

**obscurities offstage**



**obscurities offstage:  
Melbourne's gay saunas  
& the limits of representation**

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Critical Performance Project  
School of Human Movement, Recreation & Performance  
Victoria University

August 2007

## **declaration**

I, Russell Walsh, declare that the PhD thesis entitled 'obscurities offstage: Melbourne's gay saunas and the limits of representation' is no more than 100,000 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.

Russell Walsh  
24 August 2007

## abstract

*Obscenites offstage* is conceived and designed as a study in performance. It is alert to the dangers inherent in positing erotic fields, especially so-called “gay saunas”, as objects of study, dangers that have dogged the scientific research, both qualitative and quantitative, undertaken in this field since the 1960s. The dangers arise precisely because the positing of the sauna as a coherent unitary object to be studied by the researcher as a coherent unitary subject naturalises a discrete relation that is in effect utterly bogus.

The project reconfigures the epistemic stage of sauna research. It recognises that the scene of the gay sauna resists anything more than incomplete, inconclusive or reductive representation, not through some teleological or mystificatory agency, but simply because it is technically, that is, materially and socially, designed to do so. With its focus on producing effects of ambiguity, anonymity, darkness, disorientation, excitation, hermeticism, muteness, obscurity, seclusion and synaesthesia, on producing these effects as the commodities on which its commercial viability effectively depends, the gay sauna can be recognised as a zone in which the knowledge sought by the physical and human sciences is necessarily and always located just out of reach, offstage.

Performance as an episteme [sic] offers methodological opportunities here that have hitherto been unexplored. Performance produces effects of knowledge not in spite of but through the production, articulation, shimmer and play of contingent reality effects, and importantly for this project through an ontological intervention that deconstructs the “naturalised” opposition of absence and presence. It is with the commonplace performative force known as “offstage”—in Latin, *obscaenus*—that the current project strives to know the gay sauna, and yet let it remain “obscene”.



## acknowledgements

For three years I was financially supported by a Victoria University Postgraduate Scholarship for which I remain extremely grateful; I'd particularly like to thank Mr Paul Carter, University of Melbourne, who wrote a decisive letter on my behalf in support of my application. Also at Victoria University, the Faculty of Human Development funded my transcription costs and the purchase of necessary hardware. Without this funding it is difficult to imagine how the project could not have succeeded.

Sixteen men and women, whose identities I cannot disclose, agreed to contribute to the research as interviewees. They all gave generously of their time, patience, and nerve, and I feel frustrated that I cannot acknowledge their specific contributions more particularly here by way of thanks. Working with them was, in different ways, profoundly enlightening, moving, and fun. My least hope is that they found the experience rewarding, too. Margaret ("Margot") Collins transcribed almost all of the interviews and was fabulous to work with, absolutely.

My supervisor, Associate Professor Mark Minchinton, has supported this project ardently and practically since its conception even as his life and career have diverged radically from mine. In doing so over such a long period, he has offered more than was professionally required or personally requested, performing throughout as colleague, mentor and friend. Without him, the project simply would not exist, at all. Its shortcomings, of course, remain mine.

Elsewhere at Victoria University, Grace Schirripa, Secretary to the Faculty Research and Graduate Studies Committee, provided invaluable administrative support, always, and Pam Thomas, the Faculty Librarian, favoured me with her unwavering curiosity, attention and help. I also benefitted from formal presentations at Victoria University, not least of which was the Courageous Research symposium organised by Professor Elaine Martin, Director of the Postgraduate Studies Unit, in 2002 [see \Martin, 2003 #1820]. I remain particularly grateful to Elaine who has championed the project ever since.

Off campus, I am indebted to many friends. Charles Anderson, Humphrey Bower, Hieu Cat, Vicki Davies, Andrew Hazewinkel, Jane Keech, Peter King, Richard Myers, Jon Symons and Campbell Thomson have all engaged me in conversations that took my thinking further. Dr Ben Anderson, Dr Jonathan Bollen and Steven DiGirolami did so, too, but took my thinking exponentially further still; their distinctive contributions remain crucial and special. In fact, it would be criminal not to single out Jonathan Bollen, now at Flinders University, for particular attention as he has invaluable, and wonderfully, performed as the project's mentor for many years. His former colleague, Dr David McInnes, with whom I met far too infrequently, also significantly helped.

I now come to Michael Graf, with whose life mine is inextricably involved. Anyone engaged in postgraduate study comes via the research experience to new, and scary, understandings of the concepts of “nadir” and “zenith”. Michael, being so near me, has come near these understandings, too, whether he wanted to or not. He has offered spiritual, intellectual and loving support for far too many years, and at times has simply kept me, and the project, going. I look forward happily to repaying him what I owe.

Finally, in presenting this work for examination, I would like to acknowledge the contributions of three who are now dead. Helen Wilkinson first invited me to make work at Victoria University in 1991 and thus introduced me to the Performance Studies program that she co-founded. She was a fine teacher and a magnificent person. I never had the opportunity to become her friend yet, like many nearer her, I miss her immensely. Dr Prescilla Choi, formerly the School’s Postgraduate Studies Co-ordinator, at a crucial stage when I came near quitting, offered me the stern and spirited encouragement I needed to go on. It remains terrible, in the light of this, that she herself decided not to continue. And Flo Reay, the School Administrator who toiled wearily on through what felt like one university restructure after another, her office awash with paper, always offered me, and this project, kind words, droll humour and practical support. I remain indebted to all three.



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## preface

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# obscenities offstage



## epigraph

The coherence of these subterranean relations depends on the text's paratactical form and survives only by a density of insight, not by external structure. This defines the text's—and its translation's—particular vulnerability: the slightest slackening of intensity threatens to dissolve the text into a miscellany. Nothing supports the text except the intensity with which it draws on and pushes against itself. With few exceptions, paratactical works are therefore short, fragmentary, and compacted by the crisis of their own abbreviation. Paratactical texts are intensive, almost to the denial of their quality of extension; and the more extensive the paratactical work actually is—and *Aesthetic Theory* is almost unparalleled in this—the greater the potential for its unraveling at each and every point. The text therefore requires a rhetoric what will heighten concentration and density and absorb the dozens of ways in which it is constantly exposed. Every reader will note the work's recurrence to abrupt, staccato, sometimes delphically abbreviated expression that heightens the push-pull of the text. Because it rejects certitude as a standard of truth in favor of exactness of insight, it necessarily tends toward the apodictic. Adorno is also able to produce concentration out of nowhere by beginning sentences with long-haul subordinate clauses that engage with a "That ..." that grips cognition like the ratchet on a rollercoaster with a demand for cooperative anti-gravitational struggle to the top of the first slope so momentum can be discovered shooting down the main clause into any number of concluding subordinate sweeps. A paratactical text is inimical to exposition, and Adorno uses the most condensed gestures to invoke rather than propound relevant philosophical arguments: a single "sickness unto death" does the work of all of Kierkegaard, "positive negation" all of Hegel and any phrasing that even subliminally hints at "in the age of" is expected to conjure the entire argument of Benjamin's "Artwork in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," to which the book is, as a whole, a response. Out of the same demand for density, Adorno refers wherever possible to artists and artworks in the familiar: *Recherche* is more than enough for Proust's title, the *Marriage* could not be anything but that of Figaro, and George is plenty for Stefan George.

(Robert Hullot-Kentor "Translator's introduction" in Adorno, 2002: xvi)



**words & things**



## witness

I begin with testimony.

As a child, I committed myself to a project of watching TV. I watched it whenever I could. It was for me, far more than books or movies or theatre or any other form of visual representation, a prodigious source of imagery that vitalised me. It made me feel alive. It got me going. There was an experience I had back then that I recognise now as crucial. It involved an episode of *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, an old black and white British TV series featuring the actor Richard Greene, to whom I think I might have been precociously attracted. The series also featured a supporting cast of sundry earnest figures, most of them men and most of them wearing chain mail, leather jerkins, and or tights. What distinguished this particular episode of *Robin Hood* from so many others was that someone told a joke in it. I have no idea who told it or why, but I recall distinctly the televisual spatiality of the medium length shot, static as so many of them in *Robin Hood* were, with figures splayed across the screen before me as though upon a vaudevillian stage, and above all else the unconvincing sound of laughter disproportionate to the occasion emanating on cue from the actors when the punchline was delivered. The joke was about a farmer, in a village I think, encountering a traveller who'd just returned from London. The farmer asked the traveller what the weather was like there, and the traveller replied that he couldn't tell because it was too foggy. Now I got that joke. I have no recollection of laughter on my part but I know still the rush of pleasure that came with tasting and relishing its wit, lame as it was, and, far more importantly it now seems, the quieter part of me that registered the important epistemological principle that underpinned it.

Some forty years later, my doctoral research project is founded upon that same epistemological principle, and in a way it's still to do with fog.



## traces

The current project responds to an enigma, traces of which are discernible in the following shards.

I cite from *The Age* newspaper, Melbourne, 18 March 2006:

It came as a rude shock to those gathered in a Prahran theatre in February last year. The men, some with HIV and some without, were having a frank discussion about safe sex, led by popular drag queen Vanessa Wagner. They were talking about a well-known Melbourne gay venue. The HIV-positive men nominated a particular area where you went to have unprotected sex if you were infected with the virus. No, said the HIV-negative men, that was where you went if you were negative. [new paragraph] “We had the lights up in the theatre and we could just see all these jaws dropping,” says one of the organisers, Greg Iverson, president of People Living with HIV/AIDS Victoria. “It was a real wake-up call. We realised that the two communities weren’t talking to each other about HIV.” (Fyfe, 2006)

I note [parenthetically] [sic] that this scene unfolds in *a theatre*.

In 1998, in a report on “sex-on-premises venues in Sydney” published by the National Centre in HIV Social Research at Macquarie University, Sydney, the following was noted, in passing:

Context and space influence people’s behaviour in unprotected anal intercourse. (Santana & Richters, 1998: 30)

No further elaboration of the note was made. Earlier in the same report, the following was noted, again in passing:

A map or sketched floor plan of each one of the five venues was produced by the research officer based on his observations. During the interviews [...] these maps were presented to informants in order to facilitate discussion. This proved to be unproductive, because informants had different memories of and perspectives on the venues. The maps, however, were a good instrument for comparing the different settings and layout of the venues. (Santana & Richters, 1998: 8)

The maps were “a good instrument for comparing” in spite, that is, of the informants having “different memories of and perspectives on the venues”: different from the research “officer”, it would seem, different from each other, too, in all probability, and quite possibly also different from themselves, though we cannot speak of these potential differences with any certainty as no further information is provided. The basis on which it was understood that the research officer’s “observations” proved more accurate than the informants’ “memories and perspectives on the venues” is not disclosed.

Thirty years earlier, in a pioneering study of so-called “impersonal sex in public places” conducted in an unidentified US city (1966-68), the ethnographer Laud Humphreys noted, *again in passing*:

Participants may develop strong attachments to the settings of their adventures in impersonal sex. I have noted more than once that these men seem to acquire stronger sentimental attachments to the buildings in which they meet for sex than to the persons with whom they engage in it. (Humphreys, 1975: 14)

Finally, in 1903 a labelled floor plan of New York’s Ariston Baths was prepared by police officers following extensive undercover surveillance of the premises prior to raiding them (Chauncey Jr., 1994: 213). The plan survived because it was tendered as forensic evidence in the twelve sodomy trials that followed the raid, seven of which resulted in convictions. In court, police witnesses testified to there being a small gymnasium with dumbbells and other equipment at the baths (Chauncey Jr., 1994: 212 & 427, note 14). The gym does not appear on the detailed plan, nor is it apparent where it could appear if it existed. What does appear, entirely at odds with the building’s prevailing rectilinear form, is an awkwardly hand-drawn, as distinct from ruled, “Passage way” curving in a ninety degree arc through unarticulated blank space (a courtyard?) so as to connect a set of “Dressing Rooms” with a “Hall”. On the plan the “Passage way”, rendered *as if* it were an afterthought, [re]solves the problem of how to get from one area to the other, but imagining it as an actually built curvilinear form in three material dimensions through which one might pass remains, well, difficult. (see also ‘The History,’ n.d.; Betsky, 1997: 150)

The current study does not seek to produce an ethnography of Melbourne’s gay saunas, nor a history. Nor does it intend to contribute directly to the necessary ongoing work of skilled epidemiologists combatting the spread of HIV/AIDS. It is not a study in architecture, philosophy, political science, psychology nor sociology. And it is not a study in linguistics, though as the reader penetrates the thesis she could be forgiven for occasionally thinking so.

The current study is a study in performance, that is, it is a study of and, importantly, *a study through and in performance*. It *addresses* a couple of simple but fundamental questions: What do people make of who they are and where they are when they visit gay saunas in Melbourne? and What can I, a performance maker, make of and or with [sic] what they make? In several respects, these questions remained unanswered; it’s the asking that counts.

The study is presented in the form of, that is, *as if* it were, a written thesis, with appendices.

## Melbourne's gay saunas

How to designate the object?

I cite from printed guides published in Sydney (1998) and Melbourne (2004):

There are venues which provide safe places for men to meet for sex, such as saunas, sex shops, porno cinemas and backroom bars. [...] Saunas have been described as beats where you wear a towel instead of clothes. In some ways this is right, in that, by and large, people are there for the sex. However, the atmosphere is very different in a sauna to that of a beat. [...] What you get for the money varies from place to place too. Usually there is lounge [sic] area with a television and a small cafe where you can get tea, coffee and small snacks (this is not the sex section!). They usually have a steam room (wet sauna) and a dry Scandanavian style sauna, (hence the name sauna). There are showers, toilets, a locker room to store your clothes, and if you're lucky, a swimming pool and spa. Many have mazes which are dimly lit and have some even darker corners or rooms off them, as well as a video lounge where gay porn videos are shown. Also, some saunas have gym equipment. [new paragraph] The feature common to all saunas is private cubicles and rooms in which to have sex. Most of these rooms have mattresses (which are vinyl coated for obvious reasons) and doors which are lockable from the inside. You can usually find condoms and water-based lubricant in the rooms too. If you can't, ask the attendant at the cafe or entrance for some. (Donohoe, 1998: 82-89)

There are basically three kinds of sex venues—sex clubs, saunas and backrooms. They all have things like cubicles with lockable doors, cubicles with glory holes, TVs that play porn, access to HIV/AIDS information, free condoms and lube. But each of them is also a bit different from the others, so let's look at each of them. [...] The main features at a sauna are the 'wet areas' such as the sauna, steam room and spa. At a sauna, guys wear towels rather than clothes. [new paragraph] You will also get most of the things that a sex club has—like a douche room, darkroom, slingroom, private rooms or playrooms—but they may not be as well equipped as you'll find at a sex club. There are lots of cubicles with vinyl mattresses as well as extra facilities like showers, rest areas and snack food. (VAC outreach project, 2004: 5)

The earlier of these two guides was produced by the Australasian College of Sexual Health Physicians and the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations (AFAO), both based in Sydney, as "a sexual health guide for young gay men". It was funded by the Commonwealth Department of Human Services and Health. How I came to get it here in Melbourne is worth noting: my doctor handed it to me. He knew what I'd be researching, and he thought I'd find it interesting. I was surprised to see the publication and said so. I hadn't noticed it in his waiting room nor anywhere else until he handed it to me. My doctor explained that it wasn't to be displayed. In Victoria, it could be distributed in person only and by medical practitioners only. That was the arrangement. Who made these arrangements and how they were monitored and enforced wasn't made clear; to me, that is. At the time, I didn't ask. I was accustomed to moving through a world riddled with prohibitions, rules, constraints and enforcements. Permissions, too, though these amounted to much the same thing: a naturalised deployment of

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No further elaboration of the note was made. Earlier in the same report, the following was noted, again in passing:

A map or sketched floor plan of each one of the five venues was produced by the research officer based on his observations. During the interviews [...] these maps were presented to informants in order to facilitate discussion. This proved to be unproductive, because informants had different memories of and perspectives on the venues. The maps, however, were a good instrument for comparing the different settings and layout of the venues. (Santana & Richters, 1998: 8)

The maps were “a good instrument for comparing” in spite, that is, of the informants having “different memories of and perspectives on the venues”: different from the research “officer”, it would seem, different from each other, too, in all probability, and quite possibly also different from themselves, though we cannot speak of these potential differences with any certainty as no further information is provided. The basis on which it was understood that the research officer’s “observations” proved more accurate than the informants’ “memories and perspectives on the venues” is not disclosed.

Thirty years earlier, in a pioneering study of so-called “impersonal sex in public places” conducted in an unidentified US city (1966-68), the ethnographer Laud Humphreys noted, *again in passing*:

Participants may develop strong attachments to the settings of their adventures in impersonal sex. I have noted more than once that these men seem to acquire stronger sentimental attachments to the buildings in which they meet for sex than to the persons with whom they engage in it. (Humphreys, 1975: 14)

Finally, in 1903 a labelled floor plan of New York’s Ariston Baths was prepared by police officers following extensive undercover surveillance of the premises prior to raiding them (Chauncey Jr., 1994: 213). The plan survived because it was tendered as forensic evidence in the twelve sodomy trials that followed the raid, seven of which resulted in convictions. In court, police witnesses testified to there being a small gymnasium with dumbbells and other equipment at the baths (Chauncey Jr., 1994: 212 & 427, note 14). The gym does not appear on the detailed plan, nor is it apparent where it could appear if it existed. What does appear, entirely at odds with the building’s prevailing rectilinear form, is an awkwardly hand-drawn, as distinct from ruled, “Passage way” curving in a ninety degree arc through unarticulated blank space (a courtyard?) so as to connect a set of “Dressing Rooms” with a “Hall”. On the plan the “Passage way”, rendered *as if* it were an afterthought, [re]solves the problem of how to get from one area to the other, but imagining it as an actually built curvilinear form in three material dimensions through which one might pass remains, well, difficult. (see also ‘The History,’ n.d.; Betsky, 1997: 150)

The current study does not seek to produce an ethnography of Melbourne’s gay saunas, nor a history. Nor does it intend to contribute directly to the necessary ongoing work of skilled epidemiologists combatting the spread of HIV/AIDS. It is not a study in architecture, philosophy, political science, psychology nor sociology. And it is not a study in linguistics, though as the reader penetrates the thesis she could be forgiven for occasionally thinking so.

The current study is a study in performance, that is, it is a study of and, importantly, *a study through and in performance*. It *addresses* a couple of simple but fundamental questions: What do people make of who they are and where they are when they visit gay saunas in Melbourne? and What can I, a performance maker, make of and or with [sic] what they make? In several respects, these questions remained unanswered; it’s the asking that counts.

The study is presented in the form of, that is, *as if* it were, a written thesis, with appendices.

## Melbourne's gay saunas

How to designate the object?

I cite from printed guides published in Sydney (1998) and Melbourne (2004):

There are venues which provide safe places for men to meet for sex, such as saunas, sex shops, porno cinemas and backroom bars. [...] Saunas have been described as beats where you wear a towel instead of clothes. In some ways this is right, in that, by and large, people are there for the sex. However, the atmosphere is very different in a sauna to that of a beat. [...] What you get for the money varies from place to place too. Usually there is lounge [sic] area with a television and a small cafe where you can get tea, coffee and small snacks (this is not the sex section!). They usually have a steam room (wet sauna) and a dry Scandanavian style sauna, (hence the name sauna). There are showers, toilets, a locker room to store your clothes, and if you're lucky, a swimming pool and spa. Many have mazes which are dimly lit and have some even darker corners or rooms off them, as well as a video lounge where gay porn videos are shown. Also, some saunas have gym equipment. [new paragraph] The feature common to all saunas is private cubicles and rooms in which to have sex. Most of these rooms have mattresses (which are vinyl coated for obvious reasons) and doors which are lockable from the inside. You can usually find condoms and water-based lubricant in the rooms too. If you can't, ask the attendant at the cafe or entrance for some. (Donohoe, 1998: 82-89)

There are basically three kinds of sex venues—sex clubs, saunas and backrooms. They all have things like cubicles with lockable doors, cubicles with glory holes, TVs that play porn, access to HIV/AIDS information, free condoms and lube. But each of them is also a bit different from the others, so let's look at each of them. [...] The main features at a sauna are the 'wet areas' such as the sauna, steam room and spa. At a sauna, guys wear towels rather than clothes. [new paragraph] You will also get most of the things that a sex club has—like a douche room, darkroom, slingroom, private rooms or playrooms—but they may not be as well equipped as you'll find at a sex club. There are lots of cubicles with vinyl mattresses as well as extra facilities like showers, rest areas and snack food. (VAC outreach project, 2004: 5)

The earlier of these two guides was produced by the Australasian College of Sexual Health Physicians and the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations (AFAO), both based in Sydney, as "a sexual health guide for young gay men". It was funded by the Commonwealth Department of Human Services and Health. How I came to get it here in Melbourne is worth noting: my doctor handed it to me. He knew what I'd be researching, and he thought I'd find it interesting. I was surprised to see the publication and said so. I hadn't noticed it in his waiting room nor anywhere else until he handed it to me. My doctor explained that it wasn't to be displayed. In Victoria, it could be distributed in person only and by medical practitioners only. That was the arrangement. Who made these arrangements and how they were monitored and enforced wasn't made clear; to me, that is. At the time, I didn't ask. I was accustomed to moving through a world riddled with prohibitions, rules, constraints and enforcements. Permissions, too, though these amounted to much the same thing: a naturalised deployment of

power. It was how I lived, how we all lived, and live. It didn't occur to me to enquire further at the time. I know better now.

The second guide was produced by the outreach project [sic: lower case] of the Victorian AIDS Council (VAC). I picked it up at Hares & Hyenas, a Melbourne-based gay and lesbian bookshop located at the time in a so-called gay precinct. I found copies of the guide openly displayed just inside the shop's entrance, stacked on the floor beside the free magazines, community newspapers, club cards and flyers that were always to be found there. This second guide is a publication that never quite identifies whom it's for:

This book aims to give you as much information as possible about how to have as much fun as you can with your sex life, while still keeping yourself healthy. (VAC outreach project, 2004: 1)

That's on page one. On page two, the heading is "Men and Sex":

Most men love having sex. Some men enjoy having sex only with women, others like having sex with both men and women and others still only have sex with other men. Whatever *you* like doing, it is important to protect yourself and your partners, whether they be male or female, from STIs / sexually transmitted infections, especially HIV/AIDS. (VAC outreach project, 2004: 2)

In the remaining 39 pages, women don't get mentioned again. The publication is called *Cruising*, and there's an illustration, not a photograph, on the cover that depicts the rear end of a big American-type car. I mention this because it contrasts radically with the cover of a third publication produced in Sydney two years earlier. The third publication, *When You're Hot You're Hot*, was produced by the AIDS Council of New South Wales (ACON). It describes itself as "an easy guide to what you always wanted to know about sex venues but were afraid to ask!". The cover illustration, a photograph, depicts a view down a narrow unlit stairway through an open door to a daylit street beyond; it's a view from *inside*. Silhouetted against the street and walking up (down?) the stairs is a figure who, given the context, reads as male; out of context, the figure's gender presents as ambiguous. Inside, on page one, the writers make clear whom the publication's for:

This booklet is designed for guys who are interested in visiting sex venues but who haven't yet—or who have been a few times but still find it all a little mysterious. (Gray & McGuigan, 2002: 1)

On page two, this is clarified further:

Sex venues (also called sex-on-premises venues) are privately owned businesses that provide a place for men to go to have sex with other men. You pay a fee to enter and this allows you to use the facilities. [new paragraph] Sex venues are unique to the gay community and have developed a culture of their own. (Gray & McGuigan, 2002: 2)

And on pages eight and nine we find the following:

There are basically three kinds of sex venues—sex clubs, saunas and backrooms. They all have things like cubicles with lockable doors, cubicles with glory holes, TVs that play porn, access to HIV/AIDS information, free condoms and lube. But each of them is also a bit different from the others. [...] The main features at a sauna are the 'wet areas' such as the sauna, steamroom and spa. Guys wear towels rather than clothes. [new paragraph] You will also get most of the things that a sex club has - a douche room, darkroom, slingroom, private rooms and playrooms. There are lots of cubicles with vinyl mattresses as well as extra facilities like showers, rest areas and snack food. (Gray & McGuigan, 2002: 8-9)

If this last passage seems familiar to the reader, it should, because you read something like it a minute ago a few paragraphs above. A good deal of material from ACON's *When You're Hot You're Hot* was carefully adapted, with proper acknowledgement, by the VAC outreach project for *Cruising*, the second of the two guides with which I began, two years later and in another city. I cite the relevant passage from the VAC's *Cruising* again, this time with underlinings to show where changes were made:

There are basically three kinds of sex venues—sex clubs, saunas and backrooms. They all have things like cubicles with lockable doors, cubicles with glory holes, TVs that play porn, access to HIV/AIDS information, free condoms and lube. But each of them is also a bit different from the others, so let's look at each of them. [...] The main features at a sauna are the 'wet areas' such as the sauna, steam room and spa. At a sauna, guys wear towels rather than clothes. [new paragraph] You will also get most of the things that a sex club has—like a douche room, darkroom, slingroom, private rooms or playrooms—but they may not be as well equipped as you'll find at a sex club. There are lots of cubicles with vinyl mattresses as well as extra facilities like showers, rest areas and snack food. (VAC outreach project, 2004: 5) [underlinings added]

Most of these changes initially present as cosmetic, mere subtle inflections of tone. Two of them, and this is where "I" begin to feature, catch my attention differently from the others. I wonder where the statement "but they may not be as well equipped as you'll find at a sex club" is coming from. Who wrote it: an individual or the outreach team? How was it decided that this qualification, itself further qualified ("may not be"), needed to be added? Did it have something to do with Melbourne as distinct from Sydney, or was it a reflection of how venues in Australia had changed in the intervening two years, or was it a correction of information in the original that was long overdue?

The other change I wonder about is the shift from "steamroom" in *When You're Hot You're Hot* to "steam room" in *Cruising*. I check a dictionary and "steam room" is the spelling it prefers. This seems fine until I notice that the Sydney publication also lists "douche room, darkroom, slingroom, private rooms and playrooms". A small change is made to the same list in *Cruising* ("and" becomes "or") but the spelling of "darkroom, slingroom" and "playrooms", and of "douche

room" and "private rooms", is left unchanged. I note the term "darkroom" especially. Though a "darkroom" is indeed a dark room, a room that's dark, according to *When You're Hot You're Hot* it's not merely so:

A room that has a low level of lighting and no door. It is designed for public or group sex and may have a large mattress in the room. (Gray & McGuigan, 2002: 5)

I comprehend, then, why "darkroom", signifying something that's not merely a dark room, is retained for *Cruising*. Yet a similar case could be made for retaining "steamroom":

A room that is heated like a sauna, but with water constantly dripping onto a heating element so it is always full of steam. Steamrooms are busy cruising areas. (Gray & McGuigan, 2002: 7)

Unlike "steam rooms", which might be incidentally cruisy but are not built primarily for cruising (see Schimel, 1999: 19), "steamrooms", according to *When You're Hot You're Hot*, are cruising areas, "busy" ones, and intentionally so. So I keep wondering about the figure or figures at the VAC who decided that the spelling of "steamroom" should change. Similar questions unfold: How did the decision get made? What was the change for? If the presentation of the name makes no substantial difference, then why make *that* change at all and, inconsistently, no others? And what does it mean, if anything at all, that the 1998 "sexual health guide for young gay men", also produced in Sydney, uses "steam room", too (Donohoe, 1998: 89), like *Cruising*, and not "steamroom", like *When You're Hot You're Hot*?

I set aside this apparent marginalia and move on to a view from the commercial sector abroad. The following is cited from the sixth edition (2006) of a sauna guide, "a must for the gay traveller", recently published in Berlin:

Bathhouses are permitted to operate with the agreement of State Health authorities, throughout Australia. They are required to offer clean, well maintained facilities and promote safer sex through the provision of condoms, lube and safer sex education information. All major cities in Australia have at least one bathhouse which are [sic] generally open seven days a week from around 12 noon until late, although many operate 24 hours, particularly over the weekend. (Bedford, 2006: 13)

Having introduced the venues here as "Bathhouses", the guide then abandons that term and lists six "saunas" operating in Melbourne. With the aid of a checklist of 23 ideograms, it itemises the facilities available in each of the six saunas and then adds written annotations to five of the six listings. I cite the five written annotations in sequence and in full as follows:

Intimate sauna conveniently located close to the gay scene that attracts local residents and night clubbers. On two levels with large cruising maze and four glory holes [sic] cubicles.

Mainly older clientele.

Popular, large, and well equipped sauna that attracts a hot, mixed crowd. Great massages!

One of the most popular inner-city saunas with a porn lounge, a sling room and video lounge. Cruising area with cubicles. Mixed aged crowd. Very friendly. The new steam room [sic] is fantastic. Busy during lunch times, due to the "lunchtime" special.

Has wet and dry sauna, 25m-lap pool, video lounge, cruise areas. One of the best saunas in town. Great facilities and very popular. Every 2nd Monday/month a full refund of the entry fee is offered to those that have an 8" cock or bigger. Be prepared to have it measured and verified!

(Bedford, 2006: 14-15)

### **these places variously called**

In 1979, Joseph Styles wrote of how he set off in 1974 as an openly gay US undergraduate to his local gay baths intending to research a seminar paper using "field research" as "a nonparticipating insider" as his principal method. Prior to this visit, he had not visited a gay bath. Neither the research literature he read beforehand nor his discussions with an experienced friend prepared him for the comic craziness that ensued. His glasses fogged over in the steam room, the toilet cubicles where he intended to make notes were subject to long queues, the lighting was generally too dim for him to see (in fact, he stumbled), potential interviewees would talk to him only with a view to organising sex, and he failed to physically prevent his towel from being torn from his otherwise naked form. After a few visits (yes, he dutifully persisted) he learned how to manage this "unremitting chaos" only to have a new, potentially more complicated issue emerge: he found himself interested in having sex while on the job. Initially he resolved this by visiting a second bathhouse, which he earnestly reserved for pleasure, meanwhile reserving the first bathhouse for fieldwork only. Eventually, the distinctions between the bathhouses and what he did in them collapsed and, along with them, the hierarchical distinctions, for him, between so-called "insider" and "outsider" knowledge. (Styles, 1979)

At the beginning of his article, Styles, writing for "outsiders", noted the following:

Variouly called "gay baths", "the baths", "bathhouses", "steam baths", "the tubs", "sex clubs", and "fuck clubs" by participants in the gay world, these places have existed for years but have never been thoroughly and systematically studied. (Styles, 1979: 135)

To Styles' list, I now add:

“bath” (Altman, 1982: 80),  
“bath house” (Bedford, 2000: 5),  
“bath-house” (Altman, 1979: 42),  
“gay bath houses” (Mattson, 2001),  
“gay bathhouse” (Bedford, 2000),  
“gay men’s sauna” (‘55 Porter Street,’ 2000),  
“gay saunas” (Spurr, 2001: 41),  
“gay sex-on-site sauna” (‘Sauna goers,’ 2002),  
“gay steam baths” (Grube, 1997: 128),  
“homosexual baths” (Altman, 1986: 147),  
“homosexual saunas” (Altman, 1992: 32),  
“men’s sauna” (‘Steamworks,’ 1998),  
“sauna” (Bedford, 2006),  
“sauna bath” (Plummer, 1981: 12),  
“steam rooms” (Santana & Richters, 1998: 1),  
“wet saunas” (Gurr, 2001), and  
“wet venues” (McInnes & Bollen, 2000: 27).

Generically, “these places” are also referred to in Australia as “sex-on-premises venues” or “SOPVs”, “sex-on-site venues” [rarely] or “SOSs” [rarer still], and “venues”.

I also recall seeing in Frankfurt-am-Main in 1999, outside a “sauna”, “club”, “sauna club” or “club sauna”, as “these places” are, in Germany, “variously called” (Bedford, 2006: 95-107), a monumental sign, vertically oriented and spanning three storeys of the building’s façade, on which was proclaimed the single English-language term “Bathhouse”. Amidst the bustle of the busy street below, I stood quite still gazing up at it, looming dark and unlit against the night sky, in wonder.

That wonder persists. What are “these places” that they are so “variously called”? If I refer to them persistently as “gay saunas”, what illocutionary act do I perform (see Austin, 1976), what identification do I forcefully impose, what possibilities of discursive formation, and of meaning, do I blindly exclude? If I call “these places” “gay saunas” long enough, will the name sediment and fix, will “these places” effectively become “gay saunas” after all? What kind of authoritative speaking subject do I effectively become if I consistently call them thus? Am I addressing, even in Melbourne alone, a stable category, genre or type of material “place” at all, or am I dealing with what Leap has called a “sexual landscape” or “erotic site”, a culturally produced situation, in effect, that does not effectively exist in a pre-discursive form (Leap, 1999: 115)?

I wonder.

## Melbourne's gay saunas

Browsing through the sixth edition of the gay travel guide from Berlin, I note that it lists more gay saunas [sic] for Melbourne than for Berlin; more for Melbourne than for Sydney; more for Melbourne than for Amsterdam, San Francisco or New York; fewer than for Los Angeles, Montréal, Paris or Rio de Janeiro; and the same number as for Milan, Singapore and Zurich. In fact, it lists and summarily describes 900 gay saunas worldwide (I count them, it's 900 exactly). The 23 ideograms are used throughout the guide to indicate the facilities and services on offer in each.

The facilities that the ideograms represent can be deciphered by referring to explanatory keys located at the front of the guide (Bedford, 2006: 5-9). These explanatory keys are provided in the English, German, French, Spanish and Italian languages. I note that three of the listed facilities—"bar", "glory holes" and "sling"—are called by the same name in all five languages. Of these, "bar" does not surprise. It's a noun that, thanks to mass tourism, already functions translingually. But I am surprised to see that "glory holes" and "sling", neither of which would seem to be terms in commonplace mass tourist use, are internationally recognised names for these particular facilities. I flick through the guide, noting where saunas with "slings" can be found: Berlin, Québec, Medellín, Desenzano and Melbourne, among others. I imagine a "gay traveller" visiting Melbourne from Medellín. He not only knows what a "sling" is from his local sauna back home in Colombia, but according to the guide he calls it by the same name. This interests me, and I browse further.

I check the ideogram for "steamroom" and or "steam room" and find that neither term is used. The closest name listed in English is "steam bath", which becomes "Dampfsauna" in German, "bains vapeur" in French, "baño de vapor" in Spanish, and "sauna a vapore" in Italian. This is less interesting.

Then I see the ideogram for "darkroom". I flick the pages and find that the name remains "darkroom" in English, German, Italian and French. Only in Spanish does the name change to become something recognisably Spanish, and not English: "cabina oscura". I start to wonder if the shared use of "darkroom" across the other four languages suggests that a "darkroom" might *not* be identical with a "dark room" within the German, Italian and French languages, too. I also wonder if the "darkroom" as a facility "designed for public or group sex" originated in the English speaking world and migrated, as it were, to non-English speaking cultures as their adoption of the English language term would seem to suggest. It's possible perhaps but it somehow feels implausible, a little too neat, like an explanation in a text book at school. I look back at the name in Spanish: "cabina oscura". I begin to wonder about something else: Is a "cabina oscura" a

“darkroom”, as the explanatory key indicates, or is it a “dark room” as the Spanish name would suggest? How is it that the name “darkroom” isn’t used *here*, too, meaning here on the Spanish language key? What is actually going on as I or anyone using the guide flicks between the keys in five languages, or simply uses one of them? Does this anomaly say something about the individual editorial team member who drew up the Spanish language key for the publishing house in Berlin, or does it say something about what goes on in gay saunas in Spain, or does it say something about what happens for all Spanish speakers, be they habitués of saunas in Medellín or Madrid, when they walk into what they call a “cabina oscura” in a sauna in Melbourne? I continue to wonder: What’s actually going on?

### **unreliable in Spanish**

In a six-week period during the summer of 1986, Richwald *et al.*, from the UCLA School of Public Health, approached 1636 men in Los Angeles County as they left seven gay bathhouses. Each man was asked to complete a questionnaire seeking responses to 52 items with each questionnaire taking fifteen to thirty minutes to complete. Of the 1636 men approached, 807 successfully participated, 221 [claimed they] had completed the questionnaire already, 78 couldn’t read it, and 530 simply refused. Even though the seven bathhouses were chosen as a representative sample in relation to residency, ethnicity and race, the survey was available in English only. This was due to

translation difficulties identified during the pre-test phase of the survey (ie. specific gay sexual behaviors *could not be reliably described in Spanish*). (Richwald *et al.*, 1988: 172) [emphasis added]

No one seems to have asked what this might mean or imply.

### **Melbourne's gay saunas**

I pick up the first edition (2000) of the gay travel guide produced in Berlin. It also uses ideograms with explanatory keys but in this earlier edition, explanations are offered in the English, German and French languages only (Bedford, 2000: 7-9). I note that “darkroom” on the German and French language keys becomes “dark room” in English. Sometime between the first and sixth editions, the “dark room”, in English, became a “darkroom”, too. Or so it would inexplicably seem. I set this aside.

The first edition lists five saunas for Melbourne (Bedford, 2000: 15-16), one of which is not listed in the sixth edition which lists four saunas from the first edition plus two newcomers, a total of six. The arithmetic is suggestive. It adumbrates a summary history in reductive form: in the years between the first and sixth editions of the Berlin-based travel guide, one sauna, at least, must have closed in Melbourne and two, at least, must have opened. Yet simple as this inference is, I'm not convinced. I haven't *heard* of the missing sauna's demise. When did it close? How could it be that *I would not know* this had happened? I check the *White Pages* phone directory online. The "closed" sauna is still listed. I dial the number. Yes, they'll be open till one [a.m.] "as usual". Thanks for that. "Not a problem." The object, even as I try to designate it, is proving slippery. The sauna now missing from the sixth edition of the gay travel guide is still in business. It's one of three in Melbourne that belong to the same owner-operator. The other two belonging to this owner-operator are listed in the guide, so why not the third? Its absence disturbs. I look back at a sentence I'd written earlier:

Browsing through the sixth edition of the gay travel guide from Berlin, I note that it lists more gay saunas [sic] for Melbourne than for Berlin; more for Melbourne than for Sydney; more for Melbourne than for Amsterdam, San Francisco or New York; fewer than for Los Angeles, Montréal, Paris or Rio de Janeiro; and the same number as for Milan, Singapore and Zurich.

The statement still holds. The sixth edition of the guide does list gay saunas just as I've described but the conclusions to be drawn have suddenly shifted. Following my phone call, for instance, Melbourne suddenly has *more* gay saunas than are listed for Milan, Singapore and Zurich, and, as seven saunas are listed for Los Angeles, Melbourne would now seem to be on a *par* with that city. But this new conclusion assumes that the information offered in the guide about those other cities is actually correct, or is at least *more* accurate than the information offered about saunas in Melbourne. Are there seven saunas in Los Angeles after all? How can I find out for sure?

### **white, educated, professional**

Richwald *et al.*, researching bathhouses in Los Angeles (1986), also found that

In general, the men attending the bathhouses were young, white, and well educated with relatively high incomes, not dissimilar from the bathhouse clientele described by McKusick, Horstman *et al.* [sic] (Richwald *et al.*, 1988: 178)

The reference to "McKusick, Horstman *et al.*" [sic] relates to the following: McKusick *et al.* had reported that, of 400 men recruited as they left three San Francisco bathhouses between 10pm and 2am one night in November 1983, a

mere 151 (38%) returned "usable" questionnaires. This contrasted with a cohort of 250 *volunteers*, recruited for the same project through ads in gay community newspapers, who had a higher return rate of 189 (72%); significantly no one in this second cohort had been in a bathhouse "for sex" in the previous sixty days. The questionnaire in question sought responses to a staggering 309 items. The "vast majority" of participants posting back "usable" questionnaires in preaddressed stamped envelopes identified themselves as white-collar workers and professionals. (McKusick *et al.*, 1985)

I repeat:: Richwald *et al.* found that, in Los Angeles,

the men attending the bathhouses were young, white, and well educated with relatively high incomes

not dissimilar from those described by McKusick *et al.* a few years earlier, that is, the "vast majority" of the mere 38% in San Francisco who'd returned usable questionnaires. Yet the "young, white, and well educated" men Richwald *et al.* referred to in their own study were not merely "the men attending the bathhouses" as they stated, but the men attending the bathhouses *who had successfully completed the questionnaire*, a figure which also represented less than 50% of those initially approached.

Between them, the two groups of researchers, researching a few years apart in two Californian cities, had reported approaching a total of 2068 men as they left ten bathhouses. Of the 1078 men who did not complete "usable" questionnaires for *either* study, we know almost nothing.

Nor do we know anything of the men visiting *other unsurveyed bathhouses* on those dates:

### **a representative sample**

Richwald *et al.* advised that:

Based on an initial survey of the fourteen bathhouses in Los Angeles County carried out in April and May 1986, these seven bathhouses were chosen to provide a representative sample of the men attending bathhouses in terms of residence and race/ethnicity. (Richwald *et al.*, 1988: 172)

Of the "initial survey" referred to here, we are told no more. We don't know how it was conducted, nor by whom, nor where. Just that "a representative sample" would be provided by the seven bathhouses that were chosen.

Bell & Weinberg [sic] studied "homosexualities" in the San Francisco Bay Area in the late 1960s. From eight gay baths, as distinct from McKusick *et al.*'s three, "249 white males and 5 black males" were recruited, of whom 91 were interviewed (in what racial proportions we do not know). The researchers noted:

The nonrepresentative nature of other investigators' samples as well as of our own precludes any generalization about the incidence of a particular phenomenon even to persons living in the locale where the interviews were conducted, much less to homosexuals in general. Nowhere has a random sample of American homosexual men or women ever been obtained, and given the variety of circumstances which discourage homosexuals from participating in research studies, it is unlikely that any investigator will ever be in a position to say that this or that is true of a given percentage of all homosexuals. We cannot stress too much that ours is not a representative sample. (Bell & Weinberg, 1978: 22)

Unlike Richwald *et al.*, Bell & Weinberg stressed: "ours is not a representative sample". Yet the question is begged all the same: Representative of what? If no "representative sample" can [ever] be obtained, what does this mean about the total set being sampled? How can it be *known* to actually pre-exist the occasion of its sampling? That there is a total set, a replete field of, say, "American homosexual men", entails first imagining a content without [a] form in that the total set, "American homosexual men", comprises *an unquantifiable population*, hypothesised in order that it can *then* be representatively sampled and come to be properly known, but properly known thanks to samples that cannot be properly demonstrated or verified as being "representative". This functions or *performs* effectively as a phantasy, as a case of science flirting too close to metaphysics. It isn't so much known as *believed* that there is a population, a finite population that an ideally omniscient figure (God, perhaps?) could know of and accurately describe as "American homosexual men". All subsequent discussion about such a population proceeds, of necessity, *as if* the omniscient description in question had in fact already *metaphysically* occurred, with the results known exclusively by the omniscient being and merely awaiting scientific *discovery*.

But what if the posited population didn't exist [quite] as such? Or what if it existed as did, say, populations of witches [once upon a time]? What does it mean to speak of a "homosexual population" (Hoffman, 1968: 160), a "gay community" (Scott, 2002), or a "sauna scene" ('Coming out,' 1999) as something that can [not] be representatively sampled?

### **Melbourne's gay saunas**

The gay travel guide recently published in Berlin is in its sixth edition called the *Spartacus International Sauna Guide*. The first edition is called by a different

name: *Sauna Guide and Gay Bathhouses International*. Despite the name change, I'm sure it's the same guide in two different editions: the publisher's the same, the layout is similar, and the editorial team lists at least two names common to both publications. Yes, it's the same; just different, that's all.

I wonder how the guide's title came to change. *Sauna Guide and Gay Bathhouses International* is cumbersome, true, but it has the advantage of covering several bases in that it references "sauna", "bathhouses" and "gay" all in one go. It also indirectly references a non-gay possibility by qualifying only "bathhouses" as "gay". It's not called the "Gay" *Sauna Guide and Gay Bathhouses International*, just *Sauna Guide and Gay Bathhouses International*. The sixth edition, which does describe itself on the title page as "a must for the gay traveller", discretely removes the qualifier "gay" from the cover and title proper: *Spartacus International Sauna Guide* is enough.

The shift in emphasis, a form of linguistic "de-gaying", as it were, is paralleled in the two passages that follow. The first, already cited, is from the Sydney-based *When You're Hot You're Hot*:

Sex venues (also called sex-on-premises venues) are privately owned businesses that provide a place for men to go to have sex with other men. You pay a fee to enter and this allows you to use the facilities. [new paragraph] Sex venues *are unique to the gay community* and have developed a culture of their own. (Gray & McGuigan, 2002: 2) [emphasis added]

The second passage, adapted from the first passage two years later in Melbourne, is cited from the VAC outreach project's *Cruising*:

Sex venues (also called sex-on-premises venues) are privately owned businesses that provide a place for men to go to have sex with other men. You pay a fee to enter and this allows you to use the facilities. [new paragraph] Sex venues developed a culture of their own. (VAC outreach project, 2004: 5)

It's apparent that something significant is happening here, but in response to what precisely?

### **straight or bisexual**

In April 2002, *Melbourne Community Voice (MCV)*, a free weekly gay community newspaper, published "Sex x 10", a three page guide to ten of Melbourne's "SOPV"s (sex-on-premises venues). Apart from a cheeky reference to going in "undercover" to the venues in question, no information is offered as to how or by whom the guide was prepared. There is no by-line. I note that in the guide's description of one Melbourne sauna the following sentence appears:

Mondays is good for picking up your straight or bisexual guys, but generally a mixed crowd with the younger guys popping in after 4pm and during uni holidays. ('Sex x 10,' 2002: 21)

No indication is offered as to how, or by whom, the distinction is made between guys who are "bisexual" and guys who are "straight" but who can be picked up all the same. Nor is any indication offered as to how this information was ascertained. What's so special about "Mondays", I wonder, that "straight" guys in particular come to be particularly available at this particular sauna? And what does it mean in the wake of this information that the rest of the week there is "generally" a "mixed" "crowd"? Who *are* these people? Is any of this unlikely looking information, offered *as if* it were unproblematic, *as if* it were the most natural of phenomena, actually reliable, that is, true? Is it based on scientific or some other form of systematic research, or, more likely, on the experiential know-how that Samuel R Delany has referred to as "street talk" (Delany, 1991)?

I recall Joseph Styles' still pertinent reflection:

As a gay man, I assumed I was among the "natural clientele" of the baths. It never occurred to me that I might not understand what was going on. (Styles, 1979: 151)

I am also reminded of a more recent incident in a related field:

### **homosexual and bisexual [at least**

(The bracket's correct.) When Bennett *et al.* researched their study of "AIDS-related sexual practices in a sample of homosexual and bisexual men in the western area of Sydney", they exercised what was by then customary scientific care. They echoed Bell & Weinberg [a decade earlier], among others, in stating that theirs was not a representative sample:

Ultimately, as with any homosexual sample, the data that were obtained can be said to describe only those who were willing to be interviewed, and inferences to the target population as a whole must be made with caution. (Bennett *et al.*, 1989: 311)

Even so, their non-representative "homosexual sample", which was sampled from what they refer to as "the target population", included twelve men who described themselves as "heterosexual":

Twelve men (10 beat users and two beat non-users) described themselves as heterosexual, in spite of having sexual histories that involved men, currently being engaged actively in seeking sexual contact with men and being given the opportunity to say that they were bisexual. This would seem to suggest either that such men are unwilling to acknowledge

the homosexual aspects of their lives, or that they genuinely feel themselves to be heterosexual and find this status uncompromised by occasional sexual contact with men. (Bennett *et al.*, 1989: 312)

I note how Bennett *et al.* were in turn “unwilling to acknowledge” the heterosexual, that is, the explicitly *non-bisexual* aspects of the twelve men's lives beyond these two sentences, having “given” the men “the opportunity” to say that they were “bisexual” [at least]. The researchers' unwillingness extends to the study's titular self-description which insistently and exclusively refers to “a sample of homosexual and bisexual men” even though the writers acknowledge that the twelve men in question, *who remained included in the study*, might “genuinely feel themselves to be heterosexual”. What's at stake for Bennett *et al.*, it would seem, is the idea, no, the *ideal* of their posited “target population”, that is, “homosexual and bisexual men”, an ideal which can not be said or seen to include the “heterosexual”. In the face of evidence to the contrary, the researchers deny the self-described “heterosexual” men an identity distinct from that of the self-described “bisexual” men. The self-descriptions “homosexual” and “bisexual” remain acceptable; the self-description “heterosexual”, even as it is acknowledged, is, by Bennett *et al.*, forcefully resisted and suppressed. The hypothesised “target population” and, by default, its sacrosanct, inviolable heteronormative other (see Berlant & Warner, 1998: 548, note 2) persist, *as if* they were.

I note that Samuel R Delany's term for the rhetorical mode of scientific or systematic research, as distinct from the know-how disseminated via “street talk”, is “straight talk” (Delany, 1991).

## Melbourne's gay saunas

Designating the object seems to be getting harder but, as Beckett put it, “we're getting on”, so I persist:

Another significant difference between the two editions of the gay travel guide published in Berlin is in the number of ideograms used to list services and facilities potentially available at any given sauna. In the first edition there were 14 ideograms but by the sixth edition this had grown to 23. Services and facilities added to the list between the first and sixth editions include:

“terrace”,  
“glory holes”,  
“sling”,  
“St. Andrew's cross”,  
“maze”,

“shop”,  
“snacks”,  
“free condoms”,  
“free extra-towels” and  
“internet access”.

The fourteen services and facilities common to both first and sixth editions include:

“steam bath”,  
“sauna dry heat”,  
“whirlpool”,  
“plunge basin”,  
“swimmingpool” [sic],  
“showers”,  
“video room”,  
“relax room”,  
“darkroom” [sic],  
“massage”,  
“solarium”,  
“work-out room”,  
“bar” and  
“restaurant”.

I wonder if this means that the fourteen services and facilities common to both editions were the components of a gay sauna that were considered, by the editors at least, as *essential*. The first edition listed a total of 507 saunas of which a mere 7 offered the full range of fourteen services and facilities. The remaining 500 offered varying combinations of some of these fourteen services and facilities but not all. In the sixth edition I've not yet found a sauna that lists all 23 services and facilities, though I did find one in Lausanne that lists 20 (it looks good!).

The six saunas listed for Melbourne in the sixth edition, each offer between 4 and 15 of the 23 listed services and facilities, *according to the ideograms*. In the first edition, the five listed saunas offered between 4 and 11 of the 14 services and facilities listed at that time. It's apparent, then, that saunas differ internationally, intranationally, and over time—indeed, in relation to this last point, they can be said to differ from themselves—and this acknowledged protean mutability is echoed and reinforced in both *When You're Hot You're Hot* and *Cruising*:

The other thing about venues is diversity—each area of a venue is different from the others, each person uses venues for different reasons and in different ways, and each visit to a venue is different. (Gray & McGuigan, 2002: 2; VAC outreach project, 2004: 5)

Yet what niggles in the face of this plain though vague observation, exact in its inexactitude, is the imagining by the *Sauna Guide* editors of a sauna consisting of all 23 services and facilities, an ideal sauna with which all other saunas on the

planet could be fruitfully compared but with which none is ultimately identical. An ur-sauna.

### **low hard come-stained beds, 1971**

Apart from a couple of preliminary, and very frightening, encounters on a vaguely gay section of a beach, my first real introduction to homosexual life was the bath house. These resemble nothing so much as giant steaming whorehouses in which everyone is a customer; clad only in white towels men prowl the hallways, groping each other in furtive search for instant sex, making it in small, dark cubicles on low, hard, come-stained beds. (Altman, 1972: 10)

Altman's reference to "low, hard, come-stained beds", specifically, to "low ... beds", intrigues. He's aware of the height being lower than he expects. For a bed. For a bed that *is* a bed, that is. But is this low un-bed-like thing a bed, in effect, or is it bed-like yet unconvincingly so, a "drag" bed, a failed mimesis resembling a bed without actually being one? How? At what point does the name "bed" fail to properly signify the object in question, if it is an object, that is, prior to signification? How un-bed-like must a bed [in a "bath house"] become before it no longer convincingly *performs*?

I note that Altman writes of what bath houses "resemble", not what they *are*.

I also note his reference to white towels:

### **"clad only in white towels"**

In Melbourne, the local theatre production *Bison* (Shaw, 2000) enjoyed two well-attended seasons a few years ago, one of which was mounted for the local annual gay and lesbian Midsumma Festival. The staging was designed so that in an extended sequence portraying men in gay saunas the actors changed into white towels. They wore the white towels in the publicity photos, too. In all of them. During the rehearsal period, the actors were asked to visit sites in Melbourne where men met men to have sex, and there they made notes and generally observed. According to the director-writer who told me so, the designer, a woman, never visited a sauna (personal communication, 2000). I don't know how or by whom, then, the decision was made that *white* towels would be used. Given that the performance style in *Bison* was not naturalistic, it could be argued, persuasively, that white towels imaged an emblematic ideal, a generic distillation of all sauna towels, of *the* sauna towel. Fine, but how did *the* sauna towel come to be white; what is it that white towels offer that, say, green towels do not? An

image of purity and hygiene, a guarantee of freshness unsullied by either recent or continued use? A white screen-like surface onto which all manner of phantasms may be projected, including potentially a projection of the ideal unclothed figure wrapped inside, thus the *Bison* publicity snaps?

Possibly.

What seems noteworthy now is the lack of comment about this choice at the time. No one discussed it publicly, and no one spoke of it privately to me, not even to remark it as cliché. It slipped under the collective radar. In a highly artificial non-naturalistic style of presentation, the white towels presented as the *natural* choice, which is to say, effectively, *as if* there had been no need to choose at all. This is odd, given that no Melbourne sauna at the time, and there were six of them, distributed white towels to its clientele. Red, black & red, green, blue, blue & green, rust, maroon and [*shudder*] assorted pastels, sure, but none that were white.

These [bath houses] resemble nothing so much as giant steaming whorehouses in which everyone is a customer; clad only in white towels men prowl the hallways, groping each other in furtive search for instant sex, making it in small, dark cubicles on low, hard, come-stained beds. (Altman, 1972: 10)

I mounted the broad marble steps leading up to the lobby and at the top immediately found myself in the midst of seminaked men wearing nothing but white bath towels around the waist and padding barefoot in either direction across the smooth marble floor of the lobby. (Rumaker, 1979: 5)

The same men who prowled those steamy hallways in their little white towels also turned over police cars and set them on fire during the May 21, 1979, White Night riots in San Francisco, which followed Dan White's trial for the murders of Mayor George R. Moscone and city supervisor Harvey Milk. (Califia, 1994: 34-35)

Even in the darkest of orgy rooms, a white towel still stands out like a welcoming beacon; and if it doesn't outline the silhouette of a perfect butt, neither does it discourage wandering hands. (O'Hara, 1999: 110)

In an attempt to break the barriers that separate people, the baths equalize patrons through a uniform dress code: a white towel is distributed at the point of entry, and through the dimness of lights, a theatrically designed lighting scheme favors the other senses over sight. (Tattelman, 1999: 72)

The writings cited above, produced over a period of almost thirty years, all reference US bathhouses. One might reasonably expect from reading them, diverse as they are, that towels in US bathhouses would be white, always. But one might have similarly expected that towels in Melbourne saunas would be white, too, especially after seeing *Bison* [or its publicity], without it being so. I

wonder, for instance, if that's an expectation that you, the reader, have had until now.

I cite the following description from a previously cited report on sex-on-premises venues in Sydney:

One feature that saunas and other sex-on-premises venues have in common is the buildings where they are located, which are divided into two clearly defined public and private areas. The public area is the space where patrons can socialise. Apart from the front counter with bouncer/receptionist, and the front coffee room or bar, the public areas of the building consist of: the private lockers, where patrons can keep their street clothes while on the premises; a safe, where they can have their valuables kept; TV room, games room (video games and pool table), video room and gym. These areas are shared by everyone. Although most of the pre- and post-sexual interactions occur in these areas of the building, no explicit sexual activity takes place here, although one expects to see 'seminaked men wearing nothing but white bath towels around the waist and padding barefoot in either direction across the smooth marble floor of the lobby' (Rumaker, 1977: 5). (Santana & Richters, 1998: 14-15) [Rumaker citation in original]

The Sydney-based ethnographer, citing Michael Rumaker's eloquent *roman à clef* written twenty years earlier and set in the Everard Baths of New York City, ambiguously states that an undesignated "one", the research officer, presumably, "expects" to see such scenes in Sydney now, that is, in 1998. Expects? Of course, the reader isn't meant to read this too literally, but then how much of the rest of this generic description is literally *literally* [sic] what "one" "expects" to see?

Such refracted visions are not restricted to white towels:

### **HIV/AIDS, 1977 [sic]**

In his 1998 history of "gay literature", Woods also cites Rumaker's *A Day and a Night at the Baths* in his chapter on "The AIDS Epidemic" even though Rumaker's *roman à clef*, an account of a first visit to New York's Everard Baths, was serialised in 1977 and published in book-form in 1979, long before the first traces of what would become known as the HIV/AIDS epidemic were first documented in the *US Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* of June 5, 1981, where arguably the literature, though not the epidemic, of HIV/AIDS begins (Centers for Disease Control, 1981). The trigger for contextualising Rumaker's work as "AIDS Epidemic" literature is a single sentence, cited by Woods as "representative" (that word again) of how even "the healthiest looking bodies remind him [Rumaker's first person narrator] of the likelihood of disease":

The shapely posteriors parading by in the hall I imagined rampant with hepatitis, the penises that flamed with passion flaming with spirochetes as well; and scabies, and yaws, and all the other parasites carried here, along with desire, by the sailors of love from every

port of the globe, the lonely and flesh-hungry from every corner of the nation and from every borough in the city; carrying here centuries-old infections of the fathers, their gay sons infected hosts, carriers in blind desire of invisible flesh-eating stowaways on bodies innocent of contaminating, and, in imperative yearning riding out the fears of infection, driven to this contagious harbor again and again, myself among them now, there are so few unrestricted havens, no ports free of the contaminating fathers. (cited in Woods, 1998: 360)

The sentence, far from being “representative” of many or even several other such passages in Rumaker’s work, is in fact unique. It represents itself merely. There’s nothing else in *A Day and a Night at the Baths* quite like it in either content or form. But Woods, surveying “gay literature” through the lens of “AIDS”, chooses to inflect the passage, and Rumaker’s work, as though Cassandra-like it somehow prophesied “dangers past and to come” (Woods, 1998: 361). In this way, the success of HIV and the pervasive feelings in the mid-1990s of helplessness in the face of its spectacular lethal impact and its relatively unchecked spread are represented reductively by Woods not as history but as fate. In Woods’ account, the Everard Baths, destroyed by fire in 1977, figures in its [Old Testament] Sodomitic destiny as emblematic of all bathhouses and, by ludicrous extension, of all gay men:

Bathhouses catch fire; bodies catch diseases. Rumaker offers no secure emergence, for gay men, from the ‘tragic’ nightmare of their past. (Woods, 1998: 361)

A preoccupation with “AIDS” blinds Woods to what else goes on in Rumaker’s work. He is so dazzled by the single magisterial sentence he cites, and by his own overriding expectations, that he possibly overlooks and certainly fails to acknowledge what Rumaker with ironic good humour makes of it himself immediately afterwards:

... and, in imperative yearning riding out the fears of infection, driven to this contagious harbor again and again, myself among them now, there are so few unrestricted havens, no ports free of the contaminating fathers. [new paragraph] My legs and arms began to itch, more from imagination I expect (I’d seen the attendant changing the linen in vacated rooms), but I scratched energetically anyway. (Rumaker, 1979: 28)

In relation to gay saunas, the HIV/AIDS imperative continues to blind and in some cases pervert, still infecting discourse as an “epidemic of signification” (Treichler, 1987).

