Rescripting ‘the closet’: Theoretical and conceptual renderings of Australian lesbian and gay ‘coming out’ narratives

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Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Victoria University, Australia

Institute for Sustainable Industries and Liveable Cities

July 2026

Abstract

(Re)negotiated and (re)produced linguistically, materially, historically, geographically, politically, and socially as a relation to cisgender, heterosexual identity discourses, 'the closet' is a utilitarian and disciplinary apparatus of onto-epistemic violence. This project (re)considers 'the closet' and 'coming out' as technologies of subjectivisation (Foucault, 1988b): the (re)producing of gay and lesbian subjects. In this thesis, I draw on empirical data and philosophical, theoretical, and conceptual frameworks to *think with theory* (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, 2023), and to queer (mono)methodological, conceptual, theoretical, and disciplinary cohesiveness – like coding and thematising data. This project subverts normative temporal and spatial logics, positing 'the closet' as a unique interstitial space between absence and presence, being and non-being, place and no-place. It evokes symbolic-material discourses vis-à-vis rites of passage, liberation, protection, ritual, stratagems, (self) surveillance, and (self) censorship. This thesis brings into dialogue the 'post' paradigms of post qualitative (St. Pierre, 2011, 2018), post (non) representational (Anderson & Harrison, 2016; Vannini, 2015), and post foundational inquiry (Jackson & Mazzei, 2024). It situates the co-researchers' experiences of 'the closet' and 'coming out' within plateaus to enunciate the protean, unfinishable, and unsettleable performative of 'coming out' for sexual and gender minoritarian subjects.

Key words:

'The closet', (coming) 'out'/'in', LGBTQIA+, ('the posts'), postmodern(ist)(ism), poststructural(ist)(ism), posthuman(ist)(ism), new material(ist)(ism), post qualitative, post (non) representational, post foundational inquiry.

Declaration of authenticity

I, James Milenkovic, declare that the Doctor of Philosophy thesis entitled *Rescripting 'the closet': Theoretical and conceptual renderings of Australian lesbian and gay 'coming out' narratives* is no more than 86,587 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

I have conducted my research in alignment with the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research and Victoria University's Higher Degree by Research Policy and Procedures.

Ethics declaration

All research procedures reported in the thesis were approved by the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, approval number: HRE23-154.

This research was supported by an Australian Government Research Training Program (RTP) Scholarship **doi.org/10.82133/C42F-K220**.

Signature: 

Date: 22/07/2026

Acknowledgements

This thesis came into fruition through, and is the culmination of, the intra-actions of myriad relations, both human and non-human, each of whom is as involved, inseparable, and integral as the next.

Endless thanks and love go to my mum and partner who have, in their own ways, and too numerous to enumerate, enabled me to commit to three and a half years of doctoral study. Their interest in this project and eager inquiries into its stages of progress were great sources of support and encouragement. Without them, unquestionably, this intellectual journey could not have been possible.

To my beloved dachshund, Onnie. My writing companion's long body would sit at my feet and keep me company during lengthy writing sessions, never failing to remind me to take regular breaks – to dispense treats, of course.

I am very grateful to Victoria University for awarding me a Research Training Scholarship and confirming me as a doctoral candidate to pursue the investigation in these following pages. I thank the committee members of each of my Candidature Milestones: Dianne Hall, Janine Arantes Aldous, Samara Van Toledo, Sarah Tartakover, and Amanda Muscat.

Thank you to Mark Vicars and Marcelle Cacciattolo for agreeing to supervise me throughout the writing of this doctoral thesis. I extend further thanks to Mark for instilling in me a profound love of theory, and whose own research praxis has inspired the productive queer(y)ing of research convention and methodological disciplinarity. I have been fortunate to collaborate with Mark on a number of papers and chapters concurrent with the writing of this thesis, and I thank him for these opportunities and making me a stronger scholar.

I extend my sincere appreciation to the co-researchers of this study. These individuals generously gave up their time to be involved in this project, graciously sharing their very personal experiences of sexual subjectivity. I am truly thankful to the research partners for permitting me to use their stories in this project.

I must also thank the non-human co-researchers of this study: technologies, literatures, media – the congeries of matter that were bound up with and enabled me to, conjointly, produce, this thesis. Moreover, I am grateful to the group of scholars whose work I have called

upon in this study. This corpus of scholarship has illuminated, boggled, confounded, provoked, (de)activated, mobilised, electrified, stupefied, and (re)composed not only my thinking, but the way I see the world.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge the professional editing assistance provided by Justine McNamara, in line with Parts D and E of the IPEd Standards for Editing Practice.

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CALIBRATION MACHINE

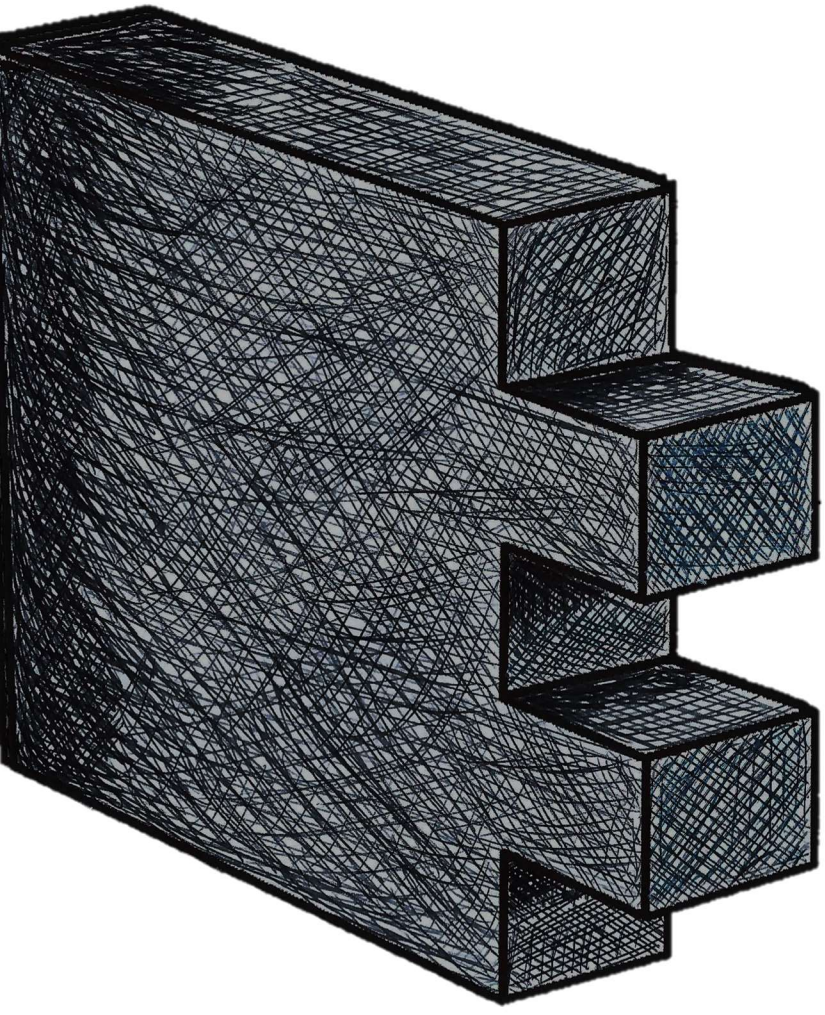


Figure 1: The *Calibration machine* is comprised of the preliminary material that lays that groundwork for, and connects into, the *Connection machine*.

Surveying the thesis: Notes on reading

Irigaray (1985) has written about the overinvestment in old patterns of thinking and doing:

> if we keep on speaking the same language … we're going to reproduce the same history. Begin the same old stories all over again …The same discussions, the same arguments, the same scenes. The same attractions and separations. The same difficulties, the same impossibility of making connections. The same … Same … Always the same. (p. 205)

Readers take note – this thesis is outré in many ways, disposing me alongside 'rebellious researchers and writing rebels … who battle against the normative standard of conventional academic practices' (Mackinlay et al., 2022, p. 3). I do not present linearly sequenced *chapters* that readers are expected to follow abidingly from beginning to end. Rather, after Deleuze and Guattari (1987), the thesis is a *body without organs*, comprised of a miscellany of plateaus in 'a smooth space of thought' (Massumi, 1987, p. xiii). *Smooth spaces* are without boundaries; they are non-hierarchical, nonlinear – rhizomatic. A conventional thesis organised with consecutive chapters is – in contradistinction to *smooth space* – akin to a *striated space*. Each plateau in this thesis engages with different philosophical, theoretical, and conceptual apparatuses to frame the co-researchers' experiences of 'the closet' and 'coming out'.

Taking another cue from Deleuze and Guattari (1987), I have arranged this thesis (have we arranged it together?) as two machines (naturally composed of other machines) that *plug into* each other: the *Calibration machine* and the *Connection machine* (see Figure 2).



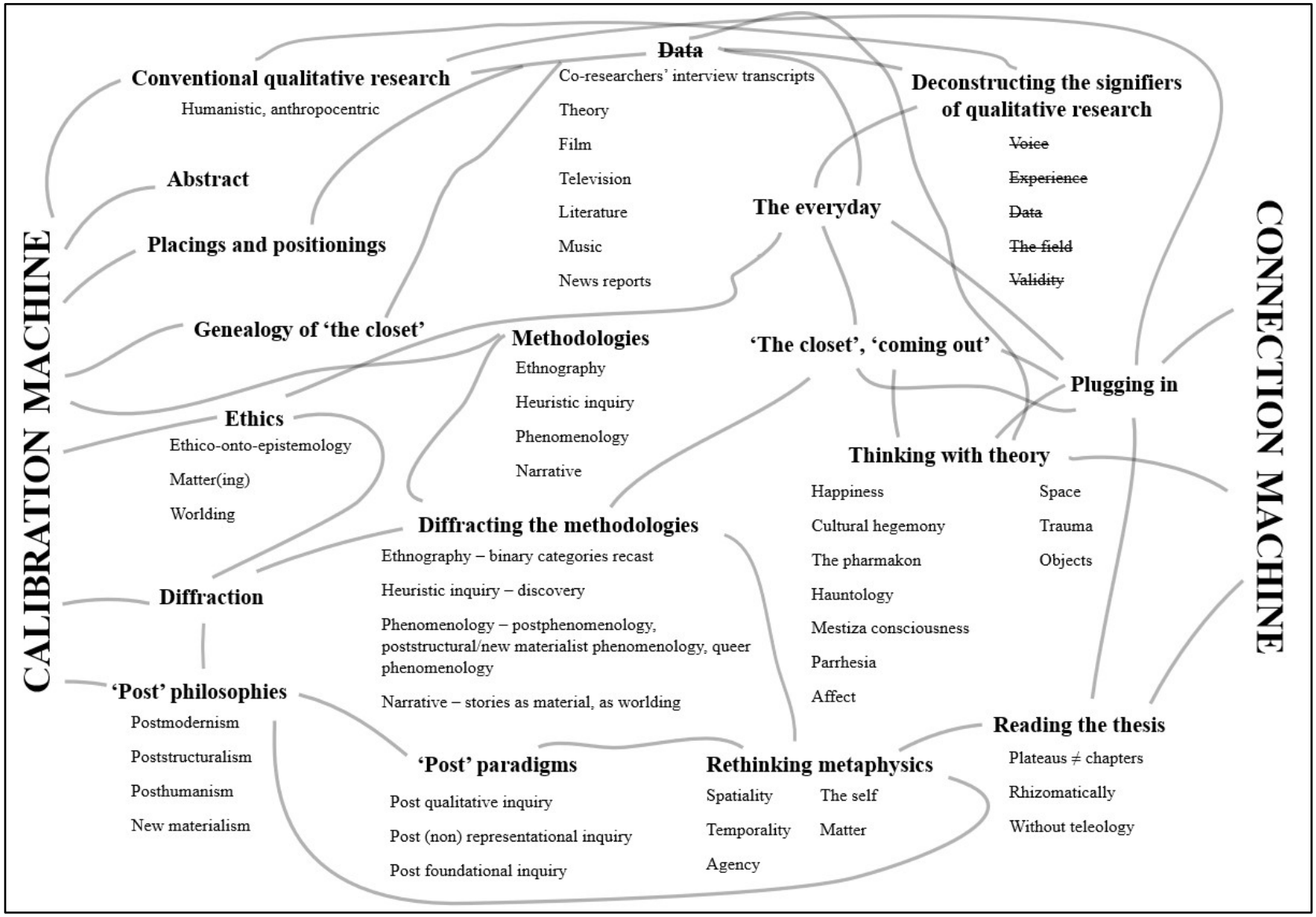


Figure 2: Rhizomatic mapping of the thesis

Machines in DeleuzoGuattarian thought do not refer to literal machines comprised of gears, levers, and pistons, but as part of their philosophical opus, denote systems and processes that connect to other machines (other systems and processes), fomenting activations and productions (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, 1987). Readers will notice on the title pages of both the *Calibration machine* and *Connection machine* a diagram of a machine – complementarily shaped – to signify the integration of this thesis's parts. The *Calibration machine* is composed of prefatory matter: this rhizomatic opening, an explanation of the ethical implications of this project, a genealogy of 'the closet' and 'coming out', a summary of 'post' philosophies, a mapping of using theory to think with, an overview of 'post' inquiry paradigms, and a deconstruction of the signifiers common to conventional qualitative inquiry. The *Calibration machine* provides the substructure for, and plugs into, the *Connection machine* which can be read in a rhizomatic fashion:

- Plateau # Against …: Dependence, 'coming out', and happiness (un)delivered
- Plateau # Spatialisations of 'the closet': The affective, emotional, and material geographies of space
- Plateau # Diffracting teacherly 'outness': Reading heteronormative inscriptions on gay educator bodies in Victorian schools
- Plateau # Between and with/in the skin: Trauma-affect, 'closeted' gay identity, and 'coming out'
- Plateau # Conjuring ghosts and lost futures: The hauntological 'closet'
- Plateau # Becoming ecologies of a social scene: Lesbian subject formation via parrhesiastic 'coming out'
- Plateau # 'Outing' an ethics of 'coming out': Commitments, affirmation, and becoming
- Plateau # 'Outed' and 'coming out': The affectual and agentic forces of objects and bodies
- Plateau # *Mestiza/o* (hetero-homo) consciousness: *Nepantla* sexualities.

As there is no prescribed sequence readers are expected to follow, there are 362,800 different possible reading orders of the plateaus in the *Connection machine*. I invite readers to roam (see Figure 3).



Figure 3: Rhizomatic reading of the plateaus in the *Connection machine*

After the study's abstract and this rhizomic opening, the *Calibration machine* next features Plateau# Enmeshments, entanglements, and becoming: An ethico-onto-epistemology. A posthuman/new materialist ethics premised on matter(ing) lays the groundwork for this project. As this study aligns with process and immanent ontologies, and rethinks matter and materiality, an enlarged understanding of the ethical is needed. In this plateau, I describe ethical concerns pertinent to conventional qualitative research – prescriptive/procedural ethics, situational ethics/ethics in practice, relational ethics – but also an ethics of materiality. As an ethico-onto-epistemologically situated project, ethics are considered inextricable from ontology and epistemology – and no longer anthropocentric in limiting ethical concern to (just) the human co-researchers – but amplified in scope to encompass processes of worlding. That is, how the knowledges generated in this project are integral to, and inseparable from, the world's becoming. I draw here from Barad's notion of *response/ability* (Barad, 2007, 2014).

The literature review is a staple – encrusted – component of the research project, widely acknowledged as helpfully providing a comprehensive survey of an epistemic field. Plateau # A genealogy 'comes out' is not a literature review but a genealogical charting of the ongoing historicity of 'the closet' and 'coming out'. Against the terms of the literature review which imply an omniscient surveying, exhaustiveness, and researcher impartiality (Murris & Bozalek, 2019; St. Pierre & Kuecker, 2024), I do not merely scope the scholarly literature, but all

modalities of matter – television series, film, literature, news reports, the co-researchers' experiences – that participate in the continuous *sedimenting* (Barad, 2007) of knowledges vis-à-vis 'the closet' and 'coming out'.

Plateau # 'Post' philosophies and using theory to think with is where I introduce the 'posts' (postmodernism, poststructuralism, posthumanism, and new materialism). I describe how traditional treatments of data, like coding and thematic analysis, are incommensurate with this project's onto-epistemological commitments. I further discuss *thinking with theory* as a framework for reading data through myriad theoretical perspectives as a commitment to ongoing reinterpretation, reanalysis, and reconsideration.

Plateau # 'Post' paradigms of inquiry provides an overview of 'post' inquiries: post qualitative, post (non) representational, and post foundational inquiry. While these approaches have resonances with one another, there are points of divergence. I detail the tenets of each paradigm I sample from in order to synthesise a bespoke paradigmatic approach. The paradigms and frameworks I am calling upon rethink, profoundly, the conventional nomenclature of qualitative research. In Plateau # Deconstructing the signifiers of qualitative research, I offer a deconstruction of the signifiers *voice*, *experience*, *data*, *the field*, and *validity*, and explicate for the reader how these are (re)defined and (re)situated in the project.

Plateau # Methodological mise-en-scène is constructed as a play, taking cues from Brecht's epic theatre, especially the Brechtian (1964) use of the chorus and its elicitation of the *alienation effect* or *Verfremdungseffekt*. The Brechtian chorus, in contrast to the Greek chorus – who motor the narrative's progression and serve as emotional signposts for the audience – frequently unsettle the narrative's progression; they disrupt and critically comment on pertinent social or political discourses (Benjamin, 2002). The alienation effect/*Verfremdungseffekt* involves the chorus engaging directly with the audience – breaking the fourth wall – reminding them they are watching a play; they redirect and reorient audiences from forming emotional connections with characters (Cuddon, 1999). The conventions of Brecht's epic theatre include unconcealed mechanics like lighting and visible costume changes, 'slide projection, film, placards and music' (Cuddon, 1999, p. 274). I draw on this shedding of illusion and artifice to transparently illustrate the constructedness of this study's methodology(ies). The play in Plateau # Methodological mise-en-scène is a meta-methodological reworking of the conventional humanistic methodologies with 'post' philosophies, depicting my working

through, and thinking against, their conventionalism; this shows how diffractively reading them through 'the posts' opens new horizons for inquiry.

The *Connection machine* opens with – should you wish – Plateau # Against … : Dependence, 'coming out', and happiness (un)delivered. This plateau riffs on Ahmed's (2010c) provocative work on happiness and interlaces Memmi's (1984) thoughts on dependence, with Derrida's (1981) *pharmakon* to pry open 'coming out's' teleological *promise of happiness* (Ahmed, 2010c). The pharmakon denotes both poison and remedy and demonstrates that binaries, like 'in' and 'out', are not absolute. 'Coming out' for some co-researchers, at one spacetime, was a remedy (a happiness-causer); at another, a poison (a source of unhappiness).

Plateau # Spatialisations of 'the closet': Affective, emotional, and material geographies addresses the aspatiality that has been given to 'the closet', despite its obvious spatial referent (Brown, 2000). I describe how different spaces and the *intra-activity* of bodies, routines, objects, and their attendant e/affects orientated the co-researchers' bodies to 'closetedness'. For Geoffrey[1], this involved *passing* as straight when facilitating training to a group of heterosexual men. For Kaye, passing was spatialised via a bedroom designed to elicit an atmosphere of heterosexuality when visitors came, suggesting that she and her girlfriend were straight. Gee's 'closet' does not conceal his gay identity but is a space where he fashions performances of normative masculinity. Moreover, I offer an account of how different spaces were bound up with my experiences of 'the closet' and 'coming out', calling on Foucault's (1986) work on heterotopias.

In Plateau # Diffracting teacherly 'outness': Reading heteronormative inscriptions on gay educator bodies in Victorian schools, I read the teacherly experiences of myself and T through one another, drawing from feminist and postmodern epistemologies to frame our bodies as body-texts. In this diffractive reading, I attend to how our bodies as gay educators were impressed upon (and not) by heteronormative discourses in educational milieus. T's experiences demonstrate how he was able to speak back to cis-hetero-normative ecologies of power and be 'out' in schools, using his gay identity to stage a queer pedagogy.

Plateau # Between and with/in the skin: Trauma-affect, 'closeted' gay identity, and 'coming out' rethinks the presuppositions of traditional traumatological scholarship and offers a philosophically informed resituating of trauma through posthumanism and new materialism

[1] Pseudonyms were assigned to all co-researchers in this study except those who expressed a desire to use their own names.

(Meretoja, 2020). I put aside psychoanalytic and psychological understandings of trauma and turn to affect via Spinoza (1996) to highlight the *sad affects* trauma elicited for Geoffrey and myself vis-à-vis our gay subjectivity. Sad affects slow and impede the body, depleting *potentia* – one's capacity to persist in their existence – and *conatus* – one's striving for affirmation. This plateau calls attention to the nexus of shame and trauma, and their ontological dimension in bringing into being a shamed being.

Plateau # Conjuring ghosts and lost futures: The hauntological 'closet' draws on Derrida's (1994) *hauntology* to situate 'the closet' as a relation that subverts normative framings of spatiality and temporality. As hauntology also engages with lost futures (Rahimi, 2021), I stage a speculative excursion into what course the co-researchers' lives might have taken if heteronormativity and its attendant 'closet' were not determinant of modes of conduct and relating. This opens into hauntology's concern for justice, and I locate the co-researchers' experiences amongst the growing global neo-fascist movement, advancing a call for an *affirmative ethics* (Braidotti, 2023).

Plateau # Becoming ecologies of a social scene: Lesbian subject formation via parrhesiastic 'coming out' dislodges 'coming out' from the realm of the confessional by presenting a theoretical interpretation of a social scene where Kaye's 'coming out' belonged to a mode of truth-telling called *parrhesia* (Foucault, 2001, 2005, 2011). Drawing from a smorgasbord of theory, including poststructuralism, critical and queer geographies, affect, and new materialism/posthumanism, I survey the conditions of the *parrhesiastic* act – the *kairos*. These conditions suggest that the affectivity and material dimensions of Kaye's workplace, and the arrangement and forces of bodies inside, are inextricably linked to – and make possible – Kaye's parrhesiastic act.

Plateau # 'Outing' an ethics of 'coming out': Commitments, affirmation, and becoming' has two discursive implications and intentions. First, with 'out's' idiom of delivery, I bring forth an ethically positioned argument germane to 'coming out'. Using Geoffrey's narrative of 'coming out' to his wife, I diffractively read this account – with special attention to her affirmative and empathetic response – through Levinasian-Butlerian notions of responsibility, vulnerability, and precarity, Barad's ethical praxis of worlding and *response-ability*, and the Spinozist-Deleuzian(Guattarian)-Braidottian affirmative ethics of affective empowerment and becoming. The second implication of the plateau's polysemous title refers to the provocative practice of 'outing'. I read this parallel discourse through the same ethical philosophical

frameworks and submit a discussion on the substantial ethical and moral controversies concerning the practice of 'outing'.

To 'come out' or be 'outed' as a queer subject presupposes the referential capacity of language. In Plateau # 'Outed' and 'coming out': The affectual and agentic forces of objects and bodies, I highlight the agentic capacity of matter and materiality in producing gay identities. It was not language (alone), via the speech act, but the congealing agency and affectivity of objects that instantiated JB and MK as gay men. I describe how objects figured in one of my 'coming out' stories vis-à-vis an *object* of affection, an *object* of longing, an *object* of anguish, and physical *objects*.

According to the dualistic thinking that characterises Western episteme, if there is no beginning/introduction to this thesis, there can also be no end. In place of a conclusion, I submit Plateau # *Mestiza/*o (hetero-homo) consciousness: *Nepantla* sexualities. Including this plateau as, or instead of, a conclusion underscores two matters that share a common temporal theme. First, 'the closet' and 'coming out' are persistent cultural mandates. As someone who negotiates these material-discourses repeatedly, who understands temporality not as a priori and achronological but 'an infinity of moments-places-matterings' (Barad, 2014, p. 169), writing a contrived ending is onto-epistemologically disingenuous. Second, according to thinking with theory, another concept can be enlisted to plug in to data ad infinitum.

In Plateau # *Mestiza/o* (hetero-homo) consciousness: *Nepantla* sexualities, I engage the work of Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) and her concept of *mestiza consciousness* – which I reframe as *mestiza/o (hetero-homo) consciousness*. The *mestiza/o* (hetero-homo) *consciousness* is called upon to explore the *in-betweenness* (*nepantla*) pertaining to Geoffrey, Tim, Kaye, and Nicole living in both heterosexual and homosexual lifeworlds. I also look to Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) and Guattari's (2001) concept of *becoming-woman* as a framework to theorise the research partners' seceding from hegemonic heterosexuality (as majoritarian) to their 'becoming-minoritarian' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 105) as gay and lesbian subjects.

Plateau # Placings and positionings: Situating the study's mattering

On a precipice: The protracted present

This project is written into the world at a particular historical epoch marked by right-wing conservatism, politics, and populism; augmented state powers and heightened nationalism; the steady dissolving of democratic principles; sensationalism, fake news, and fearmongering; and the rise of segregationist and eliminationist politics. Advanced capitalism and the explosion of technological advancements are accompanied by intensifying economic precarity and escalating ecological devastations on a global scale.

The importance and saliency of a project that considers queer people's relationships to 'the closet' and their (in)abilities to 'come out' has been arguably underscored within contemporary socio-political discourse. The election of Donald Trump as the 47th president of the United States of America has seen a bevy of presidential Executive Orders signed into effect that directly impact on conditions affecting liveability for queer populations. Executive Order 14151 – *Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing* instructed the termination of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programs and policies within the United States Government. Executive Order 14168 – *Defending Women From Gender Ideology Extremism and Restoring Biological Truth to the Federal Government* sought recourse to biological essentialism to proclaim there are only two dichotomous sexes (male and female), to homogenise gender as a dangerous ideology, and protect cisgender women in single-sex spaces from trans women. Executive Order 14187 – *Protecting Children From Chemical and Surgical Mutilation* prohibited all gender-affirming health care for trans children while countervailing the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) Standards of Care guidelines, utilised by health care professionals for their transgender patients. Executive Order 14190 – *Ending Radical Indoctrination in K-12 Schooling* prohibited critical race studies and supportive and inclusive strategies for sexually and gender diverse students. The US Government threatened to defund K–12 schools that are in violation of this Order. Executive Order 14201 – *Keeping Men Out of Women's Sports* prevents the participation of trans women in cisgender women's sports, invoking the biological facticity of two distinct sexes (male and female). The Order also threatens the severance of federal funding of educational sporting programs where, for example, trans women are permitted to compete against cisgender women.



MAGA (Make America Great Again) ideology and Trumpism have shone a hyper-fixating spotlight on LGBTQIA+ people. In rendering their lives hyper-visible, the US Government, it could be argued, has set a precedent for the rollback, retraction, and rescinding of – and a roiling reaction to – legal rights and social protections afforded to queer populations elsewhere across the world. In April 2025, the Hungarian parliament amended its constitution to illegalise LGBTQIA+ assembly and protests, including the Budapest Pride parade, with a sweeping majority of 140 votes to 21 (Corstorphan, 2025). During the 2025 Australian Federal election, the Trumpet of Patriots – a right-wing leaning, Trump-inspired political party with the promise to 'Make Australia Great Again' – featured a national television advertisement proclaiming 'male' and 'female' are the only two genders, and that 'we don't want males dressed as females confusing our children in schools' (Trumpet of Patriots, n.d.).

While Trump has undoubtedly exacerbated the negative attitudes towards queer individuals since his election, there were, in recent years and across the world, remonstrations rooted in phobias and anxieties. Right-wing Prime Minister of Italy, Georgia Meloni, has, in the past, denied that LGBTQIA+ populations are disenfranchised. Standing for conservative values, including opposing gay adoption, she has stated: '"Yes to the natural family, no to the LGBT lobby, yes to sexual identity, no to gender ideology!"' (Baska, 2022). Meloni is an outspoken critic of *gender ideology* – rather, gender self-identification – claiming that gender ideologues will erase sexed identities (Butler, 2024).

Drag Queen Story Hour events held in the US – where drag queens read storybooks and facilitate activities with children at local libraries – were being replicated in Australia, with the epicentre of debate about these events occurring in the state of Victoria. Monash[2] council cancelled one such event to be held at Oakleigh Library after a mass attendance of protesters (Aubrey, 2023). Another story time event to be hosted at the St Kilda[3] library during Pride Month in 2023 was subsequently pulled 'due to the security and safety concerns, and to avoid any disruption and distress to young participants and their families' (Carroll, 2023). In May 2024, Cumberland[4] city council in Sydney, Australia, implemented a comprehensive ban on same-sex parenting books in the council's eight municipal public libraries (Cassidy & Rose, 2024). Councillor Steve Christou, the former mayor of Cumberland, recommended '"immediate action" to "rid" same-sex parents books and materials in its library service'

[2] Oakleigh is a suburb that falls within the municipality of Monash: a densely populated suburb in south-east Melbourne.
[3] St Kilda is an eclectic bayside suburb in Melbourne's south-east.
[4] Cumberland is a residential area in western Sydney.

(Cassidy & Rose, 2024). Christou vowed to make sure that '"these kind of books, same-sex parents books, don't find their way to our kids … our kids shouldn't be sexualised"' (Cassidy & Rose, 2024). Christou's rhetoric of '"indoctrinated"', '"for the protection and safety of our children"', and '"hands off our kids"' (Cassidy & Rose, 2024) facilitated the passing of the amendment, with six councillors in favour, five opposed, and four in absentia. The same month, after fervent debate inside and heated protests outside the Merrylands[5] council offices, the ban was rescinded. The book *Same-Sex Parents* was recirculated in the public libraries' collections but migrated from the children's to the junior non-fiction section (Segaert & Gorrey, 2024).

As queer people across the world (re)navigate the flows, rhythms, and routines of this not-so-new everyday – what Berlant calls an *austere imaginary* (Berlant & Greenwald, 2012) – 'the closet' is on track to become, for many, a methodology for the management of a sexual and/or gender identity lying outside normative heterogendered identity discourses. In producing and plaiting this study's knowledge into this ever-unfolding fabric, I am reminded by Schadler (2019) that 'researchers *never do research, they enact research*' (p. 219). Terry Tempest Williams's (2001) motivations for writing are also relevant:

> I write to create a fabric in a world that often appears black and white. I write to discover. I write to uncover. I write to meet my ghosts. I write to begin a dialogue. I write *to imagine things differently* and in imaging things differently *perhaps the world will change*. (p. 6; emphasis added)

These sentiments bring me to Barad's (2007) notion of *mattering*, which refers to both how things come to attain significance (how they matter) and how they materialise (the processes through which they become matter). 'Mattering is simultaneously a matter of substance and significance' (Barad, 2007, p. 3); mattering alludes to both the timeliness and gravitas of this topic of investigation.

(Re)defining 'the closet'

This project seeks to explore how 'the closet' and 'coming out' have been, and continue to be, material-discourses navigated by gay and lesbian people living in the Australian state of Victoria. 'The closet' has been called the canonical expression of queer life (Adams, 2010,

[5] Merrylands is a multicultural suburb in western Sydney.

2011; Chirrey, 2003; Jones, 2020; Sedgwick, 1990; Seidman, 1998; Seidman et al., 1999). The signifiers '(the) closet' and 'coming out' are semantically multiple, accruing many conceptualisations within everyday parlance, activism, and academia (Boucai, 2022; Sandler, 2022). This has led Brown (2000) to postulate that 'the closet' has come to be a *dead metaphor* – ubiquitous and exhausted such that its 'newness, novelty, or oddity is largely forgotten' (p. 6). In the research context, 'coming out' may elicit 'a significant disconnect … between how LGBTQ people use coming out in their everyday lives and how research uses the term' (Orne, 2011, p. 685). It is therefore necessary to preface my working definition of 'the closet' and 'coming out', and how these are applied throughout this study.

I offer 'the closet' as a shorthand for the spatiotemporal-affective-relational (re)negotiation – forcible or reflexive, total or partial – of a sexual/gendered identity outside of heterosexual or cisgender hegemony. This (non)disclosure of identity may be considered, weighted, contingent, or naturalised; a performative designed to mitigate both the potentiality of being abjectified/objectified as Other, and to avoid the associated bodily and psychosocial harms in being Othered. Seidman et al. (1999) have stated that 'the closet' is a historical and sociological particularism, a 'patterning of a whole way of life' not 'situation-specific' (p. 11). This allows the authors to mobilise, unambivalently, the argument that 'the closet' is of 'declining social significance … in contemporary America' (Seidman et al., 1999, p. 11), that 'many gay Americans have been normalized … and thus are "beyond the closet"' (p .9). Seidman (2002) also synonymises 'the closet' with passing (as straight), not 'episodic pattern[s] of concealment' (p. 8). He writes: 'there is a huge difference between concealing from an uncle or a client and marrying or avoiding certain occupations in order to pretend to be straight' (Seidman, 2002, p. 8).

It seems to me that these are one-dimensional framings of 'the closet'. Seidman et al.'s (1999) and Seidman's (2002) descriptions establish a metric or standard to be satisfied before one can be 'in the closet'. Pachankis and Jackson (2023) convincingly argue 'that the closet cannot be discussed as a unifying experience of sexual minorities given that sexual minority individuals will experience it so differently depending on their developmental, relational, and intersectional contexts' (p. 1931). Diamond and Butterworth (2008) contend, '*all* subjective experiences of selfhood are continually transformed, reenacted, and renegotiated as a function of shifting landscapes of social context' (p. 375). While concealing from 'an uncle or a client', 'marrying', or 'avoiding certain occupations' are surely distinct from one another and will produce different e/affects, the common thread between these embodied ways of living is the

privileged status of heterosexual and cisgender existential modes within the quotidian social imaginary. The (re)interpretation of 'the closet' I have presented above is in direct contradistinction to Seidman et al.'s (1999) and Seidman's (2002) rubric. I suggest that any cogitation or enactment of 'closeting' oneself expresses that one has already deliberated – however long and extensive this might have been – on whether 'to display or not to display; to tell or not to tell; to let on or not to let on; to lie or not to lie' (Goffman, 1963, p. 42). Irrespective of the degree or context of adjustment, a material reorganisation of the self has been performed. 'The closet' is then best figured as a continuum of 'inness-outness': one is never fully 'in' or 'out' but reiteratively negotiates the (in)visibility of one's identity along a plane of disclosure shot through by a field of dynamic relations: spatial, temporal, bodily, affective. In my beginning remarks of this *not-introduction*, the suggestion was made that at any historical moment 'the closet' can regain significance:

> time and space, like matter and meaning, come into existence, are iteratively reconfigured through each intra-action, thereby making it impossible to differentiate in any absolute sense between creation and renewal, beginning and returning, continuity and discontinuity, here and there, past and present. (Barad, 2007, p. ix)

What this means is that 'the closet' is always *re-turning*. Re-turning is not a 'reflecting on or going back to a past that was, but re-turning as in turning it over and over again' (Barad, 2014, p. 168). In every new encounter, 'the closet' may be (re)engaged 'from a new relational present – a "thick-now", where each moment comprises a superimposition of all moments' (Murris & Zhao, 2022, p. 112). 'The closet' and 'coming out' are not historical particularisms that recede from conscious awareness; they are ever socially, politically, and materially relevant within this protracted present. As Tim, a co-researcher, appositely pointed out, 'the closet' 'feels different at different times'; the linear topology of past, present, and future – one distinct and discrete moment at a time – founders. Unlike the cumbersome, immobile structure, or inbuilt cavity, signified by 'the closet', its forms and expressions are, I suggest, omnifarious and protean. 'The closet' is 'the specter [of] the future, it is always to come, it presents itself only as that which could come or come back' (p. 48) (see Plateau # Conjuring ghosts and lost futures: The hauntological 'closet').

~~Research question~~ Becoming-question

The *research question* is an axiom inherited from what has been called 'humanist qualitative methodology' (Lather & St. Pierre, 2013, p. 630), and St. Pierre (2019) propounds that scholars taking the ontological/post qualitative turn should begin 'with [an] … encounter with the real, not with a research question' (p. 12). Inferred here is the tendency to demarcate research praxis from real life, and to refute the partitioning of methodology from ontology and epistemology. Distinct from conventional research questions that operate teleologically (they are posed at the beginning of a study, arbitrate findings, are ultimately answered at the end of a study), and which presuppose a self/other, researcher/researched, inside/outside dichotomy, I turn to what Jackson and Mazzei (2023) call *becoming-questions*.

Becoming-questions align with the DeleuzoGuattarian ontology of *immanence*. They do not precede inquiry but 'emerge in the *middle* of plugging in [to theory/the world]' (Jackson & Mazzei, 2023, p. viii). Indeed, before inquiry starts, we are always already in the midst of things (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Becoming-questions do not prescribe or predefine an inquiry's trajectory but open and sensitise it to the assemblage of matter and materialisations emerging in process. Unlike traditional research questions that hold inquirers unyieldingly on a predetermined track, becoming-questions encourage wonderings/wanderings; space is given to explore the clefts and crevices that stoke interest, the affective callings, the incitations and emergences that arise in the *plugging in*.

The becoming-question of this study is therefore not intended to be answered – not definitively at least. In view of the fact that any number of philosophical, theoretical, or conceptual worldviews can be read vis-à-vis the co-researchers' experiences of 'the closet' and 'coming out', this project is open, ongoing, and without finitude. The becoming-question is therefore a diffuse *something*, hovering like an atmosphere, that 'incite[s] and animate[s] the ways in which postfoundational inquiry is emergent, contingent, responsive, involuntary, and inventive: generating acts of creation in the threshold of theory, thought, encounters, and relations' (Jackson & Mazzei, 2024, p. 13). The becoming-question situated as an interrogative in this study is:

How can different philosophical, theoretical, and conceptual apparatuses be ascribed to the cross-generational experiences of 'the closet' and 'coming out' of lesbian and gay Victorians in Australia?

Departures, (re)descriptions, and (re)definitions

Throughout this study, I use the terms *co-researchers* and *research partners* interchangeably and in lieu of participants.[6] Situating myself in opposition to the grammar of traditional empirical research involves making explicit my philosophical, ideological, and political positionality. *Participants*, as a signifier, may well conjure up the epistemological (certainly not ontological or metaphysical) legacies of scientism and positivism, grounded in objectivity, measurability, systematicity, and facticity – what St. Pierre (2016) calls *methodological scientism*. *Participants* might summon to mind clinical and laboratorial settings of humming fluorescent lights, electrodes transmitting various bodily statuses while performing a physically or mentally onerous task: aloof, transactional, extractivist interactions between participant and researcher. To my mind, and in contrast, co-researchers and research partners suggest co-participation in the construction of knowledge and meaning. This manoeuvring of language indexes a deconstructive strategy that contests Cartesian binaries like knower/known, researcher/researched, while simultaneously disarticulating the relations of power/knowledge (Foucault, 1980) that undergird and uphold these binaries. The alternative language I offer is inspired by Gorman-Murray et al. (2016), who state that 'the vocabulary of co-researcher [and research partner are] deliberately deployed to move research practice beyond the dichotomy of insider/outsider' (p. 101). Disjointing the power and privilege associated with the notion of participants from this study is also a move guided by *response-ability* – acknowledging and honouring the human others' involvement in this project, and the knowledges they have brought (see Plateau # Enmeshments, entanglements, and becoming: An ethico-onto-epistemology).

The (human) co-researchers – What's in a name: Problematics of identity categories

In this study I interviewed nine lesbian and gay co-researchers from Victoria, but the precise number of *gay* and *lesbian* research partners is indeterminate. To qualify the previous statement: during their interviews, Olivia and Kaye oftentimes referred to themselves as gay and not lesbian; on some occasions, lesbian and not gay. Highlighted here is the asignifying function of *gay* and *lesbian* to their signifieds (Anzaldúa, 2009; Browne & Nash, 2016; Roseneil, 2000; Scott, 2018). Butler (1991) has indicated that 'identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes' (p. 13), suggesting that the sign of sexual identity can be kept in constant ambiguity so as not to domesticate the erotic/libidinal dimension it seeks to

[6] I use the term 'participant/s' when this term is used by other scholars.

name (also see Butler, 2004b). Moreover, Sedgwick (1990) has also expressed how *gay* conveys no inherent semiotic-symbolic unity or utility, and is 'treated as indicatively *but not exclusively* male' (p. 18; emphasis added). Hence, quantifying the number of gay and lesbian research partners, aside from being a meritless and artificial division, is an interpellative act bound up with exercising researcher epistemic authority: 'an expression of coercive power' (Baxter, 2016, p. 36). I do, however, reference explicitly the adjective-noun combination of *gay men/man*, *gay women/woman*, or *lesbian* when the co-researchers refer to themselves as such, and when referring to (scholarly) literature, film, and television that puts to use these attributive phrases.

This leads me to offer some comments on basing sexual identity categories on the apparatus of sex. Throughout this project, including in the recruitment of the co-researchers, I use(d) the terms gay and lesbian vaguely as sexual identity categories, rather than the adjective-noun units of gay men or lesbian women. By doing this, I place myself at odds with an abundance of scholarship that has situated the 'the closet', 'coming out', and the categories gay and lesbian within an economy of same-sex attraction (Adams, 2010, 2011; Brown, 2000; Dunlap, 2014; Eribon, 2004; Johnson, 2002; Jones, 2020; Lane, 2021; McDonald, 2016; Motschenbacher, 2020; Ortiz, 1993; Plummer, 1995; Rossi, 2010; Seidman, 1998, 2002; Seidman et al., 1999; Thomas et al., 2007; Wang, 2017). Aligned with the poststructural and queer understanding of keeping the signifiers and signifieds of identity troubled, contested, and problematic, I did not want to reify the sex/gender/sexuality trialectic. When sex is treated as an ahistorical and pre-discursive framework, air-droppable into any socio-cultural-historical site – the schema through which sexuality is named and understood – ipso facto, sexual categories, too, become calcified and unchanging. Adams (2010, 2011), for instance, defines sexuality in terms of sex and not gender: 'some authors define sexuality in terms of a person's attraction to others' gender … but sexuality defined in terms of gender (performance) implies that a feminine man partnered with a masculine man would be a heterosexual couple' (Adams, 2011, p. 30).

In Adams's estimation, *same-sex* can be taken to literally refer to sex's *sameness*: male and female as categories that remain historically consistent. Sex becomes an unmarked norm, reifying a 'structural symmetry of … seemingly fundamental distinctions and the inevitability of a symbolic order based on a logic of limits, margins, borders, and boundaries' (Fuss, 1991, p. 1; also see Moi, 1999). But 'the category of sex does not exist a priori' (Wittig, 1992, p. 5): identity categories and discourses move, amalgamate, and (de)(re)construct with and across

time. Phelan (1993), for instance, refers to the 1970 essay *The Woman-Identified Woman* to stake the claim that *lesbian* operates as a category for women who contest heteropatriarchal norms and expectations. A lesbian is [a] 'woman who … acts in accordance with her inner compulsion to be a more complete and freer human being than her society … cares to allow her' (Radicalesbians, 1973, as cited in Phelan, 1993, p. 771). 'Lesbianism is about being fully oneself rather than the stunted person that society thinks of as "woman"' (Phelan, 1993, pp. 771–772). Here, the signifier *lesbian* is not restricted to a sapphic economy, just as Rich (1980) theorises a *lesbian continuum* as an embodied and historically formed 'woman-identified experience' (p. 648) that is not necessarily inclusive of the erotic. Moreover, Sedgwick (1990) has remarked how 'there are women-loving women who think of themselves as lesbians but not as gay, and others who think of themselves as gay women but not as lesbians' (p. 17).

Much scholarship discusses and troubles the sex/gender dialectic (see Bettcher, 2013; Butler, 1990; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013; Halberstam, 1998; Ritz & Greaves, 2022; Štrkalj & Pather, 2021; Zanghellini, 2020). To detach sex as the determining constitutive element in designating sexual orientation may be seen as its undoing, fundamentally challenging the 'dualistic logic of sexuality' (Scott, 2018, p. 146). Categories historically premised on the strict male/female binary – gay, lesbian, and bisexual – become semiotically unstable. But to impose the strict designation of gay *male*s and lesbian *women* keeps in play modes of attraction and sexual practices that belong to the praxis of 'heteronormativising' (Danby, 2007, p. 42; also see Galupo et al., 2016). For myself, I move around the category gender queer, as a queering of normative gender, using the category *gay* to name my sexual identity, and in so doing, resignifying *gay's* signified. Had this study's remit been restricted to cisgender lesbians and gay men, I would have precluded the sharing of my own experiences. I am not interested in pursuing an etiological argument on the determinism/ voluntarism/ constructivism/ essentialism debate (see Halperin, 1986, 2000; Ortiz, 1993) around how a gay identity manifests. As Liang (1997) intimates: 'homosexuality is a contested concept … where no prototypical meaning exists' (p. 291). The point I belabour here is that it was an ethical obligation of response/ability to open the categories of gay and lesbian to the co-researchers, such that they might name their sexual identities in a way that confers intelligibility and substantiates them as subjects.

Taking guidance from Jackson and Mazzei (2012), I deliberated how much *backstory* of the co-researchers to offer readers so as to avoid 'chronological capture of their lives' (p. xi). During the long preparation that accompanies post qualitative modes of inquiry – 'reading,

thinking, writing, and living with theory' (St. Pierre, 2018, p. 2) – the research partners' biographies became entangled with these processes. Drawing from the feminist mandate that 'knowers are situated' (Hankinson Nelson, 1993, p. 122) within a *politics of location* (Braidotti, 2014; Haraway, 2014), and for the purposes of providing readers with a foothold, I have included limited backstories of the research partners, and myself. I 'show how [our] past is "insistent" in the tellings of their present' (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. xii) and how particular historical, institutional, social, and familial discourses have (re)constructed, (re)constituted, and (re)conditioned our experiences of 'the closet' and (in)capacities to 'come out'. As Rooke (2016) observes: 'social lives are caught in the flow of history, the discourses that surround us and the webs of meaning we weave' (p. 28).

Gee is a 32-year-old cisgender man living in Melbourne with his partner. After 'coming out' at 18, Gee experienced pressure to conform to what he saw as homonormative bodily aesthetics of other gay men. While Gee has not experienced negative attitudes towards his gay identity from others, he is nevertheless alert to the need to cultivate a masculinism around heterosexual men to avoid snide remarks.

Olivia is a 35-year-old cisgender woman living in Melbourne and working as a social worker in child protection. Olivia describes her 'coming out' experiences as predominantly positive. She has worked in workplaces where her relationship to 'the closet' has been both 'in' – using gender-neutral pronouns to refer to her then-partner – and 'out' – where, prior to employment, colleagues knew her socially as a lesbian.

Geoffrey is a 53-year-old cisgender man who has lived in Melbourne for 10 years and works as a senior mental health clinician in an Emergency Department and as a mental health training facilitator. Geoffrey was married to his wife for over 24 years, had five children, and 'came out' as gay 10 years ago. He described the absoluteness and deepness of his 'closeting' praxis during this period as 'like being in Narnia'.

JB is a 37-year-old cisgender man who moved from Tasmania to Melbourne after completing a Bachelor of Nursing in 2009. JB works as a nurse in a hospital Emergency Department. He is married and has been with his husband for 15 years.

Kaye is a 71-year-old cisgender woman who has lived most of her life in Melbourne. Kaye was initially married to a man before 'coming out' as a lesbian. Kaye worked for approximately 30 years as an IT project manager in the white-collar corporate sector and is now retired.

T is a 31-year-old cisgender man who grew up in regional Victoria where 'there was more cattle in the town' than people. T initially 'came out' as bisexual at 15 as a way of gauging the reactions to, and receptiveness towards, a non-heterosexual identity by those around him. He has worked as a teacher in both primary and secondary schools for six years. T is married and has been with his husband for 15 years.

Nicole is a 53-year-old cisgender woman who grew up in an inner suburb of Melbourne before relocating to the Central Highlands region of Victoria. Nicole trained as a journalist, which opened employment opportunities in administration and human resources. She was married to her husband for 25 years and had two children before 'coming out' as a lesbian. Though 'retired', Nicole takes on writing and art-based projects.

Tim is a 47-year-old cisgender man who grew up in Scotland before moving to Australia in 2003. Before 'coming out' as gay, Tim was married to his wife for 17 years, and has four children. Tim works as a nurse and has a partner.

MK is a 35-year-old cisgender man who migrated to Australia from China in 2012. MK received an offer to study in Australia, and after concluding his masters in financial management, decided to stay in the country, having found a partner. He works in mental health as a support worker.

I am a 34-year-old gay, gender queer primary school teacher-cum-academic. I left teaching to enrol in a masters degree and stayed on to complete a PhD, with the ambition of working in academe.

Recruitment

The co-researchers were recruited via purposive sampling. Within this sampling method, I selected *conveniently* (co-researchers I knew and those first to express interest in participating) (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). Purposive sampling sources participants appropriate to the topic under investigation (Andrade, 2021), for the purpose of enriching understandings of the phenomenon (Patton, 2002). This study did not seek to be representative of all gay and lesbian Victorians: indeed, to proclaim so would be as erroneous as attempting to homogenise the heterogeneity of sexual subjectivities. Purposive sampling in heuristic inquiry and interpretative phenomenological work permits the researcher to select 'participants who have rich knowledge of the phenomenon' (Frechette et al., 2020, p. 6). Given that phenomenological studies do not seek to make claims about the generalisability of their findings (Patton, 2002; van Manen, 2014), but pursue an understanding of knowing and being (Frechette et al., 2020), this study's small sample size is appropriate for taking the co-researchers' experiences of 'the closet' and emplacing and diffracting them with theoretical concepts and other representations of 'the closet'.

Interviews took place both face-to-face and online (with Zoom), with durations between 40 and 80 minutes. Interviews conducted face-to-face were undertaken in a private therapy space, a private study room at Victoria University, Australia, or in a co-researcher's home. The interviews were guided by a series of pre-planned questions, which served as springboards for the research partners to respond to. Permission was gained to audio-record the interviews. Subsequently, interviews were transcribed and I returned these transcripts to the co-researchers to give them the opportunity to supplement or redact their statements.

Apparatuses and assemblages as co-researchers

It has been reasoned that 'the phenomena and the apparatus always go hand-in-hand' (Jørgensen & Strand, 2014, p. 66; also see Kleinman & Barad, 2012; Marn & Wolgemuth, 2017). In other words, knowledge is inseparable from the conditions of its emergence: the field of relations brought into and conditioning the research process. We cannot separate off the circumstances that make matter *matter* (Barad, 2011). This project is underpinned by the

conceptual frameworks of new materialism and posthumanism. The joint endeavour of these frameworks is the disruption of human-centeredness, viewing instead the human as one component within a non-hierarchical or monistic plane, entangled with nature, technologies, animals, objects, and affects. In accordance with this post anthropocentrism, it behoves me to account for the non-human co-researchers in this project.

During the course of this study, I was attentive to the materialities and processes subsumed within the 'research apparatus' (Schadler, 2019, p. 223) or *research assemblage* (Fox & Alldred, 2015b, 2022a). I was not separate from the congeries of fieldnotes, the desk at which I worked, the pens used to compose jottings, my computer and the word processing and referencing programs; the theories, concepts, philosophies and other literatures, films, television programs, music, and news reports; the voice recorder, the recorded audio files, my university's data storage drive, my printer, all printed drafts, the printed transcripts, and the filing cabinet housing the transcripts. All these elements 'became a part of the processes that shaped the boundaries of the outcomes' (Schadler, 2019, p. 223) of this project. What I hope to have underscored here is the ethical imperative of acknowledging the assemblage of non-human and more-than-human matter and materialities that are no less involved in the *sympoietic* 'worlding-with' (Haraway, 2016, p. 58) or fruition of, this project, than the human co-researchers. Sympathetic with the postmodern perspective that challenges the insular 'assumption that knowledge is primarily the property of individuals' (Prawat, 1996, p. 217), knowledge production is, in this thesis, a distributed relational praxis.

In naming the non-human and more-than-human elements as co-researchers, I join scholars who have not only accounted for, but actively established as indispensable, these relations in their academic praxis. Monforte (2018) labels research 'tools' as participants that 'facilitate the emergence of some stories and shape how they were told and received' (p. 385). Using the same lexeme of participants, Bennett (2010) describes how a congealing of multiple agencies supported the emergence of her (their) text *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*: 'striving macro- and microactants: from "my" memories, intentions, contentions, intestinal bacteria, eyeglasses, and blood sugar, as well as from the plastic computer keyboard, the bird song from the open window, or the air or particulates in the room' (p. 23). Furthermore, Rosiek et al. (2024) have suggested that 'objects of study [can be] regarded as active participants in inquiries and the world's ongoing metaphysical becoming' (p. 221). 'The closet', as a technology of identity management, might also be considered a participant in this study.

Putting down the Master's tools[7]

Researchers and readers accustomed to the settlement and ironclad certitude of knowledge – characterological of modernist/realist/humanist ontologies – will find no such epistemic foundationalism here. You will instead encounter a vertigo of paradoxes, quandaries, aporias, and opacities, be they ethical, ontological, epistemological, philosophical, conceptual, or theoretical. To engage 'post' approaches in research, to *think with theory*, is to treat all understandings gleaned as malleable: always revisable, rethinkable, redoable. Readers of this work are enjoined to 'live in the middle of things, in the tension of conflict and confusion and possibility; and … mak[e] do with the messiness of that condition' (St. Pierre, 1997a, p. 176). I appreciate that this is a disruptive shift from 'humankind's common desire … for a stable center, and for the assurance of mastery—through knowing or possessing' (Spivak, 1974/1997, p. xi). But rather than conclusiveness, perhaps *unknowing* is an alternatively productive, promising, discursive space to attune to:

> dwelling in the imaginative space between declarative acts of knowing and not knowing; an invitation to wrest our modes of inquiry and our beings away from the clutches of finite definitions of knowledge and instead rest our endeavors in the beauty of myriad ways of knowing. (Vasudevan, 2011, p. 1157)

It is through 'myriad ways of knowing' qua philosophical, theoretical, and conceptual understandings, that 'the closet' and its corollary, 'coming out', have been rescripted in this study.

A 'post' inquiry 'comes out'

In much the same way as the *bricoleur* (Kincheloe, 2001, 2005; Kincheloe et al., 2018) or the *scavenger* in Halberstam's (1998) methodology are each '[un]constrained [by] a "methodological straightjacket"' (Aguinaldo, 2004, p. 133), this study is a hybridisation of interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and antidisciplinary approaches (Ghaziani & Brim, 2019). I have taken 'the closet' and 'coming out' as material-discursive phenomena for critical

[7] I borrow from Audre Lorde's poignant statement that 'The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House' (Lorde, 1984, p. 110).

reinterpretation – both methodologically and ethico-onto-epistemologically – where 'ethics, knowing, and being … [are] productively entwined' (Geerts & Carstens, 2019, p. 920). This project corroborates the arguments that queer temporalities necessitate 'even queerer modalities of thought, analysis, creativity, and expression' (Puar, 2005, p. 121) and that inquiries leveraging the philosophies of 'the posts' (postmodernism, poststructuralism, posthumanism, and new materialism[8]) may exhibit no approximation to conventional qualitative research (St. Pierre, 2008). I encountered this onto-epistemological indifference firsthand only after making the acquaintance of 'the posts' through the *wit(h)ness* of 'reading, attuning, thinking, sensing, and writing' (Jackson & Mazzei, 2023, p. 3). I realised the methodologies I had sought to employ in the germ of this project – ethnography, heuristic inquiry, phenomenology, and narrative, all humanistic and Cartesian in their orientation – needed to be diffracted. At the same time, the attendant signifiers – *voice*, *experience, data*, *the field*, and *validity* – needed to be deconstructed (see the diffracted reading of heuristic inquiry in Plateau # Methodological mise-en-scène).

The signifier 'post(s)' is surely a busy one in this study. Not only does it refer to the philosophies of postmodernism, poststructuralism, posthumanism, and new materialism, but also 'post' paradigms of inquiry: post qualitative, post (non) representational, and post foundational (see Plateau # 'Post' paradigms of inquiry). Under the purview of 'the posts', I have not coded or thematically analysed ~~data~~[9]; instead, I engage in the proliferative practice of thinking with theory (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, 2023). Rather than crudely and parochially simplifying ~~data~~ to succinct codes and themes, thereby anchoring meaning, thinking with theory is described by Jackson and Mazzei (2012) as 'a new analytic … to keep meaning on the move' (p. i). Theory is a smouldering potentiality, an incitation to thinking, to creative and experimental engagements that refuse the miasmas of finality and foreclosure. As part of the post qualitative problematisation of ~~data~~ as empirical, mute, brute, untainted, and unblemished, St. Pierre and Jackson (2014) aver that theory is ~~data~~ (see *data* in Plateau # Deconstructing the signifiers of qualitative research). Indeed, theory was one form of 'stumble data' (Brinkmann, 2014, p. 724) I continually happened across during the frisson of thinking-reading-writing. In the spirit of thinking with theory offered by Jackson and Mazzei, in this project I mosaic philosophical, conceptual, and theoretical perspectives. Like St. Pierre (2008), 'I have not

[8] While the prefix *post* is absent in new materialism, I have included this philosophy under 'the posts' given its rethinking of conventional humanistic and Cartesian foundations.
[9] See Plateau # Deconstructing the signifiers of qualitative research for a description of why I place the term *data sous rature* – under erasure, marked by a strikethrough.

studied participants; rather, I have investigated a topic – an object of knowledge' (p. 331), *plugging in* to empirical interview ~~data~~ – the stuff of the every day, including the material-discourses of 'the closet' and 'coming out'. This point of nonfinality is emphasised through the analytic of thinking with theory, too, insofar as it is committed to reproducibility, revisionism, and reinterpretation. It is a matter of "'and … and … and … "' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 25).

Plugging in: Navigating the rhizome

This thesis does not have a beginning. 'Beginnings are always arbitrary, always imagined' (Anderson & Harrison, 2016, p. 3). Deleuze and Guattari (1987) have written 'that there is no beginning from which a linear sequence would derive' (p. 328). The ouroboros, the lemniscate, the Möbius strip, and the torus are without beginnings, already in momentum – in indefinite momentum. To take beginnings as a self-evident temporal structuration is to expect and accept the dialectical pairing, endings. Conversely, to eschew beginnings and endings is to operate within an ontology that posits things as 'always already becoming in entanglement' (Lather & St. Pierre, 2013, p. 630). The beginning/end dualism comes to be unintelligible if we are, from the outset, 'between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 25). This is not an introduction but an *entryway* into the rhizome that is this project. The rhizome 'has neither beginning nor end' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 21). Readers are now invited to flick to the opening paragraph in *Conclusion, or another tuber emerges*.

Haraway (2016) has described the hugeness of the middle as 'the thick, fibrous, and lumpy "now"' (p. 206). In the sprawling tangle of a middle always in motion – whose tendrils, projections, filaments, and threads weave new meshes of flat horizon (not verticality) – how can an introduction and conclusion be given to a topic of investigation, a material-discourse, that is labile and lasting (see St. Pierre, 1997b)? Despite the phrase 'coming out' deceptively suggesting a teleological transfer from concealment to openness, the unidirectionality of shame to pride (Boussalem, 2020; Roseneil, 2000), as a queer subject it is an unfinishable and unsettleable performative. The enduring compulsoriness of heterosexuality 'embedded in Western psyches, classification schemes, social organizations, and public rituals' (Seidman, 2009, p. 19), means that I cohabitate with 'the closet' – as do many of the co-researchers and queer people at large – if not proximally, at least distally as a discourse bound up with queer historicity, politics, and culture. As Others who break with '*the* standard for legitimate,

authentic, prescriptive, and ruling social, cultural, and sexual arrangements' (Yep, 2003, p. 13), what we come to recognise is that 'coming out' is a 'coming to terms' (Plummer, 1995, p. 50) with the ongoing requirement to 'come out'. This is our '"consciousness of kind"' (Richardson, 1990, p. 129).

Perhaps it is a risky move to abolish the recognised and conventional composition of the scholarly thesis. Kincheloe et al. (2018) remind me that the expectation of working within an established thesis format is yet another 'claim to truth … implicated in relations of power' (p. 443). A queer approach certainly delights in disrupting its bugbear of deterministic academic formalism (Browne & Nash, 2016). St. Pierre has also critically interrogated social science's recourse to scientism and objectivity to order the unorderliness of researched lives, urging us to inquire, and present our inquiries, without a preconceived aesthetic (St. Pierre, 2013b, 2016, 2023; St. Pierre & Kuecker, 2024). Indeed, when is life ever not complexity being lived out? When is it ever not queer – riddled with contingencies, contradictions, uncertainties, interruptions, predicaments, misalignments, disarrays, and dissonances? In this thesis I am not interested in the kind of facile researcher hubris that would authorise the spurious act of engaging in what Wagner-Martin (1998) calls 'the deceit of the contrived finish' (p. 93). There is no commitment to a 'narrative whole' (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 5) in the following pages. No domestication of knowledge. No beginning. No ending. No introduction. No conclusion. Just the many *disturbances* that comprise the middle (Tsing, 2015). Berlant (2011) refers to the temporal mangle of nowness as:

> an impasse, a thick moment of ongoingness, a situation that can absorb many genres without having one itself … a middle without boundaries, edges, a shape. It is experienced in transitions and transactions. It is the name for the space where the urgencies of livelihood are worked out all over again, without assurances of futurity. (p. 200)

The presentness or 'existential temperature' (Braidotti, 2001, p. 382) of our times is increasingly precarious for queer-identifying individuals, highlighting 'the continuing significance of the closet' (Land & Kitzinger, 2007, p. 149). Not as essence, but potential, 'a *can-be* or *maybe*' (Derrida, 1994, p. 39).

Plateau # Enmeshments, entanglements, and becoming: An ethico-onto-epistemology

Towards a 'post' ethics

Ethics have been described by Brody (2002) as '"the world of human activities that have important moral content"' (as cited in Bolen & Adams, 2017, p. 618). This statement presupposes ethics as rooted in the Enlightenment ideals of truth and morals (Lincoln & Cannella, 2009), bequeathing a legacy of actions taken up as 'a way of conducting oneself in research situations that is broadly understood and agreed' (Downs, 2017, p. 459). Without question, it is fundamentally important that researchers comport themselves with utmost integrity and afford the human individuals involved in research projects care, respect, and dignity (National Health and Medical Research Council et al., 2018b). In no way is this foundational principle being called into question. Consistent with the critical insights of posthumanism and new materialism, I (re)consider ethics as not exclusively the human domain, but in a broader sense, a sphere also belonging to the non-human, where in our mutual entanglement we (trans)form the world.

Research in the ambit of posthumanism and new materialism necessitates a different interpretation of ethical accountability. This entails an expanding of ethics beyond the hubris of human individualism, beyond the scope of 'a box-ticking exercise' (Davies, 2018, p. 115), beyond – but nevertheless inclusive of – pragmatic issues concerning safety and the mitigation of potential stressors for participants (Cacciattolo, 2015), to encompass and recognise human entanglements with non-human others (Bennett, 2016; Braidotti, 2016). This relational parity is analogous to Indigenous philosophies that hold in equal regard the human, non-human, and more-than-human (see Marker, 2018; Rosiek & Snyder, 2020; TallBear, 2015; Ulmer, 2017).

For researchers moored in humanism and its traditions, to claim that concepts and ideas – as '*specific material doings or enactments of the world*' (Barad & Gandorfer, 2021, p. 25) – are ethical would be logically implausible. Within their *agential realist* framework, however, Barad (2007) fuses together ethics, ontology, and epistemology under the neologism *ethico-onto-epistemology* to make plain the inseparability of 'doing/being/knowing' (Kuby, 2017, p. 877; also see Scheurich, 1997). Central to agential realism is the notion that we are not exterior to, nor even *in*, but *of* the world (Barad, 2007, 2008). We are woven within the world's continuing becoming; as such, we are 'ethically responsible for our *intra-actions* with



it and each other' (Geerts & Carstens, 2019, p. 917), 'responsible, everywhere, all the time' (St. Pierre, 1997a, p. 177). Therefore, it matters, as scholars, what figurations of knowledge we put out into the world, how we do it, and how these knowledge compositions (re)world the world (Haraway, 2016).

This study is underpinned by an ethico-onto-epistemology of *mattering*. This incorporates the dual sense of matter, encompassing both how things come to hold significance, and how they take form. An ethico-onto-epistemology of mattering brings with it the need to be *response-able* to, and for, the relational networks comprising myself as researcher, the co-researchers, the places and spaces where knowledge is produced, and how the knowledges created in this study will intra-act with knowledges already in/of the world.

Ethical considerations in gender and sexuality inquiry

There are pertinent and particular ethical concerns when researching LGBTQIA+ populations. Blair (2016) states that 'the 20th century was replete with studies that pathologized all forms of same-sex sexuality and gender diversity' (p. 374). Examples include the Nazi experimentations on gay and lesbian concentration camp inmates (see Haeberle, 1981; Röll, 1996); the psychopathologisation of transgender women through the paraphilia of autogynephilia (see Blanchard, 1989, 1993); and the medicalised and abjectifying lens of 'sickness, diagnosis, and causation' (Blair, 2016, p. 374) which led to 'involuntary castration, hormone injections, shock treatment, institutionalization, and behavioral therapies' (p. 375). Owing to the unethical research that has been conducted – inflicted – on LGBTQIA+ people, the malign history of violence, disenfranchisement, and dehumanisation experienced by LGBTQIA+ persons, Martin and Meezan (2003) argue that, compared to populations who (have) experience(d) less social stigmatisation, 'there may be greater potential for exploitation and harm to [LGBTQIA+] participants and the communities they represent' (p. 183). The weight of this haunted history requires research with these populations to come from an 'ethic of care' (Ellis, 2007, p. 25).

Sikes (2006) prompts researchers to consider the potential effects and implications of research beyond the horizon of those intimately connected to the research endeavour. In LGBTQIA+-focused research there exists the potential for findings to cause harm not only at the individual (participant) locus, but to the queer community at large (Martin & Meezan, 2003). This may occur, for example, through the representation of gay and lesbian subjectivity

as Other, (biological) essentialist framings of gender and sexuality, and homonormativity (Duggan, 1995) vis-à-vis the reification of 'a restrictive notion of the "ideal" gay identity … (one which is usually white, western, affluent, able-bodied, and marketable to the mainstream)' (Jones, 2020, p. 499).

