*, is in large part to do with a secularised critique of the real lived world, and how humans are placed in it. A modification of self-awareness through material, bodily experience (we cannot experience anything without a body) provides a “new way to see” (in the sense that seeing is understanding). Although contextualised within Western and European late nineteenth century engagements with men, and their ways to be god-loving or not, Nietzsche’s “man” of tomorrow is far from being a queer person of tomorrow.

Any “man” including Nietzsche’s, is not a “universal man” in my unorthodox reading of the human condition, but “the tomorrow” of any “man” is. In other words, we all, in our different specificities, will have to face “a tomorrow”. It is here that Stryker’s refreshing and socio-culturally inclusive point about emergent dialogue, rather than Nietzsche’s combative struggle for a new seeing (which we can also read as a going beyond), are comparable; one is a transcendence in which the pain of Selbstüberwindung (self-overcoming) is an absolute requisite (Nietzsche’s metamorphosis) while in the other, queer askesis, it is not. For Nietzsche the self conscious act of progressing towards the Übermensch ideal is a painful, traumatic challenge. I contend that a queer self-becoming is indeed about challenge but not to the extent that ascetic\(^\text{231}\) or anti-social ideals are imperative, one need not necessarily be in pain or isolation to meet the challenges of queer self-becoming.

\(^{231}\) Note the distinction I made at the beginning of this chapter between ascetism and askesis.
Queer subjectivity is not necessarily formed by a philosophical return to innocence in order to progress, neither is it necessarily a vision for all of humankind – “menscheit”. A queer going beyond, newly envisioning is concerned with the daily realities of a queer-phobic, and queer-punishing world, perhaps because of this, the allure of new envisioning is not one of waging war with the self and a will to power (Nietzsche) but one of care of the self in which the interpenetrations of selves and others are interstitial knowledge movements.

For Nietzsche it was the “plight” of the masses (as herd-like) which should be transcended specifically because of a concern for this plight – to rectify this sorry human state. For queer self-becoming it is still “the masses” which are problematic (for example one might say that herd-mentality breeds homophobia) but it is not a concern for the plight of the masses itself – the human condition per se – that drives the desire for transcendence, it is instead, the critique of the masses. To put this distinction in ontological and epistemological terms, the plight of the masses (available by default) is to be cured or resolved; the critique of the masses (not available by default and therefore requiring effort) is to be known. The necessity for queer askesis that includes self-care and social critique can thus be utilised to explain the queer transcendent. The next section will illustrate this.

**Queer Askesis As Self-Care**

As I have said, queer self-consciousness is not necessarily about “mastery” of the self through self-conscious acts of transformation, neither is it necessarily about aspirations to grandiose, or high moral aims which will improve the “lot” of “human being”. Having said this, as a side effect, such an “improvement” may be argued as a good outcome; the reduction of homophobia and inequality for queers*, would be examples. Queer self-consciousness (in the form I articulate it here as a micro-transformativity) is primarily about a way to inhabit the queer* phobic world on one’s own queer terms as an ethics of self-reflection. I cast this ethics as an open-ness to the experiences of self-becoming, rather than the aim to self-master.

I now make a connection between Nietzsche’s “will to power” (as this can specifically be applied to the self-becoming of Übermensch that I have just illustrated) and Foucault’s “will to (self) knowledge and practice” (as it applies
to an art of living). Both these understandings of “being-as-becoming” provide a helpful underpinning for what I want to establish: that is, a clear sense (and articulation) of queer self-transformative being.

When Foucault speaks of transformation of the self, in his later works, he is specifically referring to an “art of living” (1988: 67-68) and processes of “self-govern mentality”. This “living” can be interpreted as “living philosophically”, “politically”, “spiritually”, “knowledge-seeking ly”, “thought-fully”, “care-fully” and, I would add, “queerly”. Foucault does actually speak of the necessity to invent and advance “homosexual askesis” (Foucault, 1989: 206) and I will presently extend this idea to the “art of living queerly”.

In The Use of Pleasure (originally published in 1984), Foucault described certain important practices in (Western) societies as the “arts of existence”. He explained these arts as:

[Intentional and voluntary actions by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct, but also seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an oeuvre that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria (1990b: 10-11, italics in original).

Foucault casts this aesthetics of existence alongside a history; a history of the problematization of sexual behaviour in antiquity (Foucault began this project with Greek and Greco-Roman culture) in order to write a general history of what he calls “techniques of the self” (Ibid.: 11). These techniques as they apply to queer arts of living require that the queer subject is “a technician” (Foucault also calls this “piloting” of the self) and it is this idea that I elaborate on: of the technician, the crafter, the creator of newness, the eccentric, the critical thinker, the poet, and the interstitial dweller whose queer askesis develops (and is

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232 Foucault speaks of governmentality and government in many ways, and as a theme, “governmentality” can be seen in his work at least since the 1978 lecture at the Collège de France with that name as its title. See Burchell, Gordon, & Miller (1991: 87), Foucault, Faubion, & Hurley (2000: 201) and Foucault, Rabinow, & Hurley (1997: 73-85). A distinction I make in this chapter is between the government of self as it applies to Foucault’s historical analysis of the relationship of government to power for example, and, as it applies specifically to his analysis of askesis where the relationship is directed more towards the notion of “self truth”. This distinction is slightly different from the more general and obvious one (between “government of nation state” and “government of self”), see Isabelle Lorey’s essay Governmentality and Self Precarization, for an example of this distinction (2006: 117-139). Foucault speaks of self-government in its relation to the broad meaning of the word government which he traces to a sixteenth century Western European example where government “did not refer only to political structures or the management of states; rather it designated the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed: the government of children, of souls, of communities, of families, of the sick (in Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982: 221). We have already noted this in Chapter One as structuring the “possible field of the action of others” (Ibid: 221). It is interesting to note however, that this concept of the government of others is (as the translator, Leslie Sawyer points out), implicitly linked to the concept of self-government. Foucault uses the term “conduct” in a previous sentence as a way of explaining that power relations are about “leading others” (conducting them) but it is also about a “way of behaving” (in Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982: 220). This way of behaving relates to “self” as much as it does to “others”. As Sawyer notes, “conduct” in English is “conduire” in French – a verb with a double meanings: to lead or drive (conduire) and to behave or conduct oneself (se conduire) (Ibid: 221 n.2).
enacted through) their very “skilling of being”. If queer askesis provides the technology of transformation, queer transcendence (as a “going beyond” the self) is its manifestation.

This final section of the chapter is an illustration of how we might articulate “the art and skills of living queerly”, and borrow from Foucault (who borrowed from the ancient Greeks), the “tool” of askesis which opens up new scholarly avenues for thinking about queer sensibility, queer self-knowledge and queer experiences of being; especially being-as-becoming.

**Queer Askesis As Transformativity**

I shall now examine two phenomena: “art” and “transformation” as they apply to queer askesis. I begin with the notion of transformation, and I want to recall the notion of queer transcendence in order to link Foucault’s notion of the transformative self with my earlier explanation that queer transcendence is a component of queer askesis. I am going to postulate that “care of self” and “transformation” are one and the same: that there is sense of mutual inclusivity between the two that can be illuminated. One might ask, “How is queer transcendence actually linked to a care of the self?” This question can lead us in three practical directions that I will examine. One is that if queer subjectivity is tied to the reality of living in a queer-punishing world, then there are reasons to care for oneself: reasons of protection or “fight”. The second direction is that if a critique of the masses requires effort (as outlined earlier vis-à-vis Nietzsche) then there are still other reasons to care for oneself: reasons of sustenance or nurturance. A third and especially phenomenological direction to follow (which we can also read as self-care) is that self-understanding, as going beyond, is always already connected to life experience. Phenomenologist, Dan Zahavi, comments on this through a Heideggerian formulation. He says:

> Heidegger resolutely rejected the idea that experiential life should be a mute, chaotic, and basically incomprehensible principle. Rather, life-experience is imbued with meaning, is intentionally structured, has an inner articulation and rationality, and, last but not least, it has a spontaneous and immediate self-understanding … Thinking is bound to life through an inner necessity; it is itself a form of life (2005: 79).

