Queering the Non/Human

Edited by
Noreen Giffney
and
Myra J. Hird

ASHGATE e-BOOK
QUEERING THE NON/HUMAN
Queer Interventions

Series editors:
Noreen Giffney and Michael O’Rourke
University College Dublin, Ireland

Queer Interventions is an exciting, fresh and unique new series designed to publish innovative, experimental and theoretically engaged work in the burgeoning field of queer studies.

The aim of the series is to interrogate, develop and challenge queer theory, publishing queer work which intersects with other theoretical schools and is accessible whilst valuing difficulty; empirical work which is metatheoretical in focus; ethical and political projects and most importantly work which is self-reflexive about methodological and geographical location.

The series is interdisciplinary in focus and publishes monographs and collections of essays by new and established scholars. The editors intend the series to promote and maintain high scholarly standards of research and to be attentive to queer theory’s shortcomings, silences, hegemonies and exclusions. They aim to encourage independence, creativity and experimentation: to make a queer theory that matters and to recreate it as something important; a space where new and exciting things can happen.

Forthcoming titles

Cinesexuality
Patricia MacCormack
ISBN 978 0 7546 7175 6

Gay Men and Form(s) of Contemporary US Culture
Richard Cante
ISBN 978 0 7546 7230 2

Lesbian Dames: Sapphism in Eighteenth-Century England
Edited by John Benyon and Caroline Gonda
ISBN 978 0 7546 7335 4

The Ashgate Research Companion to Queer Theory
Edited by Noreen Giffney and Michael O’Rourke
ISBN 978 0 7546 7135 0

Critical Intersex
Edited by Morgan Holmes
ISBN 978 0 7546 7311 8
Queering the Non/Human

Edited by

NOREEN GIFFNEY
University College Dublin, Ireland

MYRA J. HIRD
Queen’s University, Canada

ASHGATE
## Contents

**List of Figures**  
ix  
**Notes on Contributors**  
xi  
**Series Editor’s Preface: The Open by Michael O’Rourke**  
xxvii  
**Foreword: Companion Species, Mis-recognition, and Queer Worlding by Donna J. Haraway**  
xxxiii  
**Acknowledgements**  
xxvii  

### Introduction: Queering the Non/Human

_Noreen Giffney and Myra J. Hird_

1 How Queer Can You Go? Theory, Normality and Normativity  
_Claire Colebrook_  
17  

2 (Con)founding ‘the Human’: Incestuous Beginnings  
_Vicki Kirby_  
35  

3 Queer Apocal(o)ptic/ism: The Death Drive and the Human  
_Noreen Giffney_  
55  

4 Queering the Beast: The Antichrists’ Gay Wedding  
_Erin Runions_  
79  

5 Queering the Un/Godly: Christ’s Humanities and Medieval Sexualities  
_Robert Mills_  
111  

6 Unnatural Predators: Queer Theory Meets Environmental Studies in Bram Stoker’s _Dracula_  
_Robert Azzarello_  
137  

7 The Werewolf as Queer, the Queer as Werewolf, and Queer Werewolves  
_Phillip A. Bernhardt-House_  
159
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>The Face of a Dog: Levinasian Ethics and Human/Dog Co-evolution</td>
<td>Karalyn Kendall</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>‘I Married My Dog’: On Queer Canine Literature</td>
<td>Alice A. Kuzniar</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Animal Trans</td>
<td>Myra J. Hird</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Lessons From a Starfish</td>
<td>Eva Hayward</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Animating Revolt/Revolting Animation: Penguin Love, Doll Sex and the Spectacle of the Queer Nonhuman</td>
<td>Judith Halberstam</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>The Nanoengineering of Desire</td>
<td>Luciana Parisi</td>
<td>283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Queer Causation and the Ethics of Mattering</td>
<td>Karan Barad</td>
<td>311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Necrosexuality</td>
<td>Patricia MacCormack</td>
<td>339</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Afterword: An Unfinished Conversation About Glowing Green Bunnies</td>
<td>Jeffrey J. Cohen</td>
<td>363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Index</td>
<td></td>
<td>377</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
NG: For Nicole, I could not have survived this past year without you

MJH: To Anth, Inis and Eshe who graciously let me be part of their lives
This page intentionally left blank
## List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Two three-faced figures, on the facade of San Pietro, Tuscania, twelfth century</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Three-faced Trinity. Prayer book, late fifteenth or early sixteenth century</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>Three-faced Antichrist. <em>Bible moralisée</em>, thirteenth century</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>Sodomites tormented by demon. Scene from carved frieze, <em>c.</em> 1165–80. Lincoln Cathedral</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This page intentionally left blank
Notes on Contributors

**Robert Azzarello** is a Chancellor’s Fellow in the PhD Program in English and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York and teaches at City College. His dissertation, tentatively titled ‘Mother Nature’s Queer Creatures’, unfolds a queer environmental philosophy in American literature from Herman Melville to Djuna Barnes.

**Karen Barad** is Professor of Feminist Studies, Philosophy, and the History of Consciousness at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Her interdisciplinary research cuts across the divide between the humanities and natural sciences. Her research in physics and philosophy has been supported by the National Science Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Hughes Foundation, the Irvine Foundation, the Mellon Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities. She is the author of numerous articles on physics, feminist philosophy, philosophy of science, cultural studies of science and feminist theory. She designed and created the 3-D computer animations for the particle physics section of the CD-ROM interactive version of Stephen Hawking’s bestseller, *A Brief History of Time* (1995). Her book, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, was published by Duke University Press in 2007.

**Phillip A. Bernhardt-House** is an adjunct religious studies professor and researcher, with a doctorate in Celtic Civilisations from University College Cork, who completed a dissertation called ‘Canids in Celtic Cultures, from Celtiberia to Cú Chulainn to the Kennels of Camelot’. Originally from western Washington State in the US, Phillip attended Sarah Lawrence College (Bronxville, NY) as an undergraduate, taking a year abroad at Wadham College, Oxford University, as well as Gonzaga University (Spokane, WA) for an MA in Religious Studies, focusing on queer liberation theology. Phillip has presented internationally on subjects including mythology, queer spirituality and theology, paganism, bisexuality, BDSM, and medieval and Celtic studies, and has had poetry and articles published in *The White Crane Journal*, an autobiographical piece in *Finding the Real Me: True Tales of Sex and Gender*.
QUEERING THE NON/HUMAN


Jeffrey J. Cohen is Professor of English and Department Chair at George Washington University (Washington, DC). His books include Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages (University of Minnesota Press, 1999), Medieval Identity Machines (University of Minnesota Press, 2003), and Hybridity, Identity, and Monstrosity in Medieval Britain (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006). He is the editor of Monster Theory: Reading Culture (University of Minnesota Press, 1996); The Postcolonial Middle Ages (St Martin’s Press, 2000); (with Bonnie Wheeler), Becoming Male in the Middle Ages (Garland Publishing, 1997); (with Gail Weiss) Thinking the Limits of the Body (State University of New York Press, 2003), and a special web cluster of the journal Exemplaria on ‘Medieval Noise’.

Claire Colebrook is Professor of English Literature at the University of Edinburgh, UK. She has published on continental philosophy, feminist theory, literary theory and Romanticism. She is the author of New Literary Histories (Manchester University Press, 1997), Ethics and Representation (Edinburgh University Press, 1999), Gilles Deleuze (Routledge, 2002), Understanding Deleuze (Allen and Unwin, 2002), Irony in the Work of Philosophy (University of Nebraska Press, 2002), Gender (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), Irony: The New Critical Idiom (Routledge, 2003), Philosophy and Post-Structuralist Theory: From Kant to Deleuze (Edinburgh University Press, 2005), and Deleuze: A Guide for the Perplexed (Continuum, 2006). Her current research interests are the relationship between philosophy and literature, Romanticism and the influence of German Romanticism on literature in English. She is currently writing a book on happiness and narrative theory.

Noreen Giffney is a postdoctoral fellow in Women’s Studies, School of Social Justice at University College Dublin, Ireland. She is the co-editor of The Ashgate Research Companion to Queer Theory (Ashgate, 2008) and Twenty-First Century Lesbian Studies (Haworth Press, 2007), is the series co-editor of the ‘Queer Interventions’ book series at Ashgate Publishing and the ‘Cultural Connections: Key Thinkers and Queer Theory’ book series at the University of Wales Press, in addition to being the Humanities Book Review Editor for GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies (Duke University Press). She is the author of Queer Theory [The Key Concepts] (Berg 2009) and is currently working on a book entitled Objects of Desire: Queer Theory and Melanie Klein while co-editing The Lesbian Premodern, a collection of essays.
Judith Halberstam is Professor of English and Director of the Center for Feminist Research at the University of Southern California, USA. She is the author of *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (Duke University Press, 1995); *Female Masculinity* (Duke University Press, 1998); *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York University Press, 2005), and *The Drag King Book* (Serpent’s Tale, 1998), with Del LaGrace Volcano. She is the co-editor of *Posthuman Bodies* (Indiana University Press, 1995) and *What’s Queer About Queer Studies Now?* (Duke University Press, 2005). She is currently writing a book entitled *Dude, Where’s My Theory? Alternative Political Imaginaries and Contemporary Knowledge Production*.


Eva S. Hayward is a PhD student at the University of California, Santa Cruz. She is currently working on light diffraction patterns produced by hermaphroditic ctenophores (jellyfish) in an aquarium display. Her research interests include science studies, marine invertebrates, sex-changing and visual culture.

Myra J. Hird is Professor and Queen’s National Scholar at Queen’s University, Canada. The author of *Questioning Sociology* (edited with George Pavlich, Oxford University Press, 2006), *Sex, Gender and Science* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), *Sociology for the Asking* (edited with George Pavlich, Oxford University Press, 2003), *Engendering Violence* (Ashgate, 2002) and over forty articles and book chapters, she is currently writing *The Science of Social Relating* about evolutionary theory, and *Sociology of Science* about current developments in science studies.

Karalyn Kendall is a PhD candidate in the Department of English at Indiana University (Bloomington, IN). Her dissertation focuses on the aesthetics and ethical implications of representations of dogs and domestication in transatlantic modernist literature. She has presented several conference papers on literary and cultural representations of animals and animality. In 2006, she helped organise
QUEERING THE NON/HUMAN

‘Kindred Spirits’, an international, interdisciplinary conference on the cultural and legal status of nonhuman animals. She also teaches an undergraduate course on representations of animality, race and gender in Animal Planet programmes and other popular media. Her interest in human/animal relationships extends beyond her academic pursuits, a fact to which her rescued dog, Gatsby, and cat, Oscar, can attest. She volunteers as an adoption counsellor at the Bloomington Animal Shelter and serves as Community Outreach Coordinator for Revitalizing Animal Well-Being (RAW), a student organisation dedicated to developing innovative and inclusive approaches to animal advocacy.

Vicki Kirby teaches in the School of Social Sciences and International Relations at the University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia. She is the author of *Telling Flesh: The Substance of the Corporeal* (Routledge 1997) and *Judith Butler: Live Theory* (Continuum 2006). Her most recent articles appear in D. Olkowski and G. Weiss (eds), *Feminist Interpretations of Maurice Merleau-Ponty* (Pennsylvania State University Press) and *Configurations: Journal of Literature, Science and Technology*. She is a recipient of an Australian Research Council Discovery Grant investigating the relationship between post-structural theories of language in the humanities and the heavy reliance on linguistic textual metaphors in the sciences. She is currently completing a manuscript entitled *Quantum Anthropologies: Life at Large*.

Alice Ann Kuzniar is Professor of German at the University of North Carolina (Chapel Hill, NC), where she teaches classes, among other things, on ‘Canine Cultural Studies’ and ‘Global Queer Cinema’. She edited the volume *Outing Goethe and His Age* (Stanford University Press, 1996) and is the author of *The Queer German Cinema* (Stanford University Press, 2000). Her newest book is *Melancholia’s Dog: Reflections on Our Animal Kinship* (University of Chicago Press, 2006).

Patricia MacCormack is Senior Lecturer in Communication and Film at Anglia Ruskin University, UK. She has published extensively in the areas of the visceral dimension of cinema, corporeality, the post-human, queer theory, ethics and Continental philosophy. Not shy of controversy, MacCormack’s work fearlessly exposes the darker side of desire. She is well known for essays on sexual perversion, sadism, masochism, body modification, necrophilia, and polysexuality, which have appeared in *New Formations*, *Body and Society*, and *Theory, Culture and Society*. She is the author of *Cinesexuality* (Ashgate, 2008) and the co-editor (with Ian Buchanan) of *Schizoanalysis and Cinema* (Continuum, 2008).

Robert Mills is Senior Lecturer in English at King’s College, London, UK. His research is interdisciplinary, spanning literary studies, religious history and visual cultures. He is the author of *Suspended Animation: Pain, Pleasure and
Punishment in Medieval Culture (Reaktion, 2005), co-editor of The Monstrous Middle Ages (University of Toronto Press, 2003) and Troubled Vision: Gender, Sexuality and Sight in Medieval Text and Image (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), and has recently contributed the medieval section to Matt Cook (ed.) A Gay History of Britain (Greenwood World Publishing, 2007). He is currently working on a study of same-sex intimacy in medieval devotion.

Luciana Parisi convenes the MA in Interactive Media in the Centre for Cultural Studies at Goldsmiths, University of London, UK. Her work is concerned with the relation between science, technology and the ontogenetic dimensions of evolution in nature, culture and capitalism. Her research has also focused on the impact of biotechnologies on the concepts of the body, sex, femininity and desire. She is the author of Abstract Sex: Philosophy, Biotechnology and the Mutations of Desire (Continuum, 2004). Most recently, her interest in interactive media technologies has led her towards the study of generative or soft architecture in relation to perceptive and affective space. She is currently working on digital architecture.

Erin Runions is Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at Pomona College (Claremont, CA). Her books include How Hysterical: Identification and Resistance in the Bible and Film (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Changing Subjects: Gender, Nation and Future in Micah (Sheffield Academic Press, 2001); and (as editor with Fiona Black and Roland Beer) The Labour of Reading: Desire, Alienation and Biblical Interpretation (Scholars Press, 1999).
This page intentionally left blank
If there is something, then there are some things, lots of them, whether they be shells or eyebrows, clouds or hammers: several, many, different in number as well as quality. The profusions of nature and the profusions of technology contribute to the same sort of abundance, an abundance that isn’t an end. Foam, erase, tooth, canvas, synapse, liquid crystal, tentacle, scale, plank, spume, fingernail, hail, neutron, lymph … and so ever indefinitely on. [Jean-Luc Nancy, ‘Res Ipsa et Ultima’]

Bunnies, turtles, machines, dogs, teacups, bacteria, chickens, jellyfish, God, Christ, antichrist, ducks, vampires, pigs, werewolves, macaques, starfish, beetles, corpses, butterflies, salamanders, barnacles, cats, termites, dolls, brittlestars, monsters, cyborgs, penguins, robots … and ‘so ever indefinitely on’. These wonderful things, creatures, animals populate the pages of Myra J. Hird and Noreen Giffney’s Queering the Non/Human, a book marked simultaneously by an exuberant sense of wonder, of fullness, and by a sense that the conversation is only ever, and can only ever be, provisional, marked by temporariness, interminability, unfinishedness. In a word: open. Queering the non/human, the hybrid process so enthusiastically embarked upon by the editors and the essays gathered in these pages, in our hands, is an open one: infinitely open to and responsible for others, to other spaces, other times, other worlds, to the other (than human), to new forms of being-in-the-world. The ‘polylogue’ which unfolds (and en-folds) across these essays, as they inter- and intra-act with one another, is as Jeffrey J. Cohen points out, an ‘unfinished’ one, yet, that conversation in its very gapingness constitutes an ‘allness’, gesturing and rippling in an infinite number of directions, in an infinite number of ways.

This notion of allness is one I borrow from Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit who in their Forms of Being take up similar concerns to our authors here: questions of ethics, aesthetics, subjectivity, singularity, relationality and the co-appearance of humans and nonhuman others. They claim that the distance between subject and world is narrowed by our receptivity to, our opening-up to, if you will, the world. To be shattered by (our being in) the world is, for Bersani and Dutoit, facilitative of a creation of the world, a redesigning of it, and makes space for new relations, affective ones, between the subject and world, and among
the world’s objects. The essays in *Queering the Non/Human* similarly argue for a new way of looking at the world, a perceptive optic (albeit a diffracted one), which shatters received notions about what it is that constitutes us as human in the first place. With immense elegance the contributors trouble the binaries natural/unnatural, human/animal, living/dead, organic/inorganic, animate/inanimate, nature/culture, useful/useless (among others) and, to paraphrase the closing line of Bersani and Dutoit’s book, ‘allness, as the wholly open looking [of Giffney and Hird’s collection] teaches us, is the truest human ripeness.’

If Jean-François Lyotard once asked ‘can thought go on without a body?’, then Giffney and Hird persuade us to question whether thought can go on not without the human but without the mythic understanding of the human as foundational, natural, of the bio-anthropological as the degree zero of the human. For Giffney and Hird, thinking begins not just there with the animal, as it does for Jacques Derrida, but with all non/human others, and with the reframing of traditional forms of humanism to make way for the becoming-human of humanity, its *hominisation*. Such a theoretical claim is incredibly sustaining but also remarkably difficult for many to accept. The very givenness or monumentalisation of the human, of the vitally integral human subject, is something few, even in queer studies, will want to retreat from, let alone discard. But the courage such a theoretical, and immediately practical, gesture inspires in us, allows us to reimagine the world differently, everywhere, every day. And such a task involves many hands (one of the things which has of course for many marked us out as different from the animal) and many tools (another thing which, for Martin Heidegger particularly, makes us indicatively human), hands and tools which when used together, can bring about previously unimagined, or unimaginable, transformations, transpositions, transitions.

In Jean-Luc Nancy’s terms, we might say that queering the non/human, as a new kind of process ontology, is transimmanent. By this, Nancy means that we open ourselves to the sense of the world, are vulnerably exposed to the future, but are all singular plural, not substantial, settled, or stable subjects, but singular beings in a relational regime independent of identitarianism or anthropomorphism. Our transimmanence, or allness, a being-with towards others, all others, brings about new modes of sociability. When it comes to disciplinary subjects, *Queering the Non/Human* slides across many disciplines without substantialising them: environmental philosophy, quantum physics, neomaterialism, sociology, literary studies, feminism, medieval studies, religious studies, visual studies, environmental theory, to name just a handful. These interspecies intimacies between and across disciplines, the being-with of bodies of knowledge, is what clears a space for an openness without anticipation or prescription, for surprise, for wonder, for love, for happiness, for a world in
which our very uncertainty about what it means to be human comes to be understood as definitive of the human condition. In the laboratory of *Queering the Non/Human*, the authors nano-engineer our desire for a world recycled, a world re-encountered, in which each singular being is exposed to an existence they share with others. This wonder, which shakes all our certainties is, we might say, a queer phenomenology. In Sara Ahmed’s words, such a reorientation toward the world and its objects, such a making strange, is what ‘allows the familiar to dance again with life’. Even if humanity as finitude, being-with-toward-death, vulnerably exposes us, we are far from inert as we project ourselves into the future of queered humanity. Karen Barad’s notion of ‘agential realism’ deftly captures this queer phenomenology in so far as bodies intra-act, dynamically and causally.

Like Judith Butler’s iterability, this agential materialism, which brackets ‘things-in-phenomena’, allows for new articulations, new configurations, for what Luciana Parisi calls ‘affective relations’, a community constituted through ‘posthumanist performativity’. By evoking community here, I am drawing on the sense of the ‘coming community’ in Giorgio Agamben and the ‘inoperative community’ in Nancy, a subjectless community of people emerging with a new ethics and politics of being-with (singularity by singularity, relation by relation) one another. Such an ethico-politics (and the queering of the normativities of queer theory itself) depends upon what Agamben calls ‘the open’, a process which does not follow some preconceived teleological programme. Queering the non/human is not a means to an end but a means ‘without end’. Agamben tries to short-circuit the ‘anthropological machine’ by problematising the ways in which the human is privileged in the current hierarchisation (which also extends as the authors demonstrate to culture/nature) of man/animal. Agamben argues for openness to the other which in significant ways resembles Donna Haraway’s ‘companion species’. While the kindred spirits in her manifesto for ‘significant otherness’ are dogs and humans, Agamben argues for a broader ethics of relationships based on difference. But, what each of these thinkers share is a meditation on how modes of being-in-the-world are intimately connected to forms of material existence. If for Haraway and many of the authors collected here the question has been ‘if we have never been human, then where do we begin?’, then answers have been forthcoming in other fields: Bruno Latour’s Actor Network Theory has been at the forefront of technoscientific attention to (if not queering as such) the non-human, Bill Brown’s and Sherry Turkle’s probing of things and ‘evocative objects’ has foregrounded our intimacy with the objects we live with in generative ways, Graham Harman’s speculative realism has inaugurated a philosophy turned toward objects and consistently urged us towards a humanitarian politics attuned to objects themselves, while Quentin
Meillassoux’s non-correlationism argues that there can be no necessary relations between things in a vision of the world after finitude, a world without humans. All these very different thinkers get, one way or another and at differing angles, at the project of queering the non/human as it is variously teased out here and that is to ask what would the world be like for us if we had never been, and will never be human?

Many of the aforementioned commentators begin with Heidegger who was famously hard on animals in claiming that the animal is ‘poor in world’ while man is ‘world forming’. Agamben’s *The Open: Man and Animal* jams the workings of the anthropological machine in Western science and philosophy and claims that the caesura between man and animal produces a zone of indeterminacy and it is this state of exception which the authors here productively seize on, excavating it to ask serious questions about causation, contingency, ethics, matter, spatiality, temporality and technicity (among many others). Bernard Stiegler’s *Technics and Time* also queers the distinction between man and animal by mining the paradox between the human invention of the technical and the technical invention of the human. This productive aporia allows Stiegler to assert a somatechnicity (to borrow Nikki Sullivan’s neologism), an intertwining, or en-folding, of man and animal, of the human and the object. As with Haraway’s notion of co-evolution, there is a plasticity at work here: human and nonhuman mutually inform each other. In Stiegler’s technovitalist theory, the non-living, the inanimate, the inert are classed as having their own being, their own agential dynamism. Similarly, in *The Sense of the World* (which also reworks Heideggerian phenomenology and its anthropo-hetero-normativities), Nancy activates the word ‘opening’ in his account of the being of the world and being-in-the-world and, in the creation of the world, opening is not foundational but provisional and strategic. In their coexistence, Nancy accords both the human and nonhuman an engaged status within the formation of the world and extends Agamben’s biopolitics to questions of non-living and inert matter (one thinks here of Ahmed’s gorgeous evocation of pebbles becoming queer). Nancy dreams of an intervention, an eruption of the new, unknown and unforeseeable ‘without figure [visage]’ and the touch-in-separation of bodies that *matter*. This demand for a thinking of engaged being-in-the-world should bring into focus the ethical and political intervention which Giffney and Hird make. The ontological and ethical concerns of this book take up from Judith Butler’s discussions of livable life and grievable death, processes of dehumanisation and abjection, and who gets to count as human. Giffney and Hird urge us along with Nancy to ‘immediately and without delay … reopen every possible struggle for a world’. This call for justice in the face of global violence, war and terror, of racial, religious and economic oppressions, affirms the need to do justice to *all* others, human and
non-human alike, what John Caputo calls the ‘wholly other’, no matter how impossible, unreachable, or embryonic, that struggle for justice might be.

The cover of this book is, of course, not ‘without visage’ and Karl Grimes’s image powerfully reminds us that the foetus (or more properly the human foetus) as the originary human form is an ethico-political figure for the living and viable human subject, the foetus as life itself. Yet, Grimes rotates this foundational scene by framing, like an ultrasound, the smiling face of the dead axolotl thereby destabilising the economy of life, humanness, and sexual difference (the very axles upon which Western conceptions of the hu/man pivot). In the face of the dead foetus, we cannot help but be astonished and Grimes shows us that if we simply understand Western politics, as Agamben does, as at its root bio-political, then we necessarily exclude the nonliving, the inanimate, the inorganic, an exclusion that would have the inadvertent effect of reinstituting the biological being, the human, to a position of originality or priority. *Queering the Non/Human* does not suture across these vital differences and invites us to visualise and listen for possible future worlds, makes a ‘concerted effort to make sense of, and make space in, a world that has given up on us’. Rather than giving up, Giffney and Hird exhort us to get tangled up in re-making and re-creating a world, open ourselves to the spacing of the world, ‘bear witness’ to a world that is always to-come. With *Queering the Non/Human*, a new sense of being-in-the-world, of beings-in-the-world, is born.

Michael O’Rourke
The root meanings of ‘companion’ bring us to eat together, to breaking bread, to a classical meal *cum panis*. “To companion” ties us together in eating and pleasure, in sex and camaraderie. To companion is to consort. Comrades are political companions, *copains* of the street. Companions tie knots of many kinds outside compulsory heterosexual joints and their issue. All of the orifices of materiality are open to companions. Companions are in company; they accompany each other in their finitude and thickness. But no one should forget that ‘the company’ is also a popular name for the CIA, not to mention the moniker for the key unit of capitalist economic organisation. A company is even a (low) order of angels and, of course, a military unit. So, our classical meal *cum panis* provokes salutary indigestion as well as inescapable assimilation.