Topology of ethical practices in research

Guillemin and Gillam (2004) and Bolen and Adams (2017) identify two broad ethical frameworks in research:

1. *Prescriptive/procedural ethics* – mandated processes and procedures like Institutional Review Board / ethical review committee approval, obtaining informed consent, providing anonymity/pseudonymity to participants.
2. *Situational ethics/ethics in practice* – those which are contextually contingent, emerging in the unfolding of the research process, such as throughout an interview or during the writing up of the study.

Ellis (2007) has identified a third framework:

3. *Relational ethics* – the care extended to participants and *intimate others* throughout the research event, including in their textual (re)presentations.

The above ethical topologies in their current iterations are predominantly humanistic and anthropocentric, attentive exclusively to *the human*. In the discussion below, I interject in and interpose within these frameworks a posthuman ethics of 'ontological relationality' (Braidotti, 2016, p. 25).

Prescriptive/procedural ethics

This project was approved by Victoria University's Human Ethics Research Committee (VUHREC), in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council et al. (2018a). The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) is the lead body overseeing the conduct of ethical, responsible, and honest research in Australia (approval number HRE23-154). When advertising for research partners for this study, the only parameters imposed were those of age (the co-researchers had to be 18 years of age or older); geography (the research partners had to live in the state of Victoria, Australia); and sexual orientation (the research partners had to self-identify as lesbian or gay). Gender identity, race, culture, religion,

socio-economic status, and employment status were not determining factors for preclusion or inclusion in the study, as these intersections of identity (Crenshaw, 2019) would surface within the spatiotemporal conditions of the interview.

Upon responding to the advertisement, the co-researchers were sent information outlining the scope of the project and what their participation would entail. Prior to each interview's commencement, the aims of the project and ethical concerns (confidentiality, data usage/storage) were verbalised to each research partner, and an opportunity to ask questions was provided before written consent was given. All of the co-researchers, bar Geoffrey, Kaye, and Nicole were provided with or chose pseudonyms, and any reference to identifiable others and places (residential/employment/educative) have been omitted or renamed throughout this thesis. Geoffrey, Kaye, and Nicole wanted to use their names without the veil of pseudonymity as a political practice of (re)claiming authenticity of their gay and lesbian identities.

Situational ethics/ethics in practice

Prescriptive/procedural ethics have been called insufficient in recognising and taking into account the complexity of lives and unfolding situations in research (Sikes, 2010). *Situational ethics/ethics in practice* arise in situ and refer to instances in research that are unaccountable, unanticipated, unforeseeable, and, therefore, impractical to ‘‘proceduralise’’ (Goodson, 2017, p. 8). Guillemin and Gillam (2004) call these occurrences ‘ethically important moments’ (p. 265), where the researcher's response can have significant implications. Throughout the interviews, I engaged with Kaufman's (1974) notion of the *interpersonal bridge*: relational linkages predicated on emotionality, vulnerability, receptivity, and trust between individuals. I could not expect the research partners to surrender their stories to me without cultivating *response-ability*: ‘being in touch … being ethically in touch with the other, as opposed to pretending to theorize from the outside’ (Barad & Gandorfer, 2021, p. 24). In this way, ‘the [interpersonal] bridge bec[a]me a vehicle to facilitate mutual understandings, growth, and change’ (Kaufman, 1974, p. 570). Williams (1996) has described how disclosing his sexual subjectivity facilitated open and personal dialogue between a *me-xo-ga* (loosely translated as gay) Native American historian when on reservation, and Ropers-Huilman (1999) speaks of the sharing of one's own – and being witness to others' – experiences and insights as a relational act, which can be transformational for both researcher and participant.

Given the possibility of transformation for participants as a consequence of their participation in research, Husband (2020) muses whether the ethical practices of researchers

should broaden beyond the elementary considerations of 'anonymity, comfort, wellbeing, and professional standing' (p. 3) to encompass the potentiality for 'real and tangible personal and professional change' (p. 3). This gestures towards the posthuman ethic of response-ability as a practice of response, of responding to and with the other (Barad & Gandorfer, 2021; Bozalek & Zembylas, 2023; Juelskjær & Schwennesen, 2012). Because this project is ontologically and materially generative, an ethics of mattering is called for, consistent with this plateau's epigraph, drawn from Barad (2007): a 'responsibility and accountability for the lively relationalities of becoming of which we are a part' (p. 393).

Relational ethics

To nurture an ethics of relationality is to be response-able: to 'reject the metaphysics of individualism and [foster] collective knowing, being and doing' (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2023, p. 64). During the recruitment phase, for example, I was cognisant of the locales – both physical and online – where this study was advertised. To ameliorate 'the unique ethical dilemmas that may arise in the conduct of research with lesbian, gay, or bisexual populations' (Martin & Meezan, 2003, p. 182) – notably the potentiality for, and the consequences of, being 'outed' – participation for the study was advertised by means of queer-friendly social media (Facebook pages) and queer-friendly bricks-and-mortar shops via flyers. It was also important to consider the interview locale's appropriateness, taking into account the research partners' varying degrees of 'outness' (Griffith et al., 2017).

To crash into the lives of the co-researchers and plunder data riches – 'narratives of the intimate life' (Plummer, 1995, p. 6) – and then depart, leaving a swathe of collateral damage in one's wake, is what Reinharz (1979) calls the 'rape model of research' (p. 95). As an act of response-ability, at the conclusion of each interview a flyer with information about psychological services specialising in LGBTQIA+ populations – *Qlife*, *LGBTIQ+ Health Australia*, *Queerspace*, *Beyond Blue*, *The Anxiety Recovery Centre* – was provided to the research partners. On the day following the interview, I followed up with the research partners to check on their welfare. I impressed upon the co-researchers that they were welcome to contact me to convey any concerns during the research process. The research partners were offered copies of their transcribed interview to supplement or redact their statements, and the opportunity to read the publication at the study's conclusion.

Ethics of/for storying and stories

Within the scope of *relational ethics*, narrative research presents a unique array of ethical concerns distinct from other research forms (Clandinin et al., 2017; Sikes, 2010, 2012; Smythe & Murray, 2000). Writing about the self – and others – inescapably implicates the individuals with whom we share our lifeworlds (Bochner, 2017; Ellis, 2007; Ellis et al., 2011; Garner, 2002; Mesner, 2016; Sikes, 2010). Eaken (2004) correctly observes that 'because we live our lives in relation to others, our privacies are largely shared, making it hard to demarcate the boundary where one life leaves off and another begins' (p. 8; also see Garner, 2002). Given our shared sociality, how one is (re)presented surely matters when 'narrativizing, like all intentional behavior (including the writing of conventional social science) is a site of moral responsibility' (Richardson, 1990, p. 131). Consistent between different narrative research forms is the abrupt shift from the intimacy of sharing between participant and researcher, to the transmission of those stories into an exposing public sphere, where researchers knit fragments of these retellings into broader social phenomena fabrics (Bochner & Riggs, 2014; Sikes & Goodson, 2017; Smythe & Murray, 2000; Søndergaard, 2002).

The ethical quagmire of narrative ownership is longstanding in narrative research (see Barton, 2011; Bolen & Adams, 2017; Bron, 2017; Christians, 2005; Goodson & Gill, 2011; Hendry et al., 2018a; Sikes, 2010; Smythe & Murray, 2000; Trahar, 2009). Sikes (2010) identifies the sticking point concerning scholars' academic responsibility in interpreting and making sense of phenomena, and the indebtedness researchers have to participants who proffer their lives as source material, allowing us to do this intellectual labour. Although important, a posthuman/new materialist worldview sets to the backburner these anthropocentric concerns over the ownership of narratives and ontologises these stories, interested in their performative, worlding dimensions. Focus is redirected from narrative being 'an end in itself' (Bochner & Riggs, 2014, p. 201) to a (re)consideration: what are these stories doing and becoming as 'ontological performance[s] of the world in its ongoing articulation' (Barad, 2007, p. 149)?

The posthuman and new materialist (re)situating of knowledge from the domain of the epistemological to equally ontological and ethical is claimed by Davies (2018) as a significant conceptual hurdle in social science research praxis. An ethico-onto-epistemology in relation to storytelling would require 'understanding stories and narrative as not separate from the world (as an object), but as always, already constituting it—as living, breathing, material assemblages' (Hendry et al., 2018b, p. 16). Storytelling is, contemporaneously, the production of a text and an act (Jolly, 2001). Stories, as a unit of reference to static, passive reflections and

representations of lifeworlds qua social constructivism are fundamentally revised within a posthumanist and new materialist ethics. Stories live (Hendry et al., 2018c; Jørgensen & Strand, 2014) and breathe (Frank, 2010); they are dynamic, affectual, material performances. Barad's (2007) posthuman performativity thesis has challenged representationalism and emphasises matter's – not just the human's – role in (re)configuring worlds. As material *agents*, stories exercise agency in their intra-actions with, and contributions to, the world's worlding (Frank, 1995; Garroutte & Westcott, 2013; Hendry et al., 2018c; Rosiek & Snyder, 2020).

It is imperative that researchers account for their nodal point in the knotty muddle of research and the materialisations we bring about (see McGregor, 2020). As I think with and (re)present the stories of the research partners and my own, I *response-ably* consider how I am (re)writing these tellings. I recognise that my *self* becomes embedded in the writing about others (Clandinin, 2020; Sikes, 2010) as the *self-other* (Fine, 1994). I reflect on how these stories will circulate, become entwined, and participate in the world, acknowledging the 'new configurations, new subjectivities, new possibilities' (Barad, 2007, p. 384) these stories will generate.

This ethics-centred plateau, lengthier than in most theses, is an imperative inclusion in a project that is intertheoretical in approach and grounded in a posthumanist and new materialist onto-epistemology of mattering. Haraway (2016) has contended that 'it matters what thoughts think thoughts, what stories tell stories, what knowledges know knowledges' (p. 199), and this plateau forecasts the inseparability of ethics from ontology from epistemology (ethico-onto-epistemology) within this study. Ethics is not arrogated by, or uniquely germane to, the human, but inclusive of non-human others. Ethics names the generative praxis of world-making.

Plateau # A genealogy ‘comes out’

To manufacture a topography of ‘the closet’s’ scholarly History – what the classicism of empirical social science research calls *the literature review* – is to accept the ontological, epistemological, methodological, and ideological warrants of academia as the bastion of knowledge production.

Foucault’s (1973, 1975, 1995) oeuvre has called attention to *dividing practices* as ‘modes of manipulation that combine the mediation of a science (or pseudo-science) and the practice of exclusion—usually in a spatial sense, but always in a social sense’ (Rabinow, 1984, p. 8). The normalised and disciplinised stratification of the scholarly and the non-scholarly could be considered a dividing practice vis-à-vis ‘modes of classification, control, and containment … the increasingly efficient and diverse applications of … combined procedures of power and knowledge’ (Rabinow, 1984, p. 8). This kind of segregationist politics is an ‘intellectual problematic’ (Anderson & Harrison, 2016, p. 3) within a diffractive approach, premised upon the superpositions – not hierarchisation – of knowledges. As Murris and Bozalek (2019) remark:

> a diffractive reading is unlike a literature review as the latter assumes that you are at a distance of the literature, having a bird’s eye point of view – creating an overview by comparing, contrasting, juxtaposing or looking for similarities and themes. (p. 1505)

No single text, theory, or concept serves as the epistemological bedrock within diffraction; knowledge is produced through an iterative process of ‘reading insights through one another’ (Barad, 2007, p. 30). Munslow (2003) tells us that ‘we would do well to recognize and remember that the histories we assign to things and people are composed, created, constituted, constructed and always situated literatures’ (p. xi; also see Dilley, 1999). To accept that ‘history … is an inter-textual … event’ (Jenkins, 2003, p. 8) or ‘extra-textual’ (MacLure, 2024, p. 1648) is to recognise other sources, from other locations, as no less a part of ‘the closet’s’ unfolding historicity. For the reason that these funds of knowledge are already *of* not *in* the world, they too are part of ‘the closet’s’ *sedimenting* (Barad, 2007); that is, the recurrent process of layering understandings and (re)forming meaning.



St. Pierre (2021a, 2021c, 2023, 2024b, 2024c) wearies of the obsessive need in social science research to *methodologise* routine and regular activities: reading, writing, speaking, observing, walking. In a co-authored paper she writes:

> If the purpose of the literature review … is to read in order to present a mostly coherent, unified body of knowledge to which a study contributes, reading, and thought, is constrained and domesticated from the beginning, absorbed into methodology's enclosure. Reading is reduced to a preliminary step in the forward movement of a research project. (St. Pierre & Kuecker, 2024, p. 1570)

These remarks have direct and significant implications for a project that operationalises theory to think with. Reading – and the quotidian practices of the everyday mentioned previously of viewing, conversing, thinking, writing – cannot be constrained, siloed, or methodologised. For St. Pierre and Kuecker (2024), the specific scoping and surveying function of the academic literature review – as part of the proceduralised research process – is portentous. 'Read; find a gap in knowledge; identify a research question whose answer will fill the gap; choose a pre-existing, legitimated research methodology; design an empirical study; collect empirical data; analyze the data; produce findings; represent the study in a text—fill the gap' (p. 1570). In contrast, MacLure's (2024) description of 'professional reading' (i.e., the literature review) claims that this activity 'is inescapably done from the middle, trailing its ties to past and current reading and doings, putting out feelers toward *what the inquiry might become*' (p. 1649; emphasis added). Reading, viewing, conversing, thinking, and writing in this philosophically, conceptually, and theoretically structured project were ongoing engagements that lost any semblance of spatiotemporal demarcation.

The metahistorical and metapractical comments I have offered are ethico-onto-epistemological in nature, in that they highlight the necessity to acknowledge the confluence of both scholarly and *non-scholarly* material as intra-actively constituting the 'ongoing historicity' (Barad, 2007, p. 66) of 'the closet'. The non-scholarly is not in excess of the scholarly, and, as Butler (1991) has petitioned: 'Is there a pregiven distinction between theory, politics, culture, media?' (p. 14). In place of a literature review produced as a kind of exhaustive, authoritative representation of the scholarly literature, I offer a genealogy of 'the closet' and 'coming out' that engages more broadly with 'encounter[s] with the real' (St. Pierre,

2019, p. 8). A genealogy is in *continuo*: a living and evolving prismatic ecology of epistemic contributions continuously being produced and added to. The literature review as single source or *arborescent* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) cataloguing of knowledge is, it seems to me, the precise location where queer theory would interject or 'fuck with' (Browne & Nash, 2016, p. 9).

In composing this genealogy, I am already in the middle of a process in motion; I situate myself within this immanence and do not aim for transcendentalism (see Rosiek et al., 2024). Rather, I connect diverse fountainheads of knowledge in a non-dialectical fashion, suturing together an admixture of scholarship from the repositories of academe, biographies from the co-researchers (see St. Pierre, 2008), scenes from films and television series, literature, and news reports. Wellington (2000) has remarked that theory defies definitive definition, and consequently, the form it takes might not be immediately registerable. I argue forcefully that these reserves of knowledge mentioned above are 'already products of theory' (St. Pierre, 2011, p. 621).

Foucault (1980) might categorise this assortment of conjoint non-scholarly material as *subjugated knowledges*: 'a … set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate … naive knowledges … located low down on the hierarchy' (p. 82). Furthermore, Halberstam (2008, 2011) has offered the notion of queer *counterintuitive* thinking to refer to engagements with disregarded, outwardly unimportant, and irrelevant knowledges. Both *subjugated* and *counterintuitive* are approaches that characterise my queer re-engineering of the formalised, academised literature review. To consort ostensibly 'low-ranking knowledges' (Foucault, 1980, p. 82) and the scholarly canon of academe, to view both as operating along a continuum of knowledge sites and reservoirs – where no fundamental difference in their epistemological contributions exists – is doubtless political and contentious. Yet, as Braidotti (2013a) observes, '"difference" defined as a hierarchical notion' (p. 12) is not the same as *differentiating* along a *plane of consistency* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Under such a rubric, difference is relieved of its negative valence and engaged affirmatively. This outlook is consistent with Spinoza's monistic ontology taken up in new materialism and posthumanism, which rejects dualistic thought, polarisations, and hierarchical orders (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012; Fox & Alldred, 2022a; van der Tuin & Dolphijn, 2010) (see Plateau # 'Post' philosophies and using theory to think with). In this genealogy, I perform 'a politics of citation' (Rosiek et al., 2024, p. 222) by incorporating these differentiating knowledges and not discounting their insights and offerings.

Gay and lesbian identity formation

Common to models of sexual identity development are distinct stages in the formation and interpsychic acceptance of a homosexual identity (see Cass, 1979, 1984; Chapman & Brannock, 1987; Fassinger & Miller, 1997; Troiden, 1989). There is not enough space here to enumerate the postulations of each model; I instead focus on the fundamentals of the canonical Cass model.

Cass (1979) proposed a 'six-stage model of homosexual identity formation' (p. 219) for both male and female homosexuals. The first stage, *Identity confusion*, entails a recognition that one's behaviour may be labelled as homosexual. This stirs and disrupts the former heterosexual lifeworld. The individual questions their hitherto heterosexual status and – depending on their perception of this 'confusion' – may seek out resources on homosexuality, wholly deny and disengage from the possibility of being homosexual, or reinterpret and redefine the definition of homosexuality in describing their feelings or behaviours.

In the second stage, *Identity comparison*, the individual may accede to the possibility of their being homosexual. As the individual can now recognise the potentiality of being homosexual, the dis-ease from stage one is lessened. This is short-lived as that same acknowledgement permits an examination of what this information portends; the potential discrepancy between the individual's apprehension of self and how others view homosexuals, can lead to feelings of isolation and dissension. When the individual accepts themselves as no longer heterosexual but homosexual, normative 'behavior, ideals, and expectations' (Cass, 1979, p. 225) of heterosexuality are undone. The undoing of these heterosexual structures can spur further alienation.

In stage three, *Identity tolerance*, the individual becomes more amenable to considering themselves homosexual. The degree to which one is agreeable to this identity wields important and disparate consequences. First, a greater level of responsiveness to being homosexual ameliorates confusion and disorder, facilitating the 'acknowledg[ement] [of] social, emotional, and sexual needs' (Cass, 1979, p. 229). Second, the dialectic of how the individual sees themselves and how others perceive them can exacerbate isolation. The individual immerses themselves in the homosexual lifeworld to source the toleration and acceptance of others and to supplement feelings of negative affect. What co-occurs is the realisation of unbelonging with, and delimiting oneself from, heterosexual persons.

Stage four, *Identity acceptance*, is distinguished by 'continued and increasing' (Cass, 1979, p. 231) absorption within homosexual worlds and subcultures. A homosexual identity and way of living becomes normalised in this process. Acceptance replaces tolerance. Earlier musings of placelessness and identity fragmentation have been supplanted by continued interactions with other homosexuals and the formation of friendships. According to Cass (1979), the individual's engagement in homosexual subcultures portends the remaining two stages. The (il)legitimacy of homosexuality in *both* the public and private sphere makes *passing* 'a routine strategy for compartmentalizing a homosexual way of life and reducing the likelihood of being confronted with the reactions of heterosexuals' (Cass, 1979, p. 232). The individual might also disclose – 'come out' – to selected heterosexual persons. The individual is able to straddle the 'incongruency' of heterosexual and homosexual norms; 'for many homosexuals this proves to be a satisfactory way to live their lives' (Cass, 1979, p. 232).

In stage five, *Identity pride*, the individual is cognisant of the discrepancy between their acceptance of sense of self as homosexual and society's rejection of the category. The individual engages in debasing the opinions of heterosexuals and raising those of other homosexuals, segregating homosexuals as 'credible and significant' and heterosexuals as 'discredited and insignificant' (Cass, 1979, p. 233). Attachment to the homosexual culture is emboldened and pride in one's homosexuality is attained. Normative heterosexual arrangements – marriage, gender roles – are discounted. The disparate relation between heterosexuality and homosexuality may inaugurate a political engagement, whose visibility reifies homosexuality as a valid style of being. This brings into line the public and the private, 'strategies previously used to conceal personal identity' (Cass, 1979, p. 233) – 'the closet' – are discarded. Contrarywise, 'the closet' may resurface at times when disclosing one's homosexuality can have jeopardising effects.

In the final stage, *Identity synthesis*, the individual's previous regard for homosexuals and disregard for heterosexuals is undone because of the comprehension that some heterosexuals accept their homosexuality as they themselves do. Positive interaction with heterosexuals continues to facilitate this; an acknowledgement of the similarities and discrepancies between homosexuals and heterosexuals occurs. Homosexuality goes from being seen as a principle identity marker to 'merely one aspect of self' (Cass, 1979, p. 235). The homosexual identity formation is complete.

Researchers and scholars have interrogated the representativeness of 'coming out' models, describing them as ill-fitting to clothe the heterogeneity of sexual identities (Kahn, 1991; Kaufman & Johnson, 2004; Manning, 2015a). 'Coming out' models presuppose a unidirectional conception of time (Klein et al., 2015) and situate 'coming out' as 'a onetime developmental event' (Orne, 2011, p. 683). Urbach (2000) describes, superbly, the presupposition in regard to the consistency of time, bodies, identities, and spaces in relation to 'coming out':

> to come out and declare 'I am gay'—whether to another person or to oneself—is to submit to a host of ideological imperatives: self-unity ('I'); immutability over time ('am'); and the given characterisation ('gay'). These are crude and brittle words, unable to capture the diachronicity and multivalence of identity as played out in social space. (p. 347)

Dhaenens (2013) has recognised that gay identity models place the onus on sexual and gender dissidents to 'come out' and wade through the cis-hetero-normative reckoning of the social. In other words, 'the gay subject can struggle him- or herself towards self-acceptance' (Dhaenens, 2013, p. 307). At the end of the teleological 'coming out' process – from anguish to self-actualisation – gays and lesbians find belonging within a community of similar others (Orne, 2011; Roseneil, 2000). Moreover, these models often ignore bisexuals (McLean, 2007), give little heed to the social and the relational in shaping one's 'coming out' (Klein et al., 2015; Manning, 2015a), shelve the intersections of race, class, and culture (Manning, 2015a), and overlook fine-grained permutations of sexuality that are uncapturable, explorative, and *becoming* (Savin-Williams, 2005). On this point, JB commented that for his queer co-workers, 'coming out' is anachronistic. They refuse to be answerable or concretise their identity, favouring nonteleological, ever-evolving intonations of self:

> They're so fluid … they're so fluid about their sexuality and they talk about gender and sexuality … that there is no label on it. And when people say to them, like, older people, *'So you're gay? You're bi? You're straight? What are you?* And they're, like, *'I'm whatever I want to be'*. And they're very quick to stamp that … out, like: *'Don't put a label on me'*. And I think that is just so incredibly refreshing and admirable … And I

> love to see it. And the fallout of the gossip that comes from it: people being, like, *'Well, I don't know what they are because … one day they're sleeping with a girl, the next day they're sleeping with a boy'* … I love that that there's that turn around talk that's got people questioning. And people are doing some self-reflection and going, *'You know what, it doesn't matter'*. It doesn't matter at the end of the day what they decide to do.

While for JB's co-workers, 'coming out' may be passé, many dissident sexual and gendered subjects have encountered – and still encounter – a medicalising and psychopathologising gaze.

'Coming out' models also assume the pre-existence of interlocutors – to confess and bear witness – in an individualised undertaking premised upon the 'association of agency with subjectivity' (Barad, 2007, p. 441). This is the signature of humanism. For Barad (2007), agency is not an innate human property but emerges through and is distributed across the entangled intra-actions of human and non-human relations. Operating under the theoretical perspectives of posthumanism and new materialism – particularly Barad's (2007) *agential realist* notions of *re-turning* and *diffraction* – the notion of 'coming out' takes for granted many metaphysical suppositions. 'Coming out' models submit 'coming out' as a series of sequential moments or steps, definable and delineable: a *singular* undertaking in the instantiation of a gay/lesbian identity. A new materialist/posthuman critique of 'coming out' models would resituate and reaffirm the significance of the material in 'coming out' processes and performances: the intra-action between bodies, objects, spaces, and discourses. As offered by Page and Peacock (2013): 'the contexts within which we define, explore, enact, perform, and interpret our own (as well as others') gender and sexuality change over time, with different experiences, and across space and time (p. 640). Lewis (2012) has stated that 'coming-out journeys are ongoing, relational, and often discontinuous' (p. 11).

This genealogy has presented matter constitutive of the unfolding historicity of 'the closet' and 'coming out'. While it may be possible for non-normative sexual subjects to defy or queer the cultural obligation to pronounce and make legible their sexual identity, the point remains that the discourse of 'coming out' subsists as a cultural narrative hemmed into everyday life: a background that we, as queer people, constantly brush up against (see Plateau # Against the background: Dependence, 'coming out', and happiness (un)delivered).

A lineage of psychopathologisation

It is a truism that sexual practices and relationships between members of what we might call the *same sex* have always occurred (Beachy, 2010; Rohleder, 2020; Valentine, 1993a). As mentioned previously, sexual categorisations and identities are, however, spatiotemporally situated and specific, and whilst practices like sodomy can be said to be transhistorical and transcultural, the term 'gay', as a signifier given to refer to men who partake in this act with other men (but not always), is a Eurocentric lexiconic particularism.

In Ancient Greece, for instance, the practice of pederasty – sexual relations between a man and youth – was not premised upon gender, sexuality, or libidinal object choice, but the man's sexually active role as an expression of power (Halperin, 1986, 2000). 'The object of sexual desire (whether homosexual or heterosexual) was not of concern, rather, it was the form of sex act, whether "active" (penetrator) or "passive" (penetrated), and who could acceptably penetrate whom depended on status and social hierarchy' (Rohleder, 2020, p. 5; also see Plummer, 1992). Halperin (1986) tells us that 'before 1892 there was no homosexuality, only sexual inversion' (p. 34; also see Chauncey, 1982). Prior to the implementation of a positivistic, observable, and deterministic framework of the psycho-physio-social economy of sexuality, in the nineteenth century there was no ontological schema 'for identifying a person's fixed and determine sexual *orientation*, much less for assessing and classifying it' (Halperin, 1986, p. 36).

As the discourse of homosexuality emerged in the nineteenth century so too did its psychopathological and medicalised framing (Foucault, 1976; Weeks, 1976): the clinic instantiated the homosexual (Foucault, 1976; Wahlert, 2012). In the eighteenth century, however, 'homosexual behavior' did not attract the importance it attained in the subsequent century, but was an 'excess of natural behavior' (Foucault, 1988a, p. 11; also see Foucault, 1998). The homosexual subject in the later nineteenth century became 'a discrete sexual phenomenon' (Chauncey, 1982, p. 116), a 'species' (Foucault, 1976, p. 43), marking a transition from behaviour to subjectivity, and with it, a new social intelligibility (Wahlert, 2012). Female homosexuality did not, however, garner the same onto-epistemological attention (Weeks, 1976). As Plummer (1992) intimates: 'women did not have much of their own discourse on sexuality outside that imposed by men, one that was usually very negative, rendering the lesbian into a morbid pathology' (p. 3). Furthermore, Sedgwick (1990) contends that many of the knowledge systems and modes of understanding from the later nineteenth century were carried into the twentieth century via the segregationist politic of the heterosexual/homosexual

split. Like the assignability of a dimorphic male and female sex, a hetero- or homo- sexuality was now designatable (Sedgwick, 1990).

Homosexuality was removed fully from the *Diagnostic and Statical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) as a diagnosable sexual pathology in 1987, and the World Health Organization (WHO) withdrew homosexuality from the International Classification of Diseases in 1990 (Drescher, 2015). However, the legacy of medicalising and positivising homosexuality begun over 150 years ago continues with, for example, research pursuing the cause/s of homosexual morphology (see Bailey, 1995; Hegarty, 1997; Jannini et al., 2010; LeVay & Hamer, 1994; Rahman & Wilson, 2003; Votinov et al., 2021).

The heterosexual presupposition

Heterosexuality is a normative (and rudimentary) framework that organises the social. Walters (2014) states that heterosexuality is a social axiomatic: 'the default, the assumed, the preferred, the promoted. It need not be explained, analyzed, or unpacked' (p. 43). Heteronormativity insures heterosexuality as an embedded and entrenched norm that needs not be marked – much like whiteness (Reddy, 1998) – whose hegemony percolates through the ecologies of family, government, law, medicine, education, religion, and media, without qualification (Farvid, 2015; B. A. Robinson, 2016; Ward & Schneider, 2009; Yep, 2003). I have co-written elsewhere that 'the queer … body possesses a sensitivity and sentience to the experiences, encounters, practices, affects, and interactions that sustain and invigorate the heteronorm' (Milenkovic & Vicars, 2025a, p. 2). Highlighted here is the queer subject's capacity to intuit and register heterosexual modes of being, living, and relating. As de Lauretis (1984) has written: 'for what is instinct but a kind of knowledge *internalized from daily, secular repetition of actions, impressions, and meanings*, whose cause-and-effect or otherwise binding relation has been accepted as certain and even necessary' (p. 158; emphasis added).

Heterosexuality's normative status is 'imposed, managed, organized, propagandized, and maintained by force' (Rich, 1980, p. 648). This has given rise to what Ingraham (1994) names as the *heterosexual imaginary*. Rossi (2011), van der Toorn et al. (2020), and Gorman-Murray (2007) have written on heterosexuality's normalisation and socialisation through visual and consumer economies, with the marketing of the iconographic nuclear family a key element of these economies. From an Althusserian perspective, this (re)production of heterosexuality testifies to the thesis that 'the ultimate condition of production is … the

reproduction of the conditions of production' (Althusser, 2001, p. 85). Heteronormativity naturalises heterosexuality's assumed and desired status, maintaining the dichotomisation and hierarchisation of gender (male/female – men as superior/women as inferior) and gendered behaviour (men as masculine/women as feminine) (Fischer, 2013; Jackson, 2011; Valentine, 1993a). This ontological quarantining is the mechanism by which heterosexuality relegates homosexuality to the undesired, corrosive, supplemental Other, 'defin[ing] itself in critical opposition to that which it is not' (Fuss, 1991, p. 1). Relatedly, the work of Valentine (1993a) has redeployed heterosexuality from an exclusive sexual economy to a field of power relations – a heteropatriarchy that serves the enduring privilege of heterosexual men.

It is important to understand that heteronormativity and heterosexuality are not synonymous (Berlant & Warner, 1998; Danby, 2007; Rossi, 2011; Ward & Schneider, 2009), neither is heterosexuality a category of ubiquitous, undifferentiating identities, experiences, practices, or discourses (see Beasley et al., 2015; Johnson, 2005). It is within heteronormativity's prescriptivism that certain preconditions for (heterosexual) life are naturalised; particular desires, kinship arrangements (marriage), and procreation are designated as scripts of the heteronorm (Ahmed, 2010c; Hubbard, 2008). Indeed, the disciplinary apparatus of heteronormativity also discriminates amongst and polices heterosexual bodies, with married and monogamous couples the idealised formulation, while unwed, sexually casual heterosexuals are, comparatively, inferior (Fischer, 2013).

Given that queer lives are made (un)intelligible through comparison to 'heterosexual assumptions, practices and prejudices' (Jackson, 2011, p. 13), queer unions are deemed lesser within the framework of heteronormativity because procreation between bodies with the same anatomical configuration is not possible (Pecoraro, 2020). For instance, when Gee 'came out' to his mother, she initially believed this negated the possibility of her having grandchildren. Similarly, T recollects a comment made by his father at his mother's 60th birthday party, which implied the impossibility of their having grandchildren from T and his husband. Both these accounts speak to a presumption and qualification of heterosexuality as not only natural and optimal for child rearing, but inevitable. Moreover, Dhaenens (2013) tells us that so pervasive is the heteronorm that despite the increase of lesbian and gay representation on television, these portrayals often index a homonormative assimilationist politics (Duggan, 2002), where characters' 'participat[ion] in [heterosexual] institutions, practices, norms, and values' (Dhaenens, 2013, p. 304) are an attempt at integration and normalisation within the heteronormative social fabric.

Adams (2010) calls attention to the implicit yet pervasive assumption whereby individuals are heterosexual by default until they admit they are not, or are proved to be gay/queer. Chirrey (2003) also describes the cultural framework wherein 'the gay or lesbian individual [will] verbalise his or her sexuality or else he/she will not be regarded as being out' (pp. 27–28). Because heterosexuality's privileged order is institutionalised through '[the] state, social institutions, and popular culture' (Seidman, 2002, p. 6), 'always already present in our individual and collective psyches … cultural practices, and knowledge systems' (Yep, 2003, p. 11), the presupposition of straightness evinces why there is no heterosexual equivalent to 'coming out'. The discursive act is uniquely ascribed to – and operates as a social mandate for – queer persons, who must, time and again, 'come out' and announce their non-heterosexuality:

> the sustenance of gay identity (where straight identity is presumed) depends upon continuous acts of declaration. To reveal gay identity in one situation does not obviate the need to reveal it again in the next. Every new acquaintance, every new situation demands a repetition of, or retreat from, disclosure. (Urbach 2000, p. 347)

Crimp (1992) expresses similar reflections:

> The closet is not a function of homosexuality in our culture, but of compulsory and presumptive heterosexuality. I may be publicly identified as gay, but in order for that identity to be acknowledged, I have to declare it on each new occasion. (p. 6)

It has been argued that the material-discursive act of 'coming out' reifies the heteronormative heterosexual ideal (Jones, 2020; Lane, 2021; Pecoraro, 2020; van den Berg, 2016):

> the act of disclosing is already linked to a subservient subject position that not only grants the heterosexual majority the power to judge the intelligibility and accountability of the gay subject, but also reconfirms the heterosexual as the superior sexual subject. (Dhaenens, 2013, pp. 306–307)

Like all identity categories, the ontological fault line between gay and straight is power-laden: a heteronormative deployment of power/knowledge (Foucault, 1980) through which heterosexuality instantiates itself as a '"normal," "taken-for-granted" and "default" identity and

social location' (Yep, 2003, p. 30). 'The closet' – like its architectural and domestical namesake – conceals the undesired queer Other, keeping the heteronorm intact while cementing heterosexuality's illusory claim to originality (Fuss, 1991; Lane, 2021; Urbach, 2000). The reassertion of 'the coming out imperative' (Rasmussen, 2004, p. 144) – the notion that one *must* 'come out' repeatedly – is one mechanism through which heterosexuality supplements its fragile, facile claim to originality (Butler, 1991). Each prosaic 'coming out' performance establishes anew the possibility for discrimination and stigmatisation (Lane, 2021).

Outgrowths of heteronormativity: Homophobia and heterosexism

'The closet', as a regulator of identity, and 'coming out', which is the performative disclosure of that identity, hold meaning and significance only in the context of the social conditions that compel certain bodies to engage in these material-discourses. Homophobia and heterosexism instantiate the terms for the concealment of a non-heterosexual subjectivity. Homophobia is a systematically embedded worldview that exists before one's *being-in-the-world* (Heidegger, 1962), what Lane (2021) refers to as *a priori homophobia*. Because heteronormativity ascribes the mythology of heterosexual normativity, desirability, and superiority, it establishes and bolsters the preconditions for homophobia (B. A. Robinson, 2016). This *weltanschauung* – worldview – osmotes through the consciousnesses of queer individuals, instantiating the conditions to enact mitigative and denunciative identity stratagems against homophobia and heterosexism. These cultural narratives wield an interpellative power in that the exogenous nature of 'homophobic attitudes' (Lane, 2021, p. 2178) become endogenous: directed inwards, settling in, and, unwilled, disturbing the psychological interior.

Politicised pejoratives

While Australia is generally considered progressive in its attitude to LGBTQIA+ subjects and politics, as Plateau # Placings and positionings: Situating the study's mattering gleaned, there are factions of phobic actors and reactionary movements. Australian politician, Mark Latham, former leader of the One Nation Party NSW, posted and subsequently deleted a homophobic tweet about openly gay Sydney MP Alex Greenwich on 30 March 2023. The tweet was in response to a comment made by Greenwich, who called Latham 'disgusting' when LGBTQIA+ protesters were attacked by Christian Lives Matter members at an event Latham was speaking at in Sydney. Latham responded by tweeting:

> *Disgusting? How does that compare with sticking your d*** up a bloke's a*** and covering it with s***?* (Hyland, 2023 [original tweet uncensored]).

Greenwich filed a defamation case against Latham, who has doubled down on his comments and refused to apologise, and whose legal team will argue the comments were 'an "honest opinion" and related to a "matter of public interest"' (McLeod & Rose, 2023). Greenwich stated: '"I've been openly gay in public life for 15 years and in NSW parliament for over 10 years, and never have I experienced such a homophobic, sexualised attack that exposed me to contempt, ridicule and extreme abuse, based on my sexuality"' (Rose, 2023). In April 2026, the NSW Civil and Administrative Tribunal (NCAT) found that Greenwich had been sexually harassed and vilified by Latham, who was ordered to pay $100,000 in damages (McSweeney, 2026).

(Un)shareable and (un)safe spaces

Mapping the sociohistorical occurrences of homophobia and heterosexism in Australia reveals the patterning of an ongoing, disquieting history:

> More than three decades after John Russell, 31, was believed to have accidentally fallen to his death near Bondi Beach, Sydney, the incident is now thought to have been a gay hate crime. His body was discovered at the cliff bottom of Marks Park – a gay cruising area where, during the 1980s, gay men were bashed and robbed (Om, 2023). Russell's death is among three deaths re-examined as part of a special inquiry into LGBTQIA+ hate crimes. The special inquiry also delved into the unresolved deaths of 88 gay men from 1970 and 2010 (Australian Associated Press, 2023).
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> 30 year-old LGBTQIA+ man, Mirco Olivieri, had his conviction overturned after coming to the aid of a man, Jack Schmidt, who was being assailed homophobically by two brusque men during Sydney WorldPride. Olivieri was called homophobic pejoratives and engaged in a physical altercation with the men before all three were arrested (Bolza, 2024).
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In April 2023, in Perth, Western Australia, a 37 year-old man, Adrian Lea, and his friend were involved in a violent homophobic attack. While travelling between two gay clubs, Lea was asked if he was gay by an unknown man. Both Lea and his friend were then bashed by the man and another, resulting in a broken nose for Lea (Billson, 2023; McNeill, 2023).

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Having planned to meet up with a man on Grindr for a meal, in February 2020, then 24- year-old Melbourne man, Jack Jacobs, had in fact been baited and was set upon by a group of eight youths who savagely beat him. A statement was given by Jacobs to the police but a subsequent police report was not filed (Taylor, 2025, June 21). Gripped by shame, Jacobs did not pursue the matter. The psychic and affective weight of the traumatic incident is carried by Jacobs, manifesting as a relational incapacity to connect with others: '"I don't trust the world. I don't use Grindr. I won't even invite people to my apartment. I've been single. I'm definitely not a trusting person anymore"' (Taylor, 2025, June 21).

In 2010, former Australian Football League (AFL) player, Jason Akermanis, wrote an article for the *Herald Sun* titled 'Stay in the Closet', urging gay football players to stay in 'the closet' because the code was '"not ready for [them]"' (Australian Associated Press, 2010). In 2012, St. Kilda player, Stephen Milne, was fined $3,000 for a homophobic comment made against his opponent (Buckle, 2012), calling him 'a "f**king homo"' (Four Corners & Milligan, 2023). In April 2024, Port Adelaide player Jeremy Finlayson was banned for three games after he called an Essendon player a '"f-----"' (Ryan et al., 2024). Finlayson apologised for the pejorative; the Port Adelaide club argued the incident should not have warranted suspension (Dundas, 2024). This was the first occasion the AFL had suspended a player for 'using homophobic language' (Ryan et al., 2024). Storr et al. (2022), citing research conducted by VicHealth in 2017, have written that out of 673 LGBT+ AFL patron participants, '60% had witnessed homophobia or transphobia and 47% thought that AFL games were not safe places for LGBT+ people' (p. 95).

In 2018, former Wallabies and New South Wales Waratahs rugby player, Israel Folau, garnered a maelstrom of controversy when he replied HELL when asked on Instagram what God's plan is for gay people (ABC News, 2018). Again in 2019, Folau posted on social media a sign stating that hell awaits homosexuals, drunks, thieves, and fornicators, amongst others.

Folau, an Evangelical Christian, claimed he had expressed those views out of his faith, bringing into focus the threshold where freedom of speech is coterminous with hate speech. Then treasurer, Scott Morrison – who in the same year became Prime Minister of Australia, and who is also a devout Christian – celebrated Folau's strength of character, commenting that '"it clearly means a lot to Izzy and good for him for standing up for his faith"' (Australian Associated Press, 2018). Rugby Australia subsequently terminated Folau (Hytner, 2019). Decorated women's tennis player Margaret Court, who is widely thought of as the greatest female player of all time, and who, in retirement, became an ordained Pentecostal minister, has been a vocal opponent of LGBTQIA+ rights, including the legalisation of gay marriage in Australia. Court stated that '"politically correct education has masterfully escorted homosexuality out from behind closed doors, into the community openly and now is aggressively demanding marriage rights that are not theirs to take"' (Lacy, 2011). Court has espoused that a heteronormatively organised family unit comprised of a father and mother is in the best interests of not only the child, but society at large:

> there is no reason to put forward alternative, unhealthy, unnatural unions as some form of substitute … To dismantle this sole definition of marriage and try to legitimise what God calls abominable sexual practices that include sodomy, reveals our ignorance as to the ills that come when society is forced to accept law that violates their very own God-given nature of what is right and what is wrong. (Lacy, 2011)

Charting homophobic and heterosexist occurrences that establish 'the closet' as an apparatus of gay/queer subjective safeguarding has led me to propose how 'the closet' is a ubiquitous material-discourse for individuals marginal to the cisgender-heterosexual centre. Always 'near at hand' (Kushnick, 2010, p. 678), it both derives from, and interpenetrates, relational, spatial, and temporal ecologies, affecting one's capacity to integrate within the social because of the constant (re)negotiation of the disclosure/concealment dialectic (McDonald, 2016). The metaphor of 'the closet' is metonymical with 'coming out': it is the 'symbolical, discursive, psychical, psychological, and material' (Yep, 2003, p. 18) space one exits to be considered 'out'. This was noted by the co-researchers:

> A young gay man came into the ED [emergency department] a while back and he'd been on a hook-up via Grindr and been raped. [On] the computer screen you can see all the patients in the ED, and it has a little summary if you hover over the name as to why

they're there. They'd done an AOD [alcohol and other drug] referral as well, so it popped up on our list because he'd been on ice [crystal methamphetamine]. Two of my AOD colleagues … just went on this homophobic rant … right in front of me. And I'm like, '*Ok, they don't know I'm gay*' – Geoffrey.

[My daughter] and her girlfriend were somewhere in Melbourne recently and they were walking down [the street]. They saw this group of young men, kind of stereotypically alpha, straight (presumably). [My daughter and her girlfriend] were holding hands and they immediately let go of each other's hands [when they saw the men]. I mean, they're 21 and … it's still on their radar: safety and homophobia – Geoffrey.

I feel like heterosexual people just don't have that mental struggle. They just enter a new space and just introduce themselves. And that's just sort of that. And it's the assumption of someone being straight. But it's a constant mental thought – Olivia.

People don't 'come out' as straight … They should not have to 'come out' about being straight in their sexuality. So why should we? – JB.

My partner and I were taking the lift and at the next floor a young man and his girlfriend entered. After a moment the man asked us if we were gay. Whether he was intending to harass us or just curious, the unilaterality of the encounter remains: a heterosexual couple would seldom be asked if they were straight – James.

We were living with a friend … she had some said some things … regarding homosexuality and whatnot, and … she ended up asking [if I was gay] – Gee.

From these accounts, it is feasible to propose that 'the closet' is ever materialisable; it is a spectre looming over LGBTQIA+-identifying subjects and their social relations.

‘The closet’: A common presence

Researchers on ‘the closet’ and ‘coming out’ might themselves be considered ‘closeted’ qua scholarship that tends to preserve Western, Eurocentric, male-centric, urbanised, affluent experiences (Boussalem, 2020). That said, research that explores ‘coming out’ within other racial and cultural contexts is burgeoning (see Barglowski et al., 2018; Bhugra, 1997; Bie & Tang, 2016; Cheah & Singaravelu, 2017; Tamagawa, 2018; Wang et al., 2009; Wang, 2017; Wang, 2021).

Walters (2014) states that the ‘coming-out story has long been offered as the master narrative of gay life’ (p. 28). Certainly, when ‘coming out’ is not an isolated event but a protracted, tedious process of disclosure over the lifetime (see Adams, 2011; Benozzo et al., 2015; Chekola, 1994; Chirrey, 2003; Dindia, 1998; Eribon, 2004; Lane, 2021), Walters’s reasoning is salient. Recounting, renarrating, and making meaning of, and from, one’s ‘coming out’ instantiated the genre of *the coming-out story* (see Liang, 1997; Plummer, 1995), now cemented as ‘[the] paradigmatic mode of contemporary gay literature and the exemplary act of gay self-disclosure’ (Boucai, 2022, p. 604).

Set in the suburbs of Melbourne, Australia, over the course of 24 hours, Christos Tsiolkas’s novel *Loaded* centres on Ari – a 19 year-old Greek-Australian, whose complex relationship with his gay subjectivity is intersected by familial and cultural discourses pertaining to his Greek heritage, hegemonic masculinity, and internalised homophobia. Ari is dislocated from both Greek and Australian society: jaded, discontented, and unbelonging, he is esurient for the high of drugs and casual sexual encounters with men (and sometimes women) to evacuate himself from the monotony of his lifeworld.

Assigning the signifier *gay* to name the economy of sexual desires and acts he engages in is of little consequence for Ari – a refusal that ‘unscrambles sexual behavior from sexual identity’ (Ghaziani, 2017, as cited in Ghaziani & Brim, 2019, p. 18). Indeed, Ari pronounces: ‘I’m a man … And I take it up the arse’ (Tsiolkas, 2011, p. 46), but over the span of the novel, he never ‘comes out’, or refers to himself as gay. He does, in fact, have a distaste for totalising identity categories: ‘I don’t like definitions’ (Tsiolkas, 2011, p. 115), ‘words such as faggot, wog, poofter, gay, Greek, Australian, Croat are just excuses. Just stories, they mean shit’ (Tsiolkas, 2011, p. 141). Whether it is shame or the stigma of being gay that keeps Ari ‘closeted’, or, as indicated by his apathy towards ‘definitions’, the queer misgivings about identity categories, Ari evades definitively naming his sexual identity. In this way, Ari breaks

from heteronormativity and *compulsory heterosexuality* (Rich, 1980) as socio-cultural discourses that compel straightness – or demand non-heterosexuals' disclosure:

> Angie rests her hand on my shoulder. So, what are you, she asks, gay, straight or bi? ... She stands up and faces me. Her tone is aggressive. So what are you, Ari, she asks again, gay, straight or bi? (Tsiolkas, 2011, pp. 93–94)

And later in a conversation with Serena, as she airs out her love life with a woman:

– Do your parents know? She's asking me a question.
– Know what?
– That you are gay. Am I? I want to say. (Tsiolkas, 2011, p. 141)

In *Loaded*, the function of 'the closet' – and Ari's relationship to it – is complex. On one hand, he is not 'out' to others – for example, his parents – and can be considered 'in the closet'. On the other hand, Ari appears to have little regard for the consequences of 'coming out' to his parents. Returning to the conversation with Serena:

– We have to protect them, Ari, she tells me.
– What do you mean, protect. I don't understand her.
– Protect them, she is insistent. So that the neighbours don't talk, so the relatives don't talk. She is loud now. You are protecting them, Ari, you don't tell them about your life because you know what that will do to them.
– Like I care. Her face freezes over, she draws back in her seat. She wanted a connection between us and there isn't one. She cares. I don't. I'm protecting myself. Mum and Dad are adults. They can protect themselves. (Tsiolkas, 2011, p. 141)

The 2025 Stan original series *Invisible Boys*, adapted from the 2019 novel of the same name by Holden Sheppard, revolves around the intersecting storylines of four young gay men within the rural Western Australian town of Geraldton. Set against the geopolitical moment of Australia's gay marriage plebiscite in 2017, played out over the course of the series is the angst and tumult of teenagerhood, an ardent yearning to get out of town and never look back, the crystallising awareness and (un)acceptance of identifying – and 'coming out' (or not) – as gay, and the weight of cultural expectations and familial duties.

The title word *invisible* is redolent of the psychic state of invisibility gay/queer subjects might occupy when moving through the world, where being 'in the closet' disqualifies these individuals from the visual and audible fields of social recognition and participation. Invisible might also be consequential to the familial, social, and cultural interpellations the protagonists are subject to. For Hammer, it is the burden of pursuing sporting excellence imposed by his mother for the purposes of being drafted to a professional AFL [Australian Rules Football] club, and the coincident, exacting demand to adopt the hegemonic hetero-masculinity cultivated by this institution. For Zeke, it is the traditions and expectations of his Italian culture – notably his emotionally manipulative and homophobic mother. My analysis below focuses, however, on the character of Charlie. This fiery, teal-haired, raven-nailed punk rocker is the nexus between the series' character arcs.

After a bungled hookup with Kev – who, unbeknownst to Charlie, is a married man – Charlie is threatened with 'outing' by Kev's wife, Alicia. Audaciously, Charlie 'comes out' first on social media, and as a result, also 'outs' Kev:

> Kev's got a thing for underage boys. That's right, he's a pedo. And how do I know? Well, 'cause he picked me up off an app. And what app I hear you ask? A faggot app. 'Cause I, Charlie Roth, am a fucking faggot. And I don't give a shit who knows it anymore. (Verso, 2025a, 19:07)

Charlie forms a romantic relationship with Matt, a handsome, slightly older farmer, who, in many ways, is the characterological antithesis of Charlie: uncompromisingly 'closeted', conventionally masculine presenting, and unassuming. Audiences are witness to Matt's 'closet' panopticon in episode three, when, on a date with Charlie, he parks the car at the outskirts of the drive-in. No shrinking violet, Charlie makes his feelings clearly known:

> Matt: 'You wanna go inside?'
>
> Charlie: 'Kinda.'
>
> Matt: 'But … people will see.'
>
> Charlie: 'That's the whole fucking point. I've never had a boyfriend, but I guess I thought that when I did get one, he might want to be seen in public with me.' (Verso, 2025b, 21:00)

Unknown to both Charlie and the audience, Matt shoulders many burdens that have silently gnawed away at his desire for, and the moorings that hold him to, life. In episode nine, *Bees*, viewers are given an intimate view into Matt's adversities: the declining mental faculties of his father, how he labours with the responsibility of managing the farm, the crop's lack of yield, the farm's financial crisis, and, as audiences can correctly guess, his sexual orientation. In the closing scene of episode nine, consumed by these tribulations, Matt commits suicide.

In the series final, *Sunset*, the results from the Marriage Equality plebiscite return with *Yes*. In the wake of Matt's death, Charlie is bereft, infuriated – it is the decisive event that cements his decision to leave Geraldton. Zeke, having defiantly walked out on his mother and father, goes with him. Without a destination, without financial security, they ride off with middle fingers aloft, cheering.

Etymology of 'the closet' and 'coming out'

Sedgwick (1990) has observed:

> There are remarkably few of even the most openly gay people who are not deliberately in the closet with someone personally or economically or institutionally important to them … every encounter with a new classful of students, to say nothing of a new boss, social worker, loan officer, landlord, doctor, erects new closets whose fraught and characteristic law of optics and physics exact from at least gay people new surveys, new calculations, new draughts and requisitions of secrecy or disclosure. (pp. 67–68)

When the need to 'come out' is so insistent, queer people will never be, as Scott (2018) indicates, short of tales to tell: 'I, for one, never know how to respond when asked for my 'coming out story'. I do not have one; I have many' (p. 153). This sentiment was further echoed by two co-researchers:

> It's ['coming out' is] a constant need to continually 'come out' to everyone you meet, everyone you talk to … when you join a space, whether that's like a club or a hobby or a new job, or you go to a new school or new uni, whatever space you're in, you have to make that assessment: do you tell or do you not tell? And then remember: have you told

> or haven't you told? And if you do tell, what you tell. How much information to give? … You've got your few defining moments of the initial sort of 'come out', but then it's constant micro 'coming out' – Olivia.

> It's interesting, the whole 'coming out' journey, it's not once, is it? I didn't realise that … It's almost like a daily thing' – Geoffrey.

The etymology of the term 'closet' and its embedment within the discourse of sexuality has been well-established (see Bobker, 2015; Brown, 2000; Kushnick, 2010; Stewart, 1995; Urbach, 2000). 'The closet's' correlative phrase, 'coming out', was recontextualised from a debutante's coming out into society; 'the enormous drag balls that were patterned on the debutante and masquerade balls of the dominant culture' (Chauncey, 1994, p. 7; also see Scott, 2018). Before World War II, 'coming out' did not carry the implicature of confessionalism as it does in contemporary parlance, but referenced an initiation into the boldness of the gay society or scene – 'a world neither so small, nor so isolated, nor, often, so hidden as "closet" implies' (Chauncey, 1994, p. 7). From 1890 to World War II, the gay scene was thriving in its visibility – something seldom acknowledged by historians (Chauncey, 1994). In the 1950s, 'coming out' referred to gay men who had had their 'first sexual experience with another man' (Chauncey, 1994, p. 8). By the 1970s, 'coming out' continued to reference first male sexual contact, but now 'more commonly referred to announcing one's homosexuality to straight friends and family' (Chauncey, 1994, p. 8).

Understandings of, and attitudes towards, 'the closet' are bound up with one's temporal, cultural, social, and political context. Boucai (2022), for example, cautions against acceding to Chauncey's rosy-eyed depictions of *gay New York* and ignoring 'the closet's' equally negative affectual power:

> In the course of a single lifetime … such a man would have occupied (as so many of us still occupy) multiple intersections along the axes of self-loathing and self-acceptance, sexual deprivation and sexual indulgence, normative and queer sociability. … The metaphor of the closet is capacious enough to accommodate all of these experiences: enabling disguises, secrets, seclusions, and subcultures, but also … repressed desires,

> earnest renunciations, desperate conversions, and—when all else failed—the revolver, the noose, and the parapet. (p. 290)

These 'secrets, seclusions [and] repressed desires' were certainly prevalent during the feverous denunciation of homosexuality throughout 1950s McCarthyist America. Gay men and women were branded as a corrupting and dangerous phantasmatic public enemy. During the moral panic of the *Lavender scare*, gays and lesbians were weeded out from US Government positions as homosexuality became tantamount to communism, an inimical Soviet danger imperilling the moral and political foundations of the United States (Johnson, 2004; Ortiz, 1993). 'Persecuted and prosecuted' (Seidman, 2002, p. 14), the 'closet' became a sanctuary, and it is at this historical juncture that Scott (2018) subverts the 'entrance or arrival' (p. 146) of 'coming out' – à la Chauncey – with having skeletons in one's closet.

According to Motschenbacher (2020), the nomenclature of 'coming out' was not incepted before the Stonewall riots. 'This does not mean that coming out processes did not occur, but that they were framed in different ways and described using other terminology than the verb *come out*' (Motschenbacher, 2020, p. 258). Brown (2000) postulates that between 1968 and 1972 the term 'closet' 'came to signify the concealment and erasure of gays and lesbians specifically in the U.S' (pp. 5–6), while Eskridge (1999) locates this several decades earlier to the 1930s where 'the closet' 'became a metaphor for secrecy about sexuality and gender' (p. 7). It was in the late 1960s that the Gay Liberation Movement politicised the phrase 'coming out' with the catchcry 'out of the closets and into the streets!' (Boucai, 2022; Plummer, 1995; Sedgwick, 1990; Urbach, 2000).

A continuing weaving

This genealogy has chronicled the historicity of 'the closet' and 'coming out', and the continuing relevance of these discourses to social and political life. The accounts of the co-researchers in the following pages join this genealogy, contributing to the ongoing negotiation of sexual and gender identity within the cis-hetero-normative imaginary.

Plateau # ‘Post’ philosophies and using theory to think with

An aside: Finding or being found by theory

> One cannot not put theory to work.
> (St. Pierre, 2018, p. 3)

Brookfield (2017) has described theory as being like ‘coming home’ (p. 73). ‘You stumble on a piece of work that puts into cogent words something you’ve felt but been unable to articulate’ (Brookfield, 2017, p. 73). This viewpoint resonates with me profoundly, and here I offer some prefatory comments about how I found theory, or, perhaps, theory found me.

When I invoked and wove theory within my teacherly experiences of cis-hetero-normativity in Victorian primary schools in my masters thesis, I did not then have a name for *what* I was doing. But theory electrified and activated thought. I called upon Foucault’s (1995) notion of *panopticism* to describe my sense of being surveilled as a gay, gender queer teacher. Mizzi’s (2013, 2016) *heteroprofessionalism* offered insight into how professionalism was enacted by senior, heterosexual leadership within the workplace. Røthing’s (2008) work on *homotolerance* provided a framework for contemplating if my sexual/gendered subjectivities would be affirmed if known by staff, or if I would have simply been tolerated or caricatured. And Butler’s (1990) seminal theory of gender performativity explicated how I performed a series of cited and recited acts to render a desexualised subjectivity in order to avoid harassment.

Wellington (2000) has remarked how theory is a ‘framework for understanding’ (p. 27), and through this confederation of thinkers I arrived at new understandings and illuminations of my teacherly lifeworld. Finding or being found by theory was a watershed moment as a scholar, as a subject. I think of this encounter as my *becoming* to theory; I have come to realise that ‘there is nothing as practical as good theory’ (Lewin, 1943, p. 118), and that:

> theory is a toolbox, something that is full of transformative potential. Theory is a vector for intergenerational connection. Theory is a counter-memory so that you remember the



> radical voices … Theory is a database of counter-knowledges, of oppositional voices. (Braidotti & Strom, 2018, p. 187)

As I call on theory's elucidative potential in this study, I (re)return to Jackson and Mazzei's (2012, 2023) *thinking with theory*, which marries the methodological and philosophical, repudiating unilateral methods of data analysis and interpretation in favour of a multiplication of theoretical perspectives (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). To think with theory departs from the orthodoxy of 'Cartesian ontological realism' (St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014, p. 715) anchored in qualitative and quantitative research, within which 'data … are considered to be inert, lifeless, and disorganized … wait[ing] to be "collected," "processed," and verified – awakened to meaning through the ministrations of researchers and their specialist, methodic procedures' (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2018, p. 806).

Thinking with theory

Thinking with theory involves 'plugging … theory and the data into one another' (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013, p. 261). The phrase *plugging in* is taken from Deleuze and Guattari (1987) to describe the forming of multiplicitous, rhizomatic, and experimental connections. Working data in this manner refuses the calcification and ossification of meaning: 'one form of knowledge is free to enrich, complement, supplement, challenge, contest or overturn any other' (Baxter, 2016, p. 36). The conventional, monological, and reductive practice of siphoning participants' accounts from transcripts and neatly parcelling and inventorying this data into putatively perceptible codes and themes to 'make things stand still and separate out, so that meaning, structure, and order may coalesce' (MacLure, 2013b, p. 228) is untenable when thinking with theory.

Thinking with theory can be seen as sharing a queer(ing) sensibility. Di Feliciantonio et al. (2017) highlight that 'the main aim of queer methods and methodologies has traditionally been to revolt and demolish monolithic and hegemonic conceptions, avoiding precise and closed answers, while continuously opening up new ones' (pp. 406–407). MacLure (2010) has also written about theory's queer(ing) propensity to disrupt old habits of thought and elicit novel ways of thinking and doing. As it is integrated in this project, thinking with theory marks a withdrawal from similarly themed research on lesbian and gay subjectivity, 'coming out', and 'the closet' that has employed conventional data analyses, including coding and thematic

analysis (see Boussalem, 2020; Connell, 2012; Denes & Afifi, 2014; Docena, 2013; Dunlap, 2014; King & Noelle, 2005; Klein et al., 2015; Legate et al., 2012; Lewis, 2012; Pecoraro, 2020; Rossi, 2010; Sandler, 2022; Thomas et al., 2007; Wang et al., 2009; Yap et al., 2020). Invoking thinking with theory effectuates a proliferative and diffractive approach that 'keep[s] meaning on the move' (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 7), 'in a state of in-between-ness, as always becoming' (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013, p. 270). It is evident here how thinking with theory shares resonances with Barad's (2007, 2014) work on *diffraction*; in this study I read empirical data, the material-discourses of 'the closet', 'coming out', the everyday, through a confederation of theoretical and conceptual armatures.

Definitional dis-ease: 'Post' paradigm approaches to inquiry

Some work must be done before introducing and putting into motion the methodology(ies) used in this study. In order to show how I diffractively read ethnography, heuristic inquiry, phenomenology, and narrative through 'the posts', a (very) condensed abridgement of their onto-epistemologies and vocabularies needs to be tendered. However, I am ambivalent about offering a summation of the philosophical ensemble of postmodernism, poststructuralism, new materialism, and posthumanism, hereafter collectively referred to as 'the posts' (St. Pierre, 2013b, 2023), whose frameworks are so crucial to this project. I am concerned about doing justice to their multidimensionality, potentiality, and productivity, and also acknowledge that any expository endeavour is an antithetical and delimiting exercise. Dillet (2017) has, for example, commented that 'historicising "poststructuralism" does not seem very "poststructuralist" as an approach, given that poststructuralists are supposed to argue for relativism and becoming, as against history, reason, representation, the subject and so on' (p. 517; also see Kellner, 1987). Like trying to define the polymorphism that is queer (see Jagose, 1996), any attempt to extract 'the posts'' nature or essence is to chain, constrain, and contain their theoretical applications and snap-freeze their mercuriality – their becoming.

At the same time, I am sympathetic to the fact that, for readers less familiar and fluent with these philosophical perspectives – and post qualitative, post (non) representational, and post foundational inquiry more broadly – their novelty might seem like something out of the methodological hinterlands. 'The posts', as they underlie this research, can be thought of as jigsaw pieces, each with its own contours, tabs, and slots that, with care and patience, interlock

and interconnect to form a synergistic framework. Below I offer a philosophical scaffolding for readers in order to identify these points of connection and breakage.

Postmodernism

Postmodernism and poststructuralism, whilst often synonymised with one another (Gannon & Davies, 2012), and although closely related through a 'family resemblance' (Delamont & Atkinson, 2009, p. 668), have distinct nodes of articulation and application (Phelan, 1993). Postmodernism, as described superbly by Seidman (1991), works towards the 'deconstructing [of] false closure, prying open present and future social possibilities, detecting fluidity and porousness in forms of life where hegemonic discourses posit closure and a frozen order' (p. 131). Postmodernism's task of critically interrogating '"taken-for-granted structures of intelligibility"' (Lather, 1996, as cited in Pillow, 2000, p. 22) led to the crisis of representation in social science research (Clifford & Marcus, 1986). This is considered the fourth epoch in qualitative research, in which representing the social became a contested endeavour (see Denzin, 1994a, 1994b). This created an ontological-epistemological-methodological upheaval where the researcher who was once believed to 'unproblematically insure accurate or valid representations of reality' (Scheurich, 1997, p. 30) had this ability fundamentally challenged.

The postmodern temper is, in a strong sense, marked by '*doubt*' (Richardson, 1991, p. 173). Truth is subjectively, temporally, and spatially contingent. Any appeal to foundationalism and representationalism – central to the modernist, humanist, realist project – does not align with postmodernism (Seidman, 1991; Wilchins, 2004). For example, Lyotard (1984) characterises postmodernism 'as [the] incredulity toward[s] metanarratives' (p. xxiv). Therefore, grand narratives that 'legitimate knowledge' (Lyotard, 1984, p. xxiv) within which the scientism of validity, replicability, and generalisability are ensconced, no longer hold as apparatuses of legitimation, nor can their putative universalism be mobilised to rationalise the world. As Nietzsche (1968) has commented: 'against positivism, which halts at phenomena – "There are only facts" – I would say: No, facts is precisely what there is not, only interpretations. We cannot establish any fact "in itself"" (p. 267).

In postmodernism, methods and concepts are transported and transposed across disciplines (Richardson, 1988). The postmodern sensibility of 'copying, scavenging, recycling, and recombining [of] surfaces and fragments' (Goldman & Papson, 1994, p. 224) is characteristic of the *pastiche*. Defined by Pool (1991), a pastiche is 'a work of art or a text that is composed of elements from different styles' (p. 316). Furthermore, the origin of queer theory,

whose knowledge systems I draw on, is itself postmodern (Dilley, 1999; Goodrich et al., 2016; Honeychurch, 1996; Plummer, 2011). In *Methodological mise-en-scène*, I lean into the pastiche by sampling from 'the styles of the past [conventional methodologies]' (Dickens, 1994, p. 90); through diffraction, I rework the former to open new horizons.

Poststructuralism

Poststructuralism was born out of critique of, and reaction against, structuralism (Scheurich, 1997). Unlike postmodernism's broader influence over the cultural, artistic, and intellectual, poststructuralism's gaze falls on the interplay between 'language, subjectivity, social organization, and power' (Richardson, 2000, p. 928). Poststructuralism displaces and destabilises the pre-discursive, the ahistorical, the reified – discourses, practices, categories, and identities – through 'a constant undermining of unitary dominance in any form' (Scheurich, 1997, p. 35). Essentialist, universal, or transcendental structures governing a single reality are challenged by poststructuralism. Language – once believed to have the capacity to secure knowledge and meaning – is indeterminate and unstable (Gannon & Davies, 2012). Knowledge is always only partial and situated (Hayden, 2009). Unsurprisingly, then, poststructuralism denies the existence of a single truth (Søndergaard, 2002), attentive instead to how power and discourse are constitutive in multiple truths, subject positions, and locations (Butler, 1990, 1997b; Foucault, 1980; Søndergaard, 2002).