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233 As Foucault said, “I would like my books to be a kind of tool-box which others can rummage through to find a tool which they can use however they wish in their own area… I would like the little volume that I want to write on disciplinary systems to be useful to an educator, a warden, a magistrate, a conscientious objector. I don’t write for an audience, I write for users, not readers” (1994: 523-524).
It is the last sentence above (actually drawn from Heidegger’s paraphrase of Dilthey), that enables us to see the implication of care of the self. Care of the self (as a self-conscious ethics of being) is implied here because it is part of the very fabric of life-necessity that is bound to thinking. The relationship between thinking and experience, cannot be separate from the relationship of either, to a self-conscious care of the self. I shall steer the concluding parts of this thesis further towards the work of Zahavi, but for now, I return to the first two reasons to care for self.

Together these two reasons support the notion of self-transformation as “freeing oneself” but these reasons are also simplistic and literal. The complex nature of what it means to “care for self” is partly revealed when we think of that care as transformation, and of that transformation as a self-directed gaze. This gaze (at and of the self) is tied to the notion of a self-to-self relationship, one that I have especially analysed and emphasised previously through the concepts of: interpenetrative senses and selves, the particularity of self-reflective consciousness, queer self-knowledges of embodiment, Selbstüberwindung, self-daring and so on. I now want to link these ways of looking at a self-to-self relationship to one of Foucault’s central questions in order to problematise the art of a self-to-self relationship in terms of the notion of “return-to-self”. Foucault’s question comes from a lecture he gave in 1982 at the Collège De France, and was designed to illuminate a relationship between truth-telling and governing. It also explains (in part) Foucault’s connection between ancient periods in history and contemporary Western experience.234 Foucault said:

I would … like to consider … a question, … namely the question of what it means to “turn one’s gaze away from the world in order to shift it towards the self”… How is the relationship between truth-telling (veridiction) and the practice of the subject established, fixed, and defined? I have tried to look at this problem under a whole range of aspects … and now, starting from the question I asked myself concerning sexuality, I would like to formulate it differently… I would now like to pose this question … in ancient thought before Christianity. I would also like to pose it in the form and within the framework of the constitution of self-to-self in order to show how within this relationship of self-to-self the formation of a certain type of experience of the self became possible, which is, it seems to me, typical of Western experience, of the subject’s experience of himself in the West, but also of the experience the Western subject may have or create of others (2005: 230).

It is clear that Foucault’s interest is in the becoming of a type of self experience – and his detailed historical account emerges through this. It is here that Foucault discusses the idea of “piloting”. He says:

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234 Foucault provides numerous reasons elsewhere in his work for such connections. For examples see Martin, Gutman, & Hutton (1988: 146) and Foucault, Rabinow, & Hurley (1997: 259).
The idea of piloting as an art, as a theoretical and practical technique necessary to existence, is an important idea ... at least three types of techniques are usually associated with this method of piloting: first, medicine; second, political government; third, the direction and government of oneself. In Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman literature, these three activities (curing, leading others, and governing oneself) were regularly analysed by reference to the image of piloting. ... I think there is here ... a set of notions in the mind of the Greeks and Romans which ... fall within the province of a single type of knowledge (savoir), ... activity, and ... conjectural knowledge (connaissance). And I think we could follow the entire history of this metaphor practically up to the sixteenth century. ... [I]n all of this you see that in this practice of the self, as it appeared and was expressed in the last centuries of the so-called pagan era and the first centuries of the Christian era, the self basically appeared as the aim, the end of an uncertain and possibly circular journey ... (2005: 249-250).

My interpretation of this “journey” is in relation to the self-journey of what we can call “asketic transformation”. Foucault emphasises and introduces the notion of “return” with self-journey because it is singular to Western culture in a different way than it was to earlier cultures. He goes on to say:

I think we should be clear about the possible historical importance of this prescriptive figure of the return to the self, and especially its singularity in Western culture. ... We cannot fail to be struck by the fact that this theme of return to the self has basically been reconstituted ... in fragments and scraps ... in a series of successive attempts that have never been organized in the overall and continuous way that it was in Hellenistic and Roman antiquity. The theme of return to the self has never been dominant for us as it was possible for it to be in the Hellenistic and Roman epoch. To be sure, there is an ethics and also an aesthetics of the self in the sixteenth century. ... we could also take up the history of the nineteenth century thought a bit in this perspective. ... A whole section of nineteenth-century can be reread as a difficult attempt, ... to reconstitute an ethics and an aesthetics of the self (Ibid.: 250-251).

Foucault’s reasons for privileging a care of the self, even whilst he acknowledges its difficulty (as we will see below), are to do with the exposure of power relations as a thread of components – one of which is the self-to-self relationship. It is a poorly constituted contemporary ethic of the self which Foucault laments; nonetheless he still regards the project of providing an ethic of the self as an urgent and indispensable task. He says:

Is it possible to constitute, or reconstitute an aesthetics of the self? At what cost and under what conditions? Or should the ethics and aesthetics of the self ultimately be inverted in the systematic refusal of the self ...? After all, when today we see the meaning, or rather the almost total absence of meaning, given to some nonetheless very familiar expressions which continue to permeate our discourse – like getting back to oneself, freeing oneself, being oneself, being authentic, etcetera – when we see the absence of meaning and thought in all of these expressions we employ today, then I do not think we have anything to be proud of in our current efforts to reconstitute an ethic of self. ... We may have to suspect that we find it impossible today to constitute an ethic of the self, even though it may be an urgent, fundamental, and politically indispensable task, if it is true after all that there is no first or final point of resistance to political power other than in the relationship one has to oneself. ... In the type of analysis I have been trying to advance for some time you can see that power relations, governmentality, the government of the self and of others, and the relationship of self-to-self constitute a chain, a thread, and I think it is around these notions that we should be able to connect together the question of politics and the question of ethics (Ibid.: 251-252).
It should be noted that Foucault does not prescribe the Greek model as an alternative, instead he situates each historical epoch (this includes our contemporary situation) with its own “problématiques” and stresses that not everything is bad but that everything is dangerous (1997: 256). The terms “bad” and “dangerous” are rendered complex by the term “problématiques”, which in turn points towards the complexities between politics and ethics. Foucault’s point here especially links to a queer sense of being where the dangers of being, that require bravery and creativity (which I have situated as Übermut) induce action, activism, and what Foucault also calls simply “doing”. “If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do” (Ibid.: 256). Here we can again see a reason (the notion of problématiques) for care of the self.

**The Queer Asketic: An Artist**

I have already listed several ways that living can be considered an art. For Foucault, the art of living requires the “artist subject” to be a technician. The “artist” I focus on, is the queer being who is a “queer asketic”. Having stressed the point that there is an art to living queerly – which is especially about living etho-politically, and knowledge-seekingly, and transformatively – I now want to examine some of the conditions for that art. By paying particular attention to the notion of the “art” of a self-to-self relationship, I point again to the problem I raised earlier with Foucault’s notion of a “return” to self. It is here that I diverge from Foucault’s interpretation of Ancient Greek askesis and suggest its transmutation to a twenty first century queer interpretation in which the gaze of self-to-self does not mutually exclude the gaze onto the world.

The “advancement and invention” of queer askesis, as distinct from “homosexual askesis” (by which Foucault (1989a: 206) may have inferred gay male being but in any case was a term that pre-dated and did not infer “queer” as I use it here), is contiguous with the radical opposition to institutional norms (for example, opposing the normative, regulatory institutions of marriage and/or monogamy). These are “conditions” of queer political self-hood, but the advancement of queer askesis is necessarily characterised by juggling the

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235 Foucault refers to his “mistake” of situating *ars erotica* with *scientia sexualis* in *The History of Sexuality Volume One*. He explains in an interview, that it is important to situate relevantly opposed historical phenomena which contrast homonormous practices. See Rabinow (1997: 259).

236 This is not to be confused with etho-poetically which is a term that I turn to in the following pages. The art of living etho-politically connects ethics and politics as we know them today and through what Foucault calls self-government. The term etho-political as I use it here makes an explicit acknowledgement of the subject’s resistance to political power. Etho-poetics is a term which refers to an orientation of the self.
relationship between government and power, with a simultaneous radical approach to one’s self – an ethic of the self – incorporated in a self-to-self relationship, in which a “going-beyond-ness” probes the limits of one's being.