## **Melbourne’s gay saunas**

And then if we...

There comes a point at which the attempt to designate the object needs to pause and take stock. The more one seeks to define the sauna either as built environment or as social formation, the more ambiguous and elusive it becomes. The details don't add up. That there *is* something *there* and that something *is* happening feels certain. But beyond this, neither definite nor substantial, the sauna shimmers through its various *proper* representations imprecisely, inconsistently and nonsensically. Yes, something *is* happening, and it's happening *somewhere*. But what precisely it is, this *scene*, ultimately eludes. It doesn't unfold *onstage*. Not entirely. This interests me.

Five researched publications—three driven by epidemiological imperatives, two by commercial concerns, each presenting itself as a reliable “guide”—when read closely, and in proximity to each other and the research literature that precedes them, complicate, confuse, contradict, disorientate, elide and entangle. As the representations accrue, they, like the steam on Joseph Styles' spectacles, cloud or “fog over” one's ability to see. I, who have found myself *inside* most of “these places” so “variously called” in Melbourne, and others beside, now find myself *outside* amazed at the difficulty, the impossibility, perhaps, of *properly* representing that which lies within.

I find myself looking not through but *at* the obscuring fog.

*[a silence, then]*

Perhaps if we shift our gaze momentarily toward the subject [which thus becomes an object] of these various [proper] representations, by which I mean not the [imporper] figures being researched—the generally anonymous bisexual black educated gay HIV-negative HIV-positive homeless homosexual hot local mixed older professional [non]representative Spanish-speaking straight white younger clientele clubbers crowd group guys individuals informants interviewees males men participants patrons people persons population respondents sample (all of these descriptors being derived from the literature so far cited)—but the figure that researches: the researcher.

(Initially, *proper* representations of gay saunas were produced in sympathetic relation to the movement that became known as “gay liberation”. They entailed what was then believed to be a coming out of the bathhouse, a production and distribution of information and knowledge which had hitherto been concealed, an airing of linen, dirty or otherwise, from “the closet” (Sedgwick, 1990). It is possible, perhaps necessary, to now understand this process as one whereby “the bathhouse” was produced as an effect of a disciplinary articulation which was itself produced under the aegis of a contested bid for power. Since the 1980s the scrutiny of the bathhouse, now internationally sedimented as a generic urban sex

institution and as an object of study, has been fuelled by the emergency known as the HIV/AIDS epidemic. HIV/AIDS research has tended to deal with "the" bathhouse as though it actually existed in the terms in which previous scholarship had produced it. The current project seeks to interrogate the ontological status of the object of these studies and, with it, the ontological status of the subject, including and especially the subject who researches. Including, that is, me.)

I decide to investigate further.



**a procedure**



## obscænus

### **gorgon**

Perseus then collected the sandals, wallet, and helmet from the nymphs, and flew westwards to the Land of the Hyperboreans, where he found the Gorgons asleep, among rain-worn shapes of men and wild beasts petrified by Medusa. He fixed his eyes on the reflection in the shield, Athene guided his hand, and he cut off Medusa's head with one stroke of the sickle. (Graves, 1955: 239)

To gaze upon the Gorgon is to be in the position of the one who dies, who is already dead, even in the moment of the gaze. To represent the Gorgon as a figure that can be observed and survived, then, is to make a non-truth, a pathetic fiction, a fantastic wish, a delusion. The representation of the Gorgon by ancient Greek [vase] painters respects this, the figure, never shown in profile (Agamben, 1999: 53), reduced to pure inescapable gaze, all gaze, total gaze, no less. The modern fantasy of seeing the Gorgon, of gazing upon her yet remaining unaffected—as in the iconic artworks of Cellini and Moreau—coincides with a turn to the Cartesian abstraction whereby experience and the knowledge of experience become confused, and whereby the object of knowledge is rendered distinct from the knowing subject. This metaphysical turn pervades contemporary life as its principal consoling myth; as Duchamp's tomb-stone so scathingly put it: *D'ailleurs c'est toujours les autres qui meurent*. It's always the others who die. The ancient Greeks knew better. Actaeon gazes upon Artemis, and is torn to pieces. Likewise Pentheus upon the maenads, with similar results.

The obscene cannot be *survived* once experienced, else it is not obscene, merely out of sight.

The Gorgon can be experienced [actually] reflected and refracted in Perseus' shield. The figure can be managed at this level. It can be known. The technique requires a mastering of the indirect mirrored gaze; the occasion remains a situation requiring care. The ancient Greek picturing of the Gorgon reflects the reflection on Perseus' shield—thus the tondo form in which the images predominately survive—as the image that can be known but which is not the facing of death. This image evidences the obscene reality of the Gorgon while preserving that obscenity's force. The image, even as it confirms imminence, affirms absence.

## **obscenities offstage**

While the Oxford English Dictionary (1989) states that the word *obscene* is “of doubtful etymology”, Saslow has suggested a derivation from the Latin *obscænus*, a theatrical term denoting “offstage” (Saslow, 1994: 215). The suggestion is supported by practice. Huston, for instance, has noted how in Attic tragedy “there is no convention for representing the interior of the palace [the site of incest, mutilation and murder] ... the private is obscene and cannot appear” (Huston, 1992: 62). Two thousand years later, De Sade teasingly describes a closet, furnished “for every kind of impurity”, adjoining the central “theatre” of the chateau in *The 120 days of Sodom*, and then, a few pages later when an atrocity is committed in it, denies the reader narrative access (Sade, 1966: 238, 272).

Neither *the obscene* nor *the offstage*, the one perhaps identical with the other, readily “appears”. They exist essentially at and as limits of representation.

## **mirror, shield**

Again: An experience of the Gorgon is available, reflected and refracted in Perseus’ shield. Athene (wisdom) artfully crafts this shield so that its surface performs as a mirror. By looking *into* the image of the reflection, which is simultaneously a looking *onto* the surface of the shield, the petrifying head can be severed, handled, [ab]used. The Gorgon can be known. She is never seen absolutely, yet she is experienced, imminently known, *not just known about*, all the same.

The current project intends something similar. It does not pretend to offer the “actual” sauna but the sauna as reflected and refracted. It keeps the sauna obscene even as it deals with its representations. It reminds the reader that she is not inside the sauna but that the sauna is *near*, and that no representation that pretends to totality or blithe cartesian knowlege of it is, in any substantial way, of use. What counts is that which is and remains obscene, not that which is merely unnoted or unobserved.

## rejection

### the observer

The history of “observation” in sauna research abounds with aporia, contradictions and flaws reflecting the tensions inherent in the task. At its origin, as it were, stands the figure of R A Laud Humphreys: postgraduate student, Episcopalian pastor, ethnographer, husband and father. Humphreys was the first social scientist to *explicitly* position himself within a public sex environment as an observational researcher (Humphreys, 1970). In *Tearoom Trade: Impersonal Sex in Public Places*, a reworking of his doctoral dissertation, he described in detail how he studied sexual encounters between men in nineteen public toilets in an unidentified US city (the toilets were known to their sexually active users as “tearooms”, thus the “tearoom trade” of his title). In an unprecedented use of fieldwork observation, Humphreys adopted the role of a lookout or “watchqueen” within the nineteen tearooms, and, from April 1966 to April 1967, was able to observe and record 120 acts of fellatio without disturbing the tearoom “scene”, that is, without taking on an “overtly sexual” role. Or so he claimed. The possibility that his watchful presence, on the alert for the approach of unwanted intruders on behalf of the men engaging in fellatio, might also sexually satisfy exhibitionist urges in those same men is a possibility he never entertained [in print]. Nor did he ever acknowledge the erotic pleasure afforded to him as a researcher in intermittently being able to observe the sex-acts he desired to see:

one might wait for months before observing a deviant act

he wistfully noted, before adding parenthetically

(unless solitary masturbation is considered deviant) (Humphreys, 1975: 6)

—which only begs the question of how masturbation can be “solitary” if it is being overtly observed.

Also in *Tearoom Trade*, and rarely discussed, if at all, Humphreys reported making observational visits to gay baths in order to compare (Humphreys, 1975: 152-160). He noted, for instance, how picking up a partner takes longer at the baths, but strangely, given that he is so detailed in his accounts of his observational practice in tearooms, he did not describe the organisation or structure of his observational practice inside gay baths at all. His silence in this matter niggles, given that the lookout or “watchqueen” role he performed within the tearoom scene would have proven redundant within the enclosed world of

the baths. Further, in his discussion of gay baths, he offered, *in passing*, the telling detail that a man entering a gay bath surrenders his watch and wallet in exchange for a locker key, shower clogs and a towel that is “always too small”. This towel “always too small” suggests a depth of experience and an accumulation of knowledge incommensurate with the passing references he otherwise makes. How Humphreys knew it to be true, that the towel was “always” too small, is not, by him, disclosed (see Simes, 1998: 56, 72).

Following Humphreys, whom they cite, Weinberg & Williams nominated “fieldwork observation and informal interviews” as the key methods used in gathering data for their study, “Gay Baths and the Social Organization of Impersonal Sex” (Weinberg & Williams, 1975: 125), yet offered a mere three sentences outlining what the “fieldwork observation” entailed:

Five gay baths - all relatively new and modern - were studied in cities in the southeastern, midwestern, and western parts of the United States. Observations were conducted at different times (e.g. afternoons and late in the evening, weekdays and weekends) in order to obtain as broad a picture as possible. Fieldnotes were taken in private areas or immediately after leaving the bath, and observations were interpreted and validated by interviews with bath patrons contacted and interviewed away from that setting.

In reading their summary account, questions arose as to what they actually did: Were the five “gay baths” that were studied intended to offer “a representative sample” of some kind? If so, of what and how? If not, on what basis were these baths selected for study? How were they distributed in relation to the [three, four or five] “cities in the southeastern, midwestern, and western parts of the United States”? Over what period of time were the observations conducted: hours? days? weeks? Was this period of time equally distributed between and reflected across all five gay baths? Did the researchers observe together or separately? Consistently? If separately, how was parity assured? Were fieldnotes made in collaboration or discretely? How immediate was “immediately after leaving the bath”? Were fieldnotes ever subject to editorial revision? If so, at what stage, for what purpose, and by whom? How many bath patrons were contacted for follow up “informal interviews”? How were they selected? How were their contact details obtained? Was each gay bath studied equally represented by one or more of its patrons? If so, in what ways? If not, what form of sample did these patrons constitute? Where precisely were the “informal interviews” conducted and how were they documented? In what ways were the informal interviews “informal”, and how did this informality inform the research? Were some informal interviewees more informative than others? In what ways? Were all interviewees offered a standard questionnaire? How were disagreements between interviewees, if any, resolved, if at all?

Most of these issues, or ones akin to them, were addressed in detail by Humphreys, who mentioned, for example, how an assistant, “a cooperating

respondent”, made “30 systematic observations” on Humphreys’ behalf using the same standard observation sheet that Humphreys had devised and used [and the *pro forma* of which he published in *Tearoom Trade*]. Humphreys then adds that his own observations and those of the respondent generally agreed but notes that the respondent tended to concentrate on the details of the sex that occurred rather than on the interactions leading up to it, and that the respondent’s estimates of participants’ ages amounted to an average lower than Humphreys’ overall (Humphreys, 1975: 33-34). Weinberg & Williams’ account comes nowhere near this methodological *aside* in the level of detail offered. And the scale of the problem—for it is a problem that they disclose so few of their procedures, a consequence being that their work emerges phantasmagorically, effectively metaphysically, within the scientific scene—becomes clearer when I read ethnographic descriptions penned by them (?) such as the following:

The orgy room is equally crowded. Two males are engaging in anal intercourse on a central bed, surrounded by some 15–20 spectators. Throughout the room, cruising and sexual activity are taking place. When they come into the room, patrons move clockwise around the room, squeezing through the crowd. The room is very hot and humid, with a great deal of traffic and no conversation. (Weinberg & Williams, 1975: 127-128)

What is the status of this passage? As a plain depiction of what Barker has scathingly termed “the quotidian real” (Barker, 1995: 2-3), the description offers its readers [apparently] unadorned information. Yet more questions are raised than resolved: Which of the two scientists observed this scene? Did both? (In the interests of avoiding an ongoing “he/they” entanglement, let’s assume “they” both did.) From where in the room did they observe? What precisely was the form of their “observation”? Were they included among the figures who are described? How did their presence[s] contribute to the event’s spatial and social construction? Did they, too, on arrival move clockwise through the room? Did they later join the crowd through which new arrivals squeezed? How attractive or repulsive did they appear in [or out] of a towel? And to whom? (Not flippant questions: the terms “attractive” and “repulsive” register kinetic impulses that dynamically inflect erotically charged space.) What necessary tactics, if any, did the researchers deploy in order to maintain professional focus? Did the observed figures present as anonymously and interchangeably as they have been described while they performed their various roles? Were there no “stars” among their number? For how long was this *scene* observed? Did the observed details present themselves consecutively and evenly to attention as described, that is, *as if* they constituted a *tableau vivant*? To what specific purpose, apart from compliance with convention, were the observations, written down later, cast in the present tense? Were the five sentences that constitute the description written initially as printed here or were the notes later polished or revised? If so, by whom, and for what purpose; with what effect in mind? Were similar scenes witnessed on other occasions? In what ways was this witnessed scene typical of the five gay baths

studied, and in what ways was it unique? How did the researchers choose these particular notes for inclusion in their report, and with what intention?

I contrast this passage with one penned by the novelist Rita Mae Brown, also published in 1975. Assisted by her friend Arthur (Bell? see Bell, 1994), Brown claimed to have toured incognito through New York's Club Baths for several hours on 21 March 1975 wearing a towelling robe, a padded jock strap and a false moustache glued to her upper lip (Brown, 1994). Not the last woman to tour a male bathhouse in the guise of a man (see Kozyra, 1999), her account of what happened in the Club Baths' orgy room offers a yardstick against which the shortcomings of Weinberg & Williams' supposedly plain description can be measured:

At last the Maze spills into a dark and unbelievable orgy room. A large square bed, about the size of four double beds placed together, dominates the room, with about four feet of space around it so men have a place from which to observe. The silence amazed me. Seventy-five to one hundred men packed into that room, seven of them on the bed, and not one word was spoken. Heavy breathing, sucking, and a few timid moans were the only noises. Everyone watched the bed where a black man assfucked a white man while another white held his balls waiting for the surge. One couple valiantly tried to pull off sixty-nine without choking each other to death. The two other men on the bed circled each other like wrestlers trying to get the proper hold. [new paragraph] Inching around the bed, I felt like I was sliding by a picket fence - all the erect penises behind me were hitting me in the small of my back. People reach for your genitals as you pass. (Brown, 1994: 72)

Brown offers what Weinberg & Williams withhold: an account of her engaged presence in the scene. The contrast between her orgy room and theirs lies not in the physical properties of the room itself, about which Brown offers more physical detail anyway, but in the articulation of her *experience*, or rather, of her knowledge of her experience, which is explicitly foregrounded and which permeates all that she has to say: the "picket fence" of penises hitting the small of her back (oh, so she's short), the evocative economy of "the silence amazed me", and the varying levels of attention she invests in the participants in the scene ranging from the baroque spectacle of the inter-racial trio (not her way of phrasing it) to the "everyone" (75-100 men) watching them.

In the decades since Weinberg & Williams' article was first published, there has been no published interrogation of their working methods. Quite the reverse. While their paper has been cited as a key reference repeatedly since publication (Styles, 1979; Richwald *et al.*, 1988; Bolton *et al.*, 1994; Santana & Richters, 1998; Tattelman, 1999; Flowers *et al.*, 2000; Tewksbury, 2002), the precise form of their "fieldwork observation" remains obscure. As researchers in the field, their presence, while generally acknowledged, cannot be traced reliably; they, a duo, are reduced absurdly, but conventionally, to the status of a single disembodied, omniscient, Cartesian eye; and the object of their enquiry, "gay baths", is offered up generically as a naturalistic theatrical spectacle, one laid out benignly *as if*

beyond a fourth wall, believable [above all] and [seemingly] immediately before the spectator's equally disembodied gaze. In these respects, their project *typifies* bathhouse ethnographies prior to the outbreak of HIV/AIDS (Hoffman, 1968: 48-52; Bell & Weinberg, 1978: 239-241; Delph, 1978 135-148) with the US gay bathhouse emerging in the discourse (that is, on the stage) of the human sciences during the same period as a coherent cultural form, but with the construction of that form depending in turn on an elision of the means of its production, on a phantasmagoric procedure more readily associated with naturalistic theatre.

In 1976, Taylor challenged this practice in part by mapping himself explicitly within his studied field, the clandestine homosexual subculture of Mexico City's *public* bathhouses (Taylor, 1993), but it was the aforementioned Joseph Styles who reversed the trend with his reflexive critique of adopting "outsider" and "insider" roles in "researching gay baths" (Styles, 1979). In Styles, we have the first ethnographer willing to explicitly position himself within the US gay bathhouse *scene*. In doing so, he effectively dismantled bathhouse ethnography's fourth wall. What's missing in his case is the ethnography that he researched. It remains unpublished [in written form], and like Styles himself, who ominously disappeared from the scene of bathhouse research immediately afterwards, it sadly remains lost.

Following Styles, it was almost twenty years before sauna ethnographies were next attempted (Keogh *et al.*, 1998; Santana & Richters, 1998; Tewksbury, 2002). Whether this was due to the spectre of HIV/AIDS or the embarrassment to science posed by Styles' good-natured revelations remains unclear. By the time fieldwork observation did resume within the English-speaking world, the protocols of what would *properly* constitute an acceptable methodology were sedimented. In none of these more recent ethnographies did the researchers participate in sexual activities while observing, or so they stated. In all of them, the observational procedure was described in more detail than before. And in all of them, the research protocols and the physical and social organisation of the venues under investigation imposed major constraints on what could or couldn't be actually observed or otherwise known, frustrating attempts to produce understandings grounded in verifiable data. Not that this inhibited Richard Tewksbury:

### **deviant behavio[u]r**

In October 2000, Richard Tewksbury, then professor of Justice Administration at the University of Louisville, Kentucky, submitted to the editors of *Deviant Behavior* a paper which, a few months later after a process of peer review, was

accepted for publication. It appeared in print at the beginning of 2002 (Tewksbury, 2002).

In his paper, Tewksbury described how he posed as a “potential participant” in two “gay bathhouses” in an unnamed “major midwestern city” (Cleveland, Ohio?). He spent a total of “45.5 hours” inside the two bathhouses, studying in each case both the building and its inhabitants. While onsite in each establishment, he made notes on an average of four or five times each hour in one of the private rooms available for hire. The rest of the time he wandered through the building covertly observing what he could as *if* he were “a real member of the setting being studied”, what he has called a “potential participant” as distinct from a [non-]participant observer (see Tewksbury, 2001). His field notes were later expanded, elaborated and analysed “after leaving the settings”. That is, once he was back *outside*.

In describing the two bathhouses, Tewksbury noted their major facilities, their materiality and design, and the internal organisation and sequencing of areas within each building. He also offered detailed but generalised descriptions of the various behaviours of bathhouse patrons, what he called “the social and sexual dynamics of the setting”. He acknowledged the scholarship preceding and informing his research, and specifically referenced Weinberg & Williams and Styles, among others. He correctly noted that “where the present work goes beyond the existing literature is in analyzing the micro-aspects of the structure, organization, and interaction between and among patrons”.

In his concluding remarks, he noted:

Bathhouses host an abundance of high-risk sexual activity; oral and anal sex are common, and condoms are rarely used. In response to this concern, the mid-1980s saw the closure (both voluntary and forced) of numerous bathhouses. However, in the 1990s, many bathhouses reopened, and began to appear in some cities that previously did not have such facilities. Consequently, as the HIV epidemic has continued, bathhouses need to be considered as important foci for HIV prevention and intervention efforts. At present, the likelihood of HIV transmission among bathhouse patrons appears to be quite high. (Tewksbury, 2002: 108)

And continued:

The present work shows that there clearly is cause for concern regarding health aspects of bathhouses. Safer sex practices are generally not practiced and patrons typically engage in sex with multiple, usually anonymous partners. (Tewksbury, 2002: 110)

The evidentiary basis for the claims relating to condom use and unsafe sex in bathhouses, claims that Tewksbury by inference applied to *all* bathhouses in the

USA, if not to all bathhouses in North America, or indeed the world, would appear to be founded entirely on the following [non-]observations:

at no time were any condoms seen being used, and no used, discarded condoms or open condom wrappers were ever seen in either facility. This does not mean that condoms are never used; it is probable that condoms are most likely used for anal sex [...] which presumably is most likely to occur in private rooms. Therefore if condoms are used for anal intercourse it would not be readily known to an observer. However, based on verbal solicitations of the researcher it is clear that condoms are not consistently used even for sex in private rooms. Comments such as ‘Want to fuck? You don’t have to use a condom.’ were heard on multiple occasions. (Tewksbury, 2002: 101)

Tewksbury offered no other evidence to support his claims regarding the absence of “safer sex practices” in bathhouses. Indeed, he acknowledged that his findings stood “in direct contrast” to those of Richwald *et al.* (Richwald *et al.*, 1988) and Bolton *et al.* (Bolton *et al.*, 1994). Puzzled, he continued:

The reasons for this difference in findings is unclear. It may be a difference based on geographic location of the study sites, it may be that condom use has decreased since these earlier studies were completed, or it may be that what men actually do in bathhouses differs from what they report on surveys. (Tewksbury, 2002: 101)

Despite this lack of clarity, his faith in his own findings remained unshaken and his large and sombre claims were offered without further qualification.

I note several immediate and obvious problems:

“at no time were any condoms seen being used”

Seen by Tewksbury, that is. I note the following:

- Tewksbury’s study is based on a total of 45.5 hours of [non-participant] observation in the two bathhouses. During these hours, he made periodic retreats, “usually every 10 to 15 minutes”, to write field notes. Accordingly, there must have been 150 to 200 of these retreats overall but he reports on neither their average nor total duration. Nor does he clarify whether or not he included them in his total of 45.5 hours of observation. During each retreat, he wrote notes inside his rented room, presumably alone, out of sight, and, in turn, unable to observe other men.
- The total of 45.5 hours of observation in the two bathhouses includes time spent in “sex free zones” and in areas “intended for nonsexual use” in which men would engage in unspecified “sexual activities” but only on rare occasions. Tewksbury indicates neither the proportion nor the sum total of time he spent observing in these “sex free zones” and areas “intended” for

non-sexual use, as distinct from areas where he could expect to observe condoms [not] being used.

- Tewksbury asserts that “the most common locations for sexual activities are private rooms”, and “most sex in private rooms is performed behind closed doors” (91). He also designates “anal sex” as “most likely” to occur in private rooms, and concedes that “if condoms are used for anal intercourse it would not be readily known to an observer” (101). In his role, then, as a *potential* participant, he was unable to witness most of the sex that occurred in the most common location within each building for sexual activities, including and especially acts entailing anal penetration.
- Finally, although he asserts that it occurs, at no point does Tewksbury *testify* to *witnessing* any act of anal penetration during his 45.5 hours of observation. Nor does he offer any estimates of the range, frequency, and incidence, either relative or total, of acts of penetrative and non-penetrative sex, of any kind, that he witnessed overall. He merely notes, instead, that he never saw condoms being used.

“and no used, discarded condoms or open condom wrappers were ever seen in either facility”

Again, “seen” by Tewksbury:

- In describing the two bathhouses in detail, he refers to neither the ashtrays nor rubbish bins that must have been there, nor to other facilities that could be presumed as given: toilets, for instance. Nor does he discuss the design and construction of ashtrays and bins—whether, for instance, they’re open or covered—or their placement and distribution throughout each complex, nor their total numbers and availability overall. It’s *as if* such receptacles for various items of litter, say, used condoms and their wrappers, did not exist in either facility.
- According to Tewksbury, most sex, including and especially anal sex, would “most likely” occur in private rooms behind closed doors. But at no time does he indicate that he ever stepped inside a private room—other than the ones he hired and to which he retreated “every 10 to 15 minutes” for note taking—with a view to inspecting it for debris.
- Tewksbury states that both bathhouses are open “24 hours a day”. Effectively, they never close. He notes that one area in “Facility A”, between the entrance and the private rooms, is “very clean” (86), and he never describes any area in either bathhouse as other than clean. Nor does he indicate by what means or under what conditions, including how frequently, how regularly, and how

thoroughly, cleaning and general maintenance, including the clearing away of debris and litter, occurred.

- And finally, again, he gives no indication of the incidence, either relative or total, of sexual acts that he witnessed in either bathhouse which would have been rendered safer if condoms had been worn.

“comments such as ‘Want to fuck? You don’t have to use a condom.’ were heard on multiple occasions”

Were “heard” by Tewksbury:

- Not overheard but “heard”. Tewksbury specifically refers to the comments as “verbal solicitations of the researcher”. He never indicates that he overheard or observed anyone else solicited in this way at any time during his 45.5 hours of observation in either venue.
- The phrase “on multiple occasions” references an unquantified plural that could, say, amount to either 20, 200, or 2 such occasions. That is, by indicating a general plurality, the phrase could connote an abundance where there might be none. Given that it is so imprecise, it sits oddly with his otherwise characteristic numerical exactitude, his “45.5 hours” of observation, for example, or the following passage excerpted from his description of “Facility A”:

There are 50 private rooms on two floors, with rooms on the second floor having 19” televisions suspended from the ceiling showing pornographic videos on closed-circuit. Each private room is approximately 8’ x 8’ with dark wood paneling, a light on a dimmer switch, and a 8” x 8” window in the door. (Tewksbury, 2002: 86)

- Tewksbury has not indicated the number of men who solicited him for sex without condoms, merely that such solicitations occurred “on multiple occasions”; that is, he does not indicate whether [the man or] the men who solicited him repeated the approach and, if [he or] they did repeat, the number of occasions on which they did so.
- Finally, the invitation to fuck without condoms does not automatically equate to fucking without condoms, nor does a verbal solicitation of any kind inevitably lead to a performance of the solicited deed. Tewksbury is himself exemplary in this respect. Though invited “on multiple occasions” to participate in fucking without condoms, he never did so. Nor does he report witnessing anyone who did.

Tewksbury's findings insofar as they relate to the lack of condom use and the prevalence of unsafe sex in bathhouses, are not substantiated by the evidence he provides. This is not to say that his findings are disproved; just that they remain unsubstantiated. He might have had further compelling evidence, for example, recorded in his field notes, evidence to which he has for whatever reason not specifically referred. Or he might not. We cannot tell. But even if he has such evidence to offer, evidence that he inexplicably failed to disclose, even then the inductive extrapolation of his data so that it applies to bathhouses in general, to a field, that is, which is potentially and globally without limits, rather than to two bathhouses in particular, stretches credibility to a point where it cannot be sustained. Tewksbury states that in 1999 there were 77 bathhouses operating in the USA, of which his pair, both located in one midwestern city, would represent a research sample of just over 1%, and in those two bathhouses, each open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, he spent a total of 45.5 hours overall, not managing to experience a complete 24 hour cycle in both.

With Tewksbury, as with all his observer forebears, *obscenity* prevails. Either the gay bathhouse [and or its clientele] eludes coherent observation and description, or the figure of the researcher and or his observational method [necessarily] disappears at crucial points from view. So naturalised is this pattern in bathhouse ethnography after almost forty years that neither the editors nor the peer reviewers at *Deviant Behavior* identified or interrogated the [to me] obvious gulf lying between the evidence that Tewksbury presented and the conclusions that he drew. It seems enough that his study sat [and sits] in recognisable methodological relation to its forebears whom it acknowledges, and that the conclusions Tewksbury draws are in keeping with the journal's ideologically inflected name.

### **sleeping with the natives**

I politely disentangled myself both flattered and embarrassed, by telling him that he was lovely, but that it was not the time and place for our great love. I did not mention that it is almost impossible to have sex and take field-notes at the same time. (Taylor, 1993: 106)

Taylor's dictum holds.

In the 1990s, US anthropologist Ralph Bolton, then engaged in HIV-related sauna research in Belgium (Bolton *et al.*, 1992; Bolton *et al.*, 1994), disclosed in a series of articles how he'd personally engaged in sexual activities as part of his ongoing study. He described repeatedly and in detail the function of such activities in relation to his research overall and argued for the ethical necessity of his conduct (Bolton, 1992; Bolton, 1995; Bolton, 1996).

Crucial to Bolton's practice were post-coital conversations with his various partners at saunas and the writing up of detailed notes afterwards at home. Repeatedly he claimed that he "*never engaged in sex for the purpose of collecting data*" (Bolton, 1995: 151; see also Bolton, 1992: 136-137), but seems either oblivious to or in denial of the subtle ways in which his sexual experience could have been informed by his awareness of *the writing that was to come*, a body of literature that as early as 1992 amounted to

a set of qualitative field notes (approximately 500 pages, 8 by 11, single-spaced) in which I recorded observations, conversations, and experiences. (Bolton, 1992: 134)

I recall here an excerpt from an interview in Sydney in which McInnes & Bollen (2000), then researching on behalf of the AIDS Council of NSW (ACON), document a story told them by one "Nathan" about the first time he fist-fucked a man. I cite the excerpted fragment:

And it was really cool, like it was in a public arena, which I found a turn-on as well and it wasn't something I'd gone expecting to do, or planning to do or anything. And my partner was at [venue Y] at the same time. I'd gone to [venue X] and he'd gone to [venue Y] and as I was doing it I was thinking, here's a story! [Laughter.] That actually added to it as well, because when we do go that we go back and talk about it, like you were saying before, we remember as many details as we can and we talk about that and it kind of adds ... telling the stories and I think wow ... doing this. (McInnes & Bollen, 2000: 35)

According to the earlier part of this transcript, Nathan first identifies his performance *while it is underway* as fist-fucking, then, in the citation above, comes to further identify it, again, *in the moment*, as "a story!" he'll later tell. His excitement is thus understood as an occasion of experiencing what for him is an unprecedented erotic technique *and* as an occasion of narrative composition. It is inconceivable that Nathan's affective investment in the act of fist-fucking can be distinguished here from an affective investment in his having a story to tell, which in his words "actually added to it".

I also cite professional writer Lawrence Schimel who wrote an account of masturbating a man in the steam room of New York's Chelsea Gym:

I'm tired, my body aches, I'm feeling not in the least erotic. I'd like someone to give me a massage, to feed me, and perhaps to hold me while I fall asleep. I'm not aroused and I'm not taking any pleasure out of jerking him off. Why then am I doing it? [new paragraph] Because he's attractive. Because I'm curious. Because I feel I should be responding to him, the situation. [new paragraph] Because I know I'll write this essay when I get home. (Schimel, 1999: 18)

Bolton's faith in his ability to distinguish between erotic experience and narrative composition is not shared by me. His invocation of the concept of "sex" is itself subject to self-conscious discursive formation. How Bolton *knows* he is having

a procedure: rejection

“sex” would seem, if we were to take him at his word [as we say], to be related to what he has identified as

the elementary units of behavior that constitute meaningful elements in sexual encounters (Bolton, 1992: 145)

tabled by him as

A Partial List of Erotic Behaviors That May Occur During Gay Male Sexual Encounters (Bolton, 1992: 149-150).

I note that this “partial list”, consisting of 91 discrete concepts or so-called “sexemes”, includes “81. Fisting, top” [as per Nathan], “15. Masturbating your partner” [as per Schimel] and “91. Showering after sex” [as per me], yet strangely includes neither

the apres-sex milieu of a casual sexual encounter when people often open up and speak honestly about their lives, sharing thoughts with a partner that may never be voiced in any other context (Bolton, 1992: 138)

nor the

writing—and even publishing—about one’s sexual encounters (Bolton, 1992: 137)

which Bolton claims is not uncommon among gay men. Further, the list is based on research conducted in Flanders and presumes that concepts first articulated in Flemish translate “reliably” into English.

One further note. I specifically designed the current project so that it would entail no fieldwork observation of any kind. I explicitly stated as much in the first draft of my Candidature Proposal submitted to the Faculty Research and Graduate Studies Committee (FRAGS). It wasn’t enough. The Committee, immediately following the advice that they had “thoroughly enjoyed reading the proposal”, required that I redraft it and provide

a statement to the effect that the researcher’s participation will not be in the sauna’s erotic scene, [and] will not take place during hours of research conduct (Faculty of Human Development (Victoria University), 1999).

No explanation for this requirement was provided. I immediately complied. (Why not? It effectively altered nothing I’d proposed.) I do not imagine that a similar requirement would have been made had I been studying, say, space and subjectivity in supermarkets.

## observation, power

I am not saying that the human sciences emerged from the prison. But, if they have been able to be formed and to produce so many profound changes in the episteme, it is because they have been conveyed by a specific and new modality of power: a certain policy of the body, a certain way of rendering the group of men docile and useful. This policy required the involvement of definite relations of knowledge in relations of power; it called for a technique of overlapping subjection and objectification; it brought with it new procedures of individualization. The carceral network constituted one of the armatures of this power-knowledge that has made the human sciences historically possible. Knowable man (soul, individuality, consciousness, conduct, whatever it is called) is the object-effect of this analytical investment, of this domination-observation. (Foucault, 1977: 305)

Cindy Patton, following Foucault and writing at the height of the HIV/AIDS epidemic that killed him, offered a polemical account of a new, more specific, “object-effect” being produced by the scrutiny of the human sciences, an object-effect that could then [and still now] be termed with grim irony as “knowable gay man”:

The paradigmatic representation/embodiment of the “AIDS virus” is the gay man. Thus gay men are in the uncomfortable position of being constantly spoken *about*, though there is virtually no context in which men can speak of their sexuality and community processes without being rendered a “case study” or subject of confession. The world of AIDS knowledge mobilises a dispersed panopticism which directs everyone’s eyes to the sex lives of gay men. Like the architectural panopticon Foucault describes as arising in prison, school, and factory construction in the late seventeenth century, expert keepers of AIDS knowledge possess a *discursive* centrality from which to observe their charges without themselves being observed. For Foucault, the space of the observer is foregrounded in architectural style: it is obvious that this tower, this corridor, this window is the place from which scrutiny comes, though it is not possible to tell when and whether the keeper is actually there looking. Likewise, where gay men were once hidden (metaphorically, in closets from which they could observe but not be observed), epidemiology, public health police power, and the social voyeurism of lifestyle journalism now serve as central points from which to observe the sex lives of gay men. The love that dare not speak its name is now asked endlessly to repeat that name in public in order to inscribe and reinscribe the ineluctable sexual difference that reassures a shifting “general public” that it is not subject to AIDS. (Patton, 1990: 55)

With the use of first-hand observation in sauna research, the discursive centrality of which Patton speaks takes on corporeal form as the figure of “the observer” (Humphreys, 1975: 69; Delph, 1978: 37, 52; Santana & Richters, 1998: 6; Tewksbury, 2001): a supposedly sterile, hygienic figure professionally dedicated to the systematic acquisition of objective data (see Lévi-Strauss, 1993: 363-364); a figure presumably without a sexuality, without lust, and without desire, apart from the [supposedly] unerotic desire for knowledge; a “proper” and “moral” figure above all, based in, and therefore authorised by, the space of the [heteronormative] academy and or its satellites.



## attraction

### interview

Before embarking on the current project, I read Gary Dowsett's *Practicing Desire: Homosexual Sex in the Era of AIDS* (Dowsett, 1996) in which saunas were intermittently mentioned but not substantially enough to earn as did "beats" (cf. US "tearooms" & UK "cottages") an index entry. Even so, Dowsett's study, conducted in Sydney and a nearby regional city, spurred me on. I noted especially the skilled and patient evocation of specificity and difference in the lives of the men he interviewed. I was also dismayed that the task of articulating this difference was, as late as the mid-1990s, so necessary to perform (I had not yet begun wading through decades of research literature that sought to reduce difference to the schematic same). I was moved by the stories that Dowsett's interviewees told but mostly I was excited by the drama of the interview itself. I wondered about its qualities as an event, *as a scene*, this strange staged meeting between the self-identified gay sociologist and the twenty not so readily classifiable figures whose lives in various ways encompassed homosexual desire, homosexual sex and the epidemic of HIV/AIDS. It was for me a remarkable and pertinent work to encounter. Inspiring.

At the heart of Dowsett's project, there lay a belief that the interviews offered a window-like insight into the lives of the interviewees. This belief was not naively held by Dowsett but emerged from almost two decades of professional experience so that even as he put into practice an established "life-history method" using "semi-structured interviews" over a period of several years, he acknowledged the potential for factual truth to remain unverifiable or even for it to be set aside:

The information gained from life histories is not fact per se, but it is possible to verify some of the information obtained across subjects and in reference to other material at hand—local histories, related studies, similar material gleaned elsewhere, and other empirical work that has sharpened a theoretically informed vantage point.

He immediately continued:

Facticity may not always be the major concern: the discursive framework used and the persona or subjectivity constructed in the interview itself will be revealing. (Dowsett, 1996: 47)

So it was for me, and is. Here's a fragment from one of Dowsett's interviews with "Ren Pinch" about Ren having exciting and memorable sex with a stranger at a

beachside park in Sydney late one warm, moonlit night (Dowsett's speech as interviewer is in parentheses):

Well, we did this a bit and then the guy slowly opened his fly—it was velcro and you can always tell when they open their flies when they're velcro [laughter], it's a dead giveaway. Anyway, he slid his hand inside his pants and started playing with himself. He had a hardon, you could see that as plain as day. I did the same and changed position on the rock so he could see me, you know, opened my legs a bit, sort of face on. You're enjoying this, aren't you? (All in the name of science. Do go on.) Well, I played with myself and slowly pulled my cock out of my pants and started rubbing myself a bit... (Dowsett, 1996: 144-145)

What's overt here is the interviewee's awareness that he may be entertaining the interviewer, an awareness that gets explicitly articulated—"You're enjoying this, aren't you?"—and is wryly parried in turn. Yet what Dowsett immediately concludes following his lengthy citation of this performance—for a compelling, expertly crafted performance is above all else what Ren's storytelling is—is

This is what Ralph [another interviewee] meant when he said casual sex could be "first rate." (Dowsett, 1996: 146)

Dowsett deals, then, with Ren's story in the analysis that immediately follows *as if* the events narrated in it were somehow uninformed by the occasion of the story being told. I mean to suggest not that Ren Pinch's story is an improbable fiction but that more reliable statements can be made about the occasion of its telling than about the event it purports to narrate. I, for one, like Dowsett, believe that something akin to what Ren narrates actually happened that night—I have no problem admitting to a strong phantasmatic and ideological investment in its truth claims—but how much of the event unfolded exactly as narrated, given Ren's acknowledged awareness of pleasing his interviewer, is not possible to discern. At the very least, a cautionary note could have been made that it might not have been so much the "casual sex" as Ren's discursive prowess that was "first rate".

I also became aware at this early stage of the conventional transcription of speech as literary prose in Dowsett's study *as if* the interviewer and his twenty interviewees spoke sentences that began with capital letters and ended with full-stops, *as if* speech were a form of writing organised, say, by synchronic conventions of grammar on the page rather than by the diachronic, performative rhythms of thought, impulse and breath. Here's "Harriet", as it were, another of Dowsett's interviewees:

If they thought you were a girl, well, naturally, they'd assume you'd have a fanny and they'd go for the tits first. But if they knew you were a boy and you had tits right—they could see that—the first thing they'd try to find out whether you had a cock. In some cases. And most cases they like the dick ... I guarantee—take a percentage—80 percent of the men that I had, right, were basically straight you may as well say, that liked to dabble

with boys. Say, out of 100 percent, I rooted about 70 to 80 percent of them. And [they] loved it. (Dowsett, 1996: 107)

The effort made by Dowsett here to render Harriet's speech as *literally* intelligible is evident and understandable, but even though the repertoire of standard graphic punctuation—the Queen's English, as we say—is stretched, the overall effect is of a reining in. This is most evident in the ways in which Harriet's speech *reads* here as fractured, that is, as a *departure* from the order and transparent clarity of classical prose. I expect, however, that if I were actually listening to Harriet from *inside* the scene of the interview, I would be unlikely to experience her speech as a departure of any kind, being too engaged in keeping up as a participant in the event of her speech's production. Dowsett's literary punctuation, then, substantially mediates, an effect that's ultimately unavoidable in transcription but which can be diminished far more than it is here. What Dowsett's punctuation effectively does is direct the reader's attention to how, and therefore what, Dowsett heard as distinct from what Harriet might have intended or indeed actually said. Again, I *feel* I can trust Dowsett's judgement in such matters, but question that I should be so dependent upon that feeling of trust. And what has happened in these transcripts to the abject vocalisations that surely were also made: the false starts, the phatic ruptures, the slips of the tongue, the hesitations? Did they [improbably] not actually occur? Why clean them up if it's believed, as stated, that "the discursive framework" "will be revealing"? Of course, what Dowsett does here is no more than comply with a standard format for representing speech as transcription in the human sciences, a predominant convention so pervasive as to become effectively "natural". It's not that a better conventional option is readily available, more that an occasional de-naturalisation could generate awareness of otherwise invisible, or at least unnoted, skewing effects.

Dowsett's was the earliest of several studies emerging from Sydney that I became aware of in the course of my research, all of them crucial to informing and shaping the current project (Bartos *et al.*, 1994; Slavin *et al.*, 1998; McInnes & Bollen, 2000; Rosengarten *et al.*, 2000; McInnes *et al.*, 2001; McInnes *et al.*, 2002). I noted the emphasis on discursive representation in these studies overall. If the sex-on-premises venue was referenced, then as a physical object of investigation, as a potential ethnographic *scene*, it receded in priority. In its place there emerged the *experiences* that men had at such venues, or rather, *their representation of those experiences* in one-to-one interviews and focus groups.

For instance:

McInnes *et al.* researched how men developed concepts of "risk" within specific erotic contexts (McInnes *et al.*, 2001). Their project produced and analysed interviews with 20 men selected from the more than 1100 who constituted the

ongoing Sydney Men and Sexual Health (SMASH) Study. Selections were made according to key variables, including “use of certain kinds of sex on premises venues”. Saunas featured prominently. The findings described the interviewees “as agents or enactors” using sex on premises venues “as a resource”, rather than as “passive participants ... users or consumers of a venue”. “Intimate familiarity with the venue” at the level of “architecture and design” was identified, but not analysed, as an active informant of specific behaviours. The most salient finding from the research was that “participation is highly variable” (McInnes *et al.*, 2001: 3). In eschewing schematic structuralist models, and in dealing with phenomena strictly at the level of representation (in this case, twenty interview transcripts), this project charted important new terrain.

McInnes & Bollen drew on this same interview material for a later study [published earlier] (McInnes & Bollen, 2000). They noted that the metaphor of “choreography” was much [mis-]used in scientific research literature and decided to give it “a bit of a shake”. Identifying two polarised applications of the metaphor—one involving the prescriptive application of determinative scripts to men’s behaviour, the other investing sexual practice “with flowing qualities of creativity and transgression that would exceed the categories of structural analysis”—they located a third perspective between the two extremes: one where “doing sex entails a constrained deployment of improvisational capacities by those who do sex in sex-on-premises venues” (McInnes & Bollen, 2000: 28). Further, they identified discursive repertoire as a conceptual resource and constraint, albeit a different resource and constraint from the physics of locale (see Flowers *et al.*, 2000). They also described *reports* of movement within a sex-on-premises venue as *experiences* of movement toward and away from moments of sex. Finally, they listed three dimensions along which experience at sex-on-premises venues could be discursively modelled: trajectory (temporal-narrative), scope (spatial-situational), and moments (actional-relational). This enabled the development of an analytic frame in which the protean mutability of sauna experience could be exactly described.

The shift that fired my imagination in all these studies, including Dowsett’s, was a shift in attention from the generic and or the schematic towards difference and specificity. The current project is accordingly indebted to all. It is with this body of work that it most fruitfully engages. And from which it critically departs:

### **performance: six tasks**

One: An issue I’ve already touched on relates to the status of the interview as a window onto “reality”, a form of naturalistic fourth wall. The issue is not the

interviewees' honesty or integrity, or even of the reliability of memory *per se*. It's simply a matter of speech as a problematic and unlike[ly] signifier of experience. Hunt & Davies (Hunt & Davies, 1991) reported on this after asking interviewees the following question:

Suppose someone asked you 'How many sexual partners have you had this month?', what must have happened sexually for someone to 'count' as your sexual partner? (Hunt & Davies, 1991: 46)

Many of the interviewees expressed surprise that the question needed to be asked at all, yet the range and variety of responses was comically vast ("Must go to the cinema", for example) effectively rendering the term "sexual partner" almost unusable in research without high levels of further investigation. Likewise, in *Enacting Sexual Contexts*, McInnes *et al.* distinguished between what they call "the material" ("what the interviewees did and saw") and "the discursive" ("the set of values and meanings which these men attach to their experiences") as if the former were somehow unproblematically known via speech, even though the fallacy of assuming so is evident in the following slippage noted elsewhere in their report:

Some of the men didn't recognise some substances as drugs until prompted in the interview. Amyl nitrate, marijuana, and especially alcohol were all 'remembered' by interviewees when asked about them specifically, but not mentioned when they were asked generically about drug use. (McInnes *et al.*, 2001: 16)

Instead of regarding the interview as a window onto reality, I begin to wonder about its status as a reality in itself, what Denzin, in an important discussion of the interview as performance, has called "a perfectly miniature and coherent world in its own right" (Denzin, 2001: 25).

Two: The Sydney research shifts attention from the scene of the sauna to the scene of its representation. In this way, the sauna is no longer analysed as if it were an object. The interview, however, is; or so it seems. What actually happens is that the interview is staged, *performed*, and then *the transcript* is later analysed, the situation of such analysis, the place from which it is done, not being disclosed. The work that counts, in a sense, is not being done in the interview itself, which becomes just a stage the research is going through, albeit a necessary and important one. This procedure diminishes the status of the interviewee's experience and knowledge; it becomes undynamic, no longer processual or in formation, no longer interrogative or critical, no longer live. It is the researcher who "professionally" takes on this role, anatomising the interviewee's words like so much dead meat. I begin to wonder if this ancient and predominant convention can be shifted, if the work of analysis can be undertaken within the interview itself, with the active participation of the interviewee.

Three: I question the relative invisibility of the researcher in relation to the figures researched. Dowsett repeatedly brings himself into focus in *Practising Desire* to a degree unmatched in the other Sydney-based studies, but the interview, even by him, is not represented ultimately as an occasion that's *shared*, as an event profoundly organised in relation to a mutual co-presence. The interviewer-researcher's position is understood as given, as relatively inert or neutral, *as if* in the scene of the interview, the interviewer were sitting in the wings or in a position in which he could be overlooked; beside the reader, say. A consequence is that in all this research the interviewee is constructed as the "other", as the research subject who effectively performs as research object. How can this be critically addressed?

Four: The interview transcripts in all these reports are rendered as literary speech with *Enacting Sexual Contexts* alone allowing "em", the sole phatic representation. In producing legibility, the origin of the transcribed interview as *performance* is erased. How to resist this dominant convention?

Five: In the studies focussing on sex-on-premises venues, the interviewer interviews the interviewee across a professional abyss: that of HIV/AIDS and the need to contain the epidemic's spread. This is not to state that the interviewees do not share the interviewer's epidemiological concerns, but it is to state that the interest and investment in sex-on-premises venues in general, and in saunas in particular, profoundly differs depending on whether the figure in question is the interviewer or interviewee. All research interviews in the projects to which I've alluded were effectively constructed as encounters between health researchers, on the one hand, and sex-on-premises venues clientele on the other *as if* these two categories were mutually exclusive, and *as if* such an encounter were uniquely proper for research. I begin to wonder about the possibilities of an interview unfolding on, indeed, producing, common ground.

Six: I wonder about power and narrative. McInnes & Bollen (2000) identified a series of five generic applications to practice or "moments" from which venue "trajectories" seemed to be inevitably composed: (1) "orientation", which oddly includes both arrival *and departure*; (2) "attending the self", effectively things done alone; (3) "doing the circuit-checking out-cruising", similar to (2) but with a widening of scope; (4) "contact-negotiating-time together"; and (5) "doing sex" (McInnes & Bollen, 2000: 30-31). Even though they stated that such moments "do have a loose sequential relation to each other", but that trajectories "more often" accommodate "repetitions, jumps, skips, aborts, returns and restarts", McInnes & Bollen nevertheless sequenced their five generic "moments" according to the consecutive numerical sequence outlined above. The model trajectory becomes, in this way, the path from which interviewees digress. It stands effectively as a

structural narrative norm. Further, there's little difference between this schema—for the “trajectories” have no other ontological status within the research than as the narratives in which they are described—and that of commercial US gay video porn or, indeed, that of Martin Hoffman's exemplary bathhouse narrative—“Jack's” typical “Friday night out with the boys” [as his wife understands it]—of thirty years before (Hoffman, 1968: 48-52). I am particularly struck by the tell-tale elision of departure narratives in McInnes & Bollen's schema, which effectively disappear like the post-ejaculation image in gay video porn's closing fade-to-black. One Sydney-based researcher, Michael Hurley, has produced a non-linear narrative, “Wet spot” (Hurley, 2000), that effectively deconstructs the predominant narrative schema in interesting ways. I, too, wonder if the representation of sauna experience needs to be organised in relation to classic linear narrative form.

### **buttons or a zip?**

When I was still developing a blueprint of how I would proceed, I read *Meanings of Sex Between Men*, a study conducted by the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations for the Commonwealth Department of Human Services and Health. The study focussed on the HIV/AIDS information needs of so-called “MSM”:

men who have sex with men who do not identify as gay or who do not identify with the gay community (Bartos *et al.*, 1994: 2)

The study interested me because of the constraints imposed upon it by the ostensible object under investigation. First, the research subjects were difficult to identify, a difficulty that arose not merely for the researchers but [potentially] for the research subjects themselves:

Sexual identity is not a major issue for MSM. Sexuality is not a key part of their sense of personal identity, which is based instead on other personal relationships (e.g. family, career etc.). Some men actively refuse a gay sexual identity, for others it is simply irrelevant. MSM rarely think of themselves as bisexual, although if they have to choose a sexual identity, some are prepared to be called bisexual. (Bartos *et al.*, 1994: 4)

Second, the men in question proved difficult to contact; a nation-wide search, excluding “over-researched” Sydney, recruited relatively few interviewees.

Questionnaires were eschewed:

Any questionnaire is inevitably predicated on a value and knowledge laden perspective and position. Questionnaires though, make it difficult to go beyond or even discard that

a procedure: attraction

perspective in the course of the interview. Questionnaires determine the parameters within which replies can be made. (Bartos *et al.*, 1994: 19)

Attention was given instead to extended in-depth interviews:

The interviews normally took between one and two hours, although some went for up to three hours. [...] The role of the interviewer was to enable the men to tell their stories in their own ways and to acknowledge and value their experiences. (Bartos *et al.*, 1994: 19)

The interviews were characterised by the interviewees' engagement with narrative content at the level of specific concrete phenomena, which sometimes carried with it a metonymic force:

[T]he men being interviewed were asked not to generalise about their sexual activities. Rather, they were asked to focus on very particular sexual incidents. Minute details were seen as very important: What was the man wearing? Was he standing on your left or your right? Were his jeans a zip fly or were there buttons?" (Bartos *et al.*, 1994: 19)

By avoiding the general, by focussing on sites of differentiation, the so-called "minute details", what emerged was a plenitude of difference, and it was a difference that rightly problematised the prevailing hegemonic same[s]. This excited me.

There were, however, aspects of the project that perturbed. I noted that one of the interviewees, "OB, 28 years old, Unemployed", was quoted several times. When considered separately, each quotation, separated by up to forty pages, seemed coherent and plausible, *believable* as a direct transcription of his speech. Yet when I compared the quotations alongside each other, it became obvious that this was not the case:

OB, 28 years old, Unemployed : "I met Peter 4 years ago through mutual friends. We were at a party. I expected to pick up a girl I liked and go home with her. This didn't happen. Instead I stayed the night and ended up in bed with Peter. I'd never thought about sex with a man before that night. Our relationship has continued on from that night. I also don't think I'm gay. I'm just in love with Peter. We're in a relationship together. That's all." (Bartos *et al.*, 1994: 29)

OB, 28 years old, Unemployed : "We fuck each other, taking turns. It's always unsafe. Our relationship is totally monogamous. I've never done it with another man or woman in the time we have been together, and can't imagine doing it with anyone else while we're together. I love him. I don't need to have sex with other people. I'm not tempted. I also don't think I'm gay. I'm just in love with Peter. We're in a relationship together. That's all." (Bartos *et al.*, 1994: 53)

OB, 28 years old, Unemployed : "I'd never thought about sex with a man before that night. It sort of just happened totally out of the blue. We have great sex. Maybe once or twice a day. We fuck each other, taking turns. It's always unsafe. I'm just in love with Peter. We're in a relationship together. That's all." (Bartos *et al.*, 1994: 55)

OB, 28 years old, Unemployed : “I’d never thought about sex with a man before that night. It sort of just happened totally out of the blue. I liked him and I liked sex together. Our relationship has continued on from that night. I didn’t go through a crisis or panic thinking I was gay. I simply moved in and I’m still there. We have great sex. Maybe once or twice a day. We fuck each other, taking turns. It’s always unsafe. Our relationship is totally monogamous. I’ve never done it with another man or woman in the time we have been together, and can’t imagine doing it with anyone else while we’re together.” (Bartos *et al.*, 1994: 68)

None of these passages, it now seemed, *literally* quoted OB at all. While all of the interviewees may have been encouraged “to tell their stories in their own ways” at the time of the interview this was not how OB’s story was now being re-presented. What had he said? Something like the following?

I met Peter 4 years ago through mutual friends. We were at a party. I expected to pick up a girl I liked and go home with her. This didn’t happen. Instead I stayed the night and ended up in bed with Peter. I’d never thought about sex with a man before that night. It sort of just happened totally out of the blue. I liked him and I liked sex together. Our relationship has continued on from that night. I didn’t go through a crisis or panic thinking I was gay. I simply moved in and I’m still there. We have great sex. Maybe once or twice a day. We fuck each other, taking turns. It’s always unsafe. Our relationship is totally monogamous. I’ve never done it with another man or woman in the time we have been together, and can’t imagine doing it with anyone else while we’re together. I love him. I don’t need to have sex with other people. I’m not tempted. I also don’t think I’m gay. I’m just in love with Peter. We’re in a relationship together. That’s all.

Possibly.

My reconstruction demonstrated the virtue of narrative logic [at least], but I had no way of telling what further material, if any, was missing. Had there been interruptive interviewer probes that had since been removed? Had OB’s speech flowed as evenly in time as its distribution on the page suggested, unhindered by hesitations, false starts, repetitions, coughs, pauses for thought, reflective silences, about-faces, phatic ruptures and, for the purposes of the research, irrelevance (that concern with literary form again)? For me the answer mattered. It wasn’t enough that I was reminded of Barthes’ sarcasm:

We talk, a tape recording is made, diligent secretaries listen to our words to refine, transcribe, and punctuate them, producing a first draft that we can tidy up afresh before it goes on to publication, the book, eternity. (Barthes, 1985: 3)

I was niggled by an apparently marginal detail:

We fuck each other, taking turns. It’s always unsafe. Our relationship is totally monogamous. I’ve never done it with another man or woman in the time we have been together, and can’t imagine doing it with anyone else while we’re together. (Bartos *et al.*, 1994: 53)

The term “unsafe” here seems to mean “unprotected”, that is, without a condom. OB, who had no “gay community attachment”, probably picked up the term from its currency somewhere else, maybe from the researcher who interviewed him:

In this study we define ‘unsafe sex’ as ‘unprotected anal or vaginal intercourse, insertive or receptive’. Unless stated otherwise, ‘unsafe sex’ will refer to unprotected anal intercourse between men. (Bartos *et al.*, 1994: 2)

Wherever it came from, at a first reading, what OB seems to have accepted without question, and this was common enough in the early 1990s, is the *conventional* use of the term “unsafe” as a synonym for “unprotected”, even though the situation he described—two men, both HIV negative, in a “totally monogamous” relationship—is one where “unprotected” sex would not be “unsafe” at all. After declaring “our” relationship to be “totally monogamous” OB goes on to state, *as if* clarifying what he meant by “totally monogamous”, that *he* has never done it with another man or woman in the time that he and Peter have been together. This is what niggled: total monogamy being what it is, there should be no need for OB to offer this quasi-tautological clarification. The effect of it is to underscore a potentially “unsafe” slippage on his part between “our” and “I” in which “our” “totally monogamous” relationship actually refers to OB’s behaviour only: “I’ve never done it with another”. Did OB doubt the “totally monogamous” status of his relationship with Peter, after all? If so, when he stated that their sex was always “unsafe” was he indeed speaking exactly and not, as it would initially seem, conventionally? Because of the undisclosed extent of the editorial interventions, it wasn’t possible to tell. I had no way of ascertaining what OB had actually said (it’s a measure of the report’s overall success that I came so much to care). If the excerpts of the interview transcripts had been printed in their entirety, with all elisions and other editorial changes noted, then my knowledge would’ve been more usefully complete. As it was, I couldn’t tell if OB was exact in calling their unprotected sex “unsafe”. And I still can’t.

There were other reservations I had with the study, but the main reason I held back from basing my own research on its methodology was more fundamental. These researchers, like so many others I’d read, were skilled social scientists; I was not. I was intellectually engaged and moved by their work—it felt *near* to my interests and concerns—but emulating their methodology, even in an adapted version, was another matter. I work in and with performance. At the time, I’d been doing so for twenty years: directing, composing, sometimes even performing. I needed something nearer to what I knew. And then, while reading this same report, I unexpectedly found it:

We should not expect to find men articulating the nature of the experience of sex as time out of time in rational discourse or in response to researchers’ questions. It is, by nature, inchoate. But we can find evidence for the plausibility of such explanations in what cannot be said, at the points where rational discourse fails. (Bartos *et al.*, 1994: 55)

It was when I read this passage in relation to others, such as that describing questions at the level of “minute detail”—what I came to think of as the “buttons or a zip” phenomenon—that a connection was made, especially the references to “what cannot be said” and to “the points where rational discourse fails”. I was reminded of something unlike anything in this study of “MSM”, unlike anything else I’d been reading. And being reminded of it challenged and disturbed me.