‘Species’ is no less promiscuous, but in the visual more than the gustatory register. Rooted in ‘specere’, ‘to look’ and ‘to behold’, species takes us to the image impressed on a wax tablet, to the idea impressed on a receptive mind, and to the sovereign stamped on metal coins. Referring both to the relentlessly ‘specific’ or particular and to a class of individuals with the same characteristics, species contains its own opposite in the most promising – or special – way. Species means radical difference as well as logical, classificatory kind. Debates about whether species are earthly organic entities or taxonomic conveniences are co-extensive with the discourse we call ‘biology’. The ability to interbreed reproductively is the rough and ready requirement for members of the same biological species; all those lateral gene exchangers like bacteria have never made very good species. And yet, no species is ever One; to be a species is to be constitutively a crowd, in symbiogenetic naturecultures, with no stopping point. Living piles turtles on turtles, all the way down. Species is about the dance linking kin and kind. The dance is full of syncopation and oddly jointed moves, as well as sinuous curves – snake curves that tell their own tales.
The word ‘species’ structures conservation and environmental discourses, with their ‘endangered species’ that function simultaneously to locate value and to evoke death and extinction in ways familiar in colonial representations of the always vanishing indigene. The discursive tie between the colonised, the enslaved, the non-citizen and the animal – all reduced to type, all others to rational man, and all essential to his bright constitution – is at the heart of racism and, lethally, flourishes in the entrails of humanism. Woven into that tie in all the categories is ‘woman’s’ putative self-defining responsibility to ‘the species’, as this singular and typological female is reduced to her reproductive function. Gestation, where what kin and kind need is perhaps indigestion, \( cum\ panis\). Fecund, woman lies outside the bright territory of man even as she is his conduit. That African-American men in the United States get labelled an ‘endangered species’ makes palpable the ongoing animalisation that fuels liberal and conservative racialisation alike. Species reeks of race and sex; and where and when species meet, that heritage must be untied and better knots of companion species attempted within and across differences.

Raised a Roman Catholic, I grew up knowing that the Real Presence was present under both ‘species’, the visible form of the bread and the wine. Sign and flesh, sight and food, never came apart for me again after seeing and eating that hearty meal. Secular semiotics never nourished as well or caused as much indigestion. That fact made me ready to learn that species is related to spice. A kind of atom or molecule, species is also a composition used in embalming. ‘The species’ often means the human race, unless one is attuned to science fiction, where species abound. It would be a mistake to assume much about species in advance of encounter. And any encounter worth its salt turns on responsive mis-recognition.

So, like all the important words, both ‘companion’ and ‘species’ are internally full of their multiples, even of their supposed opposites, but especially of their tripping, tropic lust for tying cat’s-cradle knots of bodies and meanings. But the terms are not just overflowing; they also link and tie. They offer attachment sites for building flourishing, finite ways of living and dying for the bumptious crowd that we terrans all are, in all our off-category kin and kind. That is why I propose the term ‘companion species’ instead of human/nonhuman or humanism and its various prefixes. Queering has the job of undoing ‘normal’ categories, and none is more critical than the human/nonhuman sorting operation. That is crucial work and play. But perhaps companion species can remind us that terran critters have never been one – or two. Tubes, membranes, orifices, organs, extensions, probes, docking sites: these are the stuff of being in material semiotic intra-action. There is no ontological starting or stopping point, neither order nor disorder, boundaries nor boundary violations. That is not a recipe.
for free-fall in abstract space, but for coming to know our obligations to each other in all their impossibility and necessity, across species and in communion. Companion species are about patterning, consequences, and the possibility of response. Living and dying on earth is tangled turtles all the way down.

I close in good company with tales of species mis-recognition and the invitation to queer, off-category, sf worlding that might better sustain terran critters’ co-flourishing. Sf is speculative fabulation, just the kind of thinking necessary to companion species. And so, I end with Ursula LeGuin’s paired stories in *Buffalo Gals and Other Animal Presences*, ‘The Wife’s Story’ and ‘Mazes’ (1988). Both stories turn on consequential and sustained mis-recognition. Both face the killing consequences of what LeGuin’s worried shewolf character in ‘The Wife’s Story’ calls ‘the man thing’s’ inability to come to grips with its all-too-normal category error, the error that denies multi-species entanglements all the way down.

In ‘The Wife’s Story’, a good husband, a good father, someone who seemed able to play and nurture, turns out to become human at the turn of the moon, dangerously and murderously human, human in the sense of not knowing its kin, human in the sense of immune from the duty to care. The lupine wife and mother smells the awful difference and knows the terrible fate in store for her canine youngsters if she does not act. She sees the betrayal in its eyes, just for a second:

That’s what I can’t forget. The look in his eyes looking at his own child … He stood up then on two legs. I saw him, I had to see him, my own dear love, turned into the hateful one … I was trembling and shaking with a growl that burst out into a crazy, awful howling. A grief howl and a terror howl and a calling howl. And the others heard it, even sleeping, and woke up … I was last, because love still bound the anger and the fear in me. I was running when I saw them pull it down. [69–71]

The asymmetrical and doubled misrecognitions and betrayals in the plot seem pretty clear to me. The one who would be normal, in a category of his own, upright and single, ended badly. Still, the righteous killing leaves a very bad taste and a very bad smell for those remaining; the pack cannot rid themselves of the taint of their necessary murder. Companion species worlds are not flourishing here; there is no saving indigestion among those who eat and are eaten together, but only an awful severing of distinct kinds.

‘Mazes’ tells the story of an off-terran critter trapped in a bizarre experimental apparatus by the alien, the one from Earth. The alien seems utterly unable to recognise the presence of the trapped one. Assuming no one is at home in the categorically Other, the alien looks only for reaction, not response. The alien is unintentionally but relentlessly cruel, seeking information and data when what
is on offer is communication and entanglement. The maze itself, which at first
seemed to the trapped one to be an invitation to intelligent exchange, turns out
to be another deadly one-way test. All the gorgeous mathematical functions that
the trapped one performed in the futile hope that the alien could learn to read
went unsolved. The entrapped one tried a ‘kind of simple version of the Ungated
Affirmation, quite adequate for the reassuring, outreaching statement I wanted
to make’ (63). That failed. Then the trapped one tried the Eighth Maluvian,
which could ‘survive the crudest performance in the poorest maze … I myself
was carried away by the power of the motions and forgot that I was a prisoner,
forgot the alien eyes watching me’ (63). To no avail. Uncomprehending, the
alien failed miserably, condemning the prisoner to knob-pushing and maze-
running labours until the end: ‘And now I have to die. No doubt it will come
in to watch me die; but it will not understand the dance I dance in dying’ (66).
The risk of recognition-in-difference was refused. For the terran alien, the off-
category remained illegible and companion species stayed out-of-bounds of the
uniquely human.

LeGuin tells a story about her two stories that gets to the heart of the
matter for companion species. She writes that readers constantly make the
same category mistake, the mistake that keeps such readers firmly and normally
human, outside the pile of turtles:

… what they [the two tales] have in common, it seems to me, is that they are
both about betrayals. They are simple but drastic reversals of the conventional,
the expected. So strong is the sway of the expected that I have learned to explain
before I read to an audience that ‘The Wife’s Story’ is not about werewolves, and
that ‘Mazes’ is not about rats. [61]

The direction of mis-recognition is what is at stake here. Queer re-worlding
depends on reorienting the human and its posts to the never-finished meal
of companion species, complete with all the acidic consequences for all the
diners.

Reference

Acknowledgements

Our thanks to Karl Grimes for his generosity in allowing us to reproduce his fantastic image, *Axolotl*, on the front cover; the contributors for their stellar chapters and patience while we brought this book to completion; Jeffrey J. Cohen and Donna J. Haraway for contributing such deliberative responses to this volume by way of an afterword and a foreword; the reviewers for their indispensable comments on previous drafts of the contributors’ work; Michael O’Rourke for his friendship and continued support; the Ashgate team for their professionalism and dedication to this project, particularly Mary Savigar, Pam Bertram and Neil Jordan; and Wendy Schuler for printing the manuscript and making certain it arrived safely in the UK.

Noreen Giffney and Myra J. Hird, October 2007

In September 2006, a series of events began to transpire that have shaken me to the very core of my being. I am forever reading descriptions of queer theory as a destabilising, subversive force that invests in fluidity by undermining certainties, challenging ontologies and enacting change wherever it appears. I have lived my life for so long without truly realising what the above words mean; however, over the past year I have come to understand all too well what they signify in the unhinging of my life from much of what I assumed had been true. I could not have survived this process without your love, Nicole. Your emotional strength, resilience and integrity have been the glue that has held me together. Without you, I would not have made it. Michael, do not think I do not know what supporting me has cost you. I value the unremitting loyalty of your friendship and the steadfastness of the compassion you have shown towards me above all else. Aoife and Gillian, your attentive ears and patient sensitivity have been vital. The fire of your tenacity fuelled my own and gave me the energy to pick myself up after each new wave hit. I could not hope for better friends. Mary G., Kathleen, Barbara, Noirin, Aintzane, Miriam, Maura, Kay, Anne H., Paula, Anne, M., Fiona, Sarah, Mary F.-E., Ailbhe, Mary L’E., Brenda, Catriona and Myra, the gentleness and respect with which you have treated me and the fierceness with which you stand by your own ideals have been an inspiration to me. Thank you all. Chris, Louise and Rosemary, this past
year has forced me to seek assistance in quarters that hitherto I would not have expected. The professionalism you countenance, the dedication to your work you exhibit and the warmth with which you have treated me throughout this process have been indispensible and much appreciated. Fittingly, considering the theme of this book, it is the humaneness of your behaviour towards me that will stay with me and for which I am most grateful.

Noreen Giffney

I thank Noreen Giffney for the inspiration for this book, as well as her friendship over the years. I also thank Neil Jordan and Mary Savigar for their support at Ashgate, and Melissa Houghtaling for her help preparing this manuscript.

Myra J. Hird

Copyright Information

Introduction

Queering the Non/Human

Noreen Giffney and Myra J. Hird

Non/Human

Allow us to direct your attention to the front cover of this book – its face if you like. What do you see? A buoyant smile and a pair of large eyes staring eagerly back at you? What affects does the appearance of such an image engender in you? Does your own mouth fashion a smile in return, for example? Is the image before you human? What critical registers are you using to determine such a response? What does the term ‘human’ and its so-called inverse, ‘nonhuman’, mean to you? How have you come upon such knowledge? What cultural resonances, in other words, inform your views? At this stage you might be wondering what queer theory has to do with all of this. It is in this moment of wondering – of wondering about wondering – that queering the non/human begins because ‘queering’, as Jeffrey J. Cohen reminds us, ‘is at its heart a process of wonder’ (2003, xxiv). The above questions are central to this book’s engagement with a range of issues regarding identification, categorisation, normativity, relationality, ethics, and practices of theorising. Two questions underpin authors’ work, namely: what might it mean to queer the non/human? By extension, what effects might such an act have on our conception of the figure of the Human; on queer theory’s relationship with such a category and its exclusions, limits and excesses; and on understandings of the ‘queer’ and ‘theory’ in queer theory?

Axolotl by Karl Grimes is an image of a dead salamander, preserved in alcohol. The image forms part of Grimes’s collection, Future Nature, a photographic and filmic compendium of animal embryos and foetuses in glass jars, originally used in scientific and medical experiments and later discovered by the artist in research collections in the Tornblad Institute in Lund, the Hubrecht Laboratory in Utrecht and the Museum für Naturkunde in Berlin. Although reproduced in Future Nature was first exhibited at 5th @ Guinness Storehouse in Dublin, Ireland in 2002. For further information about the work of Karl Grimes, see <http://www.karlgrimes.net>. See also Grimes (2007).
black and white here, Grimes employs a sumptuous array of colours to lavishly illuminate his subjects, a ‘highly colourful carnival of animals’ in his words (2006). Taking tiny specimens, Grimes transforms them into ‘larger than life’ prints set starkly against the clinical white walls of the art gallery. *Future Nature* marks the continuation of the artist’s engagement with discursive categories, such as nature, culture, science, art, temporality and the Human. Describing the exhibition as ‘both requiem and genesis’, Grimes brings together life and death in this image through his attendance to animals that are ‘constantly on the verge of becoming … yet frozen in time and death’ (2006). Relationality is tantamount for Grimes. He revitalises what have been forgotten as mere scientific remains, turning former objects into present subjects, in his ‘photographic portraiture’, inviting viewers to meditate on matters pertaining to ethics and representation (2006).

One cannot help but notice, what Grimes terms, ‘the anthropomorphic allure’ of *Axolotl* achieved ‘through details of gesture and expression’ (2006). It is almost as if the salamander is moving towards us, about to speak. Face to face as it were. ‘How can an animal look you in the face?’ Jacques Derrida asks (2002, 377). While naked he is prompted, by his cat gazing at him, to think about the place of the animal in the Western philosophical tradition, the violence of naming and what it might mean to respond as opposed to react to an animal. What then are we to make of this almost-address by a dead salamander? ‘The animal looks at us, and we are naked before it’, writes Derrida, ‘Thinking perhaps begins there’ (397). And so it begins here. Through its anthropomorphic potential, *Axolotl* moves viewers to reflect on boundaries in its challenging of binaries pertaining to nature/culture, living/dead, beautiful/grotesque, desire/disgust, subject/object, presence/absence and human/nonhuman. Is this simply putting the animal to use for the purposes of poring over the ins and outs of the Human, thus reinscribing by default the Human at the centre of this very meditation? Perhaps. Yet in its irreducible difference, *Axolotl* insists that we respond to it on its own terms – partly ascribed by Grimes certainly – but also set down by the animal voluptuously appearing before us, resplendent in its cacophony of contradictions; a signifier of the différantial relation between the Human and the nonhuman (Derrida 1973).

The use of the word ‘non/human’ in this book’s title is both deliberate and precise; deliberate in our employment of ‘non/human’ rather than ‘human/nonhuman’ and precise in our strategic placing of the slash between, as well as, making it part of ‘non’ and ‘human’. Recognising the trace of the nonhuman in

---

every figuration of the Human also means being cognisant of the exclusive and excluding economy of discourses relating to what it means to be, live, act or occupy the category of the Human (Butler 2004a, 356). This has real material effects. For every ‘livable life’ and ‘grievable death’ (Butler 2004b, xv), there are a litany of unmentionable, unassimilable Others melting into the space of the nonhuman. Other configurative prefixes – ‘in-’ and ‘sub-’ – also work here, however, ‘non-’ illustrates all too well how norms operate through, while necessitating, a relation fabricated on negation, denial, resistance and rejection. If the Human is a mobile category, its mutations are not always in the service of inclusivity (Fuss 1996). As ‘The Posthuman Manifesto’ puts it, ‘All humans are not born equal, but it is too dangerous not to pretend that they are’ (Pepperell 2003, 177). The slash, positioned as it is between and in-between simultaneously, raises the issue of ‘limits, margins, borders, and boundaries’ (Fuss 1991), but also that of instability, fluidity, reliance and vulnerability. ‘Binary logic’, according to Vicki Kirby, ‘undoes its truths even as it affirms them, so that an effective way to displace and intervene into what appears to be a repressive mono-logic is to consider its essential perversity’ (1999, 28). So while the slash opens out onto – facilitates even – explorations of literal, figural, metaphorical and material relationships, transmigrations and hybridisations between the Human and the nonhuman (Haraway 2003; Hurley 2005/2006; Mills 2003), its positioning marks out the impossibility of applying a hermetic seal to the distinction between – however temporary and shifting – what gets to count as Human and nonhuman (Haraway 2006).

There is much in this collection that can be characterised as ‘posthumanism’ in the contributors’ critiques of the exclusions prefiguring any exposition of the Human as an ontological category (Badmington 2000; Halberstam and Livingston 1995; Butler 2004c); explorations of taxonomies pertaining to species and affiliations between ‘human’ and ‘nonhuman’ animals (Haraway 2007; Kuzniar 2006; Wolfe 2003); as well as considerations of our encounters with, reliance on and thoughts about technological advancements and their impact on conceptions of the Human (Parisi 2004; Graham 2002; Kac 2007). Yet we use ‘non/human’ rather than ‘post/human’ in the title of this book. While many of our authors share an affinity with posthumanist efforts to critique normative anthropocentrism – or what Alice Kuzniar terms ‘anthronormativity’ – that prescribes and proscribes, we are wary of privileging one epistemological term over another in case we displace one ‘proper object’ (the Human, Humanism) and in the process enact a new normative paradigm (the Posthuman, Posthumanism) (Butler 1997). This is not to claim that either humanism or posthumanism are inherently normative – much critically pertinent work is done within each (Badmington 2003; Smith, Gallardo-C. and Klock, 2004; Joy and Neufeld 2007; Janicaud 2005 [2002]) – but rather to mention that too strong an investment in
Queering the Non/Human stages an encounter at the interface between the two, facilitated by the term ‘queer’ which appears in the contributors’ work variously as a noun, adjective, verb and adverb.

**Queer/ing**

Does this make queer the proper object of this collection? Perhaps. Yet it is only a proper object in so far as the contributors’ relation to it is an improper one, perversely challenging the very epistemological ground – shaky though it might be – on which it uncomfortably rests (Ahmed 2006). There is an urgency to queer, a forcefulness and an insistence on its own significance. This is partly because provisionality characterises uses of the word ‘queer’ and ambivalence marks attachments to it as an identity category, political positionality, methodological framework, or system of knowledge production. This centres on the issue of utility and the recognition that, while no term can be capacious enough to represent all those to whom it purports, it is necessary to work with what is available to us in the present moment in the pursuit of change (Butler 1993, 223–42). A spirit of critique underpins much queer theorising in addition to a respect for difference, dedication to self-reflexivity and drive towards revision (Johnson and Henderson 2005; McRuer 2006). This is facilitated by an openness to other epistemological tools, the incorporation of new insights and a commitment to forgoing ownership of the word ‘queer’ (Butler 1993, 228), or indeed becoming owned by it in the process (Giffney 2007, 206–207). This engenders an uncertain and uneasy relationship with the term ‘queer’, which comes to signify the continual unhinging of certainties and the systematic disturbing of the familiar. The ‘touch of the queer’ has uncanny – ‘disillusioning, demystifying’ – effects with queer itself becoming altered in the process of denaturalising its objects (Dinshaw 1995, 77). The unremitting emphasis in queer theoretical work on fluidity, über-inclusivity, indeterminacy, indefinability, unknowability, the preposterous, impossibility, unthinkability, unintelligibility, meaninglessness and that which is unrepresentable is an attempt to undo normative entanglements and fashion alternative imaginaries. Far from being a narcissistic exercise in abstraction, this represents a concerted effort to make sense of, and make space in, a world that has given up on us. As Donna J.
Haraway’s statement makes clear: ‘Theory is not about matters distant from the lived body; quite the opposite. Theory is anything but disembodied’ (1992, 295).

Queer is utilised in this book as a critical theory ‘to challenge and break apart conventional categories’ (Doty 1993, xv) pertaining to the ‘non/human’, including the long-standing divide between ‘nature’ and ‘culture’ (Barad 2007). Queer is employed here as a collection of methodologies to unpick binaries and reread gaps, silences and in-between spaces. It is this volume’s intention to further broaden and diversify the scope of queer; to insist as Donald E. Hall does that ‘there is no “queer theory” in the singular, only many different voices and sometimes overlapping, sometimes divergent perspectives that can loosely be called “queer theories”’ (2003, 5). If this book is concerned with queering the non/human, it is also about submitting the ‘queer’ in queerness/queering/queer theory/queer studies to examination. Despite its slipperiness, its unrelenting resistance to categorisation and practitioners’ insistence that queer is a ‘doing’ rather than a ‘being’, queer theory has been described recently as ‘a tradition that has managed somehow to have acquired a past’ (Halley and Parker 2007, 428). While there may be a reluctance to say what queer ‘is’, there are assuredly assumptions circulating about what queer ‘does’. These concern genealogies, aims, priorities, interconnections with activism and other theories and fields, and the thorny issue of who gets to decide on all of this.

This puts us in mind of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s pronouncement that ‘there are important senses in which “queer” can signify only when attached to the first person … all it takes – to make the description “queer” a true one is the impulsion to use it in the first person’ (Sedgwick 1993, 9, original emphasis). The personal, rooted as it is in subjective experience, undergirding invocations of the term ‘queer’ has consequences for how queer theory is conceptualised, because queer is nothing if not relational in its formulations. Queer functions variously for the contributors as an interpellating gesture that calls on them to resist, reclaim, invent, oppose, defy, make trouble for, open up, enrich, facilitate, disturb, produce, undermine, expose, make visible, critique, reveal, move beyond, transgress, subvert, unsettle, challenge, celebrate, interrogate, counter, provoke and rebel. These are their words. While a good many of the aforementioned terms could be collapsed into a shorter, more seemly and manageable list, we have chosen not to do this as queer is anything but seemly or manageable. This, for us, is one of the refreshing if sometimes frustrating facets of queer – practitioners’ outright refusal to form a consensus around vocabulary or rules of usage.

The term ‘postqueer’ is appearing with more frequency in the past couple of years (Noble 2006; Freccero 2007, 491), as commentators begin to think about queer theory in terms of moments, waves, phases, or stages. What is the implication of such a move (if there is one) for this volume? ‘Post’ makes us
think of prepositions such as ‘after’ (in the shadow of queer, working within the context of its presence, being haunted by it) and ‘beyond’ (transgressing queer, improving on it, submitting oneself to a developmental sequence). ‘Post’ also bears a critical relation to that which it is attached, a tactility in which queer is interrogated as an ontology in itself, scrutinised for the exclusions through which it comes into being as a discursive field.4 A queering of queer theory we might say. Looking at this last example, although it is not a descriptor that we or the authors have adopted, it might be pertinent to use the moniker ‘postqueer’ to describe what is happening in this volume. For us, queer in its interactions with other theoretical frameworks – such as feminism, psychoanalysis, critical race studies, postcolonial theory, posthumanism, deconstruction, disability studies, or crip theory to name but a few – enacts the same critical registers that a postqueer position might claim (for now) to inaugurate. This invokes Karen Barad’s notion of a “diffractive” methodological approach’ in which she reads ‘insights from … different areas of study through one another’. Like Barad, Queering the Non/Human provide[s] a transdisciplinary approach that remains rigorously attentive to important details of specialised arguments within a given field, in an effort to foster constructive engagements across (and a reworking of) disciplinary boundaries’ (2006, 25). For this reason, we have chosen to retain queer for this volume, well aware that this book emerges at a particular historical juncture and further that its chapters will provoke discussions that may well lead those who read them in exciting directions that we cannot yet bear witness to – nor would we wish to proscribe – in advance.

**Queer/in(g) the Non/Human**

In *Medieval Identity Machines*, Jeffrey J. Cohen recognises subversive potential in queer theory precisely because ‘Queer theory is undoubtedly the most radical challenge yet posed to the immutability of sexual identities.’ In spite of this, Cohen is puzzled that ‘a critical movement predicated upon the smashing of boundary should limit itself to the small contours of human form, as if the whole of the body could be contained in the porous embrace of the skin’ (2003, 40). For him, ‘The body is not human (or at least, it is not only human); neither, he insists, ‘is it inhabited by an identity or sexuality that is unique to or even contained fully within the flesh’ (41). Queering the Non/Human takes as its starting point Cohen’s challenge to the anthropocentrism and humanism that are inherent in much queer theorising. This collection

---

4 ‘Post’ as it is envisioned here bears somewhat of an affinity with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s use of ‘beside’ (2003, 8–9).
of essays is explicitly cross-disciplinary, drawing on contributions from the humanities, social sciences and natural sciences. In the first instance, this book aims to bridge the divide between the humanities (as ‘academic’) and the social and natural sciences (as ‘useful’) by drawing on analyses from all three fields that deconstruct this distinction. This volume further scrutinises claims that the social sciences are inherently social constructionist and therefore radical, while the natural sciences are marred by absolutism and by extension staid (Kirby 2001). The authors gathered together here employ, what Cohen terms, ‘a hybrid methodology’ (2003, xxiv) as they engage with disciplines as diverse as philosophy, psychoanalysis, politics, religious studies, medieval studies, art history, critical race studies, literary studies, animal studies, sociology, science studies (including quantum physics, biology and technoscience), classics, film studies, LGBT studies, phenomenology, environmental studies, feminism and gender studies, cultural studies, music and history.

From the divine (Christ) to the diabolical (antichrist), dogs to starfish, werewolves to vampires, murderous dolls to cartoons, corpses to bacteria, nanoengineering to genetics, the brittlestar to biomimesis, the incest taboo to the death drive, the chapters examine what queering the non/human might entail. While this book is designed then, not to reach a consensus, but rather to encourage a polylogue oriented towards proliferating re-workings of queer, a number of themes may be read as organising the narrative. Chapters 1, 2 and 3 can be read as a conversation about the use of theory to articulate queer promises and contradictions. Chapters 4 and 5 use religious (Christian) iconography in different ways to focus on the profound debt that heteronormativity owes to religion as a normative institution, while identifying the potential for queer resistances nestled within the contradictions inherent in those discourses. Chapters 6 through 11 all focus on the nonhuman as animal – whether the mythical (werewolves, vampires), mundane and familiar (dogs, starfish), or microscopic (bacteria). Chapter 12 extends animal queering to meditate on the inanimate in cartoon representations, ‘nature’ documentaries and dolls in the horror film. Chapters 13, 14 and 15 offer, as it were, the juxtaposition of the ‘outer limits’ yet ‘already here’ of queer through discussions of nanoengineering, ethics, and necrosexuality.