We can also ask, what are the conditions for an art of being queer? Being a queer asketic is an “art” in the sense that queerness itself requires crafting: seeking the creative, poetic and challenging ways to occupy an interstitial space. The queer asketic consentingly invites the difficulties and challenges of asketic process by welcoming perpetual becoming-ness as unfamiliar, open-ended, or enigmatic modes of being rather than familiar, expected extensions of a teleological, normative life-experience process. The asketic process is not imposed, but willingly sought. This is a key component in care of the queer self.

One way to illustrate how this queer asketic “care” can manifest itself is in relation to Lambevski’s “virtual impulse” scenario through which we can discuss notions of return to self, Übermut, and the desiring body. The art of journeying through states of being by the queer asketic does not in my view require return to self. Lambevski’s notion of return (using the examples of his own state of undone-ness and that of the sex-actors, all going back to their “true” selves) is, presumably, a “restorative return” because the impulse of virtuality (for Lambevski) is cast as a momentary glitch – indeed an almost palpable shudder of horror – and not a queer transformative moment. Nietzsche also speaks of return to the self in this restorative way,

May I venture to indicate one last trait of my nature which creates for me no little difficulty in my relation with others? I possess a ... sensitivity of the instinct for cleanliness, ... I have in this sensitivity ... antennae with which I touch and take hold of ... all the concealed dirt at the bottom of many a nature, ... [S]uch natures unendurable to my sense ... my disgust. This makes traffic with people no small test of my patience; ... my humanity is a continual self-overcoming. – But I have need of solitude, that is to say, recovery, return to myself, the breath of a free light playful air ... (1979: 48-49).

Nietzsche’s return is not only cast as restorative but one senses it is unsatisfactory; not quite the relief it might be. He uses Zarathustra to further bolster the notion of return-to-self as “redemptive” and goes on to say:

Do you want to hear the words in which Zarathustra’s speaks of redemption from disgust? How did I free myself from disgust? ... Truly I had to fly to the extremest height to find again the fountain of delight! And here there is a life at which no rabble drinks with me! (Ibid.: 49, italics in original).

The redeeming feature of this return-to-self is in being relieved of the difficulty of relating to others, much like Foucault says, the gaze turns inwards away from
the world. It is not surprising that in Nietzsche, the notion of return-to-self is cast in these terms. When engagement with the world is so painful (the social world is disgusting and has to be painfully *endured*), return-to-self seems only possible as an idealised, therapeutic, restorative cure.

Foucault by extension also speaks of a restorative return, one that seeks the safety of a metaphorical “home”. However, he also acknowledges and casts return-to-self as a difficult, unclear and ambiguous phenomenon of “movement”, that occurs as a component of conversion-to-self (2005: 248). For Foucault, the idea of movement (in relation to care-of-the-self as concern-for-the-self) is an obvious one. Through unearthing ancient Greek and Roman expressions that concern themselves with moving “to self” (returning, reviewing, reverting, turning back, going back, withdrawing and retreating), Foucault arrives at the notion of navigation. From there, Foucault uses the obvious metaphor (amongst such others as journey, port, odyssey and so on), of the pilot (*Ibid.* : 248 including n.1-6).

The divergence I propose, is to question the exclusivity of this movement as predominantly “away” from or “withdrawing” from others, and that it is always retrospective. To alter the notion of return, from one that represents these especially anti-social withdrawals – respite, restoration, or reversion – I look to the different notion of risk.

**Queer Being: An Ethics of Self**

Queer askesis is about moving from one new moment of self discovery to the next, with *no return* to an original or previous state: “return” is impossible. We can develop this idea further (in actuality “queer” the idea) by re-placing the orthodox notion of return with the notion of risk. I do not mean any general risk: all journeys can be risky in themselves, in fact Foucault does also mention this general point (*Ibid.*: 249). It is the risk of re-crafting the art of journeying itself that I speak of, such that the notion of the self-as-pilot is not exclusively essential.

In other words, we can shift the emphasis from self-as-pilot who steers through terrain (whether it is familiar, unfamiliar, dangerous, commonplace, peripheral, central, interstitial or horizon-like) to another notion: of territory itself being the pilot. This is not to say the self is suddenly without agency, indeed it is about
extending creative choice, it is to say that the queer asketic can go beyond, transcend and further develop the role of “steering through” and allow new phenomena (such as sexgender moments, self-discoveries) to act as paced epistemological thawings and organic ontological shifts.

We could call this an ethics of risk and recognise it as an exemplification of untergehen before overture. If the danger of terrain can be an always-already, expected element of asketic endeavour, the notion of a dispensable pilot is at the least an eccentric one, and certainly characteristic of the transformative and creative drive of queer being-ness.

Let’s put this notion of “risky self-care” in practical terms. We could describe how queer askesis is absent from the two Lambevski sexual scenarios, discussed in Chapter Six, in order to illustrate that the self-directed gaze of queer transformativity operates as part of an “ethic of self” that also looks outwardly and intersubjectively. Although an impulse of virtuality sounds promising as queer term (it could certainly indicate oddity and eccentricity), it loses it’s appeal (for me at least) if the interstitiality of unpredictable sex acts and gendered, classed, raced, aged, particularly embodied social interactions, are not formulated positively (that is in terms of how they can be precise examples, of queer asketic knowledge movements).

To clarify this, before moving on to a summary of the queer asketic, I return to Bernd Magnus. His description of Übermensch as “exhibiting traits of autonomy and self-possession” and as self-overcoming “that may properly be characterised as the transformation of life into an art-form” (1978: 34) reads very nicely as a way that allows us to view eccentric social sex acts. Rather than understand sex acts between a fat woman and a gay man and the voyeurs of their acts, as the “passive erogenous affects of bodily composites” (Lambevski 2004: 305), we could instead, read them as queer asketics: going-beyond the self, transforming the self, and skilling their “sexual askesis” as a creative and intersubjective ethics of the self, a life-art-form that resists the political power of regulated social sexgender norms.

In some ways Lambevski’s reading comes tantalisingly close to my own: he does desire a new way to understand (queer) sexgender acts. The sexual arrangement that is organised on a molar level comes very close to the notion of poetry that I
have used, in terms of a paced organic thaw or the un-required self-pilot. However, Lambevski’s proposal is not epistemological or political and his dismissal of a subject position because it constitutes “macrosocial gendering” (Ibid.: 306) – although proposing to make “real” people’s “microsocial” negotiations understandable – actually works against this aim. It does so by also dismissing a self-possessed ethics of the subject for whom an autonomous self-to-self relationship is necessary.

Foucault also speaks of self-possession when he makes the distinction between Greco-Roman askesis and the Christianised ascetic practices which renounce the self. He says, “The moral askesis of the Greco-Roman philosophies has as its goal the establishment of a specific relationship to oneself – a relationship of self-possession and self-sovereignty” (2001: 144). In Lambevski’s reading of the sex acts he describes, we do not have the opportunity to grasp sexgender space in terms of self-possession, he casts it as the opposite – the loss of the self and an undone-ness within which the framework for understanding self-transformation is virtual and renounces positionality.

**Askesis: Towards The Everyday**

“Etho-poetics” is a term that Foucault scholar Edward McGushin uses in a way that encapsulates how Foucault’s illustrations of “care of the self”, ideally matches the articulation of queer being-ness (as an orientation and a self-becoming) that I want to consolidate. McGushin clarifies the term thus:

> The word “poetics”, as I am using it, refers to the ancient Greek concept of *poiesis*: productive work, deliberate fabrication in which the subject employs technē, “craft” or “art”...

The self, in the context of care of the self, is not the object of knowledge, but rather is the work of art; it is poetic. It is poetic in the sense that it is a mode of fabrication; it is etho-poetic insofar as it is an art of self-fashioning ... (2007: xviii).

Obviously, “poetics” here is different from poetics as I have previously used it (in relation to dove’s feet or splitting figs for example) in which the aligning of the known and not-yet-known create and craft (through a language sensibility) new and/or unexpected knowledges, feelings, and perceptions. McGushin uses the term “etho-poetic moment” to describe Foucault’s own personal philosophical askesis (Ibid.: xvi) as an underlay to Foucault’s principle analysis of “parrhēsia”, which he describes as an “etho-poetic resistance to the proliferation of power-knowledge relations” (Ibid.: xxi). But also for McGushin (after Foucault), an etho-poetic thinker is someone who “opens up new paths for
thought”; this is characterised as distinct from a thinker who studies the spaces, conditions or modes of thought (*Ibid.*: xvi).