New materialism and posthumanism

Much like poststructuralism, new materialism and posthumanism are not consentaneous and conclusive frameworks, but multifarious (Fox & Alldred, 2022a; Garnet & Sinner, 2019; Lemke, 2015). These neighbouring philosophical movements have emerged – or, true to their immanent nature, *emerge* – in response to the historicity of privilege given to the human, to language, and to discourse in philosophy and social inquiry (Jagger, 2015). New materialism seeks to broach the limitations of social constructivism, the customary apathy shown by postmodernism and poststructuralism towards matter, and the emphasis on the linguistic and discursive in structuring the social (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008). Distinguished by its desire for entanglements and dynamism, new materialism does not denounce language and discourse outright but interleaves the material *within* the discursive. As stated by Gamble et al. (2019), 'discourses are themselves also – and *only* – particular configurations or performances *of matter*' (p. 112). Further, queer theory aligns with the tenets of new materialism via its attention to the material-discursive conditions that *intra-act* with the materialisation of normative

gendered and sexual categories (Barad, 2003; Barad & Gandorfer, 2021; Fox & Alldred, 2015a; Kleinman & Barad, 2012; van der Tuin & Dolphijn, 2010). As explained by van den Berg (2016): 'the meanings of genders and sexualities are not only discursively constituted, but are also real, concrete, lived and exceed the sphere of the merely discursive' (p. 36).

In the Western metaphysical tradition, largely inaugurated by Descartes, matter has been perceived as passive and acted *upon*: sidelined as mute, devoid of agency and potentialities (Bennett, 2010; Coole & Frost, 2010; Fowles, 2010; Hardy & Thomas, 2015). 'Matter is essentially passive stuff, set in motion by human agents who use it as a means of survival, modify it as a vehicle of aesthetic expression, and impose subjective meanings upon it (Coole, 2010, p. 92). In a 'turn to matter' (Fox & Alldred, 2017, p. 3), new materialism recasts Cartesianism by taking seriously the productive and generative role of matter and materiality (Coole & Frost, 2010; Jagger, 2015; van der Tuin & Dolphijn, 2010). As stated by Barad (2003), 'to figure matter as merely an end product rather than an active factor in further materializations, is to cheat matter out of the fullness of its capacity' (p. 810). Matter is nonteleological: it is processual, vibratory, *becoming*. As a result of this process ontology of becoming, notions of essentialism or essences do not hold within new materialism and posthumanism (Braidotti & Strom, 2018; Smith & Monforte, 2020).

New materialism and posthumanism elide the insistent and persistent anthropocentric and humanist logics of dualism and are instead monistic (Fox & Alldred, 2022a; Jagger, 2015; Law & Mol, 1995; Miller, 2007). Under this ontology, 'everything is made of the same substance' (Bennett, 2010, p. x). Language, discourse, and matter are equally embroiled in the world's becoming (MacLure, 2013a). Reconfigured instead as but *one* constituent entangled within a vast rhizomic network of intra-acting componentry, the human becomes imbricated with the non-human, other-than-human, and more-than-human (Connolly, 2013; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Gamble et al., 2019). It is within a new materialist/posthuman ontology that agency is not the preserve of the intentional humanist subject, nor flippantly conferred on the non-human, but produced intra-actively through human and non-human engagements (Barad, 2003; Rosiek & Snyder, 2020).

New materialist and posthumanist ontologies perforate dualistic traditions of thought – mind/body, culture/nature, human/non-human – which have been fundamental to the humanistic/positivistic project (Bennett, 2010; Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2011; Fox & Alldred, 2015b; van der Tuin & Dolphijn, 2010). Of course, the epithet *new* of new materialism

summons the antonymic *old*. Such a binarism is, for Barad, disagreeable: 'the "new" not only ignores matter/ing's inherent historicity but also assumes a progressive notion of time … it announces a discontinuity from other materialisms' (Barad & Gandorfer, 2021, p. 27).

True to its name, posthumanism conveys a disengagement from humanism's androcentric human. Palpably exclusionary, this *man* – in his universalism – is recognised as white, heterosexual, and Western, neglective of what Braidotti (2006c) calls 'sexualized, racialized and naturalized others' (p. 21). These others belong to categories that have been recognised historically as unhuman, sub-human, and less-than human: women, LGBTQIA+ populations, Indigenous/black/brown/ethnic peoples, and animals (also see Braidotti, 2016). This project therefore demands a reformulation of this particular human as the principal figure prefigured in the study's methodologies – ethnography, heuristic inquiry, and phenomenology – but as also the non-neutral figure who fails to recognise the gay and lesbian subjects of this study either as human, or as the same calibre of human.

New materialism's antitheticality towards dichotomies situates the material and social worlds not as separate milieus but conjointly as sociomateriality (Martine & Cooren, 2016). Hence, the compartmentalisation of ecologies of reality, 'the social, the psychological, the biological, the economical and the emotional' (Smith & Monforte, 2020, p. 5), are rethought within a new materialist ontology as entangled (also see Guattari, 2000). This refutation towards binarisms, the dualistic, the hierarchal – also shared by posthumanism – is commensurate with the DeleuzoGuattarian (1987) notion of *flat multiplicities*, 'where discourse and matter are mutually implicated in the unfolding emergence of the world' (MacLure, 2013a, pp. 659–660; see also van der Tuin & Dolphijn, 2010).

The triad of post qualitative, post (non) representational, and post foundational inquiry are cognate approaches to research that overlap but also stand independently through distinct foci and onto-epistemological orientations and implications for inquiry. Together, they view the formalism of predetermined methods and methodology as arbitrations of thought, are antipathetic towards the dogmas of humanism and Cartesianism, are desirous of opening up new ways of thinking, and advocate experimentality and creativity (Anderson & Ash, 2015; Anderson & Harrison, 2016; Fox & Alldred, 2022b; Gerrard et al., 2017; Jackson & Mazzei, 2024; Lather & St. Pierre, 2013; St. Pierre, 2018, 2021c; Ulmer, 2017; Vannini, 2015).

Like the *bricoleur* (Kincheloe, 2001, 2005; Kincheloe et al., 2018) or *scavenger* (Halberstam, 1998), I do not plant my flag in any one approach exclusively, but through 'an

ontology of creation' (Jackson & Mazzei, 2024, p. 11) cut across and sourced from their respective offerings to accrete and aggregate a 'post' *pastiche*. Below I curate a brief and surely impossibly inadequate exegesis for readers to traverse the terrain of these post paradigms.

Post qualitative inquiry

Post qualitative inquiry is a term offered by St. Pierre (2011) to encompass a corpus of diverse research practices that have in common a reconsideration of the ontological and epistemological underpinnings ballasted in conventional social science research (Gerrard et al., 2017; Taylor, 2017). Post qualitative inquiry is synergistic with Jackson and Mazzei's (2012) thinking with theory in its challenging of 'existing structures of intelligibility' (p. 6) found within the methodologies of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods research. As a 'truly experimental inquiry' (St. Pierre, 2018, p. 3) – and under the sway of poststructuralism – it is anti-method and methodology, understanding these as scripts in advance which foreclose experimentation, creativity, and thought (Søndergaard, 2002; St. Pierre, 2021b, 2021c). Here, one may hear the echoes of queer theory's '"antimethodological impulse"' (Love, 2016, as cited in Ghaziani & Brim, 2019, p. 3) and the 'queer suspicion of method' (Brim & Ghaziani, 2016, p. 16). Deconstruction, too, is used in post qualitative inquiry to collapse established humanist philosophical assumptions and tendencies, and recraft them (St. Pierre, 2018, 2021c, 2023).

Post (non) representational inquiry

Prima facie, post (non) representational research strikes one as contradictory. 'How can … research—which is the very process of describing, understanding, and explaining an empirical reality—deny its very raison d'être?' (Vannini, 2015, p. 1). To complicate matters further, it is perhaps oxymoronic that I try to represent post (non) representational research through 'the logic of representation' (MacLure, 2013a, p. 661), home to a language laden with misfirings, shortcomings, insufficiencies, and bluntness that petrify, make statical, and snap-freeze.

Representational logic has a history of belonging to Western *logos* (Barad, 2007) and, unsurprisingly, much qualitative research (MacLure, 2013a). Representations can be materially and affectively violent: they are power-laden and may reproduce social inequalities (Anderson, 2019). Post (non) representational inquiry refuses methodological scriptures and shackling (Ulmer, 2017); its theories, while pluralistic in nature, deprioritise representational renderings (Anderson & Harrison, 2016). Non-representational theory – at the core of post (non) representational inquiry – does not, however, completely preclude or deny representations

(Gorman & Andrews, 2023), but dials back the representational-referential dialectic and views representations as part of an ensemble in the ongoingness of the world (Anderson, 2009b, 2019; Anderson & Harrison, 2016). Barad (2007), for example, is less interested in representationalism as a one-to-one correspondence and instead focuses on 'the practices or performances of representing … the productive effects of those practices and the conditions for their efficacy' (p. 28). In other words, Barad is concerned with *how* the practice, performance, or observer are ineluctably constitutive of the phenomena and how representations are 'productive evocations, provocations, and generative material articulations or reconfigurings of what is and what is possible' (Barad, 2007, p. 389).

What would it look like for scholars to engage in post (non) representational thinking and research? For Vannini (2015), it would involve a temporal shift: from attempting to represent the past to attending to the emerging, ensuing, unfolding, arising, erupting, modulating, and materialising of the now and the next. Similarly, McCormack (2003) contends that non-representational practices are undergirded by the ontological commitment to view the world as immanent and the epistemological deprioritisation of representations as makers of meaning. Anderson and Harrison (2016) take a similar position, averring that representations are themselves enactors, not just mediators, of realities. The post (non) representational imaginary dovetails with Barad's (2007) *agential realist* account, where representationalism's obsession with correlation and resemblance is rethought as 'performative enactments' (p. 49). That is, the apparatuses used in the observation and representation of events, experiences, performances, and practices '*play a constitutive role in the production of objects and subjects and matter and meaning'* (Barad, 2007, p. 56). They are implicated in the world's becoming.

To relinquish representationalism would demand we acknowledge 'vibrant materials … [recognising that the] first language is not words' (Bennett, 2020, p. xxiv). The communicative modality of affects, timbres, sensations, sensings, energies, enchantments, vibrations, intensities, auras, and intuitions are in excess of the representational capture of language (Bissell, 2010; Vannini, 2015). As Gorman and Andrews (2023) indicate: 'representationalism tends to leave a sizeable portion of the world unrepresented, particularly the many subtle, unspoken and often unintentional micro performances and practices involved in the reproduction of everyday life' (p. 382). New materialist scholarship – with its attention to processual movements and flows, and to a critique of the linguistic and discursive as sole constructors and conductors of living and lived realities – is in the spirit of the post (non) representational (Daya, 2019; Fox & Alldred, 2022b; Labanyi, 2010; MacLure, 2013a).

Post (non) representational research is situated within and amongst the everyday: 'pre-individuality; practices; things; experimentation; affect and sensation; and space' (Ulmer, 2017, p. 839; also see Anderson & Harrison, 2016; Bissell, 2010; Crouch, 2001). For Anderson and Ash (2015), 'non-representational methods are a part of styles of research and analysis that treat non-representational phenomena as at once conditioned and conditions' (p. 35). Hence, for post (non) representational researchers, *backgrounds* are a fecund topic of inquiry (Vannini, 2015). For example, work on affective atmospheres demonstrates that the atmosphere of a space or locale reciprocally affects bodies just as the affective valences of bodies, objects, and discourses intensify or wane the atmosphere (Anderson, 2009a; Anderson & Ash, 2015). Post (non) representational research bids us to 'slow the quick jump to representational thinking and evaluative critique long enough to find ways of approaching the complex and uncertain objects that fascinate because they literally hit us or exert a pull on us' (Stewart, 2007, p. 4).

Post foundational inquiry

'Emergent, relational, responsive, involuntary, and inventive' (Jackson & Mazzei, 2024, p. 3), post foundational inquiry reveals that the bedrock upon which the methods, methodologies, and epistemologies of conventional qualitative research stake their claims for certainty is unstable, quaking, and crumbling (see Jong, 2023; Taylor & Benozzo, 2023). Kuby and Bozalek (2024) suggest that *post* foundational research – indicative of a bygone or *bygoing* era – is better interpreted as an invitation to view foundations 'as permanently contingent, open to reconfigurations, and assisting in alternative productions' (p. 181). Eliding summative analyses that normalise and universalise knowledge claims, post foundational inquiry revels in openness and aporias; thought unmanifest; materialisations in process, generated in relation with the world's becoming (Jackson & Mazzei, 2024; St. Pierre, 2024a). Studies of affect are emblematic of this approach.

Like non-representational theory, post foundational research transitions from practices of deconstruction to *poesis*: the creation of new modes of ontologically orientated, philosophically positioned knowledge (Jackson & Mazzei, 2024; Vannini, 2015). The crucial point of post foundational inquiry is 'beginning in the midst' (Jackson & Mazzei, 2024, p. 3). Just as the rhizome has no genesis and terminus but a perpetual knotty middle (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), inquirers are, too, ever 'in the middle of things' (Jackson & Mazzei, 2024, p. 3). In post foundational inquiry there are no predefined tracks; method is refused; philosophy, theory, and concepts organise and synthesise (un)thought (St. Pierre, 2024a).

Post paradigmatic pickings

Earlier, I stated that I do not lay roots down in any one post paradigm exclusively. I instead thread together the cohesions and *tinker* (Kincheloe et al., 2018) with the vicissitudes in and across post qualitative, post (non) representational, and post foundational inquiry. I lay out below how I pleat together a 'post' medley.

The poststructural backbone bracing post qualitative inquiry is critical of the *cogito* (Lather & St. Pierre, 2013; St. Pierre, 2017, 2019). This is the 'unique, unified, agentive, coherent, self-contained individual/person/self' (St. Pierre, 2017, p. 687), who can speak for themselves (MacLure, 2010). Practices like reflexivity and writing the self (and others), and methods such as interviews, are problematised in post qualitative research (Lather & St. Pierre, 2013; St. Pierre, 2016, 2018, 2023; Stewart et al., 2021). For instance, St. Pierre (2013a) views researcher positionality statements as validatory evocations 'bound to logical positivism/empiricism, objectivism, and realism' (p. 224). For Braidotti, however, shedding the subject's situatedness is a profoundly contentious and worrisome move that negates feminist *politics of location* and renders the subject (the researcher) unaccountable, ungrounded, and unembedded (Braidotti & Strom, 2018).

Having interviewed gay and lesbian individuals and having written from *fugitive* (Hill, 1996), *subaltern* (Spivak, 1988), and *minoritarian* (Braidotti, 2013a, 2017, 2019b; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) knowledges, I have not aligned strictly with the post qualitative proper. Rather, I have worked within a new materialist orientation, thoughtfully attending to material configurations (assemblages) of bodies, objects, places, spaces, and temporalities (Marn & Wolgemuth, 2017; Schadler, 2019).

Just as 'there are many posthumanisms … each [with] different twists, turns, and ways of thinking about methodology' (Ulmer, 2017, p. 832), there are other formulations of poststructuralism (Butler, 1990). In contradistinction to the strain of poststructuralism that post qualitative inquiry advances and applies – producing, paradoxically, the very binarism poststructuralism contests (Gerrard et al., 2017; Zierhofer, 2002) – I view the dialogical nature of the interview as an 'inculcat[ion] into [a] pre-existing "structuralist" language system that partially shapes [our] identities' (Baxter, 2016, p. 36). In other words, the interview is a site of *subjectivisation* – the process of becoming, constituting, and affirming oneself as a subject (Bonham & Bacchi, 2017). I am all the while cognisant that one cannot represent becoming

(Stivale, 2014) when ‘becoming is creation’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 106) and ‘always in the middle’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 293).

Post qualitative inquiry and post foundational inquiry stand in contrast to pre-established methods and methodology (Jackson & Mazzei, 2024). However, the methodological indifference shared by post qualitative inquiry and post foundational research is still carried out by ‘non-representational researchers’: ‘interviews, focus groups, observations, participant observations, introspections, archival research, case studies’ (Vannini, 2015, p. 11; also see Anderson & Ash, 2015). I have employed ‘conventional humanist qualitative research methodology[ies]’ (St. Pierre, 2024c, p. 8) – ethnography, heuristic inquiry, phenomenology, and narrative – albeit read diffractively through ‘the posts’. In so doing I have called into question received concepts and categories such as the *human*, temporality, spatiality, representation, materiality, and agency. Moreover, in the post qualitative temper, I have addressed the inadequacies of language, and used deconstruction to rethink the concepts of *voice*, *experience*, *data*, *the field*, and *validity* (see Plateau # Deconstructing the signifiers of qualitative research).

Consistent across this ‘post’ triad is creativity and experimentation. I have rethought, reassembled, rehabilitated, and rejiggered, through the practice of diffraction, the humanist qualitative methodologies and the conventional handling of data. Refusing codification, thematisation, and patterning, I have thought with theory ‘to show the suppleness of truth and meaning’ (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 34). After the crises of representation and legitimation I do not rely exclusively on representationalism but diffract the co-researchers’ stories – at times written in the subversive genre of creative non-fiction – with theory. Given that we are ‘always already theory-laden’ (St. Pierre & Roulston, 2006, p. 677), the research partners’ accounts, too, are data that I think with. These empirical data were heuristic incitements, sparks, and stirrings to thought that allowed me to think with different concepts.

Plateau # Deconstructing the signifiers of qualitative research

> Deconstruction can annihilate an image of thought such that it can never be thought again. (St. Pierre, 2017, p. 687)

In this plateau I offer a metadiscourse that foregrounds why the signifiers *voice*, *experience*, *data*, *the field*, and *validity* in their humanist, (neo)positivistic condition demand a redescription and rearticulation under 'the posts'. Using the poststructural practice of deconstruction, I place these particularities of research *sous rature* – under erasure (Derrida, 1974/1997; Spivak, 1974/1997). This is expressed by applying a ~~strikethrough~~ to the relevant word. Jackson and Mazzei (2012) note that 'to put a signifier under erasure is to expose the uncertainty of what that signifier might be or could become … [it] is to engage in the process of using them and troubling them simultaneously, rendering them inaccurate yet necessary' (p. 18).

It is true that we are inevitably reliant upon a language of metaphysics that precedes us. As Derrida (1978) describes:

> there is no sense in doing without the concepts of metaphysics in order to shake metaphysics. We have no language – no syntax and no lexicon – which is foreign to this history; we can pronounce not a single destructive proposition which has not already had to slip into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest (pp. 280–281).

From this point forward, I place the terms *voice*, *experience*, *data*, *the field*, and *validity sous rature* to trouble their humanist and positivist genealogies. Terms like ~~voice~~, ~~experience~~, ~~data~~, ~~the field~~, and ~~validity~~ are so entrenched within the epistemological/methodological lexicon 'that it seems futile to argue for [their] expulsion' (Scott, 1991, p. 797). Albeit, while we may not be able to dispense with this taxonomy we can critically hold it to account, and *sous rature* unanchors the above concepts from the moorings of conventional research practice (St. Pierre, 2011, 2021c).



Voice

> There is, of course, no 'real' to be accurately captured, no 'true' representation of voice – our own or those we gather *in* or *from* the field. (Segall, 2001, p. 589)

The status of participant ~~voice~~ is recurrently privileged in qualitative research (Britzman, 1995b; Grant, 2014; Jackson & Mazzei, 2008; Lather, 2009; Lather & St. Pierre, 2013; Mazzei, 2013; Mazzei & Jackson, 2009, 2012; St. Pierre, 2008). Qualitative researchers frequently express fidelity towards *phonocentricism*, believing 'that voice makes present the truth and *reflects* the meaning of an experience that has already happened' (Mazzei & Jackson, 2009, p. 4), that it is 'the truest, most authentic data and/or evidence' (St. Pierre, 2008, p. 319; also see St. Pierre, 2018). In other words, participants *speak for themselves* through an individual ~~voice~~ that, prima facie, authentically and authoritatively describes their ~~experiences~~.

'Matters of voice', as Van Maanen (1988) tells us, 'can quickly grow complicated' (p. ix). Certainly, under a postmodern/poststructural paradigm the notion of ~~voice~~ giving a facsimile of *truth* is problematical (Jackson, 2003; Mazzei & Jackson, 2009; St. Pierre, 2008). Barad (2003) has commented on what they call the 'representationalist belief in the power of words' (p. 802), where through the triptych of 'words, knowers, and things' (p. 813) truth can be distilled. The humanist positioning of ~~voice~~ as foundational is, however, uncritical of 'the historical, contextual, and discursive circumstances constituting the subjectivity and intersubjectivity involved in the production and performance of voice; the positioning of subjects within structures of power; and the ambiguity and contradictions within and between individuals and their lives' (Grant, 2014, p. 545; also see Rhedding-Jones, 1995).

These remarks are not advocative for the absenting or abolition of ~~voice~~, nor are they denunciative: they do not imply that 'voices are incapable of expressing truth' (Jackson, 2003, p. 704) or that 'participants don't have many interesting things to tell us' (St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014, p. 716). More accurately, this deconstruction is a reminder that the ~~voices~~ of the co-researchers are multiplicitous, provisional, discontinuous, and disarticulable from the contexts in which they are produced. ~~Voices~~ are always (re)interpreted, (re)presented, and (re)storied, peppered with inclusions and omissions, *overwritten* (Mazzei, 2009), and situated within relations that are 'historically contingent, contextually bound, and socially constructed' (Jackson, 2003, p. 704).

It is possible that ~~voice~~ can exceed its ambit of belonging to (human) research participants alone. Drawing from Deleuze and Guattari's idea of the *Body without Organs*, Mazzei (2013) offers what she calls the *Voice without Organs*. This is 'a complex network of human and nonhuman agents that exceeds the traditional notion of the individual' (p. 734), threading together the research participants, data, theory, and analysis into an assemblage of relations. I call upon the *Voice without Organs* to broaden the scope of ~~voice~~ to include the research partners', colleagues', scholars', and my own ~~voice~~, along with everyday interactions, public discourse, television, film, and music. None is privileged over the other; all have equal epistemological weight.

Experience

> What could be truer, after all, than a subject's own account of what he or she has lived through? (Scott, 1991, p. 777)

The epigraph by Scott (1991) may well be axiomatic to the humanist qualitative researcher; an undeniable fact. But, like ~~voice~~, the notion of ~~experience~~ 'as an origin or source of knowledge and insight' (Stoller, 2009, p. 708), or '"the most authentic kind of truth"' (Williams, 1985, as cited in Scott, 1991, p. 781), is a zone of contestation within postmodern/poststructural episteme. In qualitative research, ~~experience~~ is frequently read with the notion of *presence* (Derrida, 1974/1997), and 'presence is the locus of truth' (Denzin, 1994b, p. 189).

A humanist ontology assumes that 'there are representations on the one hand and … separate entities awaiting representation on the other' (Barad, 2003, p. 7). Yet, the *crisis of representation* during the mid-1980s marked as incommensurable the 'claim to legitimacy on the authority of experience' (Scott, 1991, p. 776) within the ethnographic text (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; also see Flaherty et al., 2002; Fontana, 1994; Sikes & Goodson, 2017). A postmodern/poststructural theoretical position observes that recourse to ~~experience~~ through ~~voice~~ – inescapably contingent and fractious – invariably produces (re)tellings that are 'always selective, partial, and in tension' (Britzman, 1991, as cited in Jackson, 2003, p. 704). As Denzin (1994c) states: 'there can never be a final, accurate representation of what was meant or said, only different textual representations of different experience' (p. 296; also see Segall, 2001).

Likewise, texts are read from one's social location and ~~experiences~~ (Sikes & Goodson, 2017; Van Maanen, 1988), and thus generate proliferative interpretations.

It was suggested earlier that theories are not 'unified, pure, and monolithic' (Butler, 1990, p. ix). Hence, iterations of poststructuralism do not call for the abolition of ~~experience~~ (Stoller, 2009). There are 'particular conditions under which the body necessitates its presence' (Somerville, 2004, p. 49). As Honeychurch (1996) says of the violence done to the queer body: 'we come to knowledge obliged to consider our bodies with a deliberateness not required of heterosexuals' (p. 350).

A postmodern/poststructural reading of the co-researchers' ~~experiences~~ does not equate to perceiving these experiences with incredulity, 'but rather [they become] that which [I] seek to explain, that about which knowledge is produced' (Scott, 1991, p. 780). The task, then, is to 'take as [my] project *not* the reproduction and transmission of knowledge said to be arrived at through experience [solely], but the analysis of the production of that knowledge itself' (Scott, 1991, p. 797). As 'site[s] of information and practice, of regulation, power, and resistance' (Pillow, 1997, p. 360), the queer body experiences the e/affects of the material-discursive not experienced by heterosexual people. And while postmodernism '*suspects* all truth claims', it 'does allow us to know "something" without claiming to know everything. Having a partial, local, historical knowledge is still knowing' (Richardson, 2000, p. 928). It is the queer body that becomes orientated (Ahmed, 2006); the heterosexual body is unmarked in its putative normativity; it is the queer body that 'bear[s] the marks of our culture, practices, and policies' (Pillow, 1997, p. 360).

How, then, do we reconcile this onto-epistemological conundrum of ~~experience~~ as a source of knowing? Scott (2001) tells us that 'the task … is not to drop the concept of experience, but to historicize it, to ask what constituted experience for the subjects … and for us' (as cited in Stoller, 2009, p. 729). One possibility is to take the body, already constituted through theory (Gannon, 2006; Somerville, 2004; St. Pierre, 2017), and 'bring [it] … into a discursive relation with contemporary theoretical formulations of the body' (Somerville, 2004, p. 50). ~~Experience~~ becomes no longer 'an unquestioned precondition' (Stoller, 2009, p. 708). Somerville (2004) points to *naïve accounts of experience*: experiential descriptions that 'enable the lived body to be researched in an acknowledgement that we continue to experience our bodies in certain ways while also being able to deconstruct that experience' (Somerville, 2004, p. 50). This (new) materialist approach allows us to acknowledge the unique experiences of

‘the closet’ for the lesbian and gay co-researchers, attentive to the spatial, temporal, material, and discursive influences that reify ‘the closest’ and constitute subjects through their ~~experiences~~.

Data

> [It] is no longer possible to imagine the researcher positioned at arm’s length from the data, exercising interpretive dominion over them, conferring meaning upon them, and marshalling them as evidence in a greater cause. (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2018, p. 816)

Much has been written problematising ~~data~~ within qualitative research (Brinkmann, 2014; Denzin, 2013; Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2018; Lather & St. Pierre, 2013; St. Pierre, 1997a, 2013a, 2023). Owing to its positivist/humanist genealogy, the term is contentious, ‘irretrievably contaminated by humanist, scientific, and representational assumptions’ (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2018, p. 807). The humanist presupposition is that ~~data~~ are ‘mute, brute, passive, simple, and concrete’ (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2018, p. 806). In other words, whatever ~~data~~ are, they are unauthored entities necessitating, through human (and only human) intervention, ‘“practices of formalization”’ (Pascale, 2011, as cited in St. Pierre, 2013a, p. 224). Barad’s (2003, 2007) concept of *intra-action*, however, contests Cartesian distinctions, including the independent researcher whose ‘prior existence [is] independent [of] entities/relata’ (Barad, 2003, p. 815). The researcher is not a pre-existing producer of knowledge, meaning, and worth, just as ~~data~~ do not wait idly for collection and treatment. Both are constituted through intra-action.

The researcher not only determines what qualifies as ~~data~~ (Sikes & Goodson, 2017) but is also the ~~data~~ collection instrument (Bourke, 2014), the apparatus (Barad, 2007). It is through the researcher’s interpositions by way of the commitment to collecting, sorting, ordering, coding, and thematising that ~~data~~ are teleologically bestowed with epistemological worth. Positivism rears its head via formulaic processes of analysing, triangulating, validating, and replicating (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2010). Oxymoronically, these practices, much like coding, are seemingly unmindful that language is already impregnated with meanings (St. Pierre, 2013a; St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014), and the process of ‘translation/interpretation/representation, like

any act of language, *produces* rather than *reflects* reality' (Jackson, 2003, p. 704; also see Richardson, 1990).

In this study, inspired by queer theory, postmodernism, and new materialism, ~~data~~ are a 'heteroglossia of texts' (King, 1999, p. 475). ~~Data~~ are not limited to the ethnographic interview material, but include theory, television, film, literature, music, feelings and intuitions, ruminations, dreams, conversations, objects, nature, and places and spaces.

The field

The term ~~data~~ inevitably invokes its counterpart, ~~the field~~, which refers to the locale(s) the researcher – the 'fieldworker-*cum*-ethnographer' (Britzman, 1995b, p. 233) – travels to in order to collect the bits and bobs to bestow with epistemological value (Jackman, 2016; Mazzei, 2007a, 2007b; St. Pierre, 2014, 2017, 2023). ~~Fieldwork~~ has been argued as the premier way to understand others and their worlds (Van Maanen, 1988). It is in the *out there* of ~~the field~~, after all, that the researcher 'share[s] firsthand the environment, problems, background, language, rituals, and social relations' (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 3) of the investigated group, for the purpose of producing a 'rich, concrete, complex and hence truthful account of the social world' (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 3).

~~The field~~ has become an overdetermined site in conventional qualitative inquiry, which 'assumes a point of origin' (Jackman, 2016, p. 113). The doing of ~~field~~work is viewed as distinct from, and prior to, the transcribing of ~~voice~~ recordings and ~~field~~notes and, naturally, the writing of the research report. ~~The field~~ is, according to Nash (2016), 'constituted through relations of power that define participants and researchers in hierarchical ways' (p. 134). In related terms, St. Pierre (2017) identifies how Cartesian distinctions of inside(r)/outside(r) become associated with ~~the field~~ as 'a place of cultural difference the researcher travels to, an inside (the Same) against the outside that's different from it (the Other)' (p. 689).

~~The field~~ has been (re)theorised as a labile spatiotemporal relation (Crouch, 2001; Nash, 2016; Rooke, 2016). Expectedly, reimagining ~~the field~~ consequently destabilises 'everything we "do" in it, like collecting data' (St. Pierre, 2017, p. 690). Ropers-Huilman (1999) suggests that ~~the field(s)~~ are always carried with us through daily movements. There is no discrete point of departure. Postmodernism, poststructuralism, and queer theory draw attention to ontological, epistemological, and methodological questions of ~~the field~~. That is: 'What/when [is] the data

[of a] study?' (St. Pierre, 2017, p. 690); 'when does fieldwork start and end?' (Di Feliciantonio et al., 2017, p. 460); 'where – both physically and epistemologically – is "Here" and where is "There" in our ethnographic endeavors?' (Segall, 2001, p. 581). These authors suggest that ~~fieldwork~~ is leaky and open-ended, with no fixed beginning or end. St. Pierre (2017) evinces the non-teleology of ~~the field~~ by describing a research project in which ~~data~~ emerged across a liquid temporality:

> The study began unofficially (when I was five) much sooner than it began officially (when I was middle-aged). It began before it began, and I had always been in the middle of it. I had been interviewing and observing in Milton – collecting and interpreting data – for decades before I returned to study it for my dissertation research. (St. Pierre, 2017, p. 689)

How do I qualify ~~the field~~ in this study? It is not simply spawned in the spacetime of interviewing the research partners. ~~The field~~ is – has been – a part of me all along vis-à-vis the intra-actions of human, non-human, and more-than-human agents and relations that compose and recompose my lifeworld. In 'reimagin[ing] what counts as data' (Murphy & Lugg, 2016, p. 371), I reimagine ~~the field~~, which in its diffuseness is more like an atmosphere: a constellation of relations registered by my sensorium; my living the 'closet'; the theory I encounter; the writing I produce; driving trips; shopping at the supermarket; cruising at 35,000 feet; walking my dachshund; working at my desk. My interpretation of ~~the field~~, then, might best be described as being-in-the-world.

Validity

> Legitimation becomes visible as a problem and an object of study only at the point in which it is called into question. (Jameson, 1984, p. viii)

> New forms of knowledge require new forms of evaluation, and even more so, new ways of valuing the work we do. (E. Manning, 2015, p. 53)

The conventional criteria superintending qualitative research – ~~validity~~, ~~generalisability~~, ~~reliability~~, and ~~trustworthiness~~ – are perceived as the hallmarks of research quality control (Cho & Trent, 2006; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mathison, 1988; McDonough & McDonough, 1997; Scheurich, 1996; Smith, 1984; Tracy, 2010). In fact, *criteria* have been called the frontier 'that separates modernists from postmodernists, foundationalists from antifoundationalists, empiricists from interpretivists' (Bochner, 2000, p. 266). Perhaps this is right. Lyotard (1984), for example, has claimed that:

> a postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he [*sic*] writes, the work he [*sic*] produces are not in principle governed by preestablished rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgement, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. (p. 81)

The *crisis of legitimation* has confounded the evaluatory schemata of qualitative research (Denzin, 1994a). A poststructural position, for example, perceives recourse to ~~validity~~ as an exhortation to textual authority. Denzin (1994a) explains that 'critical poststructuralism reads the discussions of logical, construct, internal, ethnographic, and external validity, text-based data, triangulation, trustworthiness, credibility, grounding, naturalistic indicators, fit, coherence, comprehensiveness … plausibility, truth, relevance … as attempts to re-authorize a text's authority in the postpositivist moment' (pp. 296–297).

An appeal to ~~validity~~, as an objective, empirical-centric approach of establishing certitude, is never value-free, or unblemished by the marks of the human (and only human), but is emblematic of power relations imposed on readers (Denzin, 1994a; Foucault, 1980; Seidman, 1991). As Scheurich (1996) comments: 'validity boundaries are always ideological power alignments. They always create insiders and outsiders' (p. 53). Aguinaldo (2004) further expatiates on this point, observing that the relations of power undergirding ~~validity~~ are censorious, '*polic[ing] the social science enterprises ... through de/legitimation of social knowledge, research practice, and experiential possibilities*' (p. 127).

The interpretive turn in social science research has determined that achieving ~~validity~~ is beyond the bounds of possibility. Petitions to ~~validity~~, however framed, 'are simply different masks that conceal an underlying sameness' (Scheurich, 1996, p. 49). This begs the question: 'How are qualitative studies to be evaluated in the contemporary poststructural moment?' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 17). Enlarging this conundrum further, what system of assessment, if any, is diachronic and malleable enough in the post qualitative, post (non) representational, post foundational epoch? What evaluatory barometer is dynamic enough to possibly respond to ambulant process and immanent ontologies concerned with *becoming* (Braidotti, 2006b, 2023; Braidotti & Strom, 2018)? To the self-organising, agentic, intra-acting capacities of matter and materiality (Barad, 2003, 2007; Braidotti, 2019b; Monforte, 2018; Tillman, 2015)? To ephemerally *felt* and *sensed somethings* – rhythms, ripples, and atmospheres – of affect?

The ethos of posthumanism has offered a reassessment of ~~validity~~ not within the 'geometrical optics' (Barad, 2007, p. 85) of one-to-one representation, 'but in the specific character of the futurities enabled and disabled by the ontologically generative action of inquiry' (Pratt & Rosiek, 2023, p. 897). The impact of an inquiry (not in the neoliberal sense) is measured vis-à-vis the futural (im)possibilities (dis)allowed by the research process and product. Thinking *response-ably*, I recognise this inquiry as 'an ontologically generative act' (Pratt & Rosiek, 2023, p. 904). Knowledges garnered by and through this study are mutable across readings, forwarding the potentiality to change the research partners, readers, and myself (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2023).

In contradistinction to the 'logical purity' (Scheurich, 1997, p. 30) of modernist, quasi- (post/neo) positivistic metrics of evaluation contested by the crisis of legitimation (Scheurich, 1996), I call upon Richardson's (2000) postmodern notion of *crystallisation*. As a deconstruction of ~~validity~~, to crystallise is to recognise a text as a crystal: 'combin[ing] symmetry and substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities, and angles of approach' (Richardson, 2000, p. 934). Whereas triangulation is a blunt, three-pronged, two-dimensional tool, crystals are polygonal, 'prisms that reflect externalities *and* refract within themselves, creating different colors, patterns, and arrays, casting off in different directions' (Richardson, 2000, p. 934). Attridge (1999) points to the fact that every reading of a text constitutes an act of singularity. The reader at *this* spatiotemporal context is/will be a different subject who arrives at the next reading, and who, in being (re)worked on again, will respond anew (also see Davies & Davies, 2007). A crystallographic ~~validity~~ responds precisely to this viewpoint of subjective becoming.

Crystallisation cuts ties with an optics of reflection for diffraction. Earlier I expressed how *thinking with theory* keeps meaning mobile and mercurial by rupturing anachronistic treatments of ~~data~~ qua coding, thematic analysis, and so on. Put into conversation with crystallisation, each face of the crystal corresponds to a particular theoretical or conceptual armature. Richardson (2000) tells us that with crystallisation, 'what we see depends upon our angle of repose' (p. 934); there is no single *legislator* of knowledge (Lyotard, 1984). When light hits the crystal's face and splits into a prismatic outpouring of coloured shards, new matterings and patternings of 'the closet' and 'coming out' are produced. Upon striking a new facet – a differential fractal of theory – another illumination of 'the closet' and 'coming out', another act of worlding, is generated (see Figure 4). As Barad (2007) explicates, praxes of knowledge production are 'material-discursive practices [that] produce different material configurings of the world' (p. 72).

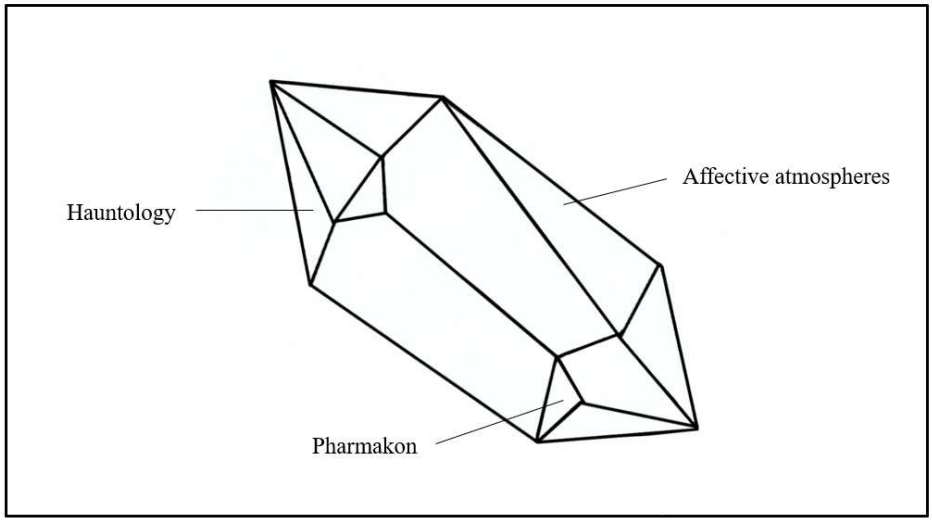


Figure 4: Crystallisation meets thinking with theory

Deleuze (1989) has also called on the dynamism of the crystal to expound on the *indiscernibility* of the actual and the virtual. 'There is no virtual which does not become actual in relation to the actual, the latter becoming virtual through the same relation' (Deleuze, 1989, p. 69). Both the actual and the virtual coexist as coequals on a *plane of immanence*, described by St. Pierre (2019) as:

> a *flat surface* of virtuals or potentials or forces or singularities moving at different speeds that produce but do not condition the actual. The virtual and the actual do not

> exist in a hierarchy, as in a two-world ontology, because they exist on the same plane … both the virtual and the actual are real. (p. 5)

In this project, readers become nodes of connectivity bound up in *the folding* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) of the actual (the text) and the virtual (futural imaginaries potentiated by the stirrings, provocations, wonderings, and actions materialised by reading the text). ~~Validity~~ is the measure of these potentialities.

Plateau # Methodological mise-en-scène

Putting 'the posts' to work

As this plateau will demonstrate, the ready-made methodologies of ethnography, heuristic inquiry, phenomenology, and narrative in their current (humanistic) arrangements are intermeshed by Cartesian and anthropocentric logics. Laced within them is a specific iteration of *the human* at the apex of natureculture ecologies; spatiality and temporality – in their inconsequentiality – *precede* social phenomena; and language is seen as the direct transit of reality into textual representation. Unknotting and dislodging the humanist moorings of these methodologies is a process of 'making and unmaking and *re*making and redissolution of…old and new categorical imaginings' (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 23). To portray my process of 'making', 'unmaking', and '*re*making', I present a script inspired by Brechtian epic theatre, drawing from his practice of the *alienation effect* or *Verfremdungseffekt*. I use this technique to illustrate the process of taking the above methodological repertoire – in their conventional visage – then recasting and reworking their onto-epistemologies by *diffractively* reading them through 'the posts'.



Scholarly becoming – A play

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

DR ORTHODOXY: a curmudgeon academic and stickler for qualitative conventionality

SPECTRE: the presence haunting qualitative methodology

JAMES: a PhD student in the process of breaking with methodological normalcy

CHORUS

TRANSGRESSIVE DISRUPTOR: mentor for JAMES

ONYX: JAMES'S beloved dachshund and writing companion

'THE POSTS': philosophies that challenge SPECTRE'S conventionalism and humanist/anthropocentric onto-episteme

KAYE:
OLIVIA:
NICOLE:
GEOFFREY:
T:
TIM:
MK:

Co-researchers

NON-HUMAN ACTORS

CLOSET

COMPUTER CHAIR

DESK and COMPUTER

ACT 1. LEARNING TO FOLLOW

SCENE I. UNIVERSITY – LECTURE THEATRE

DR ORTHODOXY is standing at a lectern, bloviating about methodological conventionality. The audience are positioned as the class of Higher Degree Research students.

DR ORTHODOXY: *(to audience)* You've got to stick to the well-trodden methodological path. Don't deviate.
Laptop keys tapping and pen scribbling sounds played.

DR ORTHODOXY (cont'd): A central *research question* is essential for every doctoral project. A *research design* is like a blueprint for the collection, measurement, and analysis of *data*.
Laptop keys tapping and pen scribbling sounds play again.

DR ORTHODOXY (cont'd): To answer your *research question*, you must select the most appropriate and feasible *methodology and methods*.

Enter SPECTRE, imperceptible to DR ORTHODOXY and JAMES. SPECTRE crosses the stage, then exits.

Enter CHORUS.

CHORUS: *(to audience)* 'A specter is haunting [qualitative research] — the specter of [conventionality]' *(Marx & Engels, 1898, p. 11).*[10]

CHORUS (cont'd): *(to audience)* JAMES is taught that methodology must follow a predetermined path. This play will show how JAMES unlearned this dogma.

SCENE II. UNIVERSITY – LIBRARY

Set changes in view of the audience. Bookshelves line the walls. JAMES is sitting at a desk, typing on the laptop.

Enter SPECTRE. JAMES is startled.

[10] A note for the reader: the italicised in-text citations acknowledge the source of the literature but are not intended to be read as part of the line when performing the play.

SPECTRE: Don't mind me, I like to visit the newcomers … well, I tend to stick around the long-timers, too. Careers have been made in my image. Tenured positions offered.

SPECTRE glides over behind JAMES, studying the contents of the laptop screen.

SPECTRE: A PhD on 'the closet' and 'coming out'?

JAMES nods.

SPECTRE: Got to finish those assignments for DR ORTHODOXY – must pass the unit to move ahead.

JAMES: *(sighs)* How are we meant to know the methodologies we'll choose at this early stage, with such little time?

SPECTRE: By taking the path most-travelled. Why reinvent the wheel? Look at ethnography, heuristic inquiry, phenomenology, and narrative – DR ORTHODOXY will love them.

SCENE III. UNIVERSITY – AUDITORIUM. SEVERAL WEEKS LATER

'Higher Degree Research Students' Coursework Conference' is projected on the screen.

It is time for JAMES'S presentation. They stand at the lectern, facing the audience.

JAMES: *(to audience)* Good afternoon, everyone, today I am presenting the research proposal for my PhD study, which examines experiences of 'the closet' and 'coming out' for lesbian and gay individuals in Victoria, Australia. The study

uses a multi-methodological approach: ethnography, heuristic inquiry, phenomenology, and narrative.

JAMES (cont'd): Ethnography is a sociological and anthropological research methodology engaged in the study of cultures, societies, or phenomena, and a textualized product *(Britzman, 1995b; Clifford, 1988; Geertz, 1988; Riemer, 2012)*. Ethnography involves the ethnographer's immersion into the social-cultural scene under investigation, with the point of 'obtain[ing] an insider view of a particular dimension of people's everyday lives by participating, overtly or covertly, in it for a sustained period of time' *(Willig, 2014, p. 145)*. To achieve this 'insider view', I will interview the co-researchers and extract finely tuned details of their experiences *(Clifford, 1986; Hammersley, 2006)*, maintaining an 'intense reliance on personalized seeing, hearing, experiencing' *(Van Maanen, 2006, p. 18)*.

JAMES (cont'd): Heuristic inquiry is a methodology purposed to explicate lived experience. The heuristic researcher is propelled into inquiry by their internal desire to illuminate 'the nature and meaning of experience' *(Moustakas, 1990, p. 9)*, given their experiential understanding. Hence, it is my experiences of 'the closet' that leads me to explore the experiences of others. I call on the research partners, who have been experientially proximate to the phenomenon, and through a 'plurality of voices', 'deeper understanding[s] that result in a full descriptive account of the experience studied' *(Mihalache, 2019, p. 138)* are achieved. Enlisting heuristic inquiry in my study will allow me to concomitantly gain deeper understanding of 'the closet' and underscore the active presence of the research partners in the investigation. As a result of undertaking the heuristic process, a transformation of self takes place.

JAMES (cont'd): The lineage of phenomenology is vast and diverse. Phenomenology originates from the Greek *phainomenon*, '*that which shows itself in itself' (Heidegger, 1962, p. 51)*, and is, fundamentally, the study of lived experience; expressly, how phenomena are perceived by one's consciousness *(Frechette et al., 2020; Laverty, 2003; Pitard, 2019)*. Phenomenology seeks to glean meaning of one's lifeworld, and I will be investigating the essence of co-researchers' experiences of 'the closet' and 'coming out'.

JAMES (cont'd): Narrative has been described as the medium through which people make sense of their experiences and give their lives meaning *(Carolan, 2005; Clandinin, 2006; Richardson, 1990; Sikes & Goodson, 2017; Slembrouck, 2015)*. Our encounters and exchanges with others in everyday life are dialogic and relational. We tell stories about the milestones and mundanities in, and of, our lives.

Narrative methodology has been described as the most illustrative method of investigating and communicating the sociological *(Richardson, 1990)*. This methodology will enable me to (re)present the co-researchers' personal experiences of 'the closet' and 'coming out'. Narrative-focused research is understood as having an emancipatory impetus *(Hendry et al., 2018b)*, giving *voice* to participants – notably participants whose voices have been sidelined and silenced *(Atkinson, 1997; Moon, 2016; Richardson, 1988; Segall, 2001)*. I will privilege the voices of the research partners.

Enter SPECTRE, who stands stage left, and gives an approving nod.

ACT II. AN ETHICO-ONTO-EPISTEMOLOGICAL QUAGMIRE

SCENE I. JAMES'S STUDY

Set changes in view of the audience.

JAMES is having a Zoom supervisory meeting. TRANSGRESSIVE DISRUPTOR'S Zoom screen is projected on the screen.

TRANSGRESSIVE DISRUPTOR: (*lighting a cigarette*) How did the conference go?

JAMES: Shit. I'm starting to read theory and philosophy that rejects the methodologies' presuppositions – qualitative research, period.

TRANSGRESSIVE DISRUPTOR: Don't listen to ORTHODOXY. No, no, NO! Whatever that crusty biddy has said, file it under F.R.O – fuck right off!

JAMES: What can I do? Forms have been signed, milestone presentations completed. Ethnography, heuristic inquiry, phenomenology, and narrative have been put on record.

TRANSGRESSIVE DISRUPTOR: Follow the reading. Break the methodological hivemind. That's the very raison d'être of queer(y)(ing) research!

JAMES: And SPECTRE?

TRANSGRESSIVE DISRUPTOR: I'm going to send you something.

A computer mouse 'click' sound plays and the following (Figure 5) is projected on the screen:

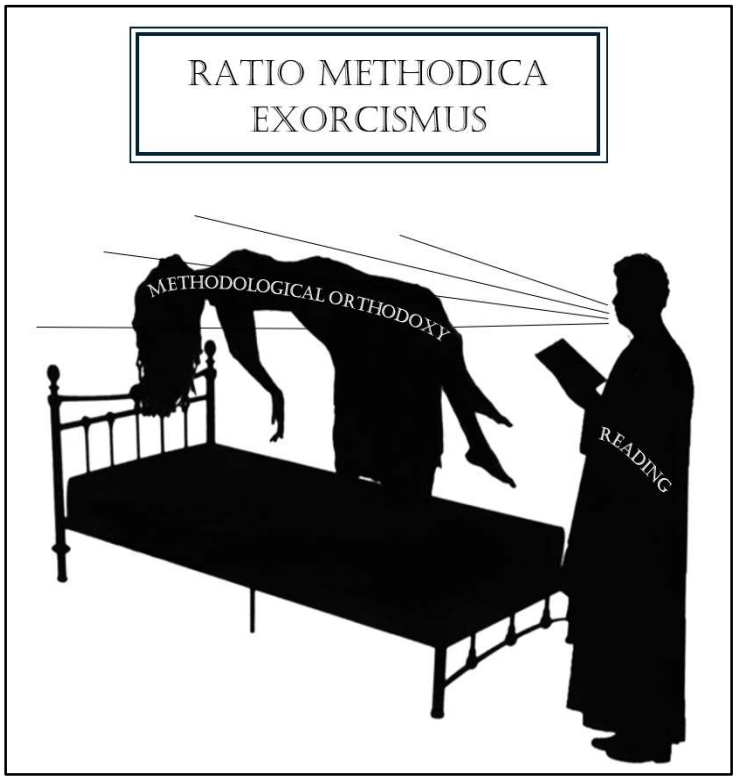


Figure 5: Ratio Methodica Exorcismus – Exorcising the Spectre of humanistic qualitative methodology

TRANSGRESSIVE DISRUPTOR: The biggest threat to SPECTRE is 'questioning what is being made to matter and how that mattering affects what it is possible to do and to think' *(Davies, 2018, p. 121)*. As St. Pierre *(2000)* said:

> our responsibility as researchers is to read widely and deeply in the 'original literature' in order to open up the protective structures we create that limit intelligibility. … keep … research … increasingly unintelligible to itself, in order to produce different knowledge and produce knowledge differently. *(p. 27)*

Set changes in view of the audience.

ACT III. EXORCISING METHODOLOGICAL CONVENTIONALITY

SCENE I. JAMES'S STUDY. SEVERAL MONTHS LATER

Books are now splayed open on the desk; myriad PDFs open on the monitor. JAMES is flicking through a notebook.

A close-up shot of DR ORTHODOXY against a dark background is projected on the screen:

DR ORTHODOXY: What is *your* contribution to knowledge going to be? What shape do you want to make out of *your* material/*data*? What do you see as the *outcomes* of *your* research?
What are the *aims* of *your* research?

Enter CHORUS.

CHORUS: *(to audience)* JAMES has been ethico-onto-epistemologically transformed after reading 'post' philosophies and 'post' approaches to inquiry.

Exit CHORUS.

JAMES (V.O.): (*typing*) How could I answer ORTHODOXY'S questions? I couldn't intuit what would emerge then, and I can't now. St. Pierre (2021b) said that to 'create something new and different … might *not* be recognizable in existing structures of intelligibility' *(p. 6)*. *Data*, *aims*, and *outcomes* belong to a systematised and scientised ontology. And this *your* – *your* contribution to knowledge, *your* research. Isn't the production of knowledge always relational, unfolding through a 'sensitiv[ity] to the strangeness of the world' *(Brinkmann, 2014, p. 724)*.

JAMES (cont'd): I can't abandon the methodologies, but I can rethink them. Push them somewhere else. Read them against the understandings I have gained through 'the posts'.
Enter CHORUS.

CHORUS: *(to audience)* JAMES will purpose the practice of diffraction *(Barad, 2007, 2014)* to rethink the humanistic and anthropocentric underpinnings of ethnography, heuristic inquiry, phenomenology, and narrative – a praxis dovetailing with what Deleuze and Guattari *(1987)* have called *deterritorialization* and *reterritorialization*. Through diffraction, JAMES will *deterritorialise* the humanist and anthropocentric arrangements of the methodologies – reconfiguring their original form. In their revised and reconstructed condition, they are *reterritorialised*: opened up to *new lines of flight (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987)* – movements, trajectories, and flows that eschew forces of constraint and limitation and allow transformative potential.

CHORUS (cont'd): Barad's *(2007, 2014)* notion of diffraction involves reading texts through one another in order to 'illuminate differences as they emerge: how different differences get made, what gets excluded, and how those exclusions matter' *(Barad, 2007, p. 30)*. To read diffractively is to experiment, produce openings, expose firmly held presuppositions to the light of potential reworkings, refigurings, and new imaginaries *(Kleinman & Barad, 2012)*. Enlisting the practice of diffraction 'demands taking risks and embracing the tensions that arise when working with disparate, if not competing assumptions' *(Smith & Monforte, 2020, p. 6)*.

CHORUS (cont'd): *(to audience)* Diffraction is not a comparative reading nor a total and complete refutation, rejection, or refusal of former epistemological underpinnings and offerings.

Rather, a diffractive reading is a *superposition (Barad, 2007; Smith & Monforte, 2020)*, an overlapping.

A video of ocean waves is projected on a screen (click here).

CHORUS (cont'd): It is in the course of this overlapping that JAMES engages in what Barad has called a *dis/continuity*: 'a cutting together-apart (one move) that doesn't deny creativity and innovation but understands its indebtedness and entanglements to the past and the future' *(Juelskjær & Schwennesen, 2012, p. 16)*.

SCENE II. JAMES'S STUDY[11]

Set changes in view of the audience. The sound of soft patters of rain plays. ONYX is cocooned within his blanket. JAMES returns to their office with a fresh cup of coffee, sits in the groaning desk chair, and faces the two glaring monitors.

JAMES (V.O.): Diffraction – reading insights through one another … not about deletion, about reworking … 'taking risks and embracing the tensions' … 'understand[ing] … indebtedness and entanglements to the past and the future'.

ONYX begins to bark, startling JAMES. Enter SPECTRE.

SPECTRE: *(to JAMES)* I told you to follow ethnography, heuristic inquiry, phenomenology, and narrative and you couldn't go wrong.

[11] Given this section is a diffractive and deconstructive re-reading of the methodologies – and although being a play – I place under *sous rature* the terms ~~voice~~, ~~experience~~, ~~data~~, ~~the field~~, and ~~validity~~ to graphically demonstrate my change in thinking.

JAMES reaches for a leaflet of paper and brandishes a printout of Figure 5: Ratio Methodica Exorcismus – Exorcising the Spectre of humanistic qualitative methodology.

JAMES: *Go back to the void!*

SPECTRE hisses and thrashes. Cue smoke machine. Lights flicker rapidly.

Exit SPECTRE, JAMES, and ONYX. Set changes in view of the audience.

Act IV. METHODOLOGICAL REDUX: DIFFRACTIVE DISCUSSIONS

SCENE I. HOME OFFICE/LOUNGE

The stage resembles a comfortable home office/lounge. There is an armchair, two side chairs, a desk with a computer and a jutting chair, and a closet.

CHORUS enters and sits on the side chair to the left.

CHORUS: This is the methodological *plane of immanence (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987)*, a space where thinking comes together, and JAMES recounts their experimentations with 'post' philosophies for a methodological reconfiguring.

'Diffracting ethnography through "the posts"' is projected on the screen.

JAMES enters with 'THE POSTS': JAMES sits on the armchair centrestage; 'THE POSTS' on the side chair stage right.

CHORUS: (*to JAMES)* Should we maybe start broadly with the elements of the methodologies you're reworking?

JAMES: The common humanistic and anthropocentric denominators of ethnography, heuristic inquiry, phenomenology, and narrative are *(JAMES gestures to the screen, which projects the following)*:

- a sovereign individual who can reflexively use language – stable, unambiguous, and reflective – to speak to their experiences
- matter is quarantined from having any real bearing on the unfolding of the social and matters of worlding
- the metaphysics of spatiality and temporality are simple *containers* of reality. (Barad, 2007; Brown, 2000)

CHORUS: *(to 'THE POSTS')* How would we approach a diffractive reading of ethnography through 'the pos' ... *you*?

'THE POSTS': Ethnography and its practitioners presuppose that there is a *known* and therefore *knowable* reality to be reported on *(Britzman, 1995b; Richardson, 1988)*.

CHORUS: Ah, yes, the Cartesian dichotomy of self/other, insider/outsider, objective/subjective.

JAMES: *(to audience)* According to the onto-epistemologies of new materialism and posthumanism, bodies, time, and space are not separate metaphysical relations as in conventional ethnography but are (re)produced through their *intra-actions (Barad, 2007; Duff, 2010; Fox & Alldred, 2022a; Simpson, 2014)*. The researcher is an apparatus of the research; never absent, always bound up.

CHORUS: Conventional ethnography evacuates the ethnographer, Poof! Gone! And so temporally normative *(Rooke, 2016)*. ~~The field~~ – just *one* spacetime *(scoffs)*.

JAMES: Certainly wasn't like that for me. The immanent ontology common to new materialism and posthumanism meant that I couldn't be external to the phenomenon *(Schadler, 2019)*. I was always reading-thinking-feeling-writing – ~~the field~~ was everywhere - everything. As McGregor *(2020)* highlighted: 'when I enter the phenomena/experience as a researcher, I am entangling myself in that intra-action … and thus have ethical obligations to what I enact there' *(p. 511)*.

JAMES (cont'd): I did some reading around postmodern ethnography, which according to Tyler *(1986)* dislocates the '"observer-observed"' *(p. 126)* polarity, and takes as its focus a 'mutual, dialogical production of a discourse … a story of sorts' *(p. 126)*.

The following quotation is projected on the screen:

> The whole point of 'evoking' rather than 'representing' is that it frees ethnography from *mimesis* and the inappropriate mode of scientific rhetoric that entails 'objects,' 'facts,' 'descriptions,' 'inductions,' 'generalizations,' 'verification,' 'experiment,' 'truth,' and like concepts that, except as empty invocations, have no parallels either in the experience of ethnographic fieldwork or in the writing of ethnographies. (Tyler, 1986, p. 130)

JAMES: This is why, in Plateau # Deconstructing the signifiers of qualitative research, I stated that ~~validity~~ is not a

facsimile of the co-researchers' ~~experiences~~, but the actual and virtual potentialities opened by this study.

'Diffracting heuristic inquiry through "the posts"' is projected on the screen.

CHORUS: *(to audience)* A diffractive reading is what allows JAMES to engage in a meta-methodological and meta-theoretical commentary about heuristic inquiry and its humanist presuppositions.

'THE POSTS': JAMES uses its tenets to deconstruct its tenets. Remember, JAMES is all the while entangled with, and inseparable from, the methodologies' genealogies.

CHORUS: *(to JAMES)* What are the synergies between heuristic inquiry and 'the posts'? How are they read through one another as an 'affirmative engagement' *(Barad, 2014, p. 187)*?

JAMES: Heuristic inquiry considers as important as the research product the preparing, collecting, organising, and writing of material *(Sultan, 2019)*. Sikes *(2010)* has noted that:

> the preliminary jottings we make … proposals, notes and references we take from the literature, field notes, transcripts, research diary entries, and so on, as much as any formal accounts – papers for journals, dissertations, chapters, books, whatever – are … as much a part of the investigation as any data we may collect. *(p. 12)*

JAMES: *(to audience)* But so often these elements of efflorescence are curtained *behind the scenes*. The trivial. The unimportant. For me, these were the subsoil upon which the study's architecture was built. It was in the process of

assembling the component parts for this project via reading, writing, and thinking that I encountered the onto-epistemological incongruencies between ethnography, heuristic inquiry, phenomenology, and narrative and 'the posts'.

CHORUS: And this play is demonstrative of you 'work[ing] constructively and deconstructively (not destructively) in making new patterns of understanding-becoming' *(Barad, 2014, p. 187)*.

JAMES: The cornerstone of heuristic inquiry is discovery *(Bach, 2002; Douglass & Moustakas, 1985; Sultan, 2019)*. Through 'the posts', I discovered a new stream of thinking. I couldn't blackbox the conditions and discoveries that shaped this project.

JAMES (cont'd): MacLure *(2010)* describes how ~~data~~ glows in the way it beckons for a closer look, and Bennett *(2010)* recounts how the materiality of an ensemble of items 'issued a call' *(p. 4)* to her. Moustakas *(1990)* states that heuristic inquiries are launched from one's own ~~experiences~~. My ~~experiences~~ of 'the closet' certainly contributed to pursuing this topic of investigation, but in a new materialist onto-episteme, objects – including thoughts and ideas – wield their own agentic capacities. They modulate ~~experience~~. This inquiry topic cannot be said to have transpired from an agency that is simply *mine*.

'THE POSTS': *(to JAMES)* Agency in this study felt more *distributed (Latour, 2005)*?

JAMES: Exactly, 'ideas are dynamic, socio-material and relational entities' *(Rudnicki, 2021, p. 187)*, and 'the closet' and 'coming out', as research topics, materialised in my

entanglement with contextual, spatial, temporal, and discursive relations *(Martine & Cooren, 2016)*.

CHORUS: (*to JAMES*) And, I suppose, your ~~experiences~~ of 'the closet' – the very thing Moustakas claims drives heuristic inquiry – were themselves affected by human and non-human relations?

JAMES: Of course. I had to give due consideration to the matter that produced my own and the co-researchers' ~~experiences~~.

CHORUS: (*to JAMES*) In this study, you haven't engaged in a hypothetico-deductive model of scientific research praxis characterised by systematicity, testing, and reproducibility? You haven't coded or thematically analysed?

JAMES: *(to CHORUS)* That's right, I've *thought with theory*. I've taken 'the closet' and 'coming out' and incorporated them into different theoretical brews to cook up multiple conceptual and epistemological batches.

'THE POSTS': *(to audience)* Another heuristic inquiry principle: to be 'exploratory rather than ... explanatory' *(Bach, 2002, p. 96)*.

JAMES: The litheness and generativity of thinking with theory *(Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, 2023)* corresponds with 'the closet's' protean quality, its ongoingness.

CHORUS: *(nervously)* So … what about the *D* word?

A scream sound plays.

JAMES: Ah, yes. Reading postmodern, poststructural, posthuman, and new materialist literature has led me to reconsider ~~data~~.

'THE POSTS': As it should!

CHORUS: *(to audience)* Another tenet of heuristic inquiry: 'all data are attributed equal value' *(Sultan, 2019, p. 31)*, including 'visons, images, and dreams' *(Moustakas, 1990, p. 11)*.

JAMES: Additionally, Fontana *(1994)* tells us that postmodernism expands the definition of ~~data~~ to include '"everyday life"' such as 'films, television, fiction, dreams' *(p. 213; also see King, 1999)*.

'THE POSTS': And new materialist ascriptions of ~~data~~ and its materiality include: 'photo-diaries, items of clothing, films and walking tours, dream data, sensual data, music and sound data, digital memes, GIFs, clothing, wearable devices, apps and mix data' *(Smith & Monforte, 2020, p. 6)*.

JAMES: As a result of my reading, I discovered the 'research experience [is] data' *(Sultan, 2019, p. 32)*. Heuristic inquiry and 'the posts' taught me that ~~data~~ is not the domain of the empirical. In this study, ~~data~~ belongs to the everyday: the co-researchers' interview ~~data~~, my conversations with colleagues, everyday interactions, public discourse, television, film, literature, and music.

'Diffracting phenomenology through "the posts"' is projected on the screen.

CHORUS: *(to 'THE POSTS')* How are you going to bridge the onto-epistemological chasm between phenomenology and … yourself?

'THE POSTS': *(to audience)* McGregor *(2020)* offered a new materialist-informed phenomenology, what she calls *phenomenology of the material*.

JAMES: *(to CHORUS)* Her project is attentive to the material elements imbricated in not just the *unfolding* of the phenomenon but the intra-actions occurring in – *producing* – the phenomenon.

'THE POSTS': *(to JAMES)* Because nothing pre-exists its intra-action *(Barad, 2007)*, ~~experience~~ in *phenomenology of the material* is not something one simply has *of* the world, but takes into consideration the intra-actions of material, discursive, human, and non-human elements, and how these are situated *within* the world's perpetual *becoming*.

JAMES: And in searching for a way to more comprehensively account for materiality in phenomenology, I happened upon postphenomenology. This offered me a framework to accommodate the mediating relations between humans and technology (non-human relations) and their co-constitutive relationship *(Idhe, 1993; Rosenberger & Verbeek, 2015)*. Postphenomenology's 'greater emphasis on objects/materiality' *(Ash & Simpson, 2016, p. 49)* allies it with new materialism's focus on the agency, affectivity, and relationality of matter *(Aagaard, 2017)*.

'THE POSTS': *(to audience)* Whereas traditional phenomenology held the belief that technology estranges us from the world, postphenomenology considers it as constituent of the relations that shape how we engage with it *(Rosenberger & Verbeek, 2015)*. Technology refers not only to digital systems, hardware, and infrastructures, but any *thing* that mediates human-world relations.

The following signifiers are projected on the screen: spectacles, a mobile phone, an air conditioner, a car.

JAMES: Postphenomenology evacuates the notion of a priori subjects and objects such that technology is pregnant with prospects and potentials – *multistable* – transforming our capacity for action *(Aagaard, 2017; Rosenberger, 2017)*. For some of the co-researchers, objects mediated their capacities to 'come out' – even 'outed' them.

The jutting out computer chair is lit up.

CHAIR (V.O.): Postphenomenology doesn't negate the notion of ~~experience~~ but disaggregates it from the province of the (human) subject alone.