The Human, invoked as it is through a web of discourses and norms, operates not just descriptively but also prescriptively and proscriptively. Queering the Non/Human begins this interdisciplinary engagement by asking ‘What qualifies as a human, as a human subject, as human speech, as human desire?’ (Butler 2004a, 356). This volume explores how the Human acts as an umbrella signifier for a diverse amalgam of acts, identities and bodily manifestations by attending to the ‘human’ body – its constitutive elements, limits, exclusions, excesses
and borders – within a range of cultural, scientific, theoretical and historical contexts. The contributors do this by tracing ‘the exclusionary conceptions of who is normatively human’ (Butler 2004b, xv) by looking at this category within discourses of the outer limits of the Human. Vicki Kirby’s ‘(Con)founding “the Human”: Incestuous Beginnings’ is concerned to point out that most social scientific and humanities theory is based on the premise and emphasis of the ‘human’ as product and process of cultural structures (power, for instance), and that it is these structures that conceive and produce ‘bodily contours’ – that is, the actual body. In this way, uncertainty, generativity, diversity and potentiality are all located within the Cultural. Kirby interrogates the limits of the nature/culture divide by attending to the question of ‘initial conditions’ through a discussion of Judith Butler’s representation of nature and culture as discrete yet interrelated systems, in a dexterous reading of Butler’s formulation of the lesbian phallus. Kirby’s query is this: what about evidence from the natural sciences, including medicine? What might they tell us about origins that do not fit neatly into Culture?

Contributors attend to what might constitute nonhuman, posthuman, subhuman, transhuman, superhuman and inhuman perspectives, and discuss moreover how these terms intersect with and diverge from the monstrous, the Other, the abject and the barbarous (Halberstam 1995; Bildhauer and Mills 2003). In ‘Queering the Un/Godly: Christ’s Humanities and Medieval Sexualities’, Robert Mills argues – through an analysis of three-faced/headed sculptures of Christ, afterlife representations of sodomites and monsters, and the blurring of the boundaries between the human and the nonhuman in movable, mechanical icons of the divine – that these assemblages of human and nonhuman, inorganic and flesh can be seen as cyborgian, posthuman reconfigurations of the body. His chapter moreover is cleverly arranged in a tripartite structure, perversely mimicking the trifacial sculptures of Christ discussed. Mills refuses to make his visions cohere neatly in a heteronormative fashion. Instead he insists that readers engage with his chapter on its own terms and forwards not only a pluralised conception of the past but also suggests in its reading practice and presentation the potential beginnings of an écriture queer. Phillip A. Bernhardt-House’s ‘The Werewolf as Queer, the Queer as Werewolf, and Queer Werewolves’ provides an impressively wide-ranging overview of the representation of werewolves and offers an examination of this figure as a site for exploring discourses of sexuality in historical source materials through to contemporary treatments of lycanthropy in popular culture. Bernhardt-House argues that in its hybridity and transgression of species boundaries the werewolf, like the vampire, has become a signifier of queer, defying the homosexual/heterosexual dichotomy as much as it contests that of the human/nonhuman. Bernhardt-House also submits
queer theory to ‘the yellow-eyed gaze of the werewolf’ and insists that such a move ‘questions the plausibility of any overarching theory at all’.

The authors consider the status conferred on the Human as a proper object by probing the desire for the Human, the desire for recognition as Human and how desire itself becomes prefigured in the pit of heteronormativity as an extension of the Human subject narrowly conceived, that is, the Human subject as analogous to heterosexuality. This is achieved partially through the authors’ undertaking of analyses of ‘the horror of uselessness’, indeed ‘the abhorrence of all that is not useful’ that appears to pervade heteronormative understandings of the Human subject (Winnubst 2007, 85). Noreen Giffney’s ‘Queer Apocal(o)ptic/ism: The Death Drive and the Human’ is concerned with the Human as a discursive category and its ideological and material effects. She considers what queer theory, read together with posthumanism and figured through the psychoanalytic concept of the death drive, might bring to discussions of the permeability, elasticity and (im)possible redundancy of the category of the Human. While reading Lee Edelman’s No Future within the context of her neologism ‘apocal(o)ptic/ism’, Giffney argues that queer theory has always been haunted by the death drive, driven both towards its own ‘death’ and by the knowledge that it will – must – end. ‘Necrosexuality’ by Patricia MacCormack considers corpses as the in-between of human and inhuman, ‘both and neither human/nonhuman – the were that do and don’t count.’ After tracing discourses of ‘necrophilia’ as an ontological category through medical and academic writing and in popular culture, she shifts her attention to representations of what she terms ‘non-aggressive’ necrophilia in Italian horror cinema. Employing Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s Body without Organs, Deleuze’s Leibnizian fold and Guattari’s massacred body, MacCormack explores how these films’ presentation of necrophilia has the potential to challenge how we think about gender, sexuality, embodiment and ethics. MacCormack’s analysis rests ultimately on an examination of desire; of the viewer’s relation with horror through a discussion of her concept, ‘cinesexuality’, which is expressed for her ‘not in what one watches but how one is altered’. In ‘Queering the Beast: The Antichrists’ Gay Wedding’, Erin Runions critiques the apocalyptic logic that holds together homophobia in the US (in the form of denying gay marriage) with the unconscionable and dehumanising tactics of the war on terror (such as torture). She offers a nuanced analysis of the juxtaposition of desires – on the one hand a Christian apocalyptic desire for a glorious nation and people to come, and on the other hand the apocalyptic desire of terrorists or queers for the destruction, as antichrist, of the American way of life. Runions traces the rhetorical processes through which this latter desire is rendered in/human, thus further dividing the good (human godly) Christian from the bad (inhuman)
antichrist. Ultimately, she seeks a queer antichrist as a way of interrogating the normative sanctions and censures inherent in contemporary Christian discourses of temporality, family, nation and humanity.

*Queering the Non/Human* showcases important potentialities for rethinking identity, desire, subjectivity and embodiment ‘in radically different, off-center, and revealing ways’ (Burger and Kruger 2001, xiii) through a widening of the interrogative lens to question, for example, the narrowness with which sexed embodiment is determined if considered only from anthropocentric vantage points (Hird 2004; Colebrook 2000). In ‘Animal Trans’, Myra J. Hird undertakes an analysis of trans to argue that human normative sanctions rely upon an erroneous misconception of nonhuman sex dimorphism and sexuality. She insists that much queer theorising about sexuality, irrespective of its use of nonhuman behaviour evidence, effectively reinscribes the socio-cultural onto the nonhuman. She asks us to consider, instead, how we might understand trans in humans from a bacterial perspective. The word ‘queer’ becomes a facilitative metaphor for talking about affective relations between human and nonhuman animals and for thinking about the animal as a symbol for representing non-normative love and the resistance to normative hegemonies. Alice Kuzniar’s ‘‘I Married My Dog’: On Queer Canine Literature’ considers the intense intimacy between humans and their pets, which has the potential to profoundly disturb the limit of both animal and human existence; that is, what it means to exist through relations with an Other. Through an analysis of writings by Rosalyn Drexler, Margaret Ross Kemp, Michael Field, André Pieyre de Mandiargues, Jean Dutourd, J.R. Ackerley and Rebecca Brown and by focusing on the multiform ways in which the love of dogs has been employed as a code for same-sex desire, Kuzniar explores a range of issues pertaining to same-sex desire and how human/dog relations can function as a strategy to challenge, critique and subvert norms relating to sex, gender, species, desire, intimacy and love. The facilitative functions of queer are also evident in Robert Azzarello’s ‘Unnatural Predators: Queer Theory Meets Environmental Studies in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*’, which argues for queer theory as a productive site to bring together the politics of human sexuality and the politics of the ‘other-than-human world’ of environmental studies. Through a vivid and provocative analysis of Renfield’s obsession with food chains coupled with Dracula’s queer predation, he argues that this queer eroticism may be harnessed to build a queer environmental studies.

The contributors meditate on the ethical implications of discussing animals without simply anthropomorphising them in the service of a narcissistic propping-up of the Human. Through an interrogation of Emmanuel Levinas’s encounter with Bobby, a dog he comes across during his time in a concentration camp, Karalyn Kendall’s ‘The Face of a Dog: Levinasian Ethics and Human/Dog Co-
evolution’ pushes the human/animal encounter further to consider the possibilities for a queer co-evolution of the human–nonhuman. Kendall meditates not only on the complex, messy and largely unrecognised co-evolution of living organisms, but presses us to think about what kinds of ethics this co-evolution precipitates. Eva Hayward’s ‘Lessons from a Starfish’ discusses starfish morphology and ontogeny (the so-called ‘natural’) alongside Antony and the Johnsons’ song, ‘The Cripple and the Starfish’ (the supposedly ‘cultural’), to offer a ‘critical poetics’ of embodiment, trans/formation and re-generation. By emphasising relationality, tactility and enfolding, she asks us to resist anthropomorphising the starfish to think about what it might mean to be ‘not like a starfish … [but] of a starfish … not trapped in [a] body … [but] of [a] body.’ In ‘Animating Revolt/Revolting Animation: Penguin Love, Doll Sex and the Spectacle of the Queer Non-Human’, Judith Halberstam disturbs the human/nonhuman distinction through an evocative analysis of penguin love, doll sex and transbiology. She creatively conjoins three filmic genres (‘nature’ documentary, cartoon, horror film) to argue that the kind of ‘transbiology’ theorised by Donna J. Haraway and Sarah Franklin as new conceptions of the body within the ‘new technologies’ of cloning and cell regeneration, is already pre-figured in horror film and cartoon animation. While the transbiological is often absorbed into normative figurations of the Human, the heteronormative and the familial, Halberstam argues that popular culture imagines rich alternative politics of embodiment, reproduction and desire and, as such, presents a valuable avenue for queer resistance.

In their chapters, the authors also reflect on the rapidly expanding reach of technological advancements and how they impact on practices of knowing, desiring and relating. In ‘The Nanoengineering of Desire’, Luciana Parisi continues her innovative thinking on desire, sexual difference and the limits of the Human. Her discussion begins with identifying a paradox of nanoengineering: the more it purports to control the reproduction of life, the more it challenges what we understand life to be as well as our relationship with nature. Parisi argues that nanoengineering renders the organism dependent upon the inorganic in ways that eschew the Western understanding of technology defined within the Human domain; that is, created and controlled by Humans. She develops this argument through a timely analysis of the virtual-actual developed by both Henri Bergson and Gilles Deleuze. Karen Barad’s ‘Queer Causation and the Ethics of Mattering’ explores biomimicry as a springboard from which to consider the limits to which the human/nonhuman divide might be pushed. Barad skilfully interrogates the growing corporate mantra to ‘innovate through nature’, that is, to mimic nature’s own bountiful creations and innovations for human progress. With Elizabeth Wilson, Donna J. Haraway and Myra J. Hird, Barad asks us to consider embodiment and discursivity from a brittlestar perspective. Through
her well-known concept of ‘agential realism’, Barad invites us to consider bodies as neither within nor outside of the world but rather as part of the world. As such, Barad calls for an epistemology that is neither realist nor relativist, but based on the recognition of ‘the inseparability of knowing, being, and doing’. From this vantage point, Barad argues that biomimicry creates assemblages that mimic and adjust the entanglements of objects in nature that we study.

The chapters included here raise questions about received notions and uses of ‘queer’ and ‘theory’ and the relationship between the two. And so we come to the chapter that opens this collection: Claire Colebrook’s ‘How Queer Can You Go? Theory, Normality, and Normativity’, in which she distinguishes between queer critiques, queer studies and queer theory. She argues that analyses are typically unable to move beyond the act of distancing that theorising necessitates. Through a detailed exploration of Gilles Deleuze’s work on difference, Colebrook argues for a queer theory that returns to a ‘higher Platonism’; a theory ‘that identifies its orientation as essentially queer’, one which rests not simply on a ‘destabilisation or solicitation of norms, but [serves to create] differences that are no longer grounded in either the subject or generating life’. Following Colebrook, we might keep the following questions in mind while reading Queering the Non/Human. Is queer theory a theory for, about, or by queers? If queer theory is characterised by a ‘doing’, is it one of theorising on behalf of or in the service of those marked out as queer? Is queer thus a methodological extension of personal or political identifications? In this case, are we talking about queer theory or queer studies? Is a distinction helpful or are we in danger of instantiating a new binary and hierarchical relationship between the two? If we conceive of queer as an adjective or adverb that describes and propels the workings of theory, what might it mean to theorise queerly? In this instance, does queer theory entail the queering of theory? This ultimately leads our contributors to question what it means to theorise. Discussions of how we do queer theory invoke considerations of what we do with queer theory. How, in other words, does queer act on theory and how in turn is it acted upon? The association between the two is not so much an active/passive relation as an intra-active one; their enfolding an act of ‘becoming-otherwise.’ Queering the Non/Human then is not about applying queer theory to a passive non/human object awaiting change to be enacted upon it by an extraterrestrial force. This book begins rather with the conscious recognition that change is always an enfolding; an enfolding from which we as ‘agents’ are inextricable.  

5 Readers will notice that in the last couple of lines we bring together Karen Barad’s ‘agential realism’ and Claire Colebrook’s Deleuzian proclivities to produce a contradictory statement about ‘agents’ and ‘becoming-otherwise’. This is a nod to the contradictions that characterise Queering the Non/Human. Such contradictions are, in our opinion, one of this book’s major strengths.
Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Nicole Murray and Michael O’Rourke for attentively reading earlier drafts.

References


QUEERING THE NON/HUMAN

—— (2007), When Species Meet (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press).


… no ‘gay liberation movement’ is possible as long as homosexuality is caught up in a relation of exclusive disjunction with heterosexuality, a relation that ascribes them both to a common Oedipal and castrating stock, charged with ensuring only their differentiation in two noncommunicating series, instead of bringing to light their reciprocal inclusion and their transverse communication in the decoded flows of desire (included disjunctions, local connections, nomadic conjunction). [Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 350]

Consider a number of possibilities for what might count as a queer theory: the use of theory (any theory) to expose bias; the criticism of theories themselves for implicit biases; or, a redescription of theory that identifies its orientation as essentially queer. It is this last mode that I wish to pursue in this chapter, and will do so by looking at the ways in which the long-standing model of theoria as a distanced look or regard taken upon an object is intrinsically normalising. Such a model of theory as the imposition of order and judgement on chaos via a transcendent norm of logic has been identified by a number of thinkers as having its origin in Platonism. John Protevi has identified this model as hylomorphic: the ordering of chaotic matter by an external and stable system of reason (Protevi 2001). Luce Irigaray has, following Heidegger, not only criticised the notion of underlying matter (as hypokeimenon) that is then rendered intelligent through representation as subjective (for then matter becomes what it ought to be through the perceiving subject’s act of knowledge); she has also identified such a notion of theory as phallogocentric. That which is other than the self is the medium through which the self comes to know and affect itself (Irigaray 1985). Perhaps the clearest critique of this notion of theoria comes from Martin Heidegger, who argues that the original experience of the world as unfolding and disclosing itself through a time of presencing becomes covered over with the idea of ‘a’ logic which it is, eventually, the task of man to arbitrate (Heidegger 1998, 240). Rather than pursuing Heidegger’s own way beyond this
forgetting of the unfolding of Being, I wish to pursue Gilles Deleuze’s reversal of Platonism. This is not because Deleuze manages to move further beyond Plato than Heidegger – rejecting Heidegger’s calls to dwelling, caring and attending to the four-fold – but because Deleuze returns to a higher Platonism (Deleuze 1994, 265).

The reversal of Platonism, for Deleuze, is not the overcoming of a transcendent logic in favour of the primacy of lived experience, but an overturning of experience and the lived in favour of radically inhuman Ideas beyond judgement. This reversed or radical Platonism, I will argue, generates not only a new mode of theory, and a new relation between theory and sexuality, but also a new and positive notion of queerness: not as destabilisation or solicitation of norms, but as a creation of differences that are no longer grounded in either the subject or generating life. To anticipate my conclusion, this would yield different ways of thinking about practices, and different ways of thinking about sexual identities. In the case of practices, rather than examining the actions of subjects against existing regulations – are civil partnerships a reconfiguration of norms or a submission to normality? – we would look at the ways in which bodies enter into relations to produce events, events that transcend those bodies. To use Deleuze and Guattari’s phrase from Anti-Oedipus, ‘ask not what it means but how it works’: when faced with a practice try to determine its range of potentiality in the future, not its relation to the present system (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 206). In the case of sexual identities, rather than thinking of masculinity and femininity as constitutive norms to which bodies submit, we can see the ways in which bodies play with the ‘pure predicates’ of sexuality (Deleuze 1990, 186); in the case of trans-gender and trans-sexual bodies, such bodies may at one and the same time, experience their bodies as female, dress as male, and have sexual relations with partners who are similarly ‘counter-actualising’ or enjoying sexuality in its ideal and inhuman form (Deleuze 1990, 238).

If we think of normal theory as the establishment of a paradigm or norm for thinking which criticises the unthinking absurdities, illusions and stupidities of everyday thinking, then Deleuze’s theory is, or aims to be, queer in its liberation from a normative ‘image of thought’ (Deleuze 1994, 131). It does not follow, however, that such a queer theory would be a form of relativism, or the use of ‘a’ theory (Deleuze) by a group that takes itself to be the exemplification of liberatory sexual practice; on the contrary, as a radical Platonism and a commitment to taking thought beyond itself to Ideas, Deleuze presents thought with the challenge of a radical transcendentalism. Before pursuing that option I want to explore the ways in which thought approaches the queer: how can thinking, from its base of norms and recognition (or what it takes itself to be), approach the queer?
One could use theory to isolate and criticise biases and prejudices within putatively neutral positions and paradigms. Not only would there be nothing queer about theory, there would be no relation between theoretical paradigms and one's political objectives. One could criticise heterosexual or normalising assumptions from a liberal, deconstructive, communitarian or even psychoanalytic point of view. Liberalism, for example, defining itself ideally as a pure formalism devoid of any conception of the good life, would necessarily be opposed to any political or social system that discriminated against persons on the basis of some unacknowledged presupposition regarding personhood. Deconstruction could, in turn, criticise such a liberalist ideal of pure formalism by arguing that there would always be an exemplary or privileged supplement in any system that could not be rendered transparent by the system. It is possible to imagine this deconstructive orientation to metaphysics’ unthought or radically stylistic figurations as being of service to a politics that wished to expose normative and normalising conceptions of the self at the heart of figures of supposedly ‘pure thought’. While psychoanalysis from its inception bears an originally normalising bias, either by positing the Oedipus complex as the transcendental frame for the constitution of subjectivity, or the phallus as the signifier of presence, it can nevertheless be used against its own assumptions. Again, this would be possible only through a critical manoeuvre, where instead of placing a different notion of the body or subject at the heart of psychoanalysis, the queer theorist would open the genealogy of the psychic subject to permutations not recognised by the original heterosexual frame.

---

1 It was in this regard that feminists criticised the supposed pure formalism of John Rawls, who argued that subjects should imagine their ideal polity from a veil of ignorance. Such a notion of a pure subject liberated from partial attachments precludes the consideration of traditionally feminist political problems, such as childcare and childbirth: one can either, as ‘corporeal feminists’ have done, criticise the theory itself for harbouring an implicit gender bias (Diprose 1994), or one can make adjustments to the theory according to its own ideals of pure formalism (Okin 1994).

2 Figures of auto-affection, self-fathering, or mind that gives form and order to matter, have been identified by Jacques Derrida, and others, as ‘remainders’ within Western metaphysics that enable the figuration of a pure and ideal point of view. Thus ‘man’ would not be one term among others in the system but an irreducible norm from which systematicity is figured (Derrida 1981). In a more explicit use of deconstruction for gay theory Lee Edelman considered ‘homographesis’ as the general scene through which homosexuality presents itself as a series of differences to be read, but which at the same time thereby opens up sexuality in general to the problem of différence (Edelman 1994).
The second possibility for queer theorising would deploy the notion of queerness in a stronger sense, not only arguing that certain positions are narrowed by an overly normalising conception of the subject or life, but would go on to point out the ways in which the very structure of a certain notion of theory was normalising. One might contrast here, for example, the difference between Judith Butler’s early criticism of psychoanalytic Oedipalism with Deleuze and Guattari’s criticism of the Freudian subject. Butler accepts the structural premises of psychoanalysis – the constitution of the subject in relation to others, the fantasy frame of the self and the other’s body, the vicissitudes of the libido in relation to the structures of desire through which the self is constituted as human, and (most importantly) the originally subjected nature of the subject: one becomes a self only through abandonment of potentialities.

4 In *Giving an Account of Oneself* Butler does, however, distance herself from her earlier insistence on the exclusivity of subjection, and suggests other modes of relation that are not purely negative. Even so, her central criticism of Rosi Braidotti’s feminism – which is the mode of theory I will be pursuing here – is the status of the negative. I would therefore disagree with Butler’s own mapping of the relation among her own work, the work of Deleuze, psychoanalysis and Braidotti’s feminism: ‘Every time I try to write about the body, the writing ends up being about language. This is not because I think that the body is reducible to language; it is not. Language emerges from the body, constituting an emission of sorts. The body is that upon which language falters, and the body carries its own signs, its own signifiers, in ways that remain largely unconscious. Although Deleuze opposed psychoanalysis, Braidotti does not’ (Butler 2004, 198). I will contest this supposed opposition of Deleuze to psychoanalysis; Deleuze opposed the personalisation of the unconscious, favouring a more radical unconscious or ‘unthought’ that was radically inhuman and positive: the Ideas or problems through which we think, which give themselves to be thought, even if they cannot be thought: ‘schizoanalysis attains a nonfigurative and nonsymbolic unconscious, a pure abstract figural dimension’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 351). As Butler continues, ‘Psychoanalysis seems centered on the problem of lack for Deleuze, but I tend to center on the problem of negativity. One reason I have opposed Deleuze is that I find no registration of the negative in his work, and I feared he was proposing a manic defense against negativity’ (Butler 2004, 198). Even if there are modes of subjective relation that are – contra Nietzsche – not those of force and violence, there can be (for Butler) no mode of self or theory which is not constituted in relation to norms. It is precisely, though, in Butler’s (2005) critical reading of Nietzsche’s force as violence – in the sense of violence done by selves to others – that the limits of her theory lie. Another reading of Nietzsche (one pursued by Gilles Deleuze [1983] and Elizabeth Grosz [2004]) posits a positive and generating force, not as force among bodies or as force of one body over another. To say that ‘life’ begins with force is to reject the original position of bodies and terms (or even the system though which terms are distributed) – force as relations between or among bodies – and instead see force as the differential production of bodies and relations.
not allowed by the heterosexual matrix, and exists in a relation of mourning, melancholia and negativity (even if that which the self mourns is constituted after the event and fantasmatically). For Butler, then, there is nothing intrinsically normalising about psychoanalysis per se, and so a queer theorist can at one and the same time criticise and deploy Freud’s corpus. For Deleuze and Guattari, by contrast, it is that negative notion of desire and anxiety – the very structure of psychoanalysis as a theory – which remains tied to normalising notions of ‘man’ (1983, 348). For Freud it is anxiety which effects repression: the subject, faced with a world of intensity and affect, must delimit and organise the libido into a state of equilibrium or constancy. And we can see that notion of the very economy of desire in Butler’s work and its influence on queer theory, where the becoming-human of the self occurs through a process of recognition which must necessarily abandon and repress desire’s more fluid potentialities.

For Deleuze, the notion of theory that begins from the conditions for the possibility of a constituted and normative subject, is not only intrinsically bourgeois in its ideology of placing thought within a position of compromise and contradiction. It is also committed to a normalising metaphysics (Deleuze 1994, 283–84). The psychoanalytic model of a pool of energy which is then structured by attachments to desired objects – as opposed to an intensive life that harbours tendencies towards expansive and creative desires – can only produce the man of common sense and good sense. If subjects are understood as having been effected from a general and undifferentiated ‘life’, understood along the lines of nineteenth-century thermodynamics, then the relation between the queer and the normal would be entirely conventional. Were we to pursue a queer theory along these lines we would have to argue that queerness would operate as a criticism of presupposed but unavowed norms. It is because there is a heterosexual matrix that constitutes and delimits subjective possibilities that we could pay attention to those modes of performance and enactment that disturbed normative structures. Our theory would not be queer, for we might well be in agreement with the general structure of subjects being constituted through social norms and structures; the queerness would lie in the attention we paid to those supposedly failed or extrinsic modes of subjectivity, to which we may accord a privileged transgressive value. Our approach would be queer only in its difference and distinction from effected models of the subject. Such
a theory might also appear to be ‘posthuman’, for rather than beginning from the man of reason or the subject of phenomenology who synthesises given experiences into some coherent whole, we would begin from a general pool of force, life or energy that – through action or performance – constitutes subjects. Those subjects may, through misrecognition and metalepsis take themselves to be originators of the act. Theory would set itself the task of demystifying such illusions of agency, demonstrating the ways in which everything begins with performance, act and relationality – the substance or true ‘sex’ of the subject being constituted ex post facto. (I will argue, in the sections that follow that this seemingly post-human theoretical approach remains entirely subjective, and still implicated in a highly normalising ethics).

In principle, then, it would be a mistake to use the term ‘queer theory’, for what we would really be doing would be queer studies. Queer studies would be related to gay or lesbian studies, in its criticism of the assumed normality of heterosexuality, but would go beyond such identified groups to consider the fragility of identity and its excessive character in relation to what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as ‘molar politics’. Queer studies might appear to be concerned with molecular or minor forms of politics: not the contestation of paradigms from the point of view of recognisable (even if marginalised) groupings, but the interrogation of constituted subjects from the point of view of a life or desire not yet identifiable as this or that specifiable form, a ‘people to come’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 106). I would argue, though, that the true challenge of Deleuze and Guattari’s thought lies in its difference from critical models, and in its transformation of the ways in which we understand theoretical relations, and relationality in general.