Opening up paths for thought is a creative act, and as I have stressed throughout the thesis, creativity is a crucial element of queer being; one that allows a transformation not only of “the individual” (comprising their ethics of being and philosophical askesis) but also of knowledge forms and intersubjective practices of being. These include an affinity for the organic being-ness of coming-to-a-self, as it is lived in the everyday, material world.

Etho-poetics relates to a mode of self-fashioning (also as a care of self) and as McGushin says, it is the development of “an ἥθος – loosely speaking, a character of self, and more specifically a centre of action, an orientation in the world” (*Ibid.*: xviii). An analysis of the individual’s orientation in the world, of the queer asketic, or of any self-devoted, self-caring subject can be criticised for being overly individualistic. Foucault has had many critics on this point237 but as McGushin amongst others points out, Foucault’s studies in Hellenistic and Roman etho-poiesis counter the criticisms of aesthetic and/or narcissistic attention to self by “placing a heavy accent on the fact that care of the self implied all sorts of relationships to others” (*Ibid.*: 115).

Both Foucault and Nietzsche were examining a way of “becoming who one is”. Nietzsche literally explores this question in the title of his last work, *Ecce Homo: How One Becomes What One Is* (originally published in 1908) and Foucault makes explicit the late eighteenth century extension from the traditional philosophical question, “What is man? ... And so on” to “What are we in our actuality?” and “What are we today?” (in L. H. Martin, Gutman, & Hutton, 1988: 145). My concern has been to extend the notion of self-becoming so that queer being today, as a transformative experience *par excellence*, nudges at knowledge threshold spaces and at the limits of the metaphysics of neutral self-consciousness.

Perhaps a tautology explains the impossibility of self-return. If one believes that the notion of return suggests going back to somewhere that we already know or have been to, it can be expressed thus: *you cannot go back to a self that you no*
What is your analysis of Foucault’s later works (about a care of the self and the concept of askesis), and Nietzsche’s concept of Übermensch, and is one that does not interpret these works as necessarily individualistic. I have drawn on them for the practical purposes of articulating a theory of being that aligns itself with lived, queer, (social) experience. Nonetheless, I acknowledge that Foucault and Nietzsche have both been criticised for individualistic undertones in their work. In their book, Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations, Kellner and Best say:

We … find an individualistic turn in Foucault’s later works where his earlier emphases on the politics of genealogy are submerged in the project of care for the self and where individual differences - ‘the search for styles [of existence] as different as possible from each other’ - are emphasized over social and political solidarity. Symptomatically, the social or cultural field is defined as something that is ‘imposed’ rather than a positive field for self-constitution. If Foucault intends his ethics to have a substantive social and political dimension, it is not clear how and when self-constitution leads to social contestation nor why care of the self - especially in our present culture dominated by therapeutic and media industries - does not lead to narcissistic self-absorption and a withdrawal from the complexities and vicissitudes of social and political life (1991: 66-67).

It seems that another tautology is in operation here. That to speak of the self is to privilege the self. I agree with this as a self-evident dictum, but in my view it should be immediately followed with the more discerning question: In what ways do a concern, and care for the self, affect the social relations and knowledges we can all have with each other? The ways in which one may interpret this tautology to consequently mean that a privilege of the self, by default, signifies narcissism and necessarily excludes the other, are not ways that my analysis of queer being can support. The queer, self-reflective, transformative self does avail itself of social reciprocity and a concern for political imperatives and knowledges precisely because, as this thesis has demonstrated, queers generally face a queer*phobic world. We can also translate this as a “danger” (in the Foucauldian sense of problématiques) which requires that (real and social) things are to be done (in a real and social world).

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238 For examples of this criticism as they relate to the analysis at hand see Ziarek (2003) and Best & Kellner (1991).
To turn to Diprose, who disputes Nietzschean individualism, it is her investigation of Merleau-Ponty, that more significantly here, links non-individualistic articulations of self (as identity, as corporeal, as transformative and particular) and existential phenomenology. Diprose says:

For Merleau-Ponty, ... body-identity is never individual: it is fundamentally intersubjective, based on the nonvolitional generosity of intercorporeality and fashioned with reference to the social and familial situation. Further, it is because the body is constituted in relation to others that it is ambiguous, opened to the world and to others, and so can act at all (2002: 68-69).

Having already emphasised the work of Merleau-Ponty in terms of the intersubjective queer self/body, although not especially as a means to counter the notion of individualism, I want to persist for a moment longer with the emphasis on Foucault’s and Nietzsche’s terms which I think can be read as “open to the world and others”. 240

I cast Foucault’s term “epistemological thaw” alongside Nietzsche’s term “Übermensch” in order to extract possible meanings about the process of askesis which is not a process of self-absorption that excludes “the other”. As I have stated, a degree of self-privilege is self-evident (in self-reflection, self-care, self-transformation) but in terms of askesis-as-care-of-the-self, it is the very notion of caring for the self that allows one to also and consequently care for and appreciate others.

As Diprose argues, from a Merleau-Pontian framework (Ibid.: 69), and as I argue from a queer asketic one, the intersubjective self is constituted towards others. Caring for the self as a practice of askesis does indeed require indebtedness towards, or an acknowledgement of, “the other” because queer askesis is a heuristic. Queer askesis teaches the art of living in a shared queer-phobic world, which by its very being-done-ness, is intersubjective. Queer self-transformation does not happen in isolation from the world or from others even if it does fundamentally require a self-to-self relationship. We can remind ourselves here of the notion of presencing that was analysed in Chapter One as a sense of being (self) and as a being (in the world). Particularly, we can think of

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239 Diprose’s book Corporeal Generosity does not only focus on Nietzsche but compares his philosophy with that of Levinas and Merleau-Ponty. As part of her analysis, Diprose also highlights the individualistic limitations of Sartre’s ontology (2002: 79-80), and the more recent feminist philosophy of Butler (Ibid: 67-68).

240 There are other well-known evaluations of Foucault which criticise his putative destruction of identity and the notion of the subject. In this thesis, we have not entered this debate, preferring instead to focus on the worldly experience of sexgender identities and to contextualise them in relation to “the everyday”, strategised living, interstitial sensibility, and self-transformation. For a discussion of the criticisms of Foucault, particularly as they can relate to queer* reading see McWhorter (1999: especially pages 62-99).
the notion of individualistic under/over-tones as void-like phenomena. The queer interstice is, in contrast, an adhesive space of intersubjective phenomena.
CONCLUSION
Queer Orientation: Individualism And Selfhood

What, precisely, is this self? We are obviously confronted neither with a pure and detached ego-pole nor with some formal epistemological principle. Rather, we should examine factic life-experience, and what we will then find is the co-givenness of self and world ... Just as the self is what it is in its worldly relations, self-acquaintance is not something that takes place or occurs in separation from our living in a world (Zahavi, 2005: 82).

In a way, it might be a queer encounter with existential phenomenology that helps us rethink how disorientation might begin with the strangeness of familiar objects (Ahmed, 2006b: 162).

[Ph]enomenology must build on the familiarity that life already has with itself; it must draw on the self-referential dimension, the persistent care of self that is built into the very life stream (Zahavi, 2005: 79).

There are two areas for consideration that I gesture strongly towards by way of concluding this thesis: two areas towards which the notion of askesis has driven me. One is that a theory of a queer self will necessarily (because of the concept “self”) engage with a fundamentally philosophical problem: that is, the distinction between being queer and queer being. In existential phenomenological terms we can think of this as the situation, or orientation, of ethics and ontology towards each other. The second area includes the problem of individualism, or rather, the notion that (queer) self-referentiality and care of self are not co-given with the social world.