I was reminded of a film.



## a film

### witness, testimony

At one o'clock in the afternoon on a weekday, at \$10 a ticket for Part I of a nine-hour "documentary", the cinema on Broadway is packed. Some in the audience are obviously survivors, myself included... (Angress, 1986: 249)

Sometime in 1985-86, Ruth Angress, a professor of German living and working in Chicago, travelled to New York and went to see a film. The film, which was in fact almost nine and a half hours long, was called *Shoah* (Lanzmann, 1985; Lanzmann, 1995c). Angress saw the film, made by Claude Lanzmann, a French journalist with intimate connections to the existentialist left, twice, some nineteen hours in all, and then she wrote a brief account of it, of her experience of seeing it. Her account was published later that year, relatively obscurely, in the third volume of the Simon Wiesenthal Center Annual (Angress, 1986).

Forty years earlier, at the age of twelve, Ruth Angress had been deported to Auschwitz.

### Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*

I cite from the biographical notes provided by the 34th Sydney Film Festival, 1987:

CLAUDE LANZMANN was born in 1925 in Paris. As a member of the Resistance organisation at the Lycee Blaise Pascal in Clermont-Ferrand, he participated in the urban guerrilla struggle against the Nazi occupation, and later in partisan actions in the Auvergne region. After the war he studied philosophy at Tuebingen University, and then lectured at the Free University of Berlin between 1948-49. Returning to Paris, he joined the circle of Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, collaborating in the publication of *Les temps modernes*. As a correspondent for this and other publications, he championed such causes as Algerian independence and an end to French involvement in Indochina. In 1970 he gave up journalism for the cinema, directing *Pourquoi Israel/ Why Israel?* (1970-73) and *Shoah* [sic] (1974-85). (Webb, 1987)

Production of *Shoah* lasted more than a decade. Lanzmann's preparatory research, including a year of reading, took three and a half years. Filming proper began in 1976 and was focussed mostly on interviews with witnesses to atrocities perpetrated against Jews in Nazi-dominated Eastern Europe, 1933-45. The witnesses fell into three distinct groups: victims, onlookers, and perpetrators. Many of the interviews were filmed in domestic settings, presumably the

interviewees' homes. Others entailed visits to sites where atrocities had occurred. Still others were elaborately staged. A few took place at convenient locations that re-placed a site far removed: a forest in Israel, for instance, in lieu of a forest in Lithuania. Some took place at the original *scene* of a crime but entailed the contemporary staging there of an evocative *mise en scène*: a song sung in a boat punted down a river at Chelmno; the shunting of a rented steam locomotive on a specially reopened section of track near Treblinka. Lanzmann flew one interviewee, the former barber Abraham Bomba, from his home in New York to a rented barber shop in Tel Aviv where he interviewed him cutting hair. Surrounded by supposed customers, who were in fact extras hired for the occasion on condition that they did not speak English, the interview, in English, took place, initially anyway, *as if* the interviewer and his film crew had dropped by at short notice on a routine working day. Ten "former" Nazis also agreed to be interviewed by Lanzmann who pretended to them that he was one "Doctor Sorel" from the fake "Center for the Research and Study of Contemporary History" in Paris. It was during one of these interviews, when his hidden camera and microphone were discovered, that he was severely beaten and spent a month in hospital. All the material relating to that interview disappeared. By 1981, Lanzmann had visited fourteen countries and had compiled three hundred and fifty hours of footage; he had interviewed hundreds of witnesses, on camera and off. Four years of post-production followed, out of which the film *Shoah* emerged in its final monumental form: a two part structure lasting a total of *nine hours and twenty-six minutes*. *Shoah* was first screened publicly at the Venice Film Festival in 1985. (Garton Ash, 1985; Schutte, 1985; Webb, 1987; Lanzmann, 1991; Colombat, 1993; LaCapra, 1997; Lanzmann, 1995c; Loshitzky, 1997; Hellig, 1998)

### **witness, testimony**

As a twelve year old girl, Ruth Angress had been deported to Auschwitz.

I do not know what interest, if that is the correct word, she had in seeing Lanzmann's film. In her brief account she mentions attending Part 1, the first time, anyway, with students, and Part 2 alone. But beyond this professional detail she offers no personal explanation. It is in the range and nature of her concise observations and reflections, between them as it were, that some sense of an otherwise unarticulated project in relation to the film can be felt to constellate, to coalesce, to form.

During intermission a woman complains to the management that the theater is cold. It isn't: the film has drained her of warmth. After intermission I, too, start shivering and huddling and talk back to the screen as a way of warming up. (Angress, 1986: 251)

This performance of, as it were, talking back to the screen characterises the mood and trajectory of her account overall. It's as if we are sitting nearby, in that cinema on Broadway, aware of her distracting garrulous presence as the spools of celluloid unfurl:

I don't believe in going back. Lanzmann does. The museum culture that has sprung up around the concentration camps is based on a sense of *spiritus loci* which I lack. What was done there could be repeated elsewhere, I have argued, conceived as it was by human minds, carried out by human hands, somewhere on earth, the place irrelevant, so why single out the sites that now look like so many others? I don't go back to where I've been. I have escaped. No landscape, I have always believed, can recall what happened, for the stones don't cry out. Lanzmann believes they do. Standing on a rutted road where the dead and dying ones accidentally fell out of the killer vans, and if the exhaust fumes hadn't quite choked them, they were shot while crawling in the mud, he reminds us that those who have knowledge of these things haven't really escaped. As the hours pass the audience will have that knowledge too, and some will try to escape it by letting their attention drift. The "boredom" of this film is of a very special kind. (Angress, 1986: 250)

### Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*

Before viewing *Shoah*, there are two pieces of information relating to it that most of its audiences have: one of these is to do with its "nine hour" running time; the other is an awareness of its so-called "Holocaust" theme. Once a screening is underway, further distinctive features emerge. Most obvious is Lanzmann's decision to include no archival footage at any point in the film's nine and a half hours; every frame was filmed in the period post-dating 1976. Another distinctive feature is the eschewing of what I will here call the dominant convention of classical linear narrative, namely, something that has a beginning, a middle, and an end, in that order. Lanzmann, instead, edits footage into thematic and rhythmic units and sequences that rarely intersect to construct a sequential chronicle of a routinely familiar kind. No omniscient voiced-over narrator [nor orchestral soundtrack] accompanies any image on screen. The material is fundamentally organised in relation to the filmed interviews, only one of which is with a scholarly authority or professional expert, the historian Raul Hilberg (see Hilberg, 1985). All other interviewees testify solely as eye-witnesses to the specific and isolated incidents they describe. Lanzmann's questions rarely seek articulations of abstract theories or psychological explanations but are often conceived and asked in terms of precise, often minute, concrete detail: the colour of a gas van, sensations of temperature or smell. The filmed interviews are conducted in seven languages of which the director-interviewer speaks four, and when an interview requires the assistance of an interpreter the time-consuming work of translating speech from one language to another is never edited out of the film. Nor, or so it seems, are the moments when the interview process snags

or effectively breaks down: when interviewees are unable to speak or simply refuse to do so, when they ask for the interview to stop or when they abruptly walk off camera (offstage), when Lanzmann turns on his professional interpreter mid-interview and chides her for not correctly performing her role. Unexpectedly large amounts of screen time are also taken up with the depiction and repeated contemplation of apparently innocuous vistas: residential streets, busy autobahns, railway shunts, bucolic vistas. The major Nazi leaders are neither discussed in detail nor depicted in the film, and are rarely mentioned. No iconic swastika or yellow star is shown. And the word "Holocaust" is never uttered, nor is it offered as a subtitled English translation of a word or phrase uttered in another language.

What potentially emerges from a screening, then, is a thwarting of predominant conventions, a refreshment of vision. This is an experience I had when I first viewed *Shoah* in two parts at the Sydney Film Festival in 1987, on Tuesday 9 June (Part 1) and Monday 15 June (Part 2) at the State Theatre in Sydney's Market Street.

I sat in the dress circle, three rows back, to the left.

### **witness, testimony**

When I first read Angress' unfussy and unsentimental account, I felt emotionally upset. My body shook. I knew the film well—I had seen it three times—but I had not yet encountered any writer, or anyone else for that matter, who brought it so alive for me, who conveyed, who *invoked* so vividly its epistemic force. What I believed unmistakably as I read her testimony, was that she had been there, and though I believed this ardently, I couldn't tell if by "there" I meant Auschwitz, or the cinema on Broadway, or some other place unnamed. It was simply, and mysteriously, just *there*.

### **[mis]representing *Shoah***

The literature responding to *Shoah* is extensive and ranges from populist film reviews to scholarly discussions and critiques (publications in English include: Garton Ash, 1985; Kael, 1985; Ophuls, 1985; Schutte, 1985; Angress, 1986; Erens, 1986; Luft, 1986; Pym, 1986; Rubenstein, 1986; Webb, 1987; Avisar, 1988; Faurisson, 1988; Young, 1988; Koch, 1989; Felman, 1991; Felman, 1992; Hartman, 1992; Kaes, 1992; Colombat, 1993; Felman, 1994; Louvish, 1994; Bartov, 1996; Brinkley & Youra, 1996; Elsaesser, 1996; Fackenheim, 1996;

Hartman, 1996; Smith, 1986; Hansen, 1997; Hartman, 1997; LaCapra, 1997; Loshitzky, 1997; Thion, 1997; Hellig, 1998; Rosenbaum, 1998; Agamben, 1999; Clendinnen, 1999; Saxton, 2004). Lanzmann has contributed substantially, too, via writings and documented talks (in English: Lanzmann, 1991; Lanzmann, 1994; Lanzmann, 1995a; Lanzmann, 1995b; Lanzmann, 1995c). Two peculiarities pervading much of this material, peculiarities for me, anyway, are, first, the lack of agreement between what would otherwise pass as objective descriptions of the film [and the circumstances of its production] and, second, the many hyperbolic truth-claims made on behalf of *Shoah* that fail to withstand the most cursory inspection. A brief survey introduces the problem:

Wolfram Schutte and Rod Webb state that Lanzmann's three and a half years of preparatory research took place in fourteen countries (Schutte, 1985; Webb, 1987). Yosefa Loshitzky and Jocelyn Hellig claim that the filming proper took place in fourteen countries (Loshitzky, 1997: 105; Hellig, 1998: 57). In each case, the statements are offered as *if* Lanzmann's travels to the fourteen countries in question occurred either during preparatory research or during filming proper and not during both stages of production, that is, as *if* the two scenarios were mutually exclusive and opposed, even though there's no apparent reason why this should be so.

Herbert Luft: "*Shoah* has no staged scenes, no actors, no newsreel footage" (Luft, 1986: 307). Yet many scenes in *Shoah* are staged, and many of these are staged obviously and elaborately, including the opening scene where the adult Simon Srebnik self-consciously sings a song taught him by SS officers in his childhood while being punted along the river at Chelmno. Further, not only has Claude Lanzmann himself referred to his interviewees as "actors" (Colombat, 1993: 312; Lanzmann, 1995b; LaCapra, 1997: 261), he also cast non-English speaking extras as Abraham Bomba's fictitious barber shop customers in Tel Aviv. That there is no newsreel footage is true.

Luft again: "The film relies only on the spoken words of eye witnesses" (Luft, 1986: 307). The historian Raul Hilberg features prominently throughout the film, is interviewed onscreen at length, and offers no eye-witness testimony, of his own, that is, at all.

Lenny Rubenstein: "Bomba is still a barber, now living and working in Israel..." (Rubenstein, 1986: 41). According to Lanzmann, Abraham Bomba was living in retirement in New York at the time of filming and had a holiday house in the Catskills. In addition to filming him against the iconic backdrop of New York's Brooklyn Bridge, which Rubenstein must surely have recognised, Lanzmann flew Bomba to Israel and filmed him cutting hair in a Tel Aviv barber shop rented solely for that purpose (Lanzmann, 1991: 95).

Rod Webb lists the languages spoken in the film as “Polish, German, Hebrew, Yiddish, English and French” but omits Italian, which Lanzmann speaks with a Greek Jew on Corfu (Webb, 1987; Pym, 1986: 187).

Webb, like most others, gives the running time of the film as 566 minutes: “Part 1: 274 minutes. Part 2: 292 minutes” (Webb, 1987). Rubenstein alone, with a similar show of precision, makes it “a total of nine hours and twenty-three minutes” (Rubenstein, 1986: 41). Given the effort made toward exactitude in Rubenstein’s calculation, the three minute discrepancy is odd.

Pierre Colombat: “all the survivors, and Jan Karski, all reach a point in their testimonies when it becomes too hard for them to continue talking. They burst out in tears and ask Lanzmann to stop filming” (Colombat, 1993: 343). Many, sure, but not “all”, at all. Two of the film’s key witnesses, Richard Glazar, survivor of Treblinka, and Rudolf Vrba, survivor of Auschwitz, take up large amounts of screen time and retain their composure throughout. So do others.

Dominick LaCapra: “The names of Hitler, Himmler, Heydrich, Goring and Goebbels are not even mentioned” (LaCapra, 1997: 263). The names of Hitler, Himmler, Heydrich, and Goring *are* mentioned (Lanzmann, 1995c: 55, 61, 154, 156 & 160). The only name not mentioned is that of Goebbels.

Many of these contradictions, errors and distortions deal with matters that in isolation would seem to be of trivial or incidental significance: marginalia, if you like. However, collectively, and emanating from scholar and journalist alike, they problematise the response to *Shoah* overall. The point that LaCapra makes generally, for instance, is valid: the familiar roll-call of Nazi leaders is never discussed by Lanzmann and his interviewees, certainly not in the terms one might expect of a so-called Holocaust documentary film. It is therefore important to emphasise this realignment as one of the film’s distinctive features. LaCapra, however, goes further and in attempting to reinforce his point undermines it by making an emphatic and unsustainable claim in relation to what should have been a minor detail *as if* he wished that the names of the figures in question had been “not even mentioned” so as to make the film’s achievement somehow purer than it actually is, so as to make it more ideal.

Likewise with Colombat whose statement about survivors reaching “a point in their testimonies where it becomes too hard for them to continue talking” identifies one of Lanzmann’s key strategies and one of the most notable and much discussed features of the film. But not “all” of the survivors reach such a point, and in the face of this obstinate inconsistency, Colombat, like LaCapra, not only claims otherwise but does so emphatically. He makes his claim doubly, so

that “all [...] all” reach the point in question in his account of what happens, as if by doubly denying a minor inconvenience it can be annihilated or made to go away.

LaCapra and Colombat are not alone. The experience of engaging with *Shoah* has resulted in other voices making hyperbolic and critically vulnerable claims. For example:

After the war, we read masses of accounts of the ghettos and the extermination camps, and we were devastated. But when today we see Claude Lanzmann’s film, we realize that we have understood nothing. In spite of everything we knew, the ghastly experience remained remote from us. Now, for the first time, we live it in our minds, hearts and flesh. It becomes our experience. (de Beauvoir in Lanzmann, 1995c: iii)

And by the end of Lanzmann’s film I felt that I began to know what it seems by definition impossible to know: “How it was” for the people in the “funnel” that led to the gas chamber at Treblinka. (Garton Ash, 1985: 28)

What *Shoah* accomplishes is a total immersion into another reality. (Erens, 1986: 28)

It is a film about witnessing: about the witnessing of a catastrophe. What is testified to is limit-experiences whose overwhelming impact constantly puts to the test the limits of the witnesses and of the witnessing, at the same time that it constantly unsettles and puts into question the very limits of reality. (Felman, 1991: 40)

The prose in all these instances is romantic and wishful; indeed, romantic in that it *is* wishful. Simone de Beauvoir, according to an unattributed English translation (her own?), claims absolutely that “we realize that we have understood nothing”. Not an insufficiency, not a lesser or inadequate amount, but a simple zero sum. Nothing. And then just as absolutely she claims that “we” now have direct access to the experience of the ghettos and the extermination camps “for the first time”, that “we live it in our minds, hearts and flesh”, and that it becomes ours, as if she could verify, at all, that this was so, even at the level of the first person singular let alone the conventional first person plural that she prefers. For whom precisely does she speak when she writes thus? Through what intricate ethical obstacles does she wantonly smash when she asserts that the experiences of the survivor witnesses, born of months and years endured in ghettos and death-camps, have now, after viewing a work of cinema in the comfort of a darkened auditorium, become “our experience”?

Likewise with Garton Ash’s “I felt that I began to know.....”. There’s a wishing going on here, too, that exceeds the bounds of empathy, and, as with de Beauvoir, there’s also an affect of thrill or excitement entailed. How else to explain his impulse toward feeling something the actuality of which might well be possible to experience coincidentally or even imaginatively but the authenticity of which must be impossible, thankfully, to verify? And not just to “feeling” it but then to publishing that he has done so? To what end? What these

two writers allude to and enact is no more, and no less, than a production of knowledge as *effect*, fuelled by a desire for and will toward *belief*, which they attempt to render plausible and acceptable, to proffer as *believable*, in effect, to others via the rhapsodic tone of their prose. Indeed, at a fundamental level, the accounts they offer are rendered believable because they exist as prose, because as documents they survive, because they testify in and as writing that it is indeed possible, as it was for the heroic figures of ancient myth, like Herakles, Odysseus and Orpheus, to occupy the position of the dead, or of the Nazi death camp's living dead, of *der Muselmann* (Agamben, 1999: 41-86), and return. They each implicitly promise or at least sentimentally reassure that this antique fantasy can become "reality" after all. In this, of course, they're not alone: during a seminar at Yale in 1990, Lanzmann himself somewhat mystically described *Shoah* as "a resurrection" (Felman, 1994: 97).

Patricia Erens and Shoshana Felman also invoke the concept of "reality" directly and reductively, with the former conjuring "a total immersion into another reality". What *Shoah* offers is an immersion, sure, but just as surely not "into another reality". What could that *mean*, after all? It is, rather, a cinematic immersion, not into "another" reality, as though we could teleport ontologically between parallel universes such as those posited in science fiction, no, not into another reality but into a re-ordering of *experience* such that the *effect* is of something fundamentally other than the quotidian world experienced and known "out there", as it were, beyond the cinema doors: an immersion into a *liminal* state, perhaps. If such an immersion were indeed "total", it would amount to a form of psychosis where the experiencing subject would lose all bearings, all footholds, all lifelines keeping open the possibility of return. We would then indeed, as de Beauvoir claimed, effectively "live" the cinematic experience "in our minds, hearts and flesh". But "we" don't, not totally, anyway.

Nor does *Shoah* constantly unsettle and put into question the "very" limits of reality (that telling emphatic gesture again). To what could the concept "the very limits of reality", arguably a signifier without a signified, actually refer? The film does engage with limit-experiences, it does put to the test the limits of the witnesses and of witnessing itself, and in these respects it can be understood as visiting and critically engaging with certain limits of *representation*, maybe even probing "the" limits of representation (see Friedlander, 1992). It may even be reasonable to claim that one's *familiar* or *usual* experience of "reality" is disturbed or critiqued in seeing the film. But to claim that a conjectured topos vaguely described as reality's "very limits" is constantly unsettled and put into question as the viewer watches the film is to attempt to produce an objective correlative where none might be ready at hand, to demonstrate that "I have that within that passes show" or more mundanely that "seeing this film has produced feelings in

me that I can't adequately describe but I'm going to try to say something anyway".

In an early review of *Shoah* published in *Artforum*, Wolfram Schutte observed:

Listening to the witnesses and observing the sites of the Holocaust solely as they are today, the film calls on our capacity to visualise and experience more than what is shown. Whereas the viewer of a documentary is usually a consumer of predetermined ideas, facts, and images, the viewer of *Shoah* is deeply involved in winning back forgotten history. Listening to people talk, hearing their language, seeing their memories overpower them, you are forced to work, with all your emotions, spirit, and mind, through what you have experienced. In your own imagination and fantasy, you become a part of this process of imagining and remembering. (Schutte, 1985)

Likewise Thomas Elsaesser a decade later:

The "affect of concern" emanating from the films of [Marcel] Ophuls and Lanzmann is to make one see things which are not on screen and listen to voices speaking from within oneself. (Elsaesser, 1996: 174)

The point is astutely made. The danger, to which this writer, that is, me, is no less subject than any other viewer of *Shoah*, or any other writer, is not to heed it.

### **witness, testimony**

I particularly note one of Angress' statements:

Like all survivors I know that Auschwitz, when the Nazis killed Jews there, felt like a crater of the moon, a place only peripherally connected with the human world. It is this "otherness" of the death camps we have such difficulty conveying. (Angress, 1986: 250)

Angress indicates, and then only barely, a "place" with a peripheral connection to the human world. She writes of an "otherness" that she and other survivors have "difficulty conveying". She does not refer to Auschwitz as a mere "place" on a map, or to its "otherness" as geographically or even astrophysically produced. Her implicit desire or need to "convey" anything at all in the face of "difficulty" suggests instead an urgency in relation to this "otherness" that symmetrically aligns it with Giorgio Agamben's more recent philosophical concerns.

Thanks to a series of increasingly wide-ranging and rigorous studies—among which Raul Hilberg's *The Destruction of the European Jews* occupies a special place—the problem of the historical, material, technical, bureaucratic, and legal circumstances in which the extermination of the Jews took place has been sufficiently clarified. Future studies may shed new light on particular aspects of the events that took place in the concentration camps, but a general framework has already been established. [new paragraph] The same cannot be said for the ethical and political significance of the extermination, or even for a

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human understanding of what happened there—that is, for its contemporary relevance. Not only do we lack anything close to a complete understanding; even the sense and reasons for the behavior of the executioners and the victims, indeed very often their very words, still seem profoundly enigmatic. This can only encourage the opinion of those who would like Auschwitz to remain forever incomprehensible. (Agamben, 1999: 11)

I hear these phrases above all: “ethical and political significance”, “human understanding”, “contemporary relevance”. The efforts of the Nazis and others to systematically annihilate the European Jews in the years 1933 to 1945 is a matter that, in important respects, continues to resist representation (see Friedlander, 1992). It is this resistance to which Angress’ statement explicitly refers, and which her extreme simile—“like a crater of the moon”—in its *failure* to meaningfully evoke, invokes. Even the already unspecific term “otherness” is further qualified by her with quotation marks, as *if* borrowed for the occasion in lieu of some more authentic [in]exact expression. The problem was precisely articulated a few years later by Primo Levi:

I must repeat—we, the survivors, are not the true witnesses. This is an uncomfortable notion, of which I have become conscious little by little, reading the memoirs of others and reading mine at a distance of years. We survivors are not only an exiguous but also an anomalous minority: we are those who by their prevarications or abilities or good luck did not touch bottom. Those who did so, those who saw the Gorgon, have not returned to tell about it or have returned mute, but they are the ‘Muslims’, the submerged, the complete witnesses, the ones whose depositions would have a general significance. They are the rule, we are the exception. (Levi, 1988: 63-64)

And:

We who were favoured by fate tried, with more or less wisdom, to recount not only our fate, but also that of the others, the submerged; but this was a discourse on ‘behalf of third parties’, the story of things seen from close by, not experienced personally. When the destruction was terminated, the work accomplished was not told by anyone, just as no one ever returned to recount his own death. Even if they had paper and pen, the submerged would not have testified because their death had begun before that of their body. Weeks and months before being snuffed out, they had already lost the ability to observe, to remember, compare and express themselves. We speak in their stead, by proxy. (Levi, 1988: 64)

For Levi, eloquent and compelling as the performance of his testimony is, the fact of his survival effectively disqualifies him from claiming the status of “true” witness to the lethal success of the extermination program. As a member of “an anomalous minority”, all he can testify to is his personal “good luck”, to the occasional limits of the extermination’s reach. All he can “convey” (Angress’ term) of the extermination itself, if at all, is “the story of things seen from close by, not experienced personally”. The “complete witnesses” to the annihilation, “those who saw the Gorgon”, as he puts it, by definition are unable to speak.

Giorgio Agamben takes up this idea and pursues it further to its [perhaps] inevitable end: the impossibility of bearing witness, of testifying, in speech or writing at all. In summary form, Agamben's argument runs thus: The witness is one whose experience is unique by virtue of the fact that the witness is specifically situated in relation to the witnessed event; no other person can occupy just that position just at that time. But as soon as the experiencing subject turns to speak [or write], a problem is encountered. For a moment, I intend to follow this argument closely. Agamben claims:

The "I" that, as a unity transcending the multiple totality of lived experiences, guarantees the permanence of what we call consciousness is nothing other than the appearance in Being of an exclusively linguistic property. (Agamben, 1999: 121)

and cites Emil Benveniste as his authorising source:

Benveniste: "It is in the instance of discourse in which I designates the speaker that the speaker proclaims himself as the 'subject'. And so it is literally true that the basis of subjectivity is in the exercise of language." {Benveniste, 1971 #1626; cited in \ {Agamben, 1999 #1489: 121}} (Benveniste, 1971; cited in Agamben, 1999: 121)

Agamben then continues:

It is thanks to this unprecedented self-presence as "I", as speaker in the event of discourse, that there can be in the living being something like a unitary center to which one can refer lived experiences and acts, a firm point outside of the oceans of sensations and psychic states. And Benveniste has shown how human temporality is generated through the self-presence and presence to the world that the act of enunciation makes possible, how human beings in general have no way to experience the "now" other than by constituting it through the insertion of discourse into the world in saying "I" and "now". But precisely for this reason, precisely because it has no other reality than discourse, the "now"—as shown by every attempt to grasp the present instant—is marked by an irreducible negativity; precisely because consciousness has no other consistency than language, everything that philosophy and psychology believed themselves to discern in consciousness is simply a shadow of language, an "imagined substance". Subjectivity and consciousness, in which our culture believed itself to have found its firmest foundation, rest on what is most precarious and fragile in the world: the event of speech. (Agamben, 1999: 122)

The implications of this for the act of bearing witness, for testimony, are then crucially explicated:

There is more: the living being who has made himself absolutely present to himself in the act of enunciation, in saying "I", pushes his own lived experiences back into a limitless past and can no longer coincide with them. The event of language in the pure presence of discourse irreparably divides the self-presence of sensations and experiences in the very moment in which it refers them to a unitary center. (Agamben, 1999: 122)

The argument continues. I have no need just now to follow it so closely further. The point is made, and heard. In particular, the "oceans of sensations and

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psychic states” from which one turns in the act of enunciation, this is something I re-cognise, something I already *know*.

I note two further observations made by Angress:

I saw the film twice, 19 hours in all, and no difficulty concentrating. And unlike viewers who felt that they had learned nothing new, I was amazed at how much I did not know. (Angress, 1986: 253)

For straight information it is better to go to the books. For in a sense viewers who find nothing new here are correct. (Angress, 1986: 254)

Angress confirms that there is nothing new in the film at the level of information, at the level of data, and yet she claims to be “amazed” at how much she, who was an inmate of Auschwitz, “did not know”. It’s an apparent contradiction echoed by Lanzmann himself in statements he has contributed to the commentary surrounding his film:

Lanzmann: “...what interests me is the film. One has been able to discuss Nazism for forty years. One doesn’t need a film for that.” (LaCapra, 1997: 232)

Lanzmann: “I am often asked, “When did you know what happened to the Jews during the war?” The most honest answer I can give is that I started to know really when I started to work on the film.” (Lanzmann, 1995a: 211)

Lanzmann and Angress find that their different experiences of *Shoah*, his of making it and hers of seeing it, are experiences in which no new information is yielded but in which they come to know things “really” or for the first time. The implication in both cases is that this new knowledge, this experience, is of consequence, that it matters. This epistemic effect, as I call it, is an experience I have of *Shoah*, too, and I want to briefly delineate three ways in which it is produced.

Agamben refers deferentially to the historian, Raul Hilberg (Hilberg, 1985). Hilberg also appears as an “actor” in Lanzmann’s film (Lanzmann, 1995b). Unlike the other interviewees in the film, Hilberg does not claim to have personally witnessed any of the events he describes. He was not “there”. Instead, he, who has “sufficiently clarified” the problem of “the historical, material, technical, bureaucratic, and legal circumstances in which the extermination of the Jews took place”, testifies to something else: the evidentiary dearth that the Nazis bequeathed to empiricist historians. In one sequence in *Shoah*, Hilberg and Lanzmann discuss a document that lies on the table before them, a standard administrative order necessary for organising the shipment by rail of “group fares” across Nazi-occupied Europe, in this case, to Treblinka, one-way (Lanzmann, 1995c: 129-134). The very ordinariness of the form, typical it would seem of the

documentary evidence of the extermination program, comes to signify the scarcity of material capable of meeting forensic standards, and evidences in turn the ferocious success the Nazis had in eliminating incriminating documentation of any kind. It is *as if* the document's refusal to betray the crime of which it is a trace, its innocuous blankness in relation to the project of genocide, becomes the literal focus of the camera's lens. It is this blankness, this silence, this forensic dead end, that ironically and effectively exercises evidentiary clout throughout Lanzmann's film. It constitutes and effectively realises "the presence of an absence" (Koch, 1989: 21).

Likewise with the witnesses who offer testimony. For Lanzmann, the information they offer is, of course, important, but repeatedly, and notoriously, he brings them to a point where their capacity to bear witness at all comes under threat. One after another, they lapse into tense silence, they smile mutely and inexplicably, they stand and walk out of the room, they beg him to stop the interview, or they uncontrollably weep. The unrelenting force of Lanzmann's interrogation and the artfulness of his editing technique renders their inability or refusal to speak as profoundly eloquent and crucial, as the most compelling testimony offered in the film, beyond words, beyond conventional techniques and limits of representation. Such testimony accumulates with a devastating power akin to the disastrous earthquake, imagined by Lyotard, that destroys the seismological instruments designed to measure it and in so doing indicates, beyond calibration, the magnitude of its force (Lyotard, 1988: 56; cited in Kaes, 1992: 207).

A third aspect of Lanzmann's unorthodox "documentary" method lies in his play with reality effects. Indeed, he has referred to his film as "a fiction of reality" (Garton Ash, 1985: 30). Repeatedly he refuses the consolations of an apparently objective "naturalism" offered by "archival" film footage. Instead, he stages scenes. Indeed, all the scenes in *Shoah* present before and for the camera [as witness] *as if* theatrically staged. At its simplest, and most familiar, this entails little more than seating the interviewee, the witness, before the camera. At its most unfamiliar, theatrical elaborations accrue. A forest in Israel explicitly performs *in lieu* of a forest in Lithuania. A survivor of Chelmno, punted along the river, sings a romantic German song, just as he did for SS officers decades earlier, when he was a child, before they shot him in the head. A retired Polish train driver, "directed" by Lanzmann *as if* workshopping an improvisation, shunts a rented locomotive along a specially re-opened section of track at Treblinka:

Lanzmann: "At the back of the train there was nobody except on the tender - me, the cameraman, the assistant cameraman, and the sound man. But he was not looking at us. I told him, "You do whatever you want. We are shooting your arrival in Treblinka in the winter of 1942. You have behind you a train of fifty or sixty wagons loaded with Jews who will be killed right away, or in the two or three following hours." He was not looking at me. He is looking at these wagons, at these imaginary wagons behind him, and he invents this gesture." (Lanzmann, 1991: 88; see also Colombat, 1993: 335)

Abraham Bomba is likewise called upon to experimentally perform:

He was the only witness. This is the reason why I rented the barber shop. I tried to create a setting where something could happen. I was not sure. You have to understand me, I did not know what would happen. But I knew what I wanted from him, what he had to say. (Lanzmann, 1991: 95)

None of these *mise en scènes* literally depicts the obscene: Henrik Gawkoski's train pulls [imaginary] carriages that, in 1942, would have been pushed; Abraham Bomba's "client" [in Tel Aviv] is male, even as he speaks, with anguished difficulty, of cutting women's hair (Lanzmann, 1991: 92, 97). With no obscenity reduced to the level of its literal depictability, each is represented like the Gorgon's head reflected in and refracted through Perseus' shield, as an indication of a horror beyond that cannot be directly witnessed *and* blithely survived.

I return to "the fiction of the real":

One difficulty in discussing *Shoah* as a "fiction of the real" is that in it survivors both *play* and *are* themselves. Any boundary between art and life collapses at the point trauma is relived, for when a survivor-victim breaks down, the frame distinguishing art from life also breaks down and reality erupts on stage or film. (LaCapra, 1997: 266)

The difficulty is LaCapra's. The survivors play and are themselves. A self in play is a self subject to reconstruction, subject to an actorly "as if". That the survivor-witnesses perform is clear, *but so do we all*. In this respect, the phrase "fiction of the real" summarily describes all conscious "human" existence, an existence known solely because I make presentations (representations) of it to consciousness, because I stage it consciously as [a] *scene* (see Bal, 2000). The "fiction of the real", then, is a narrative, a discursive narrative, a linguistic [logistic] medium via which experience is consciously known. The fundamental distinction LaCapra makes between art and life, as though art were not part of life already but were opposed to it somehow, is false. It isn't the boundary between art and life that collapses in *Shoah*, but the boundary between the discursive and the non-discursive, between the *epistemological* and the *epistemic*. In this sense, it is not so much "reality" that erupts "on stage" as it is the real. Facilitating the incidence of the eruption of the real is an ancient and, in some cases, sacred art to which Lanzmann aspires.

It is through the film's specific constellation of absence, silence, and artifice, among other effects, that Lanzmann produces a new experience, an effect of knowledge that exceeds that of mere information. Crucially what I come to know, to experience, *as if* for the first time, as I, in turn, witness the film unfolding is how much I do not and can never know. It's a knowledge [of non-knowledge]

that resists ready representation, that feels pre-discursive, that has more in common with my naked *experiences* of pain, ecstasy, or art. Like the blankness I experience when I struggle to imagine my death.

### **witness**

I have two younger brothers, Stuart and Greg. When we were kids in the sixties we would go each Friday night to a “boys’ club” in a local church hall. There, for a nominal fee, we were introduced to gymnastics, games and other forms of disciplined exercise. We often arrived early, before anyone else in fact, and would hang around outside on the busy street, waiting for the building to be unlocked. One such Friday, I decided to cross the road to check out the newish indoor pool located on the other side. Even then, at the age of thirteen years, I relished peering through its steamy windows at the semi-naked forms beyond. As I crossed the road that Friday night, a car driven by a man with a blood-alcohol content of 0.125% ploughed through the pedestrian crossing at high speed and struck me head on. I remained conscious throughout all that followed.

My brother Stuart, then twelve years of age and standing with Greg outside the door of the church hall, a slightly elevated position at the top of a short flight of steps, saw the car hit me. He stayed where he was, choosing not to join the throng of passers-by who immediately rushed to my aid. That night, I am told, he attended boys’ club as usual, undertaking each task with intense focus, speaking very little if at all, and not acknowledging to anyone the disaster that had occurred. Late the next day, while I was still in a critical condition in the intensive care ward and allowed no more than one visitor at a time, he was sent in alone to visit. My parents were afraid for him and believed it imperative that he see me, even if damaged, alive. I recall him standing there stiffly on the left side of my bed, staring at me and at the tubes weaving in and out of my body. I know we talked during that awkward visit but I have no recollection of what either of us said (so different from the conversation I had with my weeping mother in the back of the ambulance which I still vividly recall).

And Greg? He was then seven years old. He didn’t see the car hit me, but he knew that something dreadful had happened, and was told by Stuart to stay close and to speak with no-one. Greg was distressed but being a good boy he did as he was told. I don’t recall now when I saw him next, nor what that meeting entailed.

A few weeks later, a tall policeman visited me at home where I was convalescing, still confined to bed. He asked me questions about what had happened and made some notes. I learned that there was to be a court case and that I would be called

as a witness, the principal witness, in fact, apart from the police officer who'd arrived at the scene and who was not the tall policeman who visited me at home. I found this odd. I was the victim. How could I also be a witness? What had happened had happened, after all, to me. I had grown up watching episodes of *Perry Mason* on TV; the victims in those hammy murder trials, to which I was fervidly devoted each Saturday night, never took the stand. Adjusting to the idea that a victim could also be a witness and could testify was for me a major paradigm shift, a challenge more daunting than the prospect of testifying in court. But I took it on, and when it came to "my day in court", I precociously starred. *Perry Mason* had prepared me well. All the adults present commented on my composure and clarity. I brilliantly *performed*, even under testy cross-examination. I was sure of what I did and did not know, and what I did know was a coherent story, *my* story, refined through many tellings, which I could draw on for my answers to whatever questions came my way. While my father was at times audibly upset in the body of the courtroom, I, with calm and cold-blooded precision, fuelled by the teenage thrill of receiving so much adult attention, ensured that the defendant succumbed to the full force of the law.

Stuart, on the other hand, was never asked to testify. He'd seen what had happened but was not in a position where he could speak about it at all, let alone in court. He was too deeply affected. In fact, to this day, he and I have never discussed the events of that night or its aftermath, and we're now both men in our fifties. He was the only person that night who was known to have seen all that transpired, whose perspective constituted an *overview*, but the risks to his well-being, and to the prosecution's case, of putting him on the witness stand were too high.

There's a coda to this story that happened months later. I made some casual remark about how lucky I'd been to have gotten off so lightly: no broken bones, a minor organ surgically removed, various abrasions and bruises, no memory of pain, total consciousness throughout. My father, sensing that something needed to be belatedly explained, corrected me. I had in fact almost died. My days in the intensive care ward, where I had been installed directly in front of the nursing station and where it always seemed to me that it was "the others" who were in peril for their lives, had been touch and go for me, too. I had come near death, my small body traumatised by blood loss and shock, my general sense of well-being being pharmaceutically induced. I took in the news, for it was news, with a weird sense of detachment that left me feeling empty. I felt I had missed out on something momentous. For all my forensic expertise in court, something devastating had passed through my existence without me being aware of it, and had left me with no experiential trace. My mother's tears in the ambulance, my father's inarticulate eruptions in the court, my brother's scary silence, all these now seemed to *bear witness* to a deep unutterable knowledge that they

collectively shared but that I did not, they *testified* to an exclusive experience to which I, who had performed so eloquently on cue in court, had no access, and, even though I was at the centre of it all, probably never would. Young as I was, I felt that some enormous opportunity in my life had passed me by, and that for all my courtroom brilliance I knew nothing worth knowing after all.

## testimony

*Shoah* is composed largely of filmed interviews. In watching the film, what I witness repeatedly but not solely is interviewees, themselves witnesses, finding a voice, a way to speak, or, if a way is clear and a voice available, the words, the right words. Testimony in *Shoah* is not the mere articulation of archived memory, nor is its truth content about a coincidence of language and fact, of signifier and signified. The offer of testimony in Lanzmann's film entails navigating one's way between the worlds of the sayable and the unsayable. The affective investment in the *performance* of this act of navigation presents as a trace of the degree of struggle entailed, of the energy required, of the failure experienced, of the excess impeding the production of speech, threatening it, repeatedly. The effort presents as evidence of the trauma entailed, which is to say that the signs of effort testify more, far more, than words alone, than the conventional bearers of information which perform as mere capsules of data, however informative. The effort, often an "internal" struggle extending to the body's surfaces, arises repeatedly because the experiencing figure and the speaking subject are ultimately antithetical. The "living being", to use Agamben's term, cannot render itself linguistic and still persist (Agamben, 1999: 129). The "living being", in becoming "the enunciative subject", the one who can say "I" and mean it, disappears in and as discourse, becoming effectively a discursive formation even as it speaks. A remainder, an excess, always remains, however, outside discourse, *as if* offstage. From within discourse, and effectively therefore within consciousness, this unarticulated, perhaps unspeakable, remainder—involuntary tears, tremors, and silences—is experienced as abject, obscene. It is what Agamben has called "the non-language to which language answers" (Agamben, 1999: 38), the obscene component of any testimony, and, in Lanzmann's film, the component of most importance. That which exists already in language is the speech of millions of others. It is not unique. But the sound that arises from the obscene lacuna in speech, this sound, this silence is eloquent and necessary. Only the witness can offer obscene articulations as testimony. All else is echo. In this respect, referring to the film's published transcript is futile—

Simon Srebnik: It's hard to recognize, but it was here. They burned people here. A lot of people were burned here. Yes, this is the place. No one ever left here again. (Lanzmann, 1995c: 3)

—for what is missing is the *performance* of which this “naked and bloodless text” is an insufficient trace (Lanzmann, 1995c: viii). One may as well read the script of *Hamlet* with a view to exactly reconstructing Burbage premiering the role.

By organising his film around the obscene lacunae in speech, Lanzmann undoes the Nazis’ work of silencing, of reducing individuals to *figuren*, cargoes, tatoored numbers, yellow stars, statistics (six million dead). It’s the obscenity that counts, that produces the effect of an ethical dimension, of value.

This is to tell you where the current project, and I, come from.

### looking at the fog

The design and construction of Claude Lanzmann’s *Shoah* serves as the current project’s methodological model. Lanzmann’s film deals with material resistant to representation, without reducing the obscene status of that material to either sensational entertainment or consolatory kitsch. Instead it constructs an unprecedented experience of the obscenity’s force without reverting to orthodox representational conventions. Some of the salient and innovative features of Lanzmann’s project, the techniques and procedures he deploys, are tabled below in summary form. I cannot stress enough: the current project deals with a realm of experience utterly unrelated to that dealt with in *Shoah* yet the epistemic problems of both projects are akin. After itemising Lanzmann’s procedures and techniques, they have been reconfigured in overtly performative terms and applied to the current project as its methods.

Lanzmann’s <i>Shoah</i>	Methodological Principles	<i>Obscenities Offstage</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No archival footage is included; all footage was filmed by Lanzmann and his crew from 1976-81.</li> <li>• The major Nazi leaders are neither discussed nor depicted and are rarely mentioned.</li> <li>• The word “Holocaust” is never uttered, nor is it offered as a subtitled English translation of a word uttered in any other language.</li> <li>• No iconic swastika or yellow star is shown.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A fundamental critical interrogation, rethinking, and, where possible, eschewing of generic categories, conventional iconography, and other “naturalised” representations.</li> <li>• A defamiliarisation, or “strange-making”, of the familiar.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Including as interviewees those figures who identify outside the obvious categories of “gay” and “male”.</li> <li>• Resisting the HIV/AIDS imperative that has driven and dominated sauna research since 1981.</li> <li>• Focussing on the little researched context of contemporary Melbourne.</li> <li>• Sustaining an ongoing interrogation (effectively, a resistance to reification) of the conceptual categories of</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large amounts of screen-time are devoted to footage of streets, highways, railway sidings, woods and houses.</li> </ul>		<p>gender, sexuality, erotics and space, and of their attendant phenomena.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Researching from the epistemic perspective of performance.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The interviewer, Lanzmann, and his various interpreter-assistants are audibly and visually foregrounded alongside the informants.</li> <li>• When an interview requires an interpreter, the time-consuming work of translating speech from one language to another is never edited out of the film.</li> <li>• Lanzmann includes in the final cut of the film episodes that expose the fragility of the film-making process (informants insisting on prematurely ending their interviews, interpreters caught out not translating accurately).</li> <li>• Lanzmann includes in the final cut of the film episodes that expose his unprofessional conduct in pursuit of his obsessions (cajoling, coercing, lying).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A critical and active resistance to the deployment of phantasmagoria (that is, the naturalised elision of the means of production).</li> <li>• A rendering visible of the means of production.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acknowledging the researcher’s presence, <i>my</i> presence, in the scene of the research; working conceptually from and with the first person singular.</li> <li>• Acknowledging the researcher’s presence, <i>my</i> presence, in the scene of the sauna by allowing my own testimony to emerge freely in the interview.</li> <li>• Publishing interview transcripts in their entirety as appendices to the thesis.</li> <li>• Reflexively (de)constructing the academic thesis as theatre; removing its “fourth wall”.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The interviews are staged variously. Some interviewees are interviewed in their homes, some are interviewed at the site where the events they witnessed occurred (Simon Srebnik is flown from Israel to Poland for this purpose), and some are interviewed in sites which fictitiously evoke the situation of the testimony (a forest in Israel standing for one in Lithuania).</li> <li>• Some interviews are actively cultivated by Lanzmann to include episodes where the interview threatens to prematurely end, where its fragility and vulnerability is exposed. Such moments present as limits of</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An awareness that the interview is a <i>performance</i>; that is, that as an <i>event</i> it is a mediated, contingent intervention in history, that it does not exist outside ideology, and that it is conceived, constructed, enacted and comprehended as an aesthetic <i>form</i>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing the form of each interview in collaboration with each interviewee.</li> <li>• Working with the time and place of each interview, its <i>scene</i>, as an element actively and reflexively informing it.</li> <li>• Creating a safe and supportive environment in which interviewees can reflect on and give voice to previously unuttered experiences.</li> <li>• Encouraging each interviewee to visit a limit of representation in his or her testimony.</li> <li>• Supporting the interviewees sensitively and efficaciously in this process; effectively, directing the performer.</li> </ul>

<p>representation.</p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All but one of Lanzmann’s interviewees offers testimony as an eye-witness; each testifies as a custodian of a lived experience that is unique.</li> <li>• Questions are often conceived in terms of specific, often minute, concrete detail: the colour of a gas van, the number of paces from a siding to a gate.</li> <li>• Questions seeking articulations of abstract theories or psychological explanations are rarely if ever asked at all.</li> <li>• The one interviewee who is not a direct witness, the historian Raul Hilberg, is also mostly interviewed at the level of minute, concrete detail, rather than in terms of abstract theory or general ideas. At one point, when he reads from a Warsaw ghetto diary, he becomes a mouthpiece or medium for testimony from a witness who is dead.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A privileging of witness and testimony as “the <i>performance of a story</i> constituted by the fact that, like the oath, it cannot be carried out by anybody else” (Felman, 1994: 92).</li> <li>• A recognition that testimony, like the psychoanalytic scene, entails: a search for truth through an act of speech; a quest of memory; a temporal disruption of chronology; an interest in specific, concrete detail; an operation at a limit of understanding (Felman in Lanzmann, 1995a: 202-203).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selecting and interviewing interviewees not as experts but as witnesses, as custodians of lived experiences that are not typical but unique.</li> <li>• Allowing each interview to develop as the performance of a story that cannot be carried out by anyone else.</li> <li>• Conceiving and asking questions at the level of minute, concrete specifics.</li> <li>• Avoiding abstractions.</li> <li>• Asking “how” rather than “why”.</li> <li>• Assessing the <i>consistency</i> of each interviewee’s testimony by staging verificatory follow-up interviews six months after the initial in-depth interview (a process not identical with assessing the <i>accuracy</i> of each witness’ testimony by testing it against a version of so-called objective reality).</li> <li>• Researching saunas at the level of the subject, not the object.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The film does not intend to offer a new “documentary” account of the destruction of the European Jews (Lanzmann, 1995a: 211).</li> <li>• No historical overview (omniscient knowledge) is offered or implied.</li> <li>• The film relentlessly resonates with an intense awareness of the “present”: of the moment in history contemporary with the film being made and (unexpectedly) with the moment in history of it being viewed.</li> <li>• The film’s discontinuous and fragmentary material achieves order, clarity and intelligibility through a series of formal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An insistence on the epistemic value of art.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Producing the thesis, at every stage, as one would make an artistic performance (a work).</li> <li>• Achieving epistemic order, clarity and intelligibility through a series of formal constellations.</li> <li>• Conceiving, researching, and producing the thesis as theatre.</li> </ul>

<p>constellations specific to it as a work of cinema: “...<i>what interests me is the film.</i>” One has been able to discuss Nazism for forty years. One doesn’t need the film for that.” (Lanzmann in LaCapra, 1997: 232).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The film’s form is unprecedented.</li><li>• “I am often asked, “When did you know what happened to the Jews during the war?” The most honest answer I can give is that I started to know really when I started to work on the film.” (Lanzmann, 1995a: 211).</li></ul>		
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**theatron**



## backstage (the transcripts)

### three sets of evidential data

In producing this study, I have compiled three sets of evidential data.

The first comprises a *survey of existing representations of gay saunas*, with an emphasis on those where space and subjectivity are referenced. The survey includes newspaper advertisements, architectural critiques, works of fiction, health information handbooks, pieces of journalism, literary memoirs, motion pictures, publications of scientific research, travel guides, visual art works and web-sites, among others. Some but not all of these representations deal specifically with saunas in Melbourne. The survey, which is extensive but not encyclopedic, is not published separately but permeates the whole.

The second set of evidential data comprises the *transcripts of 32 semi-structured in-depth interviews* conducted with 16 interviewees. Each interview was individually staged, that is, it was prepared and enacted, *performed*, as a collaboration between me, the interviewer, and each interviewee. The site and time of each interview was mutually agreed with a bias toward the interviewee's wishes and needs. All interviews took place in the year beginning May 2000. No interview took place in a gay sauna. Each interviewee was interviewed twice about six months apart, the second shorter interview offering an opportunity to clarify any matters arising from or since the first. All aspects of the interviews, including matters of consent, confidentiality, and archiving, unfolded within an articulated, agreed and institutionally approved frame of ethical standards and conduct. Interviewees were not restricted to "gay" "men". Recruitment occurred mostly through informal networks pre-existing the project's conception and, in one case, through a variant of "snowball sampling" (Minichiello *et al.*, 1995: 161). Crucial to the recruitment process in each case was the interviewee's ability to contribute to the research *as a witness*: as a custodian of a lived experience that is unique (Felman, 1994: 92), or as "one who ... was present and is able to *testify* from personal observation" (Simpson & Weiner, 1989). The 32 transcripts represent more than 40 hours of interview and comprise almost half a million words. They constitute the evidential core of the study, its vital fundament.

The third set of evidential data, embedded within the second, consists of a *series of anecdotes* offered by me intermittently throughout the interviews. These are my own sauna stories, a selection of them anyway: fragmentary and extended accounts grounded in my experience as an occasional sauna client, maybe even as what the interviewee Mark calls "a sauna rat" [l.i.56:00]. The anecdotes are not

based on written notes or systematic observation of any kind, ethnographic or otherwise, as no field work was undertaken in the course of the study, but they do situate me, and with me the study, within a contingent, historical, ideological and specific scene. They put me in the picture, so to speak, and represent, *pace* Halperin, a view from *somewhere* (Halperin, 1990: 59).

## recruiting interviewees

Recruitment of interviewees occurred mostly through informal networks that pre-existed the project's conception. Charlie, for instance, already knew me—

I.i.00:30

**Charlie:** I guess you've said before

—we shared a history, but this was true for almost all the interviewees. They were people I already *knew*. Some were friends, others people with whom I was friendly. Some I knew professionally, others I knew through non-professional networks. Some I'd met recently, others I'd known for many years. Collectively they constituted a *sampling from a sampled social network* that was *my* social network. Fifteen knew me before the project began; the sixteenth, Joe, was recruited by one of the other fifteen. Fifteen had visited a sauna in Melbourne at least once; one, Frosty, had lived next to a sauna for a couple of years but had never stepped inside. Three interviewees, Kate, Lydia, and Willow, had attended women's nights at saunas—the same night apparently on at least one occasion—and presented as female; all other interviewees presented as male. All interviewees were over eighteen years of age. None was a person with whom I'd had sex, whatever that might mean. All agreed to talk. Some of them knew each other socially at the time of interview but were unaware of each other's involvement in the study. Some have never met and given the extent of my social network they possibly never will. Together, they came from a larger list of almost fifty names, a list that began with twenty names scribbled on a sheet of paper, long since destroyed, and which grew as the project proceeded.

None of the interviewees was recruited in or from a sauna, which is to say, none was approached in a sauna about participating and none was a person I first met in a sauna. True, some of them were people whom I first met elsewhere and then subsequently bumped into at a sauna—it's unavoidable sometimes—but not many. In most cases I knew that interviewees had been to saunas because at some stage they'd told me so, and the most common context in which people *outed* themselves as having been *inside* was a casual conversation about what I was researching: "So what have you been up to? ... Oh yeah, a PhD on what? ..."

### **preliminary meetings with each interviewee**

I met with each interviewee *in person* about a week or so before recording the first interview with her or him. This first meeting was one where I outlined the nature of my research if I hadn't done so already and described the ethical principles and formal procedures under which the study would be conducted. At this meeting I handed each potential participant a consent form and a plain language statement describing what it was to which she or he was consenting. Participants were asked to spend at least 48 hours considering this material before committing to the project. Many immediately expressed a readiness to consent without delay. In each case, I insisted that she or he wait the required 48 hours. Two men who initially agreed to participate changed their mind during the cooling off period and subsequently withdrew.

At this first meeting, a provisional time and place for the first recording session was often, but not always, agreed on and pencilled into our respective diaries. Also, I would often, but not always, informally chat with the potential participant. Sometimes this chat was little more than a social catch-up (some of these people were friends of mine, after all). At other times we'd talk about saunas. With James, I distinctly recall discussing his daytime job, something I hadn't done previously even though I'd known him for several years. It was a discussion that informed an interview we later recorded, though I didn't foresee it doing so at the time. To Joe, whom I hadn't met, I needed to introduce myself and in doing so I invited him to reciprocate, which he did. Apart from handing over the consent form and information sheet, no two of these preliminary meetings took quite the same form. Nor did the interviews which followed.

### **recording the interviews**

The interviews were recorded digitally using a battery-operated minidisc recorder about the size of a cigarette packet. It was small enough to fit into a pocket but usually lay on a table or stretch of turf between me and the interviewee *as if* casually strewn. It proved reliable and efficient but I found out that it was sensitive to heat when I failed to record almost all of what should have been James' second interview (the equipment, lying in full sun, switched itself off after less than a minute; unaware of this, James and I continued talking for more than an hour). James' second transcript, then, documents his third interview with me, and this is acknowledged in the transcript's introduction.

A multi-directional microphone, plugged in to the minidisc recorder via a cable and used to record almost all the interviews, was not so miniature and sometimes attracted obvious attention. Charlie would lunge at it when emphasising points in his second interview; Willow, perched on a rudimentary park bench in windy weather, held it self-consciously in her hand throughout her first. Even so, this second microphone improved on a bulkier, heavier and less sensitive one that recorded the first interviews with Charlie and Kate; these two transcripts, the first in the series, are littered with references to [unintelligible] speech.

### **transcribing the interviews**

The first, second, fourth and fifth interviews were transcribed by me. The remaining 28 were transcribed by a professional transcriber working from analogue copies of the digital originals [sic] laboriously transferred by me onto audio-cassettes. The transcriber's accuracy rate, given the time constraints of her contract and the degradation in sound quality on the audio-cassettes, was high—about 98%—but she was working with about 400,000 words of audible dialogue so the sum total of accumulated errors was high, too. Once she had passed the draft transcripts back to me, my tasks were several:

*First*, I checked each draft against the digital recording on minidisc. My aim at this point was accuracy. Where the transcriber had omitted words, however seemingly insignificant, I reinserted them: “you know” was a typical example. Where she had added words, usually to make grammatical sense—a participle here, a preposition there—I deleted them. And where she had misheard or mistranscribed words, I corrected them. The following passage, for instance, was initially transcribed as referring to “the main stair”, not “the maze there”:

**I.i.24:00**

**Joe:** Um yeah that's about it I think the maze there was pretty good as well in that it was always it was um you know light parts dark parts um parts where you could wait to be seen parts where you could hide if you needed to

I also listened for words that had been part spoken but broken off before completion, and tried to represent them intelligibly in their incomplete form. Where phonic ambiguity occurred or I still had doubts about the ultimate accuracy of what had been transcribed, I would indicate as much in brackets, usually with a “[?]” but sometimes offering a homonym for consideration:

**I.i.26:30**

**Albert:** You you can't lay back on [in?] a sling and pretend it's Sunday afternoon in in the south of France

I also indicated utterance that was [unintelligible]:

**Charlie:**

**I.i.72:00**

can we stop there and have a a breathe

**Russell:** Yeah we can it's it's going to stop in a second anyway

**Charlie:** Right [unintelligible] impression

**Russell:** Yeah do you want a break and do some more after that

**Charlie:** [unintelligible] yeah

I also identified some passages where the reader might assume there was a typo but where the transcript was scrupulously correct. These were conventionally indicated with a [sic]:

**Russell:** And were there

**II.i.30:00**

literally alarm bells going

**Urdhvaretu:** Mm mm which is curious to think about I don't quite why [sic] the alarm bells are doing they're just warning everyone there or are they to intimidate the person

*Second*, I addressed the issue of phatic speech, especially the quasi-words that litter conversation. Each time one of these was audibly uttered in an interview, it was transcribed. Here my aim was accuracy [again] but tempered by manageability. I reduced the myriad of subtly differing phatic utterances wherever possible either to a standardised lexical form, such as "you know", or to one of the following: "ah", "er", "hmm", "mm", "oh", "uh huh", and "um". Only when the utterance failed to resemble any of these at all did I attempt to phonetically transliterate it, uniquely if necessary. Here's Yianis using "whoa":

**Yianis:** I knew there was sex you know but I

**I.i.44:30**

hadn't experienced sex that was that full on actually THAT concentrated because at beats you know like whoa you know at that stage I'd had I'd had you know like um you know it was beyond masturbation or whatever you know but when I got to saunas it was just so full on

and Willow using "pwaah":

**Willow:** I didn't walk in and go pwaah smells of men

**Russell:** Right okay that's fine

**Willow:** but I do remember remember it being damp and quite

**I.i.57:30**

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heavy with smell

*Third*, I removed all the graphic punctuation added by the transcriber: commas, full stops, question marks, and so on, the little marks that conventionally denote and hermeneutically stabilise *literary* form. My intention here was to remind the reader of the transcript's derivation from *speech*.

Where a question was explicitly asked during an interview but this was no longer obvious when reading the unpunctuated transcript, I said so (*in parentheses*):

**I.i.15:30**

**Russell:** Right and you parked (*this is a question*)

**Apollo:** Nowhere near the place (*I laugh*) nowhere near the place

*Fourth*, I inserted a hermeneutic handrail in lieu of the deleted graphic punctuation. By listening *to* the rhythm and intonation of the voices as recorded and by listening *for* grammatical sense in what was being said, I identified coherent units of meaning within speeches, that is, coherent for *me*. In the transcripts, I then inserted a double spacing between such units with the intention of offering the reader an optional modicum of support.

**Russell:** Do you find that reassuring that the police would be called in such a circumstance

**Urdhvaretu:** (*a silence*) I suppose so ah

**II.i.31:00**

I mean a question about that sort of thing would be I mean by the time the police are called you know they're not it's going to take them some length of time to come so it's in a way it's more crucial what happens before the police are called rather than whether whether or not they're called and you know it might just be I can imagine that it would be the

**II.i.31:30**

particular form of the you know how the thing ended up being handled actually on site which determined whether or not you just shuffled the person out the door or ended up calling the police um to me it seems more crucial than what the response would be inside the place

I also placed an upper case initial at the beginning of most speeches. Where this upper case initial is missing, it indicates that the speech *apparently continues* without interruption from a previous speech made by either that speaker or the other:

**Edward:** Yeah I mean he's yeah he's a complex character so there were many reasons

**Russell:** Yeah

**Edward:** sitting on the same plate but one

**I.i.05:00**

of them was because he thought that I needed to go and one was he wanted to go and go with someone

The application of this “lower case” rule is intermittent as it was never systematically or consistently applied. A speech that begins with an upper case initial might, then, continue from a previous speech without interruption or might not. The reader must decide.