The third possibility would be not simply to challenge the norms that dominate a theory – for example interrogating psychoanalysis from within by isolating its unquestioned assumption of male-female relations – but would contest just what it means to theorise. Only then would our theory be queer; it would not be the use of theory for queer politics, nor would it be an interrogation of our theoretical premises or figures regarding implicit normative and normalising assumptions. Instead we would shift the ‘image of thought’ – mind constituted as an effected point within life – to thought without an image: would it be possible to think of the emergence of qualities, potentialities or Ideas that effect an aleatory point? This would not be a position of judgement or critique, but a virtual line of sense. If life can be thought of not as substance from which predicates are then differentiated, performed or effected, but as a plane of force that allows for the creation of relatively stable points, we can think of theory as the creation of a potential which is no longer the power of this or that aspect of life (this or that body) so much as the thought of the transcendental
potentiality of life as such, life liberated from any normative image. This is why sexuality would come to the fore in the task of new thinking. If it is the case that our metaphysics – our image of what it is to think – is effected from the bodies around us, or the ways in which we ‘fold’ images around our own imagined egoism, then a radical metaphysic of transcendental empiricism would free sexuality from organised bodies. The sexual body would not be ‘a’ body constituted in a social field, but a ‘body without organs’ – all those predicates partial objects, affects and perceptions from which we are composed.

To understand how theory as such might be ‘queered’ we can distinguish between two senses of the word ‘queer’: the first would be primarily critical and would concern a difference or distinction from a constituted norm or centre. The second sense, which I wish to pursue here, concerns a critique of substance and subjectivism, and requires a reference back to what I referred to as the thermodynamic model of desire that underpins psychoanalysis and bourgeois ideology. A theory would be queer if it challenged the supposed neutrality or undifferentiated nature of life. Queerness would not concern deviation from constituted limits, nor even the acknowledgment – following deconstruction – that the condition for any constituted and repeatable identity is a structure of iteration which bears the necessary possibility of disruption. The possibility of a genuinely queer theory begins, I would argue, only when we challenge the normative image of life which underpins the Western image of theoria. Perhaps unexpectedly it is Platonism in its most radical sense which would allow us to rethink theory beyond its vitalist normativity. In order to make sense of this claim I want first to look at the ways in which the thermodynamic model of life is normalising and grounded upon an image of thought as good sense and common sense.

According to Gilles Deleuze in Difference and Repetition there is an originally violent, disruptive and impersonal potential in Plato that is immediately covered over by normative images of the thinking and theorising subject (Deleuze 1994, 244). What does it mean to theorise? If everyday thinking is directed towards constancy, recognition and efficiency, it achieves this structure through a certain synthesis of time: experience is lived as continuous, and a self is constituted as the ground for that living and open-ended continuity. Such recognition and order for experience was deemed to be possible, according to Plato, only because there existed Ideas that were beyond the lived experience of the self. Such Ideas could not be considered as concepts or categories imposed by subjects onto experience for the sake of creating coherence, and were radically impersonal and radically alien to any sense of time as a coherent and lived sequence. Within Plato’s own thought this radical nature of the Ideas is, however, immediately domesticated; for instead of considering a memory in which an Idea could
be given to thought that was not thought’s own, and that was at odds with the lived order of the world, Plato introduced a moral distinction between those experiences that truly reflected the Ideas which they actualised, and the simulated and dangerous doubles which bore a fragile and unreliable relation to the Ideas which were their pure potentiality. Deleuze’s overturning of Platonism is a return to the Idea: it is not a liberation of life from all order, distinction, difference and essence. Instead, it is a liberation of essence and distinction from the lived world. All our actual experiences that are lived as experiences of this or that identifiable and specified form need to be understood not as constructed and arbitrary impositions on an otherwise undifferentiated life, a life that is only known as lived and ordered; rather, actuality needs to be understood as the actualisation of an Idea, but the Idea does not – as it would in Plato – issue in a proper form. For the Idea is nothing other than a potentiality for difference, a difference that is given and lived as simulation of an Idea that can never be

5 In a remarkably lucid article Elisa Glick (2000) has criticised Judith Butler’s ‘linguistic idealism’ and privileging of representational politics in favour of a more Marxist interrogation of the lived practices and historical and economic contexts from which practices such as ‘drag’ emerge. Glick draws on David Harvey’s work to argue that Butler reinforces a postmodern capitalist lifestyle commodity culture in her emphasis on performativity (precisely because performance effects, rather than follows, subjectivity). Here I would like to pursue an opposite critique: Butler’s performativity is not too detached from lived experience, but too reliant on an image of life as coming into being and recognition through effected, critical and destabilising subjects. If we think of life beyond constituted bodies, as Elizabeth Grosz does in her re-reading of Darwin, Freud and Nietzsche (2004), or as Rosi Braidotti does in her notion of metamorphoses and transpositions that can be considered ecologically beyond the human (2002; 2006), then we have a new model of queer politics. We abandon the exemplary queer subject of drag and parody, to examine the abstract potentialities from which subjects are composed. Concretely, this would mean that subjects are not produced as masculine or feminine through some decisive cultural matrix (exclusive disjunction in Deleuze’s sense), but that masculinity and femininity are potentialities which can be mobilised inclusively: one can be male and female (what Deleuze refers to as inclusive disjunction: both a and not-a). This would go beyond being a socialised man dressing as a woman: for such parody would be equivocal, or playing natural being against representation. Instead, we would begin by acknowledging something like ‘becoming-woman’ that would be a potentiality for life as such, beyond women as socialised groups. Significantly both Grosz and Braidotti maintain a positive idea of sexual difference from an Irigarayan perspective which they (correctly) see as compatible with a Deleuzian impersonal vitalism. If life is not a general undifferentiated force that is then represented by ‘man’, sexual difference (becoming-woman, or understanding life beyond the image of man) opens up a new mode of relationality.
given as such: this is not because the Idea exists in some clear from that our understanding or world can never achieve. On the contrary, it is the distinctness of the Idea, its absolutely differential nature – its capacity to make differences – that means that it can only be experienced as obscure. Once something is clear – recognisable as this or that delimited and perceived object – it loses its distinction. Theory, then, is not the adjudication of this lived world according to the extent to which it properly incarnates an Idea; theory is the intuition of our lived and actual reality as simulacrum, as a becoming-clear or identifiable of an Idea. In turn, once we see the given as the actualisation of an Idea which loses its distinction by becoming-actual, we can then take the next step of theorisation which would be ‘becoming-imperceptible’: can we try to think of those movements, distinctions and potentialities which make our sensibly given world open to being sensed but which themselves – as Ideas – are only given as simulations?

How then do we move from this level of abstraction to queer theory? We can begin by going back to the thermodynamic model, which Deleuze aligns both with bourgeois ideology and good sense and common sense. If we follow the modern paradigm and argue that subjectivity is not some natural and transcendent norm but is constituted through the synthesis of relations, then we seem to have demystified all notions of a grounding normality. The subject is not the foundation of experience but is effected through experience. There would be nothing natural or insistent about the structure of the self or concepts. Indeed, each concept would be – as constituted in relation to an otherwise undifferentiated ‘life’ – an essential compromise and limitation. The subject of such an anti-metaphysical or post-foundational understanding would bear a number of features. It would, Deleuze insists, be thoroughly at home with contradiction: any constituted concept could never master or express the general life which it represents, and so one would have to deal with the essentially limited and conflictual nature of the terms and figures of our theory (Deleuze 1994, 337). Further, such a subject would be oriented towards judgement, rather than action: aware of the essentially provisional nature of our grasp of our selves and our world, we would always be compelled to consider the limitations and locatedness of our point of view, never capable of appealing to life ‘in itself’. Such a position would also be characterised by an ‘on the one hand’ and ‘on the other hand’ logic. Deprived of all foundations, norms and essences we would need to acknowledge that any decision would always preclude and belie equally justifiable possibilities.

Consider, in terms of queer theory how this logic would work. On the one hand we need to be critical of constituted identities, which might come to function as restrictive norms. On the other hand, without the tactical or strategic
adoption of such an identity we risk political invisibility and ineffectiveness. The same logic applies to all issues within queer theory: on the one hand arguments for civil partnerships seem to buy into the normative structures of middle class lifestyles and capitalist property relations; on the other hand, without such rights and entitlements we risk complete marginalisation and disempowerment. Deleuze argues that such a logic takes a partial apprehension for the absolute; always thinking within constituted, delimited and actualised terms, politics becomes a negotiation of the system, with perhaps some attempt to transgress or destabilise the system – always aware that no break from normativity in general is possible.

At first, such a logic of more or less, and of the minimal requirements of some normativity, would appear to accord with Deleuze and Guattari’s own more explicitly political statements. In *A Thousand Plateaus* they argue against an absolute deterritorialisation (while elsewhere arguing for a ‘higher’ deterritorialisation), and they also argue for the necessity of a molar politics alongside the molecular processes of becoming-woman (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 460). However, by looking at the radically Platonic model Deleuze opposes to thermodynamic and bourgeois ideology in *Difference and Repetition* we can give a more nuanced understanding of the relation between territorialisation and deterritorialisation in *A Thousand Plateaus*. The latter should not be understood as a relation between effected identities and their deviation or becoming different through time. Here we might contrast Deleuze’s own transcendental empiricism with deconstruction. According to Jacques Derrida, the condition for the possibility of any experience of a being or life as this or that ongoing and maintained being is that it be marked and lived through time as the same. This means, then, that there must be some iterable trace that marks each lived moment as a moment of this supposedly constant presence; but if this is the case then something can ‘be’ or ‘live on’ only if it has already submitted to some structure of tracing or iterability. And, as all the queer mobilisations of deconstruction have speedily noted: if an identity is effected only through a repetition through time of the same, then the condition for identity is also a condition for difference and deviation. The self is nothing other than its repeated performances, and is at once always already different from itself. There is an ‘essential’ queerness to all identity in so far as identity is effected through structures which at one and the same time make ongoing sameness possible while introducing a destabilising repetition into the marking out of that sameness. I would argue that even this most radical of models could, at a push, be understood as indebted to the late nineteenth-century understanding of life as force or energy from which identifiable terms are effected. Although Derrida (1978) has undertaken a critique of the Freudian theoretical model
and the relation between the quantity of force and constituted qualities, the dissemination of deconstruction, especially for queer theory, has resulted in the maintenance of the idea of theory as reflective and destabilising judgement in relation to differentiating systems.

Against that thermodynamic model of thinking, which Deleuze regards as an overly quiescent adoption by philosophy of scientific models, Deleuze argues for an overturning of Platonism that would pay attention to the distinct Ideas which are actualised in the seemingly clear systems within which we think and move. Life is not, Deleuze insists, a general quantity of force of energy which is then differentiated through the establishment of relations. Nor, he insists, should we take the other Bergsonian path and think of life as irreducibly different qualities which are then subjected to quantifying systems. Instead, Deleuze suggests that we consider ‘intensive quantities’. Here, intensities are not qualities that unfold in time and that are belied by quantity. For intensities are potentialities for differential relations which, when encountering other intensities, produce quantities of this or that quality. Each experienced, perceived or experienced intensity is necessarily given as a quantity of such and such a quality; what is, necessarily, covered over by this lived experience is the pure intensity from which relations are effected (Deleuze 1994, 210). It is this radically vitalist Deleuzian theory of life which, perhaps surprisingly, charts its way between the linguistic mediation or linguistic paradigm and the literalism of theories of emergence.

One way of thinking about modern theory, or metaphysics after Kant, is that we can have no knowledge of things in themselves, only as they are given through the categories of experience. The structuralist or linguistic turn, after Kant, places those categories, not in the transcendental subject but in social systems. Even though post-structuralism, especially its Derridean form, criticised the acceptance of structure without the consideration of a structure’s genesis, it was the tension between genesis and structure that dominated theory. One can only think of genesis, origins or life as it is given through structure; but any structure must have had its genesis and it is the process of the ongoing maintenance of structure which precludes any stable system. This leaves us with an ‘on the one hand’ and ‘on the other hand’ logic, and also with a judging position of the subject in relation to distanced life.

In Judith Butler, for example, we are all necessarily subjected to the heterosexual matrix or the social system of recognition. On the other hand, the condition for the maintenance of any system also destabilises and transforms that system. In terms of specific political terms and issues, we must on the one hand take part in the terrain of politics – accepting its lexicon – while at the same time acknowledging the limits of the given. There could, though, be no
appeal to that which exceeds the given. Queerness would then be understood as the destabilisation or solicitation of the normative. Theory would be queer only in so far as it attended to the conditions for normality and normativity, exposing a perturbability at the heart of all structuration.

For Deleuze, by contrast, there is no contradiction or law of exclusion between structure and genesis, and this is because of his reversed Platonism. There are Ideas, absolutely distinct potentialities from which the differentiated world is actualised. Instead of opposing structure and genesis – or the system through which the world is given, and the emergence of that system – Deleuze argues for a ‘static genesis’ (Deleuze 1990, 124). Our given world of relations, qualities, quantities, terms and predicates is dynamic, in flux and organised into relatively coherent series. Our response to such an actualised differentiated world should not be to think within a given structure while mourning our non-attainability of some ineffable ‘outside’. Instead, the idea of static genesis prompts us to think of distinct potentialities which exceed thought, but which are only given as thought. Structure is not imposed upon an undifferentiated life; rather, life as it is differentiated is the result of powers to make differences that exist eternally in a plane beyond constituted subjects. Static genesis allows us to think of a past that is impersonal and radically eternal: a potentiality for the creation of intensities, which are given to thought only in extended terms. We should see the languages, relations and structures of this world, then, not as organisations or negations/limitations of an otherwise neutral reality – where queerness would lie in the instability or perturbations of the organising system – but as actualisations of potentialities or Ideas that will be eternally repeated. Thus, for Deleuze, there is an Idea of revolution, such that we can at one and the same time think empirically of all those revolutions that have occurred within history; and the Idea of revolution, which all those instances of revolution intimate but do not exhaust. The memory or reminiscence of that Idea of revolution would take thought beyond human recognition and constituted terms to that strange virtual potentiality which at once gives itself to be thought while always violating and exceeding thought.

How might we deploy or respond to this abstract attempt to move beyond structurations of some ineffable reality to the positivity and affirmation of structure? What happens if we see the terms within which we think as actualisations of eternal Ideas? The first manoeuvre would be critical, for we can – as Deleuze did in Difference and Repetition – look at the ways in which our image of thought belies and diminishes the force of Ideas. If we think of judgement as negotiation of an arbitrary or imposed system in relation to a life that is lost, diminished or mourned then politics can only be a queering or soliciting of a terrain that will always be other than (retroactively posited) life.
If, however, we think of theory as an attempt to reinvigorate the political terrain by reference to a positive plane or ‘depth’ of problems, we open thought to a positive outside. In terms of ‘becoming-woman’, we could then think of new modes of relationality: not a world which is synthesised by man as a thinking subject, who then turns back upon his own organising systems, but a world of divergent lines of relationality, where forces intersect to produce qualities and quantities without the ground of good sense and common sense. Theory is queer, not in the sense of constant destabilisation or contradiction, but in opening itself up to problems. For Deleuze, life is neither oriented to self-maintenance and constancy, nor devoid of positivity and distinction. Instead, life takes the form of a problem. A force that encounters another force is the posing of a problem. We can think of this physically in terms of evolutionary theory, so that bodies are not passive sites for inscription but organised capacities which meet a similarly complex environment and produce relatively stable sets of terms. But this physical understanding does not, for Deleuze, provide a ground for theory. Instead, the task of theory is to take this form or Idea of difference – that we begin not with substances or subjects but potentialities for problematic relations – and create a new mode of thinking, thought liberated from the image.

I want to consider the ways in which two theorists have undertaken this challenge. Elizabeth Grosz has, in her recent work on time and evolution, argued that we can think of a ‘pure difference’ that would not be the differentiation of some prior, presupposed or posited life (Grosz 2004, 46). Such ‘pure difference’ as articulated in Grosz’s latest work can allow us to go back to her earlier positive work on embodiment, and contrast its positive and queer tendency with Judith Butler’s approach in Bodies that Matter. The key difference lies in the problematisation of the linguistic paradigm. Butler acknowledges that we cannot think of language or sociality as imposed upon life, for ‘life’ exists only as always already split from itself. Here she follows a post-structuralist notion of the signifier: not as a sign that orders reality, but as that aspect of matter which (in presenting itself as partial) creates a gap, absence, or prior real which is always given after the fact. In terms of politics, then, we are always already within subjection and mourning: at once human or recognisable only through given systems, while never fully coinciding with such systems. Queerness in Butler’s terms, as I have already suggested, can only be the effect of an explicit theorisation of the conditions for recognition: it is because one becomes human or a subject only through processes or iteration that there is also, necessarily, a failure or ‘queering’ of identity. For Grosz, by contrast, the body was never a site for iteration or inscription but always offered its own volatility (Grosz 1994). If we know and live bodies through practices and culture, culture itself
is a ‘ramification’ of a nature that is nothing other than a power of creativity (Grosz 2005). Theory is not, then, critical – operating to de-stabilise, de-mystify, or de-naturalise – but positive and affirmative: an attention to those untimely forces that will not so much persist as ongoing performances but insist. This is why, for Grosz, one can both insist upon sexual difference, without thereby submitting to some system of recognition. Sexual difference is not the relation between terms, nor a difference posited ex post facto after the gender system has produced relatively stable identities. We could think of sexual difference as an originating queerness that produces positive and creative difference in relation to natural selection. If natural selection is a theoretical postulate that explains, after the event, how randomly effected differences have survived to produce populations that have responded efficiently to the environment, sexual difference introduces an aleatory principle that disrupts life’s tendency to equilibrium, striving and self-maintenance (Grosz 2004, 66). We can see this in animal life with the production of extravagant mating calls and visual display. But Grosz makes an important point regarding human culture, where those forms of sexuality and coupling that are not oriented towards reproduction have ramifying effects that open up spaces and possibilities not accounted for by models of natural selection (Grosz 2004, 83). Indeed, the question of fitness comes to the fore once we introduce sexual selection – that is, selection not oriented towards reproduction or ongoing maintenance of the population as it recognises itself.

This question of fitness is, I would argue, a politic-metaphysical question of the utmost urgency for our time. What modes of life, what forces or selections can be affirmed? This is not the question of a decision – of how we might make or recreate ourselves – but the problem of encounters that are queer (not determined according to recognition and reproduction). Queer encounters, from a Deleuzian perspective, are not affirmations of a group of bodies who recognise themselves as other than normative, but are those in which bodies enter into relations where the mode of relation cannot be determined in advance, and where the body’s becoming is also ungrounded. Here, we pass directly from Deleuze’s transcendental empiricist motto – relations are external to terms – to micropolitics and ‘becoming-woman’. It is not the case that there is a world of uniform matter or force, governed or differentiated by a system of laws (this is neither the case physically, where interactions of matters produce distinct fields and modes of relations, nor socially, for the world we live is made up of quite distinct fields of relation that include philosophy, art and science). Nor is it the case that there are individuals who enter into relations. Rather, Deleuze begins with a differentiating ‘spatium’ that unfolds into various encounters, producing terms and relations through time (Deleuze 1994, 244).
Queer theory then has two features. First, it refuses the man of good sense and common sense who must synthesise, judge and perceive the relations of this world. Not only does such an image of thought reproduce already given terms of gender (mind ordering matter, activity organising passivity, structure giving being to non-being), it relies on equivocity, or two already decided levels of being: the force or energy of ‘life’, on the one hand, and the synthesis and organisation of that life by ‘man’ or systems on the other. Second, having refused the location or organisation in the mind of man or language we can start to think of theory in Deleuze’s sense of intuition: not as a critical destabilisation of constituted terms and systems, but as an enquiry into the emergence of terms and relations. This is why Deleuze and Guattari regarded ‘becoming-woman’ as the key to all becomings. One must escape from the image of thought of bourgeois thermodynamics: the mind as a negotiating point in a field of effected differences, outside which is the great undifferentiated (Deleuze 1994, 283-4).

There must be at least one other possibility for thinking beyond the man of reason. Sexual difference, or relations unfolding from the human that are not oriented to judgement and reproduction, would be the beginning (but not the end) of theory.

I want to conclude by thinking the practical consequences of such a notion for queer theory, now understood not as a theory that sets itself against normativity through either a recognition of another group of bodies or through a destabilisation and negation of norms. Rather the theory would set as its task the notion of the Idea as a problem: how have such relations and terms emerged, what – given effected relations – might have occurred otherwise; what are the forces of potentiality hidden in our experienced encounters? I will now turn to an iconic moment from the literary canon, Herman Melville’s *Billy Budd*, and do so through Rosi Braidotti’s concept of an ‘ethics of affirmation’, which she summarises as ‘giving what you do not have’. Such an ethic might at first appear to be at once thoroughly capitalist – speculate and project profits in virtual markets of the future – and thoroughly Kantian – we may not know our subjectivity but we can acts as if we were free. Where the ethics of affirmation becomes ecological, queer and counter-modern is in the liberation of the Idea from the lived: can we offer Ideas to thought which are not our own?

In the following scene from Melville’s *Billy Budd* Claggart perceives Billy at once as an all too desirable object and as a force that threatens his personal moral life:

---

If askance he eyed the good looks, cheery health, and frank enjoyment of young
life in Billy Budd, it was because these went along with a nature that, as Claggart
magnetically felt, had in its simplicity never willed malice or experienced the
reactionary bite of that serpent. To him, the spirit lodged within Billy, and looking
out from his welkin eyes as from windows, that ineffability it was which made the
dimple in his dyed cheek, supplied his joints, and dancing in his yellow curls made him
pre-eminently the Handsome Sailor. One person excepted, the master-at-arms was
perhaps the only man in the ship intellectually capable of adequately apprehending
the moral phenomenon presented in Billy Budd. And the insight but intensified his
passion, which assuming various secret forms within him, at times assumed that of
cynic disdain, disdain of innocence – to be nothing more than innocent! Yet in an
aesthetic way he saw the charm of it, the courageous free-and-easy temper of it, and
fain would have shared it, but he despaired of it.

With no power to annul the elemental evil in him, though readily enough he could
hide it; apprehending the good, but powerless to be it; a nature like Claggart’s,
surcharged with energy as such natures almost invariably are, what recourse is left
to it but to recoil upon itself and, like the scorpion for which the Creator alone is
responsible, act out to the end the part allotted it. [Melville 1986, 356]

One way to read such a scene would be as a representation of subjects constituted
within heterosexual normativity: in this all male environment Claggart as a figure
of authority is at once attracted to Billy’s beauty (where the beauty already tends
towards spectacular effeminacy with its ‘dyed cheek’ and ‘yellow curls’). That
very attraction is at the same time repulsive, so that Claggart must destroy what
he beholds. The isolation of such scenes in the literary canon would follow
from our attention to the ways in which desire at once presents itself within the
normative matrix, while also expressing moments of disruption, or what Alan
Sinfield (1992) has referred to as ‘faultlines’. Another mode of reading would
be not simply to read this scene – where we as readers view represented subjects
and sexualities – so much as force an encounter with the Idea of reading. If we
can read qualities as signs of some desire – see Billy as an ideal figure of male
youthful beauty – we can then see the world as composed of such signs, the
‘secret forms’ from which we are composed. In A Thousand Plateaus Deleuze
and Guattari refer to a positive, productive and feminine notion of the secret: not
the secret as that ‘gray eminence’ or hidden absolute which would be figured
by the great feminine ‘beyond’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 280) but the secret
as immanence, or the metamorphosing and transposing world whose qualities we
are. We are given in this scene, a scene of sense, a reading of reading, or what
Deleuze also referred to as ‘time in its pure state’ (Deleuze 2000, 98). Here art (as
one mode of thought among others) strives to encounter the very emergence of
relations and qualities. Billy is, as actualised, a body desired as male by another
male, destroyed for that socially prohibited line of desire. But the condition for such a series of relations – the eye of Claggart that contemplates an object that threatens his social being – is intimated when one passes beyond the moral to the aesthetic: ‘Yet in an aesthetic way he saw the charm of it’. This would approach becoming-woman, or the ‘feminine line’: qualities or predicates that are actualised but not exhausted by bodies. The task of theory would then, also, be directly political. Can we go beyond the man of good sense, common sense, negotiation and norms and intuit the qualities and the forces of qualities that diminish and compose life? Life itself would neither be that which requires the imposition of norms, nor a domain from which normativity would follow, but would be that creative, queering, divergent, and transposing power that would open up relations beyond those of the thinking or acting subject.

References

QUEERING THE NON/HUMAN


(Con)founding ‘the Human’: Incestuous Beginnings

Vicki Kirby

Keeping It All Inside

Despite the various and sometimes disparate methodologies and perspectives that jostle together under the umbrella term ‘critical theory’, there is general agreement that the properties and capacities attributed to the humanist subject, or *cogito*, aren’t all that they seem. Psychoanalytic interpretations of the subject, for example, uncover a fragile figure who is radically incapable of knowing himself; a subject who lacks the ability to remember his past without significantly reinventing it; a subject whose most personal and private desires originate elsewhere. If we accept this and concede that the subject is, indeed, an unreliable witness in the matter of her own life, then we are confronted by an extraordinary assault on our conventional assessments of political and ethical accountability: we can no longer rely on appeals to the subject’s agency, intention, reason and sense of responsibility if all these terms are now seriously qualified. The unsettling of humanist precepts is also apparent in discourse theories as well as historical and materialist accounts of the subject. There is a shared need to disarticulate the subject as an agential origin and explain the individual as a product of social and historical forces, discursive formations and cultural ‘patternments’. In sum, the individual cannot pre-exist her interpellation into social and discursive meaningfulness if she is ‘spoken’ into being by social and political frames of reference, and only *then* rendered recognisable to others, and to herself.