While it would be impractical, at this final stage of the thesis, to embark on what I perceive to be the next obvious step, it is quite appropriate to gather up the threads of this final stage and set out what it would now allow. This next step would be a new theoretical endeavour to examine more deeply the three-way relationship between the asketic queer self, a queer phenomenology of selfhood and the benefit of being able to articulate the lived onto-epistemic experiences of queer interstitiality such that “nowhere-ness of being” can always become “somewhere-ness of being”.

This last point has been a driving force of the thesis from the very beginning, in the sense that it is vital for queers to be able to articulate and validate (especially for themselves) their selfhood. Indeed, this force has not been exhausted; it has persisted to the conclusion of this project and could certainly add “pragmatic fuel” to the next.
It has always been a painful experience for me (in fact it increases with age) to know that queer people in the world can and do suffer the social injustices of queer-phobic discrimination. An uneasiness of being, a lack of queer language and knowledge, and an awareness of the extent of suicide amongst queer* youth especially are just some effects of this. Not only do I find this painful, but as I have stressed throughout the thesis, queers and their knowledges are valuable as a general heuristic and as such I also find it shocking that my project has felt, and still feels, so necessary.

At the outset of this thesis, I asked my reader to think of the term “queer” as a signifier of the odd, the non-normative, the eccentric and the poetic. I realise now that even this qualification of the word may not be sufficient to allow an unproblematic switching between “strong” and “subtle” and sexual and non-sexual senses of queer. For example, queer BDSM sex acts are equally as queer as etho-poetic moments, or the fleshy realisation of intersubjectivity that a walk in an underground passageway, a menopausal surge or a sex act may induce. (See Chapters Two, Five and Six). I feel somewhat supported in my usage then, to see that Sara Ahmed, in her book Queer Phenomenology, also justifies a use of “queer” in this way. She says,

... I have been using “queer” in at least two senses, and I have at times slid from one sense to the other. First I have used “queer” as a way of describing what is “oblique” or “off line”... Second, I have used queer to describe specific sexual practices. Queer in this sense would refer to those who practice nonnormative sexualities (Jagose 1996), which as we know involves a personal and social commitment to living in an oblique world, or in a world that has an oblique angle in relation to that which is given (2006b: 161).

Whilst there are such useful and current academic usages of the term “queer”, my own reservations about it can only become more critically and sharply informed. The commitment to living in an “oblique” world can be thought of in the terms of survival that Sedgwick (1993) especially speaks of, or as strategised living, as we have seen in Chapters Three and Four. But having allowed for the graduated analysis of queer being-ness in the early chapters to have firmed up that being-ness as a coherent phenomenon, we can also understand this phrase to mean the sensibility, or tension, of living in a queer-phobic world.

This thesis has foregrounded the notion of tensions (for example around queer* and queer, generality and specificity, easinesses of being, knowledges and ignorances, the sexual and the non-sexual), but it has been through the “vehicle”
of interstitiality that such tensions have been made theoretically sustainable; indeed one of the specific qualities of interstitial space and sensibility has been theorised as a “tensile” one (Chapter One).

In the introduction, my declaration of an irregularity at the heart of the thesis was as much a way of indicating a queer (oblique) theory and method as it was to inform the reader of the difficult terrain ahead: that queer-ness and be-ing would be interwoven in abstract and everyday terms.

As such, this conclusion will indicate the problematics of separating ethics and ontology and perceiving selfhood as an individualism of the subject, as they have arisen through the arguments already presented. I will again provide an irregular interweaving – of summation and speculation – and as a result, this conclusion will consolidate a discussion of ethics of the self in terms of a coherent queer being-ness.

By aiming to review the horizons of the ontology of the subject, this thesis has pinned the particularising of queer sensibility and the queer self, in order to make a substantial case for theorising queer being. Whilst wanting to include the relevance of everyday materiality, not only as well as, but also, as part of an existential phenomenology of being (which leads to concepts of self and self-consciousness), the introduction was a practical one: to propose a qualified meaning of the word “queer” that would be extended in this thesis.

In order to develop specific meanings for interstitiality and interstitial space so that a logic of the interstice could be used as a basis for the subsequent theory of being, the term “onto-epistemic juncture” was coined. This term was used as a means to conceptually weave the characteristics of interstitial space (movement, quality, potential and occurrence) with both abstract theory and references to lived, everyday experience.

Added to this characterisation of interstitial space, an analysis of the problematics of a mainstream/margin binary allowed queerness to be conceptually located elsewhere than at a default, polarised margin. The subsequent analyses of Ben Singer’s (1996) and Eli Clare’s (2004) trans* and queer accounts of “velveteen realness” and “freak sensibility”, respectively,
provided concrete examples through which interstitiality, as queerness, complicates the polarised view of marginality.

I drew on Clare’s account (which could in fact be easily read for “polarised marginality”) because it emphasised, or rather “queered”, notions of desire and embodiment in fine and specific “real” detail. By juxtaposing the notion of freak sensibility with Singer’s account (an intersubjective one) I showed how desire and “realness” are complicated by interpreting them in queer terms that place a heavier emphasis on interstitiality than on marginality. This is not to say that marginality is not a real phenomenon – this point was made in the margin/mainstream analysis – however, we were later able to read the complexity of queer embodied desire through the lens of intersubjectivity which was discussed in Chapter Five. These early formulations of queer interstitiality served as a concrete backdrop to the queer ontology that lay ahead.

**An Interstitial Foundation**

If the end point of the thesis is wholly turned to a queer, existential phenomenology, the first chapter had, at the least, to signal how a queer self and a queer sense of being could be theorised in relation to the tradition of existential phenomenology that examined not a particular self (queer, raced, specifically embodied, gendered and so on), but simply, “the self” or “being qua being”. For this reason, it was the ontology of Heidegger, followed and existentially teased out (if not queered) by the middle to late twentieth-century theorists (Merleau-Ponty, de Beauvoir, Cixous, Sartre, Arendt and Foucault, to name some) that began my first, tentative queer explorations into the dense and weighty tradition of phenomenology as galvanised by Edmund Husserl in Germany at the turn of the twentieth century. This engagement has now reached a point at which queer theory, queer feminism and queer phenomenology have all been drawn into orbit around what I see as the “gravitational force” of interstitial ontology.

There is a crucial point to be made concerning a queer engagement with phenomenology. In this thesis it has been fully expressed by the end of Chapter Three. Here we can derive it, in essence, from this passage by Zahavi:

> As Heidegger famously argued, the very attempt to grasp the mental states of others is the exception rather than the rule. Under normal circumstances, we understand each other well enough through our shared engagement in the common world (Heidegger GA 20: 334-335).
It is only if this understanding for some reason breaks down, for instance, if the other behaves in an unexpected and puzzling way, that other options of inferential reasoning, or some kind of simulation, kick in and take over. Because we conform to shared norms, much of the work of understanding one another does not really have to be done by us. The work is already accomplished (2005: 207, italics added).

It is the being of the queer other, who does not conform to sexgender norms (for example) or who does not have a “shared engagement” with a common world, who kick-starts a new reasoning. This is what, in the introduction (and implicitly and explicitly throughout the thesis), I have meant by a valuable general heuristic, the effect of which comes from concepto-lingual blooms and access to knowledge pools. (See Chapters Two, Three and Four). For heteronormative folk especially, the prerogative to not do the work of understanding queer ways of being is supported by an ease of being (termed an un-self-consciousness in Chapter Three) that does not depend upon, or require an examination of, sexgender hegemony – either the fact that it exists, or what the consequences of it are.

If my analysis of Heidegger’s work had rested on an investigation of the Gesamtausgabe (collected works) my entire thesis (considering the scale of Heidegger’s major works) would have been one about Heidegger’s oeuvre; that was not my intention. As such, in Chapter One I focused on four slim volumes of Heidegger’s work that contained analyses of being in relation to space, which I identified as interstitial and queerly readable. This began what Ahmed might call “a queer encounter” with existential phenomenology. This encounter did two things: firstly, it engaged with the troublesome notion of a particularised self in order for it not to be an unfamiliar theme later, when notions of self, self-consciousness and self-transformation would be theorised (Chapters Five, Six and Seven). Secondly, it firmly located three senses of self together: the queer self, the interstitial self and the embodied self.