*Fifth*, I added contextual information (*in parentheses*) in a format resembling stage directions. These ranged from indications of audible laughter, to indications of pronounced silence, to physical gestures and activities of various kinds:

**Max:** can I draw it (*he takes a pencil*) no

**Russell:** Yeah yes you can yep (*Max reaches for my note book*)

**Max:** Is that okay

**Russell:** Yeah it is (*I pass him a dark ball-point pen*) can you use that

**Max:** Yeah

**Russell:** It'll reproduce better (*I laugh a little*)

**Max:** So (*suddenly he checks the note book*) what is this oh that's yours

**Russell:** It's just mine yeah

**Max:** Okay um yeah (*he starts drawing as he speaks*) so I've come in there there's

**I.i.17:30**

the façade so I come in and there's the reception there there's a door there and then that's the lounge in there with the television the video lounge

I also introduced each transcript with a contextual “setting of the scene”:

*The following transcript documents a conversation with Charlie that was also the first conversation recorded for this project. Charlie and I met early on a weekend in a studio at Victoria University. He was waiting outside it when I arrived. Inside, we assembled a few sticks of furniture by a window and set up the recording equipment. I sat on the floor near the equipment and Charlie sat on a chair. While recording, we often looked away from each other and out through the window to the vista beyond. When we stopped, Charlie disclosed that he'd not been to bed for forty-eight hours. The conversation, like all of those documented for the project, was recorded on minidisks. The microphone used to record this exchange, and the first exchange with Kate, was barely adequate for the task.*

*Sixth*, I addressed the issues of duration, rhythm and timing. The transcripts were marked with what I will refer to as *chronometers*, of which “**II.iii.25:00**” can serve as a working example. The first part of each chronometer, either a **I** or a **II**, indicated that this was *either the first or second interview* recorded with this interviewee. The second part of the chronometer, a lower case Roman numeral, indicated *the sequential number of each uninterrupted interview segment* being

theatron: backstage (the transcripts)

recorded. The third part of the chronometer indicated *the passage of time within a given segment*, usually in thirty second blocks. The exceptions were the initial **00:00** in each segment, which of course indicated no passage of time yet at all, and the final chronometer for each segment, which indicated to the nearest whole second the point at which recording ceased:

**Russell:** Well we'll leave it there for now

**Colin:** Okay

**Russell:** Okay good ta

**Colin:** I've got your form

**I.v.24:21**

*(I switch off the minidisc recorder)*

Accordingly, "**II.iii.25:00**" would indicate that this is the second recorded interview I've had with this person, about six months after the first, that the recording equipment has, for whatever reason, been switched off twice already during this interview, and that we've now been recording the third segment for 25 minutes without interruption.

The chronometers also indicate the *dynamics* of the interview in relation to how much gets said in each thirty second block. Some speakers get to say heaps, others produce words either more slowly or punctuated by silence, and all of course change their pace from time to time. By referring to the chronometers, it becomes possible to ascertain the acceleration and deceleration of speech overall. Readers must make their own sense of what this might mean at any given moment: excitement, reflection, anxiety, hesitation, concentration, reluctance, vaguing out:

**Lydia:** I think it was probably dangerous

**II.i.60:00**

for maybe individual self esteem

**Russell:** Right

**Lydia:** That yeah think yeah I think some would have felt very liberated

**Russell:** Mm

**Lydia:** Mm um even by appearing naked or or whatever that would have been so

**II.i.60:30**

on one level I you know while I'm very sneering about um the inability to get down to it um I do kind of think that all the people there in some way were at a potential risk

**II.i.61:00**

that the b that it wasn't dangerous but they were at a risk of some kind of acceptance or desirability or lusting for someone or going and trying something and yeah yeah

**Russell:** You said all of the people there were at some kind of risk

**II.i.61:30**

at some degree is that correct

**Lydia:** Yeah I did

**Russell:** Does that include you

**Lydia:** Um (*a silence*) yes probably because of my denial of the kind of heavy stuff in terms of (*she blows an exhalation*) phhhhh because in one sense (*a silence*) what do I think about that

**II.i.62:00**

(*a silence*) at that time I (*a*

**II.i.62:30**

*silence*) mm the risk was always the risk was (*a silence*)

**II.i.63:00**

I keep remembering the woman at the dance party

*Seventh* (and finally), I removed all words and phrases that could disclose the identity of interviewees or that would compromise the agreed confidentiality protocols under which the study was conducted. I replaced such words and phrases wherever possible with pseudonyms or less specific descriptors. Almost all interviewees devised pseudonyms for themselves; only Max's name was given to him by me and even then it was subject to his approval ("Oh yes, that's good", he said).

All passages where the words written were not the words spoken are indicated by underlining in the transcripts. Underlined passages are not necessarily as brief or lengthy as the originals they replace:

**Mark:** Yes I can remember the first time that I went to Volcano

**I.i.00:30**

and I was with my then American boyfriend so it would have been in nineteen eighty-one or possibly early nineteen eighty-two and

**I.i.01:00**

it freaked me out a bit

On fourteen occasions, I was unable to invent an appropriate underlined replacement. In these cases, I elided material instead. Twelve of the elisions are indicated conventionally as [...]. Two others are replaced by [bracketed descriptions] of what was being said:

**Joe:** Mm yeah there was oh there was a bit of a sense of annoyance that I'd wasted seventeen dollars

**II.i.20:30**

um [...] I'm making it up is it seventeen

## **publishing the transcripts**

Once ready for publication, the 32 transcripts were collated and bound in the sequence in which the interviews were recorded. They are published *in their entirety* as an [unwieldy] appendix to the thesis proper and offer the reader the options of referencing and reading further in. Their layout intends to evoke the effect in *Shoah* of foregrounding layers of mediation, to remind the reader constantly that she is reading *transcripts of speech*. As such, they are offered as an incitement to an inductive archaeology, much as is a shard exhumed on the site of an ancient metropolis. Their incomplete form encourages the creation of an awareness that they do not “naturally” “reveal” “truth”, that they are difficult, partial and [literally] mute. The absence of formal grammar and punctuation, and the approximation of the dashes to breaths and locutions, without a certainty that either is indicated, problematise their status further. They need to be struggled with, constantly interrogated, and never complacently accepted as identical to “speech itself”. What ought to emerge is the reader’s sense of the effort required to make sense, both of the transcripts and of what they refer to or indicate, of what can be inferred, of what can be induced. In dealing with the transcripts, the reader must not slip into a ready-made well-honed routine, into something that feels via a process of habit to be natural. She must perform, must act, and must become a witness in turn. The transcripts are not offered as entertainment.

The appendix archives the interviews as *performances*. It is offered as the study’s evidential core.

*Fragments* of the transcripts are also cited verbatim throughout **theatron**, this final part of the thesis. In keeping with Barthes’ principle of maintaining an awareness of their derivation from speech, such fragments are referenced always as *temporal events* by referring to them via their *chronometers*. Directing the reader to page numbers in the appendix, a practice fundamentally associated with the dominant *literary* convention of the book, is here eschewed.

## onstage (the interviews)

### mediation

**Charlie:** Can I um are you ah do you have the licence to ask factual que factual questions which are

**I.i.00:30**

in fact not not the truth or which are fictional

Charlie's relation with language, with speech, is idiosyncratic, non-standard. His use of language is often non-naturalistic, that is, when he speaks I am conscious of it, the words draw attention to themselves as a mediation. Experience, when he speaks of it, is obviously not immediately available, as if it ever were ...

### testing testing one two

**Charlie:** Can I um are you ah do you have the licence to ask factual que factual questions which are

**I.i.00:30**

in fact not not the truth or which are fictional

Charlie asks if I have "the licence", not "a licence", not "licence", but "the licence". I'm thirty seconds into the first interview of the project and the law rears its head. Sure, it's a mere trope. And yes Charlie, it emerges later, is here *theatrically* performing, improvising without me yet knowing it, this part of the conversation for the benefit of the microphone, as a sound check. He asks me a tangled question about rhetorical questions

factual questions which are

**I.i.00:30**

in fact not not the truth or which are fictional

which is itself, perhaps, a rhetorical question. I cannot tell. And lurking somewhere not too far behind his question is a barometric sensitivity to law. Do I have *the* licence?

**Russell:**

**I.i.00:00**

It's recording now

**Charlie:** It's recording

**Russell:** Is that all right

theatron: onstage (the interviews)

**Charlie:** It's recording now

**Russell:** Yep it's recording

**Charlie:** All right so anything I say can be used as evidence

**Russell:** Not really it can't be used as anything

**Charlie:** Can I um are you ah do you have the licence to ask factual que factual questions which are

**I.i.00:30**

in fact not not the truth or which are fictional

**Russell:** The questions

**Charlie:** Yeah

**Russell:** Um I don't know what you mean go on

**Charlie:** See the questions that one asks I guess you've said before what's the point in asking a question when you already know the answer

**Russell:** Yeah

**Charlie:** There's a word for it that it becomes a particular kind of

**I.i.01:00**

question

**Russell:** Yeah a rhetorical question

**Charlie:** Yeah yeah so that's one type of question a rhetorical question

**Russell:** Yeah

**Charlie:** Mm yeah I guess yeah I would just be interested to see what sort of questions are answered after this (*he laughs*)

After "this". This what? Neither then nor now, and by "now" I mean no less than the many nows that have constituted the thinking and writing toward this passage, neither then nor now do I feel that I know what it is precisely that is going on here. Apart from my dawning awareness that Charlie is *playing*. And apart from the atavistic traces of law I hear in Charlie's speech: "the licence", "evidence", *the* (single) word that denotes *the* proper name for *the* question where you already know *the* answer.

**Charlie:** Mm yeah I guess yeah I would just be interested to see what sort of questions are answered after this (*he laughs*)

**Russell:** Fine that's all right

**Charlie:** (*indicating the minidisc recorder*) Is is that enough to

**I.i.01:30**

checking one two checking

## before midnight

**I.i.11:00**

**Charlie:** I remember planning that I had to get home before midnight (*he laughs a little*)

**Russell:** Because of public transport

**Charlie:** I said I yeah I sort of said I was going to go for an hour or something just um I wanted to socialise and I didn't want to go to a nightclub I wanted to go somewhere quiet where I could actually reflect because I wanted to

**I.i.11:30**

Charlie tells me he remembers planning he had to get home before midnight, and then he laughs a little. When I ask if that's to do with public transport, his response, typically, fails to clarify if that's the case. But public transport in Melbourne, at the time of the interview and at the time of Charlie's first sauna visit, ran after midnight—it still does—and what Charlie says to me is that he had to get home *before* midnight. Not leave the sauna before midnight, not leave the city before midnight, but get home before midnight. Whether it's what Charlie actually planned, if he planned anything the night of that first sauna visit, or not, what *he tells me* now in the interview is a story where the hour of midnight marks a limit or rule. It's like a fairytale where midnight's a witching hour, an hour of transformation, and thus a time "to get home before", and the fairytale that specifically comes to mind, that comes to *my* mind as I listen to his tale, is Cinderella.

**I.i.11:00**

**Charlie:** I remember planning that I had to get home before midnight (*he laughs a little*)

**Russell:** Because of public transport

**Charlie:** I said I yeah I sort of said I was going to go for an hour or something just um I wanted to socialise and I didn't want to go to a nightclub I wanted to go somewhere quiet where I could actually reflect because I wanted to

**I.i.11:30**

and I thought well I'm I'm sure if I sort of send off the right energies I can just go there and no one will bother me and sure enough you know I went home and there was no fuss with anyone except for one you know monster (*I laugh a little*) that's right this hideous queen who was really quite gorgeous and but really really muscley and he was like following me around everywhere um and I just got the feeling um

**I.i.12:00**

he was a real local and he just zoomed in on the fact that he'd never seen me there before (*he laughs a little*) and ah and so there was that real sort of ah predator sort of aspect and

**Russell:** Fresh meat

theatron: onstage (the interviews)

**Charlie:** Yeah and I remember having sort of I just thought no I don't want to stay here very long at all like I don't want people looking at me um if I'm feeling this way if I'm feeling this vulnerable it's not enjoyable [unintelligible]

**Russell:**

**I.i.12:30**

You said I want to pick you up again on something you said you thought he was a local do you just want to sort of unpack that a bit for me

**Charlie:** Well I mean I mean the fact that anyone with a body like that I assume immediately that they'd have to spend half the day every day in the gym pretty much like from stories I've heard about prostitutes who have really amazing bodies you know that's where they spend

**I.i.13:00**

their mornings is at the gym you know for three or four hours because it becomes part of their their lifestyle

**Russell:** Yeah

**Charlie:** The gym and um I mean he did look a bit like a Sydney-sider funnily enough because I'd spent some time in Sydney

**Russell:** That kind of Oxford Street buffed and

**Charlie:** Very much so very much so

**Russell:** fitting constructing one's body to fit into a scene

**Charlie:** Mm very angular very pretty really pretty

**I.i.13:30**

and really shaved like just sort of Vaseline glossy and sort of (*he laughs a little*) yeah

At the level of representation, the figure in question, the star, is initially produced in Charlie's narration, that is, introduced, as "one you know monster": a figure as alone in the sauna as he is improbably fantastic. The figure then re-forms a little more specifically, and inexplicably, as "this hideous queen who was really quite gorgeous and...". The unfinished speech lapses into silence: gorgeous and what, one wonders. Then comes a shift in thought, which almost certainly denotes a shift in scope: "but really really muscley". The figure's physique, his build, is being specifically produced, presented, "represented" as we say, as text, and this text provides Charlie with a basis for further *intertextual* analysis and critique: other stories (told by whom?) of "amazing bodies" produced by extended workouts at the gym "half the day every day" neatly segue with the hideous queen's performance, already denoted by Charlie as extreme: "and he was like following me around like everywhere". The figure, far from anonymous, is given a spatial genealogy: "a local...a bit like a Sydneysider", who, perhaps, spends many mornings at the gym and many nights at the sauna; "a regular" [I.i.14:00, I.i.18:30], a figure committed to gestural repetition evident in his build, "really really muscley", and skin, "really shaved like just sort of Vaseline glossy". Inchoately, but not incoherently, Charlie *constructs* this figure in the course of the

interview. He rummages around in language, searching for ever more specific and poetic terms with which he can truly denote. It's also apparent that he isn't practiced in describing this "monster", that he has no rehearsed sauna story to offer me here, that discursive representation of "this hideous queen" is, for him, something new.

**Russell:** About how long did he spend following you do you was this like one continuous event or did is it something that happened intermittently over a period of time

**Charlie:** There was quite strong eye contact like he sort of it was like *(he laughs a little)* you know eyes wide open kind of trying to sort of

**I.i.16:30**

rub his brown eyes all over my body and um it was really forward you know I just wasn't interested clearly and at that time I sort of I didn't even have the curiosity to go a step further to talk to him

**Russell:** Yeah

When I ask Charlie a question about the temporal structure of the event, he speaks as though not having heard me. Somewhere not quite *in* the interview, he remains focussed on the hideous queen. His scope has narrowed so specifically that I have become peripheral. He hears me, sure, but possibly as a voice, as a familiar set of sounds, as an echo, of someone speaking nearby. He may even hear the intonation, the inflection of the question, of "a" question, but instead of answering its substance, he impulsively responds as though answering a question of his own. How can he represent this figure with words?

**Charlie:** There was quite strong eye contact like he sort of it was like *(he laughs a little)* you know eyes wide open kind of trying to sort of

**I.i.16:30**

rub his brown eyes all over my body

His little laugh registers, perhaps, a momentary evocation, an affective return, of how that eye contact made him feel, a feeling, the analytic articulated elaboration of which brings him back to the interview and to me. What interests me here is the degree of *immersion* that Charlie exhibits in this scene, a scene other than the supposedly immediate scene of the interview, his circle of attention, his own "eyes wide open", as it were, focussed not so much on me as on the image, the visible body, of the "hideous queen". My question about how long he was followed is never answered. It might inform Charlie's response, me sustaining his attention on the topic, for instance, but from where I sit now, writing this passage at my sunlit desk years after the event, I cannot tell for sure. This capacity of discourse—that it can trigger affective responses that derail or otherwise threaten it, discourse itself, even as it sustains itself—interests me.

I remember planning that I had to get home before midnight *(he laughs a little)*

I wonder, now as I write this, if Charlie's little laugh consciously and ironically acknowledges the relation with Cinderella, if the "monster...who was really quite gorgeous", "really really muscley", "very angular very pretty really pretty", "really shaved like just sort of Vaseline glossy", is not in effect produced as some grotesque distortion or perverse play upon the figure of Prince Charming, a drag-like parody of the construction of the figure of power, a "hideous queen" indeed, disorientated in the heart of his domain ("a local a regular") by the unknown newcomer, the first-timer, the loner at the ball who, known only to himself, must be "home before midnight". Or, flipping through the anthology, if the "monster" with "eyes wide open kind of trying to sort of rub his brown eyes all over my body" does not more directly impersonate the Beast (who, underneath, was also a Prince "who was really quite gorgeous")? Possibly, maybe, perhaps... The two stories are too inextricably intertwined in Charlie's tale *and in my hearing of it* for me to disentangle my narrative cathexes from his and those of the brothers Grimm.

### to frequent (vb.tr.)

#### I.i.51:30

**Kate:** Yeah can I I mean can I ask you

**Russell:** Yeah absolutely

**Kate:** whether you that you know whether you you frequent saunas

There's something about Kate's use of the term that catches my attention. Something about her awkward stopping and starting as she approaches the verb: "whether you that you know whether you you frequent saunas". I follow up:

**Russell:** what what do you associate

#### I.i.58:00

that verb with frequenting something

**Kate:** Frequenting would be to do it like

**Russell:** Like you don't say visit (*I laugh a little*)

**Kate:** Visit (*she laughs*) visit [unintelligible] frequent frequent to me means more than you know a couple of times in a week say [unintelligible]

**Russell:** Do you think of frequenting a club

**Kate:** Yeah

**Russell:** Yeah you do think of frequenting a club okay so

**Kate:** Yeah frequent um not that I actually really use the word that much but yeah

**Russell:** No no

**Kate:** Yeah whether it

**Russell:** It sense well I had the sense you didn't use it that much

**Kate:** No

**Russell:** There was something point like slightly pointed or

**I.i.58:30**

lifted out a bit like it's like it's in inverted commas or (*Kate laughs*) but I'm wondering what what that might be connected with

**Kate:** The frequenting

**Russell:** Yeah what you about that kind of place like you

**Kate:** Oh right

**Russell:** But then you said with a club you'd use it too

**Kate:** I would use it too yeah

**Russell:** But you don't use it often you said

**Kate:** No (*we laugh*) whether I you know oh well I wouldn't say it sort of you know I wouldn't say you know I frequent the cinema or

**I.i.59:00**

I would I would say with clubs I'd say

In his first interview, Apollo also uses the verb

**Apollo:** but um I became really like not a happy person and I would I would frequent you know um these kinds of places like for you know every day for say a week and then I'd stop for I don't know a couple of weeks

**I.i.68:30**

and then I'd get back into it

and I follow up with him, too:

**Russell:** What do you mean by frequent

**Apollo:** Frequent I frequented these places

**Russell:** Yeah that's a new verb you've introduced

**Apollo:** Frequent

**Russell:** What do you mean

**Apollo:** I'd go there I'd go there a bit you know

theatron: onstage (the interviews)

**Russell:** Yeah but you were saying that earlier like going there and visiting but now you're using the term frequent is there is there what are you doing when you're frequenting a place

**Apollo:** You you're more than visiting

**I.i.69:00**

you're you're you know you're hanging out you know you're going to go there and you know hang out and partake in you know um

**Russell:** Do you frequent your home

**Apollo:** No I don't frequent

**Russell:** But you hang out here

**Apollo:** Yeah but I'm here all a lot of the time I don't I wouldn't say I frequent my home I just don't think I'd use that word for my home

**Russell:** Right okay right

**Apollo:** You know um

**I.i.69:30**

I used to go there frequently I mean you know

**Russell:** *(I laugh a little)* Okay

And with Charlie, too, in his second interview. He's talking about a relaxed man with whom he spoke in the locker area at a sauna:

**Charlie:** like he didn't seem from the that

**II.i.56:00**

place but in fact when I spoke to him yeah he's frequented it quite regularly just not at the times that I usually go but anyway sorry that's a bit off the point or off not off the point but just adding more to it

**Russell:** Well I'm I'm going I'm going to change the topic

**Charlie:** Yeah

**Russell:** Because there's a few other things that have come up in the time we've got available that I wouldn't mind touching on can you tell me about the word frequent *(I pronounce it as in the infinitive to frequent)*

**Charlie:**

**II.i.56:30**

I can't frequent no I sort of that was a word frequent

**Russell:** It's a word that you spoke when you used when you talked to me the first time um and it's a word you've used a couple of times today and it's a word that other interviewees I've had have used talking about frequenting places rather than say going to them or visiting them

**II.i.57:00**

or maybe in addition to saying visiting and going but using that term frequenting

**Charlie:** I think I've s I first heard that word from you

**Russell:** Oh yeah

**Charlie:** Yeah and I think I'm just I use it when I'm speaking to you

**Russell:** Yeah

**Charlie:** um as sad as that sounds um yeah it's something that sort of

**Russell:**

**II.i.57:30**

It's interesting because it's interesting you say that because I'm not aware it's a word I use that's why I hear it when other people use it because I think oh that's interesting they think of frequenting saunas whereas I don't

**Charlie:** Right

**Russell:** So if I've used it

**Charlie:** Yeah

**Russell:** then that's interesting

**Charlie:** Yeah you use two words

**Russell:** Oh yeah what's the other one

**Charlie:** Frequency and regularity

**Russell:** I

**II.i.58:00**

might ask about frequency and regularity but in terms of the verb as to frequent something I can't think of any place that I think of myself as frequenting which it's almost like it's a word the police use you know um and yeah I'm really interested because a couple of people

**II.i.58:30**

I've spoken with have used that term so for instance I've well no I'll leave it at that you've answered it you've told me you know you think you've heard me say it and you've picked it up from that is it a word you use to apply to other places do you frequent the supermarket

**Charlie:** No

**II.i.59:00**

probably not I don't know whether I frequent the supermarket I go regularly to the supermarket

None of the three seems to use the verb *to frequent* frequently. Even though Kate imagines that she could use it in relation to a club, she doesn't think she does. Apollo seems not to use it much at all, certainly not in relation to his home. Charlie's clear that he's borrowed the word from me, even though I'm confident that I rarely if ever use it, a confidence that's reinforced by scrutiny of the interview transcripts later on. I hear this word, when Kate, Apollo and Charlie use it, precisely because its occurrence is so abnormal in the discursive scenarios I

theatron: onstage (the interviews)

usually inhabit, including the interviews. It sounds odd, loaded. But then Kate, Apollo and Charlie are in discursive scenarios that they don't usually inhabit, too; they're being interviewed. I wonder what it is that they're performing, what script they're citing, and for whom, when they speak it:

**Charlie:** um but let's face it you know I do not find saunas inspiring um you know I find certain people inspiring but the saunas the way they're built the couple I've been to they're just yeah they're they're just they don't they're not inspiring I must admit um and that's something

**II.i.31:00**

that you know I'm taking into consideration and I think I'm frequenting them less because of you know because of that

Only Joe, whose sauna experience at the time of the interviews is far more extensive than that of Apollo, Charlie and Kate, especially in the sense of one who is well practised in speaking with others about that experience, uses the word with an apparently natural ease, a *naturalism* that slips under my radar:

**Joe:** and um I was working at the pub and had even before then been frequenting that sauna because I thought it was fantastic and it was so

**I.i.13:30**

big and you know whatever

**Joe:** Probably the only time I'd actually go

**II.i. 09:00**

into the dry sauna don't tend to frequent them very much only really go in them when I was be drying myself

I never ask Joe to elaborate on his use of the verb.

## wood and eucalyptus

**Charlie:** Well I went there for the purpose of um getting my money's worth and I wanted that's right I actually went there um to just sort of fix my body up and to have a spa and a sauna and I thought well for ten dollars you know I could get more than just (*we laugh*) I could get more than just a spa

**I.i.31:00**

and a sauna hey you know and that was the impetus actually

**Russell:** Yeah

**Charlie:** Yeah um

**Russell:** Um I've actually been for just a sauna and a spa

**Charlie:** Yeah I thought why not you know but when I got there and I saw the size of it I just went oh this is hideous I was imagining the sauna no which is the one that's got wood and eucalyptus (*this is a question*)

**Russell:** The wooden one is the sauna

**Charlie:** Yeah I was expecting a really large sauna instead I got there and it was like

**I.i.31:30**

you know barely fit you know people in there I don't know how many it fits but it didn't I was just imagining it to be a bit more spacious than what it was like I thought the facilities there were um yeah just not really compatible with what I imagined them to be

Charlie starts to talk to me about how he imagined the sauna at the sauna but before he gets that far he checks himself and asks me: "which is the one with the wood and eucalyptus". Without putting much thought into it, I tell him that "the wooden one is the sauna" and then, and only then, Charlie goes on to tell me how he "was expecting a really large sauna", the correct name now properly in place.

I've assumed that Charlie's reference to "wood" relates to the interior lining of what I call "the sauna", and I'm so confident of this relation that with seeming immediacy I eliminate from all consideration the unpainted wood panelling featured in other parts of the building as well as the extensive use of painted timber products throughout. This has something to do with Charlie's question "which is the one..." being addressed directly to me. It has the effect of *casting* both of us instantly in roles as *insiders* experientially aware of the sauna as a suite of areas, rooms and zones, each categorically distinct from the other, each capable of being properly named. I realise that he's suddenly wondering about the correct or proper name for that particular wooden or wood-lined room, that he seeks authoritative verification of the proper name from me.

Me. Who am I in the scene of the interview that I suddenly play such a decisive role? And when I tell him that "the wooden one is the sauna", what is it that I, the interviewer and principal researcher, am actually doing? What unstated operations of power are already at work in this first interview, coursing through our conversation, giving shape to its outcomes, authorising that which is proper? To what extent is the entire project subject to the mobile force relations of power?

## naked

**Randy:** what I do at the locker when I think about it is I I take off all my clothes and I put them into the locker but it's always very orderly I always fold everything (*I laugh a little*) okay always put everything on hangers and stuff like that and when I take my underwear off I put the towel around my waist first and take my underwear off through that I don't

theatron: onstage (the interviews)

just strip off for all the world to see and then wrap the towel around me which is really interesting because it wouldn't

**I.ii.35:00**

matter if I did but it feels like it's something that I have to do and then when I actually do then I after that once everything's packed away I go and take a shower and then of course I take my towel off and then obviously because you I can't have a shower with my towel on

**Russell:** Yep

**Randy:** Um and then from there it doesn't matter that I'm naked

The relations between such phenomena as the subject's identity and the place the subject identifies itself as being in, its situation, matter. Who is it that feels at home, at ease, relaxed, at odds, disorientated, lost, alienated, empowered, disempowered, excited, scared, threatened, amused, bored, curious, sexually motivated, turned on, turned off, intimidated, aroused, deflated, out of place, exposed, vulnerable, ashamed? Who is this figure who feels this? What does it mean to identify this figure as having a gender, sexuality, age, race, ethnicity? Where? When?

Who is the figure reporting all this, the figure who knows? Who is the interviewee?

**Randy:** part of coming from um all these different sort of backgrounds and stuff

**I.i.24:30**

like that is that I can sometimes play around with it like when someone asks me where I come from I can say Indonesian or I can say da da da because who's going to know and I kind of like that aspect and I

**Russell:** You've done that in saunas

**Randy:** I think so sometimes I just sort of go oh what the hell you know where will I be from today

## names and things

**Russell:**

**I.i.00:00**

Um the first question I want to ask you is when you were born was Randy the name you were given

**Randy:** Is Randy my given name

**Russell:** Yeah when you were born

**Randy:** Yeah it's um my actual full name is actually Friedrich Randy Joshua Marcs

**Russell:** Right

**Randy:** Um but Randy is the name my parents always used if that makes sense

**Russell:** Yeah

**Randy:** Like um I don't really know what the reason was I think um I got the name Friedrich from

**I.i.00:30**

a colleague my parents used to work with who they had a lot of respect for so that's how that came in and he was German and that's the link to that name but um Randy was one that both my parents picked together that had meaning to them I suppose so that's how that came about

**Russell:** And so even though Friedrich is the first name in your name Randy then is the name you've picked up on but partly because your parents kind of picked up on that

**Randy:** Yeah yeah and I suppose er I mean they always call me

**I.i.01:00**

Randy and I just never found it peculiar that Friedrich was my first name and I was never called that for me it was just like oh they just call me Randy so that must be who I am

**Russell:** Right

"Friedrich Randy Joshua Marcs" is a pseudonym developed specifically for this project. The "Randy" part was chosen by the interviewee, and the remaining three parts, "Friedrich" "Joshua" and "Marcs", were invented by me. I think of the pseudonym, of this pseudonym in particular, as a serviceable translation, which is to say, a good one. The reflexive operations performed upon it in the course of the transcribed interview remain intact, more or less, in that they remain essentially true to *my* experience of the interview—I'm referring to the accumulative experience of staging the interview initially and then repeatedly listening to the recording—and are legible and intelligible, available for scrutiny, critique and further thought. Yes, his first name was German and, yes, it was subject to being misspelled, and so on. So let us align ourselves with[in] this fiction, this masquerade, just for now, *as if* these were the words that the interviewee known as "Randy" actually said. Let us suspend disbelief. Let us allow "Randy" to become Randy, for a while:

**Randy:** Yeah it's um my actual full name is actually Friedrich Randy Joshua Marcs

"Randy" was not the only name Randy was given. Nor was it the first of the names he was given. Properly, "Randy" was not Randy's first name. But his parents called him "Randy" so that was who he, Randy, became, who he was, "who I am", who Randy "must be". His name, "Randy", interpellates and, in doing so, inaugurates (Butler, 1997: 33). It inaugurates Randy. It inaugurates "him". It becomes what Randy thinks of, and speaks of, as his "real" name:

theatron: onstage (the interviews)

**Randy:** generally I'm pretty truthful um I actually find it hard you know when um even if I'm just in a bar or something but especially in a sauna I never make up a fake name for myself and I know guys do that but I've just found that

**I.i.25:30**

really absurd ah an absurd thing to do um and I've noticed like particularly the first couple of times when I went someone's asked me what's your name and I'd actually hesitate for a second and then just tell them my real name because I just thought I'd say oh should I say a false name um um um oh stuff that

**Russell:** Do you ever tell them that your name's Friedrich

**Randy:** No

Randy never gives a "fake" name and always gives his "real" name, the name that's real for him: "Randy", not "Friedrich". Even though "Friedrich" is his first and proper name—his "actual" name as he, Randy, calls it—"Randy" is Randy's "real" name.

### **an exception**

There's a sauna in Melbourne of which three interviewees speak [**James: I.i.10:30** **Colin: I.i.17:30** **Mark: II.i.17:30**]. What's curious about this sauna, and in this it is distinguished from the other Melbourne saunas discussed in the interviews, is that none of these interviewees calls it by its name, though Mark attempts to. I begin to wonder if I'll need to invent a pseudonym for it, after all. It's also exceptional that this sauna is referred to in terms of the suburb in which it is located, which is understandable, but that each interviewee offers a *different suburb* as its address. Each man, it seems, has decided that the suburb is more reliable as a mnemonic device than the sauna's name but how they've each decided on the particular suburb they speak of, Suburbs B, I, and O, remains unknown, though the three suburbs in question abutt each other.

When Mark, alone of the three interviewees, attempts to call the "unnamed" sauna by its proper name, he uses an incorrect name which I correct.

### **a tour**

**James:** Okay well basically it's upstairs above shops in a fairly busy street it's just a single glass door you open you walk up

**I.i.12:30**

quite a few stairs narrow stairway and at the opening entrance there's um like a grill a small reception area and then the door's on the right and you walk in as soon as you walk in there's a bar café in front of you or the side of it anyway if you look to your right

there's a table and chairs and then further on there's lounge chairs um it's oh I don't know about I'm terrible with

**I.i.13:00**

metres and stuff like that but

**Russell:** That's good

**James:** It's not much bigger than you know I think it's probably twice the size of my flat

**Russell:** Yeah

**James:** In width

**Russell:** The whole flat or just this room we're in

**James:** Just this sorry just this room

**Russell:** Yeah

**James:** I'm just talking about the width

**Russell:** Yeah yeah

**James:** You know from wall to wall

**Russell:** It's domestic in scale

**James:** Domestic yeah

**Russell:** Yeah

**James:** Absolutely um yeah like a very a big lounge room and it's got a big TV screen um and also two of those kind of like um I think like those big

**I.i.13:30**

Chinese vases it's a bit kitsch and and there's kind of a and on the side there's a sideboard or something it's very kind of um old queen kind of look to it that front section um then if you so that's to the right and as soon as you walk in the door if you go to your left there's a small area where there's lockers and to the left of that there is a solarium room and then as you go past

**I.i.14:00**

the lockers I can't remember now if it's before or after the lockers there's a massage room yeah there's a massage room after the locker room and then there's a kind of corridor leading on and to the right there's a if you go off to the right there's a a room where they show pornos on a s on a television and a kind of bay around the walls of like a seating bay kind of thing um with cushions and stuff then as you

**I.i.14:30**

go down the corridor there's cubicles on each side the cubicles on the left have a kind of bed sort of set-up like a very simple bed set-up with the vinyl mattress thing and on the right the it's all on the floor the mattress kind of thing is on the floor the vinyl's on the floor then half way down there's on the left there's a sling room a shmall a shmall a small sling room and then further down on the left there's a room with two entrances to it with a kind of jail

**I.i.15:00**

grill in the middle that so you can close both sides and the people can meet but they're blocked off by like a a grill like a

theatron: onstage (the interviews)

**Russell:** Blocked off from each other

**James:** Yeah yeah

**Russell:** Yeah

**James:** So you're once you're in the room if you're on one side you can't get to the other

**Russell:** Like visiting time at prison

**James:** Yes yes (*he laughs*) and there's a video monitor in the room that shows the same porno that's on in the room up the front

**Russell:** Yes

**James:** Then if you go past that room you can either go right and go round to this other side where there is

**I.i.15:30**

cubicle it's much darker around that part there's kind of little solitary standing cubicles with holes in the wall glory holes and then as you walk around to that part then further round there's an area that's like completely dark and it's like a grope sort of ledge it's like a mattress and and then if you keep on going further there's a few more cubicles and then there's a glass partition or a wall with a glass window at the end that you can look into the TV room at the front so instead of when we passed

**I.i.16:00**

the room on the left with the grill the jail visiting room instead of going right keep on going round left to your right there's a washing room like for their towels and stuff washing machines and things like that

**Russell:** Yes

**James:** Turn left and keep on going down there is the showers on the left three showers and hopeless water pressure hopeless (*I laugh*) the worst in Melbourne the worst in Melbourne and if (*he laughs*) if this can if this thing can influence them to get [unintelligible: fixed?]

**Russell:** No no no of course

**James:**

**I.i.16:30**

It's terrible anyway and then to the right there's a spa and then also to the right there's a dry sauna and in front of you there's a kind of a steam room and then toilets to your left

**Russell:** And what's beyond that

**James:** And there's a little um drink water fountain and then the wall at the back I've got no idea where that leads to I imagine it there's a car I think there's a car park area out the back with all those buildings

**Russell:** Is there a door or a wall

**James:** Ah I can't remember I don't know

**I.i.17:00**

if there's a door or um I imagine it would be a door just in terms of fire regulations

**Russell:** Right

**James:** But it it's definitely locked

**Russell:** Yep okay (*a silence*) that was thorough

**James:** Hmm I've been there a few times

James' description is offered in the present tense *as if* the place described were present, *as if* it were a presence for him and or me. His description is sequenced as an embodied itinerary even though the venue [sic] in question is understood as fully realised and simultaneously present. As synchronic. When James next describes what he did at this venue last Friday night, the temporal structure shifts:

**James:** Arrived

**I.i.21:00**

said hello to the person at the door went in got changed and of course it's winter lots of jackets and things like that and I remember turning around and seeing a fairly handsome guy there and I thought oh that's a good sign because often that one is not very pretty clientele it's a lot older um but I thought oh okay that's interesting then I walked out the back

**I.i.21:30**

and had a shower and I guess I looked around and once again it seemed to be mostly older guys (*he clears his throat*) like you know over fifty sixty kind of thing um went into the sauna the wet sauna steam room sorry steam

**Russell:** Is this straight after the shower

**James:** Yeah

**Russell:** Yeah

**James:** Then wandered around a bit looking at the different rooms seeing who was there realised it was dead

**I.i.22:00**

um I think at that stage there was a young Italian guy in the room watching the videos

and so on. Why this shift? How is it that the virtual tour through the sauna is not offered as a journey through time, whereas the account of moving through the building "last Friday night" is [or was]? Denning has noted that history texts that are mostly past-participled "order the past and give a comfortable sense of control" (Denning, 1996: 17). True, and this leads me to wonder then about the ways in which the non-anecdotal itinerant descriptions, perhaps like the visit to the sauna itself, keep alive the possibility of relinquishing control.

### **Joe's friend is straight**

**Joe:** Ah it was actually a friend of mine um we must have been ah it was a guy that I had gone to primary school with and we'd been good friends stayed good friends during our

teenage years and then in my early twenties he'd told me about it um it was kind of weird actually because he was this ah straight and actually still is but we used to

**I.i.01:00**

fool around together a little bit um every so often when we were teenagers which sort of went into into our early twenties although we were both both had girlfriends and stuff and then one time um after we'd had sex he told me that such a place existed um and then we proceeded to attempt to try and go to one and weren't allowed in so that was actually the first time that I was aware that they existed I had never it was actually quite a shock I'd never existed I'd never heard that such a place existed

Joe describes his childhood friend as "straight" and adds that he "still is". He also says that both he and his friend had girlfriends for a while, that they'd often "fool around" and that it was this friend who introduced to him the concept of saunas one day "after we'd had sex". Further on in the interview, he tells me how a few years later the friend went to a sauna with him and attempted to have sex with him there and how Joe rejected his advances, though "rejected" is not Joe's term [I.i.12:00].

Joe never describes his friend as bisexual or closeted or gay. His friend is "straight" at all times; "straight" supercedes all other identifications. It's what Joe makes of his friend and presumably what his friend makes of himself, too: straight. Nor does Joe describe his friend as heterosexual and the feeling I get is that this would propose an identification not exactly identical with "straight"; hetero, maybe, heterosexual, highly improbable, as the distinction between heterosexual and "straight" is one of discursive currency. Heterosexual is a term coined within and for a predominantly scientific discourse, a discourse that produces a field identified as "sexuality" and treats it as *if* it pre-exists its discursive production, as *if* it existed as something other than a categorical abstraction, as *if* its illocutionary force were physical, much like a thump to the head. And that may be. But the force behind "straight", the force fuelling it, energising and vitalising its currency appears to have no such foundation, no springboard in science and its systematic laws. Its origin is unknown, its method performative, "a stylised repetition of acts" (Butler, 1990: 140). Joe names and identifies his friend as "straight" repeatedly over years of acquaintance, and that's what his friend becomes: straight.

## policeman

**Joe:** ... and then one time um after we'd had sex he told me that such a place existed um and then we proceeded to attempt to try and go to one and weren't allowed in so that was actually the first time that I was aware that they existed I had never it was actually quite a shock I'd never existed I'd never heard that such a place existed

**Russell:** When he when you said

**I.i.01:30**

he told you such a place existed what was the place he told you that existed

**Joe:** Ah ah Volcano in the city

**Russell:** Yeah

**Joe:** Although I think simultaneously he told me that there was a place in the city Volcano that he'd been to but there was also a place in Suburb A

**Russell:** Right and when um he told you what did he tell you this place was what was it for what what happened there do you remember

**Joe:** Mm I remember that he told me he'd gone there with someone to get a blood test

**I.i.02:00**

which was why he'd gone there and how he'd found about it out about it um

To get a blood test. Not to have sex but to get a blood test. It's an odd detail, as odd perhaps as Joe's secretive straight friend suddenly having a second, unidentified person in his life, a "someone" from whom he finds out about saunas and with whom he visits one, for a blood test, an inexplicable and enigmatic "someone" of whom we will learn nothing more. In the course of this first interview and his second, a series of stories ensue:

**Joe:** um we went to where did we go first we went to the one in Suburb A and I don't know whether we were just you know nervous and therefore seemed a bit suspicious and they actually wouldn't let us in and they said it was members only and then

**I.i.03:30**

we went to then we drove straight to Volcano and we went in and they were also um quite suspicious and saying we're members only and we didn't have cards and um I remember there was quite a to do at the front desk actually the guy was saying um oh how have you heard about this place and my friend was saying look I have been here before and the guy was saying oh look you know sorry for being um so suspicious or whatever but you know we have to be careful about who we let in

**I.i.04:00**

because we've had a problem with the police and right at that moment two policemen came up the stairs behind us and we left pretty quickly and that was um yeah my first experience of trying to go to a sauna how I ever got the nerve to try and go to one after that I don't know

\*\*\*

**Joe:** um I had a girlfriend who lived in Suburb A and when I dropped her off I would drive past the sauna in Suburb A and just because I knew where the door was and been in um and I would drive past just to see if people were looking and stuff and sometimes I would stop my car just to watch um you know who was coming in and out and then eventually I imagined I was um I imagine I'd had a few drinks or something

**I.i.05:30**

but I eventually got the courage to go up to the guy who was there and he said look it's actually um nearly empty we're about to close and he said but if you just want to come in and have a look have you been here before I said no well if you just want to come in and have a look you're more than welcome so I actually did that and that was the first experience yeah

**Russell:** So your first experience was of really looking round the premises

theatron: onstage (the interviews)

**Joe:** Mm mm and ah it was a strange thing I mean I went I was there and it was just me and him and I um

**I.i.06:00**

you know got dressed in a towel and went and had a spa and sauna and stuff and he you know pretty quickly came down in a towel and stuff too um and then I think we fooled around a bit and then we went and just had coffee and talked and I sort of told him my life story about how I had a girlfriend and I wasn't out yet and all that and he was very very kind and and sort of you know listened for hours and then we had a bit of a roll around on the floor but nothing too much um but yeah and then I went back a few weeks later

\*\*\*

**Russell:** Okay so if I were to ask you for one of the most memorable experiences could you

**I.i.35:30**

tell me

**Joe:** Um I've been so many times (*he laughs a little*) you know there's I could yeah um look probably there just one thing that's jumped into my head and I don't know it sort of has jumped in um at other times and that I've always found it a really exciting memory and probably used it to masturbate about um and I don't even know why it's so exciting but there was a guy that went to Rear Entry who I knew

**I.i.36:00**

was a policeman and I don't know how I found out um I know I had sex with him a couple of times over a period of months and then once I found out again I found that incredibly exciting that he was and um yeah there was there was an orgy I was with and I don't I think I'd been there and it hadn't been a particularly good night and then I saw him with someone else and they were trying to organise an orgy and I remember um

**I.i.36:30**

going into this room um which was actually quite light and with him and the other guy and just I've got this mental picture of him sort of standing over me sort of coming towards me and um yeah you know having pretty extraordinary sex with the three of them and then um I didn't know who the third guy was but I remember this guy drove me home that night

**Russell:** The third guy or the policeman

**Joe:** No the policeman

**Russell:** Oh yeah

**Joe:** Yeah he actually drove me back to my where I'd left my car and um yeah just that

**I.i.37:00**

whole sexual experience and him being a policeman was pretty exciting

\*\*\*

**Joe:**

**I.ii.03:30**

the other thing about the policeman which I didn't say is the policeman said to me that I was the best kisser at Rear Entry (*I laugh a little*) so we [Joe and his friends] always said that I had a rosette I had a Victoria Police award for kissing at Rear Entry (*I laugh*)

These stories of Joe's, which are not his only stories, and which are not the only stories he tells me in our interviews, are attuned to his relations with figures of

authority, figures of law, if you like. It's a simple matter to understand his friend's story of the blood test, as retold by Joe, in these terms, too. This does not mean that the story of the blood test should be understood as either the cause, origin or determinant of the series. It's simply the first such story he tells; the others follow. But before he set foot inside a sauna, so Joe tells me, he heard stories about blood tests, about needing to be card carrying members, and about trouble with the police who then materialised on the stairs *as if* on cue. His stories of being *inside* persist with these themes. The sole staff member, "the guy who was there", instead of prohibiting entry, admits him to empty premises at closing time and in addition to a quick look round, a dreamlike sequence of scenes unfolds. Likewise with the policeman, definitely not in uniform and, in the corridors of the sauna, just another guy, but, crucially, known to Joe as "the policeman" all the same:

**Russell:** All right and did you did you have sex with him just him or did you have sex with the policeman

**Joe:** Oh the policeman

**Russell:** Right

**Joe:** Yeah

**Russell:** Okay all right  
**I.ii.21:00**

okay

**Joe:** Very definitely

The peripheral details shimmer with uncertainty (did the policeman drive Joe home or back to his car? had they had sex a couple of times the previous months or once only? were there three men in the orgy or four?) but at the heart of the story, the "really exciting memory" is the phantasmatic image of "the policeman", naked but a policeman even so, standing over Joe in the unusually well lit room. Saunas had been introduced through stories to Joe as scenes populated by figures of authority, specifically figures of judgement: your test results are negative/positive, you are not/are a member, you are not/are potentially under arrest. In the stories Joe elects to tell me, the intimidating figures of judgement transform into figures of benevolence, just as the Aeschylean Erinyes become Eumenides. The formerly prohibitive guy at the front desk not only allows him inside but becomes a new man, that is, a man other than his straight boyhood friend, with whom he can "fool around" and share his life story; and a policeman becomes someone with whom he can have "pretty extraordinary sex", who will drive him "home", and who will even give him a Victoria Police award for kissing. I never hear of blood testing again.

theatron: onstage (the interviews)

## just me

**Russell:** Do you (*a silence*) do you think that a

**I.ii.14:30**

lot of these skills and techniques or tricks you called them do you think um in your experience have you witnessed other people using these same techniques

**Joe:** Mm oh yeah I mean you see people very definitely sort of show sort of showing off grandstanding sort of show-ponying um they might you know be incredibly masc do sort of like really overt masculine kind of gestures as they're sort of drying themselves you know I think a lot of it is very much

**I.ii.15:00**

presenting a sort of a masculine persona in that sort naked semi-naked state

**Russell:** Do you offer a masculine persona in that state

**Joe:** I'd always try to yeah

**Russell:** What does that entail

**Joe:** Um

**Russell:** What is a masculine persona

**Joe:** Shoulders oh shoulders probably shoulders back probably presenting your chest um probably ah ah having your arms sort of away from your sides

**Russell:** Right

**Joe:** I'm not explaining that very well

**Russell:**

**I.ii.15:30**

No no that's no that's clear to me

**Joe:** You know you know what I mean yeah

**Russell:** Yeah

**Joe:** Um not walking too fast not taking too small a steps um yeah

**Russell:** Before you went to saunas how consciously do you think that idea

**I.ii.16:00**

of a masculine persona was a thing for you

**Joe:** Oh

**Russell:** Do you think you were already working with it

**Joe:** Yeah huge I mean I grew up with four brothers no sisters in pretty sort of rough upbringing so yeah that was probably something I was um believed to be important for a time anyway so

**Russell:** If it's something you adopt what is happening the rest of the time what's the persona that's

**I.ii.16:30**

there when you don't adopt or before you've adopted the masculine persona

**Joe:** Just me

I hear Joe speaking of himself being "just me" when he is not part of the passing parade, I hear that that is his experience, but I also hear the critical voice in me that interrogates that moment. How is Joe "just me" when he is in a sauna in a towel, when he is the person named by his parents, speaking a language spoken by millions of others, when he is identifiable to himself, "just me", as Joe?

The interviewees who speak of consciously performing are not speaking of conducting themselves in Butler's sense of performativity (see Butler, 1988; Butler, 1990). They merely, in all its complexity, [theatrically] perform. The performativity to which Butler refers is that revealed by Joe when he asserts that when he isn't consciously adopting a masculine persona he's "just me". It's that "me", specific to him, that constitutes the effect by which he experiences the consolations of identification, of having an identity. It's that operation with a sense of essential self that constitutes a performative effect. It's that that can be described as performativity, a stylized repetition of acts, such that they cite each other over and in time, which is to say also through and in space.

And so I wonder: Who is Joe now as he sits here to my left, the microphone between us *as if* casually strewn? What relations exist here between the figures of the interviewee, the research subject, the stranger, the friend, the neighbour, the citizen, the gay man, the adult, the "expert", the host, the brother, the son, and the employee on leave?

**Russell:** If it's something you adopt what is happening the rest of the time what's the persona that's

**I.ii.16:30**

there when you don't adopt or before you've adopted the masculine persona

**Joe:** Just me

He reaches for the steaming mug on the table, and lifts it.

**because of the stories**

**Willow:** No

**I.i.17:00**

no I'd known about it for quite a while before and I actually because of the stories I heard I thought it would be a lot bigger

**Russell:** Oh yeah

**Willow:** Because I heard about how it had all these rooms and um I'd been to a dinner party which was quite an event and each person was asked to dress differently and I was asked to dress in drag

**I.i.17:30**

and there were must have been about twelve people seated and it was the whole event was videoed and there were a couple of maids boys dressed in girls clothes and one of the boys everyone got so rotten one of the boys ended up at Volcano and the rumour was that he got lost in the labyrinth (*I laugh a little*) and woke up the next day so I had this perception of it being quite large and that there were a lot of rooms in there

A lot bigger. Willow's talking to me about how she expected a sauna she'd "known about for quite a while" to be a lot bigger. The active informative element for Willow, at a conscious level, that is, is the "stories" she'd heard and, unsolicited, she immediately retells one of these to me: how after a dinner party, one of the "maids boys dressed in girls clothes [...] got lost in the labyrinth" at the sauna, got lost in it as if no way out could be found, exhaustion ensued and sleep overcame, and then "woke up the next day". As though getting lost, in this case, happened in spite of one's efforts rather than because of them, as though it weren't playacting, a ploy, or a pose. The story of the boy in the maid's outfit, as told by Willow, obviously draws on that of the waif-child-girl lost in the bush, itself in turn derived from the various traditional tales of children, always more than one, lost in the forest: *Hansel and Gretel*, for instance, sans breadcrumbs, or the pantomimic *Babes in the Wood*. That the adult male in Willow's story is described as a "boy" dressed in "girls" clothes, specifically those of a "maid", conflates gender, obscures erotic agency and intensifies the effect of juvenility, and with it vulnerability, so that the traditional narrative resonances come to the fore. How different the story would sound were it told as that of a drunken man who'd headed out for casual sex but who'd passed out instead in a darkened corridor in a state of sartorial disarray, a version of the tale just as plausible, if not more so.

Even the formal dinner party from which the maid set out resonates with narrative atavism: "there were must have been about twelve people seated". Not the ho-hum conventionality of "ten" or "a dozen" or the specific, far too literal, and thus heavy-handed, sacramental "thirteen", but the shimmering ambiguity of "about twelve". Quite an event, perhaps, indeed.

## premises

Some fragments from accounts of first encounters:

**Willow:**

**I.i.17:00**

because of the stories I heard I thought it would be a lot bigger

**Russell:** Oh yeah

\*\*\*

**Russell:** You drove there and parked

**Edward:** out the front

**Russell:** Just out the front okay and at what point did you recognise which building was the building you were going into

**Edward:** After when Craig pointed and said that's it over

**I.i.07:00**

there and I said oh I thought it was a pub

\*\*\*

**I.i.34:30**

**Russell:** Right and you parked (*this is a question*)

**Apollo:** Nowhere near the place (*I laugh*) nowhere near the place

**Russell:** Right

**Apollo:** I drove past

**Russell:** Yes

**Apollo:** And I thought oh god it's bloody huge it was like a bloody

**I.i.16:00**

office building and I thought my god and that that the scale of the place was also really quite threatening as well

\*\*\*

**Lydia:** I was actually more surprised by the scale of the building

**Russell:** How

**Lydia & Russell:** small

**Lydia:** it

**Russell:** or how large

**Lydia:** How small

**Russell:** How small right okay

All four accounts are of the same building.

## **labyrinth or maze?**

**Willow:** Because I heard about how it had all these rooms and um I'd been to a dinner party which was quite an event and each person was asked to dress differently and I was asked to dress in drag

**I.i.17:30**

and there were must have been about twelve people seated and it was the whole event was videoed and there were a couple of maids boys dressed in girls clothes and one of the boys everyone got so rotten one of the boys ended up at Volcano and the rumour was that he got lost in the labyrinth (*I laugh a little*) and woke up the next day so I had this perception of it being quite large and that there were a lot of rooms in there

I become interested in the word "labyrinth":

**Russell:** and the term labyrinth

**I.i.18:30**

do you remember that specifically being used or

**Willow:** Yeah

**Russell:** Yeah okay he got lost in the labyrinth

**Willow:** Or they might have used maze

**Russell:** Right right but okay

**Willow:** Labyrinth

**Russell:** Yeah

**Willow:** is what I remember

**Russell:** That's fine that's that's um

If "labyrinth is what I remember" then what am I to make of Willow's other statement: "they might have used maze"? Maze is not a term I introduced earlier in my conversations with her. Nor is it a readily available alternative from everyday non-sauna speech that "they might have used", like "corridors" or "passages". And it's also odd given that the point of her bringing up the maid's story initially was that it set up an expectation, "a visualisation", of the building's scale that was later disenchanted upon actually visiting it. That is, the effect in the story she was told was of a labyrinth in which one, waif-like, could get lost, while her later experience was of something far more diminished in scale and mundane in form:

**Willow:** Um it was smelly and all the fittings were quite tacky and what I thought would be expansive was

**I.i.25:30**

quite small even like the bath the baths were quite small and the labyrinth wasn't a labyrinth (*we laugh a little*) it was a series of walls

It would seem that Willow had been told a story in which the storytellers “might have used maze”, which is to say, too, that they might not have used “maze” and might have used “labyrinth” or some other superceded term instead, but what she remembers is “labyrinth” and “labyrinth” is the term that sticks in spite of her subsequent experience of it not being a labyrinth at all and in spite of whatever term was actually originally used. For even after acknowledging in our conversation that “the labyrinth wasn’t a labyrinth” but was “a series of walls”, she persists in her use of the term. There’s a discursive production here, a *scenology* as distinct from a scenography, if you like, on Willow’s part, with some kind of dogged commitment behind it that exercises clout, that counts, *as if* she wants the maze, whatever that may be, to be a labyrinth, after all.

She’s not alone. Frosty tells me a story he was told by his hairdresser:

**Frosty:** um and he told me of his experiences of Volcano or his experience of Volcano I don’t think it was um ah I don’t think he went back more than once actually ah and it was when he went to Volcano with his brother who was I suppose I could I’ll use the word initiated

**II.i.02:00**

in the sense that he he had been there quite often and he took his younger brother who who’s my hairdresser along with him um so he told me of his experience of of going to Volcano and getting lost in there like a kind of a a labyrinth um and being really frightened um and going into kind of dark rooms

**II.i.02:30**

um where he yeah assumed that um men were there having sex um and that freaked him freaked him out (*a silence*) that’s sort of about it I suppose of yeah that at at yeah but he I remember him alway [sic] he constantly saying that you know he was yeah pretty

**II.i.03:00**

frightened of the place and he sort of wanted to get out of there and he felt this sort of feeling of being lost and yeah in a in a kind of labyrinth I suppose

Later I ask Frosty for more details about the story and the circumstances of its telling. What emerges is the following five minute exchange, which I cite in full:

**II.i.11:00**

**Russell:** Now did he use the term labyrinth

**Frosty:** Um now you say that he probably wouldn’t of wouldn’t have used that it’s not a type of word that he probably would use actually when I think about it um he probably wouldn now I’m assuming again but it’d be more like maze-like I suppose yeah

**Russell:** All right now what I’d like you to do is

**II.i.11:30**

unpack for me

**Frosty:** Yeah

**Russell:** what those two different words

theatron: onstage (the interviews)

**Frosty:** yeah yeah

**Russell:** are for you

**Frosty:** For me

**Russell:** Yeah what's I mean you talk about a maze and talk about a labyrinth

**Frosty:** Yeah

**Russell:** as being different kinds of words and that a person like him would be more inclined to use a word like maze and that you are probably the source of the term labyrinth I would assume

**Frosty:** Yeah yeah

**Russell:**

**II.i.12:00**

So what is it about those two words for you now

**Frosty:** Yeah

**Russell:** that distinguishes them

**Frosty:** Something that comes to mind for me it's it's labyrinths of [sic] being an idea of being in a kind of circle and maze is more sort of structurally squarer and what did come to mind when I said maze was something that I remember him talking about rooms

**Russell:** Yes

**Frosty:** um and that's probably why maze seemed to be the

**II.i.12:30**

the more appropriate than labyrinth um he he

**Russell:** So how is it then that labyrinth is the term that you've latched onto

**Frosty:** Mm yeah

**Russell:** because you latched onto that in what you had to tell me about what you knew about the interior as well and I was very aware of that

**Frosty:** Yeah um probably because of there's all there for me anyway a labyrinth is the sense of being lost

**II.i.13:00**

that's that's what I feel about labyrinth um and it being kind of deep

**Russell:** Deep in what respect

**Frosty:** Um or the sense of being lost is a kind of deep lostness (*he laughs a little*)

**Russell:** Deep in or deep under

**Frosty:** Deep in yeah

**Russell:** So it's a kind of horizontal

**Frosty:** Yeah yeah yeah

**Russell:** plane that we're talking about

**Frosty:** Yeah perhaps yeah

**II.i.13:30**

um but more kind of circle like a a a a spiral

**Russell:** Yeah

**Frosty:** That's that's how I see

**Russell:** Yeah

**Frosty:** the labyrinth

**Russell:** Now how was it do you think that you associate you have that association with the term labyrinth this notion of spiralling or circling

**Frosty:** Mm don't know (*a silence*)

**II.i.14:00**

dunno

**Russell:** At all

**Frosty:** No I'm not sure that I can answer it where where it comes from I'll have to go home and think about that one perhaps it's a a childhood childhood thing

**Russell:** Well it may be but (*we laugh*) but um what about a maze the thing about the association with things square

**Frosty:** Yeah

**Russell:** or at right angles

**Frosty:**

**II.i.14:30**

A maze I think ah there's more I feel more comfortable with the term maze in the sense that I I there's there's always an end to it or something like there's a you can go into it but you can discover the end

**Russell:** Yes

**Frosty:** Whereas the labyrinth I think there's there's an endless of being there or there possibly no end to it

**Russell:** Right okay

**Frosty:** In the sense that you may not come out of it

**Russell:**

**II.i.15:00**

Is that where the circular thing comes in that circles unlike squares I mean a square has end points in the sense that you reach a corner and you have to turn I guess but

**Frosty:** Yeah yeah

theatron: onstage (the interviews)

**Russell:** Is it something like that

**Frosty:** Yeah yeah possibly because it's sort of a I suppose spiral spiralling

**Russell:** Yeah

**Frosty:** I guess down

**Russell:** Um

**II.i.15:30**

do you know the story of THE labyrinth

**Frosty:** Er very vaguely

**Russell:** What do you vaguely know of it

**Frosty:** Of um what do I know of it that it is a spiral I think but that's probably all perhaps I must

**Russell:** Where does that story of the labyrinth come from what culture when

**Frosty:**

**II.i.16:00**

Ah don't know

**Russell:** Right okay

**Frosty:** Yeah

**Russell:** All right

**Frosty:** Can't remember

**Russell:** That's that's fine

**Frosty:** Yeah

Frosty is told a story by his hairdresser about something frightening that happened in a place that the hairdresser described as being at least "maze-like" and possibly as a maze per se, but when Frosty retells the story, he substitutes a new term, "labyrinth", as Willow had done before him, a term that for him means something quite distinct, something quite different from "maze", because it *feels* different and distinct, a term that offers him, Frosty, an objective correlative more commensurate with the intensity of fear he witnessed in his hairdresser when the story was first told. It's also a term Frosty associates with an *experience*, a feeling "of deep lostness", of being lost in a place with "possibly no end to it", a place that Frosty knows is other than a maze where "you can discover the end", just as his hairdresser did in the story he told. For that story, now become Frosty's story, to ring true when he tells it to me, the maze transforms into a labyrinth. Merely the facts have been changed.