The following quotations are projected on a screen:

> Experience does not just occur within the body, confirming our boundaries and corporeality, but is a creative force distributed across bodies and worlds (all manner of 'things' – objects, events, places, spaces – matter here, having performative and constitutive force). (Lea, 2009, p. 374)

> [Posthphenomenology] calls for both an emphasis on the *vitality* of embodied experience, on the dynamism of felt intensities that find corporeal expression in the feeling body, and also an emphasis on the ways in which the body-subject undergoes constant processes of 'affectual composition' in and through its relations *with* a material-agential world. (Ash & Simpson, 2016, p. 55)

CHAIR (V.O. cont'd): Just as affect speaks to the boost and diminishment in the body's capacity to affect and be affected, technological mediation, too, augments and curtails human actions *(Aagaard, 2017; Idhe, 2009)*. When you sit on me, your spine conforms to my curvature. I organise the distribution of your weight; I cause comfort or cramping. I am mediating your very engagement with this play … perhaps even the readers' encounter with this thesis.

The spotlight on CHAIR cuts and illuminates a COMPUTER atop a DESK stage left.

DESK and COMPUTER (V.O.): We were entirely present during the crafting of this thesis.

DESK (V.O.): I supported COMPUTER, provided the surface for a hotchpotch of papers and printouts, pens, and coffee cups.

COMPUTER (V.O.): *(monitor lights up)* I provided access to word processing programs, JAMES'S university's research Drive storing the research partners' ~~voice~~ ~~data~~, digitised books and articles.

'THE POSTS': COMPUTER'S digital mediation of the co-researchers' Zoom interviews invariably also shaped the ~~data~~ that emerged.

JAMES: This is what I mean by an ethico-onto-epistemology of *mattering*. We were constituent elements of a *research assemblage (Fox & Alldred, 2015b, 2022a)*. Through all of us, this thesis materialised.

Spotlight on DESK and COMPUTER cuts.

CHORUS: And the human research partners were part of this assemblage?

JAMES: Of course. We were co-constructing knowledge.

A scene from a Zoom interview is projected on the screen. KAYE and JAMES'S Zoom screens are adjacent.

KAYE: *(to JAMES) You must be hearing some good stories, JAMES?*

JAMES: *It's nice having people want to be involved in the study.*

KAYE: *Well, it's important to us, you know. That's why you've got people prepared to talk. I was talking about this study to [my co-workers] ... I asked [one woman], 'How did you find "coming out"'?*

Another scene from a Zoom interview is projected on the screen. OLIVIA and JAMES'S Zoom screens are adjacent.

OLIVIA: *I don't think there is a comparable experience [to 'coming out'] that will make [straight people] understand. … I think it's really hard to describe it … The stress, the anxiety, the mental toll, the constantly assessing situations and reassessing situations. And constantly; it's always there in the back of your mind … I just think that they will never understand … it's such a unique experience.*

Clip ends.

'THE POSTS': *(to audience)* The research partners' participation precipitated the sharing of stories as part of the worlding offered through the remit of this project.

A sequence of emails from the research partners is projected on the screen:

NICOLE: *Thank you for the interview today, JAMES. Hopefully, it will help the world become a better place*

GEOFFREY: *Thank you again for the opportunity to chat … Sharing my stories was actually quite cathartic.*

T: *I enjoyed being able to share my story.*

Sequence ends.

CHORUS: *(to JAMES and 'THE POSTS')* I have a deliberamentum: can we wed postphenomenology's underlining of technology's mediatory e/affects on lived ~~experience~~ with the *technologies* of Foucault (1988b)?

'THE POSTS': *(to CHORUS)* How's that?

CHORUS: *(to 'THE POSTS')* Well, as part of Foucault's broader project of *governmentality* – the overt and covert use of power and its internalisation by, and disciplining of, citizens – could 'the closet' and its associated states of (in)visibility be figured as a *technology of power* and a *technology of the self*.

The closet on the stage is spotlighted.

'CLOSET' (V.O.): Cis-hetero-normative systems of power/knowledge operative in social norms, educational institutions, the law, and medical domains often prompt acts of (self) surveillance and (self) discipline by queer subjects. In this case, I am a technology of power.

'CLOSET' (V.O. cont'd): Technologies of the self refer to practices that modify a subject's behaviour. *Anakhōrēsis* is

described by Foucault *(2005)* as one such technology whereby a subject evacuates their social setting:

> a particular way of detaching yourself and absenting yourself from the world in which you happen to be but doing so 'on the spot': somehow breaking contact with the external world … It is … a technique of visible absence. You are always there, visible to the eyes of others. But you are absent, elsewhere *(pp. 47–48)*.

'THE POSTS': *(to 'CLOSET')* So when you act as a mode of *anakhōrēsis* for gender and sexual dissidents to manage or *absent* their identity 'on the spot' – in a given social scene, you are …

'CLOSET' (V.O.): A technology of the self, designed to preclude stigmatisation, marginalisation, and acts of verbal and physical violence.

'CLOSET' is unlit; stage lighting returns.

CHORUS: *(to audience)* The final phenomenological approach JAMES will outline is queer phenomenology.

JAMES: *(to audience)* Queer phenomenology, as suggested and perhaps expected by the modifier *queer* 'is not "properly" phenomenological' *(Ahmed, 2006, p. 2)*. Ahmed suggests that it is this very misalignment towards the phenomenological *proper* that makes fruitful queer phenomenology for queerly focused research.

JAMES (cont'd): *(to audience)* Central to Ahmed's *(2006)* queer phenomenology is the notion of orientation: how bodies turn *away*

and turn *towards* other bodies, objects, social scripts, and discourses as a matter of proximity and distance.

'The CLOSET' is again illuminated.

'CLOSET' (V.O.): The concept of orientation lauded within queer phenomenology is germane in considering how I function as an *orientating/straightening device* and 'a matter of residence' *(Ahmed, 2006, p. 1)*.

'THE POSTS': *(to CHORUS)* If cisgender/heterosexual identities are considered default in their orientation, they follow 'a straight line' *(Ahmed, 2006, p. 23)*, a line that disciplines – Others – queer bodies.

CHORUS: *(to 'THE POSTS')* Ahmed proposes that spaces assume the shapes of bodies just as bodies adopt the shapes of spaces. Importantly, *the body* in Ahmed's thesis is not just a self-contained flesh envelope, but a cluster of relations that in their lability, porosity, and sponginess, are *affected* and *affecting (Ahmed, 2006, 2010a)*.

'CLOSET' (V.O.): Some bodies 'inhabit spaces that do not extend their shape' *(Ahmed, 2006, p. 147)*. Offsiders of normative identity discourses, like queers, can be made to reorient their bodies towards straightness.

During 'CLOSET'S' line, a group of people in corporate, casual, and industrial attire – in a vacuous dark setting – are projected onto the screen. A spotlight illuminates a man in hi-vis wear and a woman in corporate dress.

'CLOSET'(V.O.): How do these individuals (*referring to illuminated extras)* utilise me to negotiate their workplaces, for instance? What psychic and bodily exertion do I engender?

CLOSET is unlit.

JAMES: Common to queer phenomenology and new materialism is attention to the affective: how one comes to be affected by the vibrations and forces that intensify and diminish in the contact between not only humans, but geographies, animals, objects, and technologies *(Ahmed, 2006; Duff, 2010)*.

JAMES (cont'd): I was affected through the research process. Concepts, writings, ~~data~~, the research partners were affective, working in me, through me: activating actions, bidding me to explore particular trails and let others slip.

CHORUS: *(to JAMES)* Do you think the co-researchers were similarly affected?

JAMES: Certainly. For instance, affective stirrings worked through the co-researchers, prompting them to reach out and express their interest in participating in the project.

A sequence of emails from the research partners is projected on the screen:

T: *Hi JAMES, I'm interested in participating in your PhD study.*

TIM: *I saw your message … and would be interested in participating in your research on the closet and coming out.*

GEOFFREY: *Hi JAMES, I saw your post … thought I'd reach out and let you know that I'd be interested in being a part of this study. I'm 53 years old and only came out 10 years ago having been brought up in a Christian family and staying in the closet and marrying and having kids. If you think I'd be suitable, please let me know.*

MK: *Hi JAMES, my name is MK, I saw your ad … looking for participants for your research project. I am interested!*

Sequence ends.

'Diffracting narrative through "the posts"' is projected on the screen.

JAMES: *(to 'THE POSTS')* Your onto-epistemological preoccupations, which undergird this project, require narrative's unyoking from humanist and anthropocentric dictums: a critical reconsideration of narrative as methodology and product.

The following are projected on the screen:

- *the narrating self as pregiven (the human of Cartesian rationalism)*
- *narratives structured by the typological arc of beginning, middle, and end (a teleological unfolding of time)*
- *the mediating effects of the researcher (and their supposedly detached role)*
- *giving voice to the 'other'*
- *the story as a bounded and static object.*

JAMES: I'm looking to the ontologies of posthumanism and new materialism for a re-evaluation of stories' mattering. Material stories.

On the screen a large red line is drawn through each of the points.

'THE POSTS':

> While stories are often understood as being built from discursive and textual expressions, they possess qualities that parallel our conceptions of objects. New materialism, seen through a postqualitative research lens, shifts the way we speak about objects from a descriptive, strictly visual account of tactile forms to a genealogy of relations and relationality. Through this conceptual lens, the relational takes on a form that can be used to envision a 'story-object'. *(Garnet & Sinner, 2019, p. 52)*

CHORUS: *(to audience)* Jørgensen and Strand *(2014)* explicate *living stories* as 'stories-in-the-making … a performative, enacted, and embodied material way of being and becoming that is a part of identity in-the-making' *(p. 54)*. The stories of JAMES and the co-researchers are 'material event[s]' *(Garnet & Sinner, 2019, p. 53)*: more than inert representational captures of experience but ontologically generative, acting on/in others and the world *(Abell et al., 2000; Rosiek & Snyder, 2020)*.

CHORUS (cont'd): Common to new materialist/posthumanist-informed narrative research is the idea that 'stories are themselves agents' *(Rosiek & Snyder, 2020, p. 1152)*; they are matter that is ethical *(Kowalcze, 2022)* and agential. Narratives elicit affects, and Smith and Monforte (2020) have posited how

this affectivity has the 'capacity to *do* things … act on, in, and for people'*(p. 2)*.

JAMES: This is what I've written in Plateau # Enmeshments, entanglements, and becoming: An ethico-onto-epistemology. The stories, as material, are ethical: they are part of the world's continuing composition.

CHORUS:(*to JAMES*) In light of the cautions and considerations that you've outlined, what form do the co-researchers' stories acquire in the following plateaus?

JAMES: *(to CHORUS)* To storify life, I've called on creative non-fiction, which takes real-life events and overlays fictionalising techniques including dialogue, scene, and point of view to produce resonant and evocative texts *(Caulley, 2008; Cheney, 1987; Gutkind, 1997)*.

CHORUS: In the context of social science inquiry, the researcher harnessing creative non-fiction dons the mantle of a storyteller. They remain faithful to the source material, but render prose flourished with 'literary licks' *(Hackley, 2007, p. 102)*.

'THE POSTS': *(to JAMES)* Your application of creative non-fiction links to my anathema towards dualisms *(Barad & Gandorfer, 2021; Braidotti, 2019b, 2023; Coole & Frost, 2010; St. Pierre, 2016)* and the representational (in)capacity of language.

JAMES: *(to 'THE POSTS')* That's right. When (re)storying the research partners' experiences of 'the closet' and 'coming out', the *correspondence* of representation *(Barad, 2007)* is not my intention. In the post (non) representational mode, I 'enliven rather than report … render rather than represent … resonate

rather than validate … rupture and reimagine rather than to faithfully describe … generate possibilities of encounter rather than construct representative ideal types' *(Vannini, 2015, p. 15)*.

JAMES (cont'd): *(to audience)* I have called on creative non-fiction to counterpose – to *queer* – received notions and expectations of methodological rigour.

The following terms are consecutively projected on the screen: validity, generalisability, reliability, and trustworthiness.

On the screen a large red line is drawn through each of the points.

JAMES (cont'd): Vannini *(2015)* argues that 'the non-representational answer to the crisis of representation lies in a variety of research styles and techniques that do not concern themselves so much with representing lifeworlds as with issuing forth novel reverberations' *(p. 12)*.

'THE POSTS': *(to audience)* These reverberations are epitomised in Lauren Berlant's and Kathleen Stewart's *The Hundreds (Berlant & Stewart, 2019)*. Written in florid poetic prose, this text is a collection of ethnographic experimental writings. Within the miniaturised accounts are tableaus of quotidian scenes, charged with affective forces, flows, and textures.

JAMES: Drawing from Berlant and Stewart, and the brevity of *flash fiction (Sharqi & Abbasi, 2015; Williams, 2007)*, I craft shorter pieces consistent with the postmodern and poststructural amenability to a 'lack of closure' *(Van Maanen, 2006, p. 16)*. The narratives woven throughout the plateaus accord with an

'[un]privileging [of] sequentially ordered, well-formed, and coherent plots' *(Brockmeier, 2015, p. 103)*.

CHORUS: JAMES doesn't offer *closed* texts – endpoints, finite or resolutory – but texts that 'give way to the possibilities of more open forms with holes and questions and explorations of situatedness and partiality' *(Lenzo, 1995, p. 19)*. The co-researchers' stories are diffracted across the plateaus, splicing with one another and with theory in a dynamic, rhizomatic sprawling where you, dear readers, too, become nodal points.

TRANSGRESSIVE DISRUPTOR'S Zoom screen suddenly appears on the screen.

TRANSGRESSIVE DISRUPTOR: *We can't end without a musical number!*

The piano prelude of Gloria Gaynor's I Will Survive[12] *commences. TRANSGRESSIVE DISRUPTOR ad-libs the lyrics.*

TRANSGRESSIVE DISRUPTOR: *At first JAMES was afraid, they were petrified, kept thinking they could never live without methodology by their side …* (listen here)

A record scratch sound plays. TRANSGRESSIVE DISRUPTOR'S screen is cut.

CHORUS: We really must be moving on.

Lights fade to black.

[12] Gaynor (1978).

CONNECTION MACHINE

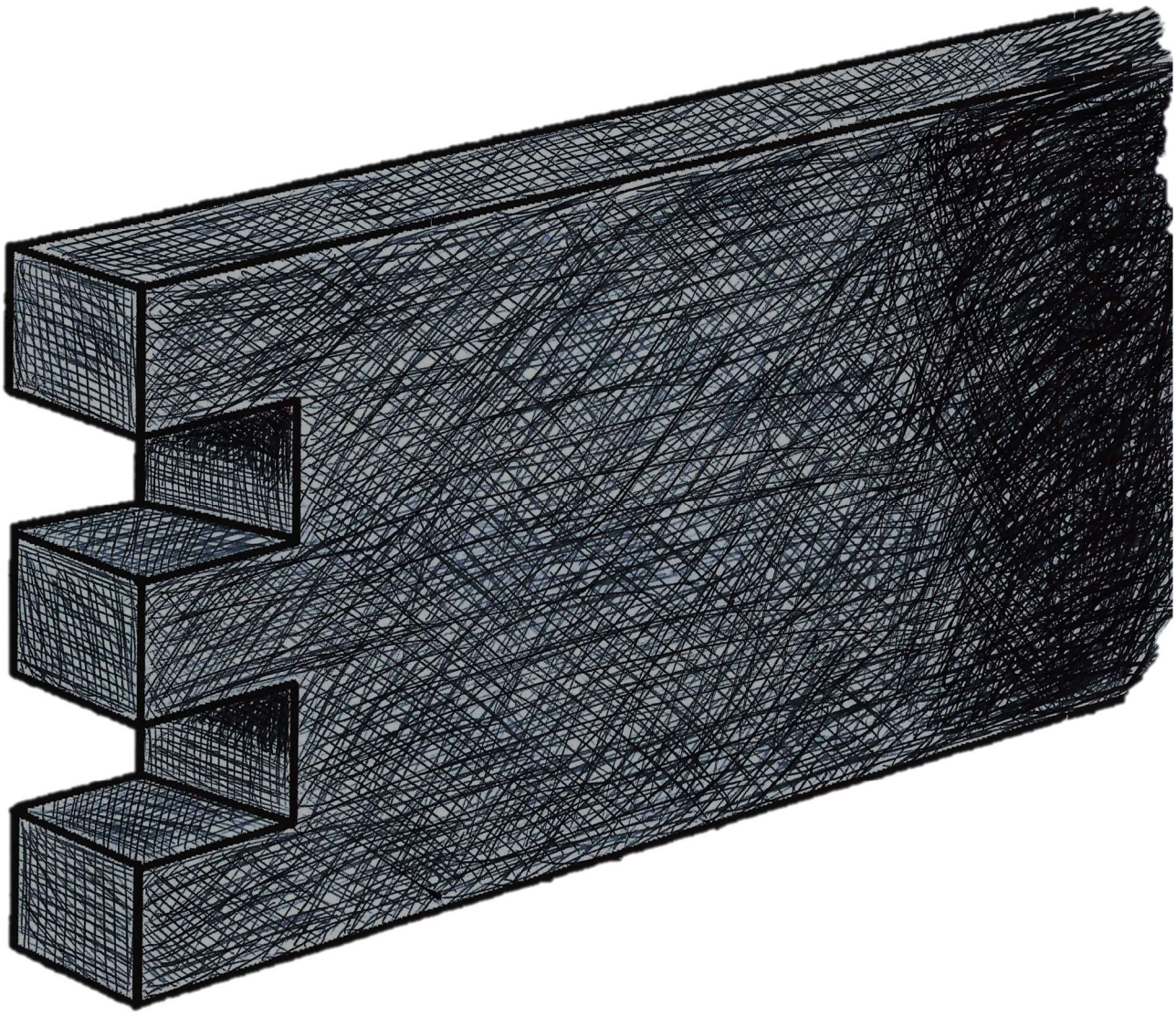


Figure 6: The *Connection machine* comprises the plateaus of theoretical and conceptual renderings of ‘the closet’ and ‘coming out’

Plateau # Against …: Dependence, ‘coming out’, and happiness (un)delivered

> Happiness becomes our defense; you can defend anything by saying it is necessary for happiness, whether that happiness is the happiness of a certain one, or the happiness of many. (Ahmed, 2010c, p. 203)

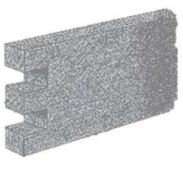
> I am convinced that the proper answer to the question ‘Who is dependent’ is ‘Everyone’ – everyone in his or her [*sic*] own way, of course, to a different degree, on one or several objects, and in a manner that is dynamic and variable according to their circumstances. (Memmi, 1984, pp. 12–13)

> By portraying the closet as confining, dark and unhappy, the outside is painted as liberating, bright and happy. (Orne, 2011, p. 695)

Recall that this thesis does not offer *chapters* that readers are required to teleologically follow. The reading of the plateaus in the *Connection machine* is intended to be rhizomatic or played like music. As Massumi (1987) writes in the Translator’s Foreword to *A Thousand Plateaus*:

> When you buy a record there are always cuts that leave you cold. You skip them. You don’t approach a record as a closed book that you have to take or leave. Other cuts you may listen to over and over again. They follow you. (pp. xiii–iv)

To ‘come out’ as a sexual or gendered subject diverging from normative cisgender, heterosexual identities can be a profoundly anxiety-triggering and fear-provoking experience. This plateau explores the presuppositions and implicit beliefs that assemble and accumulate at the ‘coming out’ moment, queer(y)ing the inventory of promises, assurances, and motivations that orbit around this event for the co-researchers, inhabiting the discursive spaces between ‘in’ and ‘out’. With particular emphasis on Ahmed’s (2010c) provocative work on happiness and interlacing Memmi’s (1984) thoughts on dependence with Derrida’s (1981) *pharmakon*, I explore ‘coming



out' as a teleological *promise of happiness* (Ahmed, 2010c) – a dependence object for not only the queer interlocutor but also the cisgender/heterosexual addressee. Vis-à-vis the Gramscian (1971) theory of *cultural hegemony*, I suggest that the 'coming out' discourse acts as a background, solidifying heterosexual and cisgender identities as gatekeepers of sexual and gender citizenry – not through force or coercion (exclusively), but through a historicity of commonsense.

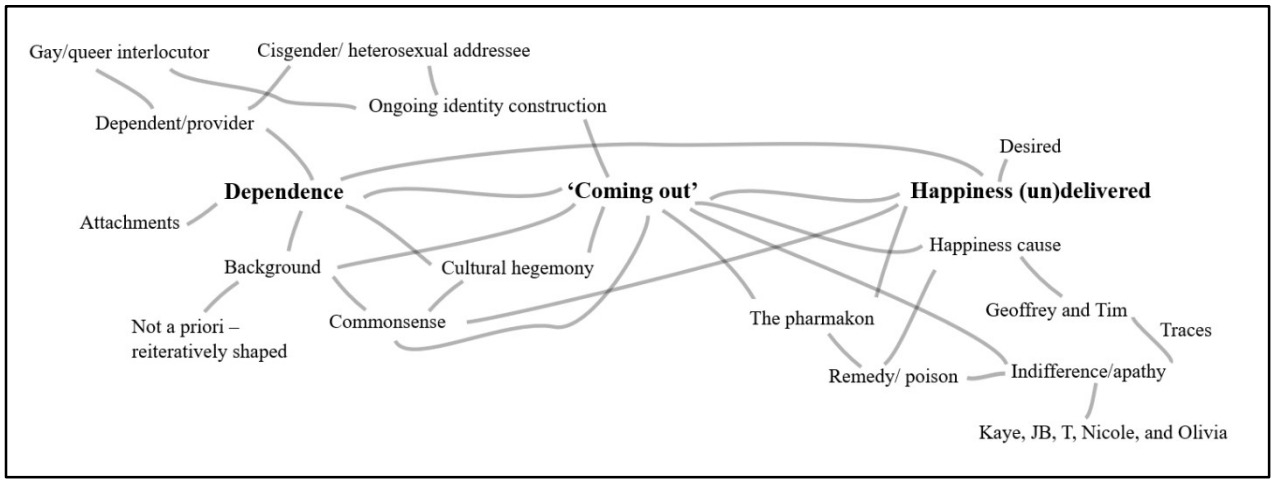


Figure 7: Rhizomatic mapping of Plateau # Against …: Dependence, 'coming out', and happiness (un)delivered

Knotty networks of dependence

Dependence takes many forms. Bodies – defined within the Spinozist (1996) schema as any-*thing* with the capacity to affect and be affected – are dependent on other bodies as part of a heterogenous assemblage of relations (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). This rhizomatic sprawling of *dependencies* (Brandel, 1984) rebukes the humanist, Western presumption of individualism: the intrinsically independent human as the agent of action, detached from and master of nature (Braidotti, 2013a; Strang, 2005; TallBear, 2015; Ulmer, 2017). Haraway (2003) has conceived of the term *companion species* as part of her oeuvre to situate human and non-human bodies as mutually dependent, influencing, and evolving, emphasising our ethical indebtedness to the plethora of species with whom we share the earth. Keeping in the posthumanist vein, Braidotti's philosophical project is concerned with *multiple ecologies of belonging* (Braidotti, 2006c, 2013a, 2023). Our 'trans-species solidarity [is] based on the awareness … of "our" being in *this* together, that is to say environmentally based, embodied, and embedded and in symbiosis with each other' (Braidotti, 2013a, p. 23).

Although not explicitly embedded in a post-anthropocentric framework, Memmi (1984) views dependence not as a phenomenon occurring uniquely between humans, but one that underlies the bonds between animals, objects, institutions, and ideas. Not only is dependence intricately bound up with axes of power, agency, and identity, but inherent to the concept is a *symbiotic* relationship between the categories of *dependent* and *provider* (Memmi, 1984). One can concurrently depend *on* and provide *for* others. Drawing from this reciprocal dynamism and dependency's tendency to cut both ways, this plateau canvasses how both queer and cisgender/heterosexual people have multiple co-occurring attachments vis-à-vis 'the closet' and 'coming out'.

'Coming out' as and from the background

Ahmed (2010c) conveys that the word *because* is 'a stopping point' (p. 203), the dialogic equivalent of hitting a brick wall. In answer to the question, *Why do we 'come out'?*, because acts as a shorthand for the historicity of 'coming out'. One 'comes out' because it is the done thing, 'the thing that good gays [are] supposed to do' (LeMaster, 2014, p. 189). This axiom shows how 'norms *become* forms in time' (Ahmed, 2019, p. 76). Gramsci's (1971) notion of hegemony can illuminate how this logic of expectation has become encrusted as a socio-cultural narrative organising identities and identifications. For Gramsci, hegemony is brought about not through coercion or force (only) but crystalises through consent. Consent, here, refers not to a written or verbal agreement but is a noncoercive acquiescence to prevailing and circulating norms, structures, and discourses. One comes to accept as given, however grudgingly, the socio-historico-politico condition as simply the *way of things* (Gramsci, 1971). Through the Gramscian theory of hegemony we can apprehend 'coming out' as a normalised and authorised social mandate that we, as queer people, assent to. Having become tropological in film and television (see Bannink & Wentink, 2015; Berridge, 2012; Dow, 2001; Herman, 2005; Monaghan, 2010), evolving into a genre on YouTube (see Lovelock, 2017, 2019) – even having its own annual day (11 October) – 'coming out' has achieved the status of a commonsensical cultural constant. Indeed, its ubiquitous presence has become pedagogised; as Monaghan (2010) states: 'from what I knew from film and television … I was supposed to sit down with my most trusted family member, cry, and confess' (p. 56).

Herman (2005) has remarked that 'the closet' has become 'incorporate[d] … as … part of our vocabulary and common sense' (p. 7). If 'the closet' and 'coming out' are commensurate with common sense, each 'coming out' functions to rearticulate this common sense, keeping in

place what we collectively, and from the outset, perceived *as* common sense in the first place. Olivia also commented on the presumption of heterosexuality as a cultural hegemonic:

> No heterosexual people have to sit down with their family and say: *'Look, I just have to tell you, I really like men. God, I love men. I'm in love with this boy called Johnny at my work. He's the best. Let me tell you about him'*. No straight people ever do that because it's the assumption of the collective whole that everyone is heterosexual until you tell them otherwise. And because of … the assumption of heterosexuality … the mass assumption … it is a really big deal when you go against that grain.

Above, Olivia uses the semi-modal verb phrase *have to. Have to*, and its past tense form, *had to*, were semi-modal verb phrases also uttered by JB – 'I was sort of backed into a corner and *had to* come out to my parents'; and Tim said, 'if my marriage ever ended … I would *have to* confront who I was'. Taken together, *have to* and *had to* evoke a sense of obligation and expectation: the obligation *to* 'come out' and the expectation *of* 'coming out'. Backgrounds prefigured. Obligations and expectations are methods for how 'heterosexuality is continuously re-naturalized and re-prioritized' (Roseneil, 2000, p. 60). Butler (2016) has explicated how the speech act reproduces and transmits an identity discourse:

> [The] 'I' thinks it is offering up the truth of itself in a discourse of identity ['coming out'] to satisfy the one who demands this of me … but the subject and the subject's moment of avowal become … a nodal point in the proliferation of a discourse. For I do not just bind myself to the other who demands I identify myself according to that discourse, but I bind myself to the discourse which augments its power and reach through my avowal. The power of discourse is not simply to establish the terms of what is true, but to reproduce that truth through compelling acts of avowal by which subjects constitute themselves explicitly through those very terms. (p. 85)

What has been obliquely evoked so far is the notion of the *background*. As a noun, background refers to a backdrop or setting, synonymous with everydayness, the expected, the quotidian. It is against the familiarity of the background that identities, behaviours, desires, and discourses are assessed and appraised and judgements dispensed (Ahmed, 2006). Thinking

with new materialist, posthuman, and post (non) representational understandings, a background is not ahistorical, acontextual, or apolitical but congeals through the reiterative *intra-actions* of bodies, time, space, discourses, norms, behaviours, moods, and conventions. As averred by Anderson and Ash (2015): 'the background is not an inert, natural backdrop but a collectively lived and shaped condition' (p. 34). Backgrounds, then, are dynamic and emergent processes, open to the ebbs and flows of spatial, temporal, relational, and affectual reshapings and re-formings. Duff (2010) offers a concrete illustration: 'one's favourite cafe is one day a source of deep contentment or satisfaction, just as on other occasions it conjures all the frustrations and disaffections of the modern city' (p. 885).

Bodies occupy spaces and spaces occupy bodies (Ahmed, 2006). 'Coming out', conceptualised as a background discourse of the social, is also a background that comes to form and settle in the body. Its molarity has seeped into the collective consciousnesses of queer and cisgender/heterosexual persons alike, becoming part of the molecular. Referencing confessional discourse, Foucault (1976) has similarly written that when relations of power become internalised their genesis points evanesce:

> The obligation to confess is now relayed through so many different points, is *so deeply ingrained in us, that we no longer perceive it as the effect of a power that constrains us*; on the contrary, it seems to us that truth, lodged in our most secret nature, 'demands' only to surface. (p. 60; emphasis added)

In postphenomenology, *background relations* refer to human and technology[13] relations that become taken for granted (Idhe, 1990). As a technology that mediates human–world relations, 'the closet' can be 'understood as that which must take place in order for *something* to appear' (Ahmed, 2006, pp. 37–38; emphasis added). This '*something*' is a thoroughfare of attachments, promises, drives, and possibilities. First, it is the material-discursive location from which queer subjects *have to* – to use Olivia and JB's language – 'come out'. Second, migration from this space is the spacetime juncture where/when a hitherto latent happiness can become realised. Third, 'coming out of the closet' 'must take place' to preserve and proliferate the normative status and associated privileges affiliated with heterosexual and cisgender categories. Memmi (1984) speaks of '*reciprocal dependencies*' (p. 23), in which human and

[13] In the postphenomenological strain, technology refers to any*thing* that mediates human–world relations.

non-human relations adopt the roles of both the *dependent* and *provider*. Together, cisgender and heterosexual individuals and queer people – prior to any form of disclosure – are already dependent[14] on the historicity of 'coming outs', which has come to instantiate the discourse as a background.

Backgrounds have their own history of formation and arrival, their own backgrounds (Ahmed, 2006). To provide some background, 'the closet' emerged – although not necessarily under this signifier – in the 1960s (Chauncey, 1994; Seidman, 2002). For those born after the baby boomer generation (c. 1946–1964), 'the closet' discourse predates our entry into the world. Thus, 'to arrive into the world is to inherit the world that you arrive into' (Ahmed, 2010c, p. 95); put another way, we 'come in' to the 'coming out' discourse. Below I develop further the intimacies and interworkings between dependence, hegemony, and the background and how these are all instrumental in (un)consciously (re)producing 'the closet' and 'coming out' as *doxa* (Bourdieu, 1977).

Happiness: Desired regulation, regulating desire?

It is an uncontroversial claim that people 'are directed by the promise of happiness' (Ahmed, 2010c, p. 14). Happiness is a sine qua non. In *The Promise of Happiness*, Sara Ahmed (2010c) offers a thoroughgoing, critical examination of how happiness becomes the modus operandi through which to live one's life. Happiness is operationalised, even weaponised, as a regulatory mechanism to cultivate and curtail certain behaviours, comportments, and modes of being to achieve *the good life* (Ahmed, 2010c). For Ahmed, happiness is habitually vectored through heterosexual social narratives of marriage, reproduction, and domesticity (also see Halberstam, 2005). These become *happy objects*, preloaded and prepossessed with a promise to elicit happiness in advance of their arrival (Ahmed, 2010c). Happiness is instructive. One becomes interpellated by the desire 'to be associated with [these] associations' (Ahmed, 2010c, p. 2) of happiness: 'the promise that happiness is what follows if we do this or that' (Ahmed, 2010c, p. 14). Satisfying these social and cultural scripts of normalcy germinates happiness; failing to do so invites unhappiness.

Love (2007) describes how happiness has, especially in the afterglow of the legalisation of gay marriage around the world, become an obligatory politic for queer people:

[14] Dependence, here, is closely associated to *need* (Memmi, 1984).

> Because homosexuality is traditionally so closely associated with disappointment and depression, being happy signifies participation in the coming era of gay possibility. In this brave new world, one can be gay without necessarily being tragic; however, one may only belong by erasing all traces of grief that, by definition, must remain sealed off in the past of homosexual abjection. (Love, 2007, p. 54)

The precondition for queer people to attain happiness, then, is the expungement of all our unhappiness.

Love's and Ahmed's argumentations rally around 'cultivating alternative modes of happiness' (Love, 2007, p. 63) that are resistive to, not predicated on or policed by, heteronormative and homonormative frameworks (see Duggan, 2002). Marshalling the proposition that 'we are directed toward objects that are already anticipated to cause happiness' (Ahmed, 2010c, p. 28), I bring into relief the notion that we are directed to 'come out' inasmuch as happiness has become betokened *after* 'coming out' and life beyond 'the closet'.

Happiness figures in the literature as a motivating force behind one's desire *to* 'come out' or the effect *of* 'coming out' (see Cass, 1979; Chirrey, 2007; King & Noelle, 2005; Motschenbacher, 2020; Orne, 2011; Osborne, 1996; Thomas et al., 2007). Returning again to Gramsci's (1971) work on hegemony by way of common sense, does it follow that the alleged *happy object* of 'coming out' is tactically part of heterosexuality's repertoire to attain/maintain hegemonic status through the guise of *happiness-causer*? The title of van den Berg's (2016) paper suggests that '"the closet" [is] [a] dangerous heteronormative space', that 'is already linked to a subservient subject position that not only grants the heterosexual majority the power to judge the intelligibility and accountability of the gay subject, but also reconfirms the heterosexual as the superior sexual subject' (Dhaenens, 2013, pp. 306–307). If this is true, is the sparkly haze of happiness around 'coming out' a disciplinary technology? A repackaging of the happiness promised by heteronormative scripts for the good life?

'Come out', get happy!

'Coming out' functions as a 'happiness script … [a] way of aligning bodies with what is already lined up' (Ahmed, 2010c, p. 91). '*Thought*', Glissant (1997) postulates, '*in reality spaces itself out into the world. It informs the imaginary of peoples, their varied poetics, which it then transforms, meaning, in them its risk becomes realized*' (p. 1). If happiness is, from the outset,

the angle 'we *should be* inclined toward' (Ahmed, 2010c, p. 199), 'coming out', for queer people, serves as a modality to realise this desirable alignment. This is typified by Seidman (2002), who has stated that 'the closet' 'more than likely … forfeit[s] the kinds of intimate companionship and love that make personal happiness possible' (p. 30). From this assertion, it would appear that happiness is beyond reach while in 'the closet', or, inversely, that 'coming out' heralds happiness; 'coming out' must transpire *first* before the path to happiness is embarked upon.

As mentioned earlier, the discourse of 'coming out' predates one's 'coming out'; it is 'already lined up' (Ahmed, 2010c, p. 91). Before we even 'come out' we are in an economy of expectations, eventualities, potentialities, and promises. Like Seidman's (2002) inference above, happiness becomes a product of 'coming out' in much the same way that 'objects are associated with affects before they are even encountered' (Ahmed, 2010c, p. 27). 'Coming out' – fallaciously depicted as a 'discrete, linear process with a definitive end' (Adams, 2010, p. 238) – becomes a futural orientation towards happiness as a teleological endpoint. We can term this figuration of happiness a 'regulatory effect of a social belief' (Ahmed, 2010c, p. 8). By 'directing ourselves toward this … object, we are aiming somewhere else: toward a happiness that is presumed to follow' (Ahmed, 2010c, p. 26). This teleology is not new within sexual minority economies, discourses, and politics.

Take the phrase *out and proud* – a catchcry within gay/queer activist and liberationist discourses. Its very phraseological structuration implies sequential ontological and temporal states. When one 'comes out', proudness is an inevitable outcome: 'out' → proud. As an adjective, proud signifies 'feeling pleasure and satisfaction because you or people connected with you have done or got something good' (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). 'Coming out' – configured already through the weight of history as 'something good' – instils pride. Through the '"closeness of association"' (Ahmed, 2010c, p. 27), pride is the precursor to happiness: 'out' → pride → happiness.

'Coming out' of the *pharmakon*

Queer people depend on the 'coming out' discourse as a way of socially organising ourselves as subjects outside the heterosexual/cisgender schema. This announcement inescapably carries a double valence, and scholars have looked at both positive and negative implications of

‘coming out’ (see J. Manning, 2015b; Wicks, 2017). As a point of methodological and conceptual difference and disruption, I think this dialectic through theory (St. Pierre, 2021b).

In *Dissemination*, Derrida (1981), leveraging from Plato’s *Phaedrus*, offers as part of his deconstructive project the concept of the *pharmakon*: a Greek term denoting both *poison* and *remedy*. The dual and contradictory definitions of *pharmakon* make it a contronym, and its ‘alternately or simultaneous … beneficien[ce] or maleficen[ce]’ (Derrida, 1981, p. 70) has purchase in describing the dichotomies surrounding ‘the closet’ and ‘coming out’ discourses.

When emplaced within the taxonomy of Derrida’s *pharmakonian* discourse of *medicine* and *toxin*, ‘coming out’ and ‘the closet’ become integrated into an immunological metaphor. Within this configuration, ‘coming out’ elicits health of body and mind which are conducive to happiness. ‘The happy appear relatively healthy, both physically and mentally. They are active and openminded. They feel they are in control of their lives’ (Veenhoven, 1991, as cited in Ahmed, 2010c, pp. 10–11). Being ‘in’ ‘the closet’ becomes synonymous with a kind of poison (unhappiness), a deleterious bodily and psychic diminishment. Only through the panacea of ‘coming out’ can one be remedied. As JB expressed:

> [When] I’m toning it down, I’m not being myself and, you know, in social situations you want to be able to be yourself … and showcase 100 per cent of your true personality and your authentic self. And if you can’t do that, then you think about those microdoses … filling that cup of intolerance and homophobia. It’s just filling that cup up and up and up. And, you know, that cup eventually … spills over … and leaks into your mental health.

In contradistinction, ‘coming out’ can be regarded not as a tonic but a toxin. Each ‘coming out’ is the administration of a microdose of self-Othering, a boundary-making act separating oneself from heterosexual and cisgender subjects. Over one’s lifetime this is tantamount to a slow accretion of toxicity, like the protracted build-up of heavy metals in the body. The poison of the *pharmakon* can manifest in ‘coming out’s’’ perlocutionary moment through the experiencing of physical and verbal assault, banishment from family and home, termination from employment, the severance of friendships, even death (see Bautista et al., 2017; Connell, 2012; D’augelli, 2002; Dunlap, 2014; Jones, 2020; Orne, 2011).

Happiness (un)delivered

The paradox of the *pharmakon* as *balm* or *bane* is reflected in 'coming out' operating as both a happy and unhappy object. Derrida's (1974/1997) deconstructive oeuvre reminds us of the instability of binaries, positing that the supplement is integral in bestowing meaning to the primary term; its trace can never be erased (also see Fuss, 1991). In other words, the *pharmakon* as medicine gains significance only because of its 'double-edged' (Spivak, 1974/1997, p. xlix), pairing of poison. While 'coming out' for Geoffrey and Tim tended towards remedy (happiness), its supplement of poison was, for Kaye, JB, T, Nicole, and Olivia, experienced through blasé, wounding, and dispiriting reactions to their 'coming out'.

Since childhood, Geoffrey and Tim knew themselves to be gay. Having a *discredited identity* (Goffman, 1963) provoked anxieties and shame; they cached their sexual identities and passed as heterosexual, marrying, and having children. The affective, relational, bodily, and psychic dis-ease involved in this pedagogy of passing, for Geoffrey and Tim, depleted, drained, and diminished what Spinoza (1996) names *potential*: the power in an individual's capacity to persist in and affirm their existence (*conatus*). The sea change of 'coming out' was, for both men, a replenishment and reinvigoration of *potentia*. In *pharmakonian* nomenclature, it was medicinal.

Growing up in a highly conservative and religious household, confronted by church sermons espousing that God had sent AIDS for a gay Armageddon, Geoffrey felt unable to reconcile his religious convictions with his gay identity throughout childhood, teenagerhood, and into adulthood. Passing as heterosexual for over 25 years evoked 'guilt', 'shame', and 'self-loathing'. Riven by these feelings, he came perilously close to attempting suicide on two occasions. 'Coming out' of the prison house of 'the closet' elicited, for Geoffrey, a sense of authenticity. 'I can't believe I did it [passed] for so long because ['coming out'/being 'out'] is so incredibly liberating. In most of my life I am 'out', and I love it. I love not having to hide like that anymore'.

Tim grew up in a council estate in Scotland, an area he described as not particularly gay-friendly. Knowing from a young age that he 'liked guys' but observing 'other people's reactions to being gay' and experiencing bullying around his presumed sexual orientation at high school, Tim described how he worked to disprove his gay identity. 'The closet' offered Tim protection from fear and apprehension. 'I felt a lot of shame, a lot of embarrassment, a lot of, you know, anxiety around it'.

Tim sublimated his attraction to other men into marrying his wife. ‘Being married, I always knew it [his gay identity] was there … it was something that, I guess … my marriage was my way of hiding and putting everything away’. After his marriage of 17 years ended in 2015, Tim knew he would need to ‘come out’ to his wife and children. He describes the six months after his marriage breakdown as ‘anxiety-ridden times’. Tim became house-bound, stopped leisurely smoking and drinking, refused food, and lost a substantial amount of weight. It was a ruminative and dark time, spent ‘worried about how it [being gay] was going to be received by everyone’. Tim experienced suicidal ideation during this period. ‘I just thought, like, how is anyone gonna deal with this? Like, *I* can’t deal with that so how are they going to?’

Like Geoffrey, Tim recognised ‘coming out’ as a happiness-cause. ‘I really felt good after I ‘came out’. I felt like it was just a lifetime of built-up anticipation and resentment, and it was extremely freeing when I did ‘come out’. ‘To know that I don’t have to hide anything. I mean, I hid everything and all my feelings for, you know, 18 years, and it’s awesome to be able to just be me.’

While the accounts of Geoffrey and Tim above signpost the *pharmakonian* relation of remedy qua ‘coming out’, within their narratives are trace amounts of poison. Geoffrey ‘came out’ to his parents 11 years ago, and while he now describes his father as ‘amazing’, he recalls that during his youth ‘[his father] was so homophobic, so terrified of having a kid, a son, that might be gay. Particularly his older son’. When Geoffrey ‘came out’ to his father the response was: *‘I’m glad you didn’t “come out” as a teenager … I probably would’ve killed you’*. This statement gestures not only to how ‘queers navigate multiple closets and numerous relationships to individual closets’ (LeMaster, 2014, p. 188) with many people, but also demonstrates the complementary bookend of the *pharmakon* as remedy. Death is the *pharmakon* as poison *ad extremum*. If Geoffrey had ‘come out’ to his father during his youth, his life would have been imperilled. The *pharmakon* as a poison shows up also in the dissolution of friendships Tim experienced after ‘coming out’, particularly with his best friend:

> [We had] been best friends for years, we’d done a lot together, and then to go from that to no contact whatsoever, it was harsh … It was a really important friendship to me because it was the first sort of person that I had really got on with, but as an adult. It was a big sense of loss when I didn’t have that.

For other research partners, 'coming out' prompted 'unhappy effects of happiness' (Ahmed, 2010c, p. 2). That is to say it triggered a kind of disenchantment when realising that 'coming out' – imbued 'with a positive affective value already in place' (Ahmed, 2010c, p. 28) – fell short and failed to deliver the happiness it portended. In such occasions, the expectation of happiness has laid the groundwork for disappointment (Ahmed, 2010c), and Butler (1991) has written that 'it is the figure of the closet that produces [the expectation of happiness], and which guarantees its disappointment' (p. 16).

When Kaye 'came out' to her mother by stating that she had a girlfriend, the response was simply, '*Oh*':

> I seem to remember one time I bounced back home after I, you know, had my heart broken, and she [her mother] said to me, "*Gee, Kaye, I think you've chosen a hard life for yourself".* And that was … [the] only conversation we ever had about my sexuality.

The 'coming out' discourse, in this scene, becomes a conversational cul-de-sac. Although Kaye had 'come out', her lesbian identity was still confined to the domain of the taboo, instantiating a new kind of 'closet'. Her mother's suggestion that she had '*chosen a hard life for [her]self*' posits the ordinariness of heterosexuality as not only the *easier* life, but the identity monopolising happiness. The tacit *un*happiness ingrained in the '*hard [lesbian] life*' Kaye's mother alludes to arguably catalyses the very conditions of unhappiness that it sought to name (see Ahmed, 2010c).

Upon his mother discovering a Christmas present gifted by his partner, JB 'came out' as gay to his mother and stepfather. 'I remember [his mother's] words vividly: *"You've disappointed me.*"' Because JB had had sexual relationships with women in the past, his claim to a gay identity was met by his mother with incredulity. 'She tried to immediately put a label on me and say that, *"well, maybe you're bisexual."*'

T initially 'came out' to his parents as bisexual when he was 17 before 'coming out' as gay in 2012. T explained that 'at the time [he] felt affirmed … but then … looking back on it … [he] did want … further affirmation'. Stating that his father's reaction 'wasn't homophobic' but somewhat apathetic, T believed this was out of concern for his safety, his father having known of gay and lesbian people for whom reactions from the community were not positive. Nevertheless, T 'sort of resented [his father] for…saying that'.

When Nicole told her mother she was a lesbian, she was met with, '*Oh, that's disgusting!'*. The usual banter between the pair was non-existent: 'there [was] about five lines of conversation between us with my last being, like, *"Well, Mum, if you're not going to talk to me, I'm going to go back home"'*. Nicole could not square her mother's disapproval towards her lesbian identity – despite the fact one of her mother's best friends was a gay man, with whom she would go to dances during the 1950s in West Melbourne. A week later, at her mother's birthday picnic in the Central Highlands of Victoria, Nicole attempted to speak to her mother, who had stayed in the car's passenger seat. Met with monosyllabic responses to her questions, Nicole saw the futility of engaging with her mother. Their relationship remains fraught.

Olivia explained that she spent some time in Louisiana, befriending an older couple who 'adopted [her] as their … Australian daughter'. Given what she felt to be the conservative values of the Deep South, Olivia did not feel safe in discussing her sexual subjectivity. Indeed, she describes the husband and wife whom she befriended as 'quite religious, quite conservative … [and] pretty racist'. During her stay, Olivia became friends with the couple's nephew, Steve, who was a similar age to her. Upon returning to Australia, the pair kept in contact. It was after returning to Louisiana a couple of years later that Olivia disclosed her identity as a lesbian to Steve:

> We were at the bar one night with his then girlfriend and another friend of hers, and I finally told him … I remember he then went inside to go to the bathroom. I went to the bar and then he came out of the bathroom … and we saw each other for a few seconds in the bar and he said, '*My initial reaction to you telling me was I was pretty upset. I thought we were pretty close. I can't believe you hadn't said anything*'. But he said, *'But then I realised that it would've been really unsafe for you to tell me and that's why you didn't'*. He's like, *'I know why you didn't tell my aunt and uncle because they would have chucked you out, like, that wouldn't have been safe … obviously I know where we live'*.

In Olivia's recount, Steve's lamentation was not out of disapproval or condemnation towards Olivia's lesbian identity, but arose from the withholding of something whose gravitas had, to his mind, violated the pair's closeness. What this scene illuminates is the power of *arrivals*.

‘What we … receive as an impression will depend on our affective situation’ (Ahmed, 2010c, p. 40). Put another way, how Steve arrived at and was attuned to Olivia’s ‘coming out’ was affected by the array of affects carried with him into the social scene. These affective and relational interplays brought into the social constituted Olivia’s ‘coming out’ as, in the *pharmakon’s* terminology, poison.

(Un)happy ever after?

Like the spine of a favourite book creased and wrinkled through consumption, ‘repetition … leaves a residue like a track or a habit’ (Stewart, 2008, p. 73). Through Memmi’s (1984) work on dependence and Gramsci’s (1971) theory of *cultural hegemony* via commonsense, this plateau has proposed that ‘coming out’, through repetition and recurrence, over time, has settled into the ‘track’ that we, as queer people, follow; the ‘habit’ we sustain.

Both queer and cisgender/heterosexual subjects – albeit for contrasting agendas – become both *dependant* and *provider* (Memmi, 1984) in relationship to ‘coming out’. Both depend on its historicity and on performative forebears who have legitimated it as a praxis of queer identity construction through annunciation. For queers, ‘coming out’ is the material-discursive act that produces and announces an identity outside the precinct of normative gender and sexuality; we depend on the (cisgender/heterosexual) witness to render our ‘coming out’ performance felicitous (see Austin, 1962). At the same time, cisgender/heterosexual identities depend on, and are beneficiaries of, the ‘coming out’ speech act – to which they *provide* ministration – in maintaining their hegemonic status over sexual and gender malcontents.

Ahmed (2010c) has described how some orientations are preloaded with expectations and promises, ‘already understood to be *what you want to have*’ (p. 5; emphasis added). Indeed, happiness and heterosexuality are both commonsense, baseline orientations, or *straight lines* (Ahmed, 2006). To askew – to queer – one’s alignment to these *happy objects* is to teeter on the cutting edge of unhappiness. Levin (1984) has, for example, described the homosexual economy of genital misuse as conducive to unhappiness.

It has been suggested in this plateau that ‘coming out’ is prefabricated with the promise of happiness. As put by Ahmed (2010c): ‘the promise of happiness is the promise that the lines we follow will get us there, where the “there” acquires its value by not being “here”’ (Ahmed,

2010c, p. 32). '"There"' represents 'coming out' to openness, freedom, and authenticity from the '"here"' of being 'in the closet', suggestive of deceit, secrecy, and inauthenticity. Grounding 'coming out' through *pharmakonian* discourse (Derrida, 1981) emphasises, however, that our relation to 'the closet' is labile, moving between remedy (happiness) and poison (dejection, indifference, etc.). The shelf-life of 'out' is short and 'coming out' not curative because of the reiterative requirement to 'come out' in new social contexts (Butler, 1991; Dindia, 1998; Sedgwick, 1990). As captured by Chambers (2003):

> with respect to the closet one's identity is always in a state of becoming, but never of being. That is to say, one can *come out* of the closet or one can closet oneself, but one can never *be* in the closet or *be* out. (p. 38)

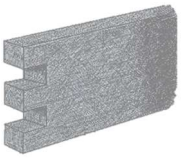
Returning to the immunological metaphor of the *pharmakon*, 'coming out' is a regimen that only defers and delays until the next 'administration of the pharmakon, the drug' (Derrida, 1981, p. 70), the next 'coming out'. In light of the *pharmakon* denoting two oppositional definitions contemporaneously, this plateau has reread the teleology of 'coming out' vis-à-vis happiness functioning as an impetus that 'risks raising false hopes for a simple, feel-good happy ending, never to come' (Scott, 2018, p. 153). Like the etymology of the *hap* of happiness – meaning luck or chance (Ahmed, 2010c) – one's 'coming out' can at one spacetime be a remedy (a happy object) or poison (met with indifference, banishment, even death). 'Coming out' is ever an aleatory act, a roll of the dice.

Plateau # Spatialisations of 'the closet': Affective, emotional, and material geographies

> Just as bodies affect one another *in place*, bodies are inevitably affected *by place.* (Duff, 2010, p. 885)

> Space is not a collection of preexisting points set out as a container for matter to inhabit. (Barad, 2007, p. 234)

In this plateau I engage in something approaching what Tuck and McKenzie (2015) have named a *critical place inquiry*. A critical place inquiry is cognisant that places are ever-evolving within and across temporal and spatial relations and that space is imbricated in the unfolding of performances and practices. Such an inquiry understands how space is reciprocally affected by bodily acts and that the experiencing of space is mediated by geographical, cultural, sexual, gendered, and racialised discourses (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). Space is a metaphysics that in Western *logos* has a history of having little space made for it in research endeavours. The purpose of this plateau, underpinned by incarnations of new materialism and affect theory, is to (re)think space not as an unresponsive, a priori backcloth against which the theatre of life is played, but a reiteratively (re)producing, affective, and dynamic relation. Addressing the *aspatiality* that has been given to 'the closet', despite its patent spatial referent (Brown, 2000), I convey how, for the co-researchers, the *intra-activity* of spaces, other bodies, routines, objects, and their attendant e/affects orientated their bodies and their (in)ability to assimilate into heteronormatively authored and authoring locations. The coalescing of these relations can be seen as producing *affective atmospheres* (Anderson, 2009a; Anderson & Ash, 2015) in which bodily and spatial expressions of passing take place. This plateau explores not only bricks-and-mortar spaces, but the materiality of affective and emotional geographies I occupied prior to my first 'coming out'.



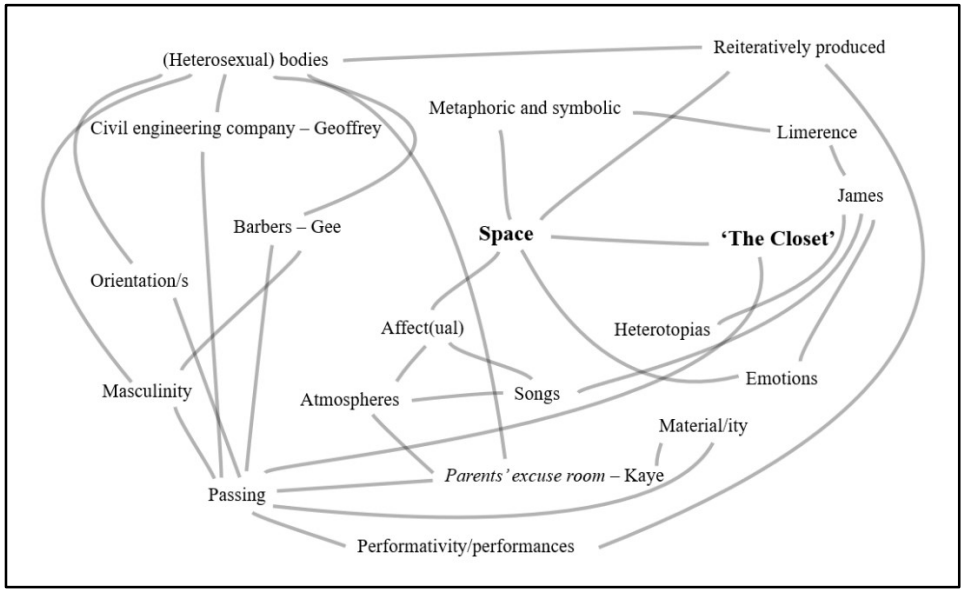


Figure 8: Rhizomatic mapping of Plateau # Spatialisations of 'the closet': Affective, emotional, and material geographies

Make space for space

In what has become a citation par excellence on affect and atmospheres, Brennan (2004) has asked: 'Is there anyone who has not, at least once, walked into a room and "felt the atmosphere"'? (p. 1). It is not at all difficult to see the merit of Brennan's compelling rhetorical question. Many of us have had similar sensational transactions occur when encountering a space: the prickliness of goosebumps, the churning of the stomach, a helium buoyancy, a lead-like heaviness. The contact zone of the body feels the frequencies and complexions of a space, but this registering is not an asymmetrical apprehending of a *thereness* already established. Indeed, Ewalt (2016) purports that space is 'a lively habitat built out of the meeting-up of many different trajectories of moving matter' (p. 137; also see Iovino, 2012). *Habitat* is an apposite ecological metaphor for the myriad, lively matter intra-actively (re)forming space's mutability, dynamism, and processuality.

Scholarship has drawn attention to the non-extraneousness of space (Ahmed, 2014; Anderson et al., 2010; Barad, 2007; Booth, 2015; Kunz, 2010; Lefebvre, 1974/1991; Massey, 2005; Soja, 1989; Tuck & McKenzie, 2014, 2015). This corpus of work compellingly and vigorously denounces space as a tabula rosa, and any notion of inconsequentiality that has been attributed to space's 'everydayness' (Kunz, 2010, p. 150). It disclaims the idea of the intentional human subject wilfully and unidirectionally acting *on* space, and submits space as wielding agentic capacities. The indifference shown towards spatiality has its roots in Descartes's Cartesian dualism, but is symptomatic also of the postmodern and poststructural emphasis on

the linguistic and the discursive in social constructionism, where ontological materiality was walled off from mattering (Coole & Frost, 2010; Kunz, 2010; Simpson, 2014; Thrift, 2008; Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). 'There is', however, as Löw (2016) pointedly states, 'no social phenomenon free of space' (p. x). This is made obvious by the fact that 'the very act of research is both constituted in places and in the process, constitutes places' (Booth, 2015, p. 20).

Scholars have increasingly attended to the 'significance of *affect* to the experience and production of social spaces' (Simpson, 2014, p. 329). For affect and new materialist scholars, whose onto-epistemologies often seep into one another (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2016), there is consensus that space cannot be interpreted as the mere backdrop of the social: a putatively pre-existing, passive panorama. As Booth (2015) has noted: 'to represent place as a thing separate from oneself is, potentially, opening the door for place or a place to assert some kind of *a priori* influence and determination over oneself and perhaps over others' (p. 27). As hinted at earlier, space is, like time, iteratively (re)produced (Barad, 2007; Gregson & Rose, 2000; Valentine, 2002). Ahmed (2006) has remarked that 'space acquires "direction" through how bodies inhabit it, just as bodies acquire direction in this inhabitance' (p. 12). Thus, when one intuits the atmosphere of a location (Brennan, 2004) that tonus is the registering of not just the space, but an affectual panoply of bodies – in the Spinozist sense – (including the affectual cadence of the senser), and of time, moods/emotions, vibrations, and other affects. The work of Roberts (2012), for example, has examined the agential capacities of space through his research on the megastore IKEA, describing through Guattari's notion of *machinic assemblage*, how human and non-human relations transcend their points of origin:

> on the one hand, IKEA's material choreographies reflect the calculated intentions of architects, designers, and market researchers, engineering material capacities in order to maximise sales … on the other hand, a new materialist IKEA emerges from the uncertain trajectories of vibrant matter … its circulations, overflowing the spatiotemporal confines of the store itself. (pp. 2513–2514)

Similarly, Duff's (2010) ethnographic project in Vancouver, Canada, centred on 'the *affective experience of place-making*' (p. 893). Duff gleaned that the urban places the 15–18-year-old participants frequented and the practices and pastimes carried out within those places engendered affects that produced and made meaningful these specific places. In equal measure,

the places became embodied through practice; the affectual suffusions elicited through the mutual constitution by and of space modulated how the young folks negotiated the places (Duff, 2010).

Brown (2000) has argued that epistemologies of 'the closet' have neglected theorisations of space as cultivating social dynamics. The author stresses for conceptualisations of 'the closet' that underscore its spatiality, and I submit Foucault's (1986) *heterotopology* as one such framework. Heterotopias are transspatial, heterogeneous, temporally structured locales 'outside of all places' but 'locat[ed] in reality' (Foucault, 1986, p. 24). Heterotopias are not open-access spaces; entrance is either mandatory or granted. For instance, 'the closet' – as a space to conceal or downplay a non-heterosexual identity – is limited only to queer subjects, seeing that heterosexuals need not conceal their heterosexuality. 'The closet' is a heterotopia of both *crisis* and *deviation* (Foucault, 1986). *Crisis heterotopias* are 'privileged or sacred or forbidden places' (Foucault, 1986, p. 24), accessed by those in precarity or turmoil; 'the closet' becomes a safe house for the subaltern queer body from cis-hetero-normative persecution and harm. Conversely, *heterotopias of deviation* include prisons and psychiatric facilities; 'the closet' serves as a jailhouse to contain the sexual/gender outlaw who transgresses the cis-hetero norm, and in their confinement, heterosexual hegemony is maintained.

In what follows, I articulate how 'the closet' materialised for Geoffrey, Kaye, Gee, and myself as a response to, and as part of, the synergetic (intra-active) relationships between the domestic, commercial, industrial, and community spaces in our tellings, the (heterosexual) patronage of these milieus, and the concomitant customs and exchanges that occurred within the spatial domains.

Spatialising (hetero)sexuality

Passing and spatial (dis)ease

When walking on the site of a civil engineering company to facilitate mental health training for the employees Geoffrey became attuned to affective bodily and spatial forces that palpably conditioned a dramaturgy of heterosexuality:

> I could almost feel this almost physical transformation as I entered the building. I went from being gay Geoffrey to straight Geoff. And I even introduced myself as Geoff. I

> lowered my voice to look more forceful, kind of a harsh tone. It wasn't a conscious decision, but I [became] very aware that I was changing how I was moving in that space because I'm working with all these, kind of, blokey bloke engineers. And I realised … *'Oh, ok, I'm kind of trying to pass here'*.

The change for Geoffrey as he walked into GPU Civics[15] and picked up his visitor pass was totalising. When in Rome do as the Romans do, he thought. For the next hour, Geoffrey, who even as a child felt titillating electricity when looking at a naked man in a porn magazine, would be stowed away. Geoff would be his stand-in. Geoff was as straight as they came. An Aussie bloke. He'd greet someone with a firm handshake – 'How ya going, mate?' Divorced, father of five kids – being straight's assumed when you've got kids. Over two decades of playing Geoff while married to his wife had built significant straight muscle memory, making stepping back into the role easy.

Several rows of misaligned plastic, leather, and fabric desk chairs ran along the length of a general-purpose room. Geoff walked in and put his satchel on the front desk. Against the smearings of dry erasing he wrote 'Geoff' on the whiteboard. The room began to fill with shirted men and their blokey banter, the likes of 'fuck off, cunt' and 'yeah, I seen that'.

Geoff checked his watch. 'That everyone?'

Bill, the chief officer who had organised the training, piped up. 'Looks like it, yeah.'

Clapping his hands together and rubbing his palms back and forth, he began.

'G'day everyone, my name's Geoff. I'm going to be taking you through this training today.'

~

'How'd you go?' asked the lady at reception.

'Yeah, all good,' replied Geoff, handing his visitor pass to her.

He made his way to the carpeted foyer where the lifts were. The low, metallic rumble grew and with a *ping* the doors parted. Two terse-looking men exited; Geoff greeted them, 'G'day.' He stepped inside and the doors slowly closed. Alone.

[15] A pseudonym has been used for the company.

Geoffrey pressed the ground floor button.

Geoffrey[16] stated that the shift in his identity, at first, 'wasn't a conscious decision'; that he '[became] very aware that [he] was changing how [he] was moving in that space'. Goffman (1963) refers to this as a 'cycle of passing' (p. 79). Geoffrey migrated from 'unwitting passing' – reflexive and unconscious – to 'unintended passing' – where the passer becomes cognisant of their passing performance (Goffman, 1963, p. 79). We can describe this passing as coordinated by the mutual *experiencing of* place and being *affected by* place (Duff, 2010, p. 881). The civil engineering company had been made heterosexual as an effect of the intra-actions between the architectural space and the recursive performances, practices, knowledges, rituals, traditions, and exchanges between the straight 'blokey bloke engineers'.

Crouch (2001) avers that '[spaces] may be developed *in practice*, ontologically, discursively made sense and felt in an embodied way' (p. 63; also see Soja, 1985). When Geoffrey entered the civil engineering company he was affected by '*a congealed history of past approaches*' (Ahmed, 2014, p. 145). Through the reproduction of sociosexual scripts and normative gendered behaviours, the bodies of the employees had *taken* shape, were reiteratively *taking* shape, but also *giving* shape to the civil engineering company. Barad (2007) has referred to such processes as *sedimentation*:

> As the rings of trees mark the sedimented history of their intra-actions within and as part of the world, so matter carries within itself the sedimented historialities of the practices through which it is produced as part of its ongoing becoming. (p. 180)

Paradoxically, the very accretion and routinisation of these norms corresponded to a malaise or anaesthetisation of their force for the engineers, subsumed by a quotidian heteronormative *comfort* (Ahmed, 2014). The skin of the civil engineering company had been impressed *by* the bodies of the engineers just as the space had impressed *upon* their bodies (Grosz, 1993). 'To be comfortable is to be so at ease with one's environment that it is hard to distinguish where one's body ends and the world begins' (Ahmed, 2014, p. 148).

[16] I distinguish between *Geoffrey*: the gay man who is interpellated by the spatial, bodily, affective ecologies in the civil engineering company, and *Geoff*: the passing persona. I toggle between *Geoffrey* and *Geoff* to highlight this shift.

Geoffrey's orientation towards straightness speaks to Ahmed's (2006) contention that 'bodies are sexualized through how they inhabit space' (p. 67). Sack (1993) has written of the *territorial rules* that govern spaces and the conduct within them. The affective energies of the rules of the heteronormative space and bodies of the civil engineering company impressed upon Geoffrey, orienting his residence in place (Ahmed, 2006, 2014; Booth, 2015). Certainly, 'people are always in a place, and places constrain and enable' (Sack, 1993, p. 329). When one follows the rules, one is kept *in line* (Ahmed, 2006). Passing as heterosexual thus kept Geoffrey in line. While Geoffrey's passing concurrently emerged from and caused for him *discomfort* (Ahmed, 2014), it also further reinforced and reinvigorated the heteronormative aura of the civil engineering company.

Duff (2010) illustrates how 'places evolve and mutate according to the affective pitch and echo of the myriad practices and encounters experienced in place' (p. 885). When Geoffrey modifies the register of his voice ('forceful, kind of a harsh tone'), his comportment ('changing how [he] was moving'), these are embodied practices of passing that instantiated for *Geoff*, a heterosexual subjectivity. As described by Seidman (2002):

> the closeted individual closely monitors his or her speech, emotional expression, and behavior in order to avoid unwanted suspicion. The sexual meaning of the things (for example, clothes, furniture) and acts (for example, styles of walking, talking, posture) of daily life must be carefully read in order to skilfully fashion a convincing public heterosexual identity. (p. 31)

Spaces – pedestrian or opulent – are presumed heterosexual (Valentine, 1995). In response to the straightness of the civil engineering company, the straightening of Geoffrey's body, and the effect of his passing performative meant that *Geoff's* straightness was unquestion(able)(ed) by the engineers. He was assimilated into heterosexual 'social ways of knowing' (Kunz, 2010, p. 151). Considering that 'bodies are affected by place in each instance anew' (Duff, 2010, p. 885), if Geoffrey had presented himself as gay, the porous skin of the civil engineering company 'that feels and is shaped by … the comings and goings of different bodies' (Ahmed, 2006, p. 6), would have likely produced different affectual intensities, relations, forces, and exchanges. Geoffrey may have been seen as disturbing and unsettling the familiarity of the heterosexual ecology – the space's straight feeling – bestirring a reinforcement of spatial rules.