Things get even more curious when we include within these frames the facts of anatomy, sexual identity and the specificity of sensual pleasure and sexuality more generally, because even bodily experience will reflect historical and cultural contingencies that translate into perception and sensation. Although at first glance our anatomy and what we do with it may appear as natural facts that we hold in common with all members of our species, both post-structuralist and postmodern representations of the subject, as well as medical and empirical
evidence from anthropology and history, suggest that what constitutes pleasure and pain varies dramatically across time and space.

According to these theoretical approaches, we are unable to exit particular historical and cultural frames of reference and return to a prior moment before their institution, or even to access some external yet quite different state of life that might be contemporaneous with them. The process of subject formation, which in everyday parlance is the forging of the individual as a recognisable entity, is said to take place, indeed, to require, a bounded system of social forces. And this boundary, or bar, that marks a radical separation between the origin/Nature/the animal and a second-order system of complexity/Culture/the human, secures the difference from that primordial state of being by emphasising the absolute status of this limit and the complex evolution that has taken place since its installation. Whether we pitch our theoretical allegiances with the intellectual tradition that favours hermeneutic circles, Jacques Lacan’s bar of prohibition, Fredric Jameson’s ‘prison-house of language’, Michel Foucault’s ‘no outside of power’, or perhaps Jacques Derrida’s ‘no outside of text’, there is a common attempt in these spatial metaphors to establish a field of productive energy whose changing effects derive from their internal relations.

Not surprisingly, activists who are persuaded that things can and should be different have found this epigenetic productivity, this ongoing re-creation of identity and opportunity, immensely attractive. What is important here is that after nearly thirty years of such arguments it now seems to go without saying that this space of contestation and potential promise has been equated with the workings of Culture.¹

Given this, it is little wonder that cultural critics who are committed to these styles of thinking experience genuine unease when it comes to naturalising arguments: after all, according to most critical theories Nature is prescriptive by definition. Nature is the ineffable – that state of primordial life that precedes language and to which access is denied. And if it lacks the capacity to speak then in truth, it must be unrepresentable. Any sign of Nature, inasmuch as it is

---

¹ A long history of feminist criticism and intervention takes its leverage from this insight and elaborates the conservative investments in naturalising arguments. I am thinking here of such influential writers as Simone de Beauvoir, Diana Fuss, Jane Gallop, Elizabeth Grosz, Hélène Cixous – another fifty names and we would still be at the beginning of this list of acknowledgements. However, a different reading of the intricacies and paradoxes in these same arguments, especially those that focus on the body, can reveal an inherent conservatism within cultural constructionism. The following meditation explores this irony and suggests that the most unthinkable and yet radical assault on prejudice is to return to Nature its explanatory and constitutive powers.
a sign, will always/already be a cultural interpretation: in short, Nature as such is absent from the representations of it.

But there are problems here, the most obvious being the surreptitious return to Cartesianism and the conservative legacies that the nature/culture division implies. This recuperation is rarely remarked because the terms of its repetition have changed through a veritable sleight of hand. In what we might call the humanist version of Cartesianism, the difference between nature and culture, or body and mind, is perceived as patently apparent, a conscious determination that can be tested through reflection. Against this view, an anti-humanist Cartesianism which discovers the unconscious within the conscious, understands reflection as a hall of mirrors that deflects one’s capacity to know the difference between a fact and its interpretation – the difference between Nature proper and a representation of it. Despite their differences, which are considerable, both humanist and anti-humanist positions regard the identity of ‘the human’ as self-evident, a cultural artefact of unique complexity: thought, reflection and language are the inalienable properties and capacities of humanness for both sides of this debate. Indeed, even feminist and queer theory, for example, strive to disengage ‘otherness’ from its associations with Nature so that the recognition and legitimacy afforded ‘the human’ can be made more inclusive.

If finding ways to keep ‘the in-itself of Nature’ out of the play of significance has been a matter of ongoing vigilance, a political practice in itself, more recent shifts in intellectual attentions, coupled with quite dramatic medical and computational breakthroughs in the sciences, threaten to render the defensive reasoning in these positions increasingly irrelevant. After all, how does one explain the referential purchase of forensic investigation, genetic testing and the like, the predictive capacity of mathematical algorithms in computational programmes and so on? As cultural constructs, or models of a world that cannot in reality be that world, it is entirely unclear how such representational abstractions might be deemed to work at all.2 This is not to suggest that a critical tradition that discovers all manner of prejudices in the very models of analysis has been misguided, nor that scientific results aren’t contestable. Surely the more interesting point is to consider how cultural criticism and scientific insights can both hold true: the value of one isn’t necessarily secured by proving the error of another, any more than the determination of an error will simply erase its truth-effects.

Coupled with this question about the pragmatic purchase of scientific reference – the question of Nature at its most insistent – is the sobering evidence that the textualising of the subject and the object in the humanities is also

---

2 For an extended meditation on this question, see Kirby (2003; 2005).
underscored in scientific methodologies and their outcomes. From the study of astronomical bodies and their ‘signatures’ to the operations of the tiniest signs of life, the world appears as a body of interlocking information. And the fascinating provocation that presents itself here is that these interwoven, interacting sign systems that articulate the most intricate complexities are not just languages that are transferred between computers, people, chemical processes, biological operations and so on. In other words, these languages are not alien technologies that are acquired and exchanged between pre-existing entities – senders and receivers that communicate with each other. If the very stuff of these senders and receivers is also information, then what appears to be external and other can’t be defined against what is internal and enclosed. This sense that there is no outside of textuality/information begs the question of how an identity, of whatever sort, is individuated from the process of its emergence and ongoing re-production and maintenance.

What are we to make of the ubiquity of these textual involvements and their manifestation across all modes of knowledge, all expressions of being? Is this inversion of inside with/in outside (the humanities with the sciences, culture with nature, the ideation and abstraction of language with the manifest substance of physical reality) yet more evidence that we remain on the inside of metaphysics and epistemology, an arena whose operations define human identity and its unique ability to read, to write, to think? Or have all these terms assumed such curious dimensions that we might even consider that Nature as such might be a meta-physics, an involved mediation and re-production of itself that is essentially queer?

As the relevance of explanatory models that underline ‘culture’ as the causal force of determination is still very much alive, what I want to do in this chapter is to follow my own advice and try to re-form their terms of reference. My aim is to acknowledge the importance of cultural interventions that explain the problematic nature of identity and the perverse and hybrid forms of communication/intercourse that produce them. However, I want to argue that we do not need to circumscribe the arena of production and re-production by segregating what is properly cultural from what is then necessarily and inevitably alien, primordial and inarticulate. What I propose is not a simple reiteration of the sort of cultural constructionist arguments that remind us that what appears as Nature is better understood as the dissemblings of Culture; or its corollary, that intervention and contestation are necessarily cultural and social endeavours. Indeed, I will at least try to suggest why the strange condensations that confuse and collapse differences into the mirror-maze of an ‘always/already’ might better be described as facts of Nature.
The Queer Entanglements of Being Human

The suggestion that what has become axiomatic for cultural constructionist arguments might be inadequate to explain empirical complexity has recently been conceded by Judith Butler. Butler is well known for privileging cultural systems whose mediation and displacement of Nature proper confines it to a shadowy, unrepresentable existence. Given the increasingly awkward ramifications of this exclusion, Butler’s admission is an important one:

I think perhaps mainly in Gender Trouble I overemphasize the priority of culture over nature … At the time of Gender Trouble, now sixteen years ago, it seemed to me that there was a cultural use of ‘natural’ arguments to provide legitimacy for natural genders or natural heterosexuality. But that criticism did not take account of a nature that might be, as it were, beyond the nature/culture divide, one that is not immediately harnessed for the aims of certain kinds of cultural legitimation practices. [Butler, in Kirby 2006, 144–5]

Citing the efforts of biologist Anne Fausto-Sterling to illustrate a more even-handed approach to the nature/culture question, Butler notes the inter-activity of Fausto-Sterling’s approach and its ability to acknowledge the productive contributions that are made from both sides of the divide:

… a) biology conditions cultural life and contributes to its forms, and b) cultural life enters into the reproduction of our bodies at a biological level. My sense is that her formulation is resonant with my brief effort [in Bodies that Matter] to establish a kind of chiasmic relation between the two. After all, she also eschews forms of determinism, either cultural or biological, and yet refuses the collapse of the categories into one another. [Butler, in Kirby 2006, 145]

I want to pause and take stock of what is being claimed here as it will provide a point of departure for the rest of my argument. First, Butler assumes the presence of two quite different ‘entities’ on either side of a divide, and where she previously tried to circumscribe all discussion within the realm of the cultural, she now concedes that these two ‘systems’ do manage some form of intercourse. I use the word intercourse deliberately because however we try to think this interactive interface, this coming together, this copulating necessity that enables human being, it is nourished by our prejudices about the nature of sex, reproduction, sexual difference and sexual sameness. In the scenario described above, two separate systems come into contact to affect and transform each other, yet their respective identities are somehow ‘given’ before the interactions that affect them. If the belief in identity as something coherent and wholesome before its intercourse with ‘otherness’ is routinely contested in
feminist and queer analysis, then we are right to be suspicious of this enlarged manifestation of the same problematic.

A second point to note is that Butler installs a sort of incest taboo, a moral bar of prohibition about what will count as intercourse as well as what forms it can take, when she conflates cultural activity with political activity, and political activity with the desire to prohibit, restrict and dominate. As we see in the first citation, Nature proper, the benign nature that Fausto-Sterling’s work investigates, is rendered an acceptable force of transformation that we can include in our analyses because it is beyond (or before) the desire to use – to harness, legitimate and calculate – in other words, it doesn’t do the sorts of corrupting, calculating, instrumental things that Culture does. And it doesn’t do what culture does because culture identifies and defines the difference/distance of humanness from the animal. Of course, there are arguments that acknowledge human indebtedness or dependence on Nature – even Descartes conceded this. But what stops us from at least considering that humans are inherently natural, and not in the sense of an aggregation of one part Nature to one part Culture? What if Nature does more than speak (innocently in Butler’s configuration) – what if it also reads and writes, calculates and creates, copulates with itself in the most perverse, creative and also destructive ways? What if it is political through and through?

The task I have set myself here is to try to evoke the stickier aspects of identity formation, the gender discriminations that are articulated through the nature/culture division and the consonance of this problematic with the puzzle of relationality and intercourse more generally. But where to start? Cultural criticism has made a point of interrogating ‘initial conditions’ – those inherited logics and assumptions that authenticate certain behaviours and ways of being while denigrating others as perverse and improper. However, if we move to

3 Writers such as Bruno Latour express impatience at the postmodern privileging of culture and the resulting evacuation and erasure of nature. However, although Latour’s solution includes nature in the dispositif of power that forges a referent, he rather vigilantly maintains the difference between nature and culture. Latour does concede that nature has language, but it is confined to the capacity of speech: it seems that only humans can abstract – read, interpret and cogitate. While Latour’s speech/writing split can’t be sustained, for even speech is a mediated abstraction, Latour’s work does very often capture the puzzle and wonder of the nature/culture problematic. See especially Latour (1999; 2004).
the physical sciences and a very different field of enquiry we are confronted with an argument that finds ‘initial conditions’ within ‘final conditions’, and signs of what comes second in what must surely come first. Consistent with this, the difference between concepts (ideality) and material reality (physical objects) seems to collapse, or at least to go awry in some way that no longer makes sense. According to quantum relations, the local is a very specific manifestation of global forces whereby an ‘atom’ of information can be both here and yet everywhere at the same time. This suggests that the identity of the atom, its integrity, isn’t simply reproduced elsewhere (both here and also there); rather, the atom’s identity as an informational unit is ‘inherently’ global. The description of entities as either separate to each other or inseparable is no longer adequate to this complexity, where an entire summation (a globality) of possible and probable states renders any identity a ‘superposition’. And similarly, the temporal differences that separate past, present and future appear synchronous when thought experiments can anticipate what will have already taken place: remarkably, the results of these experiments are retrospectively actualised and empirically verifiable.4

While the complexities of scientific theory surely exceed our disciplinary expertise, it is sobering to consider that such scientific experimentation whose results have proven predictive and pragmatic efficacy, have made the appeal to an ‘absolute outside’ of anything (whether the discipline of physics, the entity of an atom, or subjective interpretation) considerably more difficult. For this reason, and in the spirit of a more meditative style of enquiry, perhaps we can at least risk the suggestion that if the quantum conflation of thesis with/in physis has general purchase then we should not read the most complex and curious aspects of post-structuralism and posthumanism as pure thesis. Counterintuitive arguments about the superposition of matter and ideation, concept and object, or the conundrum whereby one identity seems to haunt and even be another; all of the close analytical criticism that discovers systems of referral and relationality within identity/the individual; the peculiar space/time condensations that we confront in Freud’s notion of memory or nachträglichkeit (deferred action), or the ‘intra-actions’5 of Derridean différence and its counterintuitive implications

4 Experiments undertaken by Alain Aspect and more recently, Nicolus Grisin, have confirmed that non-locality is a general property of the universe. Consequently, if any ‘event’ in the universe is inseparable from another, any part inseparable from the whole, then the local is articulated through the universal and vice versa. For a helpful introduction to this field of inquiry, see Nadeau and Kafatos (2001).

5 Just as Derrida conceived the neologism différence to complicate the meaning of difference, so Karen Barad has coined the term ‘intra-action’ to evoke an involvement that is inadequately accommodated by the term, ‘interaction’. For an elaboration of this
need we assume that such insights are purely ‘cultural’ because the world itself, in its enduring insistence, simply couldn’t be that dynamically confronting to ordinary common sense?

The Incestuous Nature of Initial Conditions: Rethinking the Familiar, the Self-Same

Let’s pull this discussion back into the familiar zone of cultural analysis, bearing in mind that by ‘keeping it all inside’ we might well be working with something whose incestuous implications are considerably more involved than convention will sanction. What we will need to consider is whether this shift that places ‘cultural’ arguments inside a first-order system of differences, a sort of unified field of genesis fraught with ‘un-natural’ relations, might truthfully be described as Nature itself. Indeed, what happens to truth, to scientific reference (for this is the most enduring puzzle that discussions about Nature must address) if it is in the Nature of Nature to be political, perverse, contestatory – and to mutate accordingly?6

A good place to begin this consideration is Judith Butler’s exploration of biological reference as it informs sexual identity and sexuality.7 In ‘The Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary’ (1993), Butler ponders the puzzle of anatomy and opens with a detailed reference to Freud’s essay, ‘On Narcissism: An Introduction’, where the analyst dilates on the nature of the libido. According to Freud, the libido has a fluid and quantitative dimension, and it is through the accrual and diminution of its ‘love energy’ that the personal significance of bodily experience is registered, or felt. The movement of these excitations is likened to an economy because its forces are cathected, or invested, through fluctuating intensities across the body, as well as outwardly, into the bodies of others. Evidence of this fluctuation can be seen in the response to pain and injury.

When we think of pain we think of the body’s unmediated and most urgent reality, and yet the experience of pain shows radical variation across different cultural and social contexts, as well as marked shifts within the individual subject.8 A toothache, for example, involves pain that is physically and psychically induced, and registered accordingly. And yet the need to use a conjunction in this simple way of thinking that will also offer the humanities scholar some insight into the wonder of quantum entanglement, see Barad (2006).

6 A cluster of texts that will introduce the humanities reader to the literary, or textual nature of biology, might include Freud (1961) and Derrida’s thoughtful response to it (1985), as well as Wilson (1998).

7 A slightly revised version of the following argument appears in Kirby (2006).

8 See, for example, Morris (1991) and Greco (1998).
description of hybrid causes tends to install biology as the first, or original cause, whose effects may be modulated by cultural and subjective influence. However, the logic of this temporal two-step that separates nature from culture is increasingly confused as Freud extrapolates from the experience of toothache to other examples of libidinal self-investment, including hypochondria. In the latter instance of imaginary physical ailments, the explanatory direction from biological causes to their subjective interpretation is reversed: here, pain arises from psychical forces that manifest as biological symptoms. Noting the ‘theoretical indissolubility of physical and imaginary injury’ in Freud’s argument, Butler makes two interesting observations:

This position has consequences for determining what constitutes a body part at all, and, as we shall see, what constitutes an erotogenic body part in particular. In the essay on narcissism, hypochondria lavishes libido on a body part, but in a significant sense, that body part does not exist for consciousness prior to that investiture; indeed, that body part is delineated and becomes knowable for Freud only on the condition of that investiture. [1993, 58]

Anticipating Lacan’s argument in ‘The Mirror Stage’, Freud believed that a sense of self was acquired through the realisation of body boundaries as the child underwent a developmental separation from the (m)other. And yet the suggestion that self-discovery is provoked by the conscious experience of physical excitation or pain presents us with something of a quandary. How can consciousness be a derivative of corporeal self-discovery if it is already present at its initiation? Butler notes that ‘it is fundamentally unclear, even undecidable, whether this is a consciousness that imputes pain to the object, thereby delineating it – as is the case in hypochondria – or whether it is a pain caused by organic disease which is retrospectively registered by an attending consciousness’ (1993, 59). In this account, self-perception is not attributed to biological causes alone (assuming there could be such a thing), but to an erotogenicity that renders the idea of a particular body part coincident with the phenomenology of its perception.

The relevance of this point for the broader argument is simply stated. Whereas we might readily agree that notions, beliefs and ideas can be realised, or made physically manifest, we rarely consider how. I want to suggest that what sits behind this question’s prohibition is the possibility that the physical body – biology – conceives itself differently through myriad images, ideas and notions, such that an idea is a biological cause/effect. In other words, ‘initial conditions’ are inherently unstable and mutable, and consciousness can’t be separated out from this biological complexity.
Exploring this question of what comes first, Freud underlines the sexual nature of libidinal self-attention when he suggests that ‘the familiar prototype [Vorbild] of an organ sensitive to pain, in some way changed and yet not diseased in the ordinary sense, is that of the genital organ in a state of excitation’ (Freud, in Butler 1993, 59). Butler remarks on the attribution of masculinity in Freud’s use of the definite article, the genital organ, yet any sexual specificity vanishes when we realise that other erogenous zones can substitute for the genitals and respond similarly. The redistribution of libidinal investment from one body part to another means that while the genitals are prototypical of this variable process they do not inaugurate this chain of substitutions. As Freud explains, ‘We can decide to regard erotogenicity as a general characteristic of all organs and may then speak of an increase or decrease of it in a particular part of the body’ (Freud, in Butler 1993, 61).

The ambiguity in Freud’s clarification provides Butler with a degree of critical purchase, because if male genitals retain no ontological privilege or priority in fact or symbolic value, then there is more going on than the simple displacement of an original phallic (masculine) privilege and the transference of its erotogenicity to other body parts. Indeed, what can it mean to talk of ‘its erotogenicity’, as if the phallus is one single organ, a penis? As Butler describes it, ‘To be a property of all organs is to be a property necessary to no organ, a property defined by its very plasticity, transferability, and expropriability’ (1993, 61). And if the properties and capacities of a body part are truly contingent, acquiring recognition as a result of libidinal investiture, then ‘the phallus’ is a term for the process of investiture – for the action of delineating, identifying and eroticising. It follows from this that the identity and integrity of any one organ will always be compromised because its ‘singling out’ is a relational discrimination whose construal involves, and retains, its context. Butler’s explanation of what is going on in Freud’s example of that ‘jaw-tooth’s aching hole’ provides a helpful illustration of this congested and condensed network of referral, ‘a punctured instrument of penetration, an inverted vagina dentata, anus, mouth, orifice in general, the spectre of the penetrating instrument penetrated’. Even the tooth’s identity is ambivalent, as ‘that which bites, cuts, breaks through, and enters’ and yet, ‘that which is itself already entered, broken into’ (Butler 1993, 61).

But why should libidinal transfer be described in terms of paternity? Through a sliding metonymy of references that presumes the identities it is trying to explain, Freud conflates the generative power of the phallus with the male organ. As we have seen, the phallus is more accurately understood as a productive process of delineation through which entities/body parts emerge into identifiable significance. When this transformative dynamism is arrested and
likened to a thing-like property however, man appears to have the phallus, just as woman appears to be this erotic and valued object.

With such considerations in mind, we can appreciate why Butler’s reflections on the lesbian phallus are provocative. Is it really a failed copy of a male original, a substitute for woman’s bodily lack and its corollary – the sexual incapacity of the lesbian? Freud’s own conviction about the nature of libidinal energy thwarts an explanatory return to a single origin because the libido is a field of energy whose uneven distribution throughout the body motors the infant’s self-discovery. Of course, the notion of ‘self’ in this description is somewhat premature because the infant’s self-recognition as a bounded individual among many has yet to take place: prior to this, the plenum of the world is self-same with the child.9 And here we need another qualification and one we will have good reason to return to, for the infant’s apparent coincidence with the world need not imply an homogenised unity, or undifferentiated plenitude before the cut of difference (culture/language/individuation). It is important to appreciate that this originary ‘self-same’ is a congested and entangled scene of non-coincidence and referral. In other words, the differentiation that the infant perceives remains overwhelming because its complexity has yet to be ‘properly’ interpreted and apportioned a meaningful place. Because he sees the infant as inherently fragmented at first, and therefore fractured and certainly ‘multiple’ in what might be described as its primordial identifications, attachments and desirings (because the other is [also] itself), Freud described human sexuality as constitutionally bisexual and polymorphously perverse. Although Freud doesn’t provide an exact explanation of bisexuality and questions its meaning and implications throughout his life, it is clear that the difference between masculine and feminine, or male and female, is so muddled by the notion that the binary co-ordinates of sexual difference can’t explain the term.10 For this reason, rather than think of bisexuality in ways that already presume identity (for example, male plus female), it might be more useful to consider bisexuality as the splitting of desire that renders all identity incoherent and perverse from the start: deprived of a single origin, a unified identity, intention, or goal, the teleological notion of sexuality that segregates

---

9 Elizabeth Wilson informs me that some psychoanalysts, building on recent evidence in infant development, contend there is some kind of primordial, or proto-self much earlier than Lacan’s mirror-stage. To cite her comments: ‘What makes these recent developments interesting, from the point of view of the argument being made here, is that this pre-mirror stage self is not considered Cartesian in the way Lacan critiques, but rather an open system of affective, motor, perceptual inter-courses with parent and world’. See Stern (2000) and the recent empirical work of Fonagy (2005).

10 The reference to ‘Bisexuality’ in Laplanche and Pontalis (1973), is helpful here.
bodies and pleasures into distinct identities and appropriate practices has no fixed and stable foundation.

It follows from this that the attribution of the libido’s origin to the male organ and the inevitable valorisation of the penis as the generative site (the phallus) is an imaginary illusion that can only be sustained if the transgenesis of libidinal energy is denied and repressed. And yet, although this denial naturalises privilege, the very nature of its deceptive manufacture will remain a structural flaw in its maintenance – something Butler considers ‘the promising spectre of its destabilisation’ (1993, 63). The system’s fragility is again underlined when Freud describes erotogenic discovery and self-preoccupation in terms of illness, pain and suffering. As we saw earlier in the example of hypochondria, a case of narcissistic self-absorption, the subject’s fascination is expressed by delineating a particular body part as inherently fragile, sick and in need. By making the theatrical performance of illness exemplary in the eroticisation of the body – ‘a libidinal projection of the body-surface which in turn establishes its epistemological accessibility’ (1993, 63) – Freud underlined the social fabrication of sexuality and its potential concatenation with illness.

In ‘The Ego and the Id’, Freud draws an even closer link between sexuality and illness when he finds that the hypochondriac’s self-preoccupation is, as Butler describes it, ‘symptomatic of the structuring presence of a moralistic framework of guilt’ (1993, 63). According to Freud, guilt arises because the internal dynamic of narcissistic self-possession must be externalised towards objects and other subjects if we are to experience a normal sexuality. To refuse this social demand by reinvesting in the self is to take a guilty pleasure, and yet this pleasure is fraught with ambivalence: on the one hand, its unsanctioned satisfaction exacts physical illness and suffering, but on the other, if the resulting illness effectively deceives society then the underlying narcissism is affirmed. Can the difference between pleasure and pain be decided in this example?

Aware of the ambiguous possibilities that attend an ‘eroticised hypochondria’, Butler notes that if conformity to regulatory sexual ideals requires prohibition and the threat of pain, then the failure of these interdictions, or their qualified success, must induce irregular outcomes. ‘[T]hey may delineate body surfaces that do not signify conventional heterosexual polarities. These variable body surfaces or bodily egos may thus become sites of transfer for properties that no longer belong properly to any anatomy’ (1993, 64).

The possibility of the lesbian phallus makes its appearance at this juncture. However, before returning to this provocative proposition, we should underline that the link that connects sickness with narcissism, the love of self, is something Freud associates with homosexuality, the love of self-same. What is purported to be an inwardly directed, primitive and pre-social libidinal energy must be
turned around in a heterosexuality and aimed towards others. Freud argued that the successful taking-on of these heteronormative requirements coincides with the development of a conscience – the will to conform to social regulation. Thus, if the propriety of sexual identity depends on ‘the introjection of the homosexual cathexis’ (Butler 1993, 65), then the effective maintenance of normality is built on the pain and guilt that now attaches to this unsanctioned and prohibited pleasure.