## just knew

**Apollo:**

**I.i.09:30**

Um mm that's interesting I knew deep down that these places had to exist

**Russell:** Ah fantastic yeah

**Apollo:** I just knew they did

It excites me to hear Apollo talking this way so early in his first interview. I'm excited most of all by how he said he "knew" things, how he "just knew" them. Excited by how he knows; not knowing about, but knowing. One doesn't know "deep down" *about* something. One doesn't "just" know *about*.

The shift entailed in moving from "knowing something" to "knowing about something" is from one order of spatial relation to another. The preposition "about" denotes a distance, a gap, a chasm, a separation in space and time; "knowing about" locates the subject outside the object, even if one circumscribes, surrounds, and envelopes the thing known. To be about, ab-out, is to be separate from, to be located so that the remote senses, sight and hearing, come into play. For instance, I *know about* safe sex from posters and what people say. I *know* safe sex when I'm doing it. At least I think I do:

Two men meet in a park at night. One offers to fuck the other from behind and then puts a condom on, and lube, and the other guy checks this to make sure. And then the fucking happens in episodes where occasionally the man wearing the condom withdraws completely and then re-enters. The guy with his back turned learns to expect re-entry and so they both get on with it. It ends with the man behind clasping the man in front and shuddering. When it's over, the man in front turns round and sees that the condom's on the ground and it's been there some time. The other man removed it at some stage when he withdrew. The man who *knew* where the condom was knows now that he knew no such thing. Or, rather, what he knew wasn't helpful. What he knew was no more than what he could imagine, *a hybrid of the believable and the desired*. The penetrator consoles the penetratee. He tells him not to worry. He *knows* his HIV status is negative. He had a test recently and has practised safe sex ever since, including tonight.

When Apollo speaks with conviction of knowing something, of just knowing something, he's saying something about belief and desire, giving them a new identity, a new name. It's not all he's doing, but it's part of it. How big a part is hard to tell. "I just knew they did" denotes the triumph of a wish fulfilled.

theatron: onstage (the interviews)

**Russell:**

**I.i.41:30**

do you recall anything about what you imagined was behind that façade

**Yianis:** No I had (*sighs*) no idea really I mean I did

**Russell:** Any images any images

**Yianis:** I didn't have images I just knew

### most of them

**Colin:** ah well I was really just leaving um and

**I.i.19:30**

um because the place was kind of there was no nothing happening and um almost with relief I was sort of I had done my duty and it hadn't worked out [?] I don't know that sort of feel a bit ah and I'd done my watch on the deck (*I laugh a little*) and um um as just sort of gone to my locker

**I.i.20:00**

this gorgeous young sort of builder type came in just lovely longish blonde hair and a very lovely kind of solid but not overdone build all of that and um I said um mm I'd I I said oh it's a you're a bit late it's closing up and he said isn't

**I.i.20:30**

there anyone here and I said not really he said well you're here (*I laugh*) and I honestly my heart missed a beat [unintelligible] and um and so I took him up on this and and um he he wanted to be fucked and um which most of them seem to want and ah I don't know exactly where my preference lies

**I.i.21:00**

I think it prefer I think I prefer just laying there (*he laughs a little*) and being fucked probably but I'm very bad at it and it's happened very rarely

There are two things I hear here: "most of them" and "I'm very bad at it".

In saying "most of them", Colin it would seem refers to the other men at the sauna; at the sauna in this story, at least. This "them" comprises a group of men to which, in the scene of the interview, he does not belong. He identifies "them" but does not identify *with* them. He says that "most of them seem to want" to be fucked, and thinks that he too prefers "just laying there and being fucked probably", but this shared orientation toward a particular activity is insufficient to produce an identification. They remain "them" not "us". There are differentiations in what Colin says that help me to understand.

First of all, the other men, the "them", seem "to want" it. Being fucked is what they want. Colin, however, *prefers* it, which is a different thing. He too might "want" to be fucked but he might not. For him, "being fucked" might be, as it were, the lesser of two evils; as he says earlier, he'd done his duty, etc. He might

“prefer” being fucked to any number of erotic acts but not “want” it. His observation that being fucked is what “most of them seem to want” rather than “what most of them want” indicates he’s alert to the possibility that someone else might, like him perhaps, merely seem to want it while being actually a little averse: tolerance mistaken for enthusiasm.

A second distinction lies between the acts Colin describes: “most of them” seem to want to be fucked, but Colin prefers “just laying there and being fucked”. He, in his own case, introduces an extra dimension to the act, “just laying there”, and it might be the case that he does not attribute this additional dimension to “most of them”. It might be the case that they don’t just lie there being fucked, that they don’t just lie there *while* being fucked, that, for “most of them”, their want, their desire, activates them in a discernable way that sits incompatibly with “just laying there”. But having said all this, that the orientation towards being fucked might still result in two radically different deeds, at the level of experience, it might also be the case that for Colin, what “most of them” want and what he wants are the same. We can not tell.

But let’s momentarily *hypothesise* that this is the case. Let us suppose that Colin does not identify with the “most of them” with whom he shares a desire. The easy option suddenly available is to construct scenarios of Colin being in denial, of Colin either suppressing or repressing an unpalatable truth, of “us”, whoever “we” are, in our position of relative omniscience and mastery, knowing what’s “really” going on. Easy and, for me, inappropriate, because this latter option entails a suppression of Colin’s testimony and perhaps a repression of a potentially unpalatable truth. What if identification is not something everyone performs identically? What if Colin does identify, does produce effects of identification but does so not in relation to erotic desire, nor in relation to erotic preference, nor even in relation to erotic acts? What if this “sexuality” about which he speaks, with not only me but with his untrusted gay psychiatrist, what if it *is*, as he claims elsewhere in his interview, something that does not yet for him practicably exist?

Charlie, on a similar theme, speaks of heading off “in search of this sexuality” [I.i.58:00], not “my” sexuality. What if Charlie and Colin are figures who do not have a sexuality but who expect that they should get one, as though it were a moral imperative to be “in search of” and, as Colin puts it, “arrive” at one? For Colin and Charlie, a sexuality, a practicable sexuality, is, at the moment of speaking, something, not only that they do not have, but something that they describe as located or even as a location. Sexuality, as they imagine it, as they discursively represent it, is spatialised. It exists in a place, a place where they are not, and may even be such a place. Spatially they experience it as remote, as Shangri-La, as the “lost horizon” that other men, “most of them” have found.

## taking [a] place

**Mark:** I wasn't only physically um lost in this strange place I was also not um appraised of the sort of protocols and um

**I.i.02:00**

and behaviours that that took place in a sauna I had absolutely no idea no idea

Mark clearly distinguishes here between a physical and, for want of a better word, a social orientation, or rather, disorientation. The two experiences of disorientation are offered, by him, as a sum: there is one *and* there is also the other. At this point in his conversation he is unambiguously clear. And yet I wonder about the word "place" in his testimony. It twice occurs. He speaks of being lost in "this strange place" (physically lost) and he speaks of the protocols and behaviours "that took place" in a sauna, that took place *there*, in effect. The notion or concept of something "taking place" would seem to suggest some sense of legitimation, not so much juridically as ontologically. There's a clarity about it, an undeniability: something takes place. To describe the sauna, as Mark does, as a "place", even as a "strange place", is to accept as given that the sauna has taken, is taking place, too. In this way I come to understand how it is that the sauna can be a site *and* an event, *when interviewees speak of it*: a "scene", as we say. To say that something *is* a place effectively functions as a verbal shorthand for saying that something is taking (a) place and effectively making (a) place. And so it becomes unproblematic for Mark a few minutes later to speak of being "led through each episode in the building", an experience that resulted in him knowing "the lie of the land" *and* having "a much better idea of what the rules of the game were":

**Mark:** I recall though going back subsequently some years later and bumping into someone who I knew socially not sexually who offered me a guided tour

**Russell:**

**I.i.03:30**

Right

**Mark:** and ah that completely that experience completely changed the way that um I was able to approach saunas from that point on because I actually knew the lie of the land um I'd had a I'd been taken by the hand and led through each episode in the building and um explained

**I.i.04:00**

ah had explained to me exactly what went on there and so I knew what the rule well I had a much better idea of what the rules of the game were and so um that was really the the ah transformational experience for me the first experience was um quite brief and and frightening

The separation is offered as an analytic distinction formed in reflective thought, afterwords. The “transformational experience”, however, that rendered such a reflection possible is not known as one where “place” and “event” functioned discretely. Instead Mark describes his experience as being “led through each episode in the building”, a phrase that sounds problematic only if one holds onto the discursive distinction that renders place and event as conventionally distinct. Of course, they aren’t, for Mark, anyway. That much is discernible.

### **an image repertoire**

**Mark:** Well that was my vision

**Russell:** Yeah

**Mark:** of of what a um a gay bathhouse was I imagined um older um ah wrinkly um masseurs um brutalising young chaps with

**I.i.14:00**

um ah towels wrapped around them by brutalising I mean you know with massage

**Russell:** Yeah

**Mark:** and sort of you know sweaty vinyl benches and um and the whole thing being much more sort of locker room rah rah um jolly hockey sticks and you know men standing around naked in a in a swimming pool tossing a ball between them and nonsense like that

**Russell:** Right

**I.i.14:30**

but that’s not what you found

**Mark:** No no no it was um

**Russell:** Is it fair to say that everything you’ve just listed is something that was absent

**Mark:** No the sweaty vinyl benches were there the locker rooms were there the swimming pool the swimming pool was there there wasn’t any ball tossing there well there was but of a different variety

**Russell:** Yeah

**Mark:** Um no it all

**I.i.15:00**

just seemed a lot more um er reduced in scale and suburban and rather tacky than I’d imagined but I suppose also I’d been reared on the um the grandeur of of Roman baths and the the mysteries of the hamam and and I had a romanticised view of what um a an aquatic

**I.i.15:30**

gentlemen’s leisure centre might be like

theatron: onstage (the interviews)

**Russell:** When you say you'd been reared on those can you just give me a bit more information about that how did those um

**Mark:** Oh they're osmotic myths I think they sort of percolate through classical literature and um

**Russell:** Is this stuff you were exposed to at school

**Mark:** I think so yes and I always thought it had

**I.i.16:00**

a bit of a sexy edge to it

Mark, like many others in this project, describes the contrast between what he imagined and what he found when he first visited a sauna at the age of twenty or twenty-one, maybe three or four years out of school. Mark's school, a school with a "junior boarding house" [I.i.59:00], seems to have provided him with an image repertoire out of which or with which to imagine firstly the intergenerational aspect of the sauna, in this case, older wrinkly masseurs brutalising young chaps in towels. It takes little effort to discern the pedagogic image in phantasmatic form here. I also note the British public school emphasis on games, "sort of locker room rah rah um jolly hockey sticks", and the "nonsense" of naked men standing around in a swimming pool "tossing" (not throwing) a ball between them. Mark also speaks of being "reared on the um the grandeur of of Roman baths". If Mark had been a boarder, then school may well have been a place in which he was "reared" in such a sense, and when I ask him if school was a place where he was introduced to Roman Baths, he responds "I think so yes".

But Mark also tells me that he was "reared" on "the mysteries of the hamam", a phrase he uses that suggests to me something post-dating his schooling in the seventies, for "the mysteries of the hamam" is also an English subtitle that occurs in a crucial and memorable scene from an Italian/Turkish feature film made in the nineties: *Hamam*, also known as *The Turkish Bath* (Ozpetek, 1997). The scene in question is one where a Turkish youth and an Italian architect in his thirties are sitting alone in the hot room of a hamam talking. They are clad in towels and while they talk they heavily perspire. Their conversation is about a woman who for each of them has been a kind of benefactor. She was the architect's aunt, and her death brought him to Istanbul to claim his inheritance, the hamam she used to own and operate. For the youth, the dead woman was a benefactor of a different kind. She imparted knowledge to him with the aim of cultivating him, bringing him to a state of complex maturity. The two men talk about this woman, or rather, the architect inquires and the youth tells, and it emerges that one of the most important things the woman gave to the youth, clearly, and it is registered in the simple gravity with which he utters it, his eyes fixed on something he sees in his mind's eye (I immerse myself totally at this moment in the phantasmagoric pleasures afforded by fiction) while the architect gazes in turn directly at him (and we gaze at them as they perspire near naked in the hamam's heat), ... that

important legacy she imparted to him was knowledge of “the mysteries of the hamam”. Soon after, we witness the architect and the youth locked in a sexual embrace. *Hamam* screened at the Melbourne Queer Film Festival in the late 1990s, and has been widely available in Melbourne on VHS and DVD formats ever since. And the central figure in the film, like Mark [I.i.23:00], is an architect. It is, however, not the architect’s but the youth’s words that Mark echoes, “the mysteries of the hamam”, a concept he was most unlikely to have been “reared” on at either junior or senior boarding school, or, indeed, in the family home. It is as the Turkish youth that Mark momentarily performs in the fleeting instant of our conversation, whether he intends to or not, and the knowledge of the mysteries of the hamam, which he in fact never knew as a youth himself, poignantly slips into his image repertoire and grants him retrospectively a rearing he never had. But then he never claims any of this for sure:

**I.i.15:30**

**Russell:** Is this stuff you were exposed to at school

**Mark:** I think so yes

“I think so yes” is accurate enough.

## panto

In his second interview, Edward and I discuss the dark part of the steam room at Volcano:

**Edward:** There’s um

**II.i.20:30**

in the steam room there’s I know there’s another room that I have not been and will not go into I don’t know what it is but there’s something in me that just says don’t go there do not go in there

He confirms he’s never gone in and I point out that I have:

**II.i.21:00**

**Russell:** I have been in

**Edward:** Have you

**Russell:** to the right

**Edward:** Oh good you can tell me what’s in there

But instead of telling him, I probe:

theatron: onstage (the interviews)

**Russell:** have you asked anyone

**Edward:**

**II.i.22:30**

Nn nn no

**Russell:** So what's stopped you from asking anyone

**Edward:** I don't know cos there are definitely um people I could ask but I don't know I think I suppose if it was that interesting

**Russell:** Would you

**Edward:** If I was that interested I'd go in

**Russell:** So like for instance you you said a moment ago oh good you can tell me about it but do you actually want me to

**Edward:** Mm no it doesn't really worry me that much

**Russell:** Yeah yeah I had

**II.i.23:00**

I wondered about that

So much for setting the scene.

There's a quality of panto or camp masquerade shaping much of Edward's performance in his interviews, a conscious level of entertainment he deploys: "Oh good you can tell me what's in there". A parodic excess, which is parodic, ultimately, by *being* excessive, by expressing a hyperbolic magnification of interest and enthusiasm played as or with excessive force, possibly in order to entertain me with its nimble wit (which it does). It's not that there isn't a gulf between what other witnesses report and what they have "actually" done. It's just that with Edward, the gulf, the space between the mask and the face, is discernible much of the time. Nor is it the case that Edward's "no it doesn't really worry me that much", which *seems* more authentic, is suddenly *less* of a performance or is *not* a performance at all. Rather, the style is, to put it the long way round, simply less non-naturalistic. After all, absolute authenticity is never possible when one works with words that are always already borrowed and cited for the occasion, even and especially the word "me".

### **a social meaning**

**James:** Mm from talking with you today yes I think I'm really keyed into that that the I'm not understanding something when you're saying it and I not because I'm stupid today but I really think that those kind of questions that you're asking in in connection with those places don't have the same kind of meaning

**II.i.50:00**

I'm trying to bring a social meaning to what goes on there and I don't think you can

What alternative is there to a social meaning? James is trying to bring a social meaning to "what goes on there" as though "what goes on there" has no social meaning prior to James bringing it to bear. What goes on *there* in the sauna is other than the social in this moment as James speaks to me *here* in his flat. Its meanings aren't social, they're something else: personal? anti-social? asocial? In discussing "private" and "public" as words in relation to saunas, James is clear that the concepts function for him inside saunas. They make sense, they mean. The problem—and it would seem to be the first time such a problem has arisen for him given that he speaks of having so much difficulty "today"—is that how these concepts function *outside* the sauna does not translate simply to the sauna world *inside*.

I am reminded of travelling in 1985 the short journey by train from Bitola in the former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia to Florina in Northern Greece. There were no natural barriers separating the two nations, just a fenced border. To the north of that border in Yugoslavia if I said a word that sounded like the English words "nay" or "neigh" it effectively meant "no". Immediately I crossed the border to Greece and said the same word it meant "yes". It remained a word that performed an action of affirmation or negation, that is, it functioned within the same field of meaning both sides of the border, but what it meant on one side didn't translate across to the other. When James talks about the words not translating across the sauna's wall, when he speaks of the difficulty of bringing "a social meaning" to what goes on there, I feel he is dealing with a phenomenon akin to that I experienced at the Greek/Yugoslavian border.

I wonder how much of the "asociality" experienced *inside* the sauna can be represented socially, in speech, in the interviews *outside*.

### **your own self**

**Apollo:** But I just presume I mean you know it's such a serious thing that you know for I just don't understand why someone would just be so irresponsible because it's it's irresponsible I mean for yourself

**II.ii.48:00**

before anyone else before you know and other people but it's you know your own self

Apollo is speaking with some evident amazement, urgency and conviction about men who put themselves at risk through unsafe sexual practices. The statement emerges in a story he tells of a specific encounter where a man asked Apollo to anally penetrate him without wearing a condom. Apollo then speaks about

irresponsibility and the lack of care shown towards others, especially if this man (or another) is HIV positive. But then he goes to another area of the argument, and it feels to me that this for him is a further or deeper area. He speaks of putting oneself at risk and then makes the speech cited above: "but it's you know your own self". This is offered as if it were some form of self-evident and unassailable argument. For Apollo, recent theoretical accounts of a decentred subject or of the subject as a discursive effect are of utterly minimal if any consequence at all.

your own self

It's a claim made with the urgency reserved in other contexts for "your soul" or "your very soul". What it is that Apollo articulates here is something he experiences as forceful and, if you like, real. And so it is, effectively. I am affected by Apollo's urgency here in the moment of the interview, and months later again reading the printed transcript, here, now, in the Victorian State Library, far away from his voice, "the grain of his voice", or the galvanised and imposing presence of his flesh, far away from his kitchen on a sunny weekday afternoon. I am affected. I recognise in Apollo a figure with what I call a heart like mine. I feel the force and truth of what he's saying, and even as I recognise, as I know that that very "saying" may well be all there is to that force and truth, that it exists only in the saying, that the saying is not a window onto a world of feeling but might well be the source of the feeling instead.

Earlier Apollo talks to me about the "enormous number" of new HIV cases reported in Victoria and he also utters those words with forceful conviction but here I feel no kinship with his speech. Instead I shift into high conceptual gear. The percentage is enormous, not the numbers. When I point out that the numbers come to about thirty or forty individuals it becomes clear that for Apollo that is "enormous" while for me it is thirty or forty times "your own self", a totality of experience for each person so affected but not enormous, not enormous when it now seems that about six million people are seroconverting each year. Enormous for each "self" so affected, sure, unutterably "enormous". But near insignificant within the scheme of things, the bigger picture, the global perspective, all of which I believe I can experience even as I sit here in Apollo's kitchen across the table from his profoundly affected self.

If the subject is an effect of discourse, it in no way lessens or diminishes its force and truth in the life-world.

## **invisible and without form**

When Frosty first tells me his hairdresser's story, he speaks of

kind of dark rooms

**II.i.02:30**

um where he yeah assumed that um men were there having sex

And ten minutes later:

**Frosty:** Something that comes to mind for me it's it's labyrinths of [sic] being an idea of being in a kind of circle and maze is more sort of structurally squarer and what did come to mind when I said maze was something that I remember him talking about rooms

**Russell:** Yes

**Frosty:** um and that's probably why maze seemed to be the

**II.i.12:30**

the more appropriate than labyrinth um he he

Frosty refers to "kind of dark rooms" when he first tells me of his hairdresser being lost in the labyrinth, but ten minutes later states "that what did come to mind when I said *maze* [my emphasis] was something that I remember him talking about rooms". There's an apparent contradiction here: Frosty, when telling the story solely in terms of it taking place in a labyrinth, explicitly states that his hairdresser referred to "rooms"; ten minutes later, he implies that it was when he said the word "maze", that is, after telling the story, that he remembered, *as if* for the first time, his hairdresser talking about rooms. This is worth pursuing.

The first reference is to rooms as

kind of dark rooms

**II.i.02:30**

um where he yeah assumed that um men were there having sex

The fact that rooms were the setting for such sex is incidental for they lack material substance of any specific kind. They're "kind of dark rooms" merely, no more. Not even "dark rooms" but "kind of dark rooms". Easy to get lost in, deeply. Barely room-like. This amorphous darkness differs immensely from the "structurally squarer" quality Frosty associates with the maze, and which he associates with the rooms there. When Frosty says "maze", the rooms that come to mind have walls and shapes. In fact, they're rooms. Palpably so. When he says labyrinth, the rooms as such barely come to mind at all. It's the assumption of men having sex that does, having sex *there*, somewhere, wherever, and whatever,

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that “there” may be. Having sex in the situation he identifies, as best he can, as “kind of dark rooms”.

Something similar emerges in James’ first interview:

**Russell:** Right and what did you imagine that environment was physically when you first heard and you pa and you knew what that building looked like from the outside

**James:** Yeah

**Russell:** I assume you would’ve looked at it a bit more closely

**James:** Well that’s what it was it

**I.i.04:00**

was I kept on going down there and I’d sit across the road and I’d watch people going in and out

**Russell:** Right

**James:** And to be honest I don’t think I had a perspective of what what it was inside I just knew that it was a place that men went to have sex I I knew there was something like that I didn’t know what was inside had no idea that you know it had like a spa or whatever

**Russell:** Yeah

**James:** You know I imagined the sauna idea and people walking around in towels and but I had no picture I don’t think in my head of what that might mean

**I.i.04:30**

James speaks of being a teenager, sitting outside a supermarket across the road from a particular sauna and watching men go in and out of it. I ask him if he can recall his earliest imaginings of the physical interior and his answer indicates not so much that he can’t recall these but that they hadn’t existed as such. He doesn’t think that he had a “perspective” on “what it was inside”, he had no idea that it had “like a spa or whatever”, and he seems not to have wondered about such matters, at all. He “just knew” that it was “a place that men went to have sex”, and he imagined the sauna “idea”, whatever that might be, and “people walking around in towels”. That was its form, that was how it appeared to him as an image. That was what he made of it. It’s as though the “place” he “just knew” had no physical properties at all yet was still imagined spatially, imagined not so much as a physical setting or site but as a situation. The building, that particular sauna, existed for him not so much as a physical container but as an experience, occurring in space, sure, but occurring in a space understood entirely in terms of the experience in question: “a place that men went to have sex”.

Something similar happens when I speak with Yianis:

**Russell:**

**I.i.41:30**

do you recall anything about what you imagined was behind that façade

**Yianis:** No I had *(sighs)* no idea really I mean I did

**Russell:** Any images any images

**Yianis:** I didn't have images I just knew I'd you know read some articles in Outrage about what they were like but I get it I never really got a good impression of them I just thought they were probably an extension of a beat

**Russell:**

**I.i.42:00**

Right

**Yianis:** for some reason

**Russell:** Right

**Yianis:** Because I understood the lang by that stage I understood the language of a beat and was quite I don't know savvy or something *(he laughs)* or not savvy um that's the wrong word

**Russell:** You'd been to beats

**Yianis:** Yeah yeah and I understood how they worked

**Russell:** Right and so you just thought this was like a beat except you paid to go in

**Yianis:** Yeah and indoors and I had no idea what the sauna I had

**I.i.42:30**

the wet bit

**Russell:** Yeah

**Yianis:** I had no idea about

**Russell:** Did you

**Yianis:** And the video bit I had no idea about

**Russell:** Did you know it existed did you know that that's why it was called a sauna

**Yianis:** No I never actually I mean I knew yeah but I never imagined the sauna you know like or

**Russell:** Did you imagine it was a place where men wore towels

**Yianis:** *(after a pause, softly)* I must have known that but

**Russell:** You told me you'd read the Michael Anderson Daniel Dalladay

**I.i.43:00**

article in Outrage

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**Yianis:** Mm yeah and all I can remember from that piece the impression that I get was they were being quite critical of the soggy carpet and how the saunas in Melbourne weren't up to up to scratch

**Russell:** Right

**Yianis:** And how they were dingy and and stuff and I just thought they were just being really kind of um over the I don't know I just thought they were over the top about I didn't take it seriously I just it was like an ex you know story an exciting

**I.i.43:30**

story or whatever but yeah I mean all that I mean at that age all I wanted to do was meet someone and I would just go in any kind of situation to meet someone I was interested in really so that was my in my head rather than yeah

**Russell:** Rather than what

**Yianis:** Men in towels I didn't imagine men in towels

The "situation", as Yianis explicitly calls it, was in each of these accounts vividly imagined: "a place that men went to have sex", "an extension of a beat". The "place" as such in each case existed merely and forcefully in these terms, as an undivided experience, and in no others. And it only produced meaning at this stage in these terms, too. Nothing else about it counted, as meaningful, anyway. Or as James says: "I had no picture in my head I don't think of what that might mean". It's not that the sauna, as imagined, was formless, or that it lacked dimensions, shape, or material properties. It's that such phenomena were produced solely in relation to men having sex or to the possibility of meeting someone, whatever dynamic form that took, *affectively*, that is. In Yianis' case that form didn't even extend to an imagining of men in towels, whether walking around or not. In James' account, "people" in the sauna, not men as such, did walk around in towels, but, then, he, unlike Yianis, had heard a particular story, before:

**I.i.03:00**

**James:** when they talked about it they talked about this raid that they had and all the men had to come out on the streets in their towels and I remember thinking oh my god how embarrassing

So it was, then, that James knew how inside the sauna, men walked around in towels. Around what exactly he never seems to have wondered.

St Augustine dramatically reflects in Book 12 of his *Confessions* on how it could have been, as is written in *Genesis* 1:2, that "the earth was invisible and without form", that is, that the earth was composed of matter but was without form, not even the degraded form of the grotesquely ugly, the *de*-formed. Augustine's problem parallels that circumscribed by James when he speaks of imagining "the sauna idea", of imagining a constructed environment, dynamically populated, but lacking any form of (imagined) architectural materiality, "like a spa or whatever".

Invisible and without form. Not the sauna, but the sauna idea. Not rooms, but kind of dark rooms. I won't revert here to Augustine's neo-platonic rationale, though I'm obviously attracted to the emphasis he places on the power of *logos* in the scheme of creation, but I will loiter a moment with one of his more provisional conclusions:

We may reason about it in this way, but we must be content to know without knowing, or should I say, to be ignorant and yet to know? (Augustine of Hippo (Saint), 1961: 283 )

## legislation

**Albert:** There's a point where I now say to myself this is public and therefore that man over there

**II.ii.23:30**

can stay here or this is private and therefore that man over there needs to go

Speech exercises illocutionary force especially insofar as it works *conventionally* with logos, which comprises logic, language, law, the proper, power. (Convention: a breathing with, a falling into place, a regular alignment.)

## underage

**Russell:** Right right so

**I.i.04:30**

he had he had not been either

**Edward:** Oh no he had been he had been going since he was thirteen or fourteen

**Russell:** Really

**Edward:** Yeah

**Russell:** Well we'll leave that for the moment (*we laugh a little*)

Edward reports that his friend Craig had been visiting saunas since he was thirteen or fourteen years of age. I move the interview on in a different direction implying that we'll get back to this later. We don't, and so I never do ask if Edward knows in which city, indeed in which country, the visits happened or which saunas Craig visited or when precisely or how many times or even what basis he has for believing Craig's story to be true; nor do Edward and I discuss it off the record later.

This is one of several instances where interviewees speak of what I keep calling “underage” youths at saunas. James, thirty-nine at the time of his first interview, claims he visited a sauna in Sydney just before he turned eighteen [I.i.06:30]. He expects he “passed” as someone of legal age, as does Yianis who reports visiting a sauna more than a decade ago when he was sixteen [I.i.23:00]. Yianis believes a precocious growth of facial hair and a strategically chosen sports jacket endowed him with the additional years he needed to get inside. Randy reports having sex with a young man at a sauna, and being told afterwards by the young man, but without any corroborative evidence, that he was sixteen [II.i.53:00]. When I pursue this in more detail, Randy confirms that the youth looked older. Albert reports seeing a young man who looked “under eighteen” at a sauna more than a year earlier but acknowledges that this was merely how he appeared [I.iv.00:30]. And I tell Randy how I observed a youth being tactfully shown the door at a sauna and being counselled to come back when he was of proper age [II.i.55:00].

The legal age of consent for male/male sex in the state of Victoria at the time of these interviews was sixteen years of age, and at the time of writing it still is. Perhaps the age restriction on sauna entry, then, is a function not so much of the sexual activity expected to occur on site as it is of being in a venue where cigarettes are sold, where X-rated and R-rated videos are screened, and where, in some cases, a liquor licence is in force. Perhaps. I assume but have not verified that these are the laws producing the belief I share with Albert, James, Randy, and Yianis that young men can only legally visit a sauna once they are eighteen years of age.

What interests me though is that none of us ever articulates a knowledge of just what law it is, apart from “house rules”, that specifies a legal age limit for sauna access yet we all believe that such a law exists, *that it must exist*, without verification. And in the interviews, we speak accordingly.

### **just one of the steam rooms**

In her second interview, Kate starts speaking of a moment when she had to make a decision: to watch something happening from a distance, or to join in. Her decision, she tells me, was to withdraw, although she later makes it clear that this withdrawal was a more complex event than simply making an exit. In fact the entire situation, the details of which remain largely undisclosed, is one that evidently remains complex and memorable for her. She doesn’t get confused as she *circumscribes* it for me—“describes” would be too direct—and she rations information about what happened specifically in relation to my questions, not one jot more. I feel a need to exercise care and sensitivity to a heightened degree.

I ask her where the scene was located, the one she was watching, and she answers:

**Kate:**

**II.i.57:00**

That was in just one of the steam rooms

I hear two things: the word “just”; and the phrase “one of the steam rooms”. At this particular sauna, in the remainder of Kate’s testimony, and in the testimony of all other witnesses, including mine, there is one steam room only, one sole steam room. No more. But for a fleeting moment Kate discursively figures a version of this sauna where there is more than one steam room, in which case the single steam room is no longer unique. It becomes one of an unspecified number, *n*, and this discursive production of Kate’s is further reinforced and refined in its productive effect by using the word “just”, a synonym for “merely”, I presume. The scene, then, as constructed by Kate at this moment in our conversation, and solely in this moment, is situated *merely* in one of several alternative sites. It’s nowhere special and somehow that ought to produce an effect of it being nothing special.

It’s not my point, interest, intention or, indeed, expertise to go on here about the interviewee, perhaps, being in denial or being embarrassed or being evasive or being shy. All these claims that come easily to mind are little more than surmises, opinions and, indeed, smug projections. What does interest me is not the psychological account of what Kate does here, an explanation of origin or cause named “motive”, or some explication of “subtext” as in “what’s really going on”. What interests me here is Kate’s spatial productivity.

She produces an effect of spatial expanse, of spatial options, of spatial seriality where, according to the rest of her testimony, there is none. She momentarily reconstructs the sauna. It’s that sudden, improbable and effective illocution that triggers an awareness in me that for her something’s going on that’s other than the simplicity of her speech, that her experience, still available to her in the moment of the interview, and her discursive representation of it are in an asymmetrical relation. For what emerges from this otherwise innocuous phrase with and as *force* is a heightened awareness that there is *no* spatial expanse, there are *no* other steam rooms, that this steam room *is* all there is. At least, that’s what emerges for *me* as I sit and listen. It’s not that Kate denies a reality, even if only for a moment, but that she produces one, and not just momentarily. The sauna is something she produces, and experiences, I would hazard, as spatially contingent, as a series of situations. Some of its constraints she relishes as challenges: the difficulty, say, of climbing up the rope and into the hole. Others, like suddenly experiencing herself as needing to make a spatial choice in relation to an imminent scene, produce a circumscription where previously her choice

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would have been to describe. Something lurks in this section of Kate's testimony as a thing, a scene, that, in the conversation, remains offstage. Something obscene. In the face of this ob-scene, Kate mobilises a discursive reconstruction which stands as an effective (however momentarily) reconstruction of the venue.

## outside

And this is how the last interview ends. It's where I've ended up:

**Russell:** That's that's fine so outside isn't just an

**II.i.65:00**

opposite of inside

**Urdhvaretu:** It depends what the word outside means doesn't it if you mean that's why that's why I asked do you mean JUST outside because if you're outside the sauna you're standing outside and you're for instance looking at the door you're in the vicinity of it you're nearly inside um or outside can just mean not in the sauna as a

**Russell:** I'm thinking I'm thinking of the meaning that is most present

**II.i.65:30**

for you and it would seem that that could be it

**Urdhvaretu:** Being just outside

**Russell:** Yes

**Urdhvaretu:** Yes

**Russell:** Right that's fine

**Urdhvaretu:** Because there's not much point talking about the other one

**Russell:** *(I laugh a little)* Well for you there isn't

**Urdhvaretu:** Okay

**Russell:** *(I laugh, then)* Um

**Urdhvaretu:** Because I'm outside an infinity of places at the moment in the greater

**II.i.66:00**

sense

**Russell:** But do you experience them that way

**Urdhvaretu:** I don't have the mental capacity to experience my

**Russell:** Right okay

**Urdhvaretu:** externality from the plurality of institutions that I might go into at one time or another

**Russell:** Do you have anything you want to ask me or say

**Urdhvaretu:** Not really

**Russell:** I'll leave it there

**Urdhvaretu:** Okay

I switch off the minidisc recorder.



## offstage (the obscene)

### the [sic] problem of knowledge

The only knowledge with any *purchase* on heteronormative power is discursive in form. An erotic action is not knowledge with a purchase on heteronormative power, the Kinsey report is; and a report on something even further abstracted from experience prior to discursive representation than is a discourse on sex—say, a government’s budget document—has even more purchase on heteronormative power than has the Kinsey report.

### a fragment of a window onto a fiction of

I’m indecisive. I was in a cubicle once with a youth who told me he was twenty. He told me other things and he did other things than tell me stuff, too, but I’m not writing about that. After a while he said to me “You can do anything you like”. It was an invitation, an offer, but he lay back as he said it and that made an enormous difference to how I heard it. What if he’d leant forward or stood up or unlatched the door? But he lay back, and what happened next was that I thought. I heard what he said and I thought about it, and the process of thinking more or less paralysed me. I thought that he didn’t really mean it, that he didn’t know what it was he’d said. The word “anything” resonated. Of course he probably would’ve resisted doing anything he didn’t like but that’s not what I was aware of. What was it that I wanted to do with him? Sade came to mind. If you’ve read Sade I need say no more. If you’ve not read Sade and you’re reading this then you need to actually read Sade, not read or hear *about* him (*ab-out* him), to get a sense of what fearful imaginings overwhelmed me.

I wondered about the youth. I wondered what his boundaries were. Was he stupid, unloved, insincere, careless or carefree? I did not wonder about how and where we were, the “room” we were in, what it offered us in terms of site. That knowledge already ran deep and didn’t require conscious thought.

He’d said “anything”.

I’d already smelt a whiff of alcohol on his breath, his body was soft, he wore spectacles. Each of these factors added weight to my sense of needing to take charge, to exercise care, to be the responsible one in what would ensue. But his

movement was co-ordinated and his speech articulate. His body was flexible and he demonstrated unexpected resources of strength. And he knew exactly where to put his spectacles as soon as we entered the room. Exactly. I remember that more than any other thing. So this paralysis in the face of choice is about me. What saunas offer me is difficulty, points of resistance. When they're busy, conucopias of flesh, I rarely get sexually engaged. What I want is something difficult, like a tight endgame of chess or the minimalism of billiards against a strong opponent. Tactics, strategies, pressure, tension, a game.

What I want is

## outside

This is as far as you go. I mean it. It's as far as you go with me. The information's there already if you want it in the books. Books movies plays websites photos newspapers magazines scholarly journals rumour gossip stories. And attached to this thesis is a bound volume of 32 interview transcripts that adds 420,000 more words to the record. It's all there already, and every last bit of it is a window onto reality like the fiction you've just read. I'm not taking you inside. Not this way. Not again. At this point, if you want to know, if you want to *know*, then you need to front up to the door yourself, with the money. You. Ah, but I'm female past it straight in love sober uninterested too busy with work and so on, you claim. None of this prevented my informants, my interviewees, my research subjects, my witnesses actors performers. They went in. As Colin, nearing seventy, put it: "I'm a person who um has gone to a sauna if you know what I mean" [II.i.52:00]. But then maybe you're a person who has gone to a sauna, too. In which case, you know already. You know something already, something different from me probably, something different from the sixteen interviewees, something different from all the others who have been inside, the millions of others. You know that there's a gap, that the sign and the signified differ, that the name never accounts for all meaning, that between identity and experience there is a chasm, always already, that the sauna is performed into existence, theatrically, sure, but in the most fundamental ways possible, too: people, men, me, you, her, us, we, them, yes, no, go, stop, deeper, further, back, out, in, now, here, there. If you've been there, *inside*, you probably know about performing, already, as such. And if you *know* absolutely without a moment's doubt that *you* have been there, "your own self" as Apollo would say, if *you* know that for certain, then there's nothing I can do from here, on the other side of this page, the mirror position that *you* now occupy in relation to it, there's nothing I can do from here to crack the phantasmagoria of that belief, to convince you where it counts, at the level of *experience*, that the "you" in question is both interpellated and illocutionary, that

the “you” is, to put it in its most reductive and crude formulation, “a stylized repetition of acts”.

It’s not just about gender. Or sexuality. Or HIV status. Or race, ethnicity, or class [good grief]. It comes down to fundamental phantasms such as “I” and “here”, always already divided in discourse *as if* the division were natural, in spite of all experience to the contrary, in spite of the inkling, the inkling afforded us of the ongoing performativity visible, barely, intermittently, just, in the improperly isolated participle: “am”.

The obscene exists outside language, outside the law, outside consciousness. Its force is palpable. It’s not a game. Language is games.

### **death in Venice**

It is a commonplace among bourgeois travellers that the principal [erotic] phantasy of a visit to Venezia lies in the tantalising prospect of intermittently getting lost [safely] inside it, of wandering without [acknowledged] purpose among its labyrinthine *calle*, *campi* and *fondamente*, regardless of hour, though moonlight is recommended, *as if* annihilation of the [heteronormative] self, the dreamed of “death in Venice”, whether literal or figurative, lurked around the corner of each next cavernous dead end, thrillingly.

Meanwhile, the maps in the guidebooks get more detailed each year, and we are reassured repeatedly that homicide rates remain low.

### **Michelangelo’s blind windows**

Forgive me. I’ve been reading. Early “essays” by Walter Benjamin. Derrida. Artaud. They’re not to blame though. None of them. No more than is Michelangelo.

Works of art are neither answers nor questions. They do not compete with philosophy but enter into a relation to it through their affinity with its problems. They do not exist as communications, that is, as teachings. They are not “about”. They are, they do. Insofar as they are about anything, then this “about-ness” is incidental, like the program notes accompanying the performance of a symphony, or the title given to a painting by tradition. The content of the philosophical problem’s solution is an idea. Art is not so much an idea as it is a

portal to the experience of an idea. As distinct from its articulation, art is the idea as experienced situation. Not so much an imitation of life as something lived.

Again—and this all is to *tell* you where I'm coming from the best way I know how—works of art do not represent philosophical problems. They present as ways, paths, portals via which the idea, the philosophical problem's solution, can be experienced *as situation*. The knowledge of this experience, which is itself an experience, is perhaps akin to what Artaud, and Derrida after him, referenced constantly, and futilely, as "force".

The silence, the "beyond-words", invoked in the face of "force" exists as testimony to the limits of representation, to its frontiers. Art, like the cruel indifference of pain, or the stupor of uncontrollable laughter, or the self-shattering of ecstasy, offers an experience at representation's frontiers. It functions as a portal, much as does one of Michelangelo's blind windows, where the frame is artfully contrived, and the pane consists of impenetrable blank stone.

### **keeping saunas obscene**

The current project does not intend to offer "the" objective "truth" of the sauna, but to *invoke* the sauna as that which exercises force, *performs*, imminently offstage. It keeps the sauna obscene even as it produces and deals with its representations. It reminds the reader that she is not in the sauna, never, but that she often nears it, and that no representation that pretends to total Cartesian knowledge of it as an object is of more than partial use.

The thesis must allow for the possibility of an opening, an opening up to, an opening up of and to, a mobility in forceful relations other than the dominant or the "natural".

### **a deep lostness**

A maze, insofar as it is actually maze-like, offers multiple itineraries in a confined or delimited space. In this respect, a maze in a sauna is like the sauna itself in purer, distilled, abstracted, microcosmic form. A labyrinth is of a different order again.

To get lost in the labyrinth is to know it intimately, to know it near immediately, prior to the production of meaning. Spiralling? Possibly. Out of agentic control?

Sure, the sole certainty, the sole discursive certainty being that one can truthfully say—but to whom?—that “I am lost”. In entering the labyrinth, one surrenders identificatory power, or acts *as if* one has done so, and enacts spatially an erotics of powerlessness, effectively a homo-erotics, as Bersani magisterially claimed (Bersani, 1987: 217-218). Inside the labyrinth, all lost figures homo-erotically move, homo-erotically dance. Even as “we” penetrate “it”, as “we” move deeper *in*, we experience, which is to say, we produce “the masochistic thrill of being invaded by a world we have not yet learned to master” (Bersani, 1995: 100). In the labyrinth, all power, that is, each mobile force relation, transfers to that which is obscene: the unviewed prospect around the corner not yet turned, the untraceable wake disappearing behind, the inscrutable thought burning in the Minotaur’s dark brain. The project of identification collapses in the labyrinth, almost, and, with it, so potentially does identity itself. I no longer am, inside the labyrinth, but become. Which is to say, I also un-become, I un-do, I un-hinge, I un-moor.

A labyrinth undoes logic, logos, law, or at least resists it, suspends its operations until it’s mastered. A maze that takes three minutes to master is no labyrinth.

### **no way out**

**labyri nth**, an artefact, looms. Imminent. Just around the corner, just over the page. Already it intrudes, invades the stage of the thesis proper, articulating not the knowledge of experience proffered by the human sciences but experience itself, *an* experience, in which Melbourne’s gay saunas are no more available for inspection than is Medusa’s head. In this respect, **labyri nth** usurps. It *improperly* represents.

**labyri nth** is not so much a thing, nor even a non-thing, a nothing, as it is an anti-thing, an anti-thing masked as a thing, in the way that anti-matter can only be conceived in material form (or, rather, *imagined* in material form), in the way that an astrophysical black hole is neither black nor a hole. **labyri nth** is an enabler, a tool, an occasion [of *deep lostness?*], an opportunity, a catalysis, a blind window, a [mere?] *series of walls*. It is anti-categorical, distinctive in that it challenges distinctions, the operations of *epistemological* power.

**labyri nth** vagues blurs obscures dims unhinges ruptures breaks dissolves vanishes recedes hides veils loosens unties frees.

**labyri nth** is consciously labyrinthine. Blatantly so. Like the figure who remains masked after the collective unmasking at the end of a masked ball (see Poe’s

theatron: offstage (the obscene)

*Masque of the Red Death*), **labyri nth** is visible, outstandingly so, and invisible simultaneously, because masked, an obscene *presence*, imminent.

**labyri nth** *performs* as an obscenity onstage.

## labyri nth

What, do you imagine that I would take so much trouble and so much pleasure in writing, do you think that I would keep so persistently to my task, if I were not preparing - with a rather shaky hand - a labyrinth into which I can venture, in which I can move my discourse, opening up underground passages, forcing it to go far from itself, finding overhangs that reduce and deform its itinerary, in which I can lose myself and appear at last to eyes that I will ever have to meet again. I am no doubt not the only one who writes in order to have no face. Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same: leave it to our bureaucrats and our police to see that our papers are in order. At least spare us their morality when we write.

(Foucault, 1972: 17)



**labyri  
nth**



*The following transcript documents a conversation with Charlie that was also the first conversation recorded for this project. Charlie and I met early on a weekend in a studio at Victoria University. He was waiting outside it when I arrived. Inside, we assembled a few sticks of furniture by a window and set up the recording equipment. I sat on the floor near the equipment and Charlie sat on a chair. While recording, we often looked away from each other and out through the window to the vista beyond. When we stopped, Charlie disclosed that he'd not been to bed for forty-eight hours. The conversation, like all of those documented for the project, was recorded on minidiscs. The microphone used to record this exchange, and the first exchange with Kate, was barely adequate for the task.*

**Russell:**

**l.i.00:00**

It's recording now

**Charlie:**

It's recording

**Russell:**

Is that all right

**Charlie:**

It's recording now

1

**I.i.00:00**

It's recording now

**Charlie:**

It's recording

**Russell:**

Is that all right

**Charlie:**

It's recording now

**Russell:**

Yep it's recording

**Charlie:**

All right so anything I say can be used as evidence

**Russell:**

Not really it can't be used as anything

**Charlie:**

Can I um are you ah do you have the licence to ask factual que

**1**

All right

**Russell:**

because it's kind of

*(I switch off the minidisc recorder)*

**I.i.74:45**

*(a fresh disc is inserted and, after a short break in which we step outside for a breath of fresh air, the conversation continues)*

**I.ii.00:00**

Okay yep that sounds okay

**Charlie:**

Recording now

**Russell:**

Yep we're on it doesn't take very much effort for it to work

**Charlie:**

Oh gosh

**Russell:**

Um so the whole thing about day into night *(Charlie laughs a little)* I can't I mean I think I have I my experiences of that

**3**

**Randy:**

No thankfully

**Russell:**

That's all right okay well um I might stop and just change it because there's a couple of other things I want to ask you

*(I switch off the minidisc recorder)*

**I.iii.10:19**

*(a fresh minidisc is inserted and I switch it back on)*

**Russell:**

**I.iv.00:00**

Okay that's recording *(I make a noise near the microphone)* yeah okay um do you remember you said before that you'd passed Rear Entry no let's go right back

**Randy:**

Okay

**Russell:**

Do you remember the very first time

**I.iv.00:30**

you ever heard of such places like a sauna existing

6

**Russell:**

Yes

**Joe:**

So you know in that sense he was sort of a bigger presence coming towards me um I reckon it was me I mean I wasn't in this whole I was I wasn't in a fantasy of you know that I was a prisoner or criminal or anything like that

**II.ii.12:30**

I didn't sort of go into that area but

**Russell:**

Good if if you were YOU though can you start telling me about the particular um state of being you were in for instance you know before we sort of talked before we started recording today you talked about ah different kinds of experiences you'd been in generally over periods of time and how they've been changing like a sense of you might feel a

**II.ii.13:00**

certain way for an extended period of time in your life and then start to shift and whatever or to see yourself if you like in certain ways now what I'm trying to now do is bring this down to a rather than a more general overview to a sense of a specific moment like did you have a sense of you you've talked about excitement at that point but can you tell me well what kind of excitement or were did you feel younger or did you feel more

**II.ii.13:30**

24

**James:**

Yes yes

**Russell:**

and it's you know

**James:**

Yes

**Russell:**

Um (*a silence*)

**II.i.42:00**

I guess I'm just sort of recording that

**James:**

Yeah

**Russell:**

because you've made me think about it again for the first time in a long time

**James:**

venue

**Albert:**

Yeah it operates in people's homes

**Russell:**

Yes that's that's all I need to know about that

**Albert:**

People's large homes (*he laughs a little*)

**Russell:**

Yeah (*laughing a little*) I don't need to know anymore about that while we're recording um is there anything you want to say to me I I don't want to um go through any more words is there anything you want to say to me or ask me about what we've just

**II.ii.40:00**

talked about

**Albert:**

No I think we've covered we've covered all we need to talk about all we all that was on your agenda

**Russell:**

*The transcript documents a second conversation with Urdhvaretu recorded at my flat on a weekday afternoon. It was the last recording made for this project.*

**Russell:**

**II.i.00:00**

Okay we're recording (*I settle into my seat*) um the bulk of what I want to do is go over um a series of terms um not necessarily terms that you've used but terms that ah other people have used and maybe you touched on them as well and what I'm [sic] really like you to do

**II.i.00:30**

is just very um simply if you can associate them or let me know what your associations are with those terms and ah your experience of saunas so it might be something to do with ah a general

**II.i.01:00**

phenomenon that you're aware of or it might be a particular ah sight or item of furniture it might be an ah event you witnessed that happened on one occasion a story of some form whatever okay all right so the first word is clean

**Urdhvaretu:**

I think I did speak a little bit

**II.i.01:30**

about this the first time ah there I recall I had a thing about declining standards and the fact that the new sauna started out very clean and is less so now particularly in the ah the ah steam room some sense of a twenty-four hour steam room

**II.i.02:00**

miasma I suppose the fact that the atmosphere in there is so thick and wet and heavy but odour basically yes

**Russell:**

**II.i.02:30**

Could that be just the frequency with which you've gone in there and sensations being dulled in some way

**Urdhvaretu:**

No because it works the in the other direction it gets worse with time

**Russell:**

Right (*a silence*) how long is it since you've been there

**II.i.03:00**

in that steam room

**Urdhvaretu:**

In the new one

**Russell:**

Mm

**Urdhvaretu:**

Er about a month I suppose

**II.i.56:00**

It may be a fair description I'm just wondering whether it's something you identify as an experience you have (*laughing a little*) I don't care really whether it's a fair description is it something you experience

**Urdhvaretu:**

Not to remark upon

**Russell:**

Right is it is it also a fair description to say that you have an experience

**II.i.56:30**

of either being inside or outside not of levels of insideness (*a silence*) can I clarify it by saying for instance that you're inside the sauna or you're inside a cubicle or you're inside a steam room but you're not inside a cubicle inside a sauna inside a city

**II.i.57:00**

for instance that you don't have that um as an experiential awareness

**Urdhvaretu:**

I don't think so

**Russell:**

Right

1

**Charlie:**

Yeah I was expecting a really large sauna instead I got there and it was like

**I.i.31:30**

you know barely fit you know people in there I don't know how many it fits but it didn't I was just imagining it to be a bit more spacious than what it was like I thought the facilities there were um yeah just not really compatible with what I imagined them to be

**Russell:**

What else do you remember

**I.i.32:00**

about there being downstairs you talked about circular paths and the spa and the sauna I remember my first visit for instance I actually didn't find the steam room (*I laugh a little*) for two and a bit hours and it was only when someone kind of went into it that I realised oh that's the steam room and and suddenly found myself in there did you find the steam room easily enough

**Charlie:**

No no

**I.i.32:30**

I ah

**Russell:**

**1**

Yeah

**Charlie:**

Um

**Russell:**

This is into the whole downstairs area

**Charlie:**

Yeah

**Russell:**

Not just into the steam room

**Charlie:**

No the downstairs area

**Russell:**

Yeah

**Charlie:**

In the corner there's a the spa and just a fake path I think

**1**

Horseshoe shape kind of

**Russell:**

pathway

**Charlie:**

Pathway

**Russell:**

Yeah

**Charlie:**

And inside of that that's the steam room and the sauna sort of comes out like a [unintelligible]

**Russell:**

Did you find the dark area

**Charlie:**

Yes yes

**Russell:**

1

*little)*

**Russell:**

Or what kind of social yeah well if you're talking about just something that seems light and and communicative in a very simple and direct way and not a complicated way I remember one

**I.i.64:00**

Saturday afternoon I was there and I was sitting in the sauna which as you've said is not well it's a place that can seat um a limited number of people and so I was sitting up on a high bench in the sauna and there were a series of four men there all of whom I would assume would have been over sixty and they were chatting away about um their memories

**I.i.64:30**

of other kinds of gyms and saunas they'd possibly been places where there'd been clandestine sexual activity or cruising or something but in but in what they called the old days I guess but they told this fantastically funny story about one place that had a steam room where jockeys used to go to kind of you know sweat it out and about this famous jockey or famous at that place anyway I don't know whether he ever rode a winner

**I.i.65:00**

he used to be in the steam room eating cream buns because he was so desperately hungry and still needed to lose weight and this bizarre and they were just laughing about this because one or two of them had heard about it and the other one hadn't and and this happy it was like this was their Saturday afternoon pension club

**Charlie:**

2

So what did you imagine the actual place was like as a physical place did you have an image building up before you arrived

**Kate:**

Yeah I think mm it was just more the um I think more the um the Roman bathhouse image

**Russell:**

Oh yeah *(we laugh)*

**Kate:**

Like oh

**I.i.05:00**

wow and I I just pictured it to be one huge bath really really steamy

**Russell:**

Yeah

**Kate:**

and possibly you know a few little showers and stuff like that

**Russell:**

Hmm and what what what kind of materials that it was made of

2

**Russell:**

Yeah

**Kate:**

**I.i.28:00**

So and then you know some were bigger than others um

**Russell:**

Where do you imagine the men when you said men would make eye contact and then go off where do you imagine they'd go off to

**Kate:**

Um they'd go off to maybe a smaller little steamy shower or maybe you know sort of jump in the spa um or decide to go

**I.i.28:30**

somewhere else yeah I don't know

**Russell:**

Another another another place away from the building

**Kate:**

Another place altogether yeah

2

**Russell:**

Oh wow

**Kate:**

So they were sort of all in one with um a little collar and a little tiny gold fringe around a sort of waist and I was wearing um I had a string of pearls long string of pearls which I had around around my neck and my hair was tied up in little thingies I had a white face sort of a slightly whiter face um

**I.I.36:30**

which I yeah I think I sort of ended up wearing that most of the night um

**Russell:**

Did you spend did you spend any time in the sauna or the steam room

**Kate:**

Ah no

**Russell:**

No

**Kate:**

Or did I no I did go into the into the steam room

2

Or did I no I did go into the into the steam room

**Russell:**

Yeah

**Kate:**

And there would be like about oh at one point you know sort of you know maybe eight you know eight eight people in there eight women in there just sort of sitting around lounging talking

**I.i.37:00**

well the times that I went in there there were all these people just chatting um

**Russell:**

And you didn't stay in the steam room yourself

**Kate:**

Mm I stayed for a wee bit but then just got a bit too hot anyway physically

**Russell:**

What happened to your make-up

**Kate:**

2

**Russell:**

Yeah so warm and

**Kate:**

Warm and and I would have salt water I wouldn't have chlorinated water I want it to be yeah um and possibly have little fountains too

**Russell:**

Oh yeah

**Kate:**

Fountains um and just really um just areas which possib um which were sort of glassed so that you could actually well as much as you can see into a steamy room

**I.i.39:30**

but you know from the outside to be able to look into it um yeah I think the thing is having having salt water and

**Russell:**

What what what's your associations with the chlorinated water

**Kate:**

Ah I just don't like the smell

## 2

In fact I'll just

**I.i.40:30**

turn that down

**Kate:**

Sure

**Russell:**

*(I walk into the next room, turn down the volume on the telephone, and return)* That's all right

**Kate:**

What else yeah I suppose yeah just I suppose the aesthetic description of the pool um and again having um steam rooms dry dry and steam saunas and um

**I.i.41:00**

actually a little diversion there um being in Sydney there's the Korean Bath House which has

**Russell:**

Oh yeah I've heard people talk about this yeah

**Kate:**

Yeah which is great because they have a woman's bath and a men's

**2**

**Russell:**

Or do you think just for you or

**Kate:**

Um I think it was just for me

**Russell:**

Yeah

**Kate:**

and that was just that um yeah just because I had you know spent a bit of time there I think and um so yeah [unintelligible] oh and and well I mean the steam rooms too

**I.i.49:00**

that was you know the steam

**Russell:**

That was erotically inviting

**Kate:**

They were yeah

**Russell:**

**2**

know because you can't really see

**Russell:**

Right

**Kate:**

And sometimes it it would be really quiet you know you would be there for a period of time and you wouldn't hear very much

**Russell:**

Oh yeah

**Kate:**

Apart from just sssssssteam

**Russell:**

Yeah when you say you can't really see is is there light in there or

**Kate:**

It's very very low light

**Russell:**

Oh yeah

2

**Russell:**

Oh yeah

**Kate:**

So it's quite sort of shadowy

**Russell:**

Yeah

**Kate:**

Um

**I.i.49:30**

and we're [where?] just incredibly steamy

**Russell:**

How close would you have needed to've been to have been able to see a person's face

**Kate:**

Um probably I don't know probably (*she brings her face near to mine*) be about a bit more than that (*she laughs a little*)

**Russell:**

**2**

becau or you can put yourself in a situation where there's you know where a particular energy is happening which you know makes you go wow I'm really quite

**I.i.70:30**

you know whether it's just a person or the way they are interacting [unintelligible]

**Russell:**

So the actual um physical environment's not particularly relevant

**Kate:**

Um not no maybe not

**Russell:**

Well let's go back to the steam room you mentioned for instance being able to see someone's face required you need

**Kate:**

Yeah

**Russell:**

Need to be about thirty centimetres away did you have any experience of the flirting

**I.i.71:00**

in the steam room

Um so yeah that's quite interesting and the other thing I was thinking of too was that the difference maybe between like the way a sauna's designed and something like a beat happens like a beat is just coincidentally happens to be a place where people might get off like it's not necessarily built for sex but the interesting thing about saunas is that often the spaces are (*he coughs*) built to recreate

**I.iii.07:30**

a feeling or a fantasy or like the sling rooms and you know the glory hole thing which I've never really had a you know fascinated by it but so there's all these things that are you know definitely created um I had a friend of mine who's actually heterosexual and this is just a really funny story because he he was working out he does security and he was working out and he goes oh I was a bit tired one day you know and I was talking to one of my colleagues and they said oh you know you should just go

**I.iii.08:00**

for a you know a bit of a steam and a sauna down to this place called Volcano of course my friend knowing nothing about gay culture he's in his fifties knows nothing about gay culture to save himself and and you think he would be in security but it's very butch and that sort of thing so he goes in there and the funny thing like he pays his membership and everything because later on that night he actually came and he told my mum about how he'd been to this thing and he was appalled because it was like gay yet he went to every level and checked it out to see what was there

**I.iii.08:30**

I guess out of his own curiosity

**Russell:**

and then I find them so I've done that and I always presume

**I.i.26:00**

that people do that do you know what I mean people with clothes on I've seen a few people with T-shirts on I guess or have I yeah I'm sure I have seen but I can't remember in what context or what they were doing but no pants I think there's towel and a T-shirt that's as much as I've seen

**Russell:**

I can remember a guy quite distinctly because I knew I knew him from somewhere and eventually I figured out where I knew him from which was something completely different er he he just happened to be someone that I'd noticed in another place several times

**I.i.26:30**

er but this this guy was at Volcano one night and for at least an hour and a half he was wandering through the entire building with the exception of the wet rooms like the sauna and the steam room I didn't see him go in there but he was fully dressed in street clothes a jumper jeans sneakers

**Yianis:**

Wow boy

**Russell:**

And was otherwise behaving as everyone else was

**I.i.27:00**

and then at a certain point he decided to change out of his clothes and

5

**James:**

Turn left and keep on going down there is the showers on the left three showers and hopeless water pressure hopeless (*I laugh*) the worst in Melbourne the worst in Melbourne and if (*he laughs*) if this can if this thing can influence them to get [unintelligible: fixed?]