Rules in spaces determine if or when emotions can manifest (Davidson & Milligan, 2004). If Geoffrey had been 'out', his transgressive gay body may have roused efforts to 're-shape' (Davidson & Milligan, 2004, p. 526) the emotional homeo(*hetero*)stasis of the space. Certainly some spaces configure only particular bodies while relegating others to placelessness (Kitchin, 1998), and the sharing of space with those different from oneself can invoke a refortification of the subject position with which one identifies (Valentine, 2008). Disciplinary acts by the engineers might have served, and been justified, as a reorientation towards the familiar: a restoration of the former comfort of straightness – noticed only upon its loss (Ahmed, 2006). In either case, inhabitation for Geoffrey in the civil engineering company, however brief, posed a catch-22.

Sewing heterospatial seeds

It would be called the parents' excuse room: the bedroom Kaye's girlfriend, Joan, would pretend to occupy when her parents visited. The young couple were living in a share house with one of Joan's friends from high school and her boyfriend. Although Kaye hated communal living, the house itself couldn't be faulted.

The double-story boasted moderate sized rooms, allowing Joan's bed to be centred against the wall with ample space. Arrangements of chrysanthemums and trumpet flowers floated on the comforter's sea of saffron. On either side of the bed were handsome walnut bedside tables with matching genie lamps in arresting orange. The bedroom window looked out onto the large but untended backyard. Especially captivating was the candescent streams of morning sun that would set aglow the patterned paper walls.

Could compartments of the Schreiber wardrobe be left empty? What if Joan's mother were to ever put away clothes? Questions. Impression was everything. It had to look lived-in. Balled-up pieces of paper and refuse in the wire rubbish basket. Clothes hung on hangers, cosmetics scattered in front of the mirror's silvery face. Perhaps an arrangement of books and bric-a-brac on some surfaces – not too contrived, though. The odd casually tossed garment on wall hook and chair back – to be changed each time Joan's parents paid a visit.

'You had to do that to, you know, pass, so there wasn't suspicion'. As Kaye herself indicated, the diversionary bedroom storied above can be understood as a kind of spatialised passing. Gorman-Murray (2007) describes how domestic spaces can become heterosexualised (also see Browne, 2007; Valentine, 1993a, 2002). The readying and presenting of the *parents'*

excuse room were material practices that constituted a 'heteronormative domesticity' (Gorman-Murray, 2007, p. 196). The furniture and furnishings in Joan's bedroom – bed, bedside tables, décor pieces – through their material qualities, their '"thingliness"' (Bille et al., 2010, p. 7), all intra-actively produced the effect of a symbolic heterosexuality, what Jagger (2015) would call the 'interimplication of the material and the symbolic' (p. 322).

The affectual forces generated through this spatialisation of heterosexuality draws attention to Anderson's (2009a) and Anderson and Ash's (2015) work on *affective atmospheres*. Straddling attributes of both the meteorological and the affective (McCormack, 2008), affective atmospheres refer to the affectual capacities and relationalities of a given space. These transmissions of affect resonate from multiplicitous bodies – human and non-human – but through their relational porosity, transcend their discrete points of origin to produce 'collective affects' (Anderson, 2009a, p. 78). Affective atmospheres contribute to the unfolding of social happenings in place; however, they are also shaped by the (im)material bodies that give rise to them in something of an affective feedback loop (Anderson & Ash, 2015). In Kaye's recount, the bedroom accoutrements in their *mattering* – their being made to matter (Barad, 2014) – did important work. They were bodies of varying intensities, gears in what Deleuze and Guattari (1983) have called *desiring machines*, actively involved in eliciting a heterosexual domestic arrangement in the eyes of Joan's parents, and a heterosexual subjectivity for Joan and Kaye.

A space can, however, have multiple atmospheres that do not necessarily compete against, dissolve into, or negate one another but 'touch, contact, and rub up against one other' (Anderson & Ash, 2015, p. 39). In the postphenomenological strand, the *multistability* of the technologies in the bedroom were 'taken up in different meaningful ways for different purposes in different contexts' (Rosenberger, 2017, p. 472). The items might have engineered an imaginary of heterosexual unremarkability for Joan's parents, but for Joan and Kaye they were conspicuous elements of an atmosphere that hummed with disingenuousness and misrecognition of their sexuality and relationship. The need for the bedroom as a spatialisation of passing, to remain 'in the closet', and the effect of being *made* straight and platonic, could be said to be co-occurring atmospheres of equal affective intensity. Neither was nullified or countervailed by the other: both co-existed in a necessary, but nevertheless unpleasant, ambivalent tension (Anderson & Ash, 2015), requiring what Stewart (2011) describes as a 'living in or living through' (p. 452).

Speaking straight: Bloke-ing it up

Gee spoke of how homosocial interactions with 'masculine looking men', for him, (re)produce a 'closet'. This 'closet' is not, however, a 'zone of shame and exclusion' (Rasmussen, 2004, p. 144) erected to conceal a stigmatic association with his gay identity, but rather a mediatory space to (re)produce 'performative maleness' (Atkins & Vicars, 2016, p. 252). 'It could be a hairdresser [barber] or it could be a cashier at a supermarket or a mechanic. Anywhere there's a male, masculine presence that actually requires me to speak.' Gee's comment here alludes to the co-constitution of space and masculinity. For gay masculine subjectivities the praxis of identity construction raises Urbach's (2000) concept of the *ante closet*: a transitory space produced at the intersection of the open closet door and room, 'where one selects clothes, where one dresses and undresses oneself, where one *changes*' (p. 349; emphasis added).

A substantive body of scholarship has posited masculinity not as a ubiquitous episteme but a mobile construct inexorably bound up with, and negotiated through, history, geography, power, gender/sex, race, and class (Butler, 1990; Halberstam, 1998; Herek, 1986; Kimmel & Coston, 2017; Weeks, 2005). Connell (1992, 2005) has offered the concept of *hegemonic masculinity* to account for a socially idealised and rewarded formulation of masculinity, braced by patriarchal ideals that reject and repudiate other inflections of masculinity and femininity, including gay 'male' identities. Perversely, 'gay men continue to engage in a hegemonic masculinity discourse to locate their identities, and this is likely to influence how they experience their masculine identities' (Ravenhill & de Visser, 2019, p. 326). The aforementioned compartmentalisation of masculinity and femininity, in a sexual/phallocentric economy, can be evinced through sexual practices between gay 'men' vis-à-vis sexual roles, where 'the masculine, 'active' inserter partner (not necessarily homosexual) represents the almighty power of the penetrating phallus, while the feminine, 'passive' insertee (and homosexual) stands for the anal powerlessness' (Tapinc, 1992, as cited in Lambevski, 1999, p. 404).

While Gee stated that he was not reticent in mentioning his partner in homosocial situations, in social contexts he consciously (re)produces culturally intelligible performances of masculinity that he believes are a corollary to his male gender identity. He opines that these 'masculine looking men' 'may be less … accepting and may be the first to crack a joke or say something stupid and unnecessary [about being gay]'. Gee's concerns are not unfounded; indeed, the enactment of homophobia – veiled frequently as humour – is often employed to confirm and embolden heterosexual men's masculinity, and banish the contaminative gay

interloper (Burn, 2000; Corbett, 2001; Herek, 1986; Kehily & Nayak, 1997; Kimmel, 1994). 'Becoming a fag', says Pascoe (2005), 'has as much to do with failing at the masculine tasks of competence, heterosexual prowess and strength or [in] anyway revealing weakness or femininity, as it does with a sexual identity' (p. 330).

In the social contract, it is men who are the arbiters of other men's performance of manhood and masculinity (Kimmel, 1994). Gee manufactures masculinising performances as a kind of inoculation against being read as feminine, similar to what Healey (1994) has referred to as *macho drag*. Already bearing aesthetic and cultural markers of masculinised maleness – short hair, a beard, piercings, gender-normative clothing – Gee embellishes his normative masculinity via speech performatives and practices (see Eguchi, 2009; Sarson, 2020). Conversing with (straight) men, he might call upon Australian demotics like *mate*, speak in monosyllables, and drop the pitch of his already sonorous voice to approximate the figure of the *Aussie bloke*.

Gee does, however, benefit from the privileges associated with normative cisgendered, heterosexual masculinity. Ab ovo, he is read *as* straight if nothing is disclosed in the social encounter that disproves his ostensible straightness. Alternatively, if his gayness is made known (i.e. by mentioning his partner), Gee is registered as *straight-acting*. The cultural codes of masculinity manifested through normative male gendered appearance, coupled with masculinising lexical and vocal adjustments, mitigate the risk of 'masculine looking men' equating his gayness with femininity. This has been referred to previously as the 'distinction between being gay and *doing gay*' (Ravenhill & de Visser, 2019, p. 328).

If not instantly recognisable by the quintessential red, white, and blue whirling barber pole, there was no mistaking the services when gazing upon the shopfront window: an angry-looking silhouette of a bearded and quiffed skull, with a pair of scissors and comb crossbones.

Gee visited the barber every six weeks for a refreshing of his undercut, a light trim, and a reshaping of his beard. The barber's was a place of discomfort for him. Not in its appointments and aesthetic (although this was not to his taste): gold-framed mirrors and matching chairs with leather cushioning, the sound of some electronic music group several decibels too high. Not because of unpleasantries, unsatisfactory results or unprofessionalism. Rather, it was from the barbers themselves. Because they were masculine presenting men.

There were two barbers working today; another man (the cashier?) was seated behind the counter, scrolling through his phone. The barber nearest to the door looked up from his client to greet Gee.

‘Hey, boss.’

‘Hi.’

‘Haircut?’

‘And the beard, too.’

‘All good, brother. Give us about 10 minutes.’

‘No worries.’ Gee sat on the sofa, next in line.

The barbers – including the man at the counter – were young, roughly early- to mid-twenties, Gee supposed. They were swaggish, chests puffed like a pool floatie, beards sculptured, hair scissored and razored with finesse – not surprising given their line of work – and head to toe in high-end sportswear.

With each ‘ah, no way, bro!’, ‘sick as’, and ‘yeah, I was gonna take my missus’, Gee became more aware of his own masculine presence. It’d be his turn soon, he’d have to meet the masculine pitch of the space.

The barber on the right was the first to finish with his client. He was dusted off, de-cloaked, and ushered over to the man at the counter, now cognisant.

The station was quickly swept and wiped down, implements brushed and dusted.

‘Come over, man.’

Gee was sat and caped.

‘How you going, brother?’

‘Not bad, mate. Yourself?’

‘Can’t complain, man. So, what do you want done today?’

‘The undercut, just a trim on top, and the beard, please.’

‘Easy.’

Spaces of (un)(be)longing

Up until this point, space has referred to physical locations – *perceived space* in Lefebvre's (1974/1991) *spatial triad*. I now make space for the inclusion of a metaphorics of space, honing in on *lived space*: the symbolic, embodied, and emotional experiences of space (Lefebvre, 1974/1991). In everyday parlance space is often metaphorised or engaged symbolically (Crouch, 2003). One may stress one's need for *some personal space*, *breathing space* or describe one's *headspace* as good or bad.

In this section I am particularly interested in the materiality of metaphoric and symbolic spaces. I describe how sociosexual-spatial relations were imbricated in the exploration of my sexual identity, roused through romantic feelings for a young man when I was 18. These shared spaces are fundamental components in what might be called a *'coming out' assemblage*. It was through the intra-actions of the spaces and places Will and I shared that materialised, for me, an intense emotional geography called limerence (Tennov, 1979/1999).

Limerence refers to a state of being where someone experiences a magnitudinous desire for their amorous feelings to be reciprocated. As put by Wyant (2021), limerence involves 'an involuntary, overwhelming longing for another person's attention and positive regard. This attachment [is] typically unrequited, developing for someone unavailable to reciprocate feelings' (p. 1). One becomes beleaguered and infatuated: ricocheting between the jubilant highs where love is ostensibly returned and the crushing oceanic depths of darkest blue despair when it is not. It might be argued that limerence is more alike emotion than affect – its object being *love*. But like Ahmed (2014), I am not interested in upholding an impervious firewall between the concepts here. And as Fox (2015) has offered, emotions are 'part of a continuum of affectivity that links human bodies to their physical and social environment' (p. 301). Certainly, limerence fulfils the affective tenet of '[a] *sometimes more sustained state of relation* as well as the passage (and the duration of passage) of forces or intensities' (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010, p. 1; emphasis added).

The forming and sharing of spaces suggested to me, at times, that Will might not only be gay (or some other non-heterosexual identity), but might respond in kind to my amorous affections. Stewart (2011) tells us that 'in any present moment there is always something to attune to, always the literal registering of forms and forces that bring you into the situation or haunt or offer solace or float lightly around the room' (p. 451). Moments of ignition were just as soon extinguished by indications and recognitions of Will's heterosexuality: a comment, a

look, a smile. But like a freshly snuffed candle, in the glowing wick is the briefest chance for reignition. Hope was rekindled, investment in my love object reconfirmed with some other gesture suggesting a not entirely heterosexual sexual orientation.

~

Will and I and a few friends are en route to Canberra to see the Paris Masterpieces exhibition. Boarding the bus, he tells me: 'I need to find myself someone. *Preferably* a girl'.

Preferably, but not limited to? Maybe I have a chance –

Limerent sign: 'acute longing for reciprocation' (Tennov, 1979/1999, p. 23).

To whittle away the long hours of driving ahead, we share music.

Clouds of sulfur in the air, bombs are falling everywhere, it's heartbreak warfare[17] (listen here).

Driving over the pockmarked road permits passage to Will's body. At my design, my headphone dislodges so that his fingers know mine in the fumbling retrieval. The haziness of twilight and the dimness of the coach's interior amplify these impish touches. The air is charged like before a thunderstorm; my eyes languor under the seductive woody notes of his cologne. In the safe, furtive dark – absorbed in the song's imaginal impressions – I want to enfold my fingers with his. I imagine him squeezing my hand back.

When space is customarily apprehended through the visual, the formative role that sound – including music – wields in organising time and its affective ambiances is overlooked (Simpson, 2017; Smith, 1994; Valentine, 1995). 'Time is consubstantial with sound. Sound is not "in" time; rather time is invented as a sound spreads "out"' (Solomos, 2018, p. 97). The *vibrational assemblage* (Gallagher, 2016) of the grumbling and chugging bus engine, the dampened conversations of other passengers, and the immersive headphone music plunged Will and I into '"timeless time"' (DeChaine, 2002, p. 80). Valentine and Skelton (2003) speak of music as having a 'queer significance' (p. 855). And, indeed, the sharing of songs, for me,

[17] Mayer (2009).

created a queer *counterspace* (Valentine, 1995): a momentary living elsewhere and otherwise, where I was winched 'from the hegemonic heterosexuality of … everyday surroundings' (p. 481). Moved by the music's affective vibrations and aesthetic impressions, I invented imaginaries and fantasies. I airdropped myself into the singer and made Will the subject of the lyrics – a practice not unlike what Vicars (2017) describes as a praxis of queerly (re)scripting, (re)constructing, and supplementing popular culture texts representing normative heterosexuality.

> If I was older then I would hold her tight and say don't you ever leave me
>
> and then
>
> maybe one day, she will just say that she's happy enough, happy enough[18] (listen here).

> The distance is quite simply much too far for me to row,
>
> it seems farther than ever before,
>
> oh no.
>
> I need you so much closer[19] (listen here).

Limerent sign: 'intrusive thinking about the object of your passionate desire' (Tennov, 1979/ 1999, p. 23).

~

A chilly and wet Wednesday morning just after 9 am. The sky is luminous but cooly toned, like a Caspar David Friedrich painting. Will is sitting on the red concrete bollard across from the glass doors of the lecture theatre, scrolling through his iPod.

'Ah, hey!'

'Have you been waiting long?'

''Bout ten minutes.'

[18] Youth Group (2005).
[19] Death Cab for Cutie (2003).

When the doors open with a mechanical *click*, I follow him through the medicinal-smelling foyer and up the polished wooden staircase. He loudly hums a song I don't know. I don't know what to say.

The theatre has cascading seating of scarlet velvet chairs; centre stage suspends a large projection screen. Will and I sit towards the back.

'You should check out my YouTube channel. I do vlogs – here.' He tears a corner of paper from his exercise book, scribbles something, and then passes it to me.

BLOODYMcKenzie

'Check it out,' he says, nudging me.

The paper is warm from his touch. 'Yeah, I will.'

'I'm kinda naked in the first one.'

I'm grateful for the dimness hiding what I'm sure are blushed cheeks. 'What do you mean?'

'I strip and swim in the dam.'

He wants me to see him naked?!

Limerent sign: 'buoyancy (a feeling of walking on air) when reciprocation seems evident' (Tennov, 1979/1999, p. 24).

Limerent sign: 'some fleeting and transient relief from unrequited limerent passion through vivid imagination of action … that means reciprocation' (Tennov, 1979/1999, p. 24).

The spaces Will and I shared, alone, annexed into heterotopic spaces (Foucault, 1986). As 'counter-sites' (Foucault, 1986, p. 24), heterotopias are spaces peripheral to and distinct from *real* spaces; provisional spaces co-present within spaces. As discussed earlier, Foucault (1986) differentiates between *heterotopias of crisis* – 'privileged or sacred or forbidden places' (p. 24) designated for individuals in peril – and *heterotopias of deviation*, restricted for dissidents and deviants who violate social norms and rules. Heterotopias can, however, exist as both crisis *and* deviation concurrently (Foucault, 1986).

Bus, lecture theatre, train station, cafe – for me, these were 'bloom space[s]' (Stewart, 2010, p. 340), where my fledgling gay identity and the associated affective and emotional

sensations, shiftings, scatterings, tempos, and turbulences had space to gestate away from the surveillance of the dominant heterosexual order. The heterotopia provided the means of engaging in a praxis of identity construction – flighty locutions, a look lingering a second too long, a jesting nudge, imagined (sexual) scenarios. Tied up with the heterotopic space, limerent shapes resembling unrequited love swelled, circulated, and amplified, inciting 'intensit[ies] of feeling that le[ft] other concerns in the background' (Tennov, 1979/1999, p. 24). The lifespan of the heterotopia generated in Will's contact and company was finite, atrophying at the spacetime we parted. I then entered, alone, my heterotopic space of crisis. Lovelorn, ruminative, and divested of orientation; stuck in a morass; to wallow and writhe. Here, limerence chimes with cruel optimism qua an 'attachment taken in its throes manifest[ing] [as] an intelligence beyond rational calculation' (Berlant, 2011, p. 2). This is inflected in my attachment to the limerent situation so that I could stay in contact with my optimistic object (Will), in whom I had sublimated the emergence – the 'coming out' – of my gay identity vis-à-vis the kaleidoscope of promises I had attached to him.

Leaving space for space

Ewalt (2016) captures the liveliness of the spatial in the formation and unfurling of social phenomena and identities: 'spatial configurations are neither static entities nor preexisting territories but are rather the product of interconnected flows, always coming from, and on their way to, elsewhere; the spatial is a momentary articulation of moving matter' (p. 137). In this plateau, spaces took shape through and co-produced hetero-masculinising performances, as per the accounts of Geoffrey and Gee. Their capacity to assimilate into heterosexually and masculinely authored milieus highlights Ahmed's (2006) queer phenomenological contention that 'bodies may become orientated in [their] responsiveness to the world around them, given [their] capacity to be affected' (p. 9). The spatialised practice of passing by setting up the parents' excuse room allowed Kaye and Joan to uphold the appearance of their presumed straightness. At the same time, the atmosphere of heterosexuality engendered through the bedroom's material spatial assemblage co-formed another affective atmosphere where Kaye and Joan's relationship was denied. Space, in my stories, referred not only to the geographic but to the psychic, emotional, and affective space of limerence. Locations shared with Will, a love interest, produced heterotopias that were zones of paradoxicality. The heterotopias concealed the sexual object choice of my desire (Freud, 1905/1979), the amorous feelings I

harboured, while at the same time they gave me space to feel out my gay identity through fantasy.

Through the (re)storied tales of the co-researchers and myself, I have considered crucial the relations between spatialities and materialisations of social identities, categories, 'the closet', and 'coming out'. Never a receptacle of inchoate matter (as if it ever were), I have impressed the affective and emotional saturations of spatialities – not as an innate agential quality but in tune with Ewalt, bound up – intra-acting – with a confederation of affectual tonalities vis-à-vis (heterosexual) bodies, their performances and practices, objects (sentient and metaphorical), and the architectural arrangements of the space itself.

Plateau # Diffracting teacherly 'outness': Reading heteronormative inscriptions on gay educator bodies in Victorian schools

In this plateau I make use of postmodern and feminist epistemologies to frame my account of how queer teacher bodies, as texts (body-texts), are inscribed by and rescript heteronormalising material-discourses in Victorian educational institutions in Australia. I call on Barad's (2007, 2014) notion of diffraction to read these body-texts through one another, sensitive to the textures and tonalities of 'outness' between T – a gay, cisgender, in-service teacher – and myself – a gay, gender queer teacher-cum-academic. Attending to the differences in our teacherly 'outness' – not as deficiencies but through a *response-able* (Barad, 2014, 2020) engagement with how and why these differences matter – this diffractive reading reveals our bodies as both surfaces scribed by cis-hetero-normativity, but also locations that curate queer pedagogical interruptions and resistances.

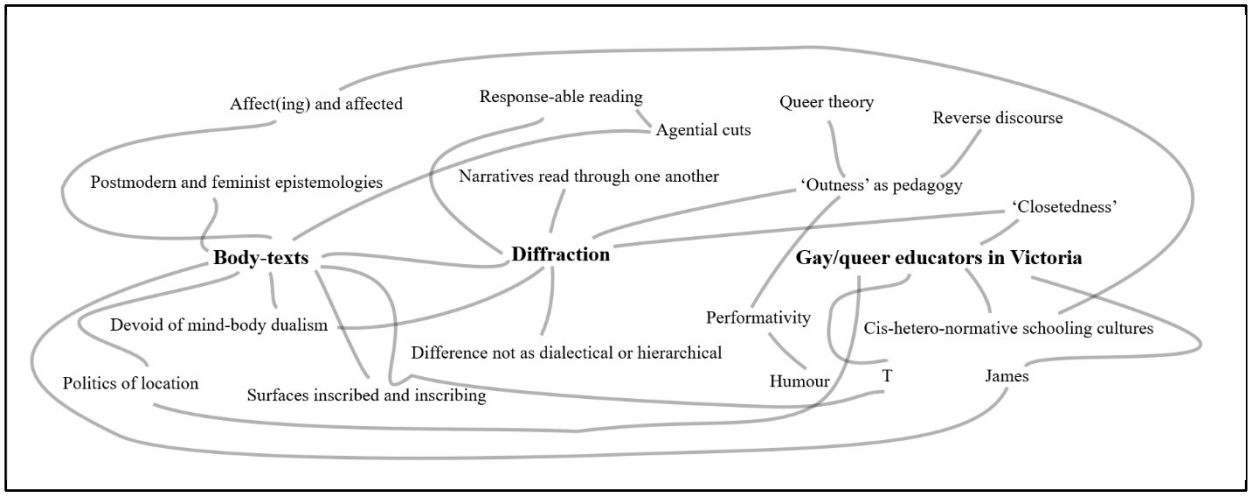


Figure 9: Rhizomatic mapping of Plateau # Diffracting teacherly 'outness': Reading heteronormative inscriptions on gay educator bodies in Victorian schools

Diffraction: Phenomenon, methodology, reading

In *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, Karen Barad draws from and extends Donna Haraway's (1991) conceptualisation of diffraction as an alternative to reflection and reflexivity, apprehending it – unsurprisingly for a physicist – as a scientific phenomenon. Barad (2007, 2014) explains that diffraction is observed in the characteristic behaviour of waves – water, sound, and light – and pertains to how these

waves overlap and, when meeting an obstruction, disperse, distribute, and diffuse. Significantly, in the overlapping of waves, the former pattern is constitutive of the new pattern; diffraction reconfigures normative temporal logics (Thorpe et al., 2020). Barad purposes this wave phenomenality as a methodology – a diffractive methodology – which entails 'reading insights through one another' (Barad, 2007, p. 30).

As a non-representational approach and optical metaphor, diffraction alleviates reflection's impossible task of producing a facsimile of phenomena – 'mirroring and sameness' (Barad, 2007, p. 29) – and is interested instead in 'patterns of difference' (p. 29). Crucially, diffraction does not situate an epistemological source (text, theory, concept) as an orienting focal point against which others are esteemed or evaluated, but is attentive and sensitised to 'how different differences get made, what gets excluded, and how those exclusions matter' (Barad, 2007, p. 30). As put by Smith and Monforte (2020), diffraction entails 'rethinking difference beyond binary oppositions' (p. 6) and attending to entanglements. Difference is relieved of dialectical and hierarchical valences and is affirm(able)ed (Bozalek & Murris, 2022).

Diffraction works at prying open deposited and encrusted knowledges and binaries, reoxygenating them by thinking them anew (Barad & Gandorfer, 2021). This licenses 'multiple theoretical perspectives, encounters, and knowledges [to be] thought alongside and with one another rather than being understood in opposition' (Thorpe et al., 2020, p. 36). Putting the above frameworks of knowledge and understanding into critical conversation requires one to read response-ably, assiduous to the contributions of each text while pursuing 'new patterns of thinking-being' (Barad et al., 2012, p. 58). Diffraction is a 'politico-ethico-onto-epistemological' (Barad, 2014, p. 186) generative engagement in world-building, allowing unmaterialised openings and unthought thoughts to materialise (Hook & Wolfe, 2018). It is engaging 'a superposition of beings, becomings, here and there's, now and then's. Superpositions, not oppositions' (Barad, 2014, p. 176). Our participation in the theorising and building of knowledges as part of the worlding of the world is a matter of response-ability, what Barad calls 'a matter of inheritance and indebtedness to the past as well as the future' (Juelskjær & Schwennesen, 2012, p. 13).

Whereas diffraction has been used to read understandings 'through one another' – literary, philosophical, and theoretical – my diffractive reading, sourcing from postmodern and feminist epistemologies, conceptualises the body as a text (body-text) – and involves reading

bodily biographies 'through one another'. While purposing diffraction here might be aslant (queer?) and sui generis, a diffractive methodology is *in/determinate* (Juelskjær et al., 2021; Murris & Bozalek, 2019), without prescriptivism. I read T's and my own gay teacherly body-texts '*through, with,* and *in relation to'* (Mazzei, 2014, p. 744) one another. Via diffraction, I seek to lever open differences through a *double consciousness* of knowing (Du Bois, 1903/2003) when the discourses of *gay* and *teacher* collide(d).

Being-becoming bodies: Body-texts

It is an uncontroversial statement to say that bodies sensately encounter worlds. It is through phenomenological encounters of the body that we live, register, and respond to the overlapping material-discursive inscriptions and imprints of, inter alia, sex, sexuality, gender, class, (dis)ability, and race (Braidotti, 2006b; Brush, 1998; Crouch, 2001; Grosz, 1993; Overton, 2008). It is on account of these coded sociological categorisations and *embodied ways of knowing* (Wilcox, 2009) that one becomes an (un)intelligible subject (de Souza et al., 2016; Grosz, 1995).

What we take to signify *the body*, however, has been a site of passionate onto-epistemological contestation within philosophy and social science, installed by the pervasive and entrenched legacy of Cartesian dualism (St. Pierre, 2013b; van der Tuin & Dolphijn, 2010). Situating the body as an a priori physical entity untouched by the social, or a mere social construction whose surface is passive, is rooted in a disembodying Cartesian legacy (Brush, 1998; Grosz, 1995). So adherent is Descartes's *cogito*, 'the unified, conscious, coherent, stable, rational and knowing individual who exists ahead of knowledge and culture' (St. Pierre, 2012, p. 486), that unsurprisingly, the term *body* is anthropocentrically metonymical with *human body* (Ferrando, 2014).

As a tonic to the sheen of Cartesianism, the monism of new materialism and posthumanism views the human in relationship with the non-human and more-than-human (Braidotti, 2019b; Connolly, 2013; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Gamble et al., 2019). These philosophies offer a reconciliatory onto-epistemology in that 'nature is always already/has never been separable from culture, from the implosion that is natureculture' (Barad, 2020, p. 109; also see Grosz, 1987). The body cannot be reduced to a mere corporeal container; mind detached from limb; independent from other bodies and interdependent from their flows of relational and vibratory affectivity (Blackman, 2012; Cohen & Weiss, 2003). Spinoza's (1996)

highly trafficked quote, ‘no one has yet determined what the body can do’ (p. 71), still holds relevance. As well as its ‘concrete, material, animate organization of flesh, organs, nerves, and skeletal structure’ (Grosz, 1995, p. 382), the body is also a constellation of modalities: affective, emotional, relational, social, cultural, linguistic, political, technological, historical, psychic, and so on. As Haraway (2006) has asked: ‘why should our bodies end at the skin[?]’ (p. 144). At the same time the body is embedded *in* it is also entangled *with* socio-semiotic-symbolic-material relations, and is constitutive of the world’s ‘differential becoming’ (Barad, 2007, p. 89). The body is an iterative assembly, a burgeoning sensorium (Thrift, 2008). The trans body, for example, has inaugurated an ingathering of new understandings of embodiment, ‘new knowledge about the experience of being in a body and … very different ways of seeing the world’ (Halberstam, 2016, p. 370). Bodies, then, are never finished but always *being-becoming* (Barad, 2014, 2015; Bozalek & Zembylas, 2023).

The body’s dependency on others cultivates issues of susceptibility, relational openness to pleasures, harms, even death (Butler, 1993, 2012a). While the body may be marked by the material-discursive relations within which it is bound up and which it is subject to, it is not simply a passive medium awaiting the scoring and scribing of the social (Barad, 2003). As proposed eloquently by Grosz (1997), it rather bears its own ‘texture, a tonus, a materiality that is an active ingredient in the messages produced’ (p. 244). Said differently, ‘what is mapped onto the body is not unaffected by the body onto which it is projected’ (Grosz, 1997, p. 245); ‘the body can intervene in discourse just as discourse can intervene into the body’ (Somerville, 2004, p. 51). These contentions cohere with Foucault’s (1976) observation that power is multi-scalar and multidirectional, not uniquely a top-down phenomenon.

Postmodern scholarship has made consonant the body and the text (Grosz, 1997; Somerville, 2004; Weiss, 2003). As a product of (material-)discourse, ‘inscriptions of corporeal differences between bodies can be seen to produce body-subjects as living significations, social texts capable of being read or interpreted’ (Grosz, 1997, p. 237). Cixous (1991) explicates the body as living pages of flesh:

> Life becomes text starting out from my body. I am already text. History, love, violence, time, work, desire inscribe it in my body, I go where the ‘fundamental language’ is spoken, the body language into which all the tongues of things, acts, and beings translate themselves, in my own breast, the whole of reality worked upon in my flesh,

> intercepted by my nerves, by my senses, by the labor of all my cells, projected, analyzed, recomposed into a book. (p. 52)

It is for this reason that I – at the risk of being tautological – bond the signifiers *body* and *text* and offer the term *body-text*. Attridge (1999) has suggested that 'a text is to be considered not as a fixed set of signifiers and signifieds but something like a field of potential meaning awaiting realization without wholly determining it in advance' (p. 25). Hence, the body-text is not a finalised or disconnected entity, but in its ongoing openness to the ebbs and flows of social relations, ever coalescing. The deposits of past events solidified as *experience* are always rethinkable, reinterpretable, reworkable: 'time *is* if it is anything at all, the indeterminate—the unfolding and emergence of the new'' (Grosz, 2003, p. 16). Offering the notion of body-texts, I draw also from new materialist understandings of the materiality of texts. Just as bodies live and breathe, so do stories (Frank, 2010; Jørgensen & Strand, 2014; Svane, 2014). The body has been regarded as a locus of theory (Somerville, 2004; St. Pierre & Roulston, 2006), a depository of (gay) embodied knowledges (Hill, 1996; Honeychurch, 1998). A diffractive reading of the body-text's inscriptions through norms and discourses, and its affective interventions and resistances, in the Foucauldian sense, are 'readable' (Grosz, 1995, p. 382) as an 'onto-tale' (Bennett, 2010, p. 117).

How can body-texts be diffractively read? I draw from Barad's (2003, 2007, 2014) notion of *agential cuts*: contextually contingent separations within a phenomenon. Agential cuts are material distinctions made within a particular *intra-action*. These cuts are ethico-onto-epistemological manoeuvres given they are a deliberate demarcation, a '*boundary-making practice*' (Barad, 2007, p. 148). In writing about T's and my own experiences as gay teachers, I have demarcated gay from straight in the service of diffractively reading our experiences of navigating 'outness' within the normativising sexual and gendered ecologies of schools.

That teachers teach out of bodies renders pedagogical practices as embodied, relational, and political engagements (Alsup, 2005; Dixon & Senior, 2011; Ivinson, 2012). Situating T's and my body as texts to be diffractively read makes possible a detailed and attentive survey of how material-discursive (hetero)normative educational mythologies, as *apparatuses of bodily production* (Barad, 2003) were encountered, sustained, and metabolised by our bodies as gay teachers. It is important to mention that no body-text is a reference point or weighed against in the diffractive reading. I belabour this point, largely for myself, given there is a real possibility

for self-flagellation and to 'mark [myself] as lacking' (Rasmussen, 2004, p. 145) when ~~comparing~~ my teacherly experiences to T's. His unequivocal 'outness' was something I could never manage during my teaching career. Each body-text, then, is engaged response-ably as a superposition, an overlapping of differences – whether infinitesimal or tremorous – such that our bodies are both *bodies that matter* (Butler, 1993).

Situated knowledges

Before diffractively reading our body-texts, it is necessary to foreground how our bodies are organised within a *politics of location* (Braidotti, 2006c, 2019b). Living, speaking, and theorising are embodied, situated practices; one cannot perform the *god-trick* and witness the world from everywhere and nowhere (Braidotti & Strom, 2018; Haraway, 2014). The body is the locus 'from which [we] theorize, analyze, practice, and critically reconsider the construction and reproduction of knowledge, power, class, and culture' (Pillow, 1997, p. 349). In this diffraction of teacherly 'outness', it is important to underscore our intersections of identity (Crenshaw, 2019) when theorising 'how … sexuality, gender, ethnicity, culture, race, class, ability, religion, gender identity/expression, age, teaching experience, and geographic location mesh to complicate the politics of coming out' (Wells, 2017, p. 271).

Both T and I are white, able-bodied, and middle-class, living and teaching/having taught in regional and metropolitan public/co-educational schools in Victoria, Australia. T is a 31-year-old gay man who, throughout his six years of teaching, has worked in both primary and secondary schools. I am a 34-year-old gay, gender queer person who taught for four years in primary schools before pursuing a career in academe. T has been 'out' throughout his entire teaching career, including as a pre-service teacher. I never occupied the discursive location of fully 'out' while working as a teacher.

Professional, pedagogical, and religious constraints

T's first teaching position was at a primary school in Greater Melbourne. T felt that primary teaching was an educational level where he could enlist interventionist pedagogies to assuage student disengagement and behavioural issues. The school at which he was employed had only 100 students. On the Friday before the new school year commenced, T had gone in to set up his classroom when he was approached by the principal and another teacher. A conversation

ensued about a pre-planned, principal-approved orientation week activity in the previous year, where the class had completed a task about the people who made them feel safe and who they trusted. Modelling this activity, T had written that his parents, his running group, and his then fiancé (now husband) were the people he trusted and who made him feel safe.

The principal told T that three students had on religious grounds since been removed from not only his class, but the school:

> The principal had basically said, like, I know that that's discriminatory. What [the parent has] said and what [they have] done and like, how that's making you feel. But … we have lost three kids out of 100, and you know, we've … lost three per cent of our school because of something that you did … I only stayed at that school for six months.

The principal's comment about losing three percent of the school's student body animates bureaucratic politics of school funding. According to the Student Resource Package (SRP), in Victorian government schools, 'student-based funding' – funding contingent on student population – is the primary basis for funding (Education.vic.gov.au, n.d.-b). A decrease in student numbers therefore correlates to a decrease in available monies.

After T resigned, he was employed at a high school in metropolitan Melbourne. T recounts some 'pointy conversations' with religious migrant students, who remarked to him that 'gay people should go to hell'. T engaged in a politicised 'coming out' to these students in an attempt to 'put a face to the person'– *'Oh, but I'm gay'*. This scene is a complex of colliding discourses: bureaucratic, religious, professional, political, sexual. It is also where a complication emerges. Since T was employed on a short-term contract, he was not afforded the job security enjoyed by teachers with ongoing tenure. Coleman et al. (2005) state that tenure can 'protect teachers' jobs from the capricious decisions of school administrators' (p. 120). A symptom of this precarious positioning is T's asking: 'Can I sort of, like, cause an issue [because] I don't feel safe?' *Safe*, here, speaks to both bodily wellbeing and professional security. T was compelled to 'go along with it' (Ahmed, 2010a, p. 39), aware that 'refus[ing] to be placed would mean to be seen as trouble' (Ahmed, 2010a, p. 39) and could potentially jeopardise his chances of ongoing tenure. T believed that leadership 'brushed under the carpet' his concerns. With one student's history of extended absenteeism from school and gang affiliations, he thought leadership were ambivalent to engage in the matter. As Victorian

schools have a duty of care to all staff (Department of Education and Training, 2023) this experience suggests that leadership here directly flouted their responsibility. One cannot help but speculate what leadership's response would have been had the issue involved a heterosexual teacher.

The precarity of non-tenured employment stymied T from engaging in a *border-crossing pedagogy* 'to facilitate crossings and connections' (Walsh & Townsin, 2018, p. 20) with the religious migrant students. Boler's (1999) *pedagogy of discomfort* could have the students sit in the space of discomfort vis-à-vis T's gay identity. Rather than ventriloquising religious doctrine condemning queer people – *'the Bible says this'* – the pupils could engage critically with where their assumptions and interpretations of scripture stem from (see Sapp, 2016). Interrupting the reception of knowledge, when that 'knowledge is a form of resistance' (Britzman, 1995a, p. 159), 'what one cannot bear to know' (Britzman, 1995a, p. 165), is the linchpin of a queer pedagogical approach.

Sites of gay disruption: (Dis)empowerment

The teacherly body garners much scrutiny in schools (Alsup, 2005). Being a figure of prominence becomes compounded for queer teachers, who must engage, and wrestle with, pedagogical questions of *if*, *how*, and *when* to 'come out' (Shlasko, 2005). Indeed, culturally intelligible performances of gayness/queerness mean that '[n]ot everyone starts with the privilege of a closet' (Branfman, 2015, p. 77). The visibility of sexual and gendered dissidents in schools amounts to '"sex in public"' (Berlant & Warner, 1998, p. 553), contravening the discourses of innocence ascribed to children (Bickmore, 1999; Britzman, 1999; Shlasko, 2005). The queer teacher becomes 'fram[ed] … within a libidinal discourse of violation, contamination, and seduction' (Ingebretsen, 2000, p. 17). Interpellated by implicit and explicit cis-hetero-normalising powers, queer teachers may adopt a position of asexuality (see Ferfolja, 2014; Milenkovic & Vicars, 2025b; Quinlivan & Town, 1999; Rudoe, 2010) or risk being viewed as sexually predatory (see Jones et al., 2014; Moosa & Bhana, 2020; Pruit, 2015). The discourse of sexual privatisation that heterosexuality authorises is, however, cross-contaminated by the passel of straight teachers who in staffrooms, offices, and corridors rabidly discuss matters sexual, familial, and domestic (Berlant & Warner, 1998; Connell, 2015). In this way, schools 'are contradictory spaces that espouse the production of a social citizenry

capable of "adult" world functioning, but maintain the ignorance of future generations in terms of LGBTQ understandings' (Ferfolja, 2014, p. 31).

According to Brim (2009), the queer teacher's body can become a 'pedagogical utility' (p. 139) that queers the Cartesian separation of mind and body ensconced in conventional understandings of pedagogy and learning (Ivinson, 2012; Nguyen & Larson, 2015; Wilcox, 2009). A queerly embodied pedagogy conjoins these Descartian divorcements, conscious that the erotic and the fantastic are the wellspring from which the pleasures of learning and teaching emerge (Britzman, 2010). As Dixon and Senior (2011) have noted: 'bodies, feelings, histories are as much pedagogical material as our minds' (p. 477).

Within cultural narratives and understandings of gayness, T's body is 'intextuated' (Grosz, 1997, p. 239) as what he describes as 'visibly homosexual':

> I'm quite flamboyant and I think I was just as flamboyant then [as a teenager before 'coming out']. I'd do things like the gay hand … my voice is quite high, so there's just sort of, I guess, some stereotypical gay things going on.

It is from the discursive location of the *glass closet* (Sedgwick, 1990) that T ignites an agentic capacity to subvert and enervate the cis-hetero-normative regulatory structures in his school. T describes a series of incidents involving a menacing student at his former secondary school '[who] caused [him] some problems'. The student began to harass a friendship group of gender and sexually diverse students who sat together in the schoolyard; when this came to T's attention, he intervened. 'I sort of swooped in … like, I'm gonna help with this. And I was able to, like, diffuse some of it and redirect … him [the student] to leadership'. This however, led to the student nettling and pursuing T around the school:

> [He was] just totally pushing the line. It ended with him, like … walking me to my office and telling me to get back into my closet … pointing at my door ... And pretty much I just … I marched him down to the principal's office and I said here's the, you know, the thing that he's done right now, the few things that have sort of led up to this. I'm not dealing with anymore … I'm not going to deal with him. I don't feel safe, like,

around him, etcetera. I was like, if it's not dealt with … I will, you know … put this on eduSafe[20] and I'll follow it up with the union … I was like, I've had enough.

In these reminiscences T speaks *parrhesiastically* back to heteronormative ecologies of power (Foucault, 2001). Parrhesiastic discourse is spoken forthrightly from a particular social location of knowing, arising from an impetus of moral and ethical duty (Foucault, 2001, 2005). For queer teachers this is a potentially dangerous undertaking when oftentimes they 'lack the social (heterosexual) capital' (Gray, 2013, p. 708) enjoyed by heterogendered educators. As the *parrhesiastes* – the speaker of truth – T '(re)frame[d] and (re)position[ed] [himself] in institutionally powerful discursive locations' (Ferfolja, 2014, pp. 31–32). Levering the visibility of his gay identity as an 'explicit exposure' (Pillow, 1997, p. 349), T short-circuited the tacit but widespread heterocentric imaginary in schooling cultures that has historically mandated queer invisibility and silence (Conrad, 2020; Ferfolja, 2005, 2013; Henderson, 2019; McKenna-Buchanan et al., 2015; Reilly, 2007).

While heteronormative powers may act upon the queer body through disciplinary and (hyper)surveillant modalities (Foucault, 1995), the body is, as Grosz (1997) states, 'a site of *resistance*' (p. 238), capable of 'counterstrategic reinscription … capable of being self-marked, self-represented in alternative ways' (p. 238). Bristling at the student's cis-hetero-sexist bullying, and demanding from the upper echelons of leadership that his concerns of safety be addressed, T's body became a pedagogical site of defiance (Burch, 2009; Sintos Coloma, 2013). Complaint became a queer method (Ahmed, 2021). This harkens to what Foucault (1976) has named *reverse discourse*, where T spoke out from his gay subjectivity about concerns for his safety, 'demand[ing] that its legitimacy [and] "naturality" be acknowledged' (p. 101). To use the common parlance, T put his body *on the line*.

At the same time that T firmly asserts his concerns to leadership, he conveys an awareness of the resources and recourses to action available to him as a gay teacher (through eduSafe and the Australian Education Union). As I have written elsewhere (Milenkovic, 2025), in my first year of teaching in a year one classroom, despite not being 'out', I experienced covert homophobia and microaggressions from school leadership, primarily the principal. Was the 'open secret' of my sexual orientation disqualified within the *distribution of the sensible*

[20] eduSafe Plus 'is the online portal for managing occupational health, safety and wellbeing' (Education.vic.gov.au, n.d.- a) for Victorian school staff.

(Rancière, 2004): that which can(not) be thought or said? Unlike T, I was unaware of the infrastructures of support and entitlements available to me as a gay/queer teacher. This was compounded also by the fact that seeking Departmental support and engaging in a mediatory process would be tantamount to 'outing' myself. Unlike T, I could never manage to be 'an open book', 'as visible as possible', during my teaching career. I 'switch[ed] dimensions' (Ahmed, 2006, p. 158) in a pendulous toing-and-froing from openness to privatisation, professional to personal.

Performing and performances: A queer pedagogy

A queer pedagogy, as offered by Bryson and de Castell (1993), is 'a radical form of educative praxis implemented deliberately to interfere with, to intervene in, the production of "normalcy"' (p. 285; also see Britzman, 1995a, 2012b; McNeil et al., 2018). Much like queer theory's insistence on eluding definitional and epistemological straitjacketing, a queer pedagogy is antagonistic towards any preconceived form and audience (Luhmann, 1998). It is the plasticity of queer theory as the undertow of queer pedagogy that, in the service of teaching and learning, allows multiple configurations, iterations, and formations within teacherly praxis (Shlasko, 2005). For T, *the personal is pedagogical* (Kletchka et al., 2020): his confidence in his classroom practice ripened as a result of experiences pertinent to his sexual orientation:

> I went into [his current school] a bit more, I guess, sort of stronger, in the way that I knew that I could sort of 'be me' … if anything comes up that is homophobic … or like something that I would find homophobic that maybe kids don't … just like saying, *'Oh, that's gay'* or *'What a faggot'* or whatever, I diffuse that.

T tacticalises humour as a predominant ingredient of his pedagogical repertoire. Pairing humour and sexuality within the conservatism of the classroom can surely be a dubious engagement, yet can also be regarded as a queer counter-code to the expected and acceptable walling of the public and private, characterological of educational discourse and domains (Allen, 2014; Vicars, 2006). T invokes humour to subvert normative heterogendered discourses:

> How I … 'come out' now is different to, like … many years ago … I'll use … either humour [or] dark humour. Or … sort of … even shock humour. [When someone presumes T has a wife and asks her name] … 'I'd be like, 'I'm married to a MAN!' [clapping hands to face].

Or as part of classroom management:

> [In the classroom] I'll be, like, '*Please put the tables back'*. And then I'm like, '*Hmm, they're not looking very straight, like me*'.

The point was offered earlier that T identifies himself as 'visibly homosexual' through culturally comprehensible semiotics of gayness (flamboyancy, 'the gay hand', a 'high' voice). Yet, in the first account in which he is presumed married to a woman, and therefore read as heterosexual, what is demonstrated is that '[e]ven the most obvious cues can be misunderstood or remain unintelligible to some people' (Khayatt, 1997, p. 139). Humour, for T, thus becomes a fruitful pedagogical tool to 'come out', rather than the declarative, confessionally tinged speech act '*I'm gay'*.

In his recount about classroom management, T can be seen as donning a kind of heterosexual drag, identifying himself as 'straight' ('not looking very straight, like me'). This is a subversive performative that 'abnormalis[es] the normal' (Quinlivan & Town, 1999, p. 509). Slipping into a heterosexual identity is a kind of inverse of 'the closet' where 'the effects of sartorial gestures and … their significance to others [can be imagined]' (Urbach, 2000, p. 70) through mimicry. T's self-naming reveals that 'the supposed fixedness and security of established norms … are not so fixed or secure after all' (Henry et al., 2023, p. 155). As Butler (1991) has described:

> The parodic or imitative effect of gay identities works neither to copy nor emulate heterosexuality, but rather, to expose heterosexuality as an incessant and *panicked* imitation of its own naturalized idealization. (pp. 22–23)

While T performed a queer pedagogy, I performed 'closetedness'. As Sedgwick (1990) explains:

> 'Closetedness' itself is a performance initiated as such by the speech act of a silence – not a particular silence, but a silence that accrues particularity by fits and starts, in relation to the discourse that surrounds and differentially constructs it. (p. 3)

I performed a discourse of silence around my sexual and gendered identities during my teaching career. During my last year of teaching in 2021, I worked as a visual arts teacher in a school in Melbourne. The school was in a booming suburb and had a large demographic of English as an additional language (EAL) students from Indian, Arabic, Indigenous, and Asian backgrounds. The principal gave the impression of genuinely caring for his staff – the pride flag even bedecked his email signature. Notwithstanding this, being so accustomed to silence and acculturated to the heteronorm I still had misgivings about being 'out'.

I discovered that two queer teachers worked at the school. Steve was a gay man who taught Foundation, while Jill, a lesbian, taught year two. By happenstance, Jill had one day emailed me, which led to her mentioning her partner of 25 years and their grown children. Later she explained that she *sensed* that I might have been gay and was for that reason comfortable in communicating her sexual identity to me. Neither of my colleagues were 'out' to their students or their parents, however. Gray (2013) has suggested that queer teachers broadly occupy three discursive locations in schools: 1. total detachment of the public from private; 2. selective 'outness' to colleagues; and 3. unequivocal 'outness' to colleagues and students. This was the first sliver of (selective) 'outness' during my career as a primary school teacher.

Role models, visibility, and teachable moments

In Jackson's (2009) study on how teachers' lesbian and gay identities informed their professional practice, Glen, a gay man, commented: 'while my being out is not responsible for [other students 'coming out'] I think it helps contribute to an environment where being gay is seen to be OK' (p. 65). A closely associated discourse is that of 'out' teachers serving as role models to queer students and 'closeted' colleagues (see Branfman, 2015; Brett, 2024; Lee, 2020; Rasmussen, 2004; Rudoe, 2010). The notion of the queer teacher role model is, for

Khayatt (1997), fraught with assumptions: what role/disposition is actually being emulated (i.e., gay/lesbian, masculine/feminine, friendly, funny?). The role model discourse presupposes that particular roles are detachable from the performer and that these roles are epitomic (Khayatt, 1997). Indeed, there is an enormous contradiction wrapped up in the role model discourse when 'LGBT-identified teachers negotiate conflicting obligations both to hide their LGBT identities, and to act as role models for their students' (Henderson, 2019, p. 849). To rehash a commonly adopted Sedgwickian (1990) passage: 'the space for simply existing as a gay person who is a teacher is in fact bayonetted through and through, from both sides, by vectors of a disclosure at once compulsory and forbidden' (p. 70).

In the crucible of educational domains in which identities and relations poach and ferment, sexual and gender diverse teachers wade through hegemonic dialectics of public/private, 'in'/'out', visible/hidden (Conrad, 2020; DePalma & Atkinson, 2006; Gray, 2013; Lee, 2020; Mayo, 2020). While queer teacher visibility in schools cannot be the teleological endpoint, at the same time, when an educative landscape does not reflect one's identity, this absence can produce psychic fragmentation and a sense of unbelonging:

> The abject is above all the ambiguous, the in-between, what defies boundaries, a composite resistant to unity. Hence, if the subject's identity derives from the unity of its objects, the abject is the threat of unassimilable non-unity: that is, ambiguity. (Lechte, 2013, p. 160)

Rather than the discourse of the role model, T instead articulates 'outness' as a counterpolitic, what Wells (2017) calls an *activist-educator* and Quinlivan and Town (1999) call a *change agent*. T's visibility is ballasted by the desire to 'be the visible person that [he] needed when [he] was growing up', to engender conditions of safety for queer students in the school, such as by co-facilitating the Rainbow Club in the school library. As Britzman (2012a) has postulated: 'teaching is one of the few professions where [teachers] feel the force of their own history of learning as if it telegraphs relevancy to their work' (p. 1). For myself, encountering the dense heteronormative ether in my workplaces produced a situation of *cruel optimism* (Berlant, 2011), where the aspirations and attachments that once promised fulfillment as a teacher counterintuitively, *cruelly*, became a locus of dejection, distress, and disappointment. Teaching became a daily breaking and reassembling of why I had joined the profession.

Diffractive discoveries and ongoing differentiatings

It was the task of this plateau, interlacing postmodern and feminist epistemologies of the body, to offer a diffractive reading of the body-texts of T and myself, accounting affirmatively for the differences encountered when the discourses of *teacher* and *gay* converge(d) in Victorian educational milieus. While cis-hetero-normativity circumambiently pressed upon and contoured our bodies – interpellating me to cordon off the public and private and maintain silence around my sexual identity during my career – this plateau brought into focus the queer teacher body's irreducibility to a passive conduit. T's body-text demonstrated that queer teachers are not fated to *the single story* (Adichie, 2009) of dispossessed, disempowered, and derealised agent under heterosexuality's thumb. Rather, he fruitfully subverted and buckled the normalising discourses in schools, speaking parrhesiastically back to power through a queer pedagogical counterclaim that ruptured the professional/personal divide. In this way, 'outness' is, perhaps, the psychic and affective diagnostic for LGBTQIA+ educators to determine if their institution will integrate or deauthenticate their sexual and/or gendered subjectivity. Reading diffractively our body-texts through one another has demonstrated 'the closet's' varied expressions and manifestations of (in)visibility, (in)consequentiality, (ir)relevance, and (in)significance for one current and one former gay teacher in Victoria, Australia.

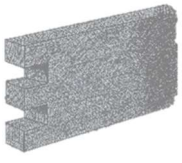
Plateau # Between and with/in the skin: Trauma-affect, 'closeted' gay identity, and 'coming out'

> Trauma can surely be called pathological in the sense that it induces discomfort and pain, but the imageries that accompany the pain have a sense all their own. (Erikson, 1991, p. 471)

> What happens if we do not take the human subject as the first and foremost starting point of our trauma analysis (even though trauma primarily originates from the human), but rather focus on non-human forces, matter and their interaction and intra-action? (Gündoğan İbrişim, 2020, p. 236)

> Shame is felt as an inner torment, a sickness of the soul. (Tomkins, 2008, p. 351)

Taking seriously Meretoja's (2020) appeal for a philosophically motivated resituating of trauma studies, in this plateau I recast traumatogenic habits of thought vis-à-vis psychoanalysis and psychology and turn to posthumanism, new materialism, and affect theory to interline traumatic experiences pertaining to gay identity and its concealment/revealment. In the tenor of innovativeness shared by post qualitative, post (non) representational, and post foundational approaches to inquiry, *the scar* is employed as a *conceptual persona* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994) to (re)think the temporality of trauma, its interplay between absence and presence using Derrida's (1974/1997) idea of *trace*, and to highlight, in the monistic tradition of Spinoza (1996), the reciprocal impact of trauma wounding mind *and* body. Calling on Spinoza's understanding of affect, Geoffrey's and my own traumatic experiences are (re)thought not in terms of feeling states belonging to the liberal human of psychoanalysis and psychology, but (re)considered in relation to the modulation of intensities, forces, and speeds of, and encountered by, our bodies. Our accounts draw attention to shame's intimate relation to ill-being and trauma, and its identity-poietic capacities.



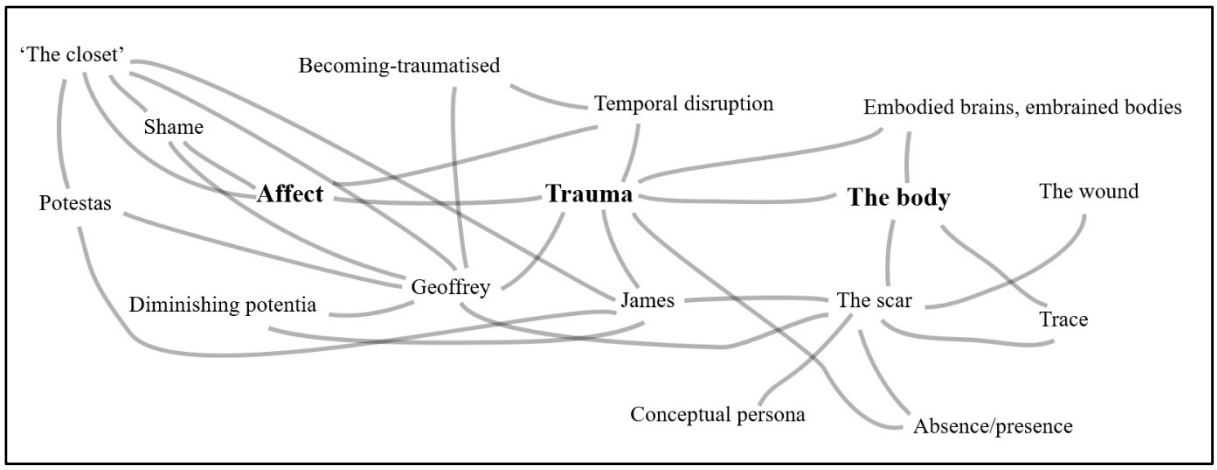


Figure 10: Rhizomatic mapping of Plateau # Between and with/in the skin: Trauma-affect, 'closeted' gay identity, and 'coming out'

Trauma, trace, and the scar

At the core of post qualitative, post (non) representational, and post foundational paradigms is the push for creative approaches to inquiry, and in this plateau I invoke *the scar* as a meta-concept to navigate the epistemological terrain of trauma. Prosser (2001) notes that 'it is a phenomenological function of the skin to record' (p. 52). The scar is the enfleshing of a permanent spatiotemporal record. As a noun, scar denotes 'a mark remaining (as on the skin) after injured tissue has healed' and 'a lasting moral or emotional injury' (Mirriam-Webster Dictionary, n.d.). Common to both these definitions is the idea of surfaces, and this plateau attunes to the porosity of body and social surfaces as ever-leaky boundaries between the exterior and interior, self and other, self and socius (Lafrance, 2018; Prosser, 2001; Turner, 2012).

The scar is a compass for a topography of the flesh (a surface), the enfleshing of a spacetime when a wound was inflicted: a childhood mishap, an act of violence visited upon by another, harm done to the self. *Trauma*, in this context, belongs to a medical nomenclature describing somatic injury – the etymology of the word trauma derives from the Greek word meaning wound (Caruth, 1996). After the burgeoning of psychoanalysis in the later part of the nineteenth century (Tumarkin, 2001), trauma later came to convey a 'psychological "wound"' (Thompson & Walsh, 2010, p. 377), 'a blow … to the tissues of the mind' (Erikson, 1991, p. 455). Without falling into this ostensible Cartesian separation of mind/body, in this plateau I employ the concept of the scar to betoken trauma's capacity to wound *both* the '"embrained

bodies and embodied brains"' (Braidotti, 2023, p. 104) of gay subjects. An important proviso: the scar, as it is taken up here, does not suggest a subaltern identarian marker or a fetishisation of the wounds of subjectivised positionalities (see Berlant, 2000; Brown, 1993), but is akin to the DeleuzoGuattarian (1994) *conceptual persona* – a tool to (re)think trauma non-dialectically and non-psychologically/psychoanalytically.

The scar occupies states of both presence and absence: it is a mark that marks the absence of the source that caused it. The scar's residence between absence and presence chimes with Derrida's (1974/1997) notion of *trace*. As part of his deconstruction oeuvre, Derrida (1994, 1974/1997) avers that presence is privileged in Western metaphysics, arguing that absence inexorably leaves its trace within presence – 'the presence-absence of the trace' (Derrida, 1974/1997, p. 71). While largely grounded in the linguistic and semiotic, trace, transposed within a traumatological framework – like the scar – speaks to the absent presence of trauma. Like a spectre, trauma is present in its absence: evoked and remembered.

One of trauma's ironies is its marking and making of bodies while being unremarkable in its everydayness (Alexander, 2004; Stevens, 2016; Wertheimer & Casper, 2016). It is on account of its ubiquity that Berlant (2011) relabels trauma as '"crisis ordinariness"' (p. 10), also challenging trauma's alleged disruption of an 'ongoing, uneventful ordinary life' (p. 10). Said differently, crisis is hemmed in the minutiae of the everyday – ordinary moments, pedestrian exchanges – rendering the crisis presupposed in, and as the issuance of, trauma 'not exceptional to history or consciousness' (Berlant, 2011, p. 10). The scar is also an ordinary object: banal integumentary evidence of our collision with the social; momentary or prolonged impingements that 'never [leave] … participating bodies unaltered' (Golańska, 2020, p. 75; also see Ahmed, 2006). Certainly, bodies marked and read as Other – racialised, gendered, sexualised, dis/abled – are keenly aware that their embodiment is inseparable from the conditions they encounter owing to that subjectivity (Ahmed & Stacey, 2001; Fanon, 1986; Kitchin, 1998). Experiences of *insidious trauma* for queer persons, as these experiences pertain to their non-normative subjectivities, arise from heteronormative infrastructures and modes of governmentality – organising, being, and relating – cloaked under the social fabric of daily life (Brown, 2003; Towns, 2020; Yep, 2017). 'Heteronormativity' is, remarks Lane (2021), 'a source of *everyday* harm' (p. 2169; emphasis added).

Arguing that trauma is grounded predominately in the psychological and cultural and not the philosophical, Meretoja (2020) introduces the concept of a *philosophy of trauma*.

Agreeing with Meretoja's contention that 'there is a need to explore the philosophical assumptions underlying trauma theory' (Meretoja, 2020, p. 23), and perceiving the generativity of this approach in surveying trauma beyond 'the disease model understanding' (Roberts, 2018, p. 2), I lay out below the philosophical knottings of this plateau.

New materialist and posthuman approaches to trauma

The traumatised self

The psychological framing of traditional trauma studies often situates the human subject as the empirical locus (Roberts, 2018; Stevens, 2016). While traumatogenic scholarship has referenced the *psychosocial* dimension of trauma (Thompson & Walsh, 2010), the relational connections to other humans vis-à-vis *cultural trauma* (Alexander, 2004; Onwuachi-Willig, 2016), and *collective trauma* (Erikson, 1991), posthumanism and new materialism delocalise and decolonise the anthropocentrism of the dominant human focus. These philosophies (re)consider the human's enmeshment with non-human others and their autopoietic qualities and agencies. This represents a continuum of 'brain-body-world entanglements' (Blackman, 2012, p. 1). The work of Gündoğan İbrişim (2020), Baelo-Allué (2022), and Biolchini (2023) proffers a posthuman and new materialist (re)interpretation of the autonomous humanist subject; these works redress the human's individuation, illuminating our interwovenness with naturecultures comprised of human and non-human relations. This critical re-evaluation is described by Gündoğan İbrişim (2020) as a 'move beyond the constructivist-essentialist impasse of transcendental and humanist traditions, the interdependence of the material and the discursive, the human and the non-human [and] underscores the idea that agents do not only denote humans' (p. 230).

In traditional studies of trauma, to be wounded represents the disintegration of a hitherto cohesive subject. Focus is given to ameliorative processes of reintegration and cohesion of these splintered parts. 'To be traumatized meant that one was psychically wounded and vulnerable, unwhole; therapeutic practices were aimed at "restoring" normalcy or stasis' (Wertheimer & Casper, 2016, p. 3). Posthumanism, for example, reinterprets the wound as proof of humans' relational interdependence, their 'co-evolving with other bodies, machines, and material forms' (Baelo-Allué, 2022, p. 1119). It is in trauma's psychic (and bodily) bulldozing that, paradoxically, we are made aware of our non-sovereignty, just as surfaces –

like the skin – become registered 'only in the event of being "impressed upon"' (Ahmed, 2005, p. 101).

Temporal disruption

Both new materialism and posthumanism are confluent with trauma's nonteleological sense of time. Caruth (1996) writes that 'trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on' (p. 4). Although the incident has passed, traumatic memories resurface as afterimages, 'not altered by the passage of time' (van der Kolk & van der Hart, 1991, p. 442). Shimmering with affinities of Derrida's (1994) hauntology, Barad (2010) writes:

> The present is not simply here-now. Multiple heterogeneous iterations all: past, present, and future, not in a relation of linear unfolding, but threaded through one another in a nonlinear enfolding of spacetimemattering, a topology that defies any suggestion of a smooth continuous manifold. (p. 244)

Like the *spectre*, trauma speaks to 'a *politics* of memory, of inheritance, and of generations' (Derrida, 1994, p. xviii). The scar, too, is an object of temporal disruption: a spacetime marked by acquirement of a mark; the past enfleshed, brought into the present, carried into the future. The scar is a re/membering, or as expressed by Deleuze (1994), ''the present fact of *having been* wounded'' (p. 77; emphasis added).

The body is accorded a fundamental role in trauma studies. But what is taken up in the citational use of *body*? This plateau considers the (human) body 'in its broadest sense' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 180), a complex of multiplicitous bodies 'composed of many individuals (of different nature), each one of which is also composed of many parts' (Spinoza, 1996, p. 52). Indeed, Spinoza underlines the mutuality of body and mind. Traditional trauma scholarship tells us that the body stores trauma, embodies it, becomes rewired by it (Eckstrand & Potter, 2017; van der Kolk, 2014). van der Kolk (2014) outlines three broad ways trauma affects the brain. First, the threat perception area of the primitive brain, the amygdala, becomes heightened. Triggered by sounds, images, or thoughts that apprehend one's sensorium, the *locus coeruleus* – 'the "alarm bell" of the CNS [central nervous system]' (van der Kolk & van der Hart, 1991, p. 443) – of the traumatised person discerns danger where others do not.

Second, the filtering system of the brain cannot adequately discern between stimuli requiring immediate notice and those which are irrelevant. Thirdly, the self-sensing system responsible for the perception of self becomes dulled, in turn dulling the capacity to respond to joy, excitement, or pleasure. Construed through the immanent philosophy of Deleuze (1994), these neurochemical, somatic, affective/emotional activations of the body belong to a convergence where the *virtual* (the contextual triggers of trauma, the re/turn to the initial encounter) cross over to *actualisation* (reawakened and re-experienced in the present moment).