However, Butler suggests that the pain of self-beratement and denial does more than simply abandon a love object, for something ‘productive’ is also at work as the psyche organises the body into an imaginary schema of meaningful parts. If the body appears in the form that it does because it is a living history of felt significance, then the social prohibition against certain love objects will re-form those libidinal investments to preserve and memorialise them:

If, then, as Freud contends, pain has a delineating effect, that is, may be one way in which we come to have an idea of our body at all, it may also be that gender-instituting prohibitions work through suffusing the body with a pain that culminates in the projection of a surface, that is, a sexed morphology which is at once a compensatory fantasy and a fetishistic mask. And if one must either love or fall ill, then perhaps the sexuality that appears as illness is the insidious effect of such a censoring love. Can the very production of the morphe be read as an allegory of prohibited love, the incorporation of loss? (1993, 65).

Butler’s argument moves from Freud’s meditation on narcissism to Jacques Lacan’s reformulation of Freud’s theory in ‘The Mirror Stage’ and ‘The Signification of the Phallus’. Lacan will argue that the child’s apperception of itself as a coherent and bounded entity in space means that it must learn to identify itself from an other’s perspective, that is, from an external vantage point that it cannot occupy. Using the child’s recognition of itself in a mirror as an analogy for this more general process of speculation, Lacan attributes the resulting morphology, or bodily outline that the child assumes, to a dynamic vacillation between projection and misrecognition. Several things are important here. First, the disjunction between the infant’s perception of its amorphous ubiquity, an ‘all over the place’ that Lacan punningly describes as an ‘hommelette’, and the specular idealisation of itself as a coherent (other) entity with control and agency, will never be resolved. This means that the ego is, and will remain, a bodily ego, whose identity is not so much a fixed property as an ongoing dynamic of re-cognition and mutation. Secondly, Lacan will also argue that the morphological schema that inaugurates the ego is also the threshold of the visible world. In other words, how we perceive the difference between people, objects and their interrelationships (the shape and definition of otherness), will be extruded through a corporeal imaginary which has constitutive force: the
subject is this process, where the differentiation of world and ego emerge in the same reflex/reflection. As Butler summarises:

As imaginary, the ego as object is neither interior nor exterior to the subject, but the permanently unstable site where that spatialized distinction is perpetually negotiated; it is this ambiguity that marks the ego as *imago*, that is, as an identificatory relation. Hence, identifications are never simply or definitively made or achieved; they are insistently constituted, contested and negotiated. [1993, 76]

Butler certainly agrees with Lacan that the child’s bodily ego is peopled with others, inasmuch as its very anatomy is in-formed with social relations and their dynamic conversions. Indeed, the possibility of a lesbian phallus will depend on the psychosocial open-endedness of the body’s perceived anatomy. However, Butler finds something disturbing in the way Lacan’s argument seems to have it both ways. He explains the organisational logic of the Symbolic order, those cultural and linguistic structures into which the child is interpellated, as a *given* system of binary identifications whose positions are determined by a transcendental signer – the phallus. And yet he also insists that the Symbolic order exceeds *specific* cultural or social ascriptions for it is the universal principle of differentiation that motors all languages. For this reason, Lacan will echo Freud by insisting that the phallus should not be confused with the penis, or indeed, with any organ or particular imaginary effect. But what can be done if we accept this thesis? As Butler’s critical energies are focused on the need to contest political inequities, her concern is that Lacan’s ‘explanation’ has the performative consequence of investing the penis (and masculinity) with the symbolic privilege accorded the phallus, and in a way that places the male organ’s political significance beyond question.

Through a close reading of the twists and turns in Lacan’s argument, Butler uses the analyst’s own position to question the distinction he makes between the Symbolic order and the Imaginary, that wishful process of representational identification that enables the infant to overcome (and deny) its inadequacies. Although this argument is inadvertently recuperated in Butler’s presumption that cultural forces are by definition quite separate from natural ones, her deconstruction of the difference makes it possible to at least begin to acknowledge that biology is not *pre*-scriptive.

Butler reminds us that for any body part to be delineated as identifiable and separate, the body’s overall erotogenicity and signifiability will be involved, indeed, the body part will emerge from a process that incorporates the whole of the body in the ‘part’s’ transvaluation. Lacan would surely agree in principle that the phallus can take myriad imaginary forms other than the penis, including objects. However, when Butler takes Lacan at his word and raises the gender-
troubling spectre of a lesbian phallus, the political investments which align phallic mastery with ‘the mutually exclusive trajectories of castration anxiety and penis envy’ (1993, 84–5) are no longer straightforward. Without recourse to a stable point of origin that can anchor the vagaries of the bodily ego as well as its dispositions of desire, all identity, including sexual identity, is rendered ambiguous. Lacan’s work would certainly concede this point, or even underline it. However, Butler perceives something more subversive in the ‘contradictory formulation’ of a lesbian phallus that ‘crosses the orders of having and being’:

… if men are said to ‘have’ the phallus symbolically, their anatomy is also a site marked by having lost it; the anatomical part is never commensurable with the phallus itself. In this sense, men might be understood to be both castrated (already) and driven by penis envy (more properly understood as phallus envy). Conversely, in so far as women might be said to ‘have’ the phallus and fear its loss (and there is no reason why that could not be true in both lesbian and heterosexual exchange, raising the question of an implicit heterosexuality in the former, and homosexuality in the latter), they may be driven by castration anxiety. [1993, 85]

If the bodily ego necessarily incorporates such phantasmatic cross-overs, then normative bifurcations of sexual identity and desire must involve a failure of fit which is borne, or made legible, by ‘marginal’ subjectivities, even though it pertains to everyone. Importantly, Butler rejects the idea that the so-called margin is constitutively different from the centre, an insight that complicates a pluralist politics of inclusion as well as its inverse – the privileging of the margin as a site of play and possibility outside the repressive structures of heteronormative identity. Instead, what is emphasised in Butler’s argument is that structures of subject formation have no central point of authorisation, no over-arching logic of non-contradiction that separate heteronormative forms of exchange from those that seem so different. If structures of identification are so thoroughly messy, implicated and ambiguous for all of us that the difference between who has the phallus and who is the phallus is a social and political determination that can’t be anatomically decided, then the seeming invariance of phallic reference is a performative fiction.

As we have seen, Butler focuses on the Lacanian thesis that the phallus inaugurates the signifying chain and sets it into motion because it is radically incommensurate with its representational substitutions. Lacan’s thesis is certainly a provocative proposition because the givenness of an origin and an entity are replaced by process and irresolution – a dynamism in which the lived significance of anatomy is in play and the absolute invariance of reference is undone. This is the leverage point where Butler locates her question about the conflation of the penis with the privileged signifier of the phallus: if ‘the
phallus symbolizes only through taking anatomy as its occasion, then the more various and unanticipated the anatomical (and non-anatomical) occasions for its symbolization, the more unstable that signifier becomes’ (1993, 90). Consequently, if the lesbian can have and be the phallus at the same time (as Lacan’s separation of the phallus from the penis must imply), then the facticity of the body and related notions about what a body can and can’t do are subjected to ‘an aggressive reterritorialization’ (1993, 86). In other words and ironically, the implications of a lesbian phallus acknowledge the complex dimensions and sensate reality of everyone’s phantasmatic anatomy as well as the myriad objects and expressions that desire can assume.

What has been established is that Butler’s work rests on a vigilant interrogation of the coherence and purity of identity, especially the presumption that identity is there from the start. And an important platform in her critical strategy has been to return to anatomy in order to reconceive its referential stability. In sum then, Butler has argued that an individual’s body boundary (the imago, or phantasmatic body) is an erotic surface whose individual perception is forged from social relations that are always evolving and shifting the body’s contours and desires. Importantly, the delineation of this imaginary anatomy is borne from the pain of loss, and it remains a fragile and unstable ‘edifice’ for just this reason. Forged from failure and incapacity, it is unable to re-present an ideal it cannot have and cannot be: it is a misrecognition of itself, a ‘dissimulated effect’, ‘a fetishistic mask’, ‘a compensatory fantasy’ of grieving melancholia for what is now prohibited (1993, 65).

Consistent with this rather forlorn scene of unrequited desire whose re-productive effects are generated from the incommensurability, or prohibited intercourse, between nature and culture, we will recall that Butler seizes on the erotics of hypochondria, the ability of pain to rewrite loss as pleasure, to exemplify this general process of transvaluation: it delineates body parts, ailments and objects as erotic memorials to a maternal loss that exceeds representation. The ability of the body to be something other than it seems, to incorporate the alien as itself, explains why Butler describes masculine, heterosexual melancholy as a

… refusal to grieve the masculine as a possibility of love; [just as] a feminine gender is formed (taken on, assumed) through the incorporative fantasy by which the feminine is excluded as a possible object of love, an exclusion never grieved, but ‘preserved’ through the heightening of feminine identification itself. [1993, 235]

The uncanny manifestations of prohibition are further underlined in the comment, ‘In this sense, the “truest” lesbian melancholic is the strictly straight woman, and the “truest” gay male melancholic is the strictly straight man’ (Butler 1993, 235).
It is politically significant to appreciate, as we do in these transfigurative examples, that prohibition is never purely negative. But here is the rub. Although things are certainly not as they seem in this account, Butler's critique of identity remains tethered to its unproblematic status as foundation. Instead of the bisexual perversion that renders sexual identity improper and undecidable from the start, and forever after, Butler's analysis effectively untangles the ambiguity to reveal a truth behind the counterfeit. If we are to understand female identity and femininity as essential attributes that define the mother, then the masquerade of identity-forming reversals that her (supposed) loss engenders makes sense. But surely this is far from the case. The mother is deemed a phallic mother because s/he lacks nothing. S/he is the (w)hole, the world, the parenting plenitude of transfiguration which, at one and the same time, expresses the child's 'own' difference from itself; the constitutive difference that drives the child's desire for itself/another. In this scene of morphogenesis where identity is never established once and for all, the m/other is a ubiquitous figure. And if s/he is never simply lost or absent, then what is the status of the term 'misrecognition' that founds Lacan's thesis as well as the masquerading ruse in Butler's description of the 'truest lesbian' and the 'truest straight man'? Butler's refusal to accede to the incestuous nature of nature, its 'un-natural' capacity to reproduce itself in myriad manifestations that, in a very real sense, are all true, is in evidence here.

But do we gain a better sense of the complex operations of identity formation if we consider that this involved complicity is not reducible to duplicity – culture’s misrecognition of what is actually (naturally?) true? This is a difficult and elusive point that requires careful exegesis. For example, we will recall that Freud interprets the hypochondriac’s sickness as a foil for narcissistic self-attention, a foil whose pleasurable suffering incorporates the guilt that attends the production of a body that will not conform to the demands society makes of it. The narrative resolution of what to do with this initial pre-possession that is defined against society, is to hide ‘it’. But why should we assume that the plenitude of primordial erotogenicity (pre-possession) is an individuated ‘something’ that is radically separate from an outside when child and world, or what we retrospectively bifurcate into these identifying differences (internal and external, self and other), are originally consubstantial?11 ‘Consubstantial’ in this sense evokes the ‘sameness’ of an identity that endures (invariance) through morphogenesis (variation). This is the real puzzle, a veritable brain twister, and

11 The importance of the term ‘consubstantial’ is evident in Ferdinand de Saussure's description of the sign's paradoxical identity – an 'entity' whose invariance is made possible by a system of referral that is pure variation. It is important to recognise that the many contradictions in Saussure's text witness an inability to resolve the notion of reference.
its dimensions defy the sort of explanatory ‘resolution’ in Butler’s reversal. The very notions of ‘sameness’ and ‘difference’, ‘homo’ and ‘hetero’, natural and cultural, are not just implicated – a notion that presumes their segregation before it is compromised. If identity is never given, and these terms of reference can never be segregated, then the constitutive paradox of identity becomes strange indeed.

But why is so much at stake in the subtleties of this entanglement? Butler’s own argument helps us here, for she repeatedly questions the commonality that subtends the description of the *homo*sexual, and even judges the existence of a lesbian sexuality ‘an impossible monolith’ (1993, 85). The developmental narrative that discovers a primordial, narcissistic self-possession at the origin, and *naturally* equates this with the love of self-same (homoeroticism), will quite logically presume that social maturity and the acquisition of a conscience are more evolved achievements – the proper attributes of the heterosexual who is male. Butler is certainly aware of the danger in this logic, as we see in this ‘cautionary note’:

The pathologization of erotogenic parts in Freud calls to be read as a discourse produced in guilt, and although the imaginary and projective possibilities of hypochondria are useful, they call to be dissociated from the metaphors of illness that pervade the description of sexuality. This is especially urgent now that the pathologization of sexuality generally, and the specific description of homosexuality as the paradigm for the pathological as such, are symptomatic of homophobic discourse on AIDS (1993, 64).

Quite clearly, the violence of homophobia can’t be attenuated by such moral appeals if the logic that discriminates homosexual from heterosexual identity remains intact. Homophobia, misogyny and racism are nourished by the notion that a primitive hypersexualised self-absorption precedes the social, and this original incapacity is defined against social legitimacy. To argue that ‘legitimacy’ is questionable because it represses and maintains something it claims to abhor certainly addresses the problem, yet it remains committed to the narrative’s political order – from primitive to civilised, from same to different, from the maternal order to the paternal symbolic, from nature to culture. Why does Butler need to assume that nature is inherently self-same and that what we call culture isn’t the very stuff of an internal differential?

To posit the social or cultural as a second-order frame of reference, a regulating force that befalls the infant (who initially lacks it) and leaves it at a loss, understands identity as ‘something’ that is either present or absent, true or fictional. And to congeal the process of differentiation into a circumscribable commodity or system, secured against an outside, is the same as reifying the
phallus, the process of identifying, into a thing – the penis. Can the ingenious provocation that Butler offers us in ‘the lesbian phallus’ keep this question of origins moving, and in a way that might resist a return to identity’s fixed and foundational truth? Does the open-ended sense of possibility and entanglement in Butler’s argument really need to ascribe to an incest taboo that confers legitimacy through prohibition, and recuperates the cogito as always and only Human – not natural? What if power’s original and ongoing purpose, its natural intention, is always/already multiple, contrary, disseminated, incestuous? Surely power can only fail to achieve its purpose, its goal, if it has ‘one’ (repression).12

References


12 For an inspiring essay on the question of power as an originary force, a natural force, see Macherey (1992). Lee Edelman’s No Future (2004) is also relevant here as it encourages us to refuse those political and social structures whose reproductive futurity will be more of the same. His call to embrace the negative, to take a risk, has parallels in this argument’s call to biologise the un-natural and refuse a politics based in culture’s redemptive promise.
Chapter 3

Queer Apocal(o)ptic/ism: The Death Drive and the Human

Noreen Giffney

… the death drive names what the queer, in the order of the social, is called forth to figure: the negativity opposed to every form of social viability. [Edelman 2004, 9]

The Queer Apocaloptic

We are the apocalypse. We’ll be your dream and their nightmare. [Lesbian Avengers, quoted in Long 2005, 125]


“The human’, writes Diana Fuss in her introduction to Human, All Too Human, ‘is not, and has never been, an all inclusive category’ (1996, 2). The Human, like any category, functions as an umbrella descriptor for a diverse range of competing moral and ethical codes, philosophical belief systems, identities, practices and forms of embodiment. The Human is both a discursive and an ideological construct which materially impacts on all those who are interpellated through that sign, especially those who find themselves on its margins or those who transgress its boundaries. The Human is not simply a discursive phenomenon that acts on materially constituted entities but calls the cause/effect dynamic and the nature/culture binary into question. According to Karen Barad, “Human bodies” and “human subjects” do not pre-exist as such; nor are they mere end products. “Humans” are neither pure cause nor pure effect but part of the world in its open-ended becoming’ (2003, 821). Much work has been done on the Human, including interrogating the genealogy of that category under the auspices of posthumanism, considering the interrelationship between the Human and other species, and discussing the current or future feasibility of using such a term in the context of increasing technological advancement.

‘Human’, in the words of Donna J. Haraway, ‘requires an extraordinary congeries of partners. Humans, wherever you track them, are products of
situated relationalities with organisms, tools, much else. We are quite a crowd’ (2006, 146). Thus, the Human is historically contingent and culturally marked in its formulations and is neither stable nor singular in its articulations or resonances. The Human in other words is, in an ontological sense, always an act of becoming-Human, bound up with the anxieties that one is not quite there, will never make it to fruition. In this and despite the careful work that is currently being done by a whole host of scholars, activists and artists, the term Human continues to have a performative power and often signifies a normative space in social and political terms, defined against those who are deemed unrecognisable and thus excluded from its remit. For Judith Butler, ‘It is not just that some humans are treated as humans, and others are dehumanized; it is rather that dehumanization becomes the condition for the production of the human’ (2004, 90). Thus, human rights become valuable in so far as everyone is included in theory but a vast number of people are excluded in practice. So while Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) states that ‘All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights’ and the Resolution adopted by the General Assembly of the Human Rights Council (2006) proclaims that ‘all States, regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems, have the duty to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms’, the reality is substantially different. This difference rests on the fact that the Human is utilised in particular contexts to deprive people of certain so-called ‘inalienable’ rights by dehumanising them. The category only exists, in other words, because it delineates between those people who are deemed to be Human and those who are considered unworthy of such a title, and treated accordingly.

What might it mean to queer the Human? By extension, how is the Human employed within queer theory? A consideration of these two questions has the potential to reconfigure the way we think about queer theory, the Human and the act of queering itself. To facilitate a discussion of the aforementioned questions, we might begin by briefly looking at two statements made within queer theory. First, Lee Edelman insists that ‘the human remains bound to the notion of futurity as the site of its endless realization through and as catachresis’ (2004, 104), which for him links the Human to what he terms ‘reproductive futurism’, the epitome of heteronormativity’s desire to reach self-fulfilment by endlessly recycling itself through the figure of the Child.1 Secondly, Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston claim that ‘Being Queer in America is a posthuman agenda’ (1995, 15). Putting aside the terms ‘in America’ and the ‘being’ of queer for a

---

1 I use ‘Human’/‘Child’/‘Queer’ when making reference to discursive categories and ‘human’/‘child’/‘queer’ when writing about the lived lives of those who occupy the aforementioned, or those who are either represented by or indeed identify themselves by employing such signifiers.
moment, we might focus instead on the potential links between posthumanism and the ‘doing’ of queer. This in turn raises the question as to whether the act of queering is always already a posthuman endeavour and what that might mean for queer theory. While recognising the myriad ways in which the Human has been approached, this chapter is concerned specifically with the Human as a discursive category and its ideological and material effects. I focus particularly on what queer theory, read together with work on the Human and figured through the psychoanalytic concept of the death drive, might bring to discussions of the permeability, elasticity and (im)possible redundancy of the category of the Human. I introduce the neologism ‘apocal(o)ptic/ism’ to assist me in this endeavour. Ruptured internally by grammatical symbols that display the very instability that constitutes it, the term is a hybrid, holding within it three interrelated concepts: the optic or the gaze (desire), the Panopticon or self-surveillance (normativity), and apocalypticism (cathartic change). In a way, apocal(o)ptic/ism has no meaning without the term that prefigures it. It is an extension of queer while disrupting any claims that queer might make to coherence.

What characterises queer apocal(o)ptic/ism? It is queer’s relentless questioning of all categorical imperatives, including the ontology Queer itself. The unremitting desire to undo, disrupt and make trouble for norms. The recognition that queer is transitory and momentary and thus might be superseded or become defunct as an interpretative tool at some future date, as well as the dedication to examining the notion of utility itself. It is queer’s commitment to the here and now, the present, not putting faith in the always postponed future but in making an immediate intervention. It is the anti-assimilationist bent in queer theory, the activist strain with its refusal to be defined by or in terms set down by the dominant culture in any given situation. It points to the fact that queer is brought into being through acts of resistance, the recognition of the potential futility of resistance because of the norm’s propensity for co-option and reinvention, but the drive towards resistance all the same. It is the trace of queer’s investments in deconstruction and psychoanalysis, the refusal to normative coherence as fantasy and the making visible of the instability that constitutes any one thing.

It characterises queer’s dedication to end things and traumatic events, its commitment to death – whether it is the mournful rage of activists in response to queer deaths arising from suicide, HIV/AIDS or queer bashings; the theorist’s inventiveness to the point of unintelligibility in an attempt to cast off the psychical death wrought by the identitarian strait(j)acket (Haver 1997), or the anarchic proclamations of death to the compulsions of heteronormativity. It is the queer embodiment of ‘the death-drive, always present in any vital process’
Queering the Non/Human

(Freud 2003/1933, 98). Queer itself is haunted by the death drive, driven both towards its own ‘death’ and by the knowledge that it will – must – end; towards a time when it will be either superseded or no longer useful, needed, required, or desired (Butler 1993, 228). Queer apocal(o)ptic/ism also encapsulates the apocalyptic moments at which the death drive becomes the destruction drive in the service of shattering an imposing illusion produced as a shifting signifier of heteronormative hegemony. In this, queer apocal(o)ptic/ism begins at the level of the self. It refers to an unremitting self-interrogation, the constant production of unease at the level of identification – unsettling the very desire for social recognition as an identifiable subject – in the realisation that ‘queer must insist … on disturbing … and on queering ourselves and our investment in [social] organization. For queerness can never define an identity; it can only ever disturb one’ (Edelman 2004, 17).

Queer apocal(o)ptic/ism, as formulated by me in this chapter, is facilitated by my close reading of Lee Edelman’s book, No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive (2004). I read Edelman’s work on the figure of the Child within the context of the category of the Human and while bringing together queer theory, posthumanism and the death drive as a critical lens, I discuss how No Future provides a felicitous vantage point from which to consider the collective societal investment in the Human and the pernicious effects of such a commitment for those marked out as Queer. At the close of his book Edelman remarks that ‘Rather than expanding the reach of the human … we might … insist on enlarging the inhuman instead’ (2004, 152). The inhuman, invoking as it does the work of Jean-François Lyotard (1991; Curtis 2006), provides a useful implement for challenging the exclusions prefiguring any enunciation of the Human as a discursive effect. I argue here however that rather than enlarging one category at the expense of another – even if it is to topple a ‘violent hierarchy’ – we might explore psychoanalytic writings on the death drive further. I do this in an effort to talk about queer apocal(o)ptic/ism as a metaphor for what No Future is doing certainly, but also as a way of prompting us to think about how the Human functions as a proper object and what it might mean for queer theory as a critical apparatus should it be put to work to unsettle that primary relation.

While Edelman draws largely on the writings of Jacques Lacan and Slavoj Žižek, I concentrate on the theories of Sigmund Freud and Melanie Klein to argue that Edelman’s call to embrace the death drive constitutes not a nihilistic gesture but rather a queer apocalypticism, a steadfast refusal to facilitate heteronormativity’s future in any way; a future configured through and proscribed by the symbol of the Human/Child. I return to Freud’s theories of the death drive, the destruction drive, the unconscious, the compulsion...
to repeat, transference and repression to offer another avenue for analysing Edelman’s interpretation of the death drive as it relates to queer theory and to probe further the links between reproductive futurism and the Human. I employ Melanie Klein’s work on the death instinct, anxiety, aggression, splitting, introjection and projective identification to uncover the mechanics through which reproductive futurism becomes heteronormativity’s symptom, which in turn points to the incorporation by the heteronormative subject of a range of mechanisms of defence to deny the existence of the death drive.

In this chapter, I also attend to the context within which Edelman’s book has arisen and read No Future as a text which engages in (non-)relations with other textual objects by feminists and lesbian and gay theorists and activists. I do this by outlining how No Future functions, not just as a searing polemic, but also perhaps in contradistinction to Edelman’s wishes as a queer (anti-)manifesto for action and as such marks a return to the anti-assimilationist politics of queer and lesbian activist groups, such as Queer Nation and Gutter Dyke Collective, with their uncompromising slogans: ‘Queers Bash Back’, ‘I Hate Straights’ and ‘This is the Year to Stamp Out the “Y” Chromosome’ (Anonymous Queers 1997/1990; Gutter Dyke Collective 1991/1973). LGBT/Q activism has always exhibited posthumanist proclivities in its undermining of heteronormativity’s universalist purchase of what it means to be Human. I contend that No Future continues the work of feminists, queer theorists and those influenced by the ideas of Michel Foucault more generally in Edelman’s genealogical refusal to leave any facet of heteronormativity untheorised. I argue that the ‘polemical engagement’ (Edelman 2004, 3) of No Future is, above all, with desire, sexuality and usefulness, and suggest moreover that Georges Bataille’s work on eroticism, waste, uselessness and unrecoverability illuminates Edelman’s thinking on the Human, and leads us back into explorations of the death drive and queer apocal(o)ptic/ism.

A significant number of feminist – especially lesbian – scholars and activists have discussed the multiple processes through which heterosexuality becomes heteronormative. Whether critics use the terms ‘heteronormativity’, ‘heteropatriarchy’, ‘compulsory heterosexuality’, ‘the heterosexual matrix’, ‘the straight mind’, or ‘heterosexism’ to refer to the effects of an ideological and structural system that regulates the expression and practice of gender and sexuality, they point to the ways in which the binary public/private operates in relation to the privileging and excluding of particular desires, practices, feelings and bodies. In ‘The Straight Mind’, Monique Wittig brings ‘the heterosexual relationship’ to the fore for critique as ‘a core of nature which resists examination’; a relationship that presents itself as the natural within the cultural (1992, 27). No Future takes the work of feminists further, in spite of operating
in a curious feminist-citational vacuum, in Edelman’s critique of ‘the image of the Child’ (2004, 2) – the only proper outcome of heteronormative couplings – which serves as a category ‘to prescribe what will count as political discourse’ (11). The figure of ‘the Child’ – ‘not to be confused with the lived experiences of any historical children’ (11) in Edelman’s words – is the last outpost of heteronormativity, ‘the fetishistic fixation of heteronormativity’ (21). Edelman rejects ‘the Child’ as an image manufactured by and ‘for the satisfaction of adults’ (21) and as a metaphor inextricably linked to a system predicated upon reproductive futurism which means ‘no future’ for queers.