**Russell:**

No no no of course

**James:**

**I.i.16:30**

It's terrible anyway and then to the right there's a spa and then also to the right there's a dry sauna and in front of you there's a kind of a steam room and then toilets to your left

**Russell:**

And what's beyond that

**James:**

And there's a little um drink water fountain and then the wall at the back I've got no idea where that leads to I imagine it there's a car I think there's a car park area out the back with all those buildings

**Russell:**

## 5

Like you arrived

**James:**

Arrived

**I.i.21:00**

said hello to the person at the door went in got changed and of course it's winter lots of jackets and things like that and I remember turning around and seeing a fairly handsome guy there and I thought oh that's a good sign because often that one is not very pretty clientele it's a lot older um but I thought oh okay that's interesting then I walked out the back

**I.i.21:30**

and had a shower and I guess I looked around and once again it seemed to be mostly older guys (*he clears his throat*) like you know over fifty sixty kind of thing um went into the sauna the wet sauna steam room sorry steam

**Russell:**

Is this straight after the shower

**James:**

Yeah

**Russell:**

Yeah

5

locker my locker and went and sat outside and Young Einstein was on I'd never seen that before so I started watching that and it was hideous so then

**I.i.22:30**

there was an a young guy and I can't work out if it was the same one in the porno or another it was a young Italian guy he came and sat sort of next to me in one of the lounges then he got up and left and I still watched the movie for a while and then I got up and went for a wander and came round to I think I went into the sauna again and I think that young guy was there and then he left

**Russell:**

So when you say into the sauna again

**James:**

The steam room

**Russell:**

The steam

**James:**

Sorry steam room steam room I mean I

**Russell:**

Yeah yeah do you think of it as a sauna though

**5**

**Russell:**

The steam

**James:**

Sorry steam room steam room I mean I

**Russell:**

Yeah yeah do you think of it as a sauna though

**James:**

**I.i.23:00**

Er yeah I get them confused just in my mind sometimes this to say the sauna I you know the sauna to me is the dry sauna and the steam room is different but often I confuse the words as to what they mean

**Russell:**

Yeah

**James:**

But I don't usually like the dry sauna as much although I did go into the dry sauna that night

**Russell:**

## 5

But let let's just come back to the point we left off from

**James:**

Okay so

**Russell:**

Because we might be leaping ahead there

**James:**

Yeah okay so I think I went

**Russell:**

You've gone into the steam room for the second time yeah

**James:**

Into the steam room and

**I.i.23:30**

there was an old guy sitting next to me and they tend to be at especially at that sauna they tend to be a bit more upfront there the older guys they tend to make overtures to you even if you don't even give the slightest acknowledgement and I usually try to be kind of ah okay without being too accommodating (*demonstrating*) like I just sort of grab their hand I hold it for a second and then I just put it away from me

**5**

No

**Russell:**

No

**James:**

I got in there and he was there

**Russell:**

Right

**James:**

but I wasn't sure because it was so steamy

**Russell:**

Yeah

**James:**

but it looked like him so he left I stayed in there for a little bit longer and then I left then I went into the dry sauna sat there for a while

**I.i.24:30**

I'm just trying to remember I think there was a guy in there but he showed no interest um anyway he left and then I left and I went for a

**5**

say do you want to go to a room and play for a while

**Russell:**

Right okay so

**James:**

Or muck around for a while

**Russell:**

So is that a kind of a line

**James:**

Yeah generally I mean usually it comes from after you've sometimes met them in a corridor in or in a steam room and you're playing and I usually say do you want to go to a room for a while

**Russell:**

Okay but when you're talking to me now you're quite clear it's not a room it's a cubicle

**James:**

Yeah I guess

**Russell:**

**James:**

Well I think I described it as a protected environment in terms

**Russell:**

Yeah

**James:**

to do with that that you can talk and in a way you oh for me anyway I'm not as conscious of um censoring myself about other people maybe listening whereas on a train or somewhere like that which has the same amount of you know possibilities of being heard as this you know I'm I'm I don't see it as protective

**I.i.43:00**

so that's what I meant by protective and often too I guess if you meet someone like in a grope room and a steam room um I'm I'm not I don't mind group scenes but I just sometimes find them a bit unwieldy a bit kind of like um and particularly if I'm interested in in the person there is a sense of well at least if we go to a room there's a sense of (*he claps his hands together, audibly*) being together for a moment but yeah so that that would be a pattern I mean you know sometimes

**I.i.43:30**

people ask me but that is a pattern I know that either you see someone I mean sometimes there's no words spoken obviously you pass someone by you they stand at the door you walk in they follow you or vice versa I know that is a line for me definitely muck around for a while and then you say do you want to go I say do you want to go to a room

forward to visiting that you know yes I will go there that it's a priority for you to  
**I.i.46:30**  
at least visit that place bec um for reasons other than utility for reasons of pleasure

**James:**

Um I I guess hmm

**Russell:**

No is acceptable as an answer

**James:**

Yeah yeah but I'm just thinking there's one it's weird because the steam room there is small  
and

**I.i.47:00**

more often than not it's because the clientele most of the clientele I'm not attracted to and  
there's something about it because it's so small and you know you get four or five guys in there  
that you're not attracted to and it feels hideous but I know that there's some level in my mind  
maybe that's the same with all the steam rooms in different saunas but with that one there is an  
image I guess or a fantasy that within that room you will make contact with someone attractive  
so there is an element I and there is a sense of the

**I.i.47:30**

warmth that I like about the steam rooms so I guess out of all the there is a quality of um  
forethought about the steam rooms um there even

**5**

Did you use it last Friday night

**James:**

No

**Russell:**

Can you describe what standing under that shower's like

**James:**

Um

**I.i.50:00**

sometimes it's good because if you want to stay in the room for whatever reason the the shower cools you down and sometimes too because the showers are so crappy there the proper showers the three of them that if there's anything been going on in the steam room and you want to wash off a bit there's a sense of not having to go out to the showers to do it

**Russell:**

Right okay

**James:**

You can do it in that room

**Russell:**

**5**

**Russell:**

And I just felt so so happy

**James:**

Right

**Russell:**

Wandering around this empty mansion or something

**James:**

Yeah yeah yeah it felt mansion I don't think I would've liked it to be empty (*I laugh a little*) but but I know what you mean yeah and the steam room was fantastic you know

**Russell:**

I agree but what was fantastic for you about the steam room [unintelligible]

**James:**

Oh

**I.ii.20:00**

just the fact that it had so many possibilities it it well

Yeah yeah yeah it felt mansion I don't think I would've liked it to be empty (*I laugh a little*) but but I know what you mean yeah and the steam room was fantastic you know

**Russell:**

I agree but what was fantastic for you about the steam room [unintelligible]

**James:**

Oh

**I.ii.20:00**

just the fact that it had so many possibilities it it well

**Russell:**

How does it differ how did it differ from the steam room at um High Street

**James:**

Oh well for a start I mean High Street is like a closet space and you know like a wardrobe and and and Splash had was huge it was big and it was had it reminded me of The Poseidon Adventure you know

**Russell:**

(*laughing*) Oh really

**5**

My memory is

**James:**

Yeah right

**Russell:**

So maybe I'm wrong

**James:**

Right

**Russell:**

But my memory is that there were actually speakers and I used to um on a couple of occasions I remember being in that steam room even with men there but thinking I wonder how the speakers don't short circuit (*we laugh*)

**James:**

[unintelligible] right

**Russell:**

Because it was definitely in there

**James:**

## 5

A real

**I.ii.26:00**

woman

**James:**

A real woman yeah

**Russell:**

Are you sure

**James:**

Yeah yeah I'm positive absolutely positive she'd obviously been brought in to see the place and I mean she got to the point where she was in a towel and the towel was up around her top (*laugh a little*) and she went into the er steam room

**Russell:**

What did you think of that

**James:**

Ah I felt very uncomfortable felt very uncomfortable it felt like an in an invasion of the space it was a real change to the atmosphere it's like ooh the kind of sexuality

**I.ii.26:30**

changed

## 6

Well

**I.i.20:30**

I'm going to ask you though to do that I'd like you to tell me what it is and what when you say it worked let's start with that when you say Splash worked what was the work it did

**Joe:**

Um there was always there was always a good crowd there there was always attractive men there there was always um you always had pretty good sex when you went there um it was always very exciting there was always

**I.i.21:00**

yeah there was always sort of a sexual energy there like you know sometimes you go to saunas and no one's doing anything whereas that place always seemed to be jumping there always seemed a real sexual vibe there you know the showers were open so there was sort of you know this titillation of seeing these naked men the steam room was you know sort of always writhing it was just yeah it just sort of really happened um yeah it was always very exciting

**I.i.21:30**

and therefore a satisfying sexual experience when you did have one I think so yeah

**Russell:**

Can you um what was your favourite part of Splash like when you'd go there the place that you would frequent you're the first person I should say who I've ever heard mention the solarium there

It no it's not such an yeah it's not such an issue when you're leaving but yeah you'd probably want to I mean I guess you'd be thinking about look to be graphic I guess you'd be thinking about what are people going to be thinking when they see your penis you know it's the size thing so if you've just come in from outside and it's cold um and your penis is sort of shrunk a bit you're probably

**I.ii.13:00**

going to try and hide that a bit from anyone that might be walking through the change rooms

**Russell:**

Because you think size is going to be a factor

**Joe:**

Yeah yeah and that would be a consideration too is if you'd come out of a steam room or a sauna and had been having some sort of sexual interaction and had an erection and there'd be times where you'd probably want people to see that but there'd be other times when you'd want to hide it so um

**Russell:**

What would be the difference between those two

**Joe & Russell:**

times

6

**Joe & Russell:**

times

**Joe:**

Oh

**Russell:**

Can you give me two examples

**Joe:**

Sure if there was someone you were attracted to who wasn't in the

**I.ii.13:30**

in the steam room and you'd been having sex with someone else you wouldn't want them to see that you'd been having sex with someone else um

**Russell:**

Right

**Joe:**

Um

**Russell:**

**8**

was going on

**Russell:**

Okay where were you when you heard this and where were you hearing it from

**Apollo:**

Oh okay I was yeah sure it was um in

**Russell:**

Everywhere or only in some

**Apollo:**

No it was in um definitely not in the rooms like the steam rooms

**Russell:**

Yeah

**Apollo:**

But outside walking outside the um the cubicles

**Russell:**

Right

**8**

Oh yeah

**Apollo:**

Not half nude or whatever but just sitting around a bar and a whole area where there's tables and chairs just sitting around talking

**Russell:**

Yeah

**Apollo:**

Because you can do that clothed there if you want to um or you can do that anywhere I guess but um it was like a bar-bar you know it didn't seem like a

**I.ii.11:30**

bar in a bathhouse or a steam or a steam place or whatever

**Russell:**

Now were these images on the first page or the second page

**Apollo:**

The the um image of the pool was on the first page that was like the premier

**Russell:**

**Russell:**

than on your ankle

**Edward:**

than on my ankle but then the elastic there is smaller so it's definitely turn your toes blue sometimes

**Russell:**

Um do you find that when you're at Squirt your behaviour is different from when you're at Volcano or do you

**Edward:**

Yes I'll go into the the um the steam room if there's a lot of people there I'll go in there

**I.i.42:30**

because if there's not then the door hasn't been opened continually and the heat in there is unforgivable it's hideous

**Russell:**

At

**Edward:**

At Squirt

Yes I'll go into the the um the steam room if there's a lot of people there I'll go in there

**I.i.42:30**

because if there's not then the door hasn't been opened continually and the heat in there is unforgivable it's hideous

**Russell:**

At

**Edward:**

At Squirt

**Russell:**

Right it's too hot in that steam room

**Edward:**

It's too bloody hot

**Russell:**

Right

**Edward:**

But then at the moment the last few times that I've been to Volcano the

**Russell:**

Yep

**Edward:**

Um the temperature is quite nice they are continually cleaning the floors and that all the time obviously they have to for for safety reasons they have to cover their own back and I suppose it doesn't have the age

**I.i.44:30**

that Volcano has so it doesn't have the the the underlying scent of the chemicals in the wood ah leeching into the atmosphere

**Russell:**

Um you when I asked you if your behaviour changes um you talked about how your um how you deal with the steam room might alter because of temperature

**Edward:**

**I.i.45:00**

Yeah

**Russell:**

But is there anything about your persona that alters

**Edward:**

10

**Max:**

Or whatever no no

**Russell:**

All right

**I.i.14:00**

and so what is it um that the saunas offer you that the other type of sex-on-premises venues don't

**Max:**

Well I've never been to them so I don't know what they'd offer me but I suppose the thing about the thing I like about the sauna is that it's kind of recreational like I actually do enjoy as part of going there and having sex I actually do enjoy being able to um you know have a sau you know actually have a sauna to sit in the steam room

**I.i.14:30**

and sometimes I can kind of almost go for that you know um to sit in the sauna um yeah I kind of like it's sort of like

**Russell:**

Have you ever gone solely for that

**Max:**

Yeah

there's

**I.i.17:30**

the façade so I come in and there's the reception there there's a door there and then that's the lounge in there with the television the video lounge and then there's a bar here and then you walk down and there's lockers on either side there's a mirror at the end there you turn left and then there's lock then you go down here and there's lockers on either side and then you go through and there's a this will all be out of proportion but then it goes like this the corridor goes d-dum d-dum is that right oh that's

**I.i.18:00**

right yes there's there's another corridor you go down there's another corridor you can go there's a weight room and everything in there and there's a little one that sort of winds through and there's some couches and things and then reconnects up with the lounge in there and then you go down that corridor and then there's this corridor and then this and then there's one that goes off to the left and in here is the hot room (*he speaks a rhythm*) b-b-b-boom steam bath showers there and then there's a central bit there (*he laughs a little*) with mirrors where everyone sits on a bench here (*I laugh a little*) and looks at themselves in the mirror while they can look at other people as well so you can check yourself out while you're checking everyone else out (*he laughs a little*)

**I.i.18:30**

and there's sh so there's the showers there's the there's another toilet there and there's a toilet there and then there's the swimming pool here with a deck up the back there and then you go round and then there's another corridor here and this corridor just goes has a slight bend funny sort of bend in it and goes down and it eventually meets up with this one that you've come through here through the room and then

10

**Max:**

No I've described it in terms of yeah okay I've described it in terms of that's the kind of geographic layout of it um

**Russell:**

Right okay

**Max:**

Hmm how else would I describe it well it's I find it quite a um I remember when I first went there I actually found it incredibly sort of stark I felt oh I see it's like an old warehouse and it felt a bit like an old warehouse

**I.i.20:00**

um and what do I think now I suppose I quite like that aspect of it now I kind of li quite like the configuration of it I hate the steam room it's got I think the steam room's really bad I don't I hardly ever go in there it feels very seedy and you know I kind of it's not the kind of I never feel like you'd ever meet anyone in the steam room and I never use I very rarely use the dry sauna not mad about the shower area I think what I like about it

**I.i.20:30**

is the actual I like this area here I like the kind of maze in that area there and I really like the upstairs

**Russell:**

I'm I'm sorry on the ground floor

10

**Max:**

Um not that I'm aware of

**Russell:**

Okay

**Max:**

No

**Russell:**

What's the light like in the

**I.i.28:00**

steam room what did you call it did you call it a steam room or a wet room or

**Max:**

Oh I could have called it the wet room but in the stea

**Russell:**

Yeah

**Max:**

Yeah I know in the steam room oh I I would describe it as sort of

**10**

Um not that I'm aware of

**Russell:**

Okay

**Max:**

No

**Russell:**

What's the light like in the

**I.i.28:00**

steam room what did you call it did you call it a steam room or a wet room or

**Max:**

Oh I could have called it the wet room but in the stea

**Russell:**

Yeah

**Max:**

Yeah I know in the steam room oh I I would describe it as sort of gloomy I find it a very gloomy place the steam room um I don't know

**10**

Right hand

**Max:**

I would grab hold and pull it like that

**Russell:**

Pull it open so the door is on your right as you pass through

**Max:**

That's right

**Russell:**

into the steam room

**Max:**

That's right yes

**Russell:**

Okay good okay

**Max:**

Mm

10

**I.i.34:00**

Right okay what do you think that's about what what strategy or purpose or

**Max:**

I don't want to feel that I'm immediately engaged in something or even um thought to be about to be engaged in something I think it's something like that I prefer to stand back and I prefer to stand back at a distance that that doesn't involve me before I make a decision to be involved

**I.i.34:30**

mm

**Russell:**

You described that steam room as small

**Max:**

Yes yes you see that's one of the interesting things about it perhaps that I that it's it I don't feel I don't it's it doesn't app it never has pleased me aesthetically that space like there's a steam room at a um at High Street in

**Russell:**

Yep

10

I suppose it depends if there's anybody else down there (*we laugh*)

**Max:**

Well that's right you can go down there and disappear

**Russell:**

Hide

**Max:**

Yeah (*the laughter has subsided*)

**Russell:**

Um so let's go back to um ah that that steam room in Rear Entry um and walking around and so you don't here (*indicating on the sketch plan*) and you it's never occurred to you to just do a U a sharp U-ie as you go in and if you

**I.i.41:00**

need to just change direction

**Max:**

No I've never done that I don't think no no no

**Russell:**

11

**Russell:**

Do you see the difference

**Frosty:**

Yeah

**Russell:**

Okay

**Frosty:**

I know that

**I.i.31:30**

there's there's um er there's water there's running water and there's probably water that like  
baths or steam or steam rooms um that men use um and I know there are kind of ah I suppose a  
labyrinth type design to these to this

**I.i.32:00**

place

**Russell:**

Yeah

**Frosty:**

Um rooms that you you could probably get lost in I suppose if you

11

Yeah

**Russell:**

Running water can you just elaborate on that a bit more for me

**Frosty:**

Um well

**Russell:**

Are we talking about a dripping tap

**Frosty:**

Um wash something to do with washing so some yeah and I suppose it's water steam's from water

**Russell:**

Yeah okay

**Frosty:**

Yeah so

**Russell:**

So are we talking about running hot water

11

Fine

**Frosty:**

Yeah I don't I don't I couldn't say what I could imagine but

**Russell:**

No that's all right just yeah

**Frosty:**

you don't want that so I don't know

**Russell:**

No that's fine um steam rooms could you do describe one

**Frosty:**

Um *(he is suddenly distracted by something he sees near me)* [unintelligible]

**Russell:**

What is a steam room

**Frosty:**

**Russell:**

What is a steam room

**Frosty:**

**I.i.35:30**

I [unintelligible] a big spider (*laughing a little*) that just crawled into that fucking cupboard

**Russell:**

(*laughing a little*) That's all right

**Frosty:**

Bizarre (*he returns to the conversation*) um a steam room four walls um and probably and a low  
ceil low ceiling something that

**Russell:**

A low ceiling yeah

**Frosty:**

Yeah that something contains the steam and gets quite (*suddenly emphatic*) steamy

**Russell:**

**11**

**Frosty:**

Um no I could I yeah I could give a description of what I think it is but

**Russell:**

Yeah

**Frosty:**

Um

**Russell:**

**I.i.37:00**

But you don't have a really strong sense about it in the sense that you do have a strong sense there is a steam room

**Frosty:**

Yes

**Russell:**

Okay now you said steam rooms though

**Frosty:**

Yeah I did it's a big building

**11**

Okay now you said steam rooms though

**Frosty:**

Yeah I did it's a big building

**Russell:**

Right

**Frosty:**

So

**Russell:**

Are the steam rooms like all next to each other

**I.i.37:30**

or are they separated

**Frosty:**

Um separated mm

**Russell:**

And are they part of the labyrinth

**Frosty:**

11

*(laughing a little)* All right

**Frosty:**

*(laughs, then)* MEN men men well

**Russell:**

Does it have a does it have an entrance

**Frosty:**

**I.i.42:00**

I don't know oh well I yes entrance and

**Russell:**

Do you know in the sense like I asked before about the steam room

**Frosty:**

Yeah yeah

**Russell:**

I mean again you may deduce there's an entrance but I'm thinking at the moment do you KNOW the entrance

**Frosty:**

11

Yes

**Russell:**

Yeah

**Frosty:**

Yes and I and I think um um oh I lost what I was going to say but yes

**I.i.65:30**

it is a shift in my identity ah well by allowing my or by yeah feeling frightened I've already said that yes

**Russell:**

I want to leave all that for a moment I want to go back to the interior you talked about places being dark or wet or steamy or labyrinthine

**I.i.66:00**

is there any kind of um materiality like are the walls and floors made of anything or are they do they have an appearance or a texture or

**Frosty:**

No I don't I don't know

**Russell:**

Thick shag pile carpet or *(I laugh a little)*

Yeah

**Charlie:**

because sometimes I do work in in the sauna but what I wanted to say was that um the ah and I and I work it's just out of self development really more than anything and awareness

**II.i.48:30**

um it's not work either any other work um the interesting thing about this conversation that I just sort of want to clear up for you because that was the original question um yes I did want to talk to him but I didn't I wanted I didn't really know what to sort of you know where to sort of talk to him at

**II.i.49:00**

like I didn't feel comfortable in expressing myself in any of those sort of areas that I'd sort of seen him crossing um and then I rememb I remember he went into the steam room and *(he laughs a little)* I recall that he received oral sex or he gave oral sex in the steam room and immediately I *(he laughs a little)* I just went oh well um he's not that interesting *(he laughs)*

**II.i.49:30**

if he's sort of run you know if he's I guess it was a judgement yeah I just thought that somehow he was different from just rushing into things with people um

**Russell:**

Ah sorry earlier you had thought that

**Russell:**

What's the term yeah  
II.i.50:00  
receiving oral sex

**Charlie:**

Yeah or

**Russell:**

Once you saw him receiving oral sex

**Charlie:**

Or or giving it I didn't know because I didn't go in to the steam room with him

**Russell:**

Yeah

**Charlie:**

But um yeah I don't I just guess I didn't feel that there was any real place for me to go up and talk to him in those in the areas and I guess the locker room that area is bright it is fairly lit well lit

II.i.50:30

**13**

Right okay and you don't recall the occasion though

**Albert:**

There have been so many times the original one would be really hard to identify I mean I can remember the way the venue was then um right down to the details of you know there being sheets on the on the beds

**Russell:**

Oh yeah

**Albert:**

**I.i.01:00**

And the steam room was positioned in the centre of the building rather than where it is at the moment if you like at the front um and the mazes were a lot darker of course this was in the late middle seventies would have been around nineteen seventy-six seven

**Russell:**

Right okay so in telling me these things are you drawing on say a series of visits in that period

**Albert:**

Um the vi

**13**

**Albert:**

Upstairs in the lounge

**Russell:**

Right okay

**Albert:**

And you were free to wander through the rest of the building and um you know have a look around but and and the the facilities weren't operating

**Russell:**

So the steam room had no steam in it

**Albert:**

The steam room had no

**l.i.17:30**

steam the dry room had no dry the pool had water but wasn't heated and the spa wasn't running

**Russell:**

So men in

**13**

**Albert:**

The steam room had no

**I.i.17:30**

steam the dry room had no dry the pool had water but wasn't heated and the spa wasn't running

**Russell:**

So men in

**Albert:**

Very much the display home

**Russell:**

So men in suits were walking in and out of the steam room with no steam

**Albert:**

Yeah looking at it yeah

**Russell:**

Oh how amazing and how dim was the lighting level for it

**Albert:**

the jangly key

**Russell:**

Can you remember the last time when you witnessed something in a sauna in Melbourne

**I.iii.25:30**

preferably but it doesn't have to be that completely surprised you

**Albert:**

My first response is to say nothing ever happens in saunas surprises me um

**Russell:**

**I.iii.26:00**

Well for instance have you ever have you ever been in the steam room and a woman has been there

**Albert:**

No no I wouldn't be in a sauna with a woman not a gay sauna where there's no place for women in a gay male space when it's demarcated as such ah

**Russell:**

One of my interviewees is a person of more than twenty years sauna going experience is absolutely convinced that interstate

**Russell:**

**I.iii.26:00**

Well for instance have you ever have you ever been in the steam room and a woman has been there

**Albert:**

No no I wouldn't be in a sauna with a woman not a gay sauna where there's no place for women in a gay male space when it's demarcated as such ah

**Russell:**

One of my interviewees is a a person of more than twenty years sauna going experience is absolutely convinced that interstate

**I.iii.26:30**

he was in a gay sauna in the steam room and a a woman and I ah and my term was a real woman and he said yes a real woman was in the steam room

**Albert:**

I think the closest thing I it initially shocked me but then I got very comfortable with it very quickly was a drag queen

**Russell:**

Oh yeah

14

**Colin:**

Well

**Russell:**

And I'm aware that from things you've intimated that there isn't necessarily a large number of those visits

**Colin:**

No I think um I mean I've sort of I think that just the desperation for sexual company

**I.i.15:00**

is um all that's ever driven me to saunas I don't go there and think oh whacko I'm really looking forward to a lovely sauna in that place (*I laugh*) I don't mean that I'm talking not talking about the steam

**Russell:**

Yeah

**Colin:**

baths [unintelligible] that sort of the relish of it is is um it's not something I relish and it's not something I do well unfortunately I sort of go along there and

**I.i.15:30**

I don't go for older men and um um I'm extremely shy about um

I said well that's what happened (*he laughs a little*)

**Russell:**

Um if we were there are there other parts of the sauna where that um that ability to you know initiate a conversation seems more difficult

**Colin:**

More difficult

**Russell:**

Yeah or do you I mean the lockers

**I.i.34:00**

I can understand even though I wouldn't do it myself but would you in the steam room would you find yourself starting to chat to someone have you

**Colin:**

No I I think what I would do is is as it were look nod smile

**Russell:**

Right

**Colin:**

That sort of thing

No I I think what I would do is is as it were look nod smile

**Russell:**

Right

**Colin:**

That sort of thing

**Russell:**

Yeah

**Colin:**

But and I have I have actually um sat in a steam room next

**I.i.34:30**

to someone and and started you know touching them up putting my hand on their knee or something like that

**Russell:**

Rather than talking with them

**Colin:**

Rather than talking with them um but I haven't found that it's worked there's one time when there was this actually gorgeous guy um again

*other cup of tea*) as honestly it's a  
**I.iii.02:00**  
long time since I've been there and um

**Russell:**

What you know

**Colin:**

Okay well there's a downstairs and an upstairs or there was when I was there I'm pretty sure and um upstairs were cubicles and with little tables in them for you know massage tables narrow ah and um which I suppose would pass muster in a police raid or something as massage tables as opposed to something you get off on um the

**I.iii.02:30**

um I seem to recollect going along a passage and there's off to the right there's a steam room and um and the showers and other stuff beyond it somewhere um I that's about it really I don't

**Russell:**

What kind of building is it

**Colin:**

It's an old building I think

**I.iii.03:00**

and ah and it has that old sort of you know I mean when I went there anyway it's sort of not new and spruced up looking at all it's it's it was

**I.i.04:30**

When you said you freaked out on the first experience um what lead what leads you now to that conclusion like what happened that makes you think that you freaked out

**Mark:**

Oh

**Russell:**

What happened for you

**Mark:**

Ah what happened for me was that let's see we were we were um in the steam room and um some guy in there started um

**I.i.05:00**

handling my boyfriend's genitalia um and that I took great umbrage at that um at the time and couldn't understand how he could conceive of allowing it to happen but I'd I had no idea that when you go into a steam room whether you're with your boyfriend or not you leave yourself open to that kind of um

**I.i.05:30**

ah ah physical interaction with total strangers so um I did I didn't realise that um that he'd probably been putting out come and get me vibes anyway and um

**Russell:**

15

realise that um that he'd probably been putting out come and get me vibes anyway and um

**Russell:**

Had you had you been walking around the building with him

**Mark:**

Um not that I recall no um

**I.i.06:00**

er he seemed to take charge and I was like a um an Arab wife following up the rear

**Russell:**

*(I laugh a little)* Okay um do you have a clear sense that you went into the steam room with him or you bumped into him there

**Mark:**

Oh no we were we went into the steam room together

**Russell:**

Right

**Mark:**

We

15

What kind of image did you associate with her singing in or performing in a gay bathhouse

**I.i.12:00**

plumbing (*this is a question*)

**Mark:**

No I think um my vision of it was much more um ah like British public baths

**Russell:**

Oh yeah

**Mark:**

Like something out of Steaming

**Russell:**

Yeah yeah

**Mark:**

Um but maybe that's just because in some respects I equate Diana Dors with um

**I.i.12:30**

er Bette Midler

**15**

I don't know the film

**Russell:**

Diana Dors is in it and it's set in a sw in a swimming pool a bath a bath a swimming pool with a bath complex attached to it in London

**Mark:**

Oh

**Russell:**

It's a Skolimowski film Jane Asher

**Mark:**

Well no I have seen it I thought that that was Steaming but you might be right it might be Deep End I've seen Diana Dors

**I.i.13:00**

as the matron at a British bathhouse in a film

**Russell:**

She was she was a customer in this bathhouse

**Mark:**

Ah right

**15**

No I don't that doesn't ring a bell

**Russell:**

The film is about a young boy and it's his first job

**Mark:**

No

**Russell:**

and he gets quite sexually confused

**Mark:**

No don't know that one no I'm thinking of still the the film version of Steaming

**Russell:**

Steaming right how curious

**Mark:**

Which has her in kind of um

**I.i.13:30**

a starched uniform

**Russell:**

15

No don't know that one no I'm thinking of still the the film version of Steaming

**Russell:**

Steaming right how curious

**Mark:**

Which has her in kind of um

**I.i.13:30**

a starched uniform

**Russell:**

How interesting (*laughing a little*) that she's done two baths movies (*we laugh*) I haven't seen Steaming

**Mark:**

Well that was my vision

**Russell:**

Yeah

**Mark:**

of of what a um a gay bathhouse was I imagined um older um ah

**15**

do you think you adopted it when

**Mark:**

It's the way that I've always worn my towel ever since

**Russell:**

Right whether you're in [a] sauna or not

**Mark:**

Um it's the way when I think about wrapping a towel around me it's what I do

**Russell:**

Right when when you um go into a steam room do you wear your towel

**Mark:**

**I.i.63:00**

No

**Russell:**

Is that always the case

**Mark:**

**15**

**Mark:**

Sometimes I'll wear it around my neck but I don't wear it around my body

**Russell:**

That won't vary from sauna to sauna

**Mark:**

No in in recent years um I've tended to leave my towel outside

**Russell:**

**I.i.63:30**

That first time you went and you were in the steam room and you saw someone fondling your boyfriend's genitals were you wearing a towel

**Mark:**

Yes

**Russell:**

Right so some time after that came the time when you took your towel off to be in a steam room

**Mark:**

15

**Mark:**

Oh I think I can't specify exactly

**I.i.64:00**

when but I know that it had something to do with getting really pissed off at my towel getting all damp and soggy in there

**Russell:**

Yeah

**Mark:**

and not being able to get a fresh one

**Russell:**

Are you aware of other men though who wear their towels into steam rooms when you're in there

**Mark:**

Um I'm generally aware of those who don't

**Russell:**

*(I laugh)* All right

**I.i.64:30**

when was the most when was the last time you went to a sauna in Melbourne

15

**Mark:**

Yeah

**Russell:**

how did you can you recall specifically a moment when you are aware of portraying that

**Mark:**

No specific one moment no um but I was aware of

**I.ii.17:00**

the need to portray some sense of proprietorship and so it was done mostly through touching through linking fingers or through being close physically to each other um or indeed um we um we ended up having sex in the steam room um

**I.ii.17:30**

but fended off interference or others joining in basically through I think the connectedness of what was going on between us

**Russell:**

Um which part of the steam room because that steam room has distinct parts to it

**Mark:**

Yeah um the low tiled platform in the er that that's sort of adjacent to

**16**

Okay

**Lydia:**

too

**Russell:**

Right okay

**Lydia:**

Yeah yeah

**Russell:**

Right did you go into the steam room wearing this

**Lydia:**

No

**Russell:**

Did you go into the steam room at all that night

**Lydia:**

No I can only vaguely remember the steam room

**16**

No

**Russell:**

Did you go into the steam room at all that night

**Lydia:**

No I can only vaguely remember the steam room

**Russell:**

Right

**Lydia:**

Well the steam room is very popular

**Russell:**

Yeah

**Lydia:**

because the role that women gave themselves is they were treating it like a health club

**Russell:**

one else none of the men none of the women have conceived around that term the idea that a place could be generous you know in the in the variety of ways that you've articulated um is there anything you want to ask me

**Lydia:**

Um

**Russell:**

that you're curious about

**Lydia:**

**I.ii.32:00**

I suppose I'm more curious not so much in why you're asking questions about steam houses but more about for you what's the interest in in performativeness I suppose or is it a for me I suppose the question to you is is it is it about the person in the space and what they bring to it or is it what the space is

**I.ii.32:30**

kind of stuff

**Russell:**

*(I sigh, then)* I suppose my question is that same question *(we laugh a little)* which is is it the place or is it the person or is is somehow are do we make false distinctions you know like I'm interested you've got an interest in you've explored or examined an interest in what home

17

Mm but it's not as dark as dark places (*putting on a voice*) used to be in the old days

**Russell:**

(*laughing a little*) Um and how dark is that let's how dark sorry

**I.i.19:30**

did dark places use to be in the old days

**Urdhvaretu:**

Um well the dark room the dark the darker portion of the wet sauna at Volcano was certainly black to behold from the outside and um

**Russell:**

Do you mean the steam room

**Urdhvaretu:**

Mm

**Russell:**

That area

**Urdhvaretu:**

The back part of it

Then what are the things that it's limited for you

**Urdhvaretu:**

Um

**I.i.48:00**

well I suppose the ah I suppose the darkness is something to do with the suspension of discrimination both that that I practice and that that is practised upon me or past me or whatever um

**I.i.48:30**

um I suppose I think well as we were saying before the as I said before the darkness um allowed um allowed a kind of density of it allowed a situation where activity was easily triggerable and so it's somewhere where something

**I.i.49:00**

is going on something is kind of evidently going on um and I think there there's a a general rhythm um in say the steam room at um Squirt which is the illumination there varies for some reason from day to day but it's never very dark um in there you'll find that a lot of the time it's just men sitting

**I.i.49:30**

motionless and silent around the room and then every now and then um some you know combination of of ah events has allowed a kind of knot of people to get together and be um groping away at each other or whatever um and there's something good about ah when the reserve peels away and that happens um I mean in general

**I.i.50:00**

um people walking around in saunas are very careful um and restrained which is I think I remember (*putting on a voice*) from

**Urdhvaretu:**

Um

**Russell:**

But you'd put that down distinctly to illumination rather than for instance the more constricted shape

**Urdhvaretu:**

**I.i.53:00**

Right um

**Russell:**

that's there for instance in that darker area everyone is within reach simply because the walls are so narrow whereas the steam room at Squirt there are much larger distances involved it's a very big room

**Urdhvaretu:**

That's true but then the circular couch room at um Volcano is that's a large

**I.i.53:30**

room um that and it's another space where people get together

**Russell:**

**Urdhvaretu:**

Er

**I.i.59:00**

*(a silence, then)* yes

**Russell:**

Just to enjoy the facilities

**Urdhvaretu:**

Um yes I think so I suppose there've been times when I've gone to Volcano um to get a massage and then stayed afterwards

**I.i.59:30**

that would be the very clearest ones um and then ah there are also times when um I've gone to the Squirt principally to go into the steam room and have a shower that kind of thing um

**I.i.60:00**

I would say it's not easy to determine or to remember the degree of erotic expectation um

**Russell:**

I mean I I've definitely had occasions where I've just had a few loose hours up my

**I.i.60:30**

sleeve it felt that way and then just suddenly thought oh no that's what I'll do I'll go there but not really with any big investment or anything but

room and have a shower that kind of thing um

**I.i.60:00**

I would say it's not easy to determine or to remember the degree of erotic expectation um

**Russell:**

I mean I I've definitely had occasions where I've just had a few loose hours up my

**I.i.60:30**

sleeve it felt that way and then just suddenly thought oh no that's what I'll do I'll go there but not really with any big investment or anything but also knowing that it was alwa there's something kind of there's always something interesting even if it's the fact that the place is a bit quiet you know for me and I'll

**I.i.61:00**

you know enjoy the facilities and just leave with no kind of big deal about that and I'd rather there however than say go um the steam and sauna spa at a public swimming pool

**Urdhvaretu:**

Right

**Russell:**

or something because there's still an a kind of an erotic ambience even if (*I laugh a little*) it doesn't look like one

**I.i.61:30**

um the other thing you mentioned early on that for want of a better

have actually been doing it at um at Volcano they have been doing a kind of colourising thing and I presume they've they're doing it to try and keep up with

**I.i.65:30**

Squirt that must have which must have taken some of their their custom um there's also the fact that it's um newer and um it smells better than Squirt er than Volcano

**Russell:**

When you say it smells better can you describe can you distinguish between the smells for me

**Urdhvaretu:**

Um

**I.i.66:00**

um only in the negative direction (*I laugh*) and that is that the steam room at um Volcano the last couple of times I've been there just smelt revolting

**Russell:**

But of what um what what was it that

**Urdhvaretu:**

Who knows it's some (*he laughs*)

**Russell:**

completely off putting um but on that score I have noticed a kind of ripening taking place at um Squirt so um

**Russell:**

A ripening

**Urdhvaretu:**

Yes it's

**Russell:**

In whereabouts

**Urdhvaretu:**

In the steam room

**Russell:**

In the steam room

**Urdhvaretu:**

Maybe it's just very hard to keep um places like that clean and I suppose particularly given that Squirt is

**I.i.68:00**

open twenty-four hours a day and also

I'm always struck when I'm there during daylight and you're suddenly seeing um daylight coming in under a door or through the um louvres

I.i.69:00

and grating whatever it is over the spa at Squirt um

**Russell:**

Over the spa right

**Urdhvaretu:**

Over the pool

**Russell:**

Because there's also like a is it a skylight or is it a an artificial light in the steam room there

**Urdhvaretu:**

Yes

**Russell:**

Just inside the door to the left

**Urdhvaretu:**

Yes

Um

**I.ii.01:30**

I think I'm drifting off into a little bit of confusion um I mean obviously the red walls are not a kind of sufficient enticement on their own um I mean there is the fact that it's distinctly smaller um which

**Russell:**

Smaller than Volcano

**Urdhvaretu:**

Yes smaller than Volcano

**I.ii.02:00**

um which ought not to be a good thing um on the idea on the notion that um a small circuit leads to early fatigue um I suppose that the apart from issues of what the steam room smells like um

**I.ii.02:30**

I probably go to um Squirt as against Volcano now um because the people there are more appealing to look at I suppose um there are less spherical men (*I laugh a little*) um sometimes at Volcano um there seems a preponderance of um

**I.ii.03:00**

spherical Caucasian men and Asian youths involved in some kind of interaction ritual [?] but in any case the sphere quotient is much much higher and then I suppose there's also um something that ah my friend pointed out and it's completely obvious but I'm not altogether sure if I would've thought to bring it up on my own but

**I.ii.03:30**

I'm going to come back to that later (*Kate laughs*) because something's actually happened [...] that um yeah we'll come back to that ah did the camera have a flash

**Kate:**

Um yes it did yep it was actually quite dark in the space

**Russell:**

**II.i.17:30**

Did you get the sense that it's usually that dark or had it been turned down because it made the candles more interesting

**Kate:**

Yeah um I think it would have quite possibly always be quite dark and really steamy that was always my impression that steamy to the point of yeah you could really see

**Russell:**

And was it steamy

**Kate:**

Oh only if you went in the in the wet sauna room

**Russell:**

18

**Russell:**

Before you got there

**Kate:**

Yeah before I got there I had this whole thing [unintelligible] be set up and they'd

**Russell:**

Where do you think that came from

**Kate:**

Um oh I think just from my I think an idea that I always sort of thought that you know like some steam rooms or or saunas were um yeah sort of large you know sort of wet wet areas which were very steamy (*she laughs a little*)

**Russell:**

Because I've seen um

**Kate:**

Imagined pictures of

**Russell:**

in winter and there's a layer of mist over the pool

**Kate:**

Oh how beautiful

**Russell:**

Yeah it is beautiful because the water comes up from underground at a really hot temperature  
ah still does um and

**Kate:**

Yeah it was almost the thing of reminiscent of ah you know filling filling the dance floor with with  
smoke to you know sort of make

**II.i.19:00**

people feel like they could just chill out a bit more or that was my little sort of reasoning to  
possibly having it fairly steamy and it's a bit daggy really but *(she laughs a little)*

**Russell:**

Do you really think it's daggy

**Kate:**

Oh no I suppose no maybe not maybe the the thing of it was always like if you go out to a  
nightclub they've always oh there was this period of you know they pump the floor full of smoke  
and then people get on

**II.i.19:30**

That for you and presumably for other women there the idea of it being like a nightclub or a club atmosphere was much more preferable than what everyone

**II.i.23:00**

believed it was for the men when the men went

**Kate:**

Yeah right um because yeah again like I had no again for me having any sort of like oh you know it has to be set up like this or it needs to be like that again being quite open and I suppose having having the opportunity to go to you know a sort of um I suppose a a just a a a women only um venue

**II.i.23:30**

being and then it being a sauna um steam room yeah oh just another I suppose place where you can just hang out and but it's funny because it yeah whether it's that whole thing of you know again that thing of going back to again what I've previously said then talking to women about the thing of just like you know having a space because there was actually you know quite a few women that did get together and say well hey come on let's

**II.i.24:00**

you know let's organise a night and and see what happens but yeah to the best of my knowledge in Melbourne it's you know there's been there's been a few attempts but they've always you know it's just always been such a just doesn't continue

18

**Kate:**

Yeah it were it was sort of like concentrated

**II.i.35:00**

areas like down by the pool and then in the little lounge area

**Russell:**

Right

**Kate:**

Yeah yeah

**Russell:**

But in the steam room for instance you didn't have a strong sense of oh suddenly everyone's looking at me

**Kate:**

No oh absolutely not no

**Russell:**

Right okay

**Kate:**

So you did put some thought into that and you more or less accurately predicted

**Kate:**

Yeah

**Russell:**

So did you expect the women would be a bit awkward

**Kate:**

**II.i.56:00**

Yeah there I mean there were pockets because then again you know going around to other areas where you know um just actually going into some of the steam rooms but then I didn't then this is where I sort of went well you know do I just sort of sit here and watch or you know see what happens in so yeah there there were complete you know sort of areas where they were quite you know

**II.i.56:30**

unselfconscious about

**Russell:**

Right

**Kate:**

quite consciously

**Kate:**

Yeah well I sort of thought well you know I did actually at one point have had a moment where I went well do I just sort of (*laughing*) sort of sit here see what happens which I did for a moment  
**II.i.57:00**

and then I actually withdrew and went oh

**Russell:**

Where was that

**Kate:**

That was in just one of the steam rooms

**Russell:**

Right where were you

**Kate:**

Where was I

**Russell:**

Yeah

**18**

That was in just one of the steam rooms

**Russell:**

Right where were you

**Kate:**

Where was I

**Russell:**

Yeah

**Kate:**

In the steam room as well

**Russell:**

No were you (*Kate laughs*) for instance were you right next to the door or were you deep into the steam room

**Kate:**

I was inside the steam room yeah

**Russell:**

18

**Kate:**

Yeah

**Russell:**

or anything even if

**II.i.59:30**

it's just for a one off event

**Kate:**

Yeah

**Russell:**

Whereas it sounds like what the steam room isn't a place for you

**Kate:**

Yeah

**Russell:**

where flirting is possible

**Kate:**

Well that particular night no

**Russell:**

Opening inwards or outwards

**Willow:**

Inwards the whole thing

**II.i.06:30**

about I guess being at Volcano and I guess working for a gay organisation is that they were always so money conscious and when I went to Volcano or even the baths in St Kilda when I was really young there never seemed to be an affluence so and my for me they might have something but but it would be in such a simple environment or

**II.i.07:00**

if you're looking at the pool where everyone's swimming all there is is tiles like it's really practical and I might have some nice lighting on the pool but that's it so everything's so minimal so they would only be an object in there and maybe because of the steam or whatever it seems to be a lack of extras so I only envisage a bicycle or a motorbike being in there

**II.i.07:30**

and nothing else so it all seems stripped bare because it's there for an effect but it's there as an icon in a way

**Russell:**

Yeah

**Willow:**

the bike if there's more than you know three people

**Russell:**

**II.i.11:30**

Tell me about the walls the surfaces of the walls in the motorbike room

**Willow:**

White and clammy

**Russell:**

White and clammy

**Willow:**

Yeah you know steam

**Russell:**

Oh yeah

**Willow:**

that's evaporating

**Russell:**

So they partake of the wetness of the venue

**Yianis:**

It is an invitation yeah people are dumb really um (*he laughs*) no just in terms of

**Russell:**

I'm not I'm not asking for the reasoning behind it I'm just wanting to know a bit more about the experience of it whether that's

**II.i.49:00**

reasonable or not it's more you seem to be in tune with the idea regardless of what their intentions are you seem in tune with the idea and you know I'm quite happy to say I recognise this immediately but a cubicle door open with two people in it doing whatever is it a different thing from the same two people doing whatever in a corridor

**II.i.49:30**

or in the middle of the steam room or

**Yianis:**

Yeah

**Russell:**

Or something now what is that difference

**Yianis:**

It's usually [unintelligible]

23

**Russell:**

Yes

**Edward:**

for my liking

**Russell:**

Yeah

**Edward:**

There's um

**II.i.20:30**

in the steam room there's I know there's another room that I have not been and will not go into I don't know what it is but there's something in me that just says don't go there do not go in there

**Russell:**

When you say that you mean if you move to the right rather than to the left

**Edward:**

Yeah where the door opens up

**23**

When you say that you mean if you move to the right rather than to the left

**Edward:**

Yeah where the door opens up

**Russell:**

Yes

**Edward:**

I have not ever

**Russell:**

So there's the door into the steam room

**Edward:**

Yeah

**Russell:**

from the corridor

**Edward:**

Yeah

23

**Russell:**

from the corridor

**Edward:**

Yeah

**Russell:**

and

**Edward:**

You can either go ahead

**II.i.21:00**

walk I think walk straight ahead or you can go into what I call what is the steam room which is

**Russell:**

Lit (*I laugh a little*)

**Edward:**

Yeah lit as opposed to

**Russell:**

As opposed to the unlit

**Edward:**

so god knows how long's that been

**Russell:**

That's just under six months

**Edward:**

Because um and I ran into a guy who works

**II.i.29:30**

there who I was seeing for five minutes and decided I didn't actually want to be there because I didn't want to see him he actually yeah he works there he still works there um and it was someone said to me we were talking about saunas and he said oh I hate the smell of shit in the steam room and I then just thought brrrh okay (*laughing a little*) I just can't go in there again I just can't go in

**II.i.30:00**

there because he kept of going oh there's shit everywhere like you know you want to see it when they turn the lights on and clean it out and I just thought oh okay foul foul and this is someone who used to work there used to so that that has actually really put me off going there and and the fact that you know to be a lobster is a life threatening

**II.i.30:30**

thing to go in there because of the the spa is so hot

**Russell:**

I haven't actually seen them

**Russell:**

Yeah

**Edward:**

physically do it

**Russell:**

Yeah

**Edward:**

And in the steam room [unintelligible] steam my eyesight's not that great um

**II.i.42:30**

mm they would just be darkened figures in and out unless I was like sitting right at the doorway and see them come and go I don't know

**Russell:**

When you say men that you're physically attracted to this is this gets tricky now but would you say that these are men who

**II.i.43:00**

um would have other men finding them physically attractive as well

Some people do

**Edward:**

Yes that's true I must admit I have pondered over that maybe you can see someone's cock through the water clearer than you can than when there's bubbles going on I don't know but um

**Russell:**

Or you don't know how to switch the bubbles on

**Edward:**

That's true (*we laugh*)

**II.I.65:00**

pick the new boy um um not in the steam room definitely never in the steam room  
[unintelligible: although?] I have had a very short bout of words in the steam room but not a conversation

**Russell:**

(*laughing a little*) Not conversation

**Edward:**

Not conversation

**Russell:**

**Russell:**

Oh there's it's it's quite extensive but do you want to look up um Australia and look up Volcano  
**II.i.70:00**  
and I'm just wondering what you think about what it has to

**Edward:**

*(turning to the Australian entry)* These are always so [unintelligible]

**Russell:**

say about it

**Edward:**

Look I didn't realise there were so many Steamee I've got to get out more

**Russell:**

Um there's a coding system which is *(indicating)*

**Edward:**

Okay

**Russell:**

**II.i.13:00**

or both or neither (*I laugh a little*) and if you want to compare it with something else as a way of starting fine

**James:**

Mm that's a hard question too I don't know do I think saunas are sexy mm I don't know if they feel sexy as that I think we talked about this once before as being more a

**II.i.13:30**

kind of um a safety zone in some way even though within that context there's often things that are confronting and scary and cold and alienating the feeling of going in there is about escape it's about going into this other world um and I don't know if that's sexy (*he laughs a little*)

**II.i.14:00**

I think it's oh I don't know I think some of the situations that can happen say in the steam room um no I don't think they are um I'm not sure why I'm saying that today but I don't think they are

**Russell:**

That's all right

**James:**

inherently sexy mm

**Russell:**

**Russell:**

Well I want to now bring up two words that you've you've kind of you've used one earlier

**II.i.54:00**

in this conversation but the other one you've used a version of it and they are dangerous and safe and you can choose them one at a time you don't have to pair them I've paired them but you don't have to there's no reason why they need to be paired

**James:**

Well I guess the whole sense of saunas in

**II.i.54:30**

particular are that kind of safe environment that you can walk in off the street and suddenly this playland exists and it's warm and it's you know steamy and towels and soft lounges and television and you know all the comforts of home (*we laugh a little*) and then the dan the danger I guess for me is the sense of ah rejection I suppose

**II.i.55:00**

and also the ah I guess the issues around health yeah and the ugliness of sex sometimes too I think there's a danger there sometimes the it's like the ritual of it or the the aspects of it you just kind of go what am I here what am I doing what is this about because there's no real sexual drive there at that

**II.i.55:30**

particular point there's just this kind of body or bodies and ah and also I guess the danger is about what is it within you that what do you want from this what do I want from this situation what am I getting

25

**Apollo:**

You know some of them you know they've got to be clean I mean you know just not grimy usually and um

**Russell:**

Do you do you have any recollection of an occasion where you've looked for grime or do you wait for it to be to leap up as it were and

**Apollo:**

Oh no there is one time I remember

**II.i.07:00**

like I I didn't go oh looking for it but I remember there's a section I don't know I haven't been there in so long now but in Volcano near the steam room

**Russell:**

Yeah

**Apollo:**

where there's um a f there's a few showers there and they're quite small and sort of awkward you have to kind of step up to get to them and um there's one area there that's I remember always when I've I'm you know going there that it's always been a bit grotty and on the times I have gone there I've I haven't gone to look for it but

where there's um a f there's a few showers there and they're quite small and sort of awkward you have to kind of step up to get to them and um there's one area there that's I remember always when I've I'm you know going there that it's always been a bit grotty and on the times I have gone there I've I haven't gone to look for it but

**II.i.07:30**

as I've passed it I've thought oh right yeah yeah it's grotty it's still grotty you know *(he laughs a little)*

**Russell:**

Now if you've been passing it let's say how you how come you've been passing it what have you been doing

**Apollo:**

Well on the way to the steam room

**Russell:**

Right okay

**Apollo:**

That's how you pass it

**Russell:**

So you're on your way to the steam room

I I couldn't and I have it's happened before you know being asked to say partake in a a threesome or a you know a group activity it's not really my scene so I I I I'd always decline in that situation and um you know I just it's not me but ah privacy's a very important

**Russell:**

Your own privacy

**Apollo:**

Well

**Russell:**

For instance if you were in

**II.ii.16:30**

something like if you were in a steam room or another area that wasn't enclosed in the sense that it could be secured and locked in the way a cubicle can be so if you were in such an area and some sort of group activity was happening in another part of that area would you feel inclined to leave

**Apollo:**

Mm well maybe not leave I wouldn't

**II.ii.17:00**

no maybe not leave

**Russell:**

Again I'm thinking of another conversation I've had with someone where they talked about their surprise at how everything doesn't descend into complete chaos

**Colin:**

Yeah

**Russell:**

**II.i.39:30**

inside the sauna

**Colin:**

It sometimes does I mean I have been in on a a sort of a you know in the in the in the deep fog of the s of the steam

**Russell:**

*(I laugh a little)* Yes

**Colin:**

in the in the steam room sort of thing when it it it just rather suddenly it takes on a bit of a free for all

**Russell:**

I mean everyone is getting into [?] everyone else and they don't care who's they don't feel there's any personal status involved and as who they allow to do this or that I think a lot with a lot of them

**II.i.40:00**

um I've been surprised sometimes I I remember again at Suburb I ah this and I think I might have mentioned this guy before um there was this really adorable guy very um very ah beautiful and and very kind of solidly lovely

**II.i.40:30**

masculine build um who was wandering about looking ill at ease and he no one was making any sort of approach at him I think because they were sort of (*laughing a little*) sort of breathless about how beautiful he was and somehow impregnable and I I went and um started massaging his shoulders and the top of his shoulders and his back and he

**II.i.41:00**

he turned around and lay down on the on the boards the seat in the steam room there were other people in there and I um and he sort of had a mounting erection ah which I started sucking off but I don't think he liked being sucked off particularly but the moment something like that had happened a whole lot of other people just moved in on him [unintelligible] and I walked away

**II.i.41:30**

and I think what I should have done later on when I saw him in the passageway wandering around again was to just actually say you know you know to do what the dear old guy had sort of you know no suck no fuck oh would you like a massage sort of thing but do you know just say would you like to come upstairs because I'd love to massage your back again um and see what happens you know I'm very timid about those sort of statements

and that the the main thing I noticed about the health farm was that there is absolutely no cultural content whatsoever you go there and there's some TV and there's some old detective novels that people have left over and that's it (*I laugh a little*) apart

**II.i.53:30**

from these stupid little pseudo doctors that hang around and make smart little Pioneer Tour jokes at the old ladies and get them you know giggling and ah and consider themselves to be little authorities some of them are awful they ought to be running parking or something (*I laugh*) and ah and that place had just no cultural content whatsoever so I feel

**II.i.54:00**

I I get the same feel off particularly the Suburb A sauna that it's that's it's got you know I it's got some magazines you can pick up and look at the sort of person you'd like to see across the room but isn't there ah ah and there's the telly with some damn thing on you know some erotic nonsense um and and there's ah the steam rooms and showers and stuff like that

**II.i.54:30**

and I think what I like about the Suburb I one is that it I I dare say it has that stuff but it doesn't come to mind it's not what the place is about it's much more it's much more about the work (*he laughs a little*) ah it's it's you go in there and there's um because it has absolutely no cultural input somehow

**II.i.55:00**

it frees you culturally you actually meet the people there or something I don't know because you're going to the same well you're washing at the same laundromat you're you're doing something like that whereas this other place is trying to pretend that you're somehow going to some

**Russell:**

No no on the contrary I'm no it's not necessarily that for me but it's not necessarily a place I go to meet people

**Colin:**

Oh so you might just there to

**Russell:**

I feel like I can meet people

**Colin:**

yeah see if it happens but you can happily go there just to just to sit in the steam room or whatever

**Russell:**

Or watch a movie *(I laugh)*

**Colin:**

Yeah watch a movie yeah yeah yeah

**Russell:**

But as a friend of mine once said when he realised that um they

Or watch a movie (*I laugh*)

**Colin:**

Yeah watch a movie yeah yeah yeah

**Russell:**

But as a friend of mine once said when he realised that um they showed

**II.i.70:30**

movies oh no was it no no I'll leave that I got I just got mixed up with something else I've just got mixed up

**Colin:**

I guess that I mean that's quite a point I think about saunas to just go along there for the steam as it were and the film and um and have no expectations just go there and that would be one way of looking completely at ease and I guess if you became more regular at certain saunas say

**II.i.71:00**

at ah Suburb I you would know what night they had the film on or whatever

**Russell:**

Yeah

**Colin:**

**29**

**Russell:**

**II.i.15:30**

And you'll hang your towel

**Mark:**

Out in the corridor on a peg

**Russell:**

The peg closest to the showers if it's free

**Mark:**

Um towards that end of things because the pegs towards the other end are where patrons hang their towels when they head into the steam room

**Russell:**

Right

**Mark:**

and um so there's generally quite a few towels at the other end not to be mistaken for

**Russell:**

**Russell:**

Right

**Mark:**

I think I'd be worried that if someone wanted to use the cleaner's door that my towel might hit the very wet floor in that area

**Russell:**

Right okay are you do you have any no all right I'll leave it at that okay good second word dirty