In order to penetrate the particular existential phenomenological tradition into which queerness could be inserted, I traced the “fine lines” or “cracks” in the conversation that Heidegger began about “being as dwelling”, but did not resolve in terms of plural ontologies. For this reason I turned to the work of

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241 I acknowledge the displacement of other axes of materiality in this instance (embodiment, income, race, class, health, age and so on), which can also involve unease. I reiterate this point to highlight the specificity of sexgender solipsism, the privilege of heterosexuality and the naturalisation of sexgender norms.

242 This is not to say that Heidegger intended to pluralise ontology: Heidegger’s ontology is “ontology for all”. In one of Arendt’s particularly critical essays on Heidegger’s work she describes his ontology as one that was “never really established … because the second volume of Being and Time (Sein und Zeit) has never appeared” (1994: 176). The
Gloria Anzaldúa especially, but also other Latina and women-of-colour writers who have written of “dwelling”, but in very particular, material terms. This connection allowed the real, material self (now constituted also as the queer interstitial being), to conceptually loom large. (Chapter One). By combining the work of Anzaldúa and Heidegger, the notion of “queer presencing” was analysed. The notion of border-living – being in a vague place formed as narrow strip along a steep edge (Anzaldúa, 1983: 25) – and the place where one’s presencing begins (Heidegger 1971: 154), were cast in terms of a queer sensibility. As such, the presencing of self could be understood as both being (a self) and being (in the world). Consequently, in the early parts of the thesis, I illustrated ways of being queer, and gave examples of the reality of living in a queer-phobic world.

In Chapter One, the notion of “being” was explicitly related to notions of living and dwelling as they could be applied to a sense of the interstice and more significantly, interstitiality – a kind of (queer) being. Chapter Two provided a way of understanding how ways of living (as bisexual, or as old, or as a kinkster, for example) could be understood specifically in terms of: queer bisexuality, queer conceptualisations of age, or queer kink. Again a precise articulation of queerness-as-oddity was articulated, but it was now linked to a sensibility of being and living; at once interstitial, political and radical.

In Chapter Two, bisexuality as a queer phenomenon illustrated how a thinking space could be created through which a much maligned sexuality category is complexified by non-normative sexgender orientations that radically challenge popular sexgender knowledge. The analysis of queer kink privileged the specificity of sex practices as they can be articulated from a queer perspective. This articulation was extended by drawing on the ageing sexual body as an exceptional sexgender heuristic. By using illustrations of radical age-specific kink practices, the queerness of kink was revealed as a manifestation of queer sensibility.

relationships between self, individualism and subjectivity proposed in existential phenomenology provide rich terrain from which queer perspectives can be articulated. In works such as Being and Time (1927) Heidegger did clarify subjectivity ontologically. As Zahavi claims, Heidegger did indeed call for “an analysis of the being of the subject” (2005: 229 n.1). However, “the self” in Heidegger, as Arendt says, is “essentialised by absolute self-ness [and] its radical separation from all of its fellows” (1994: 181). The discussion of subjectivity in Heidegger could be said to strain against romantic or nihilistic notions of a self, rather than either a particular or universal notion of self.
The analyses in Chapter Two explained a kind of queerness (radical, sexual and embodied) which is not popularly perceived because there is a fundamental lack of general access to queer sexgender knowledge. I wanted to examine how threshold knowledges (the movements from unknowing to knowing) and popular knowledges are connected, and how, in people’s everyday lives, a critical consciousness about “being” (sexgender non-normative) may form as a queer sensibility. In order to emphasise the reality of being queer as it relates to the sense of everyday life experienced in a queer-phobic world, I drew upon empirical examples.

In Chapters Three and Four, as a means to begin what we could call an epistemology of ignorance, I presented the personal narratives of self-identified queers, and people in the broader Australian LGBTIQ* community. This served to ground my theory of interstitial being in first-hand, popular, general and everyday perceptions that other Australian people have about non-normativity and identity, in specific and general terms.

The personal narratives obtained through questionnaire and interview research illustrated the connection between notions of queer* sexgender identity and the material consequences of being at odds with norms. Some examples of these consequences were: being turned out of home, losing a job, suicide, retreating to or coming out of the closet, and being always already embattled. General notions of oppression and queer* sexgender knowledge dissemination were complexified by other notions of self-identity which involve the strategy or art of living, and examples of how the radicalism of queer selfhood plays a significant role in developing an ethics of the queer self. In Chapter Four I configured this queer self in terms of a self-awareness that is oriented towards change and change-ability, and which is therefore always forming.

As I signalled in the Introduction, Chapter Four acts as a hinge in the thesis. By linking the empirical with the theoretical, Chapter Four allowed an analysis of queer life, or ways of being (in a queer*-phobic world), to expand towards an existentialist phenomenological inquiry into “being” – a “being” that is always already grounded and queer. From Chapter Four onwards, the thesis was shaped by the queer hermeneutical endeavour to configure intersubjective
relationships (incorporating self-to-self and self-to-world) as interstitial and transformative.

**The Asketic Self**

In order to further develop the notion of a queer theory that is *of* the interstice and *of* being, eight key terms were used to philosophically shape the final three chapters. Each of the terms drove us towards a notion of queer askesis, which, as a way of being in the world, could be examined in existential phenomenological terms and as self-transformative intersubjectivity. The eight terms were chosen for their heuristic potential to describe the elements of queer interstitial being, and each was used to illustrate queer being in direct correlation to queer self-consciousness.

The late work of Merleau-Ponty can be recognised as queer work (although certainly it is not queer*). In my view, it contains the “queer trace” that was outlined in the introduction and later developed in Chapters Five and Six; it was useful to the task of “getting away from” a subject/object problematic by analysing the concept of intersubjectivity.

To extend the theory of intersubjectivity into the realm of everyday embodiment, three specifically situated scenarios (in Chapter Five) served as examples of “penetration”. Each scenario – a public toilet facility in Vienna, a hospital walkway in Perth and a festival performance in Melbourne – emphasised a spatial rather than specifically sexual penetration, although aspects of these spaces were sexualised.

The critical analysis of these scenarios demonstrated how penetration could be theorised in terms of *inter*penetration and this concept was also linked to intersubjectivity. Having established that link, penetration was then also cast in specifically sexual terms using trans* and kink examples in order that Merleau-Ponty’s chiasmic ontology could be read in specifically queer and world-related ways.

As well as utilising the notion of intersubjectivity, I drew upon Hannah Arendt’s\textsuperscript{243} philosophical discussion of the term “understanding”, which cast

\textsuperscript{243} As noted in Chapter Four, Arendt is also not without her feminist critics. I utilised the term “understanding” solely to assist my clarification of motion-of-thought as it relates to queer being.
thinking as movement (an activity of the mind), and I juxtaposed this with Susan Stryker’s use of the term “drive to inhabit” (an activity of queer being). This commingling of theoretical terms served to position queer being at an onto-epistemic junction – a place of motion-of-being and embodied consciousness.

In Chapter Six I highlighted a feminist theoretical counterpart to the writings of a generally androcentric existential phenomenological tradition. I turned to Helene Cixous, whose analysis of “newly-born-ness” critiqued androcentric philosophical dualistic thinking, and made room for a conceptual space in which to configure an always-changing subject position that could be connected to self-transforming intersubjectivity.

As a further way to bypass the objectivity/subjectivity problematic, Chapter Six discussed the terms “sexual rearrangement” (Lambevski, 2004) and “impulse of virtuality” (Massumi, 2002). These terms also helped to make a distinction between subject-aligned theories (such as mine in this thesis) and non-subject-aligned perspectives such as those of Deleuze and Guattari (1983), supported by Lambevski. Countering Lambevski, my discussion of non-normative sexual acts as coherent, queer arrangements, as distinct from the mistakes of an impulse, provided a basis from which to further argue that queer acts and thoughts are precisely about understanding the familiar as strange (as Ahmed suggests in the epigraph above). This understanding also supports the notion of going beyond what Heidegger would call our “givenness”, and towards what I call the queerly transcendent, odd, poetic and creative eccentricity of being.