Biolchini (2023) has pondered how we can reframe trauma's temporality to account for traumas *not yet* experienced, a '*becoming-traumatized*' (p. 53). This future-oriented project displaces the task of psychoanalysis in plumbing the traumatic past for explication of the present (Freud, 1913). Certainly, Biolchini's point is salient when we consider that LGBTQIA+ populations have a disproportionately greater occurrence of experiencing traumatising events (Cochran & Gleason, 2016; Gandy-Guedes et al., 2018). For example, if each 'coming out' is a *becoming* (Chambers, 2003) by (re)naming oneself in new social scenes and publics, every 'coming out' has the potential to be an incitement of a trauma *to come*. Through the conceptual apparatus of 'pre-trauma' (Biolchini, 2023, p. 53), the canonical discourse of trauma becomes deterritorialised from (but still inclusive of) personal experiences of trauma and opens into being-becoming '*the historical subject of trauma*', the historicisation of 'a modern subject whose possibilities are threatened, and perhaps even originally framed, through trauma' (Roberts, 2018, p. 4; also see Caruth, 1995).

Trauma as affect

Trauma happens in the happening of life (Berlant, 2011; Stewart, 2005). The commonplaceness of trauma is embedded in the daily movements, flows, and pressings of *ordinary affects* (Stewart, 2007). Affect stands independently as its own corpus of study but is also part of the transversal onto-epistemological landscape of posthumanism and new materialism (see Fox, 2015; Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2016; Pratt & Rosiek, 2023; Roberts, 2012). Because affect is not singularly concerned with sensations and sensualities at the interior locus of the (human) body, but also with the tremors and quiverings across and between *all* bodies, it offers profitable possibilities in horizontalising trauma studies (Atkinson & Richardson, 2013). According to Messham-Muir and Čvoro (2020), although the amalgamation of affect and trauma studies had already been actively unfolding, the horrific events of September 11 fomented an epistemological fervour, occasioning the development of an 'affect-trauma paradigm' (p. 126). Atkinson and Richardson (2013) suggest there are 'productive and problematic tensions at the

nexus of the fields of affect and trauma', given their parallelism 'in irreducible experience, embodiment, and events' (p. 19). In their titular edited volume, the authors conceive of the notion of *traumatic affect*. In their words:

> Traumatic affect can … be understood as the mode, substance and dynamics of relation through which trauma is experienced, transmitted, conveyed, and represented. Traumatic affect crosses boundaries, between personal and political, text and body, screen and audience, philosophy and culture. It is not a prescriptive and contained concept, but an open one. Rather than narrowing the meaning of its constitutive terms traumatic affect brings them into relation in dynamic and surprising ways, sometimes discovering spaces in between that refuse to conform to either. (Atkinson & Richardson, 2013, p. 12).

Affect can be transported into trauma studies through Spinozism. For Spinoza (1996), our inclination to maintain and endure in our existence (*conatus*) impacts on and is impacted by our power to act (*potentia*). Suffering trauma is a diminution of one's *potentia* and deteriorates *conatus*. Affects – the primary three for Spinoza are desire (*cupiditas*), joy (*laetitia*), and sadness (*tristitia*) – are the amplification or diminishment in a body's capacity to act (Spinoza, 1996). Given that 'sadness diminishes or hinders a man's [*sic*] power of action, that is … it diminishes or hinders the endeavour with which a man [*sic*] endeavours to persist in his [*sic*] being' (Spinoza, 1996, p. 109), trauma might qualify as the purveyor of sad affects. Dissolving Descartes's dualism of mind and body, Spinoza's monism stresses their interrelationship, such that 'when … the mind is assailed by any emotion, the body is affected at the same time by a modification whereby its power of acting is either increased or diminished' (Spinoza, 1996, p. 148). Through the experience of trauma, the states of the mind *and* body are changed (*affection*).

Vicars et al. (2023) have highlighted the under-researched domain of narratives of LGBTQIA+ trauma, and this plateau tries to make a contribution to addressing this lacuna. The phenomenological accounts of trauma below evince how gay identifying individuals' traumas are often underlain by socio-cultural-historical and geopolitical dimensions vis-à-vis the ideological apparatus of cis-hetero-normativity.

Scars from the social: Traumas of 'the closet'

Scars on scars

The genealogy of Black, postcolonial, and Indigenous scholarship has challenged the particularist view of a trauma as a single, isolable spacetime, evincing its ongoingness, its capacity to accrete temporally (Pain, 2021). Stevenson (2023) calls on De Zulueta's idea of *cumulative trauma* to illustrate how the injurious effects of heteronormativity and homophobia may not manifest in the moment of their occurrence or utterance, but sediment and compound over time. Saldanha (2010) has referred to the adding up of affects as *aggregation*, and such encrustation is evident in Geoffrey's narrations. Having been subject to traumatic events during childhood and adolescence, he has carted these into adulthood. Layering and hardening like scar tissue, cumulative trauma bore upon his self-concept in relation to his sexual identity.

Geoffrey was brought up in a religious household where the Church was the lifeblood of his family, conferring the animal-warmth of belonging to a community of faith. Conservative values relative to gender and sexuality were impressed upon Geoffrey through *interpersonal panopticons* (Manning & Stern, 2018): surveillances and disciplining that formatively structured his childhood and adolescence in the 1970s and 1980s, interpellating him in religiously inflected heterosocial ways of being and behaving. Ahmed (2005, 2014) writes that the skin of the body as boundary is also the skin that contacts and connects. Owing to this relational and affective perviousness, for queer subjects, heteronormative socio-cultural-political systems – and heteronormativity's corollaries of homophobia and heterosexism – can diffuse through body surfaces, becoming absorbed and assimilated, leading to the trauma of internalised homophobia (Brown, 2003; Lane, 2021; Meyer & Dean, 1998).

The shame of being gay grew and spread for Geoffrey like a metastasising cancer. Secreting his gay identity in 'the closet' was a countermeasure, guarding against not only the disciplinarity of hegemonic heterogendered discourses, but eschatological ones: The fear of going to Hell. At 15 he experienced how even (suspected) dissident sexual identities can incite and excite deep-seated fears and anxieties:

> I was walking towards [three young men] down the street in Sydney. They probably would've been, maybe, 18, 19, 20, around about that age. I don't know whether they *read* it [his being gay] …Whether maybe I, inadvertently, did actually glance at them, and, you know, notice they were attractive … but they walked past me and one of them just said something like, *'Hey you [faggot]'.* I've turned around and [they've] said

> something to the effect of, *'What's your problem?'* and I've said, *'Nothing'*. And then they've just come and beat me up: broken ribs and contused liver.

Geoffrey subsequently experienced how outlaws of normative (hetero)sexuality could be denied justice by law enforcement:

> When I was at the hospital, police came to interview me and they said, *'Why do you think these lads beat you up?'* And I said, *'I think they thought I might be gay'*. So, I didn't say that I was [gay], and the police officer just closed his little pad and said, '*We don't help people like you'*, and they left the hospital. That was 1985. I didn't tell my parents … that it was a gay bashing. They obviously knew I got bashed, but … again, I didn't want anyone to know. By that stage, 15, I well and truly knew that I was definitely attracted to men.

Geoffrey's narrative above offers a glimpse into the prejudice, stigmatisation, and dehumanisation experienced by gay men during the 1980s' cultural *Geist* of HIV/AIDS. A teenager during a period that was marred by governmental inertia, suffering, and death, Geoffrey's 'closetedness' can be seen as a parallelism to the 'spectral dimension of pre-trauma' (Biolchini, 2023, p. 53). Remaining 'in' 'the closet' was, in part, a method called upon by Geoffrey to avoid acquiring HIV/AIDS; his refraining from romantic and sexual relationships was a sort of pre-emptive manoeuvre negating an HIV/AIDS-related trauma '*yet to occur'* (Biolchini, 2023, p. 51). That is to say, the potentiality of the virtual (contracting HIV/AIDS) was halted from becoming actualised (falling ill/dying) by being 'in' 'the closet'.

'The closet', in Geoffrey's recount above, is simultaneously a *technology of power* and a *technology of the self* (Foucault, 1988b). Technologies of power 'determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination' (Foucault, 1988b, p. 18), while technologies of the self 'permit individuals to effect by their own means … a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being' (Foucault, 1988b, p. 18). Thus, 'the closet' is a technology of power produced through heteronormative power-knowledge systems, disciplining how Geoffrey moved and behaved in the world. While as a technology of the self – and nonetheless 'associated with a certain type of domination' (Foucault, 1988b, p. 18) – 'closetedness' was a practice of self-care Geoffrey used to prolong

his life. A closet's function is to house and hide; 'the closet' hid Geoffrey from HIV/AIDS. Another contrariety of trauma presents itself: 'the closet', as a mechanism to preserve life, became a subcomponent of cumulative trauma and its extirpation of life.

At around 19 or 20, Geoffrey confided in his church's pastor about his 'unwanted evil thoughts about men'. He was prayed for and told of a prophecy the pastor had received. Geoffrey's closest friend at the time had been 'sent from God to rescue [him] from going down this sinful path [of homosexuality], and … [he] was to marry her'. Like a divine quid pro quo, Geoffrey believed that prayer, and marriage to – and having sex with – a woman, would beget heterosexuality. Geoffrey married his friend not as a beard[21] or alibi but in earnest belief that, through faith and matrimony, God would reform him as straight. 'It [was] just this kind of constant conflict within myself and believing that, if I just stuck with it, and just kept praying, that God would, eventually [make him straight]'.

Geoffrey's feelings of shame were bolstered by homophobic church sermons; believing that an evil entity had staked a claim over him, he undertook conversion therapy through the Church. Geoffrey was given strategies to quell his non-heterosexuality: averting his eyes from men he found attractive and sublimating this attraction into a woman, flicking an elastic band around his wrist when he felt an attraction to a man – not unlike the positive punishment of operant conditioning (Skinner, 1938, 1953). He was even exorcised to banish the demon *making* him gay.

Around the time Geoffrey was 26, his and his wife's second son had died. An elder from the church visited the family, and pulling Geoffrey aside, had told him that she had been given a prophecy that their baby had been sacrificed 'to pay for [his] secret sins that [he] was refusing to let go of'. As watertight as 'the closet' was in concealing his sexual orientation, as impeccable and adroit as his passing had been, Geoffrey believed these 'secret sins' alluded to his gay identity, and he blamed himself for his son's death.

Recall that cumulative trauma is the layering up of recurrently encountered events taken as traumatic, and that affects, too, pile up as aggregation (Saldanha, 2010). When bodies exceed their capacities, the skin that delineates us from, and connects us to, the social, can overflow. Trauma and its concomitant affect of shame reached their crescendo, for Geoffrey, in his forties, as the contemplation of, and the perilous closeness to attempting, suicide:

[21] A beard refers to an individual, often a woman, who partakes in the false appearance of being married or romantically connected to another, often a gay man, to cloak the other person's identity.

> The first time I was in Adelaide for work. I was so overcome with the ongoing guilt and shame [of being gay and 'closeted'] that I decided I would end my life. I drank a lot of alcohol to help me work up the courage to go through with it. I then climbed up on the railing of the apartment I was staying in, more than 20 stories high, with the intent of jumping. Then thankfully, in a moment of clarity I realised that my wife and my kids deserved to be able to choose whether they would love and accept me if I 'came out', and that it would be cruel to take that choice away from them. I told my ex this story when I 'came out' to her.

The second instance occurred two years after Geoffrey separated from his wife after 'coming out':

> I was driving home from work down the freeway during peak hour. At the time I was desperately struggling with the continued shame and guilt of 'what I had done' to my ex and the kids, even though they had all reacted well. I pulled over on the side of the road, lifted the bonnet, pretending that there was something wrong with the engine. I stood there crying for about 15 minutes, and recorded a farewell video message on my phone. My plan was to pretend to trip in front of a truck as I came round the driver's side of the car. I wanted it to look like an accident so that my ex would receive my life insurance and be able to live comfortably. But then again, in a moment of clarity I realised that was not fair, particularly on my kids, to end my life, so I decided not to do it and drove home. I've never disclosed this story to anyone.

The becoming traumatic 'closet'

Tumarkin (2001) has indicated that while the temporal dimension of trauma is largely accounted for in conventional trauma studies: '[s]pace, on the other hand, has been de-materialized to a large degree by metaphoric evocations of inner and symbolics spaces' (p. 201). In this section, I join others in giving consideration to the spatiality of trauma (see Pain, 2021; Trigg, 2009) through a rendering of the six years I lived *in terrorem* (Asquith, 2004) throughout secondary school. The traumatising bullying and ostracism I experienced during this roiling period is bound up with the material, spatial, and affective dimensions of the environ and its inhabitants, and how these were coded through my sensorium. In these

rememories (Morrison, 2007; also see Prosser, 2001), I recall the sickly, saccharine-smelling body sprays in the locker bay where I was pushed against the hard metal lockers, the poorly lit changing room as a cornucopia of hegemonic heterogendered performances on Physical Education days, sitting at engraved and Liquid Papered classroom tables while balled-up paper, spitballs, and pens would be thrown at me, or the sanctuary of the library where, when open, recesses and lunchtimes were elapsed through reading. The traumatisation I encountered during secondary school was inexorably connected to the affect of *shame–humiliation* (Tomkins, 2008).

Shame is an ontologically generative affect, bringing into being a shamed being, the being of shame (Ahmed, 2014; Biddle, 1997; Probyn, 2010; Sedgwick, 2009). Shame was, it could be said, my initiation to *gay*. As captured by Sedgwick (2009): 'for certain ("queer") people, shame is simply the first, and remains a permanent, structuring fact of identity: one that … has its own powerfully productive and powerfully social metamorphic possibilities' (p. 61). An affective-politico-pedagogy, shame (de)formed my (gay) subjectivity(ies). Under its tutelage, I learnt it was imperative to hide *gay* as a *spoiled identity* (Goffman, 1963). Named *as* gay before the category made registerable its appropriateness in describing culturally intelligible and coded understandings of my sexual desires and attractions, 'the closet' began, for me, as an introjection, a prefiguration of a 'pre-trauma' (Biolchini, 2023, p. 53). 'The closet' was where I managed the homophobic interpellations of others. Not a space hiding the shame of *being* gay (yet) but where I sheltered from the projections and projectiles naming me *as* gay.

Safety sought after the fact of being wounded.

As Ahmed (2014) writes: 'the desire to take cover and to be covered presupposes the failure of cover; in shame, one desires cover precisely because *one has already been exposed to others*' (p. 104; emphasis added).

Faggot.
Poofter.
Gay cunt.

These forms of address spat by the athletic, popular boys were, perhaps in their eyes, confirmed because of my failure to integrate and embody practices and performances of hegemonic masculinity (Coates, 2007; Connell, 2005) and normative heterogender. My disinterest and ineptitude in Physical Education, my love of English and Art, my top-button-done-up-milksoppiness made me easy pickings.

Faggot.

Poofter.

Gay cunt.

For six years the white-hotness of the 'insult [became] an important aspect of [my] relation to the world' (Eribon, 2004, p. 46). Such injurious speech (Butler, 1997a) might be deemed an outbirth of homophobia, but, for Fox (2009), this signifier, is totally, anaemically, ineffectual:

> I have a phobia of snakes; friends have phobias of spiders – we are able to learn to deal with these phobias. Yet the abuse and hate we experience in our lives is more than someone's phobia … hate … is more than a phobia, or a fear perpetrators have – it is hatred and intolerance. (Fox, 2009, p. 131)

Asquith (2004) employs the term *malediction* as a potent synonym for hatred: 'the utterance of a curse, the condition of being reviled, and an evil intention or deed' (p. 401). Not only an anathema but a 'malediction [that] also represents the use of allusions to dirt, disease and profane sexuality, and references to the imagined death or elimination of the addressee' (Asquith, 2004, p. 402). Shame bores into, and assimilates as, flesh – as the scar.

It has been 16 years since I graduated from secondary school and still I carry the traces of *malediction*. Trauma's temporal fuckery means I am always only six degrees separated from my bullied teenager *self*. Stevens (2016) draws attention to the polysemy of the term *subject*: being subject *to* trauma and being constituted as a subject *by* it (also see Butler, 1997b). In his words: '*trauma does not describe, trauma makes*' (Stevens, 2016, p. 20). As a gay subject, I am acutely aware of the tacit and quotidian rules of engagement in navigating the social. 'I am a person about whom something can be said, to whom something can be said, someone who can be looked at or talked about in a certain way and who is stigmatized by that gaze and those words' (Eribon, 2004, p. 16).

A hallmark of trauma is the traces it leaves (van der Kolk, 2014). Sixteen years later and my body registers the shocks and knocks of affectual disequilibrium upon seeing a group of high school boys. Like a revenant, traumatic memories return, scrolling across my mind's eye like a viewfinder. Are they looking at me? Are they laughing at me? What will I do if they descend upon me?

Faggot.

Poofter.

Gay cunt.

Through the scar, I am proprioceptively conscious of how my body moves through and occupies social space. At the supermarket, the shopping centre – wherever. Who is around me? Who is likely to say something? Irish drag queen, Panti Bliss, expresses with penetrating perspicacity the affective self-disciplinary praxis of *checking* oneself:

> Have any of you ever been standing at a pedestrian crossing when a car goes by and in it are a bunch of lads, and they lean out the window as they go by and shout 'fag' and throw a milk carton at you? Now, it doesn't really hurt, I mean, after all, it's just a wet carton … It doesn't hurt, but it feels oppressive and when it really does hurt is afterwards because it's afterwards that then I wonder and worry and obsess over, what was it about me? I mean, what did they see in me? What was it that gave me away? And I hate myself for wondering that. It feels oppressive and the next time that I'm standing at a pedestrian crossing, I hate myself for it, but I check myself to see what is it about me that gives the gay away. And I check myself to make sure that I'm not doing it this time. (Horgan, 2015, 37:30)

Like Panti, I find shame in *checking myself*. Shame in feeling the need to *check myself*. Shame for feeling shame in feeling the need *to check* myself.

Affect as trauma

Trauma can be understood in terms of modulating forces and speeds of affect. Geoffrey's and my own experiences of trauma conduced sad affects: affects that slow, impede, and hamper the body (Spinoza, 1996). Our *potentia*, our power to act in and of the world, was marauded by trauma, by shame, by – at times – the shame of being gay. Like a battery that has nearly run out of juice, siphoning the last volts to move in and find our places amongst communities of belonging, this languishing of power truncates the striving for affirmation (*conatus*) (Braidotti, 2006c, 2018): the power to keep on keeping on.

Falling out of sync with the world forecasts disenchantment, disengagement, disconnection; Geoffrey explained 'the closet' as a locus of affective diminishment:

> ['The closet'] gradually destroys you as a person. Your sense of self, your ability to even like yourself … How much you just crave wanting to be able to move through the world and be seen for who you are and be authentic and not be ashamed and scared all the time.

For Geoffrey, the exhaustion of *potentia*, the depletion of *conatus* – the striving that keeps us alive – brought him to the razor's edge of suicide. To desire being without life, to be life *less*, is a cruel paradox: the apotheosis of one's capacity to cope brought on by the crushing degeneration of emotion (*affectus*) – a body state (*affection*) of lowermost vibration (Spinoza, 1996). Yep (2003) puts a fine point on it by referring to such pain as *soul murder*.

The sad affects of trauma, their stymieing and stultifying of one's ability to persist in ones's existence, expressed themselves, for me, as a bankruptcy in being able to relate, with ease, to others. Ageless traumatic feelings resurface in social situations; the temporality of secondary school is rehashed; the dis-ease of its affective tempos re-felt. Making someone's acquaintance, the sentience of shame I felt about my sexual orientation has a habit of revisitation. Ember-cheeks, recoiling gaze, clumsily stumbling through small talk, fearful of judgement. As noted by Biddle (1997), shame is 'the emotion that makes us most want to disappear [but] makes us appear all the more vividly' (p. 228). Certainly, I struggle to form friendships; I struggle putting myself *out there*. Braidotti (2018) explains how the 'arrest' or 'blockage' of an event, a registering, or attuning 'destroy[s] the self's capacity to act … harm[ing] the self's ability to inter-relate to others … and thus decrease[s] one's relationship to the world' (p. 222). I constantly reach for the next rung on Yayoi Kusama's *Ladder to Heaven*[22] to move on, move up, move out, but I'm always, somehow, frustratingly, in the middle.

[22] Yayoi Kusama's *Ladder to Heaven* is an installation artwork comprising a steel ladder intertwined with LED lights and two large circular mirrors above and below the ladder. The effect produced is the seeming endlessness of the ladder, emerging from the chasmic ground up to and beyond the gallery ceiling.

It never really goes

Ahmed and Stacey (2001) write that 'the interfaces between bodies and their worlds are made and unmade through social practices, the pain of which may shatter language and defy its representational potential' (p. 3). Indeed, trauma is a signifier tasked with impossibly representing the inexpressible and unrepresentable. Overloaded, it carries contested descriptions and designations (Atkinson & Richardson, 2013; Berlant, 2001; Pain, 2021; Wertheimer & Casper, 2016). The psychopathological basis underlying conventional trauma studies was, in this plateau, sidelined to open up space for a (re)thinking of trauma through the affective. Bodily registrations, sensations, and intensities; variations in the body's capacity to integrate within webs of relation. Geoffrey's and my own phenomenological narratives of gay identity-related trauma have been read through the affective economy of Spinoza (1996), illuminating trauma's proliferation of sad affects: its devitalisation, the ruination of affirmative power (*potentia*), and the persevering power of existence (*conatus*). Shame was, for both of us, an affective-politico-pedagogy that produced dis-identifications with, and concealment of, our gay identities through 'the closet'.

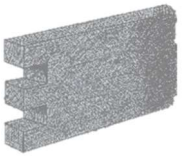
While synonymous with an extraordinary event, trauma is extraordinarily ordinary (Berlant, 2011; Stevens, 2016), part and parcel of the chiaroscuro of life. For many queer subjects, cis-hetero-normative systems and structures routinise and habituate trauma as part of the everyday. Indeed, the interpellation in being assigned a gender in utero or at birth might, for trans and gender diverse individuals, serve as the first instance of trauma (Butler, 2017). Unshackled from the clasp of psychoanalysis and psychologism, this plateau apprehended Geoffrey's and my tales of trauma through philosophical perspectives (Meretoja, 2020). The conceptual personae (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994) of the scar was called upon to highlight trauma's temporal disruption; its interface between absence and presence qua Derrida's (1974/1997) concept of trace; to account for trauma's wounding affecting both '"embrained bodies and embodied brains"' (Braidotti, 2023, p. 104); and as a mark testifying to the social's impression upon our bodily surfaces (Ahmed, 2006, 2010a). Proof of trauma's commonness, its experiential predictability, for queers, may be in the mundanity of simply being alive and walking out the (closet) door.

Plateau # Conjuring ghosts and lost futures: The hauntological 'closet'

> What may be materially absent still influences people's experience of the material world. (Bille et al., 2010, p. 4)

> The absent can have just as much of an effect upon relations as recognisable forms of presence can have … Indeed the category of absence can have a significant presence in social relations and in material culture. (Hetherington, 2004, p. 159)

It is the task of this plateau to put out to pasture the well-rehearsed and exclusively recognised symbolic-metaphoric-discursive arrangements of 'the closet' and 'coming out'. In this plateau, I (re)locate 'the closet' and 'coming out' within broader and nuanced understandings of materiality, vis-à-vis Derrida's (1994) *hauntology* and Armstrong's (2010) *spectral ethnography*. Occupying a unique interstitial or in-between space between absence and presence, being and non-being, place and no-place, 'the closet' produces e/affects and impressions, (dis)enabling particular social realities for queer-identifying individuals. Transposing 'the closet' and 'coming out' within a hauntological register thwarts a sequential temporality: 'the closet' moves across spacetimes while we are beset by the persistent and insistent need to 'come out'; each time is haunted by unknowable potentialities. Interleaving the experiences of the research partners and myself with 'closet' and hauntological literatures and media texts points to how the residua of histories are always trafficked into and impinge upon the present, haunting futures unrealis(able)ed.



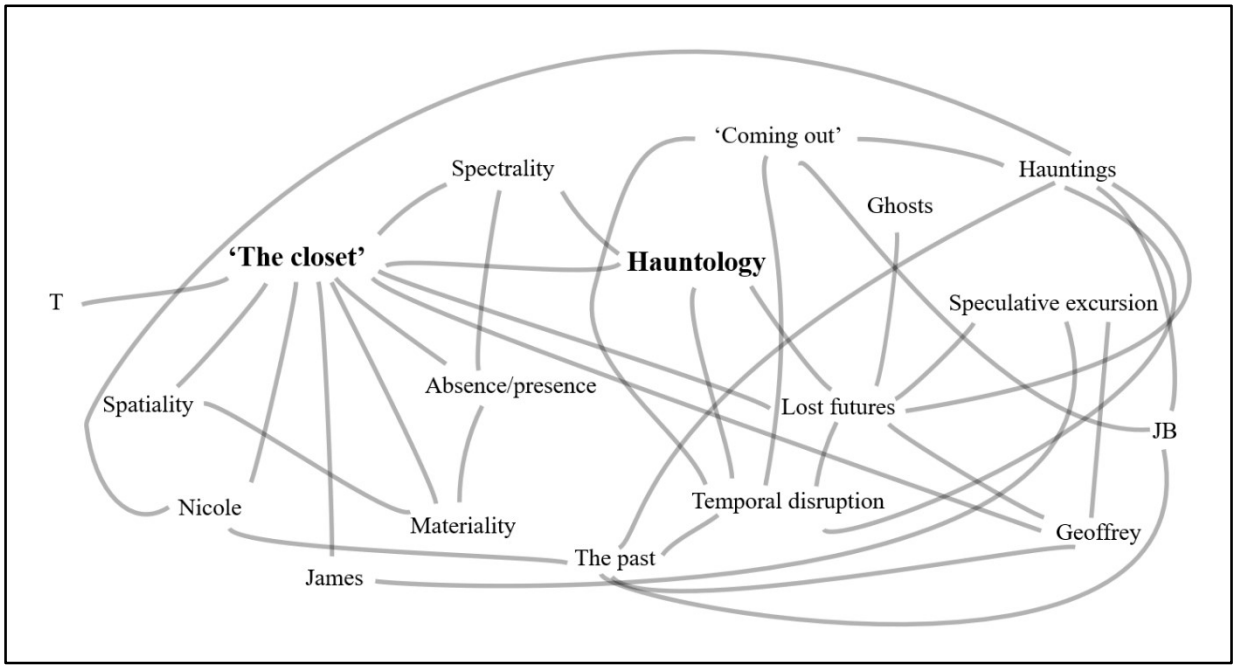


Figure 11: Rhizomatic mapping of Plateau # Conjuring ghosts and lost futures: The hauntological 'closet'

Hauntology: Phantoms of the temporal and spatial

In *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, Derrida (1994) develops the concept of hauntology to describe how the theoretical, philosophical, and ideological inheritances of Marxism still haunt the social, political, and economic. The term is a homophonic playfulness of the French *hantologie* and English pronunciation of ontology (Davis, 2005), and is a furtherance of Derrida's project of deconstruction, where meaning is in a constant state of deferral, and binarised and entrenched systems of knowledge are wrenched open (St. Pierre, 2011). In hauntology, the spectre is a heuristic for an indelible past, conjured in, and occupying, the present, bearing upon the future (Rahimi, 2021), exerting a 'spectral causality over the living' (Shaw, 2018, p. 2).

The paradoxical relations that converge in the hauntological field demand a metaphysical and onto-epistemological reappraisal of what we take to mean being and knowledge, time and space (Cameron, 2008; Lorek-Jezińska & Więckowska, 2017), but also reality, power, and agency. Hauntology inverts ontology's concern with *being* for a metaphysics of *non-being*: a 'non-present present', the 'being-there of an absent' (Derrida, 1994, p. 5). As a 'disruption of continuity' (Barad, 2010, p. 240), hauntology dislocates logical temporal boundaries of past, present, and future. As expressed by Derrida (1994): 'haunting is historical,

to be sure, but it is not *dated*, it is never docilely given a date in the chain of presents, day after day, according to the instituted order of a calendar' (p. 3). Time is untimely. The past impregnates the present, it hovers over the future – itself haunted by unrealis(able)ed and cancelled futurities (Fisher, 2012; Rahimi, 2021). We are always in the company of ghosts, and hauntology has us take notice of and minister to these quotidian phantoms: the 'pervasive, yet often unnoticed or unaccounted for part of social life' (Buser, 2017, p. 5) as part of a larger agenda of justice.

I purpose the insights of the hauntological to explore the liminal topologies of 'the closet'. What would it mean to acknowledge 'the closet' as a hauntological relation, a *spectro-geography* (Cameron, 2008)? It would surely require us to recognise 'the closet' as a special kind of non-representational trans-temporality and trans-spatiality. We would have to slough off the Cartesian and humanist distinction between 'actuality and inactuality' (Derrida, 1994, p. 13). This is surely a radical queering of the Cartesian outlook on matter as 'corporeal substance constituted of length, breadth, and thickness; as extended, uniform, and inert' (Coole & Frost, 2010, p. 7). It is a dramatic reworking of the notions of presence and touch, which in a humanist worldview would necessitate a required *thingness* to be touched and a *thereness* where contact occurs. To (re)theorise 'the closet' as hauntological is an invitation to expound what we regard as materiality (see Martine & Cooren, 2016); concepts, ideas, and theorisations are themselves material enactments (Barad, 2010; de Freitas, 2017).

I also wish to conceptualise 'the closet' outside its well-honed dialectics of straight/gay, 'in'/'out', secrecy/disclosure, private/public, and address a less acknowledged coupling, one common in, and troubled by, hauntology: absence/presence. As the epigraph by Bille et al. (2010) illuminates, the immaterial is as active and affectual in the materialisation of the world as any *present* object or entity. I remarked earlier that queer people do not inhabit a literal closet. But this lack of physical occupancy does not curtail the fact that we embody 'the closet' and are embodied by it. The absence of this physical object does not designate 'the closet' as any less substantial or tangible, or preclude its affective potential. Indeed, Garnet and Sinner (2019) conceive that 'the virtual is ontological … exist[ing] independently of actualizations' (p. 51). To register the feeling of a presence speaks to what Derrida (1994) has called 'the tangible intangibility of a proper body without flesh' (p. 6). Armstrong (2010) has averred that 'the unseen is often as important as the seen and that emotions and individually perceived resonances can act as powerful analytic agents through their affect' (p. 248). 'The closet' edges

along the 'precarious boundary between being and non-being' (Shaw, 2018, p. 1): it is both presence and absence, there and not there, palpable and impalpable.

A typology of 'the closet'

Scholarship has often referenced 'the closet' as a spatial metaphoric permutation (see Adams, 2010; Brown, 2000; Dindia, 1998; Scott, 2018). Queer people do not literally occupy a closet, but the use of this symbolic visual referent is altogether not surprising when 'in order to conceive the immaterial, one must always try to understand it in material terms' (Buchli, 2010, p. 185). As an eponym – a 'vivid spatial imagery' (Boucai, 2022, p. 589) – 'the closet' has purchase in summoning to our minds one going into, already concealed within, or emerging from its shadowy depths. Certainly, the mental picture of a body wedged and contorted inside an inhospitable space evokes a palpable sense of discomfort and claustrophobia.

I agree with Brown (2000) that 'the closet's' spatiality has either 'been neglected or treated as merely incidental' (p. 4). This seems both perplexing and antithetical when *space* is an inescapable and indispensable metaphysics when thinking about 'the closet'. To remedy this neglect, I think *matterphorically*, which is 'a material-discursive practice of doing theory' (Barad & Gandorfer, 2021, p. 14). Like Franklin-Phipps (2024), 'I am interested in a conceptual exploration of how conjuring ghosts might produce new categories of knowing, being, and sensing' (p. 65). I offer in this plateau a rescription of 'the closet' through hauntology (Derrida, 1994): ghostly resurfacings and eldritch reanimations of the past and their shaping of the present and future. I draw also from Armstrong's (2010) work on *spectral ethnography*: a reformulation of the conventional ethnographic enterprise that is concerned with how the absent and the spectral are imprinted on spaces and objects.

As part of my *spectropolitics* (Good, 2019), I do not seek to deproduce, denounce, or invalidate the metaphor of 'the closet', but rathe to unseat its purely discursive couching. As an alternative, guided by a new materialist onto-epistemology and the *spectral turn*, I consider: how 'the closet' challenges a *metaphysics of presence* and evokes a 'metaphysics of absence' (Glazier, 2017, p. 242). I am, in this plateau, concerned with how these absences – sensed, tangible, and affectual – *are* material; and that 'the closet' and its cognate discourses and histories, like ghosts, pass across time and space. To contemplate the conceptual – ostensibly immaterial, intangible, impalpable, and nonbodily – as having materiality might seem perverse. However, according to Barad (2011), social inquiry should prioritise 'an account not only of

the materialization of "human" bodies but of all matter(ings)/materializations, including the materializing effects of boundary-making practices' (p. 124). Citing the *wave-particle duality paradox*, Barad (2003) also explains that an apparatus influences a phenomenon's understanding. Thus, if 'the closet' is given intelligibility *only* as a heuristic, a metaphoric imagery or discourse, we are prevented from inquiring into its spatiality, materiality – indeed, its *spectrality*.

Touching and being touched by the absent

While new materialism upraises matter's mattering (Tillman, 2015), Fowles (2010) argues that the *material turn* has seen the privileging of presence as exclusively the domain of the physical and tangible:

> if much of the motivation behind the turn toward things has been to empower the position of nonhuman objects by demonstrating that they are truly self-standing presences in the world – presences that follow their own agendas and are not, therefore, reducible to human discourse about them – then absent objects emerge as an especially awkward category. (p. 25)

Fowles (2010) signals a more nuanced flavour of new materialism, in which distinctions between material and immaterial, matter and non-matter, the perceptible and imperceptible, the visible and invisible are indistinct. A growing body of work has challenged these very Cartesian logics (see Bille et al., 2010; Hetherington, 2004; Meyer, 2012; Meyer & Woodthorpe, 2008; Miller, 2007; Searle, 2020). Certainly, 'the virtual does not have to be experienced in order to be understood as existing' (Garnet & Sinner, 2019, p. 51).

How does one touch the absent? How can one be touched *by* absence? How is absence material? Despite appearances, these questions concerning tactility are not so outlandish. Bille et al. (2010) reference *the presence of absence* vis-à-vis the phenomenon of *phantom pains* experienced by amputees as 'a sensuous experience of something which is materially absent' (Bille et al., 2010, p. 3). These sensations are both embodied and disembodied: feelings registered in the thereness of the not there. To touch and be touched by the textures of absence is what Hetherington (2003) calls *praesentia*, where ocularcentrism – the prioritising of sight – gives way to the felt and sensed. Following Frers's (2013) contention that 'an absence arises in the experience … Someone has to miss something for it to be specifically absent' (p. 433),

could we say 'the closet' emerges for queer individuals from the *absence* of heterosexuality? Absence, here, should not be taken to mean lacking and the desire to *be* heterosexual in a Lacanian (1978/1991) sense, but gestures towards absence *as* political. Noted by Barad (2020): 'the question of absence is surely as political as that of presence. When has absence ever been an absolute givenness? Is it not always a question of what is seen, acknowledged, and counted as present, and for whom? (p. 92). Heterosexuality is an absence in its supposed normalcy, naturality, and desirability (Fischer, 2013; Hubbard, 2008; Rossi, 2011). Johnson (2005) labels heterosexuality 'a … silent principle of social organization' (p. 5); and Farvid (2015) describes it as 'a privileged and invisible category' (p. 97). After Derrida (1994), it could be named a 'paradoxical phenomenality, the furtive and ungraspable visibility of the invisible' (p. 6). Everywhere, but uncounted, unseen – like a spectre.

The hegemony of heterosexuality is accompanied by the privilege it confers, and 'as is true of all other privileges, those who lack the privilege intuitively know how severely they suffer because of its absence' (Koyama, 2003, p. 248). Like a ghost, heterosexuality and its attendant privileges are perhaps divinatory by those who, to use a metaphysical nomenclature, are clairvoyant (clear-seeing) or clairsentient (clear-feeling). Valentine (1993a) writes: 'to be lesbian or gay … is both to *perceive* and to experience the heterosexuality of the majority of environment' (p. 396; emphasis added). A co-researcher, MK, invoked the notion of clairsentience when he stated his decision to be 'out' in new locales and with new acquaintances is founded on his capacity to 'read people's energy'.

Heterosexuality demands of homosexuality unobtrusiveness, discretion – absence. Like a built-in closet 'articulated to minimise its own visibility, often set flush or painted to match the surrounding wall … the closet presents itself as an absence' (Urbach, 2000, p. 345). Indeed, 'whether we describe the closet in terms of invisibility or inaudibility, repression or suppression, self-deception or duplicity, the core idea remains the same: absence—*coerced* absence' (Boucai, 2022, p. 589). Fuss (1991) has written how the instantiation of homosexuality as an identity category occurred synchronously with its 'closeting'. Interestingly, Fuss (1991) employs a vernacular reminiscent of the spectral and hauntological to describe heterosexuality's dependence upon homosexuality in shoring up its ontological border: 'haunted, 'haunting', 'ghostly visitations', 'specter', 'phantom', 'spirit', 'revenant', and 'undead' (p. 3).

Spectres of medicalisation and pathologisation: Collective hauntings

In hauntology, time is without direction (Fisher, 2012; Lorek-Jezińska & Więckowska, 2017). Derrida (1994) has written:

> What is the time and what is the history of a specter? Is there a present of the specter? Are its comings and goings ordered according to the linear succession of a before and an after, between a present-past, a present-present, and a present-future, between a 'real time' and a 'deferred time'? (p. 48)

The notion of *queer time* has been offered by Halberstam (2005) as a disruption to the (hetero)normative model of temporality, punctuated by discrete and expected (heterosexual) life events (i.e., marriage, property acquisition, procreation). Halberstam reasons that the HIV/AIDS epidemic of the 1980s and 1990s necessitated a redescription of time and life scripts given that the insidious disease foreclosed for so many queers – gay men particularly – the possibilities of the futural.

Derrida (1994) has stated that 'memories no longer recognize … borders; by definition, they pass through walls, these *revenants*, day and night, they trick consciousness and skip generations' (p. 36). Our collective history and memory as queer persons has been and is haunted by a present-past. Wahlert (2012) has written about how a medicalising and psychopathologising discourse has remained attached to the discourse of homosexuality since the nineteenth century. At the time when the homosexual became intelligible as a socio-cultural category so began the 'long history of homosexual identity and its shameful associations with moralistic, juridical, and clinical connotations' (Wahlert, 2012, p. 264). During the nineteenth century, the homosexual was apprehended through the 'scrutiny of the clinical gaze' (Wahlert, 2012, p. 263). Similarly, Lane (2021) has commented that stigma in healthcare has been 'institutionalized' owing to the discourse of diagnosis that has affixed to homosexuality since its classification in the *Diagnostic and Statical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM). The removal of homosexuality from the DSM marked a de-emphasis of aberration, but the emergence of HIV/AIDS in 1981 gestured towards a return to the medicalising apparatus of the clinic (Wahlert, 2012).

After Rahimi (2021), the term *hauntogenic* can be attributed to the traumatic HIV/AIDS crisis to account for 'the very space of everyday life … so filled with ghosts that nobody can

avoid them' (p. 3). There are touchpoints between the spectral and the traumatic (del Pilar Blanco & Peeren, 2013): the zenith of HIV/AIDS, its high mortality rate, the lack of social and medical infrastructures, and the Reagan government's inaction laid the foundation for a *social trauma* (Hamburger, 2017). The mutual experiencing of HIV/AIDS-related trauma amongst the queer community 'bec[a]me so widely shared … that i[t] supplie[d] the prevailing mood and temper of the group – dominate[d] its imagery, [and] govern[ed] the way members relate[d] to one another' (Erikson, 1991, p. 461).

Ahmed (2004) has written of the stickiness of names. The dominant belief during the 1980s – but also an essentialist and essentialising discourse that remains today in conservative circles – was that HIV/AIDS is a *gay disease*, the *gay plague*. HIV/AIDS becomes metonymical with *gay.* For many gay men in particular, acquiring HIV/AIDS dissolved the private/public binary, 'outing' not one but two stigmatised identities. Indeed, HIV/AIDS-related stigma and the concurrent management of one's HIV/AIDS status has been named in scholarship as the *second closet* (Berg & Ross, 2014; Cui, 2023; Di Feliciantonio, 2020). Hauntologically, there are ghostly echoes and reflections between Reagan's inertia during the HIV/AIDS epidemic of the early 1980s and Trump's mismanagement of the COVID-19 pandemic (Catlin, 2021; Johnson, 2022; Strathdee et al., 2021).

For Geoffrey, 'the closet' was a safeguard during the zeitgeist of HIV/AIDS. 'Partly, being in 'the closet' was about not getting AIDS … this idea that if I 'came out' and started having sex with men that I'd inevitably get AIDS as well'. As a teenager, AIDS represented a closure of futurity for Geoffrey: a future haunted. Fisher (2012) has written that 'the future is always experienced as a haunting: as a virtuality that already impinges on the present, conditioning expectations' (p. 16). 'The closet', in Geoffrey's instance, pertains to a *conjuration* and *exorcism* (Derrida, 1994), summoned to ward off – to exorcise – the spectre of HIV/AIDS, its contraction and transmission, and possible death. 'The closet' was installed as 'an anticipation shaping [then] current behavior' (Fisher, 2012, p. 19), a spatialised interdiction of gay sexual practices, identity formation, and sociality.

The haunted and haunting epoch of HIV/AIDS of the 1980s and 1990s is revisited, relived, re-commemorated, and reinserted in the present through contemporary media texts appropriating queer individuals' and communities' experiences with the illness. These include, for example, *Queer as Folk (2000)*, *Pride (2014)*, *Looking (2014)*, *Holding the Man (2015)*, *It's a Sin (2021)*, and *Fellow Travellers (2023)*. Such a temporal remigration offered through

cinema and television screens speaks to Barad's (2010) observation that 'scenes never rest, but are reconfigured within, dispersed across, and threaded through one another' (p. 240; also see Lewis & Andrew, 2021). The reappearance of the past through the media of the present implicates viewers in a transgenerational experience of death and dying from HIV/AIDS, and is, too, 'a *politics* of memory, of inheritance, and of generations' (Derrida, 1994, p. xviii).

Ferrying the (re-emerging) past

'The closet' and 'coming out' share the hauntological displacing, (re)figuring, and (re)producing of temporality and spatiality: a *re-turning* (Barad, 2014). Equally, 'the closet's' mobility, multiplicity, and polymorphism (Gregory, 2022) share the spectre's unboundedness, ethereality, and potential for (re)emergence. 'Coming out' is not a unidirectional, one-off undertaking, but rather 'complex, dialectic interactions in which "knowing oneself as gay" involves multiple moves, places, and (re)negotiations of the social context within them' (Lewis, 2012, p. 227). Space and time in each 'coming out' are reiteratively produced through intra-action (Barad, 2007).

We might grant that out of the plethora of times we must 'come out' as queer persons during our lives, for good, ill, or indifferent, one's *first* 'coming out' holds a certain temporal endurance; often the *one* we recount, even the *one* that informs all other 'coming outs' (see Ryan et al., 2015). But the very relational nature of 'coming out' over and over again means 'coming out' '[is] dependent on context and … change[s] slightly every time [it is] enacted' (Rudnicki, 2021, p. 188): with new people, in new spaces, at new times, in different emotional and affective states (Sedgwick, 1990). Arguably, then, *all* 'coming outs' are a *first* time. This evinces why one can be 'in' and 'out' to specific persons in the same geographical location at the same juncture (Fuss, 1991) as a 'non-contemporaneity of present time with itself' (Derrida, 1994, p. 29). Orne's (2011) notion of *strategic outness* – 'the contextual and continual management of identity' (p. 681) – and Farman's (2014) view of *site-specificity* – the relational nature between space and phenomena – are summonable here. While neither is new materialist in orientation as per Barad's *agential realist* branch above, both speak to the inter – intra – implication of time and space. In the hauntological temper, each moment has the potential to be haunted by the (im)possibility of disclosure and the repercussions arising from that disclosure:

> There is no end to coming out; I can never be out always and forever, as new interactions make for new times to come out, new evaluations about whether a time is right, new worries about how others will respond. (Adams, 2010, p. 247)

> We have to 'come out' … you know, almost every day. And we have to choose to come out or not … that's really stuck with me: I have to continually keep 'coming out'. And choosing if [it's], you know, a safe place to do so – T.

The past is never past. Just as Derrida (1994) demonstrated in *Specters of Marx* that any attempt to exorcise Marxism from modern philosophy and politics is futile, 'the closet' and 'coming out' discourses both 'remain always to come and to come-back' (Derrida, 1994, p. 123). Geoffrey remarks that we cannot exorcise 'the closet' because of its historical legacy:

> Even if you told me today that every single person that I cross paths with in my work or personal life was completely ok that being gay was absolutely no different to being straight … I think there's still the history of knowing that still drives ['the closet'].

Another research partner, T, opines that even if heterosexuality and homosexuality were seen as ontologically equivalent, and 'the closet' lost its political valence:

> There would always be … sentiment towards 'the closet'. [Because] people have lived experience of 'the closet'. If it just disappeared tomorrow, then I'd still have … my 'coming out' stories … how things had been … still having the past, I guess, sort of traumas of 'coming out' and 'the closet' existing.

Importantly, 'the closet's' dependence on the intra-actions of time, space, and bodies for its materialisation is what allows it to be transposed and translated within a hauntological framework. 'It can never be always present … it can be only possible, it must even remain a *can-be* or *maybe* … Otherwise it would become presence again, that is substance, existence, essence, *permanence*' (Derrida, 1994, p. 39). 'The closet's' appearance is *indeterminate* not uncertain (Barad, 2007); we cannot deduce in what locale, in what shape or form it will come. It might manifest as me crossing the road to avoid the burly and brawny men outside the pub;

returning the garment back upon the shoulders of the hanger, fearful of the attention it will rouse; wondering what will happen if I hold my partner's hand when walking down the street; modifying the timbre and cadence of my voice and bodily movements through space. We encounter 'the closet' as 'neither singular nor localized, but multiple and mobile' (Gregory, 2022, p. 95).

The concept of hauntology also counters the assumption that we can 'live beyond the closet' (Seidman, 2002; Seidman et al., 1999). Whether as an embodied way of living or a socio-culturally circulating narrative, 'the closet' is stubbornly adherent to gay/queer identity discourse. As Walters (2014) recognises: 'until "compulsory heterosexuality" and the assumption of heterosexuality are altered fundamentally, coming out or some version of a declamatory self-naming will always have to play a part in gay culture and politics' (p. 68). 'Its time is not your time' (Foucault, 1972, p. 211). Research has traced how one's initial 'coming out' experience impresses upon future 'coming outs' (see Denes & Afifi, 2014; Ryan et al., 2015). Orne's (2011) project utilising open-ended essays written by young gay men found that 'negative personal experiences with coming out change[d] future identity management strategies' (p. 693). One participant, Andrew, demonstrated how the consequences of disclosure impacted his subsequent 'coming outs':

> I told my parent's [*sic*] when I was 14 that I was gay. They gave me a choice: move away and begin the 'straightening process' or stay where I was by myself and try to make a life at 14 on my own. I choose to stay. Because of that, I refused to tell any other family members. I'm not sure why I hesitated to tell the rest. It's not like there was a more negative reaction to fear than the one I already experienced, but it just didn't feel like it would be worth it. (Orne, 2011, p. 693)

Rahimi (2021) has stated that 'all human experience is fundamentally haunted' (p. 1). Growing up in Tasmania, the last Australian state to decriminalise homosexuality in 1997, JB speaks of how the past is carted into and resurfaces in the present, exerting influence on the future as an '*agency of the virtual'* (Fisher, 2014, p. 51). For JB, this history is 'always in the back of [his] mind'. Of great affective weight is that JB has ferried with him the reaction of disappointment expressed by his mother when he 'came out'. This was brought to bear during his early twenties when he was struggling with his sexuality. For JB, this spectre manifested

through the 'fear of standing out and being … different, being picked out and disappointing people'. There is a ghostly echo in JB's use of 'disappointing' and his mother's utterance of, '*You've disappointed me*' in response to his 'coming out'. Pursuing a career in nursing, JB was very attentive to being 'one of very few males in the industry at the time … I felt like I already stood out for being gay, being male. I didn't want to stand out for being imperfect'. When Nicole told her mother that she was a lesbian her mother grimaced and said, '*That's disgusting!*' Nicole commented how she relives that temporal juncture: 'Whenever anyone says *'Oh, that's disgusting'*, I just think of her [Nicole's mother]. I don't even know if I've gotten over it today'. Shame, in these instances, is 'the transformative potential of the figure of the spectre' (Lorek-Jezińska & Więckowska, 2017, p. 7), 'where the here and now drifts between the future making of awakened expectations and the dragging dread of lurking threats and half-remembered horrors' (Stewart, 2005, p. 325).

Geoffrey's reminiscences also point to the past leaving a *spectral imprint* (Armstrong, 2010) on the present and future. Throughout his childhood and into adulthood, Geoffrey encountered profoundly traumatic occurrences, including religious persecution, sexual assaults, gay bashing, and conversion therapy. 'The closet' became a safe haven. 'It was', as Geoffrey states, 'a place where I could just hide and be safe and protect myself from homophobia and violence'. Geoffrey has shouldered these past traumas; the threat of violence, for him, is 'always front of mind'. This speaks to 'the way in which the present exists in affective contact with the past' (Macón, 2023, p. 348). Geoffrey's experience of being gay bashed when he was 15 years old, the sense of unsafety revived when colleagues engage in homophobic commentary, weighed upon the decision to show intimacy while on a date:

> I've never shown affection to a man in public before. We were walking through Melbourne one Saturday night and it was getting a little cold. I had my hands in my pockets and he actually looped his arm through mine, we were kind of arm in arm. And I was so tense and nervous the whole time, and he was like, '*Are you ok?*' and I said, '*It's the first time I've ever been in public being affectionate with a man'*. It's not the fear of judgement but rather the potential for physical assault.

Past futures unrealised

Hauntology attends not only to the returning, recurring, and resurfacing of the past but also *lost futures* (Fisher, 2012, 2014). These are the insipient plans, potentials, possibilities, and promises that, for some reason or another, were negated, nullified, and vetoed (Rahimi, 2021). Many of us from time to time surely indulge, peer into, and ponder the afterlives of situations and exchanges: W*hat would've happened if I had said …? What if I'd have done … differently?* Rahimi (2021) names this as 'that which had been to be but was not, that which could have been, the future that hailed the past but was forced to disappear from its horizon' (p. 1). Hill (2013) has suggested that researcher engagements with hauntings behoves modes of writing outside the modus operandi of academic formalism. Bringing to the fore post (non) representational and post foundational approaches, I venture down the crepuscular road of experimental writing. I stage a speculative excursion – a postmortem – of futures suppressed and unfulfilled, where memories of 'coming out' and 'the closet' in some way hampered and hindered a particular future from coming to pass. These are the foggy figurations of the virtual …

~

My (James's) relationship with my father had always been tenuous. Victims of family violence, my mum, older sister, and I moved out of the family home when I was eight. I recall with perspicuity particular things about him: mornings playing classics from Gold 104.3 FM, the large tin of Nescafé Blend 43, the flaming red packet of Marlboro cigarettes, the inky smell of newspaper. I remember my father using epithets like *poofter*, chastising people like Molly Meldrum, but as a child, such references were esoteric. I never disclosed to him that I was gay. In my mid to late teens, I rarely saw him, so withholding my sexual orientation was not burdensome. When I was 22 my father was diagnosed with squamous cell carcinoma of the mouth and given approximately four months to live. It was shortly after that my mum disclosed in passing my sexual orientation.

His reply – '*I've had nothing to do with them in the past and I'm not going to start now'.*

Them is a plural object pronoun – a marking, and 'marking is always "marking down"' (Anzaldúa, 2009, p. 164). *Them* means all gays being *the same* (Haslam et al., 2002). I became *abject* to my father (Kristeva, 1982): contaminated, virulent, purgeable. Not unlike his cancer – inoperable – *I* could be excised: complete resection, margins clear. Was my gay identity

reduced to sexual practices (Chauncey, 2004)? Stereotypes of promiscuity (Fields, 2001)? Could my father no longer claim to be a parent but the '"parent of [a] gay [child]"' (Fields, 2001, p. 165).

During the last few weeks of his life my mum asked if he would like to see me. He refused.

~

Geoffrey described himself as 'a really sensitive, nerdy kid [who] loved art and music, and reading'. These pastimes, however, were relegated to the clandestine. Around these hobbies assembled sexuality anxieties and panics, and they were fervently discouraged by his parents. Geoffrey recounts a particular incident:

> When I was maybe 10 years old, there was a hall next to the place where we lived and there were kids in there – they used it as a dance studio. They were learning to tap dance … I was looking through the window … one day and I told my mum and dad that I wanted to learn to tap dance. My goodness, I copped the abuse … about *'boys don't dance'*.

This is a moment of gender correction through redirection. A putting to right of the gender norm violated, keeping in check the promise of 'craft[ing] [a] masculine and heterosexual identit[y]' (Solebello & Elliott, 2011, p. 297). Geoffrey spoke of wanting to have pursued a career as a professional actor/singer in musical theatre. This dream, however, came at the cost of being 'out'. There was a potent emotional toll for Geoffrey in mourning this future that had shimmered with promise, now left to dull and cloud like a mirror. This lost future has since been re-experienced, vicariously, through Geoffrey's youngest daughter, who studies musical theatre. In a way, this is a *re-turning* of a temporal juncture, 'turning it over and again'; a 're-diffract[ion]', a 'diffracting anew' (Barad, 2014, p. 168).

According to Rahimi (2021), 'what haunts is not that which is gone, it is that which was expected to come but whose condition of arrival has been foreclosed' (p. 6). What courses might our lives have taken if heteronormativity and its attendant 'closet' did not interpellate or figure so powerfully? 'Speculation. Specularity. Spectrality' (Barad, 2010, p. 242). Why did my father have such anxiety(?), disgust(?), hatred(?) of gay people? Why was disownment, for

him, a justificatory (re)action? What if Geoffrey's parents had been advocative of his tap dancing? If instead of *'boys don't dance'* they had spoken of the likes of Fred Astaire, Sammy Davis Jr., Grace Kelly, and Michael Flatley. Rather than watching surreptitiously through the window of the hall that day as a 10 year-old in 1981, what if Geoffrey had joined the class, learned discipline, mastered technique, and pursued musical theatre? Hauntology, here, opens into the realm of justice.

Justice: To be or not to be?

'No justice', argues Derrida (1994), 'seems possible or thinkable without the principle of some *responsibility*' (p. vviii). Responsibility can be recast as *response-ability*: responding to and with others; being attentive to and response-able for our enactments in the world (Barad, 2007; Barad & Gandorfer, 2021; Bozalek & Zembylas, 2023). As an excess of neo-fascist tendencies sweeps the globe, there has been a resurging anti-LGBTQIA+ sentiment (Butler, 2024; Korolczuk, 2020; Liu et al., 2024). Heterosexual and cisgender identities and modes of living – with invigoration – are being defended, (re)hegemonised, and juridically enforced. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) spoke of the political being comprised of a co-constituting *micropolitics* and *macropolitics*. Affects, desires, tendencies, and daily practices comprise the *micropolitical* which is necessarily sustained by and shapes the *macropolitical*: governments, laws, centralised power. *Capillary* power (Foucault, 1980) – power which permeates bodies and 'inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives' (p. 39) – can feasibly take form as 'the closet' in the face of this not-so-new anti-LGBTQIA+ intensification. Indeed, a report by the Human Rights Campaign and Human Rights Campaign Foundation (2026) revealed that almost half (47.5%) of LGBTQIA+ adults report 'being less out somewhere in their lives' (p. 6) in the 12 months since Trump became president. Plainly said, 'the Trump Administration is forcing LGBTQ+ Americans back into the closet' (Human Rights Campaign & Human Rights Campaign Foundation, 2026, p. 6).

It has been the ambit of this plateau to (re)situate 'the closet' within a hauntological and spectral ethnographic framework that describes its capacity to (re)emerge across, and disrupt, normative logics of time and space. Like a phantom, 'the closet' blurs the distinction between presence and absence: physically intangible, but sensed and affectual. The politicisation of absence has been explored via heterosexuality's unregistered omnipresence and its demand of homosexuality's containment through 'the closet'. This plateau has demonstrated how

scholarship, the co-researchers, and cultural texts (re)present and (re)cast the ghosts of the past, whose spectral agency conditions the future: ghostly tendrils burrow into the viscera of bodies, arresting, alarming, and affecting. '*Time is out of joint'* says Hamlet (Shakespeare, 1599/2010, 1.5.186–190), says Derrida (1994) via Hamlet, says Barad (2010) via Derrida via Hamlet.

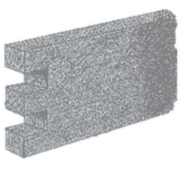
Some futures, it has been suggested, are *lost* (Fisher, 2012, 2014; Rahimi, 2021). Too often queer people swing between the future perfect of 'dealing with the virtual past, what "we will have been"' (Braidotti, 2019a, p. 465), and the past conditional of what *could have been* if 'the closet' and 'coming out' discourses did not hold sway as particular spacetimematterings (Barad, 2007, 2008). It becomes a matter of response-ability to attend to the subjects, practices, and discourses we instantiate and circulate for we are also co-participatory in the world's worlding. This calls for a renewed (re)connection to the other based on an *affirmative ethics* (Braidotti, 2023). Through hauntology we work 'in the name of *justice*. Of justice where it is not yet, not yet *there*, where it is no longer' (Derrida, 1994, p. xviii). The past-present-future is ever beckoning us – how we respond matters.

Plateau # Becoming ecologies of a social scene: Lesbian subject formation via parrhesiastic 'coming out'

> The individual is not to be conceived as a sort of elementary nucleus, a primitive atom, a multiple and inert material on which power comes to fasten or against which it happens to strike, and in so doing subdues or crushes individuals. In fact, it is already one of the prime effects of power that certain bodies, certain gestures, certain discourses, certain desires, come to be identified and constituted as individuals. The individual, that is, is not the *vis-à-vis* of power; it is, I believe, one of its prime effects. (Foucault, 1980, p. 98)

> The capacities of a body to act can come into being only in relation to the vibrations of its nonhuman environment. (Roberts, 2012, p. 2517)

This plateau shakes loose 'coming out' from its largely confessional figuration, performed by an autonomous *I*, by offering a theoretical reading of a social scene in which a research partner's – Kaye's – 'coming out' bespoke a discourse of truth-telling known as *parrhesia* (Foucault, 2001, 2005, 2011). Delving into the *kairos* – the conditions – of the *parrhesiastic* act through which Kaye became constituted as a lesbian subject, I mine the poststructural vein of Butler (2012a, 2016, 2017) and Foucault, the language philosophy of Austin (1962), and cross-fertilise their palpably discursive and linguistic foci with insights from critical and queer geographies, theories of affect, and new materialism/posthumanism. I suggest the affectivity and materiality of the spatial, including the bodies of staff and customers, cannot be shorn from – indeed, are the *foundation of* – the parrhesiastic act, and hence, Kaye's 'coming out'. Highlighted in this plateau is the dependency on multiple others – human and non-human alike – in the iterative process of subject formation vis-à-vis 'coming out'.



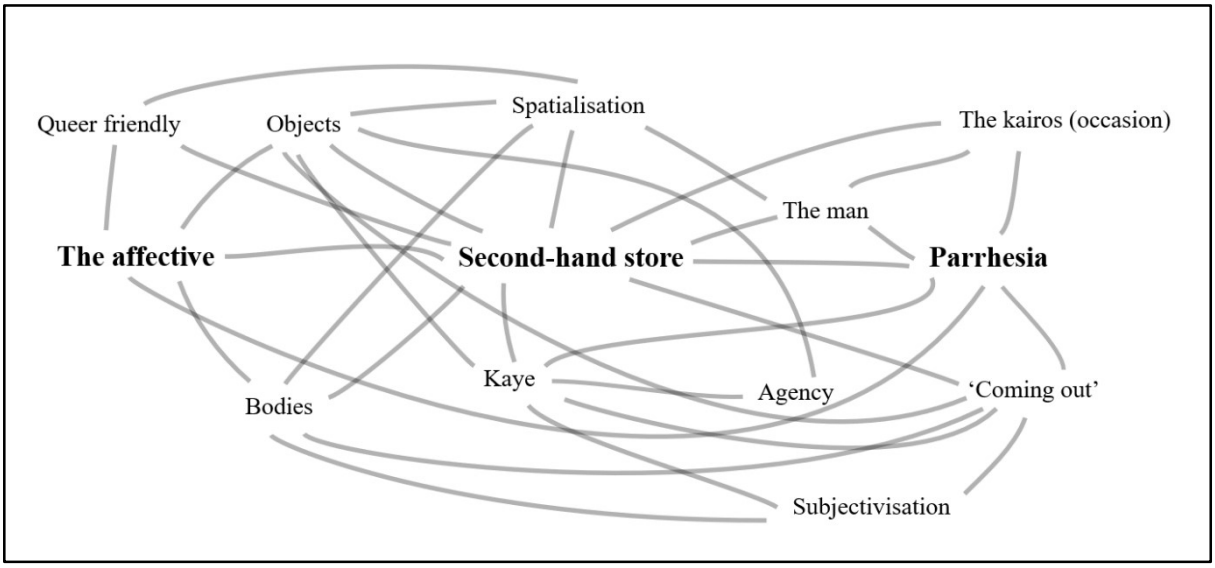


Figure 12: Rhizomatic mapping of Plateau # Becoming ecologies of a social scene: Lesbian subject formation via parrhesiastic 'coming out'

Surveying the scene

On Thursdays, Kaye serves at the counter of a capacious second-hand goods store in a gay-friendly suburb in Victoria. She recalls an occasion when a Caucasian, 'older Australian male', his Filipina wife, and stepson – roughly in his thirties – had come into the store. The woman and son had disappeared into the labyrinth of goods while the man stood at the counter, prattling about his stepson. 'Oh … he's my wife's boy. I only met him when he was nine or something like that. He's gay, he's gone to shop for handbags.'

Kaye exchanged sidelong glances with the second lady serving at the counter.

The man headed towards the corridor leading to another labyrinthine section of the store but turned on his heel.

'Oh, do you know what my wife calls him? She calls him … half-man, half-woman.'

This is the point at which Kaye clapped back. 'I just went red. And I don't normally react. I said, 'Well, I'm gay and I find your comments offensive.'

Nonplussed, the man muttered, 'Oh…', then scuttled off.

Not of the confessional

'Coming out' frequently takes the form of a confession (see Bannink & Wentink, 2015; Chirrey, 2003; Lepp, 2022; Wood, 2005). Foucault (1976) identifies that since the Middle Ages the West has drawn upon the ritual practice of confession as the means by which the truth of the subject is wrought. The confession, as a social contract, requires the actual or virtual other to bear witness to one's confession: 'the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile' (Foucault, 1976, pp. 61–62). Confessional discourse has become operationalised in legal, medical, educational, and familial domains, inexorably bound up with axes of power, privilege, and status:

> One confesses one's crimes, one's sins, one's thoughts and desires, one's illnesses and troubles; one goes about telling, with the greatest precision, whatever is most difficult to tell. One confesses in public and in private, to one's parents, one's educators, one's doctor, to those one loves; one admits to oneself, in pleasure and in pain, things it would be impossible to tell anyone else … One confesses—or is forced to confess. (Foucault, 1976, p. 59)

In the social scene Kaye describes, however, 'coming out' did not belong to the realm of the confessional but exudes a speaking back to power characteristic of a modality of speech called *parrhesia*.

Foucault is largely credited for excavating the concept of parrhesia from Greek antiquity. Translated as *free speech* (Foucault, 2001), *frankness*, *telling all* (Foucault, 2005), and *free-spokenness* (Foucault, 2011), parrhesia is truth 'in all its naked force, without adornment' (Foucault, 2005, p. 382). The *parrhesiastes* – 'the one who uses parrhesia, i.e., the one who speaks the truth' (Foucault, 2001, p. 11) – is produced *by*, and is the subject *of*, the utterance. For one to invoke the position of parrhesiastes requires particular conditions. Fundamentally, there must be a power differential between interlocutors: a person cannot marshal parrhesia if they wield greater privilege than the other party. 'The *parrhesiastes* is always less powerful than the one with whom he [*sic*] speaks' (Foucault, 2001, p. 18). The heteronormative infrastructures that encode queer subjects' 'coming out' as obligatory, while at the same time designating 'coming out' for heterosexual subjects redundant, satisfy this

condition for Kaye to speak truth to heteronormative power. To invoke parrhesia is to exhibit courage by speaking dangerously and risking violence (Foucault, 2001). Certainly, Kaye – like many queers who 'come out' – could not anticipate what manner the man's response might take to this '*explicit self-declaration*' (Butler, 1997a, p. 22). Nevertheless, her steely statement, *'I'm gay and I find your comments offensive'*, distilled the truth of her sexual subjectivity 'without concealment, reserve, empty manner of speech, or rhetorical ornament' (Foucault, 2011, p. 10). Kaye did not offer an obliging laugh to the gauche remark, a form of phatic speech – '*What are you looking for today?'* – or even respond with *'I'm offended by your comments'*. She deliberately enacted her lesbian identity as rejoinder. A crucial point is that Kaye performs parrhesia as a woman,[23] marking the intersection of sexuality, gender, and age in the parrhesiastic act: a 71 year-old *gay woman* has riposted against the heteropatriarchal power of the middle-aged *straight man's* pejorative.

Also required in the parrhesiastic act is the other 'who is present, and necessarily present in the practice of telling the truth about oneself' (Foucault, 2011, p. 5). This alterity is not, however, in the form of the witness figured in confessional discourse, who brandishes power to criticise, condemn, or console. Rather, according to parrhesia's ancient cultural tradition, this party 'could be anybody' (Foucault, 2011, p. 5), provided their social privilege and position is greater than that of the parrhesiastes, and on the condition *this* individual must receive *this* truth.