**Mark:**

**II.i.17:00**

*(a silence)* It's another space and it's the inside of the steam sauna

**Russell:**

At

**Mark:**

At Volcano but the but it's also um redolent of other places that I've encountered um I went once to a sex venue in

**II.i.17:30**

Suburb O on a specific street which was just gross in every respect

29

It's still open

**Mark:**

Mm

**Russell:**

The Playpen

**Mark:**

**II.i.18:00**

The Playpen appalling eugh um dirty yeah I find um getting drips of condensation from the ceiling falling onto me just to be a bit on the gross side

**II.i.18:30**

um and in the steam room at Volcano it just feels foetid not as in um ball and chain but foetid as in smell and dank dampness and sort of um centre for um disease propagation (*I laugh a little*)

**II.i.19:00**

I can almost feel the fungi growing out of it and it's dirty not in respect of um shit or um or um grime or filth but more dirty in terms of um fungus and athlete's foot and crutch rot and um ah

**II.i.19:30**

crabs and scabies and things that flourish in warm moist environments

**Russell:**

Having said that have you ever seen any hard evidence of any of those

**Russell:**

It's an imagining

**Mark:**

Um yes but it's triggered by um ah  
**II.i.20:00**  
by a sensual response

**Russell:**

Right

**Mark:**

Mind you I've had outrageous um in your face unprotected sex in the steam room there and it was just sensational um and I'd do it again but um but part of the fun of that was because  
**II.i.20:30**  
the whole experience was completely filthy so um

**Russell:**

Can you elaborate on that for me

**Mark:**

It was like doing something dirty in a dirty place one of one of my um quite early sexual experiences was being fucked at the tip on a piece

corpses

**II.ii.02:00**

that's another level of filth altogether so um that's what I mean by dirty um and there are aspects of all that that I find really quite stimulating um not that I want to go and fuck corpses

**Russell:**

[unintelligible]

**Mark:**

Au contraire but um but the idea of um of a place which um I associate with um mould and dirt and disease and which has got

**II.ii.02:30**

sort of cold drips coming off the ceiling and um a musky sort of foetid smell about it is reminiscent of um ah caves and an and quite literally an underworld and in this um dark and steamy space to do something which you know is um immensely transgressive not only culturally but also in terms of um ah

**II.ii.03:00**

the norms that attach to um ah healthy sexual activity um to have unprotected sex in this cave-like this um artificial cave-like environment um is fabulously transgressive and I find really very exciting so I suppose here I am associating dirty with also um transgressive

**Russell:**

**II.ii.03:30**

(*a silence*) Is transgression something you think of sorry that you

**Mark:**

No I I find it that it's more behavioural

**Russell:**

Right

**Mark:**

Um and I know that I'm um

**II.ii.04:30**

and and linguistic actually as well um if I'm having a really good time with a sex partner I'll call him filthy

**Russell:**

The steam room at Volcano which part of that are you likely if you enter it what's your likely

**Mark:**

perch

**Russell:**

Perch but also do you immediately

**II.ii.05:00**

go to a perch or do you

29

And you can also say um go away

**Mark:**

Yes

**Russell:**

very easily

**Mark:**

Yeah because you're in a position of um empowerment being placed above people but I I stay there for a while and usually get quite hot and then if I see um

**II.ii.06:00**

something interesting go into the very dark part of the steam room around the corner where the steam um enters the space then I might head in there and have a bit of a fool around but um more often than not I don't do that I just hang out on top of the tall podium and um

**II.ii.06:30**

and if someone likes the look of me and I like the look of them then sometimes we'll go from the steam room off to a cubicle without having to get down and dirty in the dark corner

**Russell:**

*(a silence)* Um third word public

29

**Mark:**

Oh it's an appalling sensation

**Russell:**

**II.ii.34:00**

Yes I agree

**Mark:**

It's like chewing on on um

**Russell:**

Oh please don't even try to compare it but the the thing about odour though being brought up yes there's been offensive body odour chlorine and then um odours to do with um the steam rooms

**Mark:**

Yeah I was just wondering

**II.ii.34:30**

whether um whether different venues had different signature smells because my strongest recollection of Sauna W in Sydney

**Russell:**

Oh yes

Right okay yeah

**Lydia:**

II.i.17:00

Yeah

**Russell:**

No that's

**Lydia:**

So it it creates the possibility of what's allowable

**Russell:**

Did I ask you last time if you went into the steam room at any point

**Lydia:**

Probably didn't I find steam rooms very boring I probably opened it and looked in

**Russell:**

Yeah cos I'm aware you had the ostrich plumes and your spectacles on

**Lydia:**

With heavy erotic expectation

**Lydia:**

That's right and the way the girls muck up in there is

**II.i.20:00**

just they're loud and rambunctious and and there's a greater ease in there it's yeah there's a greater ease in their body and you know like you know like you don't go on certain times because it's kind of these packs of chicks in gangs of five like some fucking hens night you know like it's it's and a lot much more animated and because it's

**II.i.20:30**

um it yeah it's about enjoying yourself and and and it's it's framed in a different way

**Russell:**

So the mood in the steam room at Volcano was unanimated is

**Lydia:**

An awkwardness

**Russell:**

As distinct from being unanimated or an awkwardness

**II.i.21:00**

as a form of unanimated

**Lydia:**

Right

**Lydia:**

That's all

**Russell:**

**II.i.32:30**

So in the wet area floors in the wet area

**Lydia:**

Yes that and and and you know and water moving through the darker areas and all that kind of stuff um I remember the s as I said you know when we checked it out that day like the smell of disinfectant and that wiped down natural vinyl (*I laugh a little*) um the lounge I wouldn't call clean and stuff I'm sure that carpet could do with a good steam

**II.i.33:00**

but it's not like it was dirty it was just well worn yeah yeah mm

**Russell:**

But um as you say it may not have been dirty but you couldn't call it clean

**Lydia:**

No just

to happen here

**Russell:**

Right

**Lydia:**

Yeah so that's you know in terms of it no there is no sense of it

**II.i.39:30**

physically being dirty or anything like that so when you say dirty to me it's and I think it's about the awkwardness of of the occupation anyway and I'm so aware that this is like really changed I was keep think I keep thinking how much dance party culture and E and all that kind of stuff has just busted all that kind of awkwardness of touching you know the couch

**II.i.40:00**

phenomenon you know who needs a steam bath (*I laugh a little*) when um

**Russell:**

(*laughing a little*) there's a couch

**Lydia:**

Yeah

**Russell:**

**Russell:**

Of course

**Lydia:**

I would doubt whether there were very there would I would I can't do it I would assume that there were very few women who went to that event by themselves

**Russell:**

Right right

**Lydia:**

Tell me how many guys go to steam baths with their pal

**Russell:**

Well that's an interesting question because in fact it does happen

**II.i.53:30**

and it happens significantly

**Lydia:**

Yeah

**Russell:**

infuses one in etcetera etcetera whereas you know the modern bed um and bed heads and all that kind of stuff you know the it has tho yeah just kind of leverage and pulling and all kinds of things is just not there so that's

**II.i.70:30**

in terms of making the space interesting um it doesn't you see isn't that why you go to parks because the space is actually dangerous so that in terms of danger I don't believe because

**II.i.71:00**

you know there's danger of discovery and doing something in a place that's not ascribed for the doing so I'm not sure that a constructed space can ever have the same kind of danger it's a it's a false it's a false it's a false public space um so therefore I think you know okay so it's a false public

**II.i.71:30**

space so what kind of interior mise en scenes could be kind of created or something because in one sense I always feel that the steam house stuff is trying to kind of replicate the back alley um and there's a whole range of odours and all kinds of grubbiness that yeah you know so it's trying to replicate dirty and danger but it's not really dirty and dangerous and that's also why I get the giggles about it on

**II.i.72:00**

one level because you're sort of not really being dirty and dangerous I think it's probably more dangerous to pick up sailors down at Station Pier

**Russell:**

*(laughing a little)* Yes

recorded it's not captured within these known means of circulation and documentation um in terms of with

**II.i.08:30**

females where I think the anonymous sex thing um has occurred is the whole phenomenon of um navy ships coming in to town

**Russell:**

So that the men are anonymous

**Lydia:**

That's right and you can do anything you want because you know that boat's going to go and I can I don't remem I can't remember if it was like nineteen eighty-eight or whatever when there was a [that?] shit-load of boats in um down at Station

**II.i.09:00**

Pier and it was it became this phenomenon that I can remember I and some other people drove down to watch the carloads of women picking up sailors and it was it was just incredible it was incredible it was and all of a sudden you kind of understood the Albert Tucker victory girl paintings and all that kind of stuff um

**II.i.09:30**

yeah so it's have I gone too far off the track

**Russell:**

No no um there is no track other than the one we leave

**Lydia:**

that in terms of danger I don't believe because

**II.i.71:00**

you know there's danger of discovery and doing something in a place that's not ascribed for the doing so I'm not sure that a constructed space can ever have the same kind of danger it's a it's a false it's a false it's a false public space um so therefore I think you know okay so it's a false public

**II.i.71:30**

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**II.i.72:00**

one level because you're sort of not really being dirty and dangerous I think it's probably more dangerous to pick up sailors down at Station Pier

**Russell:**

*(laughing a little)* Yes

**Lydia:**

kind of thing so it's a it's interesting because people think of them as wild spaces but they're not quite as wild as

**Russell:**

**Max:**

I've had that feeling of like I know just catching myself

**Russell:**

Did you did you did you have that feeling last Saturday night

**Max:**

Um yes I think I did because I didn't have any there were no encounters until much later in the night so there was quite a period of yes of walking and sometimes what happens to me at those moments is that I I start to think

**I.i.43:00**

I start to think I'm really wasting time and that I'm wasting time in a yeah that that I'd rather be I think I'd really rather be walking out along the pier or walking along the beach than walking around inside a you know a warehouse

**Russell:**

And do you think you you were thinking that on Saturday night while you were there

**Max:**

I had that yeah I think I did have that thought on Saturday night

**Russell:**

**I.i.43:00**

I start to think I'm really wasting time and that I'm wasting time in a yeah that that I'd rather be I think I'd really rather be walking out along the pier or walking along the beach than walking around inside a you know a warehouse

**Russell:**

And do you think you you were thinking that on Saturday night while you were there

**Max:**

I had that yeah I think I did have that thought on Saturday night

**Russell:**

About a pier or a beach

**Max:**

Oh about a pier no no no not necessarily

**Russell:**

Right okay

**Max:**

No no

**Edward:**

country upbringing but he had nipples like cow udders they were huge

**Russell:**

Right

**Edward:**

They were disgusting they were just like protruding from his body and I was thinking I'm not the first one to have done this

**Russell:**

*(we laugh a little)* Right

**II.i.12:00**

they weren't pierced or anything

**Edward:**

No not pierced just huge

**Russell:**

Did um was there any sense of mutual negotiation what I'm kind of interested in

**Edward:**

than anything else he was just really weird he was a a a big Samoan man

**Russell:**

*(laughing a little)* Right

**Edward:**

and like he was big not fat but just a really big man

**Russell:**

Yeah

**Edward:**

He was huge and it was probably more out of oh I don't know a combination of desperation and interest really because there was only I think it was at at um Volcano

**II.i.01:30**

and it was the it was late at night again I think I'd finished work not far away and gone down and there were not many people there and we kind of met in the spa there that they now have on a temperature that could cook you

**Russell:**

It is very hot isn't it

**23**

Yeah

**Russell:**

*(laughing a little)* Yeah

**Edward:**

It was like this is really weird this is just too and he had I mean maybe it's my

**Russell:**

Did it occur to

**Edward:**

country upbringing but he had nipples like cow udders they were huge

**Russell:**

Right

**Edward:**

They were disgusting they were just like protruding from his body and I was thinking I'm not the first one to have done this

**Russell:**

**Russell:**

Right

**Edward:**

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**Russell:**

*(we laugh a little)* Right

**II.i.12:00**

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**Edward:**

No not pierced just huge

**Russell:**

Did um was there any sense of mutual negotiation what I'm kind of interested in

**Edward:**

No that

**Russell:**

**Russell:**

No but I'm aware that um the history of gay saunas or the history of

**James:**

Oh not necessarily of saunas I'm thinking

**Russell:**

There's a history of Roman bathhouses that's been written there's been a lot of incidental observations about

**II.i.42:30**

behaviour in um bathhouses over the centuries and a really detailed history which is brief but beautifully researched has been written about the development of a clandestine gay sauna culture in New York between eighteen eighty and World War Two and as a result of the fact that New York City had huge tenements without proper plumbing and so

**II.i.43:00**

an enormous number of bathhouses were built

**James:**

Right

**Russell:**

and many of them catering for very specific interests like for instance Jewish ritual cleansing

24

**James:**

Right

**Russell:**

But he not only not only that but he didn't know how to find out

**James:**

Right

**Russell:**

about such other places so his sense of Melbourne

**II.i.45:30**

as um a huge civic space within which there might be possibilities of same sex activity that could be sought out was all focussed on this one not very pleasant place (*I laugh a little*)

**James:**

Right

**Russell:**

Um

**James:**

25

**Russell:**

Well no can I can you just tell me how you make that distinction though how you  
II.ii.03:00  
make that distinction whe where

**Apollo:**

The one I just talked to you about

**Russell:**

Yeah yeah between body smell and the smell that's dirty

**Apollo:**

I think there's a huge distinction

**Russell:**

But how do you make that distinction

**Apollo:**

Well

**Russell:**

You may you may

25

**Russell:**

Um ah I'll move onto another word

**Apollo:**

Yeah cool

**II.ii.32:00**

whatever

**Russell:**

Safe

**Apollo:**

Oh (*he laughs*) safe a huge one huge it's a real issue for me like it's the most out of all the words that you've talked about it's the one word that when I hear I just um

**II.ii.32:30**

freak out about and I'm always freaking out about when I go to those venues you know and it has to do you know that's why I put the light on in a lot of ways I'm always conscious of condoms breaking um of having safe sex um it's a yeah it's a really really really forever at the front of everything I do

**II.ii.33:00**

there

**Russell:**

**Russell:**

How what's the age difference do you think between them that you know of

**Frosty:**

Um I th he's about twenty-um-seven it's it's probably around six to seven years

**Russell:**

Right

**Frosty:**

I suppose not not a huge one but

**Russell:**

Do you get the sense they're the only siblings in that family

**II.i.08:00**

or there are others

**Frosty:**

No I believe there's only two two boys yeah yeah

**Russell:**

just functionally but I I I I

**Russell:**

You just made a gesture like bolting the door

**Max:**

Of bolting the door

**Russell:**

Yeah yeah yeah

**Max:**

Yes I I I'm not kind of um but it's not a huge thing for me particularly no

**Russell:**

Right

**Max:**

No no I mean that kind of relates to the public I suppose that I oh well that's well I think I I think I I went through a period

**II.i.26:00**

of of finding it quite confronting oh not [unintelligible] confronting but I

1

Because all these men were sitting around in towels

**Charlie:**

Yeah and she sort of

**I.i.48:00**

it was a surprise element you know

**Russell:**

The first the first time ever I had I have any I tried to ask myself what was the first time I ever heard of the existence of such places as gay saunas and I recall when um The Divine Miss M was released Bette Midler's first big album and it was either on the sleeve notes or in some accompanying publicity there was mention of how she used to sing

**I.i.48:30**

for men at the Cont she used to sing for gay men at the Continental Baths and I had this bizarre image of a woman in a tiled a huge tiled bathroom like at like in the film of the Marat Sade with all this plumbing everywhere singing with a pian a piano and men sitting around in towels the idea that a bathhouse at that stage was a place that wasn't just to do with

**I.i.49:00**

wet areas um hadn't even I I couldn't imagine that but I've since been in correspondence ah via email with a bookseller in New York who sold me a book in in New York State he lives not in New York City but he was part of that scene in the seventies although he told me he never went ah Barry Manilow was her accompanist it turns out so that was his career launch as well but he hasn't made as much of a big deal about it (*Charlie laughs*) and

1

**Charlie:**

**I.ii.02:00**

I did mention rhythm

**Russell:**

Did you oh the but time definitely though is a function of that [unintelligible] but um I've become curious about the way I experience duration in there um for instance one of the first things about any venue I visit is I locate the clocks I'm really curious about where the clocks are how many there are and are they synchronised (*I laugh a little*)

**I.ii.02:30**

you know so that's one thing and so I know where all the clocks are in Volcano and recently one of them got shifted and that's part of the reason I bring this up and it had a huge impact on me the fact that one clock was shifted it was still in the same area but it shifted from one wall to an adjoining wall and I found that the way in which the ways in which I've taught myself to move through that have changed subtly

**I.ii.03:00**

because I know I recognise now that I've incorporated it a glimpse at the clock as a some sort of stabilising thing but with that is an experience of duration that I find that my experience of the passing of time becomes completely ah unpredictable like so that it can suddenly telescope and I feel like I've just spent fifteen minutes doing something

**I.ii.03:30**

and an hour has passed and so on and

1

**Russell:**

It's centrally located

**Charlie:**

[names the location, twice]

**Russell:**

**I.ii.34:00**

[I repeat the name after him]

**Charlie:**

Next to a well known place I mean so you walk in and it's very much a house you know you've got the first room on the left which is the TV room and billiard room first room on the right which is your huge TV like big ah one of those massive screens and all they do is they don't they're not licensed to show movies so they're just showing commercial television which I just found weird very weird ah and there was also a bar in there

**I.ii.34:30**

and like there looked sort of er op shoppey lounge like the furnishing in the saunas were dated and tasteless as well um and they were serving snacks which you had to pay for but you um but you they just asked for your key number and they charge you on the way out and then you sort of keep walking down the corridor and then you walk into the pool the wet area shall we say

**I.ii.35:00**

I.ii.37:30

oh [unintelligible: I love you?] and so I've just sort of come to realise that that sort of ah that that happens that I'm I'm part of that and I've been part of that for for quite some time and yeah so it didn't happen as I was quite aware that I needed to make ah changes and I felt that going into the sauna was a yeah it felt really right being there in clothes

I.ii.38:00

I think it was just the headspace I was in once again I mean I don't know what it would be like in Melbourne you know with when the crowd increases by at least you know eight in this other city there was probably five people there five to ten people (*he laughs a little*)

**Russell:**

I um I've twice been at places when

I.ii.38:30

there were huge crowds one was um at Splash on its closing weekend when there were so many people there that they not only ran out of lockers they ran out of towels and um I've somebody said it was like going to the world's biggest toga party (*I laugh a little*) but it was it was so funny it was so funny because it was so chatty and buoyant it was just the place was so packed

I.ii.39:00

that a lot of the silences um fell away but it was it really was like being at someone's party and the other time was um I visited Volcano it recently had its twentieth anniversary I think and um that was quite different but er one of the things that happened that night was they ran out of lockers and started issuing people with garbage bags (*I laugh a little*) um as they arrived

2

So what did you imagine the actual place was like as a physical place did you have an image building up before you arrived

**Kate:**

Yeah I think mm it was just more the um I think more the um the Roman bathhouse image

**Russell:**

Oh yeah *(we laugh)*

**Kate:**

Like oh

**I.i.05:00**

wow and I I just pictured it to be one huge bath really really steamy

**Russell:**

Yeah

**Kate:**

and possibly you know a few little showers and stuff like that

**Russell:**

Hmm and what what what kind of materials that it was made of

corner as if I don't know you know but a lot of people really forget where they are when they're in the sauna or or they try to forget in some ways you know they try to look

**Russell:**

It appears that way to you

**Randy:**

**I.ii.17:00**

Yeah it appears that way that I think they um and I think even probably myself um you try and shut it all off and it's just about you know well you know how do I look because it is about that you're looking at each other you know you know [sic] thinking oh you know looking for each other's reactions the way you look the way you're standing um all those things I mean I think you know different poses and that sort of thing make a huge difference and I think people really become aware of that and there

**I.ii.17:30**

are some guys who are just it's it's like they have it down to an art you know they they just rub themselves or they'll I'm just trying to think of some of the things people do um

**Russell:**

What are some of the things you've done

**Randy:**

3

**Russell:**

Turns um circuits dead ends

**Randy:**

Yeah

**Russell:**

**I.iv.23:30**

You know

**Randy:**

Well that's it I mean like between between something like Volcano and Rear Entry I don't necessarily notice a huge difference except Volcano has a mirrored room which I wish Rear Entry had (*he laughs a little*) I mean it does seem to have that formula and um a couple of new saunas have sort of popped up and there I mean there used to be Splash which I never went to which was supposed to be like the most beautiful five star sauna you know and I'm really surprised that there there isn't something

**I.iv.24:00**

in Melbourne that is beautiful and luxurious that is also a a sex-on-premises-venue do you know what I mean

**Russell:**

**I.i.29:00**

*(he laughs)* Um I mean I don't want to yeah um um it's probably psychological I mean and the towel doesn't suit me and *(he laughs)* and it's it's always a you know like what length do you have the towel and it's always a question and you know what length of the towel suits you best and how low do you sling it and you know like do you have a bit of a stomach at the moment or you know

**I.i.29:30**

stuff like that

**Russell:**

I'm surprised then that you *(I laugh a little)* go to a sauna at all if you worry about such things

**Yianis:**

*(laughing a little)* I mean it's not a huge concern it's not a huge concern at all I mean it is a concern but it's not it wouldn't stop me from going

**Russell:**

Right

**Yianis:**

You know

**Russell:**

**5**

I agree but what was fantastic for you about the steam room [unintelligible]

**James:**

Oh

**I.ii.20:00**

just the fact that it had so many possibilities it it well

**Russell:**

How does it differ how did it differ from the steam room at um High Street

**James:**

Oh well for a start I mean High Street is like a closet space and you know like a wardrobe and and and Splash had was huge it was big and it was had it reminded me of The Poseidon Adventure you know

**Russell:**

*(laughing)* Oh really

**James:**

*(laughing)* Yeah

**Russell:**

**James:**

That was the best best part of that place

**Russell:**

I used to enjoy sitting in there so much

**James:**

And I liked it too when they

**I.ii.23:00**

were going to close down the place and so they opened up the other end as well so you had at one stage I mean they closed off the area where there were all the cubicles and the rooms but at one stage there was that area open that was originally there when the sauna was plus the area that was like the sex club and they opened that up as well so it was part of the sauna that was great it was just huge it just felt like a playland it felt like anything was possible

**Russell:**

I miss it

**James:**

*(laughing a little)* Yes I do too it was so much closer too

**I.ii.23:30**

than the others it w oh yeah it was a sad day when that closed

6

virtue of the fact that I kept having sex with men at these places um but apart from

**I.i.08:30**

that no I wouldn't say it was a great relationship you know

**Russell:**

After after you went the first time you said you went back a couple of weeks later in that two year period what um frequency would you say

**Joe:**

Yeah it's hard to say I imagine possibly once possibly as readily as once a week but I'm sure there were other times where I would have gone

**I.i.09:00**

month once a month because I'm at the same time when I was going I was also having huge guilt about the fact that I was going um and would try and resist it it was something I tried not to do and um um but then would still continue to do so so

**Russell:**

So when you were on the premises did you experience um kind of anguish or guilt while you were there or would it be afterwards

**Joe:**

Oh

**I.i.09:30**

**Russell:**

Before you went to saunas how consciously do you think that idea  
**I.ii.16:00**  
of a masculine persona was a thing for you

**Joe:**

Oh

**Russell:**

Do you think you were already working with it

**Joe:**

Yeah huge I mean I grew up with four brothers no sisters in pretty sort of rough upbringing so  
yeah that was probably something I was um believed to be important for a time anyway so

**Russell:**

If it's something you adopt what is happening the rest of the time what's the persona that's  
**I.ii.16:30**  
there when you don't adopt or before you've adopted the masculine persona

**Joe:**

7

**Russell:**

What um

**I.i.70:30**

these events have been infrequent

**Willow:**

Mm too infrequent

**Russell:**

How do you account for that I mean you want them to happen more frequently

**Willow:**

Yeah I think they'd be great um I don't think the turnout wasn't huge so I think financially it's quite hard to keep generating

**I.i.71:00**

an event and also the saunas are gay saunas so financially you couldn't it'd be hard to set one up because I don't think you'd have the turnout mind you there's the Coogee Women's Baths so in Sydney which I haven't been to

**Russell:**

What have you heard about them

**Willow:**

8

Nowhere near the place (*I laugh*) nowhere near the place

**Russell:**

Right

**Apollo:**

I drove past

**Russell:**

Yes

**Apollo:**

And I thought oh god it's bloody huge it was like a bloody

**l.i.16:00**

office building and I thought my god and that that the scale of the place was also really quite threatening as well

**Russell:**

So you'd never checked out the front of the place before

**Apollo:**

Never

**8**

if I were to go I

**Russell:**

Because the size of it

**Apollo:**

It's

**Russell:**

was really an important factor

**Apollo:**

It was huge

**Russell:**

that very first time

**Apollo:**

Yeah yeah yeah

**Russell:**

Yeah so you like High Street which is small

Yeah

**Russell:**

Okay what about plar parts of it that you don't want to be in at all like you mentioned early on that first night Craig said don't go up there

**Edward:**

Yeah the hardware area well I'd never actually gone into the hardware area but I mean a stream of faith in Craig I'd never gone up there I just thought well it's not

**I.i.34:30**

of interest to me and then I actually met a guy who worked at Volcano and started having some form of relationship with him and he would always take a room upstairs he and I would always go up there which was really good huge room room to move um

**Russell:**

Did you meet him there

**Edward:**

Yes yeah

**Russell:**

While he was working

If I've worked you know a few eighteen hour days and I'm absolutely fucked my main objective is to go and have a spa and a sauna

**Russell:**

Yeah

**Edward:**

If I meet someone and something else happens fantastic but if to actually go there specifically to look

**I.i.43:30**

ah to get a fuck is for me is is pacing disappointment placing disappointment in your head but um yeah I do actually and I have to say the best sex that I've had in those places has been going there to have a a a spa and a sauna because I'm just exhausted so I like Squirt because it has a beautiful spa it's huge you can sit in there without being hassled you

**I.i.44:00**

know and and it's fine it's really nice and it's incredibly clean

**Russell:**

How do you know it's clean

**Edward:**

Clean as in it whatever chemicals they use the stench is not underlying

9

Yeah

**Russell:**

Do you think that the men

**Edward:**

I think so

**Russell:**

are going to the gym up the road

**Edward:**

Yeah I think so because one one night I had sex with a guy who and he was a huge muscle boy and he said that he'd just come from the gym up the road which then indicated to me because I hadn't actually really thought about it that much

**Russell:**

Yep

**Edward:**

and that was very early stages that um oh you know maybe guys do go to that gym and then come down here

**I.i.58:00**

You can also have heterosexual sex at the you know you can be so I suppose it makes you bisexual but you are still you know bisexual is just a a lumping it all together

**Russell:**

What about um being male or masculinity do you think of a place like Volcano or Squirt as being a a male venue

**I.i.58:30**

or a masculine venue

**Edward:**

Well it's a male venue yeah because there are no females there um masculinity comes in many shapes and forms so yes it is very masculine the testosterone that's thrown around that place at times is is huge

**Russell:**

Can you can you um describe one of the more surprising forms that masculinity takes at

**I.i.59:00**

one of those venues something you've witnessed

**Edward:**

Surprising forms of it well I suppose I mean you look you see a man who is quite

10

**Max:**

**I.iii.00:00**

Now you were asking was that an answer to that question oh no look if I think about it if I if I was in a situation (*referring to the recorder*) is it is it going

**Russell:**

Yes I think so

**Max:**

I mean if I was in a situation with someone and we were both hot and really wanting to fuck and you know and they were doing it they were doing that I I would probably help I think when I said that I I think it's situations where I'm I I don't feel any I'm not really hugely involved

**I.iii.00:30**

I'm kind of going along with it because it's kind of you know but it's not and so I think in that situation I can sometimes become observer and so I'm quite f I mean part of me is perversely is quite sa is quite interested to see what they're going to do and so I won't help

**Russell:**

Right

**Max:**

over thirty-five for sure

**Russell:**

Yeah

**Charlie:**

He was saying that you know oh I love coming here during the day at about eleven a.m. just before the lunch the peak period of lunch because

**II.i.35:00**

it's now cheap cheaper at lunch for office men to come in here and I love being in here I get value for money (*he laughs a little*) when I come in here before the lunch break and um you know value for money and I sort of asked him what does he mean well he said he likes it when there are lots of men to choose from for him value for money's when there are when it's a huge marketplace in there for

**II.i.35:30**

him when it's really quiet and you know it's all relative what I mean but the population of the place it's it's populated by more men when when they obviously you know promote a particular hour of the day and and also lower the price and there so then there are all these other peripheral effects of that promotion to other people who aren't who aren't the specific targets but in a sense they probably are as

**II.i.36:00**

well

**Russell:**

13

as opposed to a room in which my bed led rested

**Russell:**

Right

**Albert:**

Um

**Russell:**

Did tell me about the opening night of Splash then

**Albert:**

Again it's a similar thing there it was it was a a um huge production event

**Russell:**

**I.i.20:30**

I can imagine *(I laugh a little)*

**Albert:**

A huge production event because the whole complex the hotel the bar

**Russell:**

**Russell:**

Yes

**Lydia:**

Yeah and I become

**I.i.12:00**

very silent when I talk about my work and so I was taken with the notion of the old notion of the body being a house of the soul and the whole idea of the metaphor of homes and safety and the desire for safe harbour within culture and yet the home is the place where most accidents happen most murders happen statistically

**I.i.12:30**

um women are murdered in the kitchen and men are murdered in the bedroom and Daniel Valerio exploded at this time and so there was this huge circulation in me of those kinds of issues of a pre-pube pre-pubescent abuse whether it was a sexual abuse or physical abuse whether there's a post-pubescent abuse um based in um rape and things like that

**I.i.13:00**

um and on and on it goes so when you've got this pure form of supposedly being safe and enacting then you have to actually start thinking about well enacting and how enacting affects behaviour and what are people performing and all that kind of stuff and in all of this I never was saying that an S&M culture was wrong I was more interested in how

**I.i.13:30**

the individual had arrived at this practice and were they truly free in it

16

Right

**Lydia:**

And because of the media publicity of Daniel Valerio so Karmain Chan is the the best example of the stranger danger and that kind of stuff but Daniel Valerio was the symbol in the early nineties of actually this danger is not outside of the home it's within the home

**Russell:**

Yeah

**Lydia:**

It's it's from

**I.i.15:30**

people so within me there's a huge crossover between physical abuse and sexual abuse um and all that kind of stuff I think a way of framing this also is um I grew up with my mother in a bedsit where um I slept in the same bed as my mother until I left home when I was seventeen and my mother had a breakdown when I was four where post post that time she

**I.i.16:00**

never cleaned the house and so the home that I lived in no one ever came in the home from the time I was growing up in it to when I left home um so the whole kind of Miss Havisham scene from Great Expectations which is a keystone moment for me um because it was the first time I ever had any reflection on the circumstance that I was living in

**Willow:**

A motorbike room is a room with a mo big big motorbike and I imagine naked people waiting on it sitting there waiting for someone to come in (*laughing a little*) so they can ride their bike with someone

**Russell:**

Right

**Willow:**

And I guess the whole (*a waitress delivers our order*) thank you I guess the whole um animation of movement and the relationship of a motorbike and its vibrating engine

**II.i.01:30**

to sex and speed so it has this connotation of sex so I guess it's to do a bit with advertising as well where you see you know these huge kind of hunky men sitting on motorbikes so I imagine someone sitting on the motorbike being a seducer or seductress kind of waiting for someone to come in and play with them on a motorbike that it's an object of desire and so there's this large element

**II.i.02:00**

in a room that might be generally lit or brightly lit I don't know but I don't see anything else in there but I heard people refer to a motorbike room so it was like

**Russell:**

A motorbike room at Volcano

**Russell:**

And do you remember anything about the porn that was screening on that occasion

**Joe:**

**II.i.23:00**

No

**Russell:**

Good

**Joe:**

No I don't I don't think I actually even took much a huge amount of notice of it I mean I'm not actually strangely I'm not heavily into porn anyway I don't I mean I don't have my own collection and I don't really watch it at home um I would go to where the porn is playing in the sauna just because that's where the guys are um

**II.i.23:30**

but not because I particularly want to watch it myself

**Russell:**

Last time when we talked you said something about you you kind of liked um you liked the light levels to be up a certain amount so that you could make an informed choice (*I laugh a little*) and one of the things

Um yeah definitely I mean I would certainly always

**II.i.27:00**

there would always probably be a you know there'd be some visual thing and then I would always probably look for an opportunity to get that person somewhere where I could touch like um say they go into a dark maze or a sauna or something and then um you do touching first almost invariably you'd sort of put their hand on their chest you know there's that sort of a thing and then there might be you know some tit play or something

**II.i.27:30**

like that so the touch does come into it then um um I can't think an example but I mean I'm sure it's happened where there'd be some touching sort of sort of tactile exploration going on um I mean if I like even within that

**II.i.28:00**

context if we started playing with each other's dicks and I guess maybe um if I found you know some huge disfiguring growth on it or something like that that I may um you know may not continue I can't think of that having happened but I guess there's as much as the touch that time which is about sort of excitement and stuff there's also about checking out the stock kind of thing um

**Russell:**

**II.i.28:30**

The visual would come first for you

**Joe:**

**Russell:**

at the end of the session yeah um and you there's there's first of all there's one question I want to ask you which is a pretty straightforward one was he physically larger than you

**Joe:**

Um yes

**Russell:**

In the sense of height or in the sense of bulk

**Joe:**

Bulk but not hugely

**Russell:**

Right

**Joe:**

But yeah

**Russell:**

II.ii.10:00

**21**

**Joe:**

Oh fantastic

**Russell:**

at the end of the session yeah um and you there's there's first of all there's one question I want to ask you which is a pretty straightforward one was he physically larger than you

**Joe:**

Um yes

**Russell:**

In the sense of height or in the sense of bulk

**Joe:**

Bulk but not hugely

**Russell:**

Right

**Joe:**

But yeah

*The transcript documents a second conversation with Urdhvaretu recorded at my flat on a weekday afternoon. It was the last recording made for this project.*

**Russell:**

**II.i.00:00**

Okay we're recording (*I settle into my seat*) um the bulk of what I want to do is go over um a series of terms um not necessarily terms that you've used but terms that ah other people have used and maybe you touched on them as well and what I'm [sic] really like you to do

**II.i.00:30**

is just very um simply if you can associate them or let me know what your associations are with those terms and ah your experience of saunas so it might be something to do with ah a general

**II.i.01:00**

phenomenon that you're aware of or it might be a particular ah sight or item of furniture it might be an ah an event you witnessed that happened on one occasion a story of some form whatever okay all right so the first word is clean

**Urdhvaretu:**

I think I did speak a little bit

**II.i.01:30**

about this the first time ah there I recall I had a thing about declining standards and the fact that the new sauna started out very clean and is less so now particularly in the ah the ah steam room some sense of a twenty-four hour steam room

**II.i.02:00**

**10**

and how long were you at Rear Entry on Saturday night

**Max:**

I left at about six o'clock I think

**Russell:**

So you were there about four hours and you said that you'd had an encounter later in the evening

**Max:**

Mm

**Russell:**

Okay so how did you spend the bulk of the time then I mean we've ta covered say the first fifteen minutes

**Max:**

I think it was probably I mean well I know um I think what

**I.i.65:00**

happens is it become I suppose I I I alternate between being I I can spend quite a long time there I can spend up to you know periods of probably fifteen or twenty minutes

**Russell:**

10

**Max:**

Yeah *(he laughs a little)*

**Russell:**

Thanks

*(I switch off the minidisc recorder)*

**I.i.72:03**

*(Max makes me an orange juice, a fresh minidisc is inserted, a bit of chat, and we continue)*

**Russell:**

**I.ii.00:00**

Right okay we we've kind of identified that earlier part of the evening and if you like the bulk of the evening as as being characterised one way by talking about how there was an encounter later in the evening so first of all was that the only encounter

**Max:**

Um

**I.ii.00:30**

yes um but that encounter was a group encounter I mean so so it sort of blurs the the definition a bit of encounter because um there were a kind of a sequence of those encounters at the end of the evening so when you say was there one more than one encounter it depends on how you define encounter I suppose

15

**Mark:**

So there's no way

**Russell:**

So you wear it symmetrically

**Mark:**

**I.i.60:30**

Yeah um and the it's it's suggestive modesty in that um you don't have ah or regardless of what state of erection you're at no one can actually visibly tell beneath your towel but because you've arranged a box pleat there um there's some sort of um there's something going on there which invites

**I.i.61:00**

oh er which because of the bulk of the towel invites further or warrants further investigation

**Russell:**

Ah I've read somewhere that geishas um in in the traditional sense when geishas were involved in offering erotic pleasure to clients um that the geisha would rarely in fact take any clothes off but that those

**I.i.61:30**

heavy and elaborate silk constructions are actually designed with a whole series of apertures and access points is is this this is what's immediately come to mind to me when you're describing the towel do you recognise that as a similar principle

16

Right

**Lydia:**

So you know there's there's the lounge room area then there's

**I.i.53:30**

stair there's stairs down here but all right down this bit past the stairs or maybe the stairs are here or whatever

**Russell:**

Yeah

**Lydia:**

there's a a like a semi-corridor to the massage room which then has a door that leads out onto the other part of the lounge room as I call it but then separated from the massage room further back was the the rough trade room

**Russell:**

Right okay

**I.i.54:00**

the building is physically altered since you were there

**Lydia:**

Yeah okay

**19**

**Willow:**

Mm

**Russell:**

What's that about there is a door but it's ajar

**Willow:**

Well I guess if the door's open it's therefore inviting but a closed door's a little bit scary to open

**Russell:**

Does it need to be ajar so that you can see into the room from outside and see the person on the bike or so that you need to actually open it further to see the bike

**Willow:**

It needs to open

**II.i.10:30**

almost so that you can peer in so I might be able to see a bit of light in there but I might be able to see one of the handle bars so I know I have an identification so when I envisage it I can see a slight amount of the bike and I go ah that's the motorbike room

**Russell:**

some of what

**II.i.35:30**

you do in a I mean what you do in an environment is who you are so you're kind of asking well where's it coming from so yeah it is it's it is intimate and also it's a matter of how much I'd like to say but I never felt pushed or uncomfortable I actually

**II.i.36:00**

had to work quite hard to think about it so I found it kind of an immersive environment in that you know I had to focus on it and it was actually quite interesting talking about the very first time I'd been when I was like nineteen and you know that was quite quite profound for me going back to thinking about that time

**Russell:**

**II.i.36:30**

(a *silence*) After we'd finished that day and I left you what kind of further thoughts or awarenesses did you have I mean you may have already answered that a bit talking about

**II.i.37:00**

thinking back to that period when you were nineteen but did you were you still immersed in that experience for a while afterwards or did it dissipate very rapidly

**Willow:**

I think it it dissipated quite quickly except for the the first experience because I had to really go back there and think about it and I

**II.i.37:30**

I guess because it was my first experience and it was quite removed

from my environment at the time like it's visually still quite striking for me when I think about it much more I mean I could describe so much more detail of that first environment than I can of the second and third one

**Russell:**

Yeah and the first one was the one at St Kilda sea baths

**Willow:**

Yeah

**Russell:**

Yeah

**II.i.38:00**

Even though it's a lot further back in time

**Willow:**

Yeah

**Russell:**

All right [?]

**Willow:**

*(a silence)* And I think during the interview as well it

Different like the mirrors would um create

**II.i.26:00**

a um kind of a um broader picture a a broader awareness of what's happening you know the moves rather than the particular surfaces of your hands and

**Russell:**

Right

**Yianis:**

The

**Russell:**

Can I I I just need to check this before we go any further you have been in a room with mirrors at some stage

**Yianis:**

Yes

**Russell:**

Okay so so you're talking from experiential knowledge yeah

**Yianis:**

today I I don't seem to be thinking clearly or

**Russell:**

Okay um

**II.i.24:00**

private

**James:**

*(a silence)* Mm

**II.i.24:30**

*(a silence)* I think the first thing that flashed in my mind was just the rooms I suppose and maybe that sense of um what really is private in those places what kind of what kind of um

**II.i.25:00**

you know in terms of personal space how far people can go into that what is regarded as this is as far as we go you don't go any further than that

**Russell:**

What do you mean personal space this is as far as you go

**James:**

In terms of

**Russell:**

world as well

**Russell:**

Yeah

**James:**

But

**II.i.50:30**

yeah it's that etiquette thing we talked about in the first meeting but I it becomes bizarre when you talk about that in terms of what goes on in these places what trying to bring those words which have a familiarity with outside experience into that I think that's part of it

**Russell:**

Is that to go back a bit further then is that somehow or other true of words like clean and dirty then in some

**II.i.51:00**

respects or are they more stable

**James:**

I think that's more to do with my blocks with that or that that thing has got to do with my own personal kind of very strongly er psyche my own kind of take on the world and my phobias

**Russell:**

**25**

Did you stay or go

**Apollo:**

No I left

**Russell:**

You left

**Apollo:**

Yeah I just thought it was just really rude

**Russell:**

Roughly how close were they to you like were they within reach or further

**Apollo:**

Arm's length

**Russell:**

Arm's length okay and for over what period of time would it have taken before you decided to go

**Apollo:**

and um and then I don't know I think we um ah did that for a little while not long and then somehow afterwards in in the course of having fun together and moving on to the next activity he l'd l'd taken off the condom by that stage

**II.ii.44:00**

right and I think it was I don't know the second or third activity I can't remember exactly like and then he got back into the same position and said come on you know I want you to you know whatever fuck me and you know and he was sort of pushing me onto him and I said oh I asked him have you got a condom he said don't worry about it and I just said no no way and he kept pushing me onto him and I just it was absolute turn off and I just got up and I just walked out

**II.ii.44:30**

and it really worried me because I started thinking oh god you know

**Russell:**

You didn't discuss it further with him

**Apollo:**

Nuh

**Russell:**

Right okay

**Apollo:**

Nuh and I just um

come in ah into consideration around nightfall and after nightfall which is

**II.ii.18:00**

um silly because it means in summertime I've missed the after work peak hour

**Russell:**

Um years ago when I first started going I used to really enjoy Saturday afternoons in winter

**Mark:**

Oh okay

**Russell:**

Mm um that's just offered without any further comment at the moment but ah the other thing then let's go back to

**II.ii.18:30**

that rattling sound it's interesting you I mean I think I'm I share this experience with you but I'm interested in getting more from you it's not an image it's a sound

**Mark:**

Yes

**Russell:**

1

**I.i.16:00**

he seemed like he sort of knew exactly what he was doing but he was also disorientated at the same time

**Russell:**

About how long did he spend following you do you was this like one continuous event or did is it something that happened intermittently over a period of time

**Charlie:**

There was quite strong eye contact like he sort of it was like (*he laughs a little*) you know eyes wide open kind of trying to sort of

**I.i.16:30**

rub his brown eyes all over my body and um it was really forward you know I just wasn't interested clearly and at that time I sort of I didn't even have the curiosity to go a step further to talk to him

**Russell:**

Yeah

**Charlie:**

because I thought that my curiosity ceased when I actually got there and the fact that I'd sort of given in as Sartre puts it to my bad faith as I call it to go into Volcano in the first place I immediately

**I.i.17:00**

closed all doors of communication with everyone because I thought well

23

**Russell:**

Okay

**Edward:**

as opposed to I think black downstairs

**Russell:**

And how many cubicles are there

**Edward:**

**II.i.08:00**

I th I don't know I only I know there's well where I was at one which is the second from the end and then there's some more up a little further but it's a little bit too dark for my liking to venture up there as in for what is ever there I don't know

**Russell:**

Yeah okay so you went into one of those

**Edward:**

Yep and um he was fascinated by my tatt my

**II.i.08:30**

and

**2**

they go off and have sex

**Kate:**

Yeah but yeah

**Russell:**

So

**Kate:**

Yeah that's

**Russell:**

So before we go further can I ask where do you imagine them making that eye contact like in  
**l.i.26:00**  
in that open area where you were for instance

**Kate:**

Ah possibly open area in the locker rooms

**Russell:**

Yeah yeah

2

about my thoughts about that like it's it's not like um  
**I.i.59:30**  
going for a swim or um if I hadn't seen if I hadn't seen

**Kate:**

Maybe for some people it is

**Russell:**

Yeah

**Kate:**

Maybe that's what it is and the whole thing of like yeah that that you can go there and have well  
yeah you can go there and have sex and it's absolutely there's no you know there's well apart  
there's you know no further commitment blah blah blah all that sort of stuff I mean you could go  
to a club and do that too I suppose

**I.i.60:00**

but I don't know because it I suppose it creates an environment where you can spend you know  
x amount of hours and um yeah and you can move around in those areas I mean there are dry  
areas that you can be in you can you know go full on in the wet area or you can just go there  
and watch I'm sure it you know for all those reasons which is really

**Russell:**

I really enjoy watching what's happening

**4**

have to open it to step into the foyer

**Yianis:**

No the front door was just open

**Russell:**

Right okay outwards or inwards

**Yianis:**

Can't remember at all

**Russell:**

Okay (*checking the time remaining on the minidisc*) um we'll go a bit further all right now what do you re

I.i.41:30

do you recall anything about what you imagined was behind that façade

**Yianis:**

No I had (*he sighs*) no idea really I mean I did

**Russell:**

Any images any images

**5**

**James:**

All right so

**Russell:**

and would be able to distinguish it from other saunas

**James:**

Okay well basically it's upstairs above shops in a fairly busy street it's just a single glass door you open you walk up

**I.i.12:30**

quite a few stairs narrow stairway and at the opening entrance there's um like a grill a small reception area and then the door's on the right and you walk in as soon as you walk in there's a bar café in front of you or the side of it anyway if you look to your right there's a table and chairs and then further on there's lounge chairs um it's oh I don't know about I'm terrible with

**I.i.13:00**

metres and stuff like that but

**Russell:**

That's good

**James:**

It's not much bigger than you know I think it's probably twice the size of my flat

kind of look to it that front section um then if you so that's to the right and as soon as you walk in the door if you go to your left there's a small area where there's lockers and to the left of that there is a solarium room and then as you go past

**I.i.14:00**

the lockers I can't remember now if it's before or after the lockers there's a massage room yeah there's a massage room after the locker room and then there's a kind of corridor leading on and to the right there's a if you go off to the right there's a a room where they show pornos on a s on a television and a kind of bay around the walls of like a seating bay kind of thing um with cushions and stuff then as you

**I.i.14:30**

go down the corridor there's cubicles on each side the cubicles on the left have a kind of bed sort of set-up like a very simple bed set-up with the vinyl mattress thing and on the right the it's all on the floor the mattress kind of thing is on the floor the vinyl's on the floor then half way down there's on the left there's a sling room a shmall a shmall a small sling room and then further down on the left there's a room with two entrances to it with a kind of jail

**I.i.15:00**

grill in the middle that so you can close both sides and the people can meet but they're blocked off by like a a a grill like a

**Russell:**

Blocked off from each other

**James:**

Yeah yeah

5

**James:**

Yes yes (*he laughs*) and there's a video monitor in the room that shows the same porno that's on in the room up the front

**Russell:**

Yes

**James:**

Then if you go past that room you can either go right and go round to this other side where there is

**I.i.15:30**

cubicle it's much darker around that part there's kind of little solitary standing cubicles with holes in the wall glory holes and then as you walk around to that part then further round there's an area that's like completely dark and it's like a grope sort of ledge it's like a mattress and and then if you keep on going further there's a few more cubicles and then there's a glass partition or a wall with a glass window at the end that you can look into the TV room at the front so instead of when we passed

**I.i.16:00**

the room on the left with the grill the jail visiting room instead of going right keep on going round left to your right there's a washing room like for their towels and stuff washing machines and things like that

**Russell:**

**5**

Yeah

**Russell:**

Is there er would you sit within reach of the door so that if you

**James:**

No

**Russell:**

No you'd sit

**James:**

**I.i.49:00**

Further down

**Russell:**

Further down so you're out of reach of the door

**James:**

Yeah so near there the back wall so that there's a kind of sense of (*indicating*) if someone sits there or someone sits there there's a sense of being in contact with each other

**Russell:**

5

**James:**

Yeah so near there the back wall so that there's a kind of sense of (*indicating*) if someone sits there or someone sits there there's a sense of being in contact with each other

**Russell:**

Hmm okay how many steps in is that roughly for you

**James:**

To there it's about three or four

**Russell:**

Three or four steps and how many more steps beyond where you would sit before you couldn't go any further

**James:**

Well I hit the end

**Russell:**

Yeah

**James:**

I sit in the corner basically

**5**

twenty to thirty kilometres

**James:**

Yes yes to find

**Russell:**

Because he knew this was almost as far as he could go

**James:**

Yeah

**Russell:**

Although there was one further

**James:**

Yeah

**Russell:**

Was he aware that there was one further

**James:**

Ah I don't know if we talked about that I can't remember if we talked

6

Sorry say that again I can't

**Russell:**

Well you said that after Splash closed you went to Rear Entry a couple of times but it was so small dark and dingy that it was disappointing to be there and so you didn't go so it would seem like suddenly but I mean Rear Entry's also a very busy sauna and presumably a lot of the men who went to Splash would be

**I.i.19:00**

at Rear Entry

**Joe:**

Mm yeah that that I mean that's very definitely true I mean there were there were some convenience factors like you know Rear Entry's a bit further away I no longer had a car um I'd been getting in you know for free to this you know

**Russell:**

Yes yes

**Joe:**

nightclub near Splash too so to have to start paying again was a bit weird um but yeah very definitely the actual space and the and the place didn't seem quite as good

**6**

Yeah I used to more and sometimes I I still would've I mean this is when I still went but no I mean more and more to when I was going to saunas at the end I wouldn't go in the spa very much you know um but no pretty much anywhere else I would go

**I.i.57:00**

yeah

**Russell:**

*(a silence)* You no longer feel the last few times you've been you've not felt guilty about going anymore that's long behind you *(Joe nods)* right

**I.i.57:30**

um do you think there may be a connection do you think that's maybe why the saunas are getting further behind for you too

**Joe:**

Um

**I.i.58:00**

I don't know I don't know actually

**Russell:**

Great I don't know is a good answer

**Joe:**

7

What I know of it or what I know of the layout

**Russell:**

Um we're talking about describing the place um you know the materiality of the place you've already sketched in bits and pieces I'm wondering if you could now

**I.i.30:30**

offer something that um is less disparate and more coherent

**Willow:**

*(a silence)* I remember once you go through the the opening upstairs on the left hand side's

**I.i.31:00**

a small bar and the lockers on the right and behind that are small rooms where they were doing the massage and there's quite a large open space and on the right hand side further away was um projections on the wall films and there's a downstairs I think but I don't remember how to get there and I remember a large bath and a smaller sauna

**Russell:**

**I.i.31:30**

A dry sauna or a wet sauna

**Willow:**

Wet sauna and there was a dry sauna off it and then to the left were

8

Ah no not blatantly looking at them

**Russell:**

Ah okay was it like when you're across the road before you went in to the building

**Apollo:**

Um no because now that I was in there I felt I felt

**I.i.42:00**

secure because I was in an enclosed space with guys like me um and it was safe to to do this

**Russell:**

All right I need to still digress further then

**Apollo:**

Yep

**Russell:**

When you say it was an enclosed space what was it that contributed to that feeling for you of it being enclosed and

**I.i.42:30**

safe in fact was it first of all was it safe because it was enclosed

fact that um that I was noticeably in it you know that I was in that state and I remember I remember kind of playing with that and that was that was at night so she was obviously still up so obviously I hadn't been there till late so I suspect yes I'd gone late afternoon

**Russell:**

Right and *(a silence)*

**I.i.05:00**

do have do you remember the actual moment of arrival

**Max:**

No I don't I don't at all

**Russell:**

Right okay I want to go back a little further can you remember the first time when you became aware that such places as saunas existed

**Max:**

Mm now this is now suddenly I realise that wasn't the first time isn't that interesting because I was living

**I.i.05:30**

oh it goes back a long way it goes back much further actually it probably goes back and it must have been Volcano because that would have been the first wasn't it Volcano was it the first one or was there one in another location or something but anyway um I remember I lived in a in a distinctive building somewhere in Melbourne I think in

**Russell:**

Right okay

**I.i.15:30**

um can you describe Rear Entry for me

**Max:**

Can I describe Rear Entry oh that's interesting um well you drive down you turn right in I'm in my car I go by car so I'm driving up a particular main road I think it's that road and I turn right

**I.i.16:00**

into the street and I always it's always interesting because as I approach that I always think now am I going to get a park because you can turn right into the street and there's a series of parks immediately on the left hand side and I've been very lucky I often get a park there so that's one of the little games I play with myself oh will I get a park there and if I don't I always have to drive much further down I notice that other people park their cars kind of in at right angles and I I think I've always assumed somehow they must be members or something and that I'm I'm not I don't have I've never really checked that out whether I have the right to park my car there so I always end up driving you know so I might end up

**I.i.16:30**

there or I drive further down um it always it has a kind of a feeling like the back of you know like the back of shops in lanes because there's the my memory is that there's just a single light over the door it may be a fluorescent light and that um I go in through that door and then immediately on you turn right and there's a kind of a little corridor and I don't think there's another door I think so there used to be but I have

10

**Max:**

In um I've suddenly forgotten where it is where is it what's the name of the place um it's not L  
one the other one

I.i.35:00

the suburb

**Russell:**

Oh

**Max:**

Why have I forgotten

**Russell:**

further down

**Max:**

Yeah Suburb E

**Russell:**

Yep

**Max:**

I love that the arrangement of that that wet sauna it's just

10

**Max:**

That's right you make a very strong statement if you

**I.i.40:00**

if there was someone [unintelligible] all the way down there yeah

**Russell:**

If I if I sit right near the door where it's really brightly lit

**Max:**

Yes that's right

**Russell:**

I'm not very committed because I'm right near the door I'm really well lit and somehow or other further in the deeper in I go I'm deeper into whatever is possible is that

**Max:**

Mm yeah well possibly I mean that's a theory yes I mean I equally I could want to sit there because I am lit and that could be you know um I don't necessarily think that going down there means

**I.i.40:30**

one's more committed

**Russell:**

10

That's pretty effortless I think mm I don't have any yeah I have a

**l.i.71:30**

it's interesting what you've brought to my attention of the birds-eye view I I suppose I have a very it feels to me like I have a very strong birds-eye view of it mm

**Russell:**

*When (I hesitate while I check the recorder)*

**Max:**

What do you have to watch the tape

**Russell:**

Yeah it's what I might do is change it at this point and just talk with you a bit further

**Max:**

Yep sure

**Russell:**

Okay

**Max:**

Do you want another orange juice

10

**Max:**

That's yeah

**Russell:**

All right okay

**Max:**

What I'm aware of with those rooms is is that there's quite a lot of um group activity happens in those two room for some well I can understand why because you can actually lean you can actually be in that alcove leaning against the wall looking at the two rooms and often the doors are left open so they're a bit they often take on the um

**I.ii.05:30**

the sort of quality of the dark room that's further down yeah but in in a kind of a sort of voyeuristic you know like they allow that you know yeah

**Russell:**

So you you went into this room with (*I emphasise*) THEM (*I laugh a little*)

**Max:**

(*echoing me*) With THEM (*we laugh*) with him

10

I don't know that I had an expectation oh well probably

**I.ii.25:30**

I did I I thought in in going to the bench that he'd gone to I don't know no I don't think I had any expectation actually

**Russell:**

So you found

**Max:**

I mean I knew that however he went to the bench however he was there would be some indication of what he wanted to do (*he laughs a little*) maybe

**Russell:**

Like a further indication of what he wanted to do

**Max:**

Yeah yes I mean it would be different if he went to the bench and lay down on the bench or he went to the bench and lay on his back and stuck his legs in the air would be different too

**Russell:**

Right okay

**Max:**

**Charlie:**

Mm quite possibly someone else's yeah um quite possibly but maybe to an extent to some extent maybe also mine um

**Russell:**

Can you tell me about the things I've just said that you know have some

**II.i.10:30**

strong relationship with what happened for you and if you can't of course that's okay

**Charlie:**

I think a lot of that first visit is over my head really um I think I went there to possibly possibly

**II.i.11:00**

um to um further an interest (*he laughs a little*) and this is going to sound completely sort of what it is in other gay people other than the pub or other than yeah I guess that's really it the pub or

**II.i.11:30**

the nightclub for gay men like gay gay [sic] men who go out not necessarily with you know rainbow clothing but who do go out to advertised openly gay venues um on their own and particularly I think that's I think that's quite an important or important (*putting on a voice*) very important (*he returns to his usual voice*) issue um but is that thing of aloneness

**II.i.12:00**

and saunas or aloneness and and me going I think it did swell

Absolutely

**Russell:**

Yeah

**Charlie:**

for god's sake you know it's so (*he growls*) errrr yeah it just there's something that makes me kind of like the other night this this guy said sorry to me

**II.i.71:30**

and I said for a moment there was a pause and then he went (*laughing a little*) and touched me on the arse after he'd said sorry and then walked on so he'd obviously had the thought or something in his mind prior to it and had apologised before interfering with me okay yeah I can say well that's funny it's really funny ha ha ha but then I can take that further and

**II.i.72:00**

go well you know what sort of justification are we talking about just because he said sorry and I'm in this venue what are the laws basically what are what are for me what are the laws about um yeah about those places and and you know where I'm I'm reading that they're safe places for men to go but are they really

**II.i.72:30**

um are they really (*he laughs a little*) it sounds like a kind of beginning of some kind of a horror documentary or something

**Russell:**

**Russell:**

and realising oh they

**I.i.37:00**

must think I don't like them you know

**Colin:**

Yeah

**Russell:**

I mean and but it yeah breaking through that

**Colin:**

I suppose I mean for you to be talking like that means you've already broken through further than I usually do in that in that you put some analysis into it and you and and some empathy of where the other person's coming from and for me I regress into feeling far too concerned

**I.i.37:30**

about what people think of me um as opposed to what impression I might be making on them in terms of whether they think I'm like them or not it's it's too much at on a level you know I I become a sort of wallflower about it and that's unfair on the other person (*he laughs a little*) apart from anything else

**Russell:**

14

**Russell:**

*(laughing a little)* Yeah

**Colin:**

And if if there was anyone else that kind of took his fancy I suppose but er he came back to me and um there were a couple of other people there not nearly attractive as I am *(I laugh a little)* but um

**I.i.22:00**

I have to say that the with men the few sexual encounters that I've had that have been enjoyable are so few that I can I can remember them basically

**Russell:**

This was an enjoyable encounter quite apart from the

**Colin:**

It was enjoyable enough yeah

**Russell:**

Yeah yeah

**Colin:**

Mm

**Russell:**

I mean and but it yeah breaking through that

**Colin:**

I suppose I mean for you to be talking like that means you've already broken through further than I usually do in that in that you put some analysis into it and you and and some empathy of where the other person's coming from and for me I regress into feeling far too concerned