As a means to justify the coherence of queer being-ness without overly abstracting the notion of a perpetually transformative self, in Chapter Seven I grounded the development of queerness-as-a-sensibility in a description of how the queer self could be articulated through the notion of askesis (which I borrow from Foucault’s later work). In particular, my discussion in Chapter Seven aimed to theorise askesis in relation to lived queer experience. As a preliminary to that conversation, two final terms – “Übermensch” (Nietzsche, 1968) and “epistemological thaw” (Foucault, 1995) – were used to situate and consolidate queerness as eminently readable in existential terms.
Rather than attempting to reveal queer sensibility as the pursuit of a core self, Chapter Seven developed the notion of “going beyond” as a relationship of the self to the self, and this was articulated in terms of both transcendence and disclosure of self to self. This, in turn, was extended to a more specific disclosure, that of etho-poetic *moments or modes* of self. In considering poetic metaphor and physical reality (a splitting fig, for example), the notion of self-disclosure (through risk and bravery, in order to see the self and to welcome or allow the transformative process) was utilised as a conceptual means to extend our ways to think through the problematic notion of self-return.

**The Problem Of Situating The Self**

At the end of Chapter Seven, a debatable problem remains: that of the situation of the self which, if privileged in theories of being, is open to the charge of individualistic narcissism – an over-emphasis on the individual to the exclusion of a realistic account of being which occurs and is experienced in the social world and which incorporates a social ethics. Chapter Seven has deliberately displaced the debate over whether such emphasis on “the self” is useful politically, by specifically emphasising the context of the lived, material foundation of being *and* by reading Foucault’s late works as *commensurable* with the reality of social and politically efficacious experiences. Certainly a future project could consider this debate from a queer phenomenological perspective.

I suggest that the doing of theory and the reading of theory be understood as the inter-twined counterparts of the “doing of self”. In the case of reading Foucault, for example, we are perfectly able to read against the insertion of narcissism and self-indulgence into (for example) the analysis of askesis. Foucault’s discourse is *itself transformative to others*: our very own reading practices have an effect on our very own lives.\(^\text{244}\)

Rather than become trapped by unhelpfully abstracted theories of being, I suggest that the contemporary phenomenological view of Dan Zahavi is one that could be aligned with an engagement with phenomenology that incorporates the specific self and subjectivity. Zahavi writes: “[A] satisfying theory of

\(^{244}\) See McWhorter (1999: xvii-xix) and McGushin (2007: xi) on this point.
consciousness has to account for the first personal access to our own consciousness that each of us enjoy” (2005: 13).

Zahavi’s phenomenology is of consciousness and it may be read as no more queer than Heidegger’s. However, it is also of the first person, and this is significant because “the self”, and “care of the self” as a way of being, are ultimately interconnected. (Hence the third epigraph at the start of this Conclusion). As Chapter Seven demonstrates, it is through Foucault’s later works that I make this connection in queer terms. By the end of the thesis, the notion of askesis has become established as the connecting point between being qua being, being queer, and the ethical self.

Not only can first person access be configured phenomenologically, it should be developed through a queer perspective. The early signs of what I perceive to be an emerging field of queer phenomenological study have already appeared. The work of Sara Heinämaa (2003), Sara Ahmed (2006a, 2006b), Gayle Salamon (2006) and David Ross Fryer (2004, 2006) as proponents of this work have provided insightful and crucial beginnings of queer phenomenology that will surely be expanded.245

The recognition of “the everyday” and the analysis of intersubjectivity (especially in relation to personal narratives) could also be extended in another phenomenological direction: the work of Vivian Sobchack (only briefly mentioned in Chapters Four and Five), might also provide an added dimension to a queer existential phenomenology. Sobchack’s Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Culture (2004) draws on the work of phenomenologists such as Merleau-Ponty and Paul Ricoeur, and interconnects not only disciplines, but also subjectivity and objectivity, the personal and the political, as well as theories of bodies and “space”. This work, which privileges (as has this thesis) a theorisation of the lived body (one that feels and senses, one in which consciousness and corporeality have mutually adhesive

245 To the best of my knowledge, Fryer’s phenomenological perspective on race, sex and gender as they relate to an ethics of identity will be available in his book Thinking Queerly: Posthumanist Essays on Ethics and Identity which has a release date of October 2008.
interstices), could also contribute to the extension of a theoretical space for the “poetics” of a lived body and the interstitality of being.

A phenomenology of poetics then, might begin with Audre Lorde, whose words – written over three decades ago – are so appropriate to the contemporary and future task of queering existential phenomenology, that I position them here as a bright point of focus, from which my theory of interstitality can be even further expanded:

Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought. The farthest horizons of our hopes and fears are cobbled by our poems, carved from the rock experiences of our daily lives. As they become known to and accepted by us, our feelings and the honest exploration of them become sanctuaries and spawning grounds for the most radical and daring of ideas (1984: 37).

I suggest that a further interesting direction that a queer phenomenology might take (and which in my view should be as radical and daring as possible) begins as an extension of Ahmed’s earlier point: it is indeed to position “the familiar” in terms of “strangeness”. This does at least two things. Firstly, if we think of queerness as strange, but by revealing its specificities as familiar transform this to un-strangeness, we risk losing queerness altogether. It is important then, to use the analysis of queerness-as-oddity as a way of complexifying the relationship between the familiar and the strange. Secondly, by revealing the strangenesses of familiar things (objects, ways of being, and experiences of the world), we involve ourselves in a critical contest, perhaps a reversal, with one strand of existential phenomenology (certainly linked to Heidegger, Jaspers and Arendt) that espouses the strangeness of the non-everyday (a falling away from the everyday) as the means to authentically “be being” itself. Rather than the everyday being something we must “get out of” in order to illuminate our existence, cannot the everyday itself be “got into” for what its very everydayness reveals as strange? This would be an exciting question for queer

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246 Following my explanation in Chapter Seven, “poetics” in this sense refers to an art, not just of crafting words in a way that academic and prosaic traditions cannot, in order to describe threshold moments, perhaps, of sense and perception, or ways of interpreting the world; but also as an art of the self that is similarly crafted.

247 Lorde, like Sobchack, is also only mentioned briefly in this thesis. Significantly, Lorde’s appearance each time has been to precipitate something significant to come. This reminds me of Foucault’s comment (part of which was discussed in Chapter Seven), that “one can envision two sorts of philosophers, those who open new paths for thought, such as Heidegger, and those who in a way play the role of archaeologist, who study the space in which thought deploys itself...” (in McGushin, 2007: xvi). We could agree with Foucault about Heidegger, and certainly Heidegger’s comment that poetry is the “topology of being” (as we saw in Chapter One) bears this out, but I would especially cast Lorde as a writer who opens up paths for thought more directly; although I am careful to note that in comparison to Heidegger (whom Lorde would call “a white father, one who has told us: I think therefore I am”), Lorde is utterly different. She is “one who feels and is therefore free” (1994: 38).
phenomenologists to consider, given the emphasis on queerness as a strange and odd phenomenon.

This thesis has analysed a kind of being – one which can be read as interstitial and queer – and it has articulated and interpreted what queer askesis can mean in material, living-in-the-world, everyday terms. The disclosure and recognition of queerness (to self and others) has been examined in relation to the realness of oddity, eccentricity, interstitiality, creativity and the contextualised processes of queer askesis. These ontological analyses have exposed and illuminated a thinking space, one in which the clarity of queer sensibility emerges, and one in which the logic of the interstice prevails.

The insistence on re-articulating nowhere-ness (the troubled form of in-between existence) as a queer somewhere-ness – welcomed and knowable in everyday life and language – has been a tenet throughout this thesis. The appeal of such a principle has been ironically paralleled by a poignancy that we can better understand now: of always sensing that queerness, however well articulated, will also remain enigmatic. It was with this paradox that I somewhat uncomfortably, began this thesis. It seems appropriate to also end with it. The enigma of queer being should be retained and embraced, for at the interstices of theory and practice, abstraction and reality, subjectivity and objectivity, there is a poetics and art of being, the horizons of which remain elusive, the articulation of which is heuristic.