The Child is, in Edelman’s view, the ultimate symbol of what it means to be Human so his extricating of himself from ‘our current captivity to futurism’s logic’ (153) through his insistence that ‘the future stop here’ (31) also entails a rejection of the Child. The face, the identifier of the physicality of the Human (MacNeill 1998), comes in for criticism from Edelman who argues that it is through ‘the fascism of the baby’s face’ that politics – always the manifestation of reproductive futurism in his estimation – submits us to heteronormativity’s ‘sovereign authority’ (2004, 151). The maltreatment of children, especially by clerical members of homophobic organisations such as the Catholic Church, illustrates the fact that the figure of the Child is more often than not employed as a cynical strategy – a shifting homophobic signifier – to give the orator a ‘moral’ advantage in condemnations of homosexuality. Like Wittig’s formulation of the straight mind, reproductive futurism cannot ‘conceive of a culture, a society where heterosexuality would not order not only all human relationships but also its very production of concepts and all the processes which escape consciousness … “you-will-be-straight-or-you-will-not-be”’ (Wittig 1992, 28). Edelman’s response is to refuse to play the game of the dominant culture by championing ‘the impossible project of a queer oppositionality’ that ‘would oppose itself to the logic of opposition’ itself (2004, 4).

Like Sigmund Freud’s proposal of a death drive, No Future has been a controversial addition to queer theory. It has provoked contentious debate in print and on the Internet among those who have read it and has garnered both fervently laudatory and fiercely critical responses. Respondents have praised and criticised Edelman’s prose style, questioned whether ‘psychoanalytic concepts can provide the building blocks of political theory’ (Brenkman 2002, 174), become energised and dismayed as a result of the polemical tone of rage permeating the book, while identifying with or rejecting Edelman’s proposals regarding futurity, political utility, queer resistance, the category of the Child

---

2 Judith Halberstam, for example, has been critical of Edelman’s conjuring of an ‘excessively small archive that represents queer negativity’ (2006, 824), with his eschewing of work by feminists and other anti-establishment figures.

3 Respondents have praised and criticised Edelman’s prose style, questioned whether ‘psychoanalytic concepts can provide the building blocks of political theory’ (Brenkman 2002, 174), become energised and dismayed as a result of the polemical tone of rage permeating the book, while identifying with or rejecting Edelman’s proposals regarding futurity, political utility, queer resistance, the category of the Child.
No Future has been received has generated much useful commentary; however, its publication has also resulted in some polarisation of positions in response to Edelman’s arguments. Judith Butler has written with disappointment previously about ‘how quickly a critical encounter becomes misconstrued as a war’ (1997, 1) in the case of feminism and queer theory. A similar thing is currently transpiring between commentators aligning themselves with queer optimism or utopianism and those with a professed allegiance to queer negativity or the antisocial thesis. For the purposes of this chapter, we might think of queer optimistic theorisations of futurity as queer eschatology and those professing negativity, such as No Future, as queer apocalypticism. Both deal with the event as it relates to temporality, the former looks constantly towards the future in order to prepare for the arrival (of queer) and the end (of heteronormativity), while a book such as Edelman’s situates itself within the immediacy of that endpoint as it unfolds. This aporia is exemplified well in Edelman’s call ‘to insist that the future stop here’ (2004, 31), which clearly grates on the nerves of those who assert, as does José Estaban Muñoz, that queerness ‘is primarily about futurity. Queerness is always on the horizon’ (2006, 825). The end – positive or negative – is not coming for queer apocalypticism, it is here; it is queer and now.

An Impossible Position

After much wavering, we have decided to propose only two basic drives: Eros and the destruction-drive … the aim of the second is … to dissolve connections, and thus to destroy things. In the case of the destruction-drive, we can also suppose that its ultimate aim is to convert the living into the inorganic state. Because of this, we also call it the death-drive. [Freud 2003/1940, 178, 179]

… it is absurd to speak of a death desire that would presumably be in qualitative opposition to the life desires. Death is not desired, there is only death that desires. [Deliuze and Guattari 2004/1972, 262]


4 This debate is playing out against the backdrop of No Future with respondents, such as Michael Snediker, rejecting what they see as the ‘coerciveness’ of Edelman’s polemic which for him represents ‘a sort of pessimism-drag’ (2006, paragraphs 37, 34), prompting Tim Dean to dismiss No Future’s argument as ‘non-psychoanalytic, verging instead on a psychological idea of self-destructive pathology that derives more from Christianity than from psychoanalysis’ (2008).
This section opens with two competing views on the existence of the death drive: the first from Sigmund Freud’s *An Outline of Psychoanalysis* (1940); the second from *Anti-Oedipus* by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1972). The crux of Edelman’s argument rests on an understanding of the drive as it is deployed in psychoanalytic theory and the question of whether one accepts or challenges the existence of the death drive. Depending on one’s position in relation to this concept will determine in turn how one receives Edelman’s argument. One’s opinion of psychoanalytic theory more generally will also impact on whether one believes that Edelman’s death-drive proposal is descriptive, prescriptive or proscriptive.

A drive, as described by Freud, ‘differs from a stimulus in that it originates from sources of stimulation within the body, acts as a constant force, and the individual can’t flee from it in the way that he can from an external stimulus’ (2003/1933, 88). For him, drives ‘represent the physical demands of the psyche’ (2003/1940, 178). Drives signify ‘need’ and thus crave satisfaction which leads Freud to formulate the pleasure-unpleasure principle (2005/1915, 15). The pleasure-ego strives for wish-fulfilment, ‘to pursue pleasure and avoid unpleasure’. The reality-ego, on the other hand, strives for what is ‘useful’ while protecting itself from harm. The reality-ego safeguards the individual from the overweening demands of the pleasure-ego but protects rather than opposes it, in a sense ‘safeguarding it, not deposing it’ (2005/1911, 6). In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* however, Freud, a self-confessed rigorous revisionist, conceded that ‘the pleasure principle exists as a strong tendency within the psyche, but is opposed by certain other forces or circumstances, so that the final outcome cannot possibly always accord with the said tendency in favour of pleasure’ (2003/1920, 47). Through observing patients undergoing psychoanalysis, Freud noticed that people regularly return to unpleasurable experiences and memories, what he termed the ‘compulsion to repeat’, which ‘pays no heed to the pleasure principle’ (57, 61). Developing on from this compulsion to return again and again to what has gone before, Freud proposed the existence of what he termed ‘der Todestrieb’ – the death drive sometimes translated as the death instinct – to explain what he saw as ‘the drive to return to the inanimate’ because ‘the inanimate existed before the animate’ (78). Freud propounded the view that there were two drives – the death drive and Eros – the interaction of which produces the vibrancy of life, a constant struggle or working-through of resistance, each one to the other. In Jean Laplanche’s view, this ongoing struggle between the death and life drives manifests ‘not as a difference between sexuality and a non-sexual aggressivity, but in the heart of sexuality itself’ (1999, 40).

In his critique of *No Future* and as part of his intention to reframe the death drive for ‘a different – one might say queerer – vision of futurity’, Tim
Dean remarks that ‘Edelman advocates our embracing – even identifying with – something that is not of the order of representation, namely, the death drive’, to which Dean asserts he is ‘not convinced that it is possible, even were it deemed politically desirable, to embrace or identify with a drive’ (2008). This statement needs unpacking, namely Dean’s representation of Edelman’s remarks on the death drive, politics, possibility and queerness. This section introduces my interpretation of Edelman’s formulation of queerness as it relates to the death drive before I argue that No Future is not about considering possibilities but rather is a meditation on a range of impossibilities. First, the impossibility of exercising agency if one partakes of a system steeped in reproductive futurism which permeates all social, political and cultural structures. Secondly, the intolerable living conditions created for those figured as *sinthomosexuals* through heteronormativity’s employment of reproductive futurism as a fantasy/phantasy (Segal 2000) against the death drive through the inauguration of a series of defence mechanisms, namely denial, splitting, idealisation and projective identification (Klein 1997/1946; 1997/1948; 1997/1955; 1997/1957). Third, the impossibility of launching a queer political resistance to heteronormativity without its being recuperated and neutralised by reproductive futurism in the process and put into the service of heteronormativity. Fourth, the Queer’s figuration as the death drive and how that both facilitates while ultimately preventing heteronormativity’s desired fulfilment of itself in the figure of the Child. Edelman’s ‘impossible project’, which he claims stakes ‘its fortunes on a truly hopeless wager’, presents us with an interpretation of queerness that promises ‘absolutely nothing’ (2004, 4, 5). It promises nothing, in my view, precisely because the death drive is already within us. To accept that – the what ‘is’ – is to accede to this book’s argument.\(^5\)

The death drive is beyond linguistic expression, it is ‘the inarticulable surplus that dismantles the subject from within’ (9). Queerness, for Edelman, is inextricably linked to the death drive. Let me return to the epigraph that frames this chapter in which Edelman proclaims that ‘the death drive names what the queer, in the order of the social, is called forth to figure: the negativity opposed to every form of social viability’ (9). Although queerness is not reducible to homosexuality and in fact ‘could never constitute an authentic or substantive identity’ (24) because it ‘is never a matter of being or becoming’ (25), the

---

\(^5\) This puts me in mind of Eckhart Tolle’s promulgation of ‘the Now’ in which he urges readers to ‘End the delusion of time … To be identified with your mind is to be trapped in time: the compulsion to live almost exclusively through memory and anticipation … The compulsion arises because the past gives you an identity and the future holds the promise of salvation, fulfilment in whatever forms. Both are illusions’ (2005/1999, 40).
Queer as a category configured by homophobic and heterosexist discourses is invariably aligned with same-sex desire (Bersani 1987; Dollimore 1995; Hanson 1991; Coviello 2000). While the Child is understood as the apotheosis of life, the Queer is set up as the epitome of death. Indeed, same-sex desire has become synonymous with death in the homophobic imagination: death understood as the foreclosure of reproduction in sexual acts performed by same-sex couples, the death of civilisation as a consequence of the ‘ills’ of ‘the homosexual lifestyle’, or same-sex desire leading to actual physical death with references to HIV/AIDS as ‘the gay plague’. So while heteronormativity is caught up in a continuous cycle of refusing to acknowledge its own internal lack by forever desiring the ‘realization of the subject’s authentic presence’ (Edelman 2004, 10) through the ‘sacralization of the Child’ (28), the Queer is feared as a threat to the completion of this compulsive practice. Thus, the death drive signifies both the position that is conferred on the Queer by the social as well as the trace of the anxious social’s projections of the death drive and everything it signifies onto the Queer, who becomes a repository of negativity. In a sense, queerness is a creation of the social, its abject Other, a constant reminder of the social’s incompleteness and vulnerability.

Reproductive futurism imposes, according to Edelman, ‘an ideological limit on political discourse as such, preserving in the process the absolute privilege of heteronormativity by rendering unthinkable, by casting outside the political domain, the possibility of a queer resistance to this organizing principle of communal relations’ (2). Reproductive futurism absorbs all challenges and translates them into more of the same. It operates in a similar way to Monique Wittig’s concept of the straight mind in that ‘when thought of by the straight mind, homosexuality is nothing but heterosexuality’ (1992, 28). Reproductive futurism is a more specific term than heteronormativity in that it describes the process through which heterosexuality becomes heteronormative. Heteronormativity is thus a term to describe a conglomerate of effects while reproductive futurism signifies the process through which such effects are wrought. It is all-encompassing, operating at the level of ideology so that it sets limits on, not just what we think or do, but also on what and how we desire. Desire itself becomes reproductive futurism in its ‘translation into a narrative’, ‘its teleological determination’ through politics which ‘conforms to the temporality of desire’, ‘the inevitable historicity of desire’ (Edelman 2004, 9).

Reproductive futurism is, what I call, ‘heterocycloptic’, bound up with the desiring gaze and the setting-out of a developmental trajectory of ‘progress’ moving endlessly towards a ‘better’ future, in the process imposing a panopticon-like self-surveillance: ‘It’s a machine in which everyone is caught, those who exercise power just as much as those over whom it is exercised’ (Foucault
It is apocaloptic in the sense that desire itself becomes a trap, a disciplining device in which the norm becomes inextricable from the natural. This technology of power – a ‘coercive universalization’ (Edelman 2004, 11) – operates at the level of fantasy and through the figure of the Child: ‘the Child has come to embody for us the telos of the social order and come to be seen as the one for whom that order is held in perpetual trust’ (11). In this, the Child becomes inextricably linked to the future and in turn to politics, and is thus reduced to a trope delimiting what will get to count as the future in advance. Reproductive futurism I believe exercises power contradictorily through a web, a net, a grid. It encourages, perhaps contradictorily, the proliferation of desires – a looking-out as opposed to a gazing-within – in the service of repressing any conscious self-awareness of the death drive. Reproductive futurism is therefore, what I term, ‘hetero-prophetic’ in that it tries to set out programatically what will transpire in the future; a future ‘endlessly postponed’ (13), thus holding the present to ransom. If it is invested in eschatology, it is only as a veneer to discipline those into enslavement to its ideals.

For Edelman, reproductive futurism presents ‘an always impossible future’ (11), ‘a fantasmatic future’ (31) which translates queerness, I think, into heteronormativity’s aggressor – the Queer – a repository for displaced feelings of anxiety. This anxiety arises because of the existence of the death drive within (Klein 1997/1946, 4) and the subject’s resultant fear of death (Klein 1997/1948, 28, 29); the fear that the future will never arrive or that the subject will not be alive to experience in it. Thus anxiety arising from the presence of an internal threat (that is, the death drive) is deflected outwards to become the fear of an external threat (that is, the Queer). This internal object of fear is displaced onto the Queer who then ‘becomes the external representative of the death instinct’ (Klein 1997/1948, 31). Through a denial both of the existence of the death drive and the social’s narcissistic investment in the Child as the wish fulfilment of its desired immortality, heteronormativity projects the death drive onto the figure of the Queer who comes to stand in for everything that is considered to be dangerous to the Child and thus the future. It is my contention that reproductive futurism operates by first denying the presence of the death drive through the inauguration of a fantasy of self-fulfilment at the same time that the anxiety of heteronormativity’s own internal shortcomings and disciplining mechanisms are displaced onto the Queer (A. Freud 2000/1937, 69–82). The instantiation of this fantasy arises, in the words of Anna Freud, because ‘the mere struggle of conflicting impulses suffices to set the defence mechanisms in motion’ (69).

More specifically, the heteronormative subject splits off parts of the self and projects them outward onto those perceived as Queer. So while the Child is
idealised, the Queer is marked out as the persecutory Other (Klein 1997/1946, 1–24; Klein 1997/1955, 141–75).6 I argue that this idealisation of the Child is a direct corollary of the fear of the Queer which itself is in response to the outward projection of the death drive. Klein’s thoughts are instructive in this regard: ‘Excessive idealization denotes that persecution is the main driving force … idealization is a corollary of persecutory anxiety – a defence against it – and the ideal breast [that is, the Child] is the counterpart of the devouring breast [that is, the Queer]’ (1997/1957, 193; see also 1997/1960, 273; 1997/1963, 311). Queerness, Edelman insists, pits itself against reproductive futurism in the refusal to deny the presence of the death drive or accede to social respectability by projecting that queerness onto someone else: ‘To figure … the death drive of the dominant order, is neither to be nor to become that drive … Rather, acceding to that figural position means recognizing and refusing the consequences of grounding reality in denial of the drive’ (2004, 17). This process of projective identification (1997/1959, 252) leaves heteronormativity in a weakened state, dependent for succour on its idealisation of the Child and its demonisation of the Queer (1997/1946, 9). Whole parts of the heteronormative subject are split off and invested in its fantasmatic relationship with its objects (1997/1955, 143). Excessive splitting can, in Klein’s view, conclude in feelings of disintegration and loss (1997/1946, 9–10). In this, heteronormativity needs its abjected queerness because without it there would be nothing against which it could define itself as the normal. Edelman recognises the power in this heteronormative reliance, thus his insistence that queerness must oppose the very ‘logic of opposition’ (2004, 4). In other words, those relegated to the category of the Queer need to cease playing the role of the persecutory Other for heteronormativity by refusing to engage in such heteronormative object relations, the stakes of which are always set out in advance. Edelman’s proposal, far from securing the end of queerness in a nihilistic act of self-destruction, urges queers to stop facilitating the system of heteronormativity and watch it unravel. The death drive is, after all, referred to by Freud as carrying out its business quietly.7

In his endorsement for No Future, Leo Bersani remarks that ‘Edelman’s extraordinary text is so powerful that we could perhaps reproach him only for not spelling out the mode in which we might survive our necessary assent to his

---

6 For a more thorough discussion of Klein’s work in relation to queer theory, see Giffney and O’Rourke (2008); for a somewhat different view of the psychical investments of queer critiques, see Sedgwick (2007).

7 Rob Weatherill writes of how ‘The death drive is not synonymous with aggression, but stands beyond, doing its own work in darkness’ (1999, 6), while Nicholas Royle says that ‘The death drive works in silence … prompt[ing] a quite different sense of the workings of silence’ (2003, 86).
argument.’ Edelman’s text is anti-programmatic and rejects what he sees as the inevitable teleology of politics. Queerness, in my opinion, is not about realising a programme, identity, or fantasy but about disruption, disturbance and laying a challenge to the very process and desire behind the act or impetus to ‘realise’ anything (2004, 17). Edelman argues that ‘queerness names the side of those not “fighting for the children”, the side outside the consensus by which all politics confirms the absolute value of reproductive futurism’ (3). In this, I believe that Edelman attempts to provide a real alternative to reproductive futurism where the chimera of choice currently exists. This proposal, which has raised such outraged objections and indignant rebuttals, offers I think a performative illustration of its own argument in readers’ resistance to it, their refusal to consider what it might mean to ‘work through’ the death drive within, and the superimposition of the death drive onto Edelman as a writer (2004, 157–8).

Many readers have found Edelman’s argument to be oppressively nihilistic; however, he does not speak of self-destruction in the sense of suicide or organic nothingness, but rather as a refusal to submit to the disciplining of fantasy in the service of reproductive futurism: ‘political self-destruction inheres in the only act that counts as one: the act of resisting enslavement to the future in the name of having a life’ (30). In response to those who insist that No Future is a stagnant and stagnating force, I offer Jonathan Dollimore’s remark that ‘death is not simply the termination of life … but life’s driving force, its animating, dynamic principle’ (1998, 192). Edelman’s rejection of ‘the future [as] mere repetition and just as lethal as the past’, coupled with his insistence that ‘the future stop here’ (2004, 31), demonstrates for me his commitment to the ‘queer and now’ in his formulation of queerness. This attendance to the fleetingness of the queer moment without an investment in the future, this acceptance of the death drive is not a death wish, a desire for annihilation but rather a loosening of futurity’s strangulating grip, an attempt to exercise agency in a world that offers but its spectre. In the words of Jacques Derrida: ‘To learn to live means to learn to die, to take into account, to accept complete mortality (without salvation, resurrection, or redemption – neither for oneself nor for any other person)’ (2004).

The sinthomosexual represents, according to Edelman, ‘the wholly impossible ethical act’ (2004, 101) to which queerness is called forth to occupy, ‘the place of

---

8 This endorsement appears on the back cover.
9 Admittedly, the death drive has not been popular within psychoanalytic circles either (Weatherill 1999, 207).
10 Eckhart Tolle’s interpretation of the death drive resonates particularly well with Edelman’s argument here: ‘Death is a stripping away of all that is not you. The secret of life is to “die before you die” – and find that there is no death’ (2005/1999, 38).
meaninglessness … unregenerate, and unregenerating, sexuality’ (47). A fusion of Jacques Lacan’s idea of the *sinthôme*, ‘which … is meant to take place at the very spot where, say, the trace of the knot goes wrong’ (Lacan; quoted in Ettinger 2006, 60) and the figuration of the Homosexual within heteronormativity, *sinthomosexual* sexuality represents both the failure of heteronormativity while also facilitating its continuation – however imperfectly and incomplete. As Bracha L. Ettinger writes in relation to the *sinthôme*: it is ‘a kind of trace of a failure in the knot that holds the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real together’ (59). While heteronormativity claims that queerness is stagnant and useless, I contend it is anything but: queerness is profoundly useful to heteronormativity because in order to function, heteronormativity needs its Queers to project negativity onto while relying on its reformed *sinthomosexual* Other, homonormativity, to facilitate its smooth operation.

Edelman’s appeal to forgo meaning, to scorn utility and occupy a space of unassimilable *jouissance*¹¹ is, I maintain, in line with the thinking of Georges Bataille who rejects the notion of transgression because it often simply reifies the norm against which it acts: ‘There exists no prohibition that cannot be transgressed. Often the transgression is permitted, often it is even prescribed’ (1986/1957, 63). Instead, Bataille locates his analysis at the level of utility and thus productivity, what Shannon Winnubst calls ‘this fundamental logic of utility at the heart of sexuality’ (2007, 85). Bataille’s work concentrates on the way in which eroticism has been reduced through normalisation to sexuality in a similar way that Edelman, I propose, comments on the disciplining of sexuality by turning it into reproductive futurism. By figuring the death drive, queerness makes visible the uselessness of all sexualities, lays bare reproductive futurism as fantasy and while embodying the negativity that the social has conferred on it, refuses to facilitate its continuation. Winnubst writes of ‘the horror of uselessness’ which comes to signify what it means to be ‘properly human’ (85), setting out how queering should engage in ‘activities that are going nowhere’, ‘acts or pleasures that offer no clear or useful meaning’ (90, 91), in an effort to reconfigure the societal obsession with teleology. Edelman writes of the ‘inhumanity’ of the *sinthomosexual* (2004, 109) as a way of challenging the normalising strictures of the Human. Describing the *sinthomosexual* as ‘anti-Promethean’ (108) devoid of the desire for self-actualisation through object choice, Edelman offers, I believe, one way in which this ‘word without a future’ (33) queers the Human. This apocaloptic gesture – read here as a cathartic letting-go of the rules governing self-actualisation – puts pressure on the desire

for recognition, on the very teleology of desire itself in the acceptance of the fact that recognition depends on the desire of another, one who in the case of reproductive futurism, may withhold at any time the ‘Humanising’ gaze from those marked out as Queer.

**Heteronormativity and its (Queer) Discontents**

… the tendency to aggression is an original, autonomous disposition in man … that represents the greatest obstacle to civilization … This aggressive drive is the descendent and principal representative of the death drive. [Freud 2002/1930, 58]

… shut up and listen. [Anonymous Queers 1997/1990, 780]

In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud comments that ‘it is impossible to overlook the extent to which civilization is built up on renunciation, how much it presupposes the non-satisfaction of powerful drives – by suppression, repression or some other means’ (2002/1930, 34). He goes on to remark that civilisation is facilitated by the repetition of a series of recognisably accepted acts and the suppression of those considered to operate contrary to the norm: ‘Order is a kind of compulsion to repeat, which, once a pattern is established, determines when, where and how something is to be done, so that there is no hesitation or vacillation in identical cases’ (30). This submission to civilisation is not without its sacrifices, as Freud himself admits in relation to the regulation of the expression of sexuality: ‘we may well ask whether our “civilized” sexual morality is worth the sacrifices it forces on us’ (2002/1908, 104). The repression of drive impulses in the servicing of civilisation can only be achieved to an extent, as Freud states: ‘Experience teaches us that for most people there is a limit beyond which their constitution cannot comply with the demands of civilization’ (93–4).

In the case of the death drive, this is exerted outwards as a destruction drive for the purposes of self-preservation (104). This drive to aggression is described by Freud in his correspondence with Albert Einstein as that which leads to physical violence (2005/1917, 219–32). Klein recognises in the death instinct or destructive impulses that ‘there is in the unconscious a fear of annihilation of life’ (Klein et al. 1952, 276), which is key to object relations in the projection and introjection of emotions such as envy, greed, fear, anxiety and hatred (1997/1957, 176–235). *No Future* illustrates, as discussed earlier in this chapter, the way in which reproductive futurism demands of its slaves the suppression

---

12 *Sinhomosexuality* offers, according to Edelman, ‘no promise of social recognition’ (2007, 473).
of the death drive through its projection onto the Queer and the denial of such by identifying with the future through the idealised figure of the Child. While Edelman’s book might arguably gesture towards a reparative relationship with the self (Klein 1998/1937), he is vociferous in his condemnation of the social.

Although Edelman offers no political programme (2004, 17–18) and in fact scorns productivity and utility because they are for him associated with reproductive futurism, I think the polemical spirit in which No Future is written can be seen as a queer (anti-)manifesto and thus one anti-assimilationist piece in a rich genealogy of LGBT/Q activism. I will briefly discuss two such pieces here, ‘Queers Read This; I Hate Straights’ (Queer Nation 1990) and ‘This is the Year to Stamp Out the “Y” Chromosome’ (Gutter Dyke Collective 1973), in an effort to tease out the ways in which No Future dovetails with while departing from their diatribes against Straights and Men respectively. This in turn will show that LGBT/Q activism has always been involved in provoking category trouble (even if new categories are sometimes reified in the process), which in turn contributes to the critique of the Human’s universalising principles at the expense of the specifics of what it means to live as the occupant of discursive categories.