**I.i.37:30**

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**Russell:**

Oh I know I agree I completely agree with that it is

**I.i.38:00**

and it's certainly

**Colin:**

We could continue this while I make the tea by the way I don't mind I mean we can be careful how we talk in front of Sam but

Okay fine okay right

**Lydia:**

Because

**Russell:**

Now as a result

**Lydia:**

Because it doesn't match her her notion of sensuousness kind of thing yeah

**Russell:**

But for you overall apart from the certain

**I.i.74:30**

kind of surprise at the um lounge room upstairs overall what you were taking in was information and recognising things that you may or may not have heard about er no recognising things you would have known of

**I.i.74:49**

*(The minidisc fills and the recorder switches itself off. Soon after, we realise that this has happened, I replace the disc, and we resume.)*

**I.ii.00:00**

Okay yeah we're back on

**16**

**Lydia:**

Yeah

**Russell:**

That the there's a view into the women's toilets but not into the cubicles of the women's toilets

**Lydia:**

Yeah

**Russell:**

and there's a view into the men's toilets but not in not a view directly onto the urinals but this absence of doors I found quite nice apart from all the

**I.ii.28:00**

other detail

**Lydia:**

Yeah

**Russell:**

But um yeah I'm not surprised that the toilets become places where people might go into one that's designated for another gender or but

**I.i.36:00**

in one way it comes down to something like friendliness um I've always been even in phase one (*I laugh a little*) I can remember being struck by well actually I'm not sure it was phase one now um I have a very strong impression I don't know how long it goes back of um overhearing people conversing in cubicles um after having after or before or during whatever

**I.i.36:30**

having sex with each other and thinking of that um as an admirable thing and there was I've always one of the things um I've most enjoyed about going to saunas and it's something that I always ask someone who's just told me having that they've just had sex with someone at the sauna I always ask about the conversation that they had um and it does just this idea of um ah two strangers that are there and they're not

**I.i.37:00**

you know they're naked so they're not carrying the the you know the cloth of their status apart from whatever they manage to carry around in their voice and facial expressions um and just you know I have the impression that people often talk in a quite honest way and they talk um as if they've known each other for a long time um and it doesn't seem you know it doesn't seem a matter of people manoeuvring to impress other people or

**I.i.37:30**

um you know there's a kind of a gentleness in the voices um not that I really hear what they're saying it's more you can just tell that and I suppose it's I don't know it's sort of the sound the overheard sound of people talking and then my own experience of of um of of talking with people um so that's on the good side and ah and with that too

**I.i.38:00**

**Russell:**

You don't mind it

**Urdhvaretu:**

No I don't mind it I mean and I suppose that somehow and maybe it's like a kind of ghost story or something but something about the ah the smell of the ah sauna at Volcano on a good day um that suggests just sort of layer after layer of semen that's been slowly kind of built up (*I laugh a little*) and is ingrained

**I.i.72:00**

in the fabric of the and you know sweat and everything

**Russell:**

Is that something (*laughing a little*) apart from entertaining me at the moment with that is it something that you're actually present to when you go

**Urdhvaretu:**

No

**Russell:**

No it isn't

**Urdhvaretu:**

Um

**I.ii.01:30**

I think I'm drifting off into a little bit of confusion um I mean obviously the red walls are not a kind of sufficient enticement on their own um I mean there is the fact that it's distinctly smaller um which

**Russell:**

Smaller than Volcano

**Urdhvaretu:**

Yes smaller than Volcano

**I.ii.02:00**

um which ought not to be a good thing um on the idea on the notion that um a small circuit leads to early fatigue um I suppose that the apart from issues of what the steam room smells like um

**I.ii.02:30**

I probably go to um Squirt as against Volcano now um because the people there are more appealing to look at I suppose um there are less spherical men (*I laugh a little*) um sometimes at Volcano um there seems a preponderance of um

**I.ii.03:00**

spherical Caucasian men and Asian youths involved in some kind of interaction ritual [?] but in any case the sphere quotient is much much higher and then I suppose there's also um something that ah my friend pointed out and it's completely obvious but I'm not altogether sure if I would've thought to bring it up on my own but

**I.ii.03:30**

**Kate:**

You know in a in a mixed gay club where yeah the the opportunity sort of presented itself over the night so with two people

**II.i.60:00**

ah *(then she makes a gabbling sound)*

**Russell:**

Yeah we don't need to

**Kate:**

Yeah we don't need to go into that but anyway that was you know but that's where sorry that just that just brought back [that?] to mind because I think yeah that thing I suppose what I'm trying to maybe get to is the thing of like like when you try to sort of plan things too much or cos I think cos most of the night I mean apart from the performance which was you know sort of an organised sort of planned thing

**II.i.60:30**

the rest of the night was pretty much not you know like having any pre trying not to have any preconceived ideas of how it should run how it should be you know put myself in a situation where I'm not going to to do that cos that I always find you know really draining and tiring and I may as well not be there so that it did get to that little point where that happened was for me an indication that yes I'm getting tired or no I've just got to not you know

**II.i.61:00**

like try to

Had I learnt well

**Russell:**

Were you more prepared

**Kate:**

Yeah I I I was but I

**II.i.68:00**

I suppose being more prepared but at the same time in a way to be more open to situations so yeah

**Russell:**

Did I mean we're talking about it now and it it's remained as a very specific memory for you but did you reflect on it afterwards is was it some one of the things after that night apart from just the general oh it was you know I had a nice time I had my photo taken and things

**II.i.68:30**

was it something you reflected on a lot like why did I go back why did I retreat

**Kate:**

No not really

**Russell:**

Right okay

conversation with someone so in a way it's what I want the most but yeah there's something about that situation where I just go oh you know the the lights are up and you know I feel really vulnerable there

**Russell:**

Right

**Randy:**

And it's spaces I just if

**II.i.22:00**

I just step around I tend not to go into it I just can't and it's really funny but it's true

**Russell:**

Um do you ah well another time measuring device apart from a number of encounters

**Randy:**

Yeah

**Russell:**

Um I found that one thing I notice is oh that video is now finished

**Randy:**

um or yeah you know in a situation where I'm not far away from someone and we will just look at each other and and do this thing which is all

**II.i.36:30**

very I was actually describing

**Russell:**

What is this thing

**Randy:**

The thing is like a it's different all the time so you can't really tell but it's it's a bit of a mind a mind mind sex I guess where you know you're definitely sexually engaging with them but it's in a nonphysical level where you know you you you're being very suggestive you know that the other person might be interested but the distance kind of just because you're you know two three metres apart doesn't make it any less sexual like I

**II.i.37:00**

found that experience a few times

**Russell:**

Right

**Randy:**

particularly with um and it doesn't always ended [sic] up in sex a couple of times it has but it hasn't always but it starts out that way and

**Yianis:**

Where you kind of you know because you know you're in an envir and it's also like the beat there's this thing of being caught there's this thing of being in public even if it's the most private location there's it's a you're

**II.i.14:00**

in public

**Russell:**

Right

**Yianis:**

and no matter how secretive the area is it's some kind of public ground um and that's probably the reason why you can kind of be a bit more detached and impersonal there's no reason not to enga I mean apart from yeah I mean it's it's I'm [?] caught up in being polite I guess as well polite and but at beats I don't feel like I have to be polite

**Russell:**

**II.i.14:30**

Um the first time I ever went to a sauna the man at reception I I said I spoke to him and I said this is my first time at a place like this what should I know and he just looked at me like he had this onerous task um and he was baffled and and then he said a couple of basic bits of information to me but one then he said something that

**II.i.15:00**

**Colin:**

that um I don't think I've I certainly I haven't learnt any social lessons that I can think of by going to saunas and ah

**II.i.53:00**

I th it's a tiny bit like I've been to a health farm once to sort of try and um turn a corner in terms of diet

**Russell:**

Yeah

**Colin:**

and that the the main thing I noticed about the health farm was that there is absolutely no cultural content whatsoever you go there and there's some TV and there's some old detective novels that people have left over and that's it (*I laugh a little*) apart

**II.i.53:30**

from these stupid little pseudo doctors that hang around and make smart little Pioneer Tour jokes at the old ladies and get them you know giggling and ah and consider themselves to be little authorities some of them are awful they ought to be running parking or something (*I laugh*) and ah and that place had just no cultural content whatsoever so I feel

**II.i.54:00**

I I get the same feel off particularly the Suburb A sauna that it's that's it's got you know I it's got some magazines you can pick up and look at the sort of person you'd like to see across the room but isn't there ah ah and there's the telly with some damn thing on you know some erotic

29

**Mark:**

No

**Russell:**

All right

**Mark:**

Um

**II.ii.22:00**

they feel for me like somewhere safe I I feel like I can go to a sauna and completely relax there um completely cast aside inhibitions and indeed in some respects even adopt um quite a different persona and I can do it safely I'm not going to come under any form of physical or psychological threat there apart

**II.ii.22:30**

from um the threat of catching some kind of STD which is a pretty constant threat and I've picked up just about every just about every variety probably through saunas but they still

**Russell:**

When you say through saunas do you mean at a sauna

**Mark:**

Yeah yeah

29

Mm

**Russell:**

Um very people might talk about um an offensive body odour on other people which I th correct me if I'm wrong is not what you were talking about when you were talking about body odour on men

**II.ii.33:30**

about that being offensive is that correct

**Mark:**

No no that I don't find body odour offensive

**Russell:**

Yes nor do I um I scandalised my students weeks ago mentioning (*laughing a little*) that I don't like licking deodorant and that apart from the fact that they said they'd bear it in mind ah (*we laugh*) um there were some

**Mark:**

Oh it's an appalling sensation

**Russell:**

**II.ii.34:00**

Yes I agree

**Mark:**

um working out how it is that I could get from that point to the toilet by only stepping on the grey squares of lino in their multicoloured lino squared floor

**II.ii.38:30**

and just that one smell threw me back almost bodily forty oh thirty-eight years

**Russell:**

It'd be interesting if they actually had different kinds of cake soap at saunas rather than those I mean I understand why they don't and there is cake soap available at Rear Entry

**II.ii.39:00**

but it's so anonymous and odourless but it'd be interesting to see you know if they had (*I laugh a little*) Pears Soap what it would do well to conversation apart from anything else

**Mark:**

Um a group of my mates are contemplating putting together a very exclusive club I don't think it will be a gentlemen's

**II.ii.39:30**

club (*I laugh a little*) um

**Russell:**

You've got that look on your face again as you say that but keep going

Well that's the other thing people often say what do you like doing and I

**Max:**

*(groaning)* Oh

**Russell:**

I almost invariably say THIS *(I laugh)*

**Max:**

This yes what we're doing now yes

**Russell:**

Apart from the questions

**Max:**

I know what do you how do you answer that question oh everything

**Russell:**

Well that's what I do sometimes I've said I'm here to find out

**Max:**

Yeah *(he laughs)*

Yeah I understand that um the word public is another word

**Lydia:**

**II.i.45:00**

Mm public mm Ladies Night events were like a public service and stuff so that the instinct behind them was in a sense to make visible lesbians

**Russell:**

Right

**Lydia:**

So the event was public

**II.i.45:30**

yeah in terms of the space no I I'm *(a silence)* because see all the spaces were used to apart from *(she lowers her voice)* the heavy duty room *(she reverts to her usual voice)* yeah which was like the hypothalamus of the event um

**II.i.46:00**

but even then there's like there's a prurient curiosity to know who's gone down that corridor who's coming back from that corridor yeah yeah this great hope that it's being used kind of *(she gasps, then puts on a voice)* we're in a place where someone's in the heavy duty room woo woo *(she reverts to her usual voice)* kind of thing mm *(a silence)*

**Russell:**

**II.i.46:30**

**23**

**Russell:**

So where do you think  
II.i.32:30  
that came from

**Edward:**

Probably from something that I was told by someone else

**Russell:**

And do you

**Edward:**

And I think people don't talk there apart from me (*I laugh a little*) so that's you know pretty that's a very

**Russell:**

You're not the only person who talks there

**Edward:**

Apart from [?] there's one Chinese guy who yelled out you Joe Blow liar cheat (*he laughs*)

**Russell:**

Mm for instance your your inex your

**II.i.53:30**

puzzlement at the motives of other people or what's happening for them is because you find them inscrutable at some level like you you simply is that another way of saying I don't know what scene you're in

**Edward:**

Um

**Russell:**

I don't know what

**Edward:**

I suppose yeah like I think if you you know pull the reasoning all apart and look for something yeah

**Russell:**

**II.i.54:00**

Let's go back to something completely different have you ever had that situation where someone says to you let's go here and as you're heading there you think oh no I don't want to go there and you make a counter suggestion say let's go here instead and then you suddenly discover that there's an incompatibility based on

**Edward:**

surprise I remember in Sydney once having an encounter with someone and

**II.i.60:00**

it was all terribly enjoyable and then as he was leaving he spoke and he had a Russian accent and I was completely devastated because I felt like I'd missed out on something (*we laugh*) I felt oh I've been with a Russian all this time and I didn't know or oh I mean why why is your accent so thick have you just arrived you know and it was too it was all gone you know

**Edward:**

Yeah well maybe that's why people don't want to talk maybe it's that thing about

**II.i.60:30**

you you talk you're interested you want to get to know them the thing you know I was saying about anonymous sex maybe that you know really does have something about if there's no communication apart from the experience of sex which is not communication you know without without speech you're you're shifting a whole load there's no need to be polite and reply and

**II.i.61:00**

create a conversation and and become interested in them a willingness to know and to share information maybe without that maybe I'm incredibly shallow and can have a conversation without having to you know go into those details I don't know

**Russell:**

I'm envious

**Russell:**

I saw near the end I saw these two

**II.i.06:30**

young guys slipping in and out of the Bamboo room through the doorway but I don't remember being able to see inside but I remember them coming in and out of that on a on a day when there was hardly anyone there and they were in that room and they looked like they'd been in there a week

**Joe:**

Wow

**Russell:**

You know like there was ah I mean obviously hadn't but um yeah apart from that no

**Joe:**

No

**Russell:**

**II.i.07:00**

And you felt that would have been too presumptuous to ask

**Joe:**

15

Ah well I knew that um I knew this person was gay but I didn't know that he was er that I was likely to bump into him in Volcano but then again I

**I.i.17:00**

I hadn't thought about it either

**Russell:**

Right

**Mark:**

It hadn't occurred to me

**Russell:**

Right had so it's probably fair to say that in the two visits apart from bumping into him and arriving with your American boyfriend a few years earlier you hadn't actually encountered anyone you knew or recognised from outside

**Mark:**

No

**Russell:**

Okay so you bumped into this um was this person a friend or an acquaintance

15

**Russell:**

in taking him around

**Mark:**

I was playing host

**Russell:**

**I.i.36:30**

Yes

**Mark:**

so I was taking him to remember he didn't know anything about Melbourne apart from where his hotel was and where the exhibition was being held and um and so I was taking him in hand so to speak

**Russell:**

Yeah

**Mark:**

for the evening and showing him a good time

**Russell:**

**2**

know because you can't really see

**Russell:**

Right

**Kate:**

And sometimes it it would be really quiet you know you would be there for a period of time and you wouldn't hear very much

**Russell:**

Oh yeah

**Kate:**

Apart from just sssssssteam

**Russell:**

Yeah when you say you can't really see is is there light in there or

**Kate:**

It's very very low light

**Russell:**

Oh yeah

um more than once a week I don't have any kind of regularity myself about my thoughts about that like it's it's not like um

**I.i.59:30**

going for a swim or um if I hadn't seen if I hadn't seen

**Kate:**

Maybe for some people it is

**Russell:**

Yeah

**Kate:**

Maybe that's what it is and the whole thing of like yeah that that you can go there and have well yeah you can go there and have sex and it's absolutely there's no you know there's well apart there's you know no further commitment blah blah blah all that sort of stuff I mean you could go to a club and do that too I suppose

**I.i.60:00**

but I don't know because it I suppose it creates an environment where you can spend you know x amount of hours and um yeah and you can move around in those areas I mean there are dry areas that you can be in you can you know go full on in the wet area or you can just go there and watch I'm sure it you know for all those reasons which is really

**Russell:**

4

**Yianis:**

I mean both both those spaces are pretty good actually

**I.i.01:30**

yeah

**Russell:**

Can we can we start talking about the porn though

**Yianis:**

Uh huh

**Russell:**

Um what I'm interested in is apart from the tinting and the sound levels is there anything else to distinguish the porn for you that they show at Rear Entry from the porn they show at other places you've been to

**Yianis:**

Oh it's um it's probably it's not it's not the B grade kind of porn or something oh I mean I guess it's *(he laughs a little)* it's the lush American A grade kind of porn

**I.i.02:00**

and

**Russell:**

I know I would know my way around you know like once I was there I wouldn't get lost or anything

**I.ii.16:00**

I'd you know instantly know like I would I'd know where everything is but at the moment I can't imagine the space

**Russell:**

That's that's interesting I mean it's like um is it like riding a bicycle

**Yianis:**

Hmm

**Russell:**

That I'm just trying to that thing of knowing something but not being able to imagine it apart from the moment of knowing it

**Yianis:**

Like a

**I.ii.16:30**

bicycle yeah

**Russell:**

Like I know that I ride my bicycle but it's not since that very first couple of times that that was when I knew how I was riding it now I don't know how I'm riding it like I imagining it just seems very very difficult

my first memory of it is someone talking about how there was a raid there and I must have been fourteen or even younger and I don't even think maybe when they were first talking about it I wasn't living there because we actually lived up the road from it

**Russell:**

Right right yep

**James:**

and er but when they talked about it they talked about this raid that they had and all the men had to come out on the streets in their towels and I remember thinking oh my god how embarrassing

**Russell:**

Right and were you at that stage apart from thinking it was embarrassing were you kind of aware of your

**I.i.03:30**

own potential interests

**James:**

I I was I knew I was gay by when I was twelve but um I don't think I I don't think at that stage I would've imagined myself in that environment

**Russell:**

Right and what did you imagine that environment was physically when

**5**

Yes

**Russell:**

It felt vast but I could well what will I do

**Russell & James:**

*(simultaneously)* now

**James:**

Yeah

**Russell:**

And and I was there I think there was no one else there apart from the three of us for the best part

**I.ii.19:30**

of three hours

**James:**

Wow

**Russell:**

And I was ecstatic

6

**Russell:**

For you

**Joe:**

It was certainly a place to go an anonymous place to go before I was ready to come out um I don't think it actually had that much to do with coming out cos my behaviour didn't change too much after that in terms of I still continued to go to those places um so yeah no I don't

**I.i.08:00**

think there was a great necessarily I mean perhaps you know it's I mean I must have you know been having sex with men more readily and then become more aware that my homosexuality was ah something permanent I mean that must have become solidified in my mind by virtue of the fact that I kept having sex with men at these places um but apart from

**I.i.08:30**

that no I wouldn't say it was a great relationship you know

**Russell:**

After after you went the first time you said you went back a couple of weeks later in that two year period what um frequency would you say

**Joe:**

Yeah it's hard to say I imagine possibly once possibly as readily as once a week but I'm sure there were other times where I would have

8

mean

**Russell:**

Do you think you were doing that by the end of that first visit

**Apollo:**

Yes

**Russell:**

Oh you're clear about that

**Apollo:**

Yes I do and I remember the thing that I also found fascinating and that I really loved playing with apart from my thumbs and leaning

**I.i.52:30**

maybe this comes from having been an actor I loved being able to um play with the various lighting combinations there on my body

**Russell:**

Tell me more

**Apollo:**

I found that exhilarating

**Edward:**

that they'd do *(he laughs a little)* something about it

**Russell:**

that something would be done about it

**Edward:**

Well probably no one mentions it no one says look I

**I.i.41:30**

really love this place but the tinkle of those keys is driving me around the bend you know I don't know

**Russell:**

Do you find um that when you go to a place like Squirt apart from oh how how do you deal with that tinkle at Squirt do you

**Edward:**

*(putting on a voice)* Give in to it

**Russell:**

choose to deal with it or do you

**Edward:**

**9**

**Russell:**

What are the things that

**Edward:**

But I feel safe in all gay venues

**Russell:**

Yeah

**Edward:**

I've never seen a fight

**I.i.56:00**

in a gay venue apart from someone yelling out fucking cunt at someone

**Russell:**

Yeah

**Edward:**

and that was it

**Russell:**

It's quite a strong vantage point because I mean (*he begins a list*) A you can watch the television A [sic] you can watch the activity of people going in and out there then you've got you can also see then you can also see men going in here you know so I suppose that's why

**Russell:**

And all the way up the corridor

**Max:**

And all the way down the corridor that's right because as they come around there you can see there mm

**Russell:**

I mean apart from anything else being

**I.i.60:30**

whether it's a strong vantage point it's a vantage point

**Max:**

It's a vantage point yeah

**Russell:**

And that again's something [unintelligible]

**Max:**

them terribly well to themselves but coming back to the thing of being well tuned um

**I.iv.05:00**

I can pick up what's going on

**Russell:**

Do you think of yourself in the sauna sorry do you experience yourself in the sauna as someone with expertise

**Albert:**

Yeah oh yes yes and there are other people with expertise who know what's going on who know who by virtue of long experience know what's going on

**I.iv.05:30**

and the regulars can sort of say when they see two people come in the door half an hour apart he will get off with him

**Russell:**

Hmm I've certainly had that experience of being at somewhere where it wasn't very heavily populated and there's somebody who seems eminently outstanding and sure enough let's say it would be ten fifteen minutes later someone else will arrive who I think yes

**Albert:**

He will get off with him

13

**Russell:**

and vivid event

**Albert:**

Because there were a whole lot of other things tied up with that [unintelligible] tied up with er going with my then boy then boyfriend for the first time taking um speed for the first time

**Russell:**

Right

**Albert:**

*(laughing a little)* Having a threesome for the first time with him at least

**I.i.07:30**

um so that's all keyed up with an event but these days no curiously I can remember the first time I went to the newer saunas when they just opened

**Russell:**

The newer ones in Melbourne

**Albert:**

In Melbourne yeah

This is interesting because did you get invited to these opening nights or were you so clear that you didn't um I'm I'm now thinking in particular of Volcano Splash and Squirt um were you very determined that you were not going to miss on their opening nights

**Albert:**

No I was on their guest list *(he laughs)*

**Russell:**

You were on the guest

**I.i.08:30**

list okay

**Albert:**

A person to be invited because he brings with him a whole coterie of other people

**Russell:**

Right now how did you get on the guest lists

**Albert:**

Well the oldest one is the Volcano one ah in Melbourne

**Russell:**

**13**

after Inquisition in Sydney

**Russell:**

So

**Albert:**

**I.i.33:30**

So the rest of the times we meet

**Russell:**

you and he are on the same party circuit

**Albert:**

On the same party circuit so let's call him for the sake of the exercise Paul um Paul does the same parties that I do we know each other socially and semi-professionally ah we don't talk to each other socially or semi-professionally because we actually have nothing in common um whereas

**Russell:**

Speech-wise

**Albert:**

Speech-wise whereas sexually when disinhibited ah

**13**

**Albert:**

In our professional lives

**Russell:**

Can can I just ask given that there are this this may seem obvious to you but for the record given that there are six saunas in Melbourne

**I.i.35:00**

how is it that you and it is at a sauna after the party

**Albert:**

Yeah

**Russell:**

that you meet him um how it is that you both end up at the same sauna

**Albert:**

Because we both end up at the same sauna quite often but

**Russell:**

So whi

**Albert:**

only engage each other when both drug fucked

**Russell:**

Now the conversation you just related to me which was typical to what extent was that specifically actual at Red Raw

**Albert:**

Those are the exact words

**Russell:**

Right and where did that happen at Red Raw

**Albert:**

Passing each other on the dance floor he had a bunch of people with him I had a bunch of people with me

**I.i.36:00**

you know (*he enacts the conversation*) hi Paul good to see you havin' a good night fucking fabulous I'll see you later probably (*the performance ends*) and that's all the social discourse that we've ever had with each other

**Russell:**

Yeah

**Albert:**

**13**

though

**Albert:**

Okay

**Russell:**

The venue was understood

**Albert:**

Yes

**Russell:**

So were you going to the venue because you knew you'd be able to meet up with him at that venue or were you going to that venue and if he had never shown there

**I.i.37:30**

it wouldn't have made any difference

**Albert:**

Wouldn't have made any difference but inevitably he does

**Russell:**

Right

time and walking in circles um and so it's very much the articulation of a lifetime um of sauna going ah by looking at what other people have experienced and how they have made sense of their space and their experience

**I.iii.02:30**

um and because of my familiarity with their space and their experience then it's made it exceptionally easy in interview to draw out from them what their wer what they were fumbling to say um they'd be fumbling around for words and and to some extent I'd I'd capture what they want with phrase

**I.iii.03:00**

ah now you could say that I was leading them on and putting words in their mouth but the phrase fits so I talk about you know the group of boys who arrive at the sauna um after a dance party together and and the participant's you know telling me about how they sat in the spa together and they quite deliberately chose who they were going to have sex with for each one you know right you know Russell you will go with him

**I.iii.03:30**

and

**Russell:**

Yeah

**Albert:**

you will go with him and you will go with him I just said to him you're a bunch of little dogs hunting in packs it (*he snaps his fingers*) clicked with him yes that's what we were doing my metaphor worked now you

**Albert:**

you will go with him and you will go with him I just said to him you're a bunch of little dogs hunting in packs it (*he snaps his fingers*) clicked with him yes that's what we were doing my metaphor worked now you could say I was putting words into his mouth or I was actually a very accurate vehicle of interpretation of his experience and I prefer to say I was an (*he laughs a little*) an accurate vehicle for interpretation of his experience because it fit fitted so well my metaphor fitted the rest of it cos that's exactly what they

**I.iii.04:00**

did the pack gathered observed the prey identified which prey was going with whom did the deed did the hunt reassembled as a pack and talked about the spoils fits beautifully and each of my interviews very early in my interviews um there's a point at which I get on to the wavelength of the participant and once I'm there

**I.iii.04:30**

um inside his world then it's just so easy to dir direct him or not to direct him that's the wrong word to be with him as he explores his experience so that he you know he talks about being fisted five times in one night there's no sense of shame in that in me because I can understand that because it's it's an experience in my space

**I.iii.05:00**

that I I comprehend it's not a foreign language um you know I remember talking to a sociologist a priest sociologist in fact about my work and he didn't know that I was a gay man which in itself was pretty odd but anyway (*I laugh a little*) he said he said to me are you gay and I went of course I am but he said there's no way a gay anyone other than a gay

**I.iii.05:30**

**13**

**Russell:**

Yes

**Albert:**

That I think

**Russell:**

**I.iii.27:00**

Has this only occurred on one occasion for you

**Albert:**

I've seen it happen a couple of times at Rear Entry in fact there's a young boy who's a drag queen who um is a furtive drag queen because his parents don't know and he takes his clothes with him to the sauna and does his make-up and puts his frock on at the sauna and then goes out for the night

**Russell:**

Right this would be at Rear Entry

**Albert:**

At Rear Entry yeah

**Russell:**

At Rear Entry and you saw this young man

**Albert:**

Exceptionally young man under twenty probably probably in fact under eighteen probably

**I.iv.00:30**

but

**Russell:**

He certainly appeared under eighteen yeah

**Albert:**

Yeah very boyish features very slim very fair skin very blonde hair beautifully maintained you know the sort of young kid who clearly I can see him in my mind's eye clearly had spent hours on his personal presentation um and I'd cruised him a bit earlier in the evening and I got very clear indications that I

**I.iv.01:00**

he wasn't interested in me though I was exceptionally interested in him um and let that be as it may he went into a cubicle with a man who's is quite tall ah very unkept [sic] hair

**Russell:**

Was this man taller than you

**Albert:**

exceptionally obese well I'm thirty-two he'd be easily easily a fifty inch waist

**Russell:**

Yeah

**Albert:**

and that would be probably gener generously tight

**Russell:**

Yeah

**Albert:**

on him um you couldn't tell the front from the back hairy gorilla sort of a monster *(he laughs a little)*

**I.iv.02:00**

and this slim little callow-faced beautiful boy and he went into a cubicle together and I just sat there and thought ya just fuckin' never can tell

**Russell:**

No you can't can you

**Albert:**

Um somewhere there was some connection that worked for both of

13

**Russell:**

Against the wall

**Albert:**

passing the time of day

**Russell:**

Right

**Albert:**

Or time of the night um and I was just absolutely astounded absolutely astounded because [unintelligible] just it was A [?] and so totally not A [?] um a friend of mine was there and I sought him out and said

**I.iv.03:30**

you know you know that little cute number that I was chasing yeah you know the monster yeah

**Russell:**

Guess what

**Albert:**

They're in a room doin' it and he went what the fuck and he articulated it as I did you never can tell

them terribly well to themselves but coming back to the thing of being well tuned um

**I.iv.05:00**

I can pick up what's going on

**Russell:**

Do you think of yourself in the sauna sorry do you experience yourself in the sauna as someone with expertise

**Albert:**

Yeah oh yes yes and there are other people with expertise who know what's going on who know who by virtue of long experience know what's going on

**I.iv.05:30**

and the regulars can sort of say when they see two people come in the door half an hour apart he will get off with him

**Russell:**

Hmm I've certainly had that experience of being at somewhere where it wasn't very heavily populated and there's somebody who seems eminently outstanding and sure enough let's say it would be ten fifteen minutes later someone else will arrive who I think yes

**Albert:**

He will get off with him

You've not been aware of that

**Albert:**

Well I've not been aware of it because I wouldn't have done it I would never be just a disembodied phallus

**I.iv.15:00**

um because of the the sense the total human-ness of the situation I mean I just when when I have sex with somebody it's all of me you may not know all of me but you're getting all of me um example that young man that I picked up this afternoon and brought home I knew he'd become data (*I laugh a little*) ah when he was in my bedroom he noticed I have a

**I.iv.15:30**

crucifix on my wall in my bedroom and he said what's that and I pointed to the crucifix and I said it's a crucifix oh why I'm a practising Catholic and sucked his cock there was a problem for him and if it continues to be a problem I'll never see him again and if it continues to be a problem

**I.iv.16:00**

I never want to see him again if it's not a problem I may in fact see him again I have no problem with that it's (*he laughs a little*) there's no disembodiment of who I am in the experience because you get all of me because I bring all with me

**Russell:**

Yeah but you can't

**Albert:**

Yeah and you know my friends will say well sisters don't fuck each other it's it's you know bad karma to fuck your sisters or your sis or your sister's husband in that (*he laughs a little*) sort of network of things um I wouldn't consciously have sex with your boyfriend now that I know who he

**I.iv.22:00**

is had I not known I may have but I don't now I do now I won't

**Russell:**

Have you met my boyfriend

**Albert:**

Yeah I've met him with you somewhere along the line

**Russell:**

Right

**Albert:**

Um I think we at least I have met him and I I can identify him from the rest of the world as it were

**Russell:**

I picked up this afternoon I told you he'd become data the boundary

**I.iv.23:00**

was that you know you don't actually get an erection in the shower at the pool you get half an erection but with great control (*I laugh a little*) structured spontaneity

**Russell:**

Yeah

**Albert:**

You maintain it all ah and you don't physically touch each other in public view so we went to the little dunny at the back of the

**I.iv.23:30**

the pool near the car park made physical contact there and then came home and we were all over all over each other that was the boundary now I'll see him say tomorrow at the pool and he'll be with people and they would never know that he and I engaged sexually because we don't want to share I don't want to share the boundary with other people unless he wants to as well

**I.iv.24:00**

you know in the sense that I could have had sex with your boyfriend and you would never know from me and say the the guy who is does have a partner that I do see occasionally I see him and his boyfriend together and his boyfriend has no idea that

**I.iv.24:30**

we do each other regularly you know little things like when I make a sexual innuendo it's always to you not to the one that I'm doing

13

had washes recently um I won't you know rim in a park because god knows where their arse has been um and my own arse for that matter I won't even offer my own arse um because it's bad practice to engage in that particular practice

**I.iv.26:30**

without having observed the the necessaries whatever the necessaries may be I'm trying to extrapolate them

**Russell:**

Yeah

**Albert:**

That may be required for that to happen you don't do you don't fist unless you've well and truly douched beforehand you don't offer someone your arse unless you well and truly douched beforehand the boy this afternoon I would have quite happily got fucked by him but I haven't douched so that was just

**I.iv.27:00**

not on in fact I said [unintelligible]

**Russell:**

Sorry I missed that

**Albert:**

In fact I said so

it because it's their ability to actually stretch and go beyond that allows the top to be powerful and one could actually ascribe that to being a traditional role for women in culture if you kind of take on you know the the you know the paradigm of male patriarchy and all that kind of stuff so it was very confused in me

**I.i.14:30**

and instinctually I did a piece based in this [...] stuff where the second project the first project referenced a lot Karmain Chan and I've always been very taken by Daniel Valerio um

**Russell:**

Can you tell me who Daniel Va

**Lydia:**

Daniel Valerio was the first famous um toddler murder from a kind of de facto relationship and the photograph of him in the paper

**I.i.15:00**

is the one that I've often referenced of this little knowing boy with the bruised eye

**Russell:**

Right

**Lydia:**

And because of the media publicity of Daniel Valerio so Karmain Chan is the the best example of the stranger danger and that kind of

and so they're things of the body the belt is the thing of everyday life which is either you wait till your father gets home you know and that that image parent chastising the child I also went to a school um in primary school I was caned on my left hand for two years by Miss F because it was the sign of the devil because I was left handed and that was only exposed um at the end of grade

**I.i.18:00**

two because she split my knuckles I um this is at a state school interstate every teacher had a set of canes there was one teacher who was very famous because they [all] had names and personalities um in my primary school room there was Child G who would always piss her pants at least once a week and would sit in a pool of urine because she wasn't allowed to clean herself

**I.i.18:30**

there was Child H who lived in constant fear and he was one of those boys who always held his dick we actually stripped Child J once and locked him naked in a press so he was discovered and humiliated um Mr K I was considered to be a rebellious girl I was constantly caned by Mr K from the grades five to seven um I took to wearing trousers and never wore dresses

**I.i.19:00**

from about ten to eleven onwards unless out of that environment because I was in my favourite yellow terry towelling mini one day and I had to go to Mr K and Mr K's speciality for caning you as a girl was to get you to bend over his desk and because your dress was short it would ride half way up your um buttocks and he would aim the cane marks directly

**I.i.19:30**

under your panty line so that when you sat it would hurt the most and

**Russell:**

But um yeah I'm not surprised that the toilets become places where people might go into one that's designated for another gender or but are you talking there at that about those toilets being used for primarily couplings between men and women

**Lydia:**

He was not explicit on that

**Russell:**

Right

**Lydia:**

I tried drawing him on that

**Russell:**

Yeah okay yeah I'm not I mean the whole place looks like you just go in there and hose it (*laugh*) ah that's the other thing

**I.ii.28:30**

that interested me I mean I've actually spoken with a couple of other women um did the thing about um I'm interested because you talked about your first awareness was of the cleaning product involved and you also told me and this immediately struck with stuck with me when you talked to told me that your mother stopped cleaning the house at the age of four what about your awareness of things like hygiene

so um the less present standards of bodily attractiveness are and so a dark place is somewhere where you're closer to a situation where anybody can have sex with anybody um and an example

**I.i.25:00**

of that (*putting on a voice*) if I can recall from my own past (*I laugh, and he returns to his usual voice*) is um ah someone who was um sort of enthusiastically engaging with me in a dark space in this case ah an upstairs room at the sauna in Melbourne which used to be jet black and no longer is or it's actually I can't remember I haven't been there for a while um

**I.i.25:30**

ah having sex with this person and then we I think I made the suggestion that we should go somewhere else but then as soon as he saw me he disengaged and left um

**Russell:**

You're absolutely confident that that was the reason for him

**I.i.26:00**

leaving that he could now see you

**Urdhvaretu:**

Um I think so yes I mean my presumption was that um he had the notion that he was having sex with you know a being of a certain kind and that he'd had some kind of um you know imagined sense and that this was disturbed by actually um ah seeing me

**I.i.26:30**

it's a supposition but the timing was pretty I mean certainly my impression was that we he left the room intending you know we we

um actually people want you to have an erection already um because and they don't want to have any part in causing you to have an erection there should be an erection there already

**I.i.40:30**

so it's just like as if um sex should be going before they even arrive and that's the kind of measure of of of hotness and any sense of arousal as something which arises between people is um is outside this way of going about things um so I suppose my my opposition is a divide between

**I.i.41:00**

um a kind of ah objectified parcelled out um version of sex and something that has a more a wider range of of ah of contact and I'll give you just a little illustration which comes (*putting on a voice*) from the beach and not from the sauna (*he returns to his usual voice*) um (*I laugh a little*) I was there not long ago and someone walked up to me

**I.i.41:30**

and I said hello or hi or something and um as soon as I did that he turned his eyes aside and nodded so um and then I said to him he nodded I kind of gave him a little narrative of what he'd just done and after that he just became uncomfortable and left um

**Russell:**

You referred to him in his presence in the third

**I.i.42:00**

person

**Urdhvaretu:**

Yes yes um

**Urdhvaretu:**

Pro proactive (*this is a question*)

**Russell:**

Yeah in the sense of

**I.i.54:30**

um inventive um you've talked about the way in which um a quality of heaviness can emerge in the sauna um ah I saw a man at Squirt in the spa um recently who just suddenly called out to called out really *loudly (I speak louder)* what are you all

**I.i.55:00**

standing around looking glum for (*Urdhvaretu laughs*) just get in here and have a good time (*I stop calling*) and it was just like magic it it everybody just thought it there was this instant agreement in the room something about not just him doing it but the moment was quite right there was this instant agreement in the room and people let go of that heaviness people were laughing and smiling

**Urdhvaretu:**

Right

**Russell:**

before they'd even taken a step there was the sense of humour

**I.i.55:30**

suddenly went through the room it was um have you ever taken on a similar kind of role not necessarily on that scale

**Russell:**

Yeah I would be too (*I laugh a little*)

**Urdhvaretu:**

Um my friend noticed someone reading in a cubicle which I thought was very nice

**Russell:**

What were they reading

**Urdhvaretu:**

Don't know

**I.i.56:30**

um and there is one man er I think I've only seen him at um Squirt at um Volcano who is very chatty and he's always standing around having conversations in the corridors and um I think it's not with people that he you know knows from any other place and I just you know notice him as a kind of cultural exception

**I.i.57:00**

and there is an amount of there is an amount of conversation there but um my overriding impression is that it's conversation between friends ah and so then it becomes a bit like conversations between friends in the street as distinct from conversation with strangers

**Russell:**

ever at a sauna was the man at the reception booth at at um Volcano and you know who was obviously the first you know I went up the stairs and there was this man there and um he was just so nice ah he was very socially awkward but I I just (*laughing a little*) laid my cards on the table and said look I've never been to a place

**I.ii.05:00**

like this before and so he said oh well you've been to beats or something like that and I said well no not really (*I laugh a little*) and so he was a bit bewildered for a moment because he suddenly realised he had the onus of explaining something to me um and he said a couple of things that were really nice probably the most significant one of which was just remember once you're inside there you don't have to do anything you don't want to which um was

**I.ii.05:30**

I thought a wonderful thing to say to someone who'd arrived and a very empowering thing and I felt fantastic because he said it I felt like I was being looked after and now I could look after myself but the thing I remember about him was when I went he had to kind of fill out some details for me and as he was doing it he kind of he seemed to be having some problem and then he said oh can you can you do it I

**I.ii.06:00**

can't hear you properly and I looked at what he'd written so far and I realised he was almost entirely illiterate and I got really moved by that there was something about him working there and I wondered whether he was just some unskilled person and that was the best he could manage or whether he really liked it there and he happened to be

**I.ii.06:30**

almost you know illiterate I don't know but he seemed to have valuable like he was so eloquent in what he said to me that it wasn't as though he was stupid I didn't ever think that for a moment so whenever I look

being looked after and now I could look after myself but the thing I remember about him was when I went he had to kind of fill out some details for me and as he was doing it he kind of he seemed to be having some problem and then he said oh can you can you do it I

**I.ii.06:00**

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**I.ii.06:30**

almost you know illiterate I don't know but he seemed to have valuable like he was so eloquent in what he said to me that it wasn't as though he was stupid I didn't ever think that for a moment so whenever I look at the staff at Volcano I can't help but remember that very very first occasion and that man who I don't think I'd recognise if I saw

**I.ii.07:00**

him now whereas the staff at Squirt are very professional (*I laugh a little*) in the sense that I find them cheerful and efficient and groomed and trained or that they they give off some aura of skill it seems

**Urdhvaretu:**

**I.ii.07:30**

I don't know they just look like waiters

**Russell:**

Well I think that of waiters I don't underestimate waiters I mean there are professional waiters I don't think they're as professional as profess

17

No

**Russell:**

or did you see it happen to someone else

**Urdhvaretu:**

I | I was watching someone

**Russell:**

How interesting because recently again I was at Squirt and um something was happening beside the spa and a man

**I.ii.23:00**

the same man who called out to everyone suddenly kind of stopped and said hey are we allowed to do this here (*we laugh*) and I was amazed to hear him he who had done all this other stuff suddenly had this sense of oh are we allowed and I'm thinking allowed you know what

**Urdhvaretu:**

Was he joking

**Russell:**

No he was he was quite concerned for a moment about about something

**Urdhvaretu:**

um I suppose I don't really think that the feel and culture of the place gets changed by rousing exhortation I mean it's very funny and good when it happens but um I think you'd have to find some other way oh you know

**I.ii.28:00**

probably I mean maybe it's the case that um many people have reasons for for wanting it to be as it is maybe they feel safer that way or

**Russell:**

You've you've clearly

**I.ii.28:30**

talked with your friend about um experiences or theories or hypotheses about saunas how often do those kinds of conversations occur for you with him

**Urdhvaretu:**

Ah it's hard to say um

**Russell:**

They've occurred

**Urdhvaretu:**

Oh a lot

the porn room was that it

**Randy:**

Um yeah I think he

**Russell:**

Or the heavy duty area

**Randy:**

Yeah he discovered the heavy duty area at Volcano and sort of went oh-kay (*I laugh a little*) and I think he would have seen I mean you would have seen guys

**II.i.48:30**

walking around too and you know he said he saw guys looking at him really strangely you know like you know like a bit more full on than he's used to and he went oh all right you know so um yeah I guess you know people what's might I think porn is probably a gay person's first experience generally of you know their sexuality

**Russell:**

Was that for you

**Randy:**

It was for me I mean people learn different ways you know be it beats

20

things

**Russell:**

Can I ask you just a bit about the man who used the equipment

**Randy:**

Okay

**Russell:**

Um (*Randy laughs a little*) was he someone who you were impressed by or attracted to

**Randy:**

Not really I didn't sort of pay much attention to him I later on I probably figured he was gay but no at at the time I just sort of thought oh is this like all I could think of was

**Russell:**

So he was incidental

**Randy:**

No he was incidental

**Russell:**

Yeah definitely ah not in Sydney that I can

**Russell:**

Can you recall an occasion like that specifically

**Randy:**

No not really not for a while

**Russell:**

You just have an awareness

**Randy:**

Yeah ah there I mean there was one guy that I was kind of quite interested in and I was cruising him for a little while but aside from that no not really I tend to notice

**II.i.51:00**

I think I was talking to you about this before but I tend to notice Asian people more because they tend to get a really strong reaction from people I um from white from you know the rest of the the predominantly what I'd associate to be white or even Mediterranean Greek Italian that tends to be the majority that I see so they get they seem to get a really strong Asian people tend to get a really strong response from them because it's like um I don't think I can quite describe

**II.i.51:30**

it

20

um

**Russell:**

But did he look sixteen

**Randy:**

No not really

**Russell:**

Yeah

**Randy:**

Yeah he looked a bit older um and he and I think I talked to you about him last time

**II.i.53:30**

too he's he came into the sauna he said he comes maybe once a month and his objective was to try it's like trying sweets in a lolly shop you know he had to try one of every kind and you know he he told me

**Russell:**

And he decided what the kinds were

**Randy:**

I decided what they were (*this is a question*)

of Volcano

**Randy:**

Okay

**Russell:**

When I say thrown out I mean that's the effect but

**Randy:**

Yeah

**Russell:**

they were actually counselling him a bit like saying look

**II.i.55:00**

you know you come back here when you're old enough you know you can get people into trouble

**Randy:**

Yeah

**Russell:**

You know whatever and clearly he'd somehow slipped through and at some point um

**20**

**Randy:**

Yeah

**Russell:**

You know whatever and clearly he'd somehow slipped through and at some point um

**Randy:**

Someone picked it up

**Russell:**

it had become clear that he was underage and they had no hesitation in removing him but also not trying to traumatise him or terrorise him

**Randy:**

Yeah

**Russell:**

but just make it clear that this was not on

**Randy:**

Yeah

they're coming from cos you know firstly you end up feeling very much I mean it's a very when you're gay it's very much you feel like you're on your own especially when you're younger

**Russell:**

Yeah

**Randy:**

you feel like oh nobody understands me and so

**II.i.56:30**

this searching for the sexual experience at a young age I completely get that and it seems so unfair that they have to wait until they're eighteen but then I've heard so many nightmare stories about you know guys who've slept with underage guys and then you know oh just real like awful stories because you know the younger guys fall in love with them he you know it was obviously just a bonk to him and blah blah blah you know and it then it ends up going into you know he raped me and all that sort of stuff and it's really so that's I can completely understand the venue's stance

**II.i.57:00**

on that

**Russell:**

And this I mean I'm very aware for instance of signage at Squirt

**Randy:**

**Russell:**

So the towel in a sense is like a law as well do you find like a dress code

**Randy:**

Yeah I I mean in many way I like it because I think a lot people judge you by the clothes you wear because it's all about tribes and you know you know is he groovy enough and all that so I like the people stripped down to a towel because that's them that's them

**II.i.60:30**

in their what they look like um whereas with when you see someone who's clothed you can't always get an idea of you know what for example I really like muscley guys so when they're clothed you can't really tell sometimes a guy might look muscley but he's not so um but then you know um and less of that playing on the fantasy too like oh he looks like rough trade like if anything you're judging him on his body type versus you know like oh you know he's wearing a flannelette shirt so he must be a blue collar worker and

**II.i.61:00**

I guess lots of that would happen I haven't experienced it but I mean I can imagine being clothed and somehow getting away with more because you know you might just you know you might just take out your penis or something and the rest of you is clothed so yeah you can be in a public situation and yet you're not completely vulnerable because people can't see all of you you know so you get away with different things in different situations but that's something I haven't experienced

haven't had a chance to go really

**Russell:**

Right um I'm going to ask you a series of questions and if you don't wanna answer them that's fine you know um because you might not want to just tell me let alone you know be anonymous going along with Salvatore what's that about

**Yianis:**

*(he laughs, then almost inaudibly)* Oh god

**Russell:**

I mean you've told me that you're  
**II.i.08:30**  
sort of seeing him you know

**Yianis:**

Yeah um

**Russell:**

But what's that about what does that mean to you

**Yianis:**

What does that mean to me um okay probable it's probably a bit

What does that mean to me um okay probable it's probably a bit muddled

**Russell:**

Yeah

**Yianis:**

Our process of getting there of thinking of how we can but um *(he begins a list)* A um we

**II.i.09:00**

don't want to be married yet and he he's just finished from a long term relationship and the one before that was me again um so while I don't have a REAL need well I never I thought I did have a need to go to the you know have sex with other people

**II.i.09:30**

I kind of do so I feel like I want to I want to involve him and and we want someone anonymous but Salvatore wants the safety of a sauna rather than a beat and although I'm a bit reluctant because

**II.i.10:00**

well he doesn't understand the difference between a beat and a sauna he just thinks one's outdoors and one's kind of legal and indoors

**Russell:**

Is that because he hasn't ever been to a sauna

**Yianis:**

**Russell:**

Right

**Yianis:**

and no matter how secretive the area is it's some kind of public ground um and that's probably the reason why you can kind of be a bit more detached and impersonal there's no reason not to engage I mean apart from yeah I mean it's it's I'm [?] caught up in being polite I guess as well polite and but at beats I don't feel like I have to be polite

**Russell:**

**II.i.14:30**

Um the first time I ever went to a sauna the man at reception I I said I spoke to him and I said this is my first time at a place like this what should I know and he just looked at me like he had this onerous task um and he was baffled and and then he said a couple of basic bits of information to me but one then he said something that

**II.i.15:00**

made me think I'd come to the right place he said don't forget above all else you don't have to do anything you don't want to and I just felt instantly happy long before I (*Yianis laughs*) you know I mean I wasn't even through the door in you know I had no idea what was going on inside but suddenly I felt like I was in control and I had control and I've never forgotten that ever since but I'm wondering do you feel that you

**II.i.15:30**

have to do things you don't want to

**Yianis:**

So we had to use it

**Russell:**

Right okay

**Yianis:**

Yeah

**Russell:**

**II.i.18:30**

*(a silence, then)* Someone um else I've interviewed talked about how one of the things for him about you know having sex when he was really enjoying it was that he was completely in the moment and then I asked him about um

**II.i.19:00**

ah about HIV issues in relation to that you know in other words being aware of safe sex practices I think it's the only time in the whole all of these interviews and conversations that I've done that and he said oh no he said I never lose sight of that he said that's like a given you know that's like a second nature and that was interesting because then what we started to tease out were a lit just

**II.i.19:30**

a little bit a sense of well what did he stay in touch with even when he was in the you know the

these interviews and conversations that I've done that and he said oh no he said I never lose sight of that he said that's like a given you know that's like a second nature and that was interesting because then what we started to tease out were a lit just

**II.i.19:30**

a little bit a sense of well what did he stay in touch with even when he was in the you know the

**Yianis:**

In the moment

**Russell:**

The heat of of something and felt he was in the moment there was still nevertheless some sense of the rest of the world he still had um ah some connection with it and was in touch with it at at almost an unconscious level but enough for it to be almost automatic for him to be still making discriminating choices

**II.i.20:00**

is it the case that for you when that cubicle door shuts that becomes difficult

**Yianis:**

Um nuh oh no not when the cubicle door shuts when we're actually kissing and you know having sex um but I don't lose sight of I mean this is me

**II.i.20:30**

being very rigid about my um rigid about the safe sex rules that I I use

Okay all right um when you you you talked a bit about um

**II.i.36:30**

the it's often been the case that the people you want don't want you

**Yianis:**

Yeah

**Russell:**

how do you know that they don't want you and it I'd like you in answering to just think of maybe a specific example you don't have to go into the example but can you give me your answer as much as possible from an example without you don't you don't have to describe it but someone where you felt

**II.i.37:00**

very confident no that person doesn't want me I want him but he doesn't want me how did I know that

**Yianis:**

They explicitly when you're following them try to dodge you and um when they're standing still and you're standing still near them they walk away um what else

**Russell:**

Well can I take those first

**II.i.37:30**

**James:**

In terms of

**Russell:**

Are you talking about like we're both sitting on a couch at the moment and there's a distance between us are you talking about personal space in that sense

**II.i.25:30**

like something I can measure with a like a ruler

**James:**

Ah yes partly partly to do with that sense of um how much and this is being actually influenced by something someone said to me recently a young guy said he was just being followed by this guy and continually touched and in the end he told him to take his hands off him and he said if you do it again I'll hit you and the guy did it again and he slapped him and ah so I guess it's that thing of like how far is that hunting principle

**II.i.26:00**

taken you know when when is the the line drawn um that's one aspect of it I the you know there's nothing very strong I mean the whole sense of it being private is the sauna environment a private situation or is it a very kind of ah expressive kind of

**II.i.26:30**

mm mm yeah see I feel like I'm repeating myself from before

**Russell:**

One one of the things that interests me about a lot of the things you've been talking about is that there's a a kind of a language running through it (*I sigh*) which is a language of space

**II.i.28:30**

a a language to do with space so you talked about people going too far crossing a line there are limits or being measured (*I laugh a little*) and when you think of your experiences that you associate with a term like private

**II.i.29:00**

what kind of um I guess what fo what form does your imagining take or that sense of your experiences take like is it a do you have a sense that that's all spatial in some way that privacy for instance you were quite concerned in the previous interview that we

**II.i.29:30**

recorded anyway um that when we were discussing the other man whose encounter you had described you you were concerned and clearly careful about um not disclosing too much information in some way about him or or the release of information was something that you were considerate you were

**II.i.30:00**

there was something considerate about him however do you also think or feel about that in some way in spatial terms like not to go too far or not to expose him put him take him from one place put him in another place or something you know it how does your imagination work around that

**II.i.30:30**

(*a silence*) or I'll ask the question in a completely different way

**James:**

**James:**

All right

**Russell:**

But there was this woman who was um just so bright

**II.i.40:00**

and energised and full of vitality and um extremely attractive too and ah she talked with me that day and then the following day she talked to me um about a conversation she'd had in the intervening night with her husband about what I was studying and she had told me that she had said to her husband that

**II.i.40:30**

something that she had said to me the previous day which was that she didn't see why they just didn't throw a lot of men in a room switch the light off and let them go for it (*James laughs a little*) and her husband had said you can't tell him that because then he's got (*I laugh a little*) nothing to research (*James laughs*) but what I felt was that she'd actually said something really interesting when she'd said that to me and her husband had been in a strange way on to it as

**II.i.41:00**

well and that is people don't just have a room and turn the light off and throw everyone into it they create these elaborate places and it's something about the room with the light off you know throwing everyone shut the door turn the light off is the kind of anarchy that you were talking about that doesn't happen in the sauna overall

**James:**

particular I found very kind of tricky in terms of what is private I don't

**II.i.51:30**

know and particularly when you're relating it to the saunas considering what happens the kind of physical intimacies that go on there so what is private

**Russell:**

Is it that you don't know it or you don't know about it because I get a sense from you that you have a sense of pri privacy other people's privacy for instance that I get a sense you respect that that you're clear for instance that that would be part of the etiquette would be that one recognises that it's important for you to recognise

**II.i.52:00**

what other people's privacy is and then ah make a decision about whether or not to respect that when you told me the story about the young man who'd been pursued you recognised in that that his privacy something private in him had been violated and it didn't seem to you unreasonable that he did hit that man

**James:**

Oh I don't know if I felt it was unreasonable or reasonable

**II.i.52:30**

I was just giving that story

**Russell:**

Right

25

**Russell:**

But how do you make that distinction

**Apollo:**

Well

**Russell:**

You may you may

**Apollo:**

There's a difference between okay a pleasant body smell of someone who's clean you know um as opposed to

**II.ii.03:30**

a body smell that comes from a guy who hasn't washed himself cleaned himself I mean I just think it's as simple as that I mean how else can you how I mean how much more of a distinction do you want me to make other than

**Russell:**

Well more how do you see you keep telling me that that's the distinction

**Apollo:**

Mm

25

**Russell:**

Right

**Apollo:**

because there was only one guy um

**Russell:**

on duty

**Apollo:**

Yeah doing and it was pretty quiet and um he was floating around from memory just doing what he was doing but I don't remember looking at him to see if he was looking but he would have probably seen what was going on ah but they weren't it wasn't full on sex like anal

**II.ii.29:00**

sex or anything it was just um it was um oral sex and it was very even ah it but it wasn't how can I say full on oral sex either it was very um relaxed casual

**Russell:**

Yeah

**Apollo:**

how does that work and it's full nudity

**Russell:**

Yes yes

**Apollo:**

So

**Russell:**

I've read about that event but I've never been

**Apollo:**

And it's quite popular from what I've at least you know maybe I was getting a biased view from the guy who works there I remember him telling me about how popular it was so you know um so they're the two (*he deals with wind*) excuse me occasions

**II.ii.31:00**

I remember of seeing guys have sex in a public area but um yeah I mean I think that the the two older guys who have who were having sex in that area where they were showing porno was I guess it makes more sense seeing guys possibly have sex there because they they were showing porno film you know whereas the other guys it was there was nothing

**Russell:**

25

**Apollo:**

by his actions

**Russell:**

What did he ac what were the actions he did

**Apollo:**

Well I was turning away right like I I was um I was ah  
II.ii.43:30  
ah

**Russell:**

Was he inviting you to penetrate him

**Apollo:**

Yeah

**Russell:**

Right

**Apollo:**

And I did right with the condom on

## **on what do I draw for this study?**

I draw on performance itself as an episteme.

Since the mid-twentieth century, performance studies has emerged as a disciplinary subset of two fields: the human sciences, with a particular emphasis on the field of structural anthropology, and cultural studies, a disciplinary formation responsive to post-structuralist critique. Queer theory has emerged along a parallel path and at times the distinction between queer theory and performance studies has become all but indiscernible.

I do not think of my work as “post-structuralist”. I’m aware of the finitude of the structuralist project and in some respects sit, then, outside it, but the structuralist project is neither complete nor redundant. It is not over, not yet. I make no claim to participating intentionally and fully in a post-structuralist moment; in fact [sic], the production of a post-structuralist thesis within a corporatised academic environment would seem to pose a potentially unresolvable contradiction in terms.

All the same, it is with intent that I interrogate the spatiality that is “structure”, to counter its sedimentary tendencies, to resist its disciplinary force. This requires further an interrogation, countering and resistance to the dominant practices of performance studies as a disciplinary field, and the basis of that interrogation, countering and resistance is performance itself. Performance, not as an *epistemology* but as an episteme.

The current project, then, is neither conceived nor designed as anthropological, ethnographic, quantitative, or some other form of sociological research but as research of and through performance. It is research conducted fundamentally within the epistemic field of performance; and it is research as performance.

Insofar as it is transdisciplinary in its techniques, it might also be described as queer (Tierney, 1997: 17, 34).

## **the thesis as theatre**

A thesis is effectively a theatre, what the Greeks called a “theatron” or “place for viewing”. It stages ideas, renders them not only visible to the spectator but also intelligible, by organising data in time and space. Walter Benjamin, in an important epistemological discussion of relations between art, ideas, and

knowledge, referred to this procedure as “constellation” (Benjamin, 1985). The term “thesis” conflates two other, identical terms: the “thesis” as, say, a written dissertation; and the “thesis” as that which is argued or demonstrated or otherwise rendered intelligible through the writing. When the terms are conflated, a congruency is fallaciously reified in which the former, rendered transparent and, consequently, invisible, overlays the latter exactly. According to this reification, successful theses (written dissertations) of, say, a uniform 90,000 words will always meet and match the representational requirements of their theses (argued ideas), so much so that in common parlance the two terms become identical. In this situation, *the thesis no longer demonstrates a thesis but becomes one*. Thesis writers, confronted by the format of the dissertation, respond artfully. They organise their material so that it fits its predetermined form. They usually work to elide the traces of their interventions or to distract attention from them. The name of this strategy, or “style”, one that presents its thesis as though *found* behind an inevitable “fourth wall” rather than *made to fit* through a fully disclosed procedure, is “naturalism”. The current project attempts to de-naturalise the production of its thesis and constellate its material so as to resist phantasmagoria.

## **closure**

At the time of writing, the project is incomplete.



theatron: offstage (the obscene)

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