Given the experience of queer-phobic living conditions, there is no queer prerogative to ignore the transformative self. In other words, whilst queers have to engage with a queer-phobic world in a way that people living normative lives generally do not, the opportunity also exists for queers to embrace transformative notions of being that continually open, and startle into life, new paths of thought. Those paths are especially creative: they are imbued with an affinity for “the interstitial” and they embrace the oddity and poetics of being that can certainly “queer” existential phenomenology. Finally, I do not say that queer askesis finds the “truth” of the queer self, but rather that it exposes the truth of the living conditions that establish the concrete reality of a queer sensibility.
Appendices
Appendix A
Duplicate Of Fair-Day Questionnaire

Project Title: Queer Being And The Sexual Interstice: A Phenomenological Approach To The Queer Transformative Self.
I am a PhD candidate at Murdoch University investigating the ways in which the “queering” of gender and queer sexualities are understood. This research is under the supervision of Associate Professor Beverly Thiele, Chair of Women’s Studies at Murdoch University. The purpose of this study is to find out how sexual/gendered identity is theorised and/or politicised and how it is understood and /or regulated in the everyday sense. You can help in this study by consenting to complete a questionnaire. It is anticipated that the time to complete the survey would not take more than an hour. Contained in the survey are questions about sexuality, gender, identity, GLBTQI rights and other questions, which may be seen as personal and private. Participants can decide to withdraw their consent at any time. All information given in the questionnaire is anonymous and no names or other information that might identify you need to be provided. Completion of the questionnaire is taken to indicate consent.

While the questionnaire can be completely anonymous if you would like to receive a summary of the statistical results (expected to be available in March 2006) there is a sheet at the end of the questionnaire where you can indicate your interest and provide me with a return address. Also on that sheet, you may indicate your willingness to have a follow-up interview. This sheet will be stored separately from the returned questionnaire. If you have any questions about this project please feel free to contact myself, Julia Horncastle, (9360 2217) or my supervisor, Assoc.Prof. Bev.Thiele (9360 2269).

My supervisor and I are happy to discuss with you any concerns you may have on how this study has been conducted, alternatively you can contact Murdoch University’s Human Research Ethics Committee on 9360 6677.

Yours Sincerely
Julia Horncastle

Bev Thiele

Questionnaire
Thank you for taking the time to fill out this questionnaire. Please answer as many questions as you can and return your form in the postage paid envelope provided.
The questionnaire should take approximately 1 hour to complete. You are invited to make your answers as fulsome as you like. If the space provided for your answer is inadequate for your purposes please feel free to continue on the back of the page or to add additional pages. In this case please clearly indicate the question number.

1) Can you say why you attended this fair day? ...........................................................
...........................................................................................................................................

2) Could you please describe your thoughts/opinions about this event? ..........................
...........................................................................................................................................

3) Are you intending to attend other Pride events at this festival? Yes/No
Can you explain why and what your criteria are for deciding which events to go to? .................................................................
...........................................................................................................................................

4) Have you been to similar events? Please circle – Local State Interstate International If so, how do they compare? ............................
5) Are you involved in sub-culture? Yes/No
If yes, can you describe which sort of sub-culture and the way in which way you are involved?

6) If you can, describe in one word your sexuality? …………………………………………………………………………..
If not, can you say why this is so?

Have you always described your sexuality this way? Yes/No
If not can you talk about why this is so?

7) Do you associate sexuality with your identity? Yes/No
Can you explain your answer?

8) What do you think about the way your sexuality is publicly represented (for example: in popular culture, the mainstream media, GLBTQI media/events)?

9) What do you think about the difference between sex and gender and sexuality?

10) Can you describe what sexuality means to you?

11) Can you say what gender you are? If yes, please indicate
If not, can you explain why?

12) Have you come across the idea that there are more than two genders? Yes/No
If yes, can you describe them?

13) Could you define any of the following terms and say what your opinions are about them?
   - Vanilla Sex
   - Sado-Masochism
   - Bondage and Discipline
Domination and submission

Queer

Radical Sex

Leather community

Kinging

Gender-fuck

Feminism

Drag

Butch

Femme

Transgender

Intersex

Transsexual

Stonefemme

Stonebutch

15) Please could you define any other terms which are significant for you?

16) What do you consider to be the main issues affecting GLBTQI people at present?

17) Do you have an opinion about this abbreviation? GLBTQI Yes/No
If yes, please state...

18) What is your comment on the amount of GLBTQI events/venues in your state?
19) Do you attend many GLBTQI venues/events? Yes/No
Approximately how many and how often?
.......................................................................................................................... ..........................................................

20) Have you been to any organised sex-specific events? Yes/No
What is your opinion on sex-specific events?............................................
.......................................................................................................................... ..........................................................

21) Do you read GLBTIQ specific material? Yes/No
If yes can you say what type of reading material and how often you read it?
.......................................................................................................................... ..........................................................

22) Can you think of any reasons why certain GLBTQ events should have a restricted entry policy to certain groups/types of people based on sexuality or gender? Yes/No
If yes, please can you explain why?
.......................................................................................................................... ..........................................................

23) Are you involved in law reform, lobbying, and political activism? Yes/No
If yes, please describe..........................................................................................................................
.......................................................................................................................... ..........................................................

24) Do you have discussions about sexuality or gender with anyone? Yes/No
How would you describe these discussions?.............................................
.......................................................................................................................... ..........................................................

25) Have you ever read anything about sexuality, gender or identity, which has changed your views of these things, or how you identify? If so please explain............
.......................................................................................................................... ..........................................................

26) Do feel that you belong to a community? Yes/No
If no can you say why?..........................................................................................................................
.......................................................................................................................... ..........................................................

27) Do you contribute to that community? Yes/No
Can you explain in what way?.................................................................
.......................................................................................................................... ..........................................................

27) Can you describe what is meant by these terms:

Queer space ..........................................................................................................................
..........................................................................................................................

Pansexual space ..........................................................................................................................
..........................................................................................................................

Play parties ..........................................................................................................................
..........................................................................................................................

Queer theory ..........................................................................................................................
..........................................................................................................................
28) Have you experienced discrimination on the basis of your sexuality or gender? Yes/No
If yes, are you able to describe the experience?

29) Do you consider yourself to be 'political'? Yes/No
Can you explain why and in what way?

30) Do you have a vision of how you would like society to be?

31) Do you have any coming out, outing or closet experiences that you could describe?

32) Can you say if your identity is closeted? all/some/none
Please can you describe how this impacts on your life?

32) Can you say what the following terms mean?
Heteronormative
Homoerotic
Autoerotic
Pornographic
Erotic
Public sex

33) What is your age?

34) Which state are you from?

35) What particular social class (if any) do consider yourself to be a part of?
36) Do you identify with a particular section of the G/L/B/T/Q/I/other community? Please can you state which? .................................................................................................................................
......................................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................................

Thank you for your time.

Please indicate if you would like a copy of the summary of results when it becomes available in March 2006
Yes.......No.......Please indicate if you would be interested in being considered for interview. Yes.......No........
If yes to either of these questions, please complete details below.
I would be willing to take part in an interview/ please send further details of your research project to:
................................................................................................................................................
................................................................................................................................................
................................................................................................................................................
or contact me:
phone................................................................
e-mail......................................................
# Appendix B

## Return Rate And Demographic Statistics Of Fair Day Questionnaires

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Number of questionnaires out</th>
<th>Number of questionnaires returned</th>
<th>Age range and average age</th>
<th>Social class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>13 returned (6.5%)</td>
<td>23-54 (average = 30)</td>
<td>D=6 M=4 W=1 UM=1 N=1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>15 returned (7.5%)</td>
<td>28-60 (average = 32)</td>
<td>D=2 M=6 W=6 C=1</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Brisbane</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>20 returned (13.3%)</td>
<td>18-61 (average = 37)</td>
<td>D=1 M=10 W=8 LM=1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adelaide</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>17 returned (11.3%)</td>
<td>21-61 (average = 44)</td>
<td>D=2 M=11 W=3 UM=1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perth</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>12 returned (8%)</td>
<td>25-60 (average = 38)</td>
<td>D=1 M=3 W=5 L=1 UM=1 A=1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Canberra</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>13 returned (26%)</td>
<td>28-50 (average = 42)</td>
<td>D=1 M=6 W=4 LM=1 WE=1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Key to social class categories: D = declined to answer, W = working, M = middle, LM = lower middle, UM = upper middle, L = lower, C = classless, N = normal, A = average, WE = well educated. All categories were articulated by the respondents themselves in answer to the question, "What particular social class (if any) do you consider yourself to be part of?").
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