The *kairos* of parrhesia

Foucault (2005) outlines the contextual parameters of parrhesia:

> It is a specific, particular practice of true discourse defined by rules of prudence, skill, and *the conditions that require one to say the truth at this moment, in this form, under these conditions, and to this individual* inasmuch, and only inasmuch as he [*sic*] is capable of receiving it, and receiving it best, at this moment in time. That is to say, what essentially defines the rules of *parrhēsia* is the *kairos*, the occasion, this being precisely

[23] In a footnote in *Fearless Speech*, editor Joseph Pearson notes that 'Foucault indicated that the oppressed role of women in Greek society generally deprived them of the use of the use of *parrhesia*' (p. 12). I acknowledge Foucault's historical analysis while, at the same time, I seek to unshackle, in this plateau, parrhesia's historical constraints by de-gendering and transposing the concept within contemporary 'coming out' discourse.

> the situation of individuals with regard to each other and to the moment chosen for saying this truth. (p. 384; emphasis added)

Every moment is a dense confluence of absences, presences, registerings, possibilities, amplifications, tensions, dispersions, exchanges, anticipations, attunings, flurries, disintegrations, and intensities. A moment might be what Stewart (2007) calls the 'something[s] [that get] throw[n] … together … as an event' (p. 1), while Barad (2007) has suggested how 'each moment is alive with different possibilities for the world's becoming and different reconfigurings of what may yet be possible' (p. 182).

It is apposite to unspool the constituents composing the *kairos* (the unscheduled moment) of parrhesia, in order to theorise the roll call of conditions – discursive, spatial, bodily, relational, political, affective – that converged in the situated and specific spacetime of Kaye's parrhesiastic act. According to McCormack (2015), 'the question of how to think with/in the world—*this* time, on *this* occasion, under *these* circumstances—is never settled in advance' (p. 89), but in line with non-representational theories and approaches, this is contextually exclusive. Foucault (2011) states that the circumstances of subjectivisation vis-à-vis parrhesia warrant exploration: 'the conditions and forms of the type of act by which the subject *manifests* himself [*sic*] when speaking the truth' (p. 2). Deleuze and Guattari (1987) have remarked that one's voice is animated by other voices, and is never the product of a ready-made, autonomous self: 'the collective assemblage is always like the murmur from which I take my proper name, the constellation of voices, concordant or not, from which I draw my voice' (p. 84). If Kaye did not speak from/as the sovereign *I*, what other 'dynamic and shifting engagement of relations' (Barad, 2007, p. 35) are mapped into the parrhesiastic act? For Zierhofer (2002), it is facile to regard speech acts as the monopoly of human speakers; they involve ever-present non-human actants and specific figurations. This begs the question: what array of conditions might have produced Kaye's act of parrhesia that Thursday?

Foucault's (1973, 1975, 1986, 1995, 2007) genealogies and archaeologies consider the nexus of space, power, and (disciplinary) practices in producing subjects. Here, I amalgamate new materialist and posthuman onto-epistemology, affect theory, and critical and queer geographies to supplement the discursive production of subjects through parrhesia. Soja (1985) argues that space is 'socially-produced', just as we are 'shaped by a constantly evolving spatiality which constitutes and concretises social action and relationship' (p. 90; also see

Thrift, 1996). Relatedly, Ahmed (2006) has described the capability of spaces to house and hold bodies, or not, and the corollary (in)capacities of these bodies to act within that location. Furthermore, Roberts (2012) writes that 'a body cannot help but contribute to the material becomings of its milieu, by virtue of its own vibrating materiality' (p. 2517). We are aware from Kaye's narration that the scene transpired within a second-hand shop, managed by a man Kaye describes as 'as camp as a row of tents', operated by gay and lesbian shop assistants, that has as its clientele queer shoppers, located in a gay-friendly suburb. But what *makes* the suburb, and correlate store, gay-friendly?

A response to these questions arises in taking seriously the mutual impress of bodies on spaces and spaces on bodies. McCormack (2013) remarks upon the porousness of bodies and spaces such that 'it becomes extremely difficult to differentiate the affective qualities of [both]' (p. 3). Queer bodies are, it seems, assimilated with relative ease into this particular geography while their presence simultaneously reinvigorates the affectivity that rendered them *in place* in the first instance. This highlights 'a spatio-temporal structuration of social life which gives form … to … the recursive practices of day-to-day activity' (Soja, 1985, p. 94). Said differently, the prosaic daily movements of queer residents (and allies and nonchalant locals), the circulation of media and people disseminating *this* place's queer conviviality, the practices of meaning-making tied to *this* locale, (re)produce the queer-friendliness of the suburb and, by extension, the shop where it is located. Ahmed (2019), too, calls attention to the evidence left when something is used: what is used leaving signs of frequentation in the form of well-wornness, ease, familiarity, and comfort. At the same time, spaces are not fixed or static. Spatialisation is a dynamic process of transformation (Barad, 2007; Ewalt, 2016; Thrift, 2008), highlighting the 'multiply fluid, ambiguous and contingent sexualised spatialities that are constants in human experience' (Knopp, 2007, p. 22). The man's comments – *'He's gay, he's gone to shop for handbags', 'my wife … calls him … half-man, half-woman'* – evidence this spatial mercuriality. In an instant there is a discernible shift in the emotional and affectual tempo of the space, reciprocally tripped by and tripping the affective thermostat of Kaye's body.

When Kaye recalls how she 'just went red', that she would not 'normally react', she references a disturbance and disequilibrium in her bodily disposition or *hexis* (Bourdieu, 1977). To use the terms of Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical framework, Kaye's *front stage*, marked by one's adherence to norms and social mores, was superseded by her countenance of frustration and a verbalised retort characteristic of the *back stage* – what is supressed and withheld from public display. The internal disordering that provoked Kaye to the 'free-spokenness' (Foucault,

2011, p. 2) of parrhesia underlines 'affect [as] the emergent and energetic expression of the force of practice in place' (Duff, 2010, p. 891). Affect is unpremeditated, as Deleuze (1988) tells us, because '[we] do not know beforehand what a body or a mind can do, in a given encounter, a given arrangement, a given combination' (p. 125). Accordingly, Kaye could not have presaged how the composite relations of the encounter would bloom into parrhesia.

The definition of affect par excellence, is the capacity to affect and be affected. Seigworth and Gregg (2010) have written that affect 'can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension' (p. 1). Might the forces, energies, and charges synonymous with affect, which move bodies and provoke action, also (dis)activate utterance? What bearing does the affectual have on instigating the somatic dimensions of speech – the will or desire to speak *at all*? 'How does a body, marked in its duration by … various encounters with mixed forces, come to shift its affections (its being-affected) into action (capacity to affect)?' (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010, p. 2). Indeed, Butler (2012a) has suggested that to be overloaded by relations is a precondition for action:

> Must we, in fact, be overwhelmed to some degree in order to have motive for action? We only act when we are moved to act, and we are moved by something that affects us from the outside, from elsewhere, from the lives of others, imposing a surfeit that we act from and upon. (p. 136)

While Kaye states that she '[doesn't] normally react', on this occasion she did. The forces at play at this spacetime suggest, for Kaye, a localised susceptibility 'to registers and modalities … that exceed conscious rational thought, or that exist at the edges of consciousness' (Blackman, 2019, p. ix). Might Kaye, in advance – and as a necessary condition – of becoming the parrhesiastes, be tapping into what Probyn (2003) refers to as the 'denseness, historicity and structural complexity' (p. 294) of the spatiality of the store and its affectual intensities? If the store has been made – is continually (re)made – familiarly queer, as 'an effect of inhabitance' (Ahmed, 2006, p. 7), when Kaye says, *'I'm gay and I find your comments offensive'*, the subject pronoun *I* could be substituted for *we*. *We* (queer bodies past and present) *find your comments offensive*. If credence is (rightly) given to the spatiality of the store and its various ecologies of practice, consumerism, movement, and affect in enabling and empowering Kaye's retort, we can infer a mutual performative enactment of agency. That is to say, the

second-hand shop and its multiplicitous materialities work *through* Kaye and her utterance, and Kaye locates agency *from* these very spatial compositions (Coole, 2005).

The prerequisites of the parrhesiastic act were introduced previously as the asymmetrical power dynamics between persons and the necessary presence of another to witness the parrhesiastic act. To this list, within this setting, I submit as crucial the man's phobicly coded comments, without which, Kaye's very impetus to 'come out' would be moot. Butler (2016) explains that not only is avowal 'a scene of address' but '*a response to an interpellation, a way of responding to having been addressed*' (p. 84; emphasis added). But as Kaye was not the one addressed as gay, the interpellation, strictly speaking, did not belong to her; it was intended for the man's 'gay' 'half-man, half-woman' 'stepson'. Nevertheless, the interpellative address triggered *something*, precipitating a gathering of relations that congealed, momentarily, as Kaye's parrhesiastic act.

Queer geographies and geographies of sexuality have explored queer-identified and identifying spaces and the attendance of heterosexual occupants within these spaces (see Bettani, 2015; Casey, 2004; Hartless, 2019; Matejskova, 2007). Brown (2000) recounts an incident on a bus in Seattle when a man boarding – performing his queerness with socially intelligible markers of non-normative sexuality – takes his seat. A young straight couple tut and scoff – this is overheard by the man. Demanding who had made audible their judgement, the woman announces that she had spoken. The queer man replies, '"Well if you don't like it, girlfriend, *what the hell you doin'* up on Capitol Hill in the first place!"' (Brown, 2000, p. 27). In the scene, the queer man's retort insinuates that it is the straight couple who are personae non gratae in the gay-friendly area of Seattle. It is a misrepresentation, however, to name Capitol Hill and the second-hand shop as *queer-exclusive*. As remarked by Chauncey (2014): 'there is no queer space; there are only spaces used by queers or put to queer use' (p. 202). It is clear in both examples that each location is visited by cisgender and heterosexual people, that both are 'transcultural contact zones' (Hacker, 2007, p. 70). The point here is that in both instances, it is the phobic remarks, *not* heterosexuality, that is *out of place*.

Couched within the *kairos* is a particular ensemble of conditions. Hence, if the social dynamics of the scene (the second-hand store) were altered, if the sexual and gender identity of the man was instead a gay/queer woman, for example, parrhesia could not have taken place, given both interlocutors (Kaye and now the woman) are equally marginal to heterosexual and androcentric discourses. Additionally, a different environ (not in the gay-friendly town/not in

the second-hand store) would foreclose, for Kaye, the possibility of drawing from relations of power and the queer affectual registers of the space. The work of Kraftl and Adey (2008) contends that within buildings, 'certain kinds of affects are specifically and locally stabilized in an effort to engender more particular forms of inhabitation' (p. 228). This would suggest that a location where homophobia is cultivated and performed with abandon might preclude Kaye from speaking out, that the relational and affective conditions of this hypothetical milieu would authorise and energise the man's comments. This points to the notion that differences between subjectivities are materialised, and one's (un)belonging is underscored, in space (Probyn, 2003).

Language *as* material: Doing things with words/words doing things

Austin's (1962) *How To Do Things With Words* demonstrated, as the title implies, how interlocutors use language as a semiotic system. Austin did not reference explicitly the materiality of language, but scholars have observed shimmers of a materialist philosophy of language in his performative speech act theory (Beetz, 2016). While Austin described the conditions that render the performative utterance (in)felicitous – the speaker's (in)sincerity, the speaker having (not) been heard by the addressee, the speaker having (not) been apprehended by the addressee – let us pivot into a new materialist and posthuman direction and consider the materiality of language. Specifically, the materiality of Kaye's parrhesia.

In Western episteme, language and materiality have a history of being separable, distinct, and unrelated. New materialist and posthuman scholarship, however, construes language *as* material (see Beetz, 2016; Daya, 2019; de Freitas & Curinga, 2015; Jackson & Mazzei, 2023; MacLure, 2013a; Pennycook, 2024; Shankar & Cavanaugh, 2012, 2017). Barad (2003) has noted that 'materiality itself is always already figured within a linguistic domain as its condition of possibility' (p. 801). Knopp (2007) declares that from a queer imaginary 'the material is always discursive and the discursive is always material' (p. 27). And Beetz (2016) asserts that 'language and discourse are fundamentally material and the subject is constituted and decentered in relation to this materiality' (p. 73). Observing language *as* material is not only an epistemological shift but undoubtedly 'an ontological move' (Shankar & Cavanaugh, 2017, p. 1).

While this scholarship collectively accentuates language's materiality, what is meant by materiality is opaque and sticky. Beetz (2016) has written, for example, that:

> language is a material phenomenon. It is material, because it consists of sounds—agitated air that sets matter in motion. In its textual form, language possesses a materiality that derives from markings—inscriptions—on pieces of paper, stone tablets, wooden planks, screens, a body, or any other surface. Gestures are material in their reliance on physical presence and bodily motion' (p. 82).

But does this interpretation of physicality underplay the extent of language's material dimension? What if we do the critical work of expanding the indexical function of *material* and *materiality*, make a U-turn on language's allegedly exclusive 'phonic, graphic, and gestural' (Beetz, 2016, p. 83) forms, and view language's materiality in, and as, matters of worlding (Barad, 2007)? A communicatory medium, (re)producing identities, structuring concepts and ideas, advancing and stultifying movements and actions, bringing relations into being, and (dis)organising social worlds and realities, language 'consist[s] of its own materiality' (Shankar & Cavanaugh, 2017, p. 2). Language does not stop at being semiotic and symbolic, significatory and representative; rather, these functions are already material processes, acting on/in the world. Indeed, Barad's (2003) posthuman performativity thesis proposes language as already part of the world and therefore an inseparable element entangled in its *intra-active* (re)production and (re)making. 'Matter and meaning are not separate elements' (Barad, 2007, p. 3). A synergy emerges between Barad's interpretation of ethics as the 'responsibility and accountability for the lively relationalities of becoming of which "we" are a part' (Barad, 2008, p. 333) and parrhesia, as a profoundly ethical act, rooted in responsibility (*response-ability*): dismantling structures of power, disrupting hegemony, and potentially transforming self and other.

Within the framework of language *as* material, what is the relationship between parrhesia and 'coming out'? In brief, both are material, generative praxes of subjectivisation and worlding. Worlding is a 'transformative politics' (Papadopoulos, 2012, p. 1), an intervention, not only human-directed but co-performed with non-human and more-than-human others that produces 'an opening to material processes and practices and a possibility for crafting—literally—common, alternative forms of life' (Papadopoulos, 2012, p. 2). 'Coming out', too, as a 'politics of naming' (Allen, 2011, p. 80), is a discourse shot through with relations of power, privilege, access, and capacity, making it a not necessarily viable or even desired option for some LGBTQIA+ people (Rasmussen, 2004). In the scene of the

second-hand store, 'coming out' is a political act of resistance (see Halperin, 1995), unlike performances of 'coming out' connected to discourses of recognition and acceptance of self and by others (see Denes & Afifi, 2014; Rossi, 2010; Whitman & Nadal, 2015). *'I'm gay and I find your comments offensive'* is double-pronged in its avowal and disavowal. Kaye avows herself as a sexual subject (see Butler, 2016) while disavowing heteropatriarchal power being (re)articulated in situ: in *this* space, at *this* time, to *this* addressee, *those* cis-hetero-centric comments are impermissible. This embodied act of opposition is powerful in view of the history of lesbian identities being restricted and regulated in public space (Browne, 2021; Valentine, 1993a, 1993b, 1996).

The purpose *of parrhesia* is *paradosis*, '[the] transfer of true discourse from the person who already possesses it to the person who must receive it, must be impregnated by it, and who must be able to use it and subjectivize it' (Foucault, 2005, p. 382). We are not privy to the after-effects of the social scene – Kaye mentions that the man scuttles off down the vestibule and is not seen again. But it merits consideration: what bearing, if any, did Kaye's address have on the man? Did paradosis occur? Stewart (2011) contends that 'what affects us—the sentience of a situation—is also a dwelling, a worlding born from an atmospheric attunement' (p. 449). Was a new world *worlded* for the man through the reattuning e/affects of paradosis? Was the man changed as a consequence of Kaye's parrhesia? Did her words burrow, lodge, and stick in the viscera of his being? Will a newly formed filial duty mean calling out his wife if or when she refers to her son as 'half-man, half-woman'? These postulations and their answers are virtual but not imponderable. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987) have espoused, the virtual is not the anthesis of the real, but precisely an elusive potentiality not yet actualised.

Material matters and lesbian subject formation: Constitution and subordination

'Coming out' is considered by and large a linguistic act. Within this linguistic economy, the queer subject precedes the *queer*, so to speak. In the poststructural modus, Butler (2001) informs us that the *I* through which one narrates an event is speaking belatedly: it is always constructed retrospective to the experience. Giving an account of the experience in which one became subjectivised – formed as a subject – is paradoxical, in that the *I* who recounts the experience is not pre-constituted but is instead its discursive *effect*. This does not mean, however, that we disregard and dispose of the narrating *I*. Indeed, for Butler (1990, 2001), this time lag is one of the necessary but ambivalent conditions we must assent to, in order to be able to speak autobiographically at all.

Foucault (2011) states that through *parrhesia* 'the individual can … tell the truth about himself [*sic*] and constitute himself [*sic*] as subject [*sic*] telling the truth about himself [*sic*]' (p. 7). Thus, parrhesia is both a discursive and material (material-discursive) act of subjectivisation and speaking out from that subjectivity. As argued by Martine and Cooren (2016), '*materiality should … be conceived of as an irreducible aspect of everything that is, including speech and any communication act in general*' (p. 151). I have attempted to aetiologically account for the myriad of relations that might be said to have permeated, pervaded, and penetrated the *kairos*. In line with Foucault (1980), I am interested in the conditions orbiting and channelled into the *kairos* which enabled parrhesia and, therefore, enabled Kaye to become subjectivised as a lesbian subject:

> Rather than ask ourselves how the sovereign appears to us in his [*sic*] lofty isolation, we should try to discover how it is that subjects are gradually, progressively, really and materially constituted through a multiplicity of organisms, forces, energies, materials, desires, thoughts etc. (Foucault, 1980, p. 97)

One element I have drawn particular attention to is the spatial organisation of the suburb and store. Probyn (2003) has emphasised the spatial dimension in subject formation: 'it is … undeniable that the sites and spaces of its [subjectivity's] production are central' (p. 294). Drawing from Barad's *agential realist* account qua matter, space, and time being interwoven (*spacetimemattering*), Juelskjær (2013) has written how gendered subjectivity is produced with/in this triad as a 'socio-material-discursive-affective process' (p. 766). To borrow this nomenclature of Barad (2014, 2020), the *kairos* might be analogous with spacetimemattering, where 'space, time, and matter are mutually constituted through the dynamics of iterative intra-activity' (Barad, 2007, p. 181).

The presence of multiplicitous agents, to which Foucault (1980) refers above, makes clear that it would be premature to suggest Kaye's parrhesiastic 'coming out' is reducible to, and successful as, a performative performed by an a priori *I*. Indeed, 'discourse precedes and makes possible the subject who speaks' (Butler, 2010, p. 148), and 'speech "acts" not because the subject's intention is so effective, but because the act of speech relies upon certain social conventions that give efficacy to the act' (Butler, 2017, p. 173). In other words, Kaye's utterance, *'I'm gay'*, is intelligible and carries the force it does because of the historicity of gay/queer identity discourses (including 'coming out'), a common understanding of what the

signifier *gay* might refer to, and the particularities of the social context (Butler, 1991, 1993, 2010). When Kaye avows her identity, *'I'm gay'*, she contemporaneously avows 'gay' as an identity which others have and avow themselves. This highlights the fundamentally relational dimension of what we take as the *self*. When one 'comes out' as a non-normative gender or sexual subject, one becomes 'bound to others who are doing the same act under a similar constraint' (Butler, 2016, p. 85). The fact that others take on the 'coming out' discourse to name themselves as a non-heterosexual/cisgender identity means that the dissymmetry of discourse becomes further (re)produced and consolidated as a dominant social script: repeatable and repeating, reified and reifying heterosexual/cisgender hegemony. There is always a dependence on the exterior in naming what we take to be, and to belong to, the interior.

The scene always changes

As Allen et al.'s (2022) new materialist-informed work tells us, spaces are made (un)safe for queers as a result of the 'intra-relational nature of space and human activity by which it *becomes*' (p. 769). Made apparent in this quotation is the relational, processual dimension of spaces and bodies, in whose mutual openness and impress each comes to affect and be affected. In this plateau I have offered what Soja (1985) might consider a 'materialist interpretation of spatiality and spatial praxis' (p. 90), exploring the cluster of relations that conditioned the *kairos* – the occasion – of Kaye's parrhesiastic act.

As a fundamentally political modality of speech in which truth, in all its possible danger and discomfort, is told sans censor, parrhesia was the method of veridiction through which Kaye became formed as a lesbian subject and, concurrently, challenged the man's phobicly veiled comments about his gay stepson. Kaye's parrhesia not only spoke truth to power in the specific context of the encounter, but was an indictment of the cis-hetero-normative powers that begot those remarks. In this way, Kaye might be making and exercising what Pennell (2016) calls *queer transgressive cultural capital*, unsettling the presuppositions of deficiency and powerlessness often ascribed to queer subjects by, and within, spheres of hegemonic sexuality and gender. Furthermore, the function of parrhesia is to achieve paradosis, handing down truth to another such that they might inherit and be changed by this truth (Foucault, 2005). We remain unsure, however, if Kaye's parrhesia parlayed into paradosis for the man.

On-brand with new materialist and posthuman understandings, in this plateau I have suggested agency was mutually constituted and distributed (Coole, 2005; Coole & Frost, 2010;

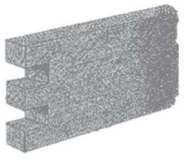
Latour, 2005). The materiality of the locale, the space's emotional and affective energies, the resonances and orbits of other bodies and objects, I suggested, catalysed Kaye's parrhesiastic act, while her parrhesia reciprocally transformed those very relations. When heed is given to the materiality of language, or language *as* material, parrhesia translates as a material praxis of subjectivisation and worlding. Within this ontology, a parrhesiastic 'coming out' breaks from 'coming out's' largely confessional/linguistic framing (Austin, 1962; Foucault, 1976), and instead becomes concerned with 'the material aspects' (Shankar & Cavanaugh, 2017, p. 4) of the performance and the materialisations it enables.

Plateau # ‘Outing’ an ethics of ‘coming out’: Commitments, affirmation, and becoming

> Meeting each moment, being alive to the possibilities of becoming, is an ethical call, an invitation that is written into the very matter of all being and becoming. We need to meet the universe halfway, to take responsibility for the role that we play in the world’s differential becoming. (Barad, 2007, p. 396)

In this plateau, I pleat together different continental philosophical strands[24] to produce an inter-ethical dialogue around Geoffrey’s ‘coming out’ to his wife. I look to Levinasian-Butlerian ideas of responsibility, vulnerability, and precarity, Barad’s ethical praxis of worlding, and the Spinozist-Deleuzian(Guattarian)-Braidottian affirmative ethics of affective empowerment and becoming. Putting these dynamic yet contrasting approaches into conversation requires careful navigation and negotiation of their ethical and ontological commitments and engagements through a diffractive reading (Barad, 2007, 2014) that acknowledges their dissimilarities and synergistic resonances. What is furnished is a metaethical analysis grounded in Geoffrey’s ‘coming out’ experience, attentive to the consortium of actors and actions e/affecting, and affected by, his subjective becoming. Lastly, I *plug into* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) the related, but conceptually distinct discourse of ‘outing’, exploring the confederation of ethical propositions claimed by these philosophies. I set out to see what these ethical frameworks can (re)offer the divisive discourse of ‘outing’.

[24] Technically, Spinoza predates the inception of continental philosophy and is considered rather one of its predecessors. Moreover, Barad, though not strictly a continental philosopher, might be considered an adjacent thinker, heavily influenced by the continental tradition of Foucault, Derrida, and Butler.



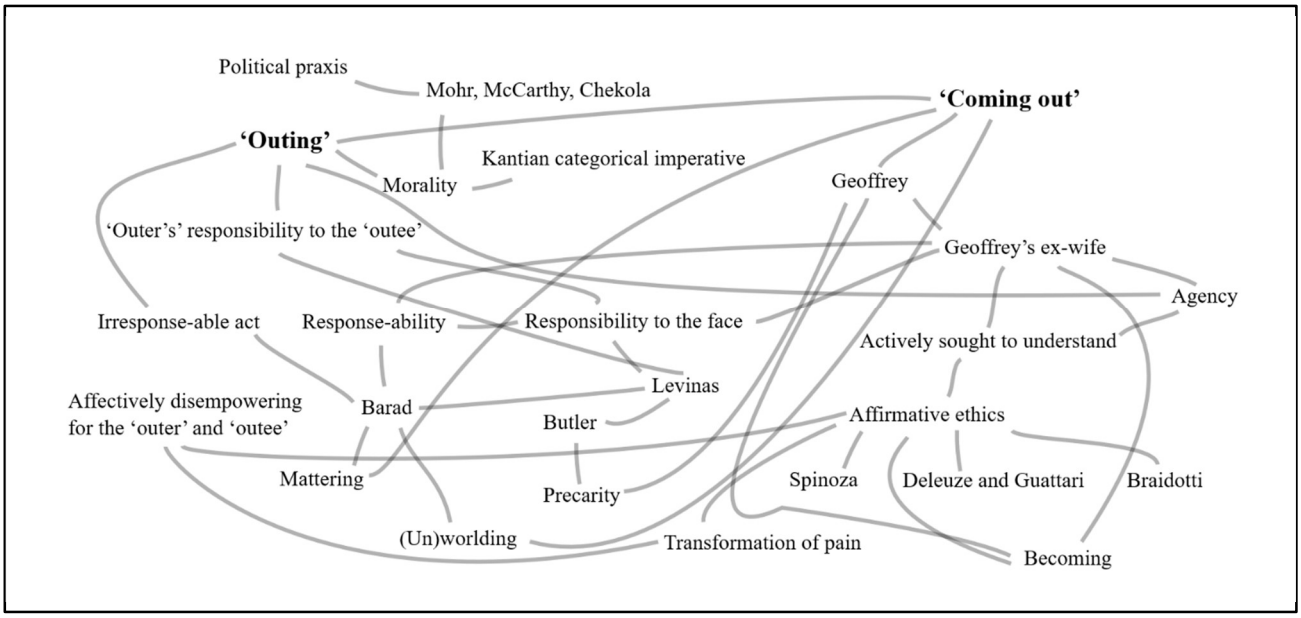


Figure 13: Rhizomatic mapping of Plateau # 'Outing an ethics of 'coming out': Commitments, affirmation, and becoming

Thought provoked

This plateau germinated in accord with St. Pierre's (2011) observation that 'participants [might act as] as provocateurs' (p. 620), as well as the new materialist onto-episteme that stories possess their own agencies that work on and through listeners and readers (Hendry et al., 2018c; Rosiek & Snyder, 2020; Rosiek et al., 2020). The story in focus is Geoffrey's 'coming out' to his wife:[25]

> She was shocked and devastated. She had no idea … Her initial reaction was [that] she wanted time to process it. So, we didn't … talk for about three months. [Geoffrey and his ex-wife lived together with three of their children during this time.] She wanted … needed her time to think it through. She's a pretty articulate, intelligent, thoughtful woman and she didn't want to have a knee-jerk reaction. So, she did her own research into why men, particularly growing up in the church, why they stayed 'closeted'. After about three months, we sat down and talked for a couple of hours and she realised that we were both actually victims of the conservative Christian narrative. Even though she was devastated and hurt, she understood why I did it, why I was 'closeted' … She said she could add to my suffering by making me pay … for what I'd done, or she could

[25] I distinguish between Geoffrey's *wife* prior to, and *ex-wife* after, his 'coming out'.

> accept that we were both victims of a dogma … and we had to somehow move forward together, as victims, without making each other suffer, and without making the kids suffer.

MacLure (2013b) has spoken of wonder as 'not necessarily a safe, comforting, or uncomplicatedly positive affect … the particular hue or tenor that it will assume is never entirely within our control' (p. 229). Indeed, Geoffrey's 'coming out' story prompted wonder: affectively agitating me, bidding me to work with this provocation and become entangled in the materialisation of its embryonic becoming.

I was struck by the response of – and subsequent actions taken by – Geoffrey's ex-wife. Not simply because her reaction was a marked contrast to the others encountered by several co-researchers after their first 'coming out'. For JB, his mother's, *'You've disappointed me'*; for MK, his father's, *'You're cursed by God'*; for Nicole, her mother's, *'That's disgusting'*; for Kaye, her mother's apathetic, *'Oh'*; my father's, *'I've had nothing to do with them [gay people] in the past and I'm not going to start* now'. In spite of having the ordinariness of her life deracinated, the poetics of the social and domestic everyday torpedoed, Geoffrey's ex-wife exhibited an unwaning relation to him. Buxton (2005) has stated that it is commonplace for the straight spouse to 'feel deceived' (p. 55) upon their partner 'coming out' as GLB.[26] One could appreciate and sympathise with Geoffrey's wife reacting with indignation; feeling the swelling desire for retribution or martyrdom; becoming incapacitated with the historico-affective weight that over 25 years had been lived – ostensibly – as artifice; demanding a complete severance of contact and communication. Despite the disincentive these feelings might have precipitated, Geoffrey's ex-wife took it upon herself to become educated: '*She wanted time to process it'*, '*[s]he wanted … needed her time to think it through*', *'she did her own research'*.

The particular discursive location Geoffrey's ex-wife entered vis-à-vis his 'coming out' is compatible with poststructural understandings of agency not as inherent to the liberal subject of humanism, but produced through discursive circumstance (Davies, 1991; Scott, 1991). Through her research, Geoffrey's ex-wife understood how his 'closetedness' was symptomatic of – and sanctioned by – the hegemonic historical, social, and political discourses castigating

[26] I use the acronym GLB here as Buxton (2005) references the 'coming outs' of only gay, lesbian, and bisexual spouses.

homosexuality. This included the Christian ideology espoused by their church that she, too, came to realise she had been interpellated by and subjectivised through.

What infrastructures – affective, relational, emotional, social – held Geoffrey and his ex-wife to life – to each other – as their shared world evanesced and, for each of them, a nascent one became instantiated? What ethics was at work in this (un)worlding? Is one ethical framework elastic and comprehensive enough to attend to the multidimensionality of this scene: its actual and virtual states? To respond to these questions, I survey the ethics of philosophies that are diverse but in whose palimpsest are sites of intersection and alignment. While it is not conceivable – or is it my intention – to make these ethical positions entirely and harmoniously commensurate, it is my contention that it is possible to locate spaces and apertures within Geoffrey's story where these respective ethical positions can be applied and articulated. In order to put these philosophical approaches into conversation – not ontological contestation or comparison – I employ Barad's (2007) diffractive approach. As readers have observed throughout this thesis, diffraction occasions reading insights through one another, where no source of knowledge is leveraged or pedestalled.

Obligations to alterity

Responsibility to the other is the basis of Levinasian ethics (Levinas, 1985, 1989). The responsibility to respond to the other is ontologically antecedent to the self that is called upon; prior to self-consciousness one is already bound by a responsibility to the other, what Levinas terms the *face*. As 'an impingement from outside' (Attridge, 1999, p. 23), the immediacy of the face 'summons me, calls for me, begs for me, and in so doing recalls my responsibility, and calls me into question' (Levinas, 1989, p. 83). A Butlerian ethics has resonances with Levinas's principle of responsibility, but unlike being responsible to the proximate other – face – singly, our 'ethical obligations', our 'bonds of solidarity' (Butler, 2012a, p. 135) are transtemporal and translocational. Distance is not a delimiting factor in the ethical accountability one has to the other. Moreover, the 'ethical solicitation' (Butler, 2012a, p. 135) put upon us is, like Levinas's, compelled, not volitional. It 'is reducible neither to consent nor to established agreement' (Butler, 2012a, p. 138); 'it does not proceed from my autonomy or my reflexivity. It comes to me from elsewhere, unbidden, unexpected, and unplanned' (Butler, 2004a, p. 130).

Let us superimpose these morally contoured propositions within the discourse of 'coming out'. The queer interlocutor 'comes out' to their (heterosexual) witness without

pre-established approval. The addressee surely does not elect in advance to be the witness of the 'coming out', but in this case of sexual subjective 'solicitation' – *I am this sexual subject* – as Butler (2012a) writes, there may be 'a Levinasian undercurrent … of having to listen to the voice of someone we never chose to hear' (p. 136). 'Never chose to hear' could, in the context of 'coming out', be substituted for *never expected to hear* or *never expected that it would be I that would hear*, or more troublingly, *I never wanted to hear*. Whatever positive or negative valence this unpreparedness of address takes, does it hold that the heterosexual subject has a moral obligation to bear witness to the face 'coming out' on account of their dominant social positionality, the status and advantage attendant to, and enjoyed by, this majoritarian social category? How does the petition of 'coming out' play into heterosexuality's '"epistemologically" dominant position' (Eribon, 2004, p. 55)?

Eribon (2004) reminds us that the heterosexual subject 'is never obliged to say what he or she is' (p. 54), and it is from this locus of privilege that the straight subject possesses 'the ability to claim that he or she does not want to know, is not interested, cannot see why it is necessary to say anything, and so on' (pp. 53–54). At work here is 'the relation between modes of address and moral authority' (Butler, 2004a, p. 131). To not be located within a domain of social recognition, without ready access to its life-sustaining and confirming structures and provisions, gives way to precarity. As Butler (2009) expresses it: 'precarious life characterizes such lives who do not qualify as recognizable, readable, or grievable. And in this way, precarity is a rubric that brings together women, queers, transgender people, the poor, and the stateless' (pp. xii–xiii). The act of 'coming out' opens up costly conditions for precarity, where a former way of living is suspended, relationships may be risked, the future seemingly hangs in the balance. It bears mentioning that precarity is not a condition unique to human beings but also non-human living entities and processes – animals, plants, and the ecosystems to which they belong and contribute. This is a fact emphatically underscored in the ecocide of these Anthropocenic times.

Butler's (2004a, 2009, 2012a) work on precarity as a state of social, political, economic, and subjective vulnerability and uncertainty can be mapped into the antecedence, and the subsequent events, of Geoffrey's 'coming out'. To interpose, for a moment, Butler with Barad's (2014, 2020) notion of *in/determinacy* – which describes states not as dialectical but as an interplay between – precarity was, before 'coming out', in/determinate. That is, what could/not transpire was un/known by Geoffrey. Said differently, while he surely knew that the disclosure of his sexual subjectivity would elicit considerable emotional turbulence, Geoffrey could not

predict the form this restructuring would take: his wife and children's responses, the shape these relationships would assume going forward. Ambivalence? Support? Abandonment? Like a berg puncturing the plates of a ship's hull, 'coming out' entailed ripping apart the structural integrity and familiarity born of over two decades of coupledom. A new everyday – familiar only in its unfamiliarity – was ushered in and, with it, a stretch of precarious living. Indeed, in the wake of 'coming out', Geoffrey stated that he, his ex-wife, and three of their children continued cohabitating together. The fraught dynamics of this domestic arrangement, including the withering of dialogue between Geoffrey and his ex-wife (not communicating for three months), feasibly heightened his sense of precarity. With no sure outcome, what recourse would Geoffrey have if his ex-wife spurned her commitment to explore why 'the closet' was his modus operandi for so many years? What if he was evicted from the home? What resources and support would be available to palliate this dispossession?

Performative materialisations: Ethics as worlding

Barad (2007) re-reads Levinas's *ethos* of responsibility by reworking its premise as part of their *agential realist* framework. Like Levinas, Barad's posthuman ethics conceives responsibility 'not [as] an obligation that the subject chooses, but rather an incarnate relation that precedes the intentionality of consciousness' (Kleinman & Barad, 2012, p. 81). However, the anthropocentrism of Levinas's responsibility to the face of the human other is countervailed and supplanted by an 'ethics of mattering' (Barad, 2007, p. 36) or 'an ethics of worlding' (p. 392). As part of this framework, all matter is ineluctably ethical: the *intra-actions* that are brought about, and contribute to, the worlding of the world – including those by non-human relations – are ethical concerns. For Barad (2007), 'a delicate tissue of ethicality runs through the marrow of being' (p. 396). Bluntly, one cannot relegate oneself and one's actions to the inconsequential – our doings, even non-doings, have material consequences. 'There is no such exterior position ... We are *of* the universe—there is no inside, no outside. There is only intra-acting from within and as part of the world in its becoming' (Barad, 2007, p. 396).

'Coming out' was a performative act of worlding – a *cutting together-apart* (Barad, 2014) – a single move through which Geoffrey constituted himself as gay and thus not straight. Barad (2007) states that 'ethics is about mattering, about taking account of the entangled materializations of which we are a part, including new configurations, new subjectivities, new possibilities' (p. 384). 'Coming out' was a matter of mattering also: both in terms of

significance for Geoffrey and in the way this performative materially reconfigured his and his family members' lives. It mattered to Geoffrey that he 'came out' to his wife, that he honoured – by bringing into being – what he felt was his authentic, previously concealed, sexual subjectivity. Barad (2007) observes that 'particular possibilities for (intra-)acting exist at every moment, and these changing possibilities entail an ethical obligation to intra-act responsibly in the world's becoming' (p. 178). The response of Geoffrey's ex-wife can be regarded as an ethical intra-action in the becoming of Geoffrey's gay subjectivity. 'Coming out' constituted a call for her to respond, a petition to understand why he had, for so many years, lived kettled in the 'closet'. Although bruised by devastation, in that moment Geoffrey's ex-wife responded *response-ably* with compassion to his claiming a gay identity. Barad has described response-ability as 'being in touch … being ethically in touch with the other' (Barad & Gandorfer, 2021, p. 24), with Haraway (2016) contending that: 'cultivating response-ability … requires the risk of being for some worlds rather than others and helping to compose those worlds with others' (p. 178).

Indeed, Geoffrey's ex-wife elected to not respond with fury or vindictiveness, and this response-able responsiveness opened the 'possibilities for becoming' (Barad, 2007, p. 396), both for Geoffrey and herself. She 'help[ed] to compose' futural potentialities for Geoffrey through the openness of her reaction, working to understand, with intention and thoughtfulness, how Geoffrey's 'closetedness' was the result of entangled discourses: social, cultural, familial, and religious. Geoffrey's wife knew of the phobic commentary their church had touted regarding gay individuals, and by *'[doing] her own research into why men, particularly growing up in the church … stayed "closeted"'*, she responded to, and accounted for, her understandings and how these had been wrought. These practices convey how justice is enact(able)(ed) in each moment as an 'ongoing practice of being open and alive to each meeting, each intra-action, so that we might use our ability to respond, our responsibility, to help awaken, to breathe life into ever new possibilities for living justly' (Barad, 2007, p. x).

An affirmative ethics of becoming

The philosophies of Spinoza, Deleuze (with Guattari), and Braidotti hold that ethics and morals are not interchangeable terms. *Contra* a series of transcendental, phallogocentric duties and responsibilities codified as morals, 'ethics … is the discourse about forces, desires, and values that act as empowering modes of being' (Braidotti, 2006a, p. 236). The increase in one's

capacity to forge and cultivate relational connections is at the heart of a Spinozist-Deleuzian(Guattarian)-Braidottian affirmative ethics. Crucially, an affirmative ethics is not 'shallow optimism' (Braidotti, 2016, p. 16). It does not dismiss, repudiate, romanticise or gloss over complexities, struggles, disagreements, or anguish. As Braidotti (2019a) indicates, the fundament of Spinoza's (1996) ethical philosophy 'is the necessity and the desire to extract knowledge from pain, to process the catastrophes of the present in order to make the actualisation of the virtual into a concrete possibility' (p. 470). Like Anselm Kiefer's sculptural painting, *Die Milchstrasse (The Milky Way)*, amongst a battle-ravaged landscape a lead funnel reaches towards the heavens, symbolising the siphoning of cosmological energies to alchemically regenerate the battlefield. Incipient transformation of ruination.

In an affirmative and affective ethics, the subject channels and mobilises damage, dejection, debilitation, and disenchantment – like Kiefer's funnel – as a 'generative … affirmative becoming' (Braidotti, 2019a, p. 466). This transfiguration of pain is illustrated through the course of action taken by Geoffrey's ex-wife. Becoming paralysed by the inundation of sad affects engendered through Geoffrey's 'coming out' could have resulted in the affective inertia of despair. Instead, she constructively processed this information: she *'did her own research'*, *'she realised that [they] were both actually victims of the conservative Christian narrative'*, and recognised that it was within their discretion *'to somehow move forward together … without making each other suffer, and without making the kids suffer'*. No longer spouses, but nevertheless in partnership, they partook in the shared process of 'transforming the debris and the ruins into workable possible systems, despair into praxis' (Braidotti, 2019a, p. 470).

Motschenbacher (2020) has suggested that 'coming out changes the world for both speaker and recipient … produc[ing] a new reality' (p. 258). This brings to the fore the DeleuzoGuattarian (1987) definition of the present as both the *actual* and the *virtual*; that is, 'what we are ceasing to be and what we are in the process of becoming' (Braidotti, 2019a, p. 479). Indeed, for Geoffrey and his ex-wife, 'coming out' had the e/affects of both devastation and emergence. These states are not dialectical or temporally achronological, but co-occur in a present that 'is simultaneously the record of what we are ceasing to be and the trace of what we are in the process of becoming' (Braidotti, 2019a, p. 465). Hence, 'coming out' materialised Geoffrey's gay subjectivity; his passing as straight came to a close; the matrimonial bonds between him and his wife concluded; both become separated.

Understood through a Spinozist-Deleuzian(Guattarian)-Braidottian monistic, affirmative, and vitalist ontology, matter is one substance that is differentially configured along a *plane of immanence* (Deleuze, 1997; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), through forces, speeds, intensities, and affects. Within Braidotti's (2006a, 2006c, 2013b) ethical nomadism, 'subjects [are] modes of individuation within a common flow of *zoe* [the vital force of life]. Consequently there is no self–other distinction in the traditional mode, but variations of intensities, assemblages set by affinities and complex synchronizations' (Braidotti, 2006a, p. 239). As an aside: how is *heterosexual* differentially articulated from *homosexual* in an ontology postulating a single substance? Both *gay* and *straight* are not inherent properties of subjects but modulations of matter differentially potentiated by, and stabilised through, desire, which, in a DeleuzoGuattarian framework is not lack, but a generative, force that connects to other *desiring machines*. Thus, the heterosexual and homosexual subject is 'an assemblage of forces or flows, intensities, and passions that solidify in space and consolidate in time, within the singular configurations commonly known as an "individual" self' (Braidotti, 2006a, p. 238).

A key tenet of affirmative ethics is the human's orientating towards relations that will positively increase their power. Spinoza (1996) names this as *cupiditas* (desire), 'the very essence of man [*sic*] in so far as it is determined to do such things as will serve for its preservation' (p. 128). Geoffrey's desire, both ontological and libidinal, was an affirmative force that prompted 'coming out' as a means to amplify his *potentia* and *conatus*. As 'an ethically empowering' (Braidotti, 2006a, p. 238) act, 'coming out' signalled, for Geoffrey, a redistribution and reconfiguration of forces, speeds, intensities, and affects: the first process in a *becoming-minoritarian* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Berlant (2011, 2022) proposes that attachment is what encourages our immersion into the social. Though his ecologies of living would be markedly transformed, 'coming out' was an object of attachment for Geoffrey, such that the state of being 'out' presupposed access to an existential reality from which straightness had previously disqualified him.

Ethics of 'outing'/ an 'outing' of ethics

I have so far applied Levinasian-Butlerian, Baradian, Spinozist-Deleuzian(Guattarian)-Braidottian ethical philosophical precepts to the 'self-ascriptive speech' (Butler, 1997a, p. 130) act of Geoffrey's 'coming out'. I turn now to one of the implications of this plateau's title,

‘*Outing’ an ethics*, to discuss the significant ethical and moral contestation surrounding the practice of ‘outing’.

The noun/gerund ‘outing’ names the event and practice of another person disclosing one’s sexual (or gender) identity without one’s consent, thereby making public what had been – and was intended to remain – private. This practice is not so obsolete as it might first seem. In 2020, South Carolina Republican Senator, Lindsey Graham, was ‘outed’ by gay adult-film actor, Sean Harding, on then-Twitter. Harding’s post precipitated other gay sex workers to recount their experiences with Graham, and resulted in the hashtag #LadyGraham trending (a reference to the alias Graham went by in gay sex worker circles) (Balcerski, 2020). In Belgium, in 2020, married Hungarian Member of the European Parliament, József Szájer – from Viktor Orbán’s right-wing Fidesz party – was ‘outed’ after escaping from a gay sex party that was raided by police for flouting Belgium’s COVID-19 lockdown rules (Boffey & Walker, 2020; The Brussels Times Newsroom, 2025). And earlier, in 2015, a user on Grindr ‘outed’ North Dakota state representative and Republican, Randy Boehning, by leaking naked photographs he had sent via the gay hook-up app (Moskowitz, 2015).

The strand of scholarship concerned with the ‘ethics of outing’ (Chekola, 1994, p. 68) almost always synonymises morality with ethicality, and ‘outing’ is framed within the discourses of (in)appropriateness, (im)permissibility, and political productiveness (see Austen & Wellington, 1995; Halwani, 2002; Mayo & Gunderson, 1994; McCarthy, 1994). Indeed, in the examples above, Lindsey Graham’s and Randy Boehning’s ‘outings’ were said to be motivated by their hypocritical anti-LGBTQIA+ stances (Moskowitz, 2015; Polumbo, 2020). In this section, I plug ‘outing’ into the ethical philosophical postulates through which I read Geoffrey’s ‘coming out’. Before proceeding, it is important to set this discussion within well-defined conceptual limits. Accordingly, my remarks will centre on the intentional act of ‘outing’ for the purpose of undermining and sabotaging the ‘outee’s’ status, such as a ‘closeted’, homophobic politician or commentator. Occasions of unintended or incidental ‘outing’ are beyond the scope of this section. I do not seek to settle the contentious issue of ‘outing’ but merely to interleave insights gleaned through Levinasian-Butlerian responsibility to the other, the Baradian praxis of response-ability and worlding, and the relationally augmenting premise of a Spinozist-Deleuzian(Guattarian)-Braidottian affirmative ethics with/in the discourse of ‘outing’.

Morality has been given as grounds for 'outing' an individual, where that 'outing' constitutes a morally acceptable act – even a morally obligatory act – for the potential 'outer'. Mohr (1992) emphatically argues that being complicit with another's 'closetedness' is tantamount to a 'demand claim', a 'gag order' (p. 18), and therefore a profoundly immoral, coercive act that violates the rights of the 'outer'. For Mohr, only the non-negotiable dyadic relationship between child and parent can impose any limitation on independence by way of obligation. Searingly, he declares: 'third parties—parties with whom I have no contractual agreements—have no right to demand things of me. They cannot demand that I limit my independence—in the case of outing, my speaking and printing—for their sake *even to the point of saving their lives*' (Mohr, 1992, p. 20; emphasis added). Through reference to 'contractual agreements', a legal discourse is spun and used to clothe the discourse of mortal peril. 'Outing' can imperil one's life – can even lead to the termination of that life – but that possibility is insufficient to stall an 'outing'. Mohr's (1992) argument for the permissibility of 'outing' is fundamentally deontological:

> Those who oppose outing claim that, as a matter of moral right, one person—the potential outee—can place on another specifiable person—the potential outer—*without that person's consent* a duty to do something for him [*sic*], to restrict her [*sic*] independence for [*his*] sake … the alleged duty, such keeping entails a complex web of actions and omissions, including lies, deceptions, and morally coerced silences'. (pp. 19–20; emphasis added)

Unlike Chekola (1994) and Halwani (2002), who both yield to contextual factors regarding 'outing's' (im)permissibility, Mohr's hardline position reflects the moral absolutism and categorical imperative of Kant. '*Act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law*' (Kant, 1997, p. 31). Truth, for Kant, is a universalism: 'truthfulness is a duty that must be regarded as the basis of all duties. … To be *truthful* (honest) in all declarations is therefore a sacred command of reason prescribing unconditionally, one not to be restricted by any conveniences' (Kant, 1996, p. 613). How would the rationality and unconditionality premising Kantian morality – which Mohr endorses – cohere with Levinas's pre-ontological moral philosophy?

For Levinas, there is no subject prior to the ethical demand of the face; responsibility to the other is an implacable, unrefusable moral petition:

> The very node of the subjective is knotted in ethics understood as responsibility. … I understand responsibility as responsibility for the Other, thus a responsibility for what is not my deed, or for what does not even matter to me; or which precisely does matter to me, is met by me as face. (Levinas, 1985, p. 95)

And later:

> Responsibility in fact is not a simple attribute of subjectivity, as if the latter already existed in itself, before the ethical relationship. Subjectivity is not for itself; it is, once again, initially for another … the proximity of the Other is presented as the fact that the Other is not simply close to me in space, or close to me like a parent, but he [*sic*] approaches me essentially insofar as I feel myself—insofar as I am—responsible for him [*sic*]. (Levinas, 1985, p. 96)

'In the face of the other man [*sic*] I am inescapably responsible and consequently the unique and chosen one' (Levinas, 1989, p. 84). The face is, for Levinas (1985), 'straightaway ethical' (p. 87), but also, the face of the other dualistically presents the beholder with the 'invit[ation] … to an act of violence' while also being 'what forbids us to kill' (Levinas, 1985, p. 86). In the case of 'outing', the face demands a moral negotiation of the harm experienceable by the possible 'outee'. The would-be 'outer' has a responsibility to the face of the 'outee' such that, in that face, the 'outer' sees how that 'outee' can be harmed. This position controverts Mohr's bellicosity and adamant moralism grounded in the egological *I*: the self without consideration or obligation to the other. In contrast, the fundament of Levinasian moral philosophy is ethics as first philosophy, that is, '[r]esponsibility is what is incumbent on me exclusively, and what, *humanly*, I cannot refuse' (Levinas, 1985, p. 101). In the example of 'outing', the potential 'outer's' obligation to the 'closeted', homophobic politician or commentator overrides self-interest. As a case in point: despite Lindsey Graham's and Randy Boehning's anti-LGBTQIA+ stances, responsibility to their face supersedes the harm inflicted by their anti-gay initiatives. Reflecting on Levinas's ethical position, Butler (2012a) comments:

> it cannot be the case that my ethical relation to another is contingent on his or her ethical relation to me, since that would make that ethical relation less than absolute and binding; and it would establish my self-preservation as a distinct and bounded sort of being as more primary than any relation I have to another. For Levinas, no ethics can be derived from egoism; indeed, egoism is the defeat of ethics itself. (p. 140)

Mohr (1992) puts forward what he suggests is a compelling special case for those opposed to outing:

> The majority of gays who have taken a published stand opposing outing as matter of general rule nevertheless have thought that there is a legitimate exception to the rule: they hold it as morally permissible, indeed commendable, to out closet cases who have viciously attacked the gay community. (p. 22)

This sentiment is not shared by Mohr alone. Chekola's (1994) argument is that 'outing others may be defensible as one pursues one's own legitimate legal and moral interests' (p. 67). Similarly, McCarthy (1994) deems 'that outing can sometimes be justified as a tactic for eliminating enemies' (p. 28). A prima facie response to these justifications might be one of accord. 'Outing' serves as a kind of self-steered karmic comeuppance; a reverse discourse that redeploys the harm done *unto* gays to gays *doing* harm. But is the reverse-engineered practice of 'outing' the *summus* expression of gay politics? The premier mobilising and collectivising praxis we have to potentiate socio-political change? Indeed, what assurances are there that 'outing' would work:

> To 'out' an insider, if it has any effect at all, can as easily precipitate that figure's fall from power and privilege as it can facilitate the rise of other gays and lesbians to positions of influence and authority. *Because of the infinitely permeable and shifting boundaries between insides and outsides, the political risks or effects of outing are always incalculable*. (Fuss, 1991, p. 4; emphasis added)

Sedgwick (1990) has also offered thoughts on the discourse of 'outing' 'closeted' individuals in positions of power:

> It has at various times and for various reasons seemed to gay people that there was some liberatory potential in articulating the supposed homosexual secrets of men in power, often homophobic men. This selective utterance of the open secrets whose tacitness structures hierarchical enforcement *can be a tragically wrong move for gay politics … It is always an intensely volatile move, depending as it does for its special surge of polemical force on the culture's (though not on the speaker's) underlying phobic valuation of homosexual choice* (and acquiescence in heterosexual exemption) (pp. 244–245; emphasis added).

Sedgewick's shrewd remarks gesture to the fact that 'outing' the 'closeted' yet homophobic politician or commentator – in the service of challenging oppressive power structures – might actually petition the very homophobic norms the 'outing' politic sought to dismantle. Explicitly, to prove that 'there have been outsiders on the inside all along' (Fuss, 1991, p. 4), by making public the politician's or commentator's gayness, the tacit homophobia of society is collectively activated to share in the discrediting knowledge that homosexuality is shameful and disreputable.

Barad's ethico-onto-epistemology underscores the inextricability of ethics, ontology, and epistemology. The practices of human and non-human relations alike constitute the ongoing and inherently ethical emergence of the world, begetting collective 'responsibility and accountability not only for what we know, how we know, and what we do but, in part, for what exists' (Barad, 2007, p. 243). Akin to Levinas, for Barad (2007), we 'are always already responsible to the others with whom or which we are entangled' (p. 393); this is a sentiment exemplified by Geoffrey's wife. Given that 'the becoming of the world is a deeply ethical matter' (Barad, 2007, p. 185), 'outing' would constitute an ir*response-able* act (intra-action) that composes an unethical world. This is not to say that the phobic rhetoric uttered, or anti-LGBTQIA+ legislation supported, by the 'closeted' politician or commentator is ethically condonable – certainly it is not. However, the ends (being 'outed') do not justify the means ('outing') since both practices catalyse an unjust world.

The concept of response-ability demonstrates 'how crucial cultivating the ability to respond and to allow the other to respond is for collective flourishing' (Bozalek & Zembylas, 2023, p. 78). Both the phobic 'closeted' individual and the 'outer' would be responsible for, and accountable to, the conditions their unethical practices have worlded. Within the framework of Barad's ethics of mattering, all actions, practices, and doings intra-actively contribute to the ongoing becoming of the world. By virtue of this rubric, the Hegelian (1807/2018) idea of the *beautiful soul*, the individual who does not act or intervene in the world so as not to taint their moralistic sensibility, cannot be sustained. Inaction is still action, and as Nietzsche (1918) has professed: 'we have no right to be "*disconnected*"; we must neither err "disconnectedly" nor strike the truth "disconnectedly"' (p. iii). The undue vitriol espoused by the 'closeted', homophobic politician or commentator, and the retaliatory 'outing' by the 'outer', are both unethical intra-actions that collectively subscribe to the notion that some lives matter less, are less imbricated in matters of worlding. This worldview expresses an aloof indifference towards the intra-actions all entities perform – none of which are more prominent than the next – in the 'reconfiguring/re-articulating (of) the world' (Barad & Gandorfer, 2021, p. 17).

Let us now consider a Spinozist-Deleuzian(Guattarian)-Braidottian ethical approach to the discourse of 'outing'. I wager the praxis would be viewed as intensely relationally and affectively disempowering, depleting, and damaging. 'Outing' someone to pay them back or blow apart their street cred bears the signature of a vengeful, spiteful politic belonging to the negative/sad affects that damage not only the other, but oneself. As put by Braidotti (2006a):

> the Kantian imperative of not doing to others what you would not want done to you is not rejected as much as enlarged. In terms of the ethics of *conatus*, in fact, the harm that you do to others is immediately reflected in the harm you do to yourself, in terms of loss of *potentia*, positivity, self-awareness, and inner freedom. (p. 238)

The power at play through the 'closeted' homophobic politician or commentator and the potential 'outer' is that of *potestas*: power over others (Spinoza, 1996), power that restricts (Braidotti, 2016), power that is reactive (Braidotti, 2014), power that entraps (Braidotti, 2019b).

As an alternative to 'outing' as the basis for action – and the political anomie it bespeaks – a gay body politic might look to Braidotti's (2019a) vision of 'counter-negativity in the mode

of affirmation' (p. 464). This does not mean accepting or assenting to the pernicious rhetoric 'closeted' homophobic politicians or commentators spew out, or surrendering to policies and legislation that restrict LGBTQIA+ rights. Rather, it involves distilling that toxicity – Kiefer's funnel makes a return – and redeploying it to synthesise an irresistible, magnetising counter political imaginary. This counter politics would be profoundly affirmative such that 'at its core is the collective pursuit of ways of actualising the virtual [political solidarity]' (Braidotti, 2019a, p. 475), and profoundly ethical, having 'to do with cultivating what increases [one's] capacity to relate' (p. 474). Such a political imaginary addresses Sedgwick's (1990) concern that 'outing' activates and leverages deep-seated social prejudices and (homo)phobias, while at the same time, staves off the diminution of affirmative power (*potentia*) and existential endurance (*conatus*) that reprisal would otherwise actualise. Butler (2024) reminds us that coalitions are not rose-tinted, but in their 'com[ing] together [to] promote more compelling visions of the world' (p. 132) they involve ongoing negotiation of competing interests, differences, and divergences. 'Solidarity requires staying with antagonisms that cannot always be resolved … Even if we cannot put our differences aside, we should carry them along, quarrelling as we forge a solidarity for the future' (Butler, 2024, pp. 132–133). Moreover, Berlant states that how well a political mobilisation maintains cohesion amongst antagonisms and sectarian interests testifies to the potency of the very power that rallied people (García Zarranz et al., 2017).

The accountability embedded in Spinozist-Deleuzian(Guattarian)-Braidottian affirmative ethics also reverberates with Barad's (2007) ethics of worlding vis-à-vis the 'responsibility and accountability for the entanglements "we" help *enact* [DeleuzoGuattarian actuality] and what kinds of commitments "we" are willing to *take on* [affirmation as what enlarges our relational capacity], including commitments to "our selves" and *who "we" may become* [DeleuzoGuattarian virtuality]' (p. 382; emphasis added).

On the way 'out'

The second implication in this plateau's wordplay, '*Outing' an ethics*, pertains to letting spill, making known, a metaethical dialogue as it relates to the discourse of 'coming out'. I have integrated the narrative of Geoffrey's 'coming out' with several ethical archives, and subsequently, diffractively read the analogous discourse of 'outing' through these ethical philosophies. Dissonances and dissensions and correspondences and commonalities emerge

between the ethical philosophies of Levinas-Butler, Barad, and Spinoza-Deleuze(Guattari)-Braidotti. Vulnerability, accountability, and obligations to otherness are at the core of Levinasian-Butlerian ethics. Nonetheless, there is a rupture in this synergy when Butler (2012a) extrapolates the intersubjective responsibility, which Levinas accedes uniquely to the immediate other, to include distant, unknown, and non-human others. In contrast, Barad's (2007) ethics is premised upon performative, material practices of worlding. They rework Levinas's principle of responsibility as response-ability: being response-able for the enactments – intra-actions – we perform which (re)form the world. For Spinoza-Deleuze(Guattari)-Braidotti, ethics are not morals but rather an affirmative, affective practice of transforming hurt and harm into empowering energies that bolster one's capacity to act (*potentia*), to form human and non-human relational connections, and to strive in one's existence (*conatus*) (Braidotti, 2019a, 2023; Deleuze, 1988; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Spinoza, 1996).

Read through Levinas's (1985, 1989) responsibility to the other, Geoffrey's wife expressed an unfaltering responsibility to him when he 'came out'. In the face of her own suffering, she sought to understand Geoffrey's plight and how he had been interpellated by intersecting discursive constraints that rendered homosexuality deviant and diabolical. Drawing from Butler's (2004a, 2012a) work on precarity, it was evident that in the aftermath of Geoffrey's 'coming out' precarity took the form of decades of worn-in life moulting, giving way to the indistinctness of an unknowable future, a refiguring of relations with his ex-wife and children.

Viewed through Barad's ethics of worlding and mattering, Geoffrey's 'coming out' was a performative (re)making of the world that brought into relation a gay sexual subjectivity from the rubble of a former heterosexual one. According to Barad, '"responsibility" is not about the right response, but rather a matter of inviting, welcoming, and enabling the response of the Other' (Kleinman & Barad, 2012, p. 81). The response given by Geoffrey's' ex-wife typifies this '"responsibility"', enabling Geoffrey, through his 'coming out', to actualise his gay identity without admonishment or malice. Indeed, as Geoffrey remarked, '*She said she could [have] add[ed] to [his] suffering by making [him] pay … for what [he]'d done, or she could accept that … [they] had to somehow move forward together, as victims, without making each other suffer, and without making the kids suffer*'. 'Questions of responsibility and accountability present themselves with every possibility; each moment is alive with different possibilities for the world's becoming and different reconfigurings of what may yet be possible' (Barad, 2007,

p. 182). While a former world closed for Geoffrey's ex-wife, and new problematics arose, her response-ability enabled the shoots of a new future to emerge for each of them.

An affirmative ethics is not 'facile optimism' (Braidotti, 2006a, p. 247) but a committed praxis of transforming excruciating, vexing, and petrifying relations and encounters in order to increase one's power (*potentia*) to maintain one's existence (*conatus*). In the emotional and affective residue of Geoffrey's 'coming out', his ex-wife could have fallen into lament, despair, disillusionment, and resentment. In place of 'a knee-jerk reaction' and meting out punishment, these negative affective states were redressed and redirected through a generous, affirmative, relational practice of seeking to understand the historical, social, and religious discourses that conditioned Geoffrey's 'closetedness'. Highlighted here is the positive response of 'coming to terms with the present, in order to intervene in it and transform it' (Braidotti, 2019a, p. 464). This reworking of pain by Geoffrey's ex-wife corresponded to an increase in her socio-political consciousness, an augmentation of *potentia* such that – through her research – she negated self-victimisation and saw that religious ideology had interpellated and constrained her too. The enfranchisement awakened through this labour conferred upon Geoffrey's ex-wife the agency to 'construct critique as affirmation' (Braidotti, 2019a, p. 472).

With regard to the often charged and destabilising temporalities of 'coming out', the spectrum of ethical postulations put forth in this plateau collectively call for witnesses to the 'coming out' speech act to demonstrate responsibility (response-ability). These are not simply individual acts that operate at the locus of the local, but practices that constitute an egalitarian, affirmative, mutually affectively empowering and materially ethical becoming of the world.

Plateau # ‘Outed’ and ‘coming out’: The affectual and agentic forces of objects and bodies

To ‘come out’ or be ‘outed’ as an identity peripheral to hegemonic heterogendered subject discourses is seen as an agentic act and, in both instances, the product of language possessed by a sovereign human individual. In this plateau I grant matter and materiality equal onto-epistemological weight in the subject’s ‘coming out’/ being ‘outed’ as gay. I describe how for JB and MK the affective and agentive capacity of objects animated, for them, identities as gay men prior to linguistic subjectivisation. I expound how language, technology, music, and page were choreographies of materiality in my first ‘coming out’. Mobilising the genre of creative non-fiction (Cheney, 1987; Gerard, 1996; Gutkind, 1997) to bypass humanism’s conviction of language’s capacity for mimetic correspondence, I produce tales of these ‘coming outs’. The jointure of post (non) representational and new materialist theories in this plateau draws our attention to the ethical, political, and social dimensions of these tellings and how, as *material stories* (Jørgensen & Strand, 2012, 2014; Svane, 2014), they are threads integral to, and inseparable from, the ongoing weaving of the world.

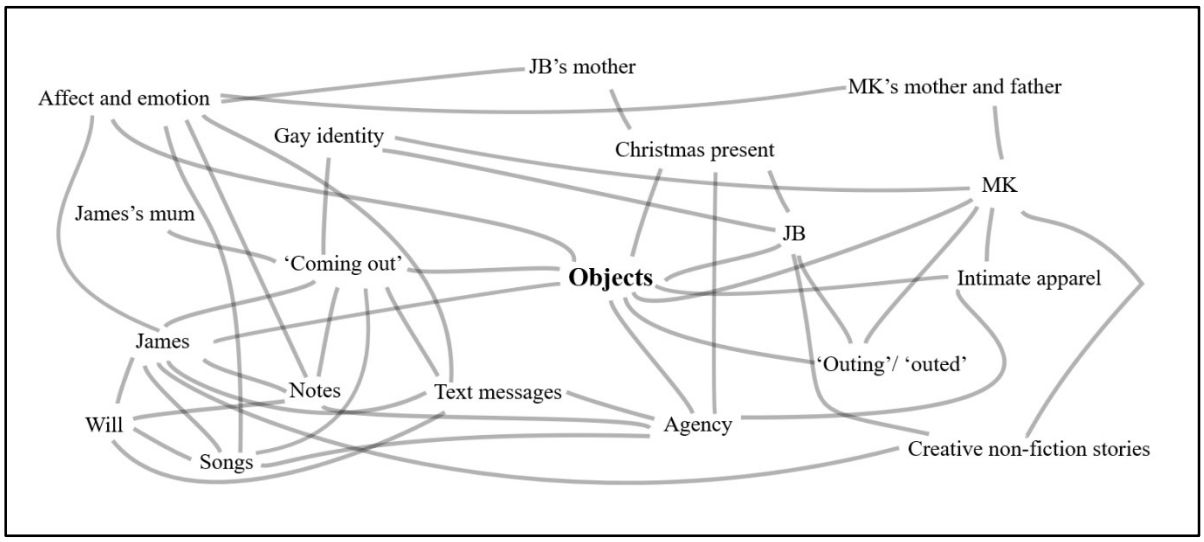


Figure 14: Rhizomatic mapping of Plateau # ‘Outed’ and ‘coming out’: The affectual and agentic forces of objects and bodies

The affective forces of objects

Barad (2003) has suggested that 'language has been granted too much power' (p. 801). Indeed, the formation and intelligibility of queer subjects is characterologically produced through declarative utterances (Austin, 1962; Brown, 2000; Butler, 1991; Chirrey, 2003; Herman, 2005; Motschenbacher, 2020). This is emblematised by Butler's (1997b) proposition that:

> individuals come to occupy the site of the subject (the subject simultaneously emerges as a 'site'), and they enjoy intelligibility only to the extent that they are, as it were, first established in language. The subject is the linguistic occasion for the individual to achieve and reproduce intelligibility, the linguistic condition of its existence and agency. (pp. 10–11)

Against postmodernism and poststructuralism, Iovino (2012) levels the charge of '"dematerializing" the world into social construction' (p. 52). In response to the privileging of language sketched above, Labanyi (2010) has petitioned for an account of subjectivity that is materially and relationally informed. I heed this appeal by relegating to the backburner conventional linguistic and discursive processes of subjectivisation central to poststructuralism (see Althusser, 2001; Butler, 1997b; Davies & Harré, 1990; Foucault, 1980, 1995), and turn the heat up on new materialist and posthuman theorisations that situate subject formation as materially grounded processes (Lara et al., 2017; McGregor, 2020).