Both pieces exhibit a rage at the way in which lesbians and queers are treated and call for direct collective action against their perceived attackers. Gutter Dyke Collective details the views of self-identified ‘man-hating dykes’ who are reacting against what they see as ‘the subtle rape of our minds by [men’s] media and society, to the very real rape we meet in the streets, at work, and even in our homes’ and urge women to separate from the harmful ‘pollution and destruction’ of men (1991/1973, 338). Queer Nation erupts in anger against ‘every sector of the straight establishment … the worst of whom actively want all queers dead, the best of whom never stick their necks out to keep us alive’ and call for ‘a moratorium on straight marriage, on babies, on public displays of affection among the opposite sex and media images that promote heterosexuality’ until such time as queers ‘can enjoy the same freedom of movement and sexuality’ (1997/1990, 776, 773). Both pieces recognise the transformative power in anger – Queer Nation calls on queers to ‘do whatever you can, whatever you have to, to save your life!’ (778) when confronted with homophobic acts of violence – while directing lesbians and queers to turn their anger outwards against the enemy and not ‘onto each other … [leading to] In-fighting and divisiveness’ (1991/1973, 338). In this, both Gutter Dyke Collective and Queer Nation aim to incite action through an appeal to unity in the hope of creating change: ‘We must fight for ourselves … and if in that process we bring about greater freedom to the world at large then great’ (1997/1990, 774). Self-definition is important for the writers of both pieces and the delineation they make between themselves as ‘queers’ or ‘women’ and those they are fighting against is equally

While Edelman taps into the same feelings of indignation that prompted Gutter Dyke Collective and Queer Nation by targeting the Child where they attack Men and Straights, No Future advocates neither collectivism nor acting out. Although Edelman’s text also constitutes a polemic, which includes a variety of statements that have been met both by offence and defensive hostility from readers, he professes the belief that speaking about queerness will not change how the dominant culture views it. In other words, proliferating discourses of queerness makes no difference as they will be condensed into a limited repertoire of statements by heteronormativity. An oft-quoted passage from No Future shows the reason why the book has garnered such acerbic commentary in some quarters: ‘Fuck the social order and the Child in whose name we’re collectively terrorized; fuck Annie; fuck the waif from Les Mis; fuck the poor, innocent kid on the Net; fuck Laws both with capital Ls and with small; fuck the whole network of Symbolic relations and the future that serves as its prop’ (2004, 29). These remarks have inflamed respondents to ask where the figure of the Child ends and the real child begins. A significant prefatory comment is often absented from reproductions of the above quotation, that is, Edelman’s observation that no matter what individuals or groups marked out as Queer say, those driven by reproductive futurism will always hear the above proclamations as having been said anyway.

By way of further illustration, Edelman writes elsewhere that ‘It is we who must bury the subject in the tomb-like hollow of the signifier, pronouncing at last the words for which we’re condemned should we speak them or not: that we are the advocates of abortion; that the Child as futurity’s emblem must die’ (31). This of course points to the way in which pro-life movements often link an anti-abortion stance with an anti-homosexual position. While identity categories – however fluid and contingent – are important strategies of resistance for Gutter Dyke Collective and Queer Nation, Edelman argues that those figured as Queer, harbingers of the death drive, should, instead of wasting their breath in espousing indignant rebuttals, accede to that position because they will continue to be flung back there by right-wing pundits, not to mention the fact that the position exercises an enormous power to jam the

13 No Future arguably works psychoanalytically as a performative text and thus induces resistance in certain of its readers in their process of ‘working through’ its message. On the issue of resistance as a psychical strategy employed by readers and Edelman’s figuration by critics as the Queer, see Edelman (2004, 157–8, n. 19).
cogs in the machinery of heteronormativity should the occupants refuse to play the ‘game’ of the dominant culture. Edelman’s work is a continuation of that carried out by other scholar-activists, such as Leo Bersani (1995), Michael Warner (1999), Lisa Duggan (2003) and Alexandra Chasin (2000), all of whom have anatomised a growing homonormativity invested in neoliberalism, consumerism and assimilation through being seen as ‘normal’ by heteronormativity. In this, while Queer Nation berates lesbians and gays for not fighting back while queer bashings go on around them (1997/1990, 778), Edelman criticises lesbians and gays, ‘these comrades in reproductive futurism’ who seek to make reforms to the system while in the process becoming assimilated and put to work in it by being turned into sinthomosexuals (2004, 19).

In their introduction to Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children, Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley respond to what they see as Edelman’s setting-up of the Child as ‘the anti-queer’ with the view that ‘queerness inheres instead in innocence run amok’ (2004, xiv). Edelman’s treatment of the Child has been denounced by those who see him as flattening out the category and universalising one such usage of its figural status, without taking account of the fluctuating contours of that category over time. Edelman’s analysis is not a historical one, but a genealogical meditation on how the Child has come to be signified as natural and the marker of the future to which everyone must bow, ‘the prop of the secular theology on which our social reality rests’ (2004, 12). Edelman follows the lead of others such as Michel Foucault (1978/1976) and Judith Butler (1990) in interrogating how the Child, politics and the future have become entangled to such an extent that ‘we are no more able to conceive of a politics without a fantasy of the future than we are able to conceive of a future without the figure of the Child’ (Edelman 2004, 11). No Future works to denaturalise this myth. In his work on sexuality, Foucault traces the ways in which power works through technique and normalisation rather than repression or interdiction (1978/76, 89). Edelman shows that a similar thing is in place with respect to the future in which ‘a notional freedom’ stands in for ‘the actuality of freedom’ (2004, 11) in the heterocycloptic gaze unblinkingly directed towards the chimera of the future. Reproductive futurism fixates on the future as fetish so the Child becomes but a means to an end; a prosthetic conduit through which access to the future can be achieved.

Among the many definitions for posthumanism is Neil Badmington’s description of it as ‘a critical practice that occurs inside humanism, consisting not of the wake but the working-through of humanist discourse’ (2003, 22; see also Badmington 2000). The Queer thus serves as an uncanny reminder of the death drive nesting within heteronormativity, the trace of the impossibility of hermetically sealing ontological categories such as the Human. In this, LGBT/Q
activism has always been posthumanist in continuously challenging and redefining what the terms ‘Human’, ‘Humanism’ and ‘Humaneness’ mean, by rejecting the heteronormativity that pervades those categories and their discursive effects. Edelman goes further by rejecting catachresis as a strategy of resistance. His project is decidedly anti-humanist, one might say ‘post·hum·an·ous’: ‘Occurring or continuing after the death of the human’ (Smith, Klock and Gallardo-C. 2004). The desire for the Human therefore signifies an ‘archive desire’ (Derrida 1996/1995, 19), a desire not for the archivisation of the past but for the inscription of the future. Heteronormativity thus works in the shadow of its own finitude, striving retroactively to reproduce the present in the future, which is always the past futurally imagined.

‘Human beings’, The Posthuman Manifesto reminds us, ‘only exist as we believe them to exist’ (2003, 177). Queer apocal(o)ptic/ism involves suspending this belief in favour of tracing the normative technologies through which this category operates within different historical and cultural contexts. It is not about the desire for ‘Human Rights’ – which would be a humanising of the Queer – but rather examines our desire for the Human, for the social and political recognition that the figuration of such a term conveys. Judith Butler links ‘a liveable life’ and ‘a grievable death’ to the instantiation of what is understood by the ‘normatively human’ (2004, xv). That is, the ability to invoke feelings of compassion. In No Future, Lee Edelman queers the Human by cutting into its very heart, the figure of the Child, that image which is the personification of compassion’s evocation. Queering the Human demands a withholding of such mechanistic displays of compassion, the empty compulsions of heteronormativity. Such an act rejects, not the child, but those who make use of the child for their own ends.

Acknowledgements

Earlier versions were presented at University College Dublin and the University of Wales, Swansea. I owe my thanks to Sarah Gamble, Liz Herbert McEvoy, Michael O’Rourke and Moynagh Sullivan for their helpful suggestions. Lee Edelman was both attentive and generous when responding to some of the arguments put forward here at the ‘Sexuality and the Death Drive’ seminar in Dublin in July 2007. I am grateful to Tim Dean for sharing his forthcoming chapter with me. I am especially indebted to Nicole Murray for painstakingly reading and commenting on many previous drafts.
References


QUEERING THE NON/HUMAN


QUEER APOCAL(Ö)PTIC/ISM: THE DEATH DRIVE AND THE HUMAN


A politically malicious, homosexualised, antichrist rises from the mystic realm of pop culture, political humour and Internet religious reflection. It appears as a disquieting manifestation of contemporary US anxieties about security and about the end of the world. Since 9/11, the ‘enemy’ of the US, that potential harbinger of apocalyptic chaos, has been named ‘terrorism’ in general, and was localised for a time in the persons of Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden. In a culture given to homophobia and apocalyptic phantasm, Hussein and bin Laden were predictably portrayed as antichrist, as gay and on occasion, as both. The political enemy as homosexualised antichrist dissolved into focus through electronic waves of worry over national security and apocalyptic eschatological doom – the latter of which both disrupts and, at the same time, dials into, the former. As rhetorical critic Stephen O’Leary has said of earlier conservative Christian apocalyptic rhetoric in the US, ‘the world’s descent into chaos no longer threatens … rather, it provides a foundation for security’ (1994, 168–9). Once again, the threat of those who would bring doom and chaos allowed for the fortification of national security, designed (at least rhetorically) to protect the future of the nation and the world.

When read intertextually and interpictorially, as I will do here, these homophobic and apocalyptic manifestations of the enemy illuminate the question of what counts as human, and what is relegated as in/human (not quite human, yet still human enough to ground imperialising tactics). In particular, the pastiche apocalyptic figure that rises from the mediatised sea of collective concern calls attention to the relation of desire to apocalyptic temporality in certain delimitations of the in/human in the US. The images I will examine demonstrate the religious, sexual and political desires that are permissible in the realm of the redeemable human, and those that tip over into fear of the irredeemable, inhuman, antichristic, beastly, homosexual and, I will ultimately argue, queer. They make visible theologically and apocalyptically informed social and legal constraints on desire, which serve to establish the limit between
the human and the inhuman, between those whose lives are bound up with the imperialistic eschatology of the nation and those whose lives and desires are seen to flaunt that eschatology.

Depictions of the antichrist – as gay, as political enemy – exhibit the anxieties of US citizens on both domestic and foreign fronts. Thus, they are particularly instructive in decoding a continuous logic that holds together the Bush administration’s seemingly disparate projects of trying to legally enforce a ‘culture of life’ at home, while refusing any legal restriction in fighting the war on terror abroad. Here I am thinking specifically about the attempted proliferation of federal and state law prohibiting gay marriage, as it markedly contrasts with the refusal of legal regulations for interrogation at war (that is, torture). In other words, attempts to write gay marriage out of the US constitution may have been more than simply a ploy in garnering support for the Bush administration’s tactics in its war on terror: there may be an apocalyptic logic holding them together. I will suggest that these contradictory legal strategies on domestic and foreign fronts are jointly governed by the desires, fears and apocalyptic temporalities represented in the images under examination and their precursors, and by the limit between human and inhuman that they mark. This argument is an attempt to diagnose and rupture the apocalyptic logic that holds together homophobia in the US with the unconscionable and dehumanising tactics of the war on terror. Further, it is an intervention that seeks not only to interrogate what is at stake in the category of human, but also to contribute to queer and feminist thinking about the larger narratives that drive conservative views of the family.1 Quite clearly, opposition to homosexuality and gay marriage is as much about reinforcing a certain familial structure as it is about banning another. In my view, it is important to understand the way in which the religious narratives that buttress these views on gender, sexuality and the family are also implicated in the cruel imperialist work of the nation.

Perhaps the clearest and most familiar depiction of the homosexualised, antichristic enemy is that of Saddam Hussein as Satan’s sadistic and insensitive gay lover in the film, *South Park: Bigger, Longer and Uncut* (1999). Satan aims for a more loving relationship, while Saddam just wants to have sex, and be turned on by the possibility of taking over the world.

The humour of screenwriters Trey Parker, Matt Stone and Pam Brady seems to be drawing on a number of religious and cultural traditions. These are the long-standing designation of the political enemy as antichrist; the more recent

---

1 For discussions of the ways in which these current culture wars seek to severely limit women’s agency in favour of reinforcing the male head of the family’s power and leadership, see Kintz (1997) and Runions (2007).
conservative Christian belief that the antichrist is likely to be homosexual, and the conventions of orientalist art. The depictions of the antichrist produced by these traditions stand somewhat independently of each other, and are rarely combined quite as they are in *South Park*. None the less, the fact that they can so easily be combined perhaps derives from the fact that, as I will demonstrate below, each of these traditions combines an apocalyptic eschatological orientation with desire, or its by-product, fear. Moreover, in each of these traditions, the humanity of those vilified is ambiguous. Though these various political enemies as homosexualised antichrists might take the form of humans (albeit sometimes with bestial qualities), their desires are inhuman, outside the desires that secure the future of the nation and humanity.

In what follows, I outline these traditions with an eye to the kinds of in/human desires ascribed to these various political and homosexualised antichrists and their precursors. Then, in order to unravel the relation between law, apocalyptic desire and the in/human, I turn to the work of Giorgio Agamben on ‘bare life’ (life considered to be borderline human) and the state of exception. His work helps us to see how legal attempts to ban gay marriage from US polity are integrally related to US disregard for international law (the state of exception) that allows for torture overseas. Both approaches to law draw boundaries around the human in ways that try to regulate and promote apocalyptically oriented desire. Finally, my analysis seeks to queer the composite image of the antichrist – the gay political enemy – in spite of its homophobic impulses, and reclaim it as a moment that disrupts the apocalyptic time of US empire. Here I will be guided by Lee Edelman’s diagnosis of queerness as the death drive of the future-oriented social order, and his insistence on the need to acknowledge and recuperate that role. My wish to reclaim the political enemy as queer antichrist is inspired, in large part, by Edelman’s work. At the same time, it offers a site of queer negativity that is somewhat outside of the usual candidates and that I hope will illuminate many of the deep, religiously motivated structures of the imperialist and heteronormative teleological project.

**The Political Enemy as In/Human Antichrist**

It is in no way surprising that contentious political leaders like Hussein, and after him bin Laden, are portrayed in both spoof and serious forms as antichrist.  

---

2 For Halberstam’s critique of the ‘small archive that represents queer negativity’, in Edelman’s work, as well as Edelman’s response to this charge, see Caserio et al. (2006).

3 Of course, these are not the only candidates for antichrist; others suggested include the Pope, George Bush, a future president of the EU, Bill Gates and Barney
Apocalyptic thought, deriving largely from various interpretations of the biblical book of Revelation, has long been central to US history and culture, and within that thought, the antichrist has long been shorthand for any and every political threat. The antichrist stands in for anything or anyone who appears to be hindering the prevalent set of nationalist and capitalist desires that originate in the colonies, and culminate in US hegemony (see Fuller 1995, 71–3, 136–60; Boyer 1992, 282–4, 328–30). In the contemporary period, no matter how the antichrist has been named, the fear is that he will establish a one-world order, thus doing away with nations (hence US hegemony) (see Corbett 1997; Froese 1997; Kjos 1997). In one common scenario, the antichrist ‘will take over the reins of world government and establish Jerusalem as his capital. When he arrives in the Holy City, he will proceed to the Temple Mount, enter the Jewish sanctuary, stop the sacrifices [], and proclaim himself to be God’ (Church 1997, 320). It is in this vein that Hussein and bin Laden have, in recent years, been designated as possible candidates for antichrist by conservative Christian and otherwise spiritually interested Internet sites (for example, Falwell 2001; Kinsella 2005; Pastor Art and Sister Sue 2005).

For lengthy discussions of the effect of apocalyptic thinking on US culture, see Boyer (1992), Ingebretsen (1996), Long (2005). The key elements of this thought – built from Revelation but supplemented by other biblical texts – are that the world will finally come to an end when Christ returns, judges all people, banishes Satan and establishes his new and glorious kingdom. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to detail the many ways in which this narrative has been scrutinised and interpreted. It is worth noting, however, that at times, interpretations of this narrative have become extremely literal, with much attention being paid to the arrival of a thousand years of peace, as described in Revelation 20:6, often called the millennium; such attention has been called millenarian. A certain kind of millenarian interpretation, called dispensational premillennialism, became popularised in Britain and the US in the nineteenth century through the teachings of John Nelson Darby and C.I. Scofield, and continues to influence conservative Christian interpretations today. In this reading of apocalyptic texts, history proceeds in ages, or dispensations. The present dispensation, ‘the Church Age’, will end when Christ will return and take all believers to him in heaven (the rapture), before the millennium – the final ‘Kingdom Age’ – begins; those left behind will be tormented by the antichrist. With the rise of dispensational premillennialism came the rise of literal readings of the text, scrutinising the text for signs about the future. The results of such reading, however, tend often to be consistent with much older interpretations, especially with regard to the antichrist.

These sites hedge their bets on the antichrist and rarely give definitive predictions; rather they strongly hint in a particular direction. Hussein has, as a matter of necessity, been superseded by bin Laden as a prime candidate. This chapter was in its final stage of revision when Hussein was executed in Iraq in December 2006. I will have to leave
Descriptions of the antichrist throughout the ages have made clear that the threat he poses to humanity is a result of his quasi-inhuman, beastly and deceptive nature. It is precisely this deceptiveness that makes the humanity of the antichrist difficult to determine: deception is evidence of the antichrist’s inhumanity and possible connection to Satan. And yet it is the human form of the antichrist that allows him to be deceptive. The antichrist’s potential human form allows for human religious and political leaders to be suspect. Political and religious leaders who do not appear to do God’s will (in the eye of the beholder) may be the antichrist. Here perhaps it is important to briefly indicate how the traditions about the antichrist have been constructed so that he comes to represent a hostile political leader that occupies a position somewhere between human and inhuman.

The term ‘antichrist’ is only found in the Bible in the epistles of John in the context of cautioning believers against false doctrine (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7). In these Johannine texts, it is unclear whether the term designates a unique figure, or if it is a term that refers to any person who teaches against Christ. So for instance, 1 John 2:18 refers to the antichrist in both singular and plural terms: ‘Children, it is the last hour! As you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. From this we know that it is the last hour’. Because of this possibility for multiple antichrists, Christian interpreters began to suggest that many little antichrists would precede the one final antichrist or, following Augustine, that any heretic or hostile leader could be called an antichrist (Homilies on 1 John 6:12; McGinn 1994, 76–7; Weinrich 1985, 137; see also n. 11 on Joachim of Fiore below). This semantic confusion in the biblical text is perhaps why nominations for antichrist can flourish as they do. It also leaves open the option that anyone (that is, any human) could be an antichrist.

Though use of the term ‘antichrist’ is infrequent in the texts that form the canon, the larger apocalyptic tradition in the Graeco-Roman world did posit an eschatological opponent. Early extra-biblical Jewish and Christian apocalypses and their later interpreters were divided on whether this eschatological opponent would be human or inhuman, whether he would be simply a human tool of greater evil forces, or whether he would be of demonic origin. On one hand, as Gregory Jenks has pointed out, many early Christian texts, such as the epistles of John, or The Apocalypse of Peter, and Didache, speak of deceivers, but not of their connection to Satan (1991, 360). Such texts seem to indicate that the lawless deceiver is expected to be a human false prophet, or deceptive teacher, simply a tool of evil forces. But other texts affiliate the antichrist much more
closely with Satan – or with his predecessor in Jewish literature, Beliar. Early Christian theologians suggested that the antichrist would be a kind of Satan incarnate, appearing as human, but having the nature of Satan – a corollary to the incarnate God, Christ. As the early tradition developed, the antichrist increasingly appeared as more demonic than human, but following the anti-apocalyptic Augustine, interpretation of these texts through the Middle Ages changed again to focus on the human form of the antichrist, who would lead the forces of evil. None the less, though appearing human, the antichrist was considered by many mediaeval interpreters to have either Satanic parentage, or protection (Emmerson 1981, 7–82). Increasingly, the antichrist was considered a threat to Christendom as a whole. As Robert Lerner (1985) points out in his essay about Joachim of Fiore – that famous and influential chiliastic biblical interpreter of the twelfth century – Joachim was innovative in understanding the final antichrist to ‘represent the embodiment of the worst imaginable Western corporate dangers – a depraved royalty and a depraved papacy’ who would deceive the world (568). 

---

6 In the early apocalypse *The Ascension of Isaiah* (of debated, but probably Jewish, origins) Beliar, the angel of lawlessness, descends in the form of a lawless king (4:2); for further discussion of this text, see Peerbolte (1996, 194–205).

7 The early Christian theologian, Irenaeus (2nd c. CE) taught that just as Christ ‘recapitulates’ God and goodness, so the antichrist would recapitulate all evil and apostasy (*Against Heresies* 5.29.2; McGinn 1994, 58–60). A little later in the tradition, the theologian Origen (3rd c. CE) taught that the antichrist could do evil miracles by the powers of ‘his father’ Satan (*Contra Celsum* VI.45). For discussion of this and other passages in Origen concerning the antichrist, see Jenks (1991, 57–60).

8 The interpretive indeterminacy over the antichrist’s humanity is further exemplified by the physical descriptions of the antichrist that began to appear in early apocalyptic texts and carry on into late antiquity. In these descriptions, the antichrist is portrayed as monstrous: often with a bald head, a leprous spot on the forehead, and with asymmetrical or oversized features, awful teeth, and a misproportioned body. He is sometimes depicted as a wild animal, or with an eye like a lion (Rosenstiehl 1967; Ford 1996; McGinn 1994, 68–73). For examples, see *The Apocalypse of Elijah* 3:15–16; *The Greek Apocalypse of Ezra* 4:30–32.

9 For a comprehensive study of the antichrist in the Middle Ages, see Emmerson (1981).

10 Joachim reads the biblical texts allegorically, to determine the identity of both the little antichrists and the final one antichrist. The many heads of the beast(s) in Revelation become these various antichrists, who would take the form of evil kings (some of whom had already reigned), appearing in final succession until the advent of the two last antichrists (one before and one after Satan’s time in the abyss, Rev. 20:1–7).
The need to identify the one final antichrist has led interpreters throughout the tradition to try to clarify the nature of the antichrist. To this end, other biblical texts warning of deceptive teachers have been used to illuminate the cryptic reference to the antichrist(s) in the letters of John. Through this process, the one final antichrist has come to be associated with Satan and described in bestial terms. In particular, the apocalyptic visions in the books of Daniel and Revelation that depict successive imperial powers as a series of beasts—culminating with the most frightening and present imperial danger (see Daniel chs. 7–11 and Revelation chs. 13–17) — are grafted onto the notion of a deceptive and Satanic leader.\footnote{Indeed, the strong allegorical anti-imperial rhetoric of the book of Revelation — which might discourage invocation of its images in the service of the American empire — has been much discussed by scholars. For the debate over the extent to which the text responds to real imperialist oppression, see Boesak 1987; Fiorenza 1985, 1991; Thompson 1990; A.Y. Collins 1984; Kraybill 1996.}

The composite image thus drawn of the biblical antichrist is both human and inhuman; he is a leader to be feared: part human, part beast. He is worldly, with otherworldly ties to the kingdom of Satan. Any leader that can be shown to be boastful or deceitful, or opposing God’s work, can be suspect.

In contemporary prophecy writing, often the antichrist is depicted as a human, as evidenced in the attempts to name world leaders the antichrist, but one whose intentions for world dominance are inhuman in the extreme (for example, \textit{Left Behind} 2005; Webber 1997). Through deceptiveness, the antichrist leads human desire astray, perverts it and makes it less than human. The antichrist marks the limit between the human and inhuman. He appears in human form, yet has inhuman desires and tools that he puts to inhuman ends, ends that seek to block the highest goals of humanity and turn desire for these goals asunder. Indeed, the only way to ascertain the inhumanity of the antichrist is to recognise that his intentions and desires are wrongly oriented, to see that he seeks to thwart believers, political goals and, ultimately, the human.

The current naming of the political enemy as antichrist falls not only within the purview of evangelists; it operates in ‘coded’ fashion in US national politics as well.\footnote{For discussions on Bush’s religious coding, see Keller 2005; Lifton 2003; Lincoln 2004; Morford 2004; Runions 2004; Urban 2004.} For instance, in one speech on the war on terror (6 October 2005), without ever mentioning the antichrist, Bush was able to paint a picture of ‘the enemy’ that is truly apocalyptic and inhuman, posing a ‘mortal danger to all humanity’ (2005a). Bush’s justification for the war on terror opened and closed with apocalyptic threats and rewards. The speech began with an apocalyptically drawn recollection of 9/11: ‘a great evil … a proud city covered in smoke and
ashes, a fire across the Potomac, and passengers who spent their final moments on Earth fighting the enemy’. It ended with the assurance that the war on terror ‘is also the current expression of an ancient struggle’, and the promise that ‘the cause of freedom will once again prevail’. Within this apocalyptic frame, the enemy was described as ‘Evil men, obsessed with ambition and unburdened by conscience’, who in ‘their cold-blooded contempt for human life’ were ‘the enemies of humanity’. A sure sign of their antichristic intent, these men were said to be ‘part of global, borderless terrorist organizations’. The president ingeniously both named this evil Islam, and disavowed that he did so: ‘Some call this evil Islamic radicalism; others, militant Jihadism; still others, Islamo-fascism. Whatever it’s called, this ideology is very different from the religion of Islam’. The fear – made particularly manifest in the term ‘Islamo-fascism’ and in its alleged global, borderless organisation – was, and continues to be, of world dominance in the wrong key. Given this kind of ‘secular’ political rhetoric, it is not at all surprising that Islamic leaders – those (correctly or incorrectly) associated with terror – have been crowned Antichrist.

This tactic of endowing enemies with spiritual significance has several obvious effects. It implicitly aligns the audience’s future with the kingdom of God (open to all humanity, if saved by Christ), while aligning its political enemies’ future with the kingdom of Satan (the enemy of humanity and