In the accounts offered in this plateau, I am 'thinking *through*' (Daya, 2019, p. 362) the material and relational dimensions of objects as being contributory to two research partners *becoming* gay men.[27] For myself, the *material agency* (Knappett & Malafouris, 2008) of handwritten notes, songs, text messages, and Facebook communications from and about a love interest were 'eventful, performative and generative' (Daya, 2019, p. 361) texts entangled in my first 'coming out'. The power of these abovementioned objects encapsulates what has been referred to by Bennett (2004) as 'the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle' (p. 351).

[27] While JB and MK identify as cisgender gay men, the category of man does not capture my gendered self, hence I make this demarcation.

The above statement, *becoming gay*, warrants qualification. I am not suggesting the spurious notion that the objects *made* JB, MK, and myself gay or that we were not gay beforehand. Rather, I refer to matter's generative and reiterative capacity to (re)produce subjects – '"matter *becomes*" rather than … "matter is"' (Coole & Frost, 2010, p. 10; emphasis added). *Becoming* gay is an unstitching of the traditional postmodern/poststructural threads that linguistically naming oneself or being named as gay is the locus of the intentional 'individualized liberal humanist subject' (Davies, 2018, p. 114). Of course, for the research partners and myself, it was not the objects, singly, that generated this effect, but the objects' *intra-actions* with, and inseparability from, particular bodily, temporal, and spatial ecologies (Barad, 2007, 2014, 2020).

Mooting matter: Objects and bodies

Objects in the social and physical sciences have historically taken up residence on the wrong side of the subject/object dialectic. They have been downplayed; viewed as bounded, backgrounded banalities of the everyday; the stuff merely perceived by the human sensorium; things that without human application and operation are inconsequential, inactive, in-*affective* (Knappett & Malafouris, 2008). Radically reworked within a new materialist register, objects are not thought of as inert or fixed, their '"thereness"' (Coole & Frost, 2010, p. 7) acted upon. Rather, as Garnet and Sinner (2019) postulate, they are 'a genealogy of relations and relationality' (p. 52). Objects in their materiality are 'activations' (Garber, 2019, p. 15) in the new materialist imaginary, considered capable of potentialising, engendering, and being receptive to affect (Bennett, 2010). Affects occur in an encounter between bodies, a point of contact: proliferating, reverberating, and passing amongst other bodies as a force potentiating transmutations and trajectories – profound, diminutive, or imperceptible (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010).

The term *bodies* similarly requires redefinition in a new materialist/posthumanist worldview. Body, here, does not denote the humanist understanding of the fleshy, corporeal *human* body but rather, in the Spinozist formulation, *any* entity – human or non-human, animate or inanimate – involved in, and susceptible to, flows and forces of affect (Ahmed, 2010a; Braidotti, 2019b; Clough, 2007; Simpson, 2014). As part of this posthumanist reformulation, bodies are not static, discrete or isolable entities but *processes* (Blackman, 2012), relational (Fox, 2015), 'bodies-in-formation' (Lara et al., 2017, p. 34). Crucially, both objects and bodies

never ‘arrive in neutral’ (Ahmed, 2010c, p. 34): they are already authored and authoring relations.

Objects and bodies as affective and agentic

Khayatt and Iskander (2020) have posed the question: ‘must a ‘coming out’ involve a declarative statement[?]’ (p. 13). As an addendum I would add: ‘must’ an ‘outing’ ‘involve a declarative statement? Briefly, ‘outing’ or being ‘outed’ refers to having one’s dissident sexual or gender identity disclosed, without permission, by another individual, a practice that has roots in activist politics (see Bunzl, 1997; Chekola, 1994; McCarthy, 1994). This plateau answers Khayatt and Iskander’s question (and my supplement) with *no* – with the caveat that language is not the *sole* apparatus in matters of worlding and producing identities. Nor is ‘outing’ exclusively the domain of the agentic humanist individual. To wit, JB and MK recount being ‘outed’ as gay subjects through what Frykman and Povrzanović Frykman (2016) have called ‘the affective potentialities of objects’ (p. 9). It was the affectual capacity of matter and not language or discourse *alone* through which they became realised as gay subjects. The concept of agency is here reconsidered and reprioritised. Agency in posthumanism and new materialism becomes dislodged from the humanist yokes of ‘[human] consciousness and intentionality’ (Knappett & Malafouris, 2008, p. ix) and distributed to encompass the non-human: places, objects, concepts. This is sympathetic with Latour’s (2005) notion of *distributed agency* wherein human and non-human entities are not custodians of agency; instead, agency is dispersed across a vast network of actants. According to Hardy and Thomas (2015), ‘objects serve to inscribe bodies, produce identities, and implicate subjects in a recursive relationship between objects and individuals’ (p. 688), with Roberts (2012) deeming that ‘subjectivities are made and remade through … material tangling’ (p. 2512).

The objects in the co-researchers’ accounts – for JB, a Christmas gift, for MK, intimate apparel – were not ‘*independent[ly]* affective’ (Frykman & Povrzanović Frykman, 2016, p. 20) entities imbued with an innate agency. As Barad has illuminated: ‘agency is … not a matter of something somebody *has* but it’s a *doing*, it’s the very possibilities for reworking and opening up new possibilities’ (Juelskjær & Schwennesen, 2012, p. 17; emphasis added). Instead, this/these mat(t)er(ials) took form as objects, enacted affects (Ewalt, 2016). They were *contingently* agentic (Coole, 2010) through their intra-actions with other (human) bodies, the spatial and temporal figurations in which they were experienced – including an element of fortuity – and the coded symbolisms and historicities attached to them. As put by Ahmed (2010a): ‘to experience an object as being affective or sensational is to be directed not only

toward an object, but to "whatever" is around the object, which includes what is behind the object, the conditions of its arrival' (p. 33).

Rather than viewing the conditions outlined in Ahmed's previous postulation as discrete elements, they are intra-active componentry. The elicitation of affect through intra-action is further evinced in Meyer and Woodthorpe's (2008) work on the spatiality of museums and cemeteries. The authors intimate that objects are made intelligible as historical and elegiac vis-à-vis the *material and metaphorical* entanglement of their situatedness in a particular space, and through visitors' prior expectations that these items are situationally specific and the tacit and distinct protocols that regulate behaviour in these locales.

Creating creative non-fiction

The word *creating* is a twofold referent for the creative storifying of JB's, MK's, and my own experiences, and also the material process of worlding through story – what Palmer (2019) has called the ''worlding which occurs in all wording'' (as cited in Skiveren, 2022, p. 197). It has been claimed that 'every storytelling involves a choice of apparatus' (Boje & Tourani, 2018, p. 119). In this plateau I harness creative non-fiction as a genre/apparatus that takes real-life events and overlays story elements: dialogue, scene, and point of view. In this approach, the 'naïve representationalism' (Pratt & Rosiek, 2023, p. 899) of humanist narrative methodology's emulative obsession is supplanted by ethical, political, and ontological concerns 'of the present and future relations [a story] makes possible' (Pratt & Rosiek, 2023, p. 902).

Garnet and Sinner (2019) have claimed that stories conceived within new materialism 'possess qualities that parallel our conceptions of objects' (p. 52). Recall that objects are rethought from static, solid, stuff to accreting(ed) yet labile relations. *Story-objects*, then, 'move from representation to production' (Garnet & Sinner, 2019, p. 54; also see Smith & Monforte, 2020). According to Jørgensen and Strand (2014) 'stories are matter in terms of being particular articulations/configurations of the world that enact a local [agential] cut [(Barad, 2007, 2014)], in terms of constraining and enabling what comes next, and in terms of being always already material' (p. 65).

'Outed' by objects

JB recounts: 'I didn't actually get the opportunity, in a nutshell, to 'come out' … it was a bit of a forced 'coming out' in a sense'. When he was 21, JB was dating a man who had gifted him a

Christmas present signed *Love* that was found by JB's mother. It was her encounter with the symbolic and semiotic codes surrounding the Christmas gift – it being squirreled away in his wardrobe, the pairing of *Love* followed by a man's name – that instantiated, for JB, the possibility of being seen as a non-heterosexual identity.

MK had ordered some intimate attire from Taobao, China's equivalent to eBay, when he had returned to visit his parents. However, the delivery time was delayed, and MK had already returned to Australia when the shipment arrived. Though MK believed his parents had already known about his sexuality, it was after his mother had opened the package that MK had his gay identity confirmed. At the same time, while his parents' reactions were emotionally charged, MK viewed this event with a silver thread. 'I [had] to find a way to ['come out'], 'cause one day I'd have to explain to them that I'm married to a guy'.

Fox and Alldred (2022a) state that 'an affect is a 'becoming' … that represents a change of state of an entity and its capacities … this change may be physical, psychological, emotional or social' (p. 628). Not only were the abovementioned events a *becoming* but also an *un-becoming* (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010). Upon the discovery of JB's Christmas gift and MK's underwear, a new gay subjectivity was formed as a former heterosexual one was collapsing. Included within this *sexuality-assemblage* (Fox & Alldred, 2013), was, for JB, symbolic and semiotic significances coded through the term *love,* the gestural act of JB's partner giving him the Christmas present, and that it had been stowed away in his wardrobe. For MK, it was the sexualised imagery of the garment's packaging, its non-normatively masculine and non-heterosexual coding. And in both cases, their mothers' discovery of the items.

Within this sexuality-assemblage, flows of affect passed between bodies, begetting other affects. The affective intensities of this sexual-assemblage produced, for JB's and MK's mothers, (dis)orientations, disruptions, and displacements regarding the presumption of their son's heterosexual identity. The *familiarity* of JB's and MK's hitherto (hetero)sexuality as their 'dispositional orientation to the world' (Duff, 2010, p. 885) was supplanted by an affective reorientation towards the unfamiliar. As described by Ahmed (2006), 'familiarity is what is, as it were, given, and which in being given "gives" the body the capacity to be orientated in this way or in that' (p. 6). Garber (2019) has noted that 'objects, materials, and the processes surrounding them have roles in the decisions and choices we make in our lives' (p. 9). The agency of human and non-human relations, the affects generated by the sexual-assemblage,

whilst ‘outing’ JB and MK, produced an additional flow that precipitated a speech act confirming their gay subjectivity.

~

Michelle always folded the washing in the main bedroom; its convenient location from the washing line made shepherding in the laundry basket easy, and the ample area of the king-size mattress was an appropriate working space. Now ready to be returned to drawer, cupboard, compartment, and hanger, the clothes were dispensed according to the piece’s proximity to the main bedroom, starting, logically, at the base of operations.

In JB’s room, Michelle gathered the curling metal heads of the coat hangers draping crisp, lemony smelling starched shirts under the claw of her fingers and with her other hand, scooped up the ensemble of folded clothes. Upon opening the sliding wardrobe door, Michelle set the hangered shirts on the rail with a clink. A flash of colour then arrested her. Too discrepant to be something JB wore, and upon closer inspection it bore a metallic shininess and pattern. Michelle cast off the crumpled t-shirt covering it. A Christmas present. Immediately she thought it a surprise gift for her and Frank, JB’s stepfather, given it hadn’t been set amongst the other papered parcels under the tree. She raised it from its swaddling. Its indistinct geometrical form and mass gave no clues as to what it was. Care had been taken in its folding: edges crisply pressed, the triangular end tails tucked and secured, equal bands of tape gnawed by the piranha teeth of a tape dispenser. Squinting at the writing penned on the sticker, it read:

Dear JB,

Wishing you a very Merry Christmas.

Love,

Simon

~

JB arrived home later than usual that night.

‘Hi,’ he called out.

‘Hi,’ came Michelle’s voice.

JB dropped his keys into the bowl on the entrance hall table. He walked through to the lounge crossing the TV’s flickery glow and sat on the couch adjacent to the Christmas tree, its polychromatic bulbs flickering discordantly. Michelle was sitting in her recliner watching *A Current Affair*.

‘Where’s Frank?’

‘He’s in the shed. Are you going to have dinner – it’s in the fridge.’

‘Yeah, I’ll heat it up soon.’

JB took his phone from his pocket and began typing. Michelle glanced over to him.

‘Who’s Simon?’

JB was hit by a sudden surge of anxiety and dread.

She found it.

‘When I was putting your clothes away, I saw a Christmas present in your wardrobe that said *Love, Simon*. Why was it in there?’

Does he produce a contingency story, a feasible reason why the present was hidden away? A gift from a colleague that has been slapdashly put aside and, absentmindedly, ended up buried? Or does he tell her the truth?

‘Simon’s my boyfriend.’

The room took on a static hum. Various indeterminate futures seemed to suspend in the ether, each vying for the title of future actualised.

‘Oh, JB … ’ Michelle trailed off.

JB thought her doleful tone was an acknowledgement of his shouldering this information, recognition of the psychological toll it must’ve wreaked – he wished it had been.

‘I just … I don’t *get it*. I know that you’ve been with girls. So … what, are you bisexual? Maybe you’re bisexual?’

‘No, mum.’

‘So, you’re gay now?’

JB didn't answer. Michelle let out an exasperated sigh.

'You've *disappointed* me.' Her words were hot and sharp like a cautery, that very distinctive *something* feeling of disappointing a parent. 'You've never done anything to disappoint me before – you're the one I could always count on.'

***

MK had claimed a reading nook in the grand wing of the State Library. The chamber was opulent in its finishes. Running along the centre of its coffered ceilings in deep, rich polish, the barrel vault of glass panels allowed daylight to flood into the space. Both the mezzanine gallery of the upper level and the atrium below had a symmetrical arrangement of bookshelves and complementing pendant lights.

It was the muffled vibration of the phone that stole MK's attention from the beigy face of the page.

Mum.

Quietly, he moved from the solemnity of the chamber to the outside passageway.

'Hey, mum.'

There was only the faint crackle of the line.

'Hello?'

'MK, what is this package that's arrived?'

'What package?'

But MK had cottoned on before he had finished the question. During his last visit to his parents he had ordered some lingerie from Taobao: the delivery time been delayed, and he had since returned to Australia. He expected that the package would be left for him, unopened, until his next visit.

'Why would you order this? Do you like men?!'

MK had been cornered into admission. 'Yes.'

His mother began to wail; in the distance sounded his father's voice –

'You're cursed by God!'

‘Coming out’ through objects

Whereas the lively and agentic capacities of objects could be said to have ‘outed’ JB and MK, my first ‘coming out’ was a melding together of disparate objects imbricated in the romantic feelings I developed for a young man during my first year of art school when I was 18. Ahmed (2010b) has suggested that objects present themselves in many forms, and for me, those objects assumed the shape of an object of *affection*, an object of *longing*, an object of *anguish*, and nonsentient (physical) *objects*. It was the material, affective, and symbolic workings of handwritten notes, songs, text messages, and Facebook communications from and about Will that inclined me to ‘come out’, for the first time, to my mum.

The propulsive dynamism of these items could be described as *thing-power* (Bennett, 2010). To my mind they functioned to instantiate Will not only as gay (or some other non-heterosexual identity) but as feeling romantically towards me. As Thrift (2008) suggests: ‘not only do objects make thought do-able … they also very often make thought possible’ (p. 60). The impressions and energies rendered by these objects intra-actively produced, for me, the social identity of being gay.

Emotion ≠ affect

A rigid distinction is often made between affect and emotion. Scholars have distinguished between the two concepts on several fronts (see Bazinet & Van Vliet, 2020; Bissell, 2010; Clough, 2007; Labanyi, 2010; McCormack, 2008; Seigworth & Gregg, 2010; Simpson, 2014; Watkins, 2010):

> 1) Affects are elusive, difficult to qualify; emotions are encoded by the conscious (human) subject.
>
> 2) Affects are prepersonal and precognitive; emotions are the purview of the individual.
>
> 3) Affects, in their unboundedness, are representationally uncapturable by language and discourse; emotions are mediated by semiotic, discursive, and symbolic meaning.
>
> 4) Affects produce other affects; emotions are marked as the concretisation of affective forces, intensities, and vibrations.

The conceptual-epistemological quarantining of affect and emotion might be better rethought as a permeable membrane that allows for flows, dispersions, and diffusions between the two. Affect scholar Greggory Seigworth, thinking with the Spinozist affective framework of the *point of intensity*, the *line of variation*, and the *plane of potential*, comments that the first register, the point of intensity, is strikingly analogous to emotion, but 'something more than emotion' (Let's talk about art and culture, 2021, 22:35; also see Anderson, 2017). Ahmed (2004) jettisons the notion that emotions are the province of the insular and anchored in the private: experienced at the individual locus, interiorly formed, and transmuted outwards. Her *affective economies* thesis contends instead that emotions are forces that 'create the very effect of the surfaces or boundaries of bodies and worlds' (p. 117). Disarticulated from a psychological framing, Ahmed (2004) considers emotions as an intermediatory 'between the psychic and the social, and between the individual and the collective' (p. 119). Thus, if emotions are the sheaths of 'bodies and worlds', then the apartheid of affect and emotion dissolves. They form 'part of a continuum of affectivity that links human bodies to their physical and social environment' (Fox, 2015, p. 301).

I, too, collapse the stringent distinctions between affect and emotion in my 'coming out' story. The '"surfacing"' (Ahmed, 2004, p. 119) of my gay subjectivity did not involve one taking up where the other left off, like a relay race, but rather a toggling and jostling between affect (the intensities and energies of bodies, spaces, and atmospheres) and emotion (love, sorrow, jealousy, and hope). Each sustaining and charging the other.

~

It was his hands that I first noticed, like Bernini himself had carved them.

Will – who I met at art school in the unshaded courtyard on orientation day in February, which in Melbourne is baking summer. He channelled an indie aesthetic: lanky, tousled hair, white tee, spray-on jeans. As the weeks passed, I became swept up within the orbit of his charisma, and feelings of affection grew. We would chance upon each other at the sculpture and photography department thoroughfare; serendipitous early arrivals to lectures that, naturally, resulted in sitting together. Will was boisterous, unabashed, unembarrassable, and outrageously flirtatious – especially to *me*. Unversed in matters of the heart, not knowing if this was his personality or morsels on a lure gauging my interest, I receded into quietude.

Friending me on Facebook unlocked new points of ingress into Will's life –

Some of them got closer than others and some **wouldn't even bother**, and then you came around.
I didn't really know what to call you, you didn't know me at all,
but I was happy to explain.
I never really knew how to move you, so I tried to **intrude through**
the little holes in your veins and I saw you[28] (listen here).

He is so unlike me. Extroverted, cool …

In a relationship with Tiffany Turner

… straight.

Heart in throat, I am hurled down into the basement of my body, in a freefall waiting for a footing that doesn't come. My first experience with love and it's with a straight man.

'cause I'm so:lo. everyone's speeding but I'm still going slow.
and I'm so:lo.
everyone glows. I see love affairs, everywhere,
but no one will do
but you[29] (listen here).

~

Discovering Will was straight should have presaged the calamity to come, like foreshocks before the ground is swallowed by the quake. But as Cixous (1976) has written, 'it is in the fissure caused by an earthquake, through that radical mutation of things brought on by a material upheaval *when every structure is for a moment thrown off balance and an ephemeral wildness sweeps order away*' (p. 879; emphasis added). I couldn't reconcile this discovery, the steadfastness of my feelings, the (continuing) telltale yet cipherlike signals that sustained my continued holding on and holding out. Berlant (2011) has described this double-bind of being

[28] The Cardigans (2008).
[29] Havnevik (2006b).

stuck with respect to one's object of desire, and how detachment from the object of attachment can leave one displaced in one's relation to the world (Berlant, 2022). Abandoning the object composing and sustaining my lifeworld (Will) meant halting my capacity to 'come in' to my gay identity. Fatiguing, flailing, and failing like an upturned bug thrashing to get back over, I was stuck.

I'm alone in the threadbare sculpture studio, sketching. I wince at the warm, moist breath huffed at the nape of my neck.

Will.

His red chequered shirt is unbuttoned several buttonholes from the top. He straightens his long-jeaned legs out on the laminated table, interlinking his fingers behind his head. I lose myself to fantasies.

The room is no longer ours; Natasha has entered. Doll-blonde hair frames her pretty and thickly bespectacled face. Mouselike, she scurries to her desk, retrieves something, then scutters off.

Will's eyes are wildfire. 'Who's *that*?'

'Natasha.'

'She's a bit of something!'

'Don't you have a girlfriend?' The words are caustic in my mouth.

Everybody go. The party's over.

I want to be alone in my head. in my bed tonight.

You never show.

You must really love **her**. *You think I don't know. but I do. yeah. it's true.*

I think over is **over**[30] (listen here).

~

A text –

Will: Guess what!

[30] Loeb (2004).

James: What?

Will: I added Natasha *on Facebook! AWOOO! :D*

James: *What happened?*

Will: I added her, then sent a msg saying that I'd seen her round n stuff, but that I couldn't go up and introduce myself cos she makes me nervous … so I added her! AWOOO!!

James: What did she say?

Will: She accepted my friend request. She wrote back saying she understood n stuff like that :) yay!

I cry and cry.

There's a light at each end of this tunnel, you shout,

'cause you're just as far in as you'll ever be out.

And these mistakes you've made, you'll just make them again.

If you only try turnin' around[31] (listen here).

~

Evidence of common feelings 1: Peculiar timing

Will has broken up with his girlfriend.

Will: I'm single now! AWOOO! Free!

James: What?! Are you ok?

Will: Yeah, it's for the best. Now I can hook up. Have fun. Yay! :P

I am elated.

Can't you see that I'm the one who understands you,

been here all along so why can't you see?

You belong with me[32] (listen here).

[31] Nalick (2005).
[32] Swift (2008).

~

Evidence of common feelings 2: First point of contact

On the train home my phone vibrates inside my bag.

Will: FAAAAAAAAARK! :(

James: What's wrong?

Will: I'm stuck in the train with a chick I went to school with. Fml. She's sooooo annoying.

James: Oh no!

*Will: *cries* I just wanna go home :(*

James: Just think, you'll be home soon :D

Will: AHHHHHHHH! She won't stop talking fml! Fml!

James: Haha so ur texting me and pretending to listen to her?!

Will: Yer, I wanna talk to u.

~

Evidence of common feelings 3: Bequeathed handwritten notes

Hey! Your sketches n works are amazing!
Keep up the good work!! XD
Willman

Hey sexyyy, mmmmmm! ahahaha :P

~

Evidence of common feelings 4: Subtext of the text

I'm running late and may miss the train. My phone's message tone chimes from within my bag. I keep my brisk pace, swing it from my shoulders, unzipper, fumble around contents in polyester compartments.

Hey, I came to say goodbye, but your door was shut so I didn't come in.
I'll see you tomorrow.

xx

That's when everything changed.

For Ahmed (2010b), these moments and communications *mattered* because of my orientation towards them. Having cathected time, energy, and hope, the mattering of these *happy objects* (Ahmed, 2010a) was a matter of their nearness. The handwritten notes, text messages, and Facebook communications became 'shaped by the intention[s]' (Ahmed, 2010b, p. 235) with which I had endowed them; matter pregnant with possibility. I mined these passional objects for a crystalline confirmation this was not just *in my head*. Their affects mediated, for me, the lived and felt momentum of temporality: its dragging and drudgery in times of dejection and despair and, conversely, its fast-forwarding flash and wink in periods of joy (Anderson, 2004, 2005).

A robust repository of work exists on sound's and music's evocation of affect, their composition of space and time, and their role in the formation and exploration of (queer) identities (Born, 2011; Born & Hesmondhalgh, 2000; Valentine, 1995; Valentine & Skelton, 2003) and in 'coming out' (Aronoff & Gilboa, 2015; Jarman-Ivens, 2011). The lyrics woven throughout this section are taken from songs constituting what I call a *spatiotemporal soundtrack*. Like the objects above, the songs marked my subjective experience of this spacetime: an affectual/emotional poesis brought through 'textures and rhythms, trajectories, and modes of attunement, attachment, and composition' (Stewart, 2008, p. 71).

Murphy (2017) has described how texts not only emerge from social contexts but confer meaning upon them. Moreover, the 'material substrate' of the text is important (paper, phone/computer screen) owing to the fact that 'the particular material form that a text artifact takes is precisely what activates the social force of the text' (Murphy, 2017, p. 67). Take, for example the handwritten notes. These had been coded with material-symbolic meaning: evidence of effort made to see me; in my absence, time was spent writing these mementos of visitation; surfaces in contact with Will's skin. These objects became saturated with 'affective value' (Ahmed, 2010a, p. 33), 'caught up in [the] currents of [my] lifeworld' (Ingold, 2007, p. 1), parts in an *assemblage of desire* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

Briñol et al. (2013) have asked whether thought can be viewed as material. The panoply of handwritten notes, text messages, songs, and Facebook communications were 'materially

engag[ed] as part of the world in giving it specific material form' (Barad, 2007, p. 91). This shares the postphenomenological tenet of technology augmenting one's experience (Aagaard, 2017). As 'vital element[s] in [the] distributed ecology of thought' (Thrift, 2008, p. 59), the objects were abuzz with material processes of memory, imagining, feeling, and worlding. They were both conductors and circuit breakers of virtual futures, accruing meaning, and visiting a maelstrom of emotions and affects upon my internal landscape. As captured eloquently by Grosz (2017):

> Language, both material and incorporeal, subjects and predicates, enables the sense that inheres in events to be the objects of conscious and collective contemplation and engagement, linking human minds to the world, but also the world to the possibility and actuality of events that may in turn transform bodies. (p. 43)

Born (2011) has written on 'the bidirectional nature both of music's mediation and of human and non-human agency: music generating and conditioning human subjectivities and socialities' (p. 378). Similarly, DeChaine (2002) speaks of the heuristic capacity of music. The songs embroidered in this section were matter in a *horizontalisation* (Bennett, 2010) of relations, bound up with processes of transformative self-awareness vis-à-vis my becoming gay identity.

Bennett (2010) accounts for 'the tendency of matter to conglomerate or form heterogeneous groupings' (p. xvii). Drawing from Deleuze and Guattari, she describes how these disparate elements cohere into assemblages: each constituent 'has a certain vital force, but there is also an effectivity proper to the grouping … : an agency *of* the assemblage' (Bennett, 2010, p. 24). *Will–straight–maybe gay–James–gay–bodies–spaces–songs–stolen touches–love–longing–sexual attraction–jealously–notes–text messages–Facebook communications* were matter that coalesced into an assemblage, whose agency and affects territorialised (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Fox, 2015) as a 'coming out' to my mum.

~

Mum is lying on the couch in the lounge room. Some inane program is on the TV. I don't take notice – not with what I'm about to do.

I look up at her from across the room where I sit leaning against the other couch. ‘I got this message from Will today.’

‘Hmm?’

Embarrassment finds me.

I pass my phone over. She holds it distantly from her eyes.

‘Have you read it?’

‘Yeah.’

‘What do you take it to mean? He *likes* me?’

‘I took it as that.’

I’m buoyed.

‘Do you like him, too?’

‘Yeah.’ I begin crying.

‘You wouldn’t just ask him?’

~

García Lorca (1976) observes that ‘to burn with desire and keep quiet about it is the greatest punishment we can bring on ourselves’ (p. 233 Act 2 Scene 1). Months passed and I have said nothing. Without the emotional bandwidth to sustain this prolongated everydayness, I leave art school but am lodged in the reverb of the one-sided affair. For two years I watch life go by from the backseat.

I’m sorry, nothing can hold me.

I adore you ***still***[33] (listen here).

Then one day I unhoarded my feelings.

Look, this is awkward, and I hate that I’m doing this this way, but I kind of love you. I have for a long time.

Delete? Enter?

Click. Enter.

One day goes by. Two days. Three …

[33] Evanescence (2011).

I wanted acknowledgement.

Hey, did you get my message?

A reply –

Hey, yeah I got your message.

Then nothing.

Perhaps the illocution of my amorous affections towards Will threw into sharp relief the difference of our sexual identities. Perhaps the curtailing of any further correspondence tilts to what Eribon (2004) refers to as a heterosexual 'state of absolute privilege' (p. 54). Claiming a non-heterosexual identity can be jammed, stalled, and choked by this privilege. But I was claiming more than a gay subjectivity. I was proclaiming Will as my love object. By remaining silent, perhaps Will was exercising the 'privilege of unknowing' (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 5). Not ignorance or obtuseness preventing one's capacity *to* know, but *désinvolture*, contentment, and comfort in *not* knowing. Perhaps he was lurched by the arresting speech act *I love you*, its suddenness and sharpness, like biting mistakenly into the meaty inside of your cheek. Perhaps the mileage of time had untied the skein of connection (if ever there was one). Perhaps this lack of answer answered all my wonderings about his suspected fondness of me. Perhaps 'all I loved, I loved alone' (Poe, 2009, p. 778).

The object of my affection on which I had hinged my gay subjectivity had been wrenched away. I was 'out' but I was still stuck –

I'm on my knees,

only memories

are left for me to hold.

Don't know how

but I'll get by,

slowly pull myself together[34] (listen here).

[34] Havnevik (2006a).

No matter of fact

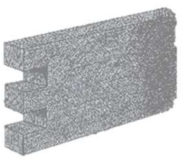
Bennett (2010) has spoken of 'the capacity of things … not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own' (p. viii). Under the auspices of this ontology, the intention of this plateau was to recast the dialectical binaries of subject/object, language/matter, and recognise the second item in each of these pairs as dynamic catalysts in the 'outing' of JB and MK, and my 'coming out', as gay subjects. The objects that figured in our stories were constitutive elements of an assemblage, whose meeting produced a distributed agency that slated our 'coming out' to our parent/s. Employing the genre of creative non-fiction within new materialist and posthuman imaginaries, I offered *material stories* (Jørgensen & Strand, 2012, 2014; Svane, 2014) of our experiences. Denuded from representational and foundational logics that 'reify a view of narrative as having the explanatory power to represent original experience' (Hendry et al., 2018b, p. 14), material stories are ethico-onto-epistemologically rethought as generative, affective, and active materialities in world-making. Extracting 'coming out' from the horizon of language vis-à-vis the human locutor, this plateau has presented a thoroughgoing excursion into the communicability and *affective infrastructures* (Berlant, 2011) of objects, exposing to new illuminations their vitalism and fomentations in (re)producing gay subjects.

Conclusion, or another tuber emerges

> Does the world really present itself to perception in the form of well-made stories, with central subjects, proper beginnings, middles, and ends, and a coherence that permits us to see 'the end' in every beginning? Or does it present itself more in the forms that the annals and chronicle suggest, either as mere sequence without beginning or end or as sequences of beginnings that only terminate and never conclude? (White, 1980, p. 27)

This thesis does not have an ending. Responding to the fallacy of endings, Mickelburgh (2024) calls attention to the garden as a project seldom completed: 'a gardener always has more plans, questions, frustrations, hopes and dreams' (p. 133). Suggesting that there are always 'unsettling things that aren't settled' (Mickelburgh, 2024, p. 134), the author implicitly invites us to abide in the impasto-thick, uncomfortable milieu of unsettlement. The not-introduction of this thesis made clear that this study has no beginning. The ouroboros, the lemniscate, the Möbius strip, and the torus are without endings, already in momentum – in indefinite momentum. To take endings as a self-evident temporal structuration is to expect and accept the dialectical pairing, beginnings.

The open systems, heterogenous networks, and rhizomatic thinking of Deleuze and Guattari upturns temporal linearity and teleological sequentiality. 'A rhizomatic approach to research', Hodgson and Standish (2009) state, 'begins from the very questioning of the desire for and possibility of wholeness' (p. 325). Rather than writing a conclusion that supports this mythos of lofty 'wholeness', I (re)write the reiterability of 'the closet' and 'coming out' as material-discourses without finish, through the plateau # *Mestiza/o* (hetero-homo) consciousness: *Nepantla* sexualities. Methodologically and epistemically, I am highlighting through this plateau – and through the analytic of *thinking with theory* – that, *in medias res*, another concept can, indefinitely, be *plugged in* to ~~data~~ (whatever one takes as its signified). In consideration of the periodicity of 'coming out', '[my] reading[s] [are] selected from an infinite number of possible readings' (Aguinaldo, 2004, p. 131), thereby cancelling any notion of, or desire for, closure in this study.

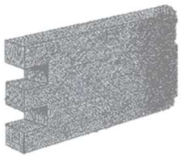


Plateau # *Mestiza/o* (hetero-homo) consciousness: *Nepantla* sexualities

> I would look into the mirror, afraid of *mi secreto terrible*, the secret sin I tried to conceal—*la seña*, the mark of the Beast. I was afraid it was in plain sight for all to see. The secret I tried to conceal was that I was not normal, that I was not like the others. I felt alien, I knew I was alien. (Anzaldúa, 1987, pp. 42–43)

> Having lived on a farm block in the country … that's when I stepped outside of that boundary … I'm literally seeing that fence, that barbed wire fence running up the side of my property … I've stepped over that and there's a paddock next to it and it's beautiful green grass … I always picture that fence when I think of ['coming out'] … the world was out there beyond – Nicole

In this plateau, I call upon the landmark work of Chicana lesbian feminist Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), invoking her notion of *mestiza consciousness* – repackaged as *mestiza/o (hetero-homo) consciousness* – to interrogate the betweenness (*nepantla*) associated with the co-researchers living heterosexual lives as gay and lesbian subjects, and the interconnections of their social, cultural, and religious memberships on their sexual identities. Whereas Geoffrey and Tim had, since childhood, recognised themselves, *post factum*, as gay, lesbian was not intelligible as a sexual identity for Kaye and Nicole until after the dissolution of their marriages; *their mestiza (hetero-homo) consciousness* is informed by a retrospective heterosexuality. I therefore alloy the conceptual apparatus of Anzaldúa with Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) and Guattari's (2001) concept of *becoming-woman* to theorise Kaye's and Nicole's breaking from the majoritarian discourse of heterosexuality, and the process of their becoming-lesbian.



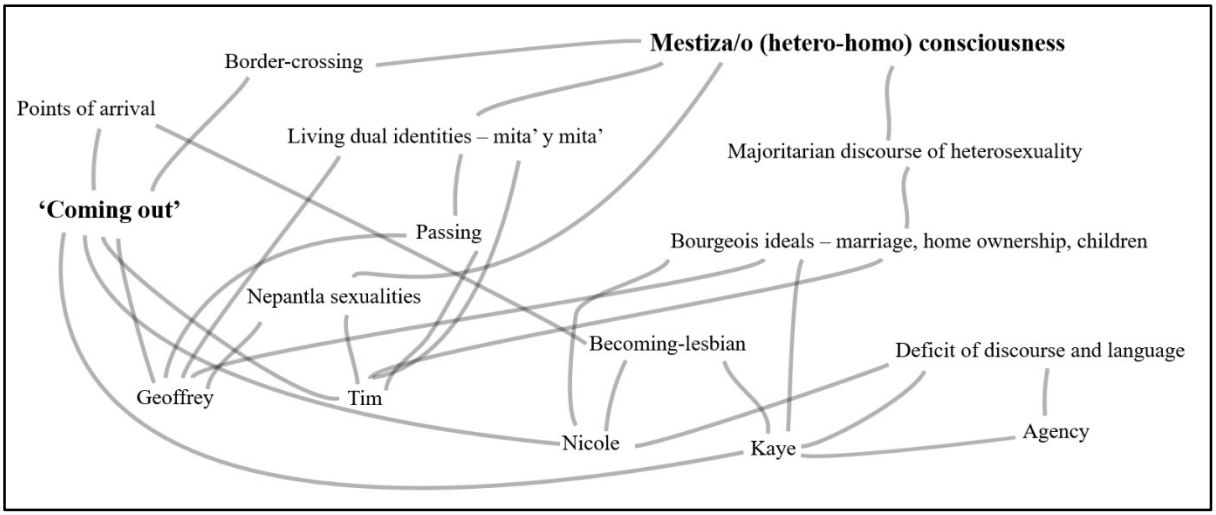


Figure 15: Rhizomatic mapping of Plateau # *Mestiza/o* (hetero-homo) consciousness: *Nepantla* sexualities

When the twain meet

In *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza,* Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) introduces the concept of the Borderlands to signify not only demarcated geographic regions, but also the psychic, sexual, racial, and class Borderlands where bodies are marked, maligned, and marginalised. Borders are formed by, impose, and uphold political regimes of power and domination. The binaries of us/them, insider/outsider, safe/dangerous, desirable/undesirable, legal/illegal are produced, policed, and protected in the service of privileging hegemonic social discourses and the normative identity categories and conducts they serve. Anzaldúa (1987) states that in contrast to persons of the centre who – on account of their majoritarian positioning – wield social and cultural currency, the Borderlands are occupied by '*[l]os atravesados* ... the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half dead' (p. 3). Living as the abject, aberrant Other on the Borderlands gives rise to what Anzaldúa calls a *mestiza consciousness*: a distinctive awareness born of the tensions and ambivalences of embodying multiple, often conflicting, identities. In contradistinction to Du Bois's (1903/2003) *double consciousness*, which centres on the discourses of race and nationality vis-à-vis the (im)possibility of reconciling one's black identity through the eyes of white Americans (also see Fanon, 1986), the mestiza consciousness is inclusive of numerous intersecting identities: national, sexual, gendered, racial, and cultural. As Anzaldúa (1987) expresses, the *mestiza/o* 'continually walk out of one culture and into another because [they are] in all cultures at the same time' (p. 77). Of course, the 'sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in

amused contempt and pity' (Du Bois, 1903/2003, p. 8), is surely sympathetic with the mestiza consciousness, as well as the affective-sociosexual habitus of the research partners and their negotiations of self.

In this plateau, I retrofit mestiza consciousness to mestiza/o (hetero-homo) consciousness to communicate the co-researchers' awarenesses in living the simultaneity, the bodily and psychic torsion of straight-gay, before 'coming out' as minority sexual subjects. Anzaldúa (1987) has articulated the felt sense of inhabiting a composite of disparate subject positions: 'I, like other queer people, am two in one body, both male and female. I am the embodiment of *hieros gamos*: the coming together of opposite qualities within' (p. 19). Fine and Sirin (2007) have proposed *hyphenated selves* as an approach for understanding the embodiment of diverse intersecting identities; the hyphen in hetero-homo, from this plateau's title, is employed to reference and recognise the living of 'two [sexual subjectivities] in one body' and 'the coming together of opposite qualities within' (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 19). Before the co-researchers 'came out' – Geoffrey and Tim as gay, Kaye and Nicole as lesbian – they had been, throughout their lives, acculturated to heterosexual practices, values, structures, and norms, including marriage and childrearing. Heterosexuality's 'tenacious obviousness' (Althusser, 2001, p. 85), its 'ideological effect' (p. 116), was and is not lightly forgotten when, as Geoffrey puts it, that is 'all you've known growing up'. Fischer (2013) refers to this heteronormative socialisation as *seeing straight*: 'going beyond just making heterosexuality visible and analyzable … "Seeing straight" also means seeing how heterosexuality—as an institution and a discourse—shapes our everyday lives' (p. 507).

Selected instead of the slash denoting *and/or*, the hyphen signals the continuum of the co-researchers living *both* gay and straight concurrently. It, too, is a Borderland between heterosexual and homosexual, a crosscurrent that deconstructs 'the closet's' oversimplified dualism of unequivocally 'in' or 'out' (see Chambers, 2003; Edelman, 2014; Sedgwick, 1990). Indeed, Barad (2008) claims that 'there is no absolute inside or absolute outside. There is only exteriority within' (p. 326). Interpenetrating the research partners' mestiza/o (hetero-homo) consciousnesses were religious convictions, heteronormative familial values, community codes and attitudes, and politico-historical discourses and conditions. This tapestry of intersecting relations imposed upon the co-researchers' abilities and desires to 'come out', becoming part of their *nepantla*:

> In nepantla we realize that realities clash, authority figures of the various groups demand contradictory commitments, and we and others have failed living up to idealized goals. We're caught in remolinos (vortexes), each with different, often contradictory, forms of cognition, perspectives, worldviews, belief systems—all occupying the transitional nepantla space. Torn between ways, we seek to find some sort of harmony amidst the remolinos of multiple and conflictive worldviews; we must learn to integrate all these perspectives. (Anzaldúa, 2009, p. 310)

While each of the research partners speaks of a different temporal node in which the understanding of being/becoming gay/lesbian crystallised, collectively, the foreboding cultural expectation that a non-heterosexual subject must 'come out' (see Luboff, 1992; Manning, 2016; Rasmussen, 2004; Smith et al., 2018) figured in their *nepantla* state and mestiza/o (hetero-homo) consciousnesses.

Occupancies of simultaneity

What does it mean to live in the liminal space of in-between? What is the emotional-affective-corporeal toll of subsisting amidst, among, and amongst? To be between any *thing* – houses, jobs, lovers, time zones – may imply a transitory state, a passing through or crossing over. Antithetically, to be between also connotes being stuck or in limbo – obstructed and delayed in some way by some *thing(s)* that make the briefness of moving through problematical if not impossible. Furthermore, repeated acts can leave the body stuck, and Ahmed (2006) equates this fixedness with repetitive strain inquiry: the non-neutral manipulation of bodies according to the movements and performances they (re)enact over time. This is apparent in the accounts of Geoffrey and Tim.

Although recognising themselves as gay since childhood and teenagerhood, Geoffrey and Tim sequestered this identity and lived many years organised through obligatory and systematic heterosexual modes of being and (un)belonging. They became stuck. Their mestizo (hetero-homo) consciousness arose from living at the interface of vexed sexual (dis)identifications, religious, familial, and socio-cultural narratives of normalcy, and historical conditions. Geoffrey and Tim trekked the in-betweenness and contradictoriness of the Borderlands: between gay – their internally acknowledged sexual identification – and straight – the subjectivity validated through their fulfillment of (hetero)normative heterosexual

domesticity, including marriage, homeownership, and procreation. This existential fragmentation speaks to what Anzaldúa (1987) calls 'mita′ y mita′… neither one nor the other but a strange doubling' (p. 19).

Geoffrey was raised in a deeply devout household where religion and the familial were indivisible institutions. As a child he was subject to the disciplinarity of religiously inflected heteronormative moralism and socialised to adopt the church's normative gendered expectations and roles of men. Transgressions from these traditional scripts – such as interest in the arts – were met with admonishment by his parents. Ahmed (2019) has written on acts of gender correction, the putting to right of the trialectic of ideology, body, and behaviour. The forced (re)alignment of heterosexuality-man-masculinity took the form of Geoffrey's father attempting to teach him to box. When Geoffrey expressed ennui, shame became another tool of (re)regulation. 'He [Geoffrey's father] would say [that] he wished that my younger brother was the oldest son because I had been such a failure to him as a man.' As Biddle (1997) pronounces: 'the self-failure feeling of shame is, of course, like all forms of social response, *learned*' (p. 229; emphasis added).

Geoffrey recalls church sermons as a teenager in the 1980s where 'the preacher would be talking about … God [having] sent AIDS to wipe the gay people off the planet'. In *nepantla*, Geoffrey witnessed the incommensurability between understanding himself as gay and an exterminationist God. He confided in the youth pastor about the 'unwanted, evil thoughts about men' he was experiencing, and the pastor imparted to him news of a premonition that he had received. Geoffrey was to marry his close friend, who had been 'sent by God to rescue [him] from going down this sinful path'. When he was 19, Geoffrey 'did the good Christian thing and got married', holding faith in matrimony and continual prayer as curative of his 'unwanted' and 'evil' desires.

Tim calls attention to the fact that he had 'always had the feelings and thoughts [being attracted to men/being gay] from a very young age'. During his formative years he internalised obligatory community, familial, and educative codes of being and behaving. The council estate in Scotland where Tim grew up was a place where 'it wasn't very accepted being gay' and 'everything about being gay was seen as a bad thing'. Both school and home were, at times, challenging and injurious sites of cohabitation. In high school, Tim experienced bullying around his presumed sexual orientation; 'faggot' was a recurring, staining utterance in the schoolyard. Tim also spoke of occasions at home when his father made disparaging comments

about gay people, one incident being related to Freddie Mercury's diagnosis of AIDS. 'I remember … my dad [said], *"Always knew he was a poof. I knew it!"*'

Becoming-lesbian

Unlike Geoffrey and Tim's coextensive relation of gay-straight, the prospect of *being* a non-heterosexual identity did not input into Kaye and Nicole's futural horizons. Both co-researchers had had boyfriends, and they married men; Nicole had children. Jointly, Kaye and Nicole remarked upon an unfolding or coalescence of their lesbian subjectivity. In an effort to theorise the becoming of their becoming-lesbian, I turn to Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) and Guattari's (2001) concept of *becoming-woman*. Becoming-woman does not imply the literal transformation into, or parodying of, a woman, nor does it posit an essentialist, biologically reductionist *femaleness* inherent to women. Rather, becoming-woman designates the first phase of a minoritarian process of deterritorialisation where subjects disengage from majoritarian systems and institutions. Becoming-woman figures as the first sequence in this minoritarian process of becoming owing to Western logos's dualistic classificatory system of *woman* as *man's* supplement; man as majoritarian; man as the archetypal formulation of the human. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987) explain: 'women, children, but also animals, plants, and molecules, are minoritarian. It is perhaps the special situation of women in relation to the man-standard that accounts for the fact that becomings, being minoritarian, always pass through a becoming-woman' (p. 291).

Sotirin (2011) has illustrated that becoming-woman is not without criticism, specifically from feminists who argue that women's histories and political projects are effaced by this ostensibly phallogocentric framework. Conversely, another feminist standpoint understands becoming-woman as productively enabling the 'map[ping] [of] lines of affective intensities and sexual energies moving through and beyond heteronormative configurations to recompose sexuate couplings inhabiting new worlds of sexualization' (Sotirin, 2011, p. 118). Braidotti (2001) reasons that:

> in [becoming-woman], sexual polarisations and gender-dichotomy are rejected as the prototype of the dualistic reduction of difference to a subcategory of Being. Thus, the becoming-woman is necessarily the starting point for dissolving the overemphasis on masculine sexuality; the persistence of sexual dualism and the positioning of woman as

> the privileged figure of otherness are constitutive of Western thought. In other words, 'becoming-woman' triggers off the deconstruction of phallic identity, because of historical and cultural and not biologically essentialist reasons. (p. 394)

An addendum – just as there is no telos to becoming-woman, I am not suggesting Kaye and Nicole possessed an unbridled individualism or intrinsic agency – qua humanism's egological *I* – for an *ex nihilo* switching *into* lesbians. Indeed, Butler (1991) has asserted that 'it is through the repeated play of … sexuality that the "I" is insistently reconstituted as a lesbian "I" (p. 18), and that 'the "I" is a site of repetition, that is, if the "I" only achieves the semblance of identity through a certain repetition of itself' (p. 18). Becoming-woman – applicable also to Geoffrey and Tim since *gay* is a rupturing/decolonising of hegemonic heterosexuality, a *becoming-minoritarian* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) – is a material-discourse iteratively performed and always shot through by historical, political, spatial, relational, and affective conditions. Put another way, being subject to heteronormative ecologies, for Kaye and Nicole, had the subjectivising effect of rendering *lesbian* a viable sexual identity. 'To think about experience in this way', says Scott (1991), 'is to historicize it as well as to historicize *the identities it produces*' (p. 780; emphasis added).

Over the course of her adolescence and early adulthood, Kaye states that she 'did the heterosexual thing', 'what everybody else did … you … went off and dated boys – didn't mean anything to me. I just did it because that's what my friends did … [and] I got married … at 19'. The sociosexual-historical moment of early 1970s Australia was defined by dual currents: the afterburn of systemic discrimination towards lesbian and gay individuals in the 1950s and 1960s, and the mobilisation of a nascent gay and lesbian activism (see Fela & McCann, 2017; Jennings, 2013; S. Robinson, 2016). In the 1970s, homosexuality was still illegal in every Australian state; South Australia was the first to decriminalise homosexual acts between men in 1972. Notably, 'the law relating to homosexual behaviour has traditionally applied only to males. Females have never come within the ambit of Australian statutes, nor has there ever been any attempt in Australia to introduce penalties for consensual lesbian behaviour' (Bull et al., 1991, p. 1). The precedence of heterosexual representation, dialogue, and discourse meant there was not a robust or honed nomenclature to articulate desires and fantasies not common to the heterosexual social order. As put by Kaye: 'you didn't have those words, you didn't have the language … I just knew that I felt strongly about my female friends, but I had no way of knowing it was a sexual attraction'. Like Kaye, Nicole refers to the paucity of discourse on

lesbian sexuality, foreclosed by *compulsory heterosexuality*, where 'the institution of heterosexuality [is] … a beachhead of male dominance' (Rich, 1980, p. 633). Nicole muses that if lesbianism had gained currency in the social imaginary, she 'would have dated girls back then'.

During our interview, Kaye mentioned that her involvement in the research provoked her to wonder: 'How on earth did I realise I was gay?' *Nepantla* describes the space of sexual in-betweenness Kaye entered when she divorced her husband after two years of marriage. She uses the terms 'stumbled' and 'discovered' – a grammar of happenstance – to signify the process of navigating '*los intersticios*, the spaces between the different worlds [one] inhabits' (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 20): the ontological relocating from a heterosexual identity to a lesbian one. While Kaye 'hadn't figured it out [being lesbian]' at the beginning of crossing the Borderlands, deeper into the journey of becoming-woman she recognised the bubbling up of romantic feelings for a co-worker. 'We would spend time together after work doing a few things and hanging around … And, one night, I made a move on her, and she didn't knock me back … within three months of being divorced I was having a relationship with a woman'.

In *nepantla*, Kaye met other inhabitants of the Borderlands. In her workplace she saw how lesbian sexuality was encrypted through a system of signs, symbols, and habits. Kaye observed the regularity with which her supervisor would be picked up out the front of the building by another woman, and it was later revealed that her supervisor was lesbian; the collector, her partner. *Gaydar* names a contested, colloquial epistemology that describes the unconscious ability to perceive someone's *gayness* based on bodily comportment, aesthetic, speech patterns, subject of conversation; and so on (see Lyons et al., 2014; Miller, 2018). Kaye insinuates that gaydar – what she analogises to a sort of 'Mark of Cain' – might explain how '[Kaye's supervisor's] girlfriend worked it out with myself and [Kaye's partner] … I don't know how. [She] started talking to me and that's how … I got to know her and her partner, and how myself and my then girlfriend got to know other gay people'.

Nicole's mestiza (hetero-homo) consciousness is informed through 'com[ing] from a hetero world' and a feminist positionality that sensitised her to the pervasiveness of heteropatriarchal societal and familial organisation. While throughout university Nicole had boyfriends, she also contemplated whether she 'should experiment [with women]'. She had never experienced or expressed prior attractions to women – including during her secondary education at an all-girls school. It was not until she completed her journalism degree that she

was fully receptive to, and acted on, these musings. *Lesbian* was not, however, the appellation that named the subject engaging in these sapphic economies and sexual publics (see Phelan, 1993; Rich, 1980). Butler (2016) poses and answers the humorous question: 'If a woman loves another woman and *avows* that love, is she therefore claiming that she is a lesbian? I do not think so. Indeed, she may simply have range' (p. 83). While Butler is here talking about love as a romantic attachment, the same logic can, I suggest, be transposed to a field of erotics that is not necessarily capturable by, or containable in, lesbian.

Nicole entered the bourgeois ideal, marrying and having children, living what she calls 'a normal everyday life' for 25 years. It was after a woman's cancer charity event where Nicole conspiratorially asked another woman is she would ever 'jump the fence' that her husband gave her a hall pass to 'go out and experience women'. During this experiential period Nicole met the woman who would become her now former partner.

Nicole uses the word 'brewing' when speculating if her attraction to women was always there, latent. Brewing, like steeping and percolating, has a temporal dimension indicative of the process, construction, and becoming of a minoritarian sexuality. For Deleuze and Guattari (1987), 'sexuality brings into play too great a diversity of conjugated becomings … Sexuality is the production of a thousand sexes, which are so many uncontrollable becomings' (p. 278). A becoming-lesbian sexuality would name 'a potential, creative and created, becoming' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 106).

Mestiza/o fugitive knowing

Geoffrey, Tim, and Kaye recounted how tacit knowledges acquired through encounters and exchanges with/in heterocentric ecologies were built into their mestizo/a (hetero-homo) consciousnesses. Geoffrey is adroit at intuiting the affectivity of spaces that (re)produce feelings of (dis)ease vis-à-vis his gay identity. While he spoke of instances and environs that reactivate/d his role as *straight-acting Geoff*, the university where Geoffrey works as an academic sessional is a locus where he does not feel impelled to pursue a praxis of passing. 'I introduce myself as Geoffrey, I'm less concerned about how I look, how I move through the world because it's probably the place where I'm least likely to experience homophobia'. The university as workplace is, for Geoffrey, a *thick place*, 'a place [that] enhance[s] one's sense of meaning and belonging, forging a series of affective and experiential connections in place' (Duff, 2010, p. 882).

After ‘coming out’, Geoffrey engaged in sexual encounters with other men and addresses how ‘the closet’, for these men, continues to be an ever-present social reality. ‘I’ve hooked up with quite a few ‘closeted’ guys … they’re ‘closeted’, again, because they’re scared of their family, of their industry. I met a guy who works in construction and he’s like, *‘It would be dangerous for me to “come out” at work*’. By virtue of his sexual relations, Geoffrey gained insight into the folkways of other mestizos (gay men) and how their mestizo (hetero-homo) consciousnesses are informed by the contemporary relevance of ‘the closet’ in their lives. This mestizo dialoguing about ‘the closet’ and incapacity to ‘come out’ pertains to the generation of ‘new stor[ies] to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to each other and to the planet’ (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 81).

Tim gestures to what Du Bois (1903/2003) calls a ‘second-sight’ (p. 8) when he recounts vicariously experiencing the ‘coming out’ process of one of his best friends from high school. Tim explained that a by proxy experience was ‘a way that [he] could experience things without having to actually go through them’, ‘without actually having to confront [him]self’. The psychoanalytic discourse of *projective identification* (Klein, 1984) is evocable here. According to its thesis, the subject’s ego splits off bad (and good) components of the self and projects these outwards into another person. Tim states that it was *he* who encouraged his friend to ‘come out’, while simultaneously ‘hiding it [being gay] from [himself]’ and ‘hid[ing] behind [his friend’s] “coming out” and sexuality’. According to the three phases of *projective consciousness* proposed by Ogden (1979), Tim first projected his desire – but inability – to ‘come out’, and the attendant affects of fear, shame, and anxiety into his friend. Then, he encouraged and supported his friend’s ‘coming out’ as a way ‘to experience feelings that are congruent with the projection’ (Ogden, 1979, p. 371). Lastly, when his friend ‘came out’, Tim identified with, and internalised, this undertaking. Tim’s location of gay-adjacent provided fugitive insight into the nuances and complexities of how his own ‘coming out’ *might* transpire – *might* because ‘coming out’ *might* be one undertaking ‘that we cannot anticipate in advance and for which there is no adequate preparation’ (Butler, 2012a, p. 141).

Kaye previously highlighted the exclusion of discourse on lesbian sexuality during her early adulthood. The ‘imposition of heterosexist knowledges and beliefs’ (Honeychurch, 1996, p. 340) necessitated a reconnaissance to locate inside knowers and their knowledge. Kaye recalls: ‘I remember going to a bookshop in [Melbourne] and buying *The Joy of Lesbian Sex* … I mean your sexual experience is … blundering along as well because, you know, you don’t have anything … it’s not as if you’re talking with your mates about things like that’. Davies

and Harré (1990) have noted that 'an individual emerges through the processes of social interaction, not as a relatively fixed end product but as one who is *constituted and reconstituted through the various discursive practices in which they participate*' (p. 46; emphasis added). It is on the grounds of that very deficit of lesbian discourse that, paradoxically, Kaye became an agentic sexual subject. Said differently, scouting for culturally specific epistemologies about lesbian existence indexes the seeking of navigational tools for entering that subjecthood and lifeworld. The pictorial, the graphic, the conversational – all nurtured Kaye's mestiza consciousness vis-à-vis 'an experimental expansion of the possibilities of subjectivity in open defiance of the modes of being that are … laid down for us constantly in every moment of our day-to-day lives' (Mansfield, 2000, p. 63).

Diasporic identities

As discussed earlier, in-between is indicative of passing through some matter or the sluggishness of inertia. Both Anzaldúa and Deleuze and Guattari have intimated the in-between as a metamorphic space. For Anzaldúa (2009) it is nepantla, 'the locus and sign of transition' (p. 310); for Deleuze and Guattari (1987), a threshold: a zone of potentiality and becoming. 'Coming out' surely corresponds with nepantla as the 'uncertain terrain one crosses when moving from one place to another' (Anzaldúa, 2009, p. 180) or, more precisely, 'when changing from one … sexual position to another, when traveling from the present identity into a new identity' (p. 180). Pachankis and Jackson (2023) have also linked 'coming out' to a set of life transitions that are 'accompanied by the uncertainty of relational threat or safety' (p. 1933). 'Coming out', for the research partners, was the linguistic performance or bridge to cross the sexual Borderlands between hetero-homo. As Anzaldúa (2009) writes: 'bridges span liminal (threshold) spaces between worlds' (p. 243). Crossing through and over *nepantla*, the co-researchers came to socially identify as gay and lesbian subjects by means of participating in *sympoietic* practices of 'worlding-with, in company' (Haraway, 2016, p. 58). This took the form of forging social bonds through friendship, community involvement, and sexual and romantic unions.

For Geoffrey, 'coming out' was contemporaneous with reaching the limit of his existential endurance. 'I reached a point where I realised after so long that this is just not working.' 'This' is a loaded demonstrative pronoun that signifies a number of dire psychic, affective, and emotional states and circumstances: believing marriage would occasion

straightness; secreting, uncompromisingly, his sexual identity and desires; the bodily and psychic butchering accrued through choreographies of passing; life's unlivability in its current figuration. 'Coming out', for Geoffrey, was a venturesome yet imperative act to claim not simply authenticity, but a stake in a liveable life (Butler, 2004a). Indeed, it is the 'tending towards' specific 'objects of desire' that 'compels such a risky action of self-naming in the first place' (Ahmed, 2006, p. 93).

Kaye analogises stepping into the category lesbian like 'putting on a comfortable pair of shoes'. Summoned here is a metaphor of fittingness (see Ahmed, 2019). The appropriateness of lesbian as an identity marker to name certain ways of desiring coincides with the realisation that a former heterosexuality was a straining or demanding alignment. As stated by Ahmed (2006): 'the work of orientations needs to be made visible as a form of work. … Or we could say that orientations too involve work, as *a work that is hidden until orientations no longer work'* (p. 100; emphasis added). Heterosexual orientation 'no longer work[ed]' when lesbian named a way of desiring that was, to use Ahmed's symbolic vernacular, more comfortable. The effect of embodying a correct orientation is to, as Kaye conveys, 'get *it* now'.

'In', 'out' on repeat

Some co-researchers commented on the contradictory phenomenon that even in the wake of 'coming out', embodying a stigmatised identity requires techniques of management in specific social spheres. Butler's (1991) claim that 'the subjection that subjectivates the gay or lesbian subject in some ways continues to oppress, or oppresses most insidiously, once "outness" is claimed' (p. 15) is here apparent. Curating a palatable social self to mitigate potential harm and harassment sheds light on the persistent negotiation of gay/lesbian subjectivity vis-à-vis 'the closet'. This leads Dindia (1998) to redeploy the 'coming out' metaphor as the more apposite '"going into and coming out of the closet"' (p. 105), to signpost continued 'revealing and concealing and revealing' (p. 90).

Anzaldúa (1987) reasons that 'people who inhabit [dual] realities are forced to live in the interface between the two, forced to become adept at switching modes' (p. 37). Persons of the Borderlands are:

> afraid of being abandoned by the mother, the culture, *la Raza*, for being unacceptable, faulty, damaged. Most of us unconsciously believe that if we reveal this unacceptable aspect of the self our mother/culture/race will totally reject us. To avoid rejection, some of us conform to the values of the culture, push the unacceptable parts into the shadows. Which leaves only one fear—that we will be found out and that the Shadow-Beast will break out of its cage. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 20)

The sentiment of self-editing, codeswitching, and fear of exposure conjured by Anzaldúa's postulations above chimes with the identity management praxis of passing. Analogous to a type of method acting, passing names a performative of assimilating within dominant sexual and gendered sociality. Chauncey (1994) writes that the 'double life' (p. 7) of passing secures for the gay/queer subject, a degree of social capital – including access to employment opportunities – from which their discredited identity might have otherwise disqualified them. Passing as self-defence, passing to pass through life, passing through *nepantla*. Anzaldúa (2009) indicates that 'most of us dwell in nepantla so much of the time it's become a sort of "home"' (p. 243). A parallel can be drawn between Ahmed's (2006) contention that the body can stiffen and set through recursive actions.

Geoffrey alludes to the commitment and agonising labour involved in passing: 'every minute … every waking minute of the day I was working to pass'. Scrupulously and assiduously coordinating his movements, Geoffrey – *Geoff* – passed as the 'stereotypical Aussie man'. So panoptic was his passing, his self-surveillance so categorical, that Geoffrey states: 'even my wife didn't know I was gay until I "came out" and told her. We were together for over 20 years'.

Marriage was a method of passing for Tim that he likens to a kind of 'shield'. 'I guess, being married, I always knew it [being gay] was there, you know … My marriage was my way of hiding and putting everything away'. Tim had hoped that he could reroute his gay desires into his marriage, expel this identity to 'the bottom of [his] mind', 'just forget about it'. But this wishful sublimation was in vain – wonderings and projections were still manifest: 'I always wondered, I always thought, but I just didn't act on it'. Tim explained that if his marriage were to ever end, he 'would have to confront who [he] was' by 'coming out' as gay. This tacit knowledge played into his mestizo (hetero-homo) consciousness, inviting ruminations and deliberations as to what would be said, when, and how. Naturally, the ending of Tim's marriage

precipitated ‘anxiety about what was going to become’, and ‘coming to terms with [himself]’ exerted more significant emotional and affective impact than the breakdown of his marriage.

In the workplace, Kaye carefully managed the public/private dialectic. She employed the strategy of evasion by means of avoiding the subject pronoun *she* when referring to her partner. ‘You would say, *“I went out with my partner”*… or *“we saw this”*, or “*my partner said” ...*’. Furthermore, the relational dynamics between colleagues that accompanies conviviality and a loosening or relaxation of boundaries triggered, for Kaye, increased vigilance and selectivity regarding topics of conversation, to avoid ‘slip[ping] up’. Dually, Kaye would tactically monitor for occasions to throw out tidbits of self-disclosure. ‘Over time you’d suss them out then you’d let “it” slip, or something would be said, and you’d see their reaction and then you’d know it was ok. So, you “came out”, time and again, time and again.’

(Re)crossing the Borderlands

The Borderlands are fraught and treacherous terrain where ‘to be Other is necessarily to be other to’ (Attridge, 1999, p. 22). ‘The border’, Anzaldúa (2009) writes, ‘is in a constant nepantla [in-between] state’ (p. 181): this in-betweenness can be synonymised with upheaval, stuckness, or briefness. On the fringes, the opposition between *us* and *them* is erected; differences are readily amplified and weaponised; the encroachment of Others and Otherness is aggressively defended against. In this plateau, I have revisited Anzaldúa’s (1987) groundbreaking work on the mestiza consciousness, *mutatis mutandis,* for the redeployment of a mestiza/o (hetero-homo) consciousness. The multifocality of the mestiza/o (hetero-homo) consciousness is born from the research partners’ ‘up-againstness’ (Butler, 2012b, p. 46) of heterosexuality’s deterministic regulation, the interrelationships of religious, familial, and communitarian networks of (un)belonging, and how these abut with the being – or coming into – a gay/lesbian identity, causing ‘*un choque*, a cultural collision’ (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 78).

Ahmed (2006) has referred to ‘different points of arrival’ (p. 100) when coming into a sexuality, and in this plateau the research partners have described the routes through which they arrived at their sexual identifications. *Arrived* is, however, something of a spatiotemporal misnomer and should not be understood as teleological, as terminus. Indeed, the persistent need for LGBTQIA+ populations to ‘come out’ ‘time and again, time and again’ – as Kaye rightly depicts – in new social landscapes, to new public scrutiny, demonstrates arrival as always

deferred and provisional. In the words of Glissant (1997): ‘we no longer reveal totality within ourselves by lightning flashes. We approach it through the accumulation of sediments’ (p. 33).

The complex ecology of sexuality and its mediation by intersecting historical, ideological, social, and institutional discourses has, in this plateau, been communicated through the co-researchers and their mestiza/o (hetero-homo) consciousnesses. Resonant with the phenomenological maxim that ‘to *know* the world is profoundly to *be* in the world in a certain way’ (van Manen, 2016, p. 5), the research partner dwellers of the Borderlands possess perspectival insight into ‘pluralistic mode[s]’ (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 79) of living many selves. It is in the friction of occupying multiple, competing worlds at once that a *divided self* or *fractured I* (Deleuze, 1994) is formed, and where the mestiza/o can creatively rework and remake forms of everyday sociality. While there is no surefire outcome in ‘coming out’, we, the mestiza/o, are ‘stubborn, persevering, impenetrable as stone, yet possessing a malleability that renders us unbreakable, we, the *mestizas* and *mestizos*, will remain’ (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 64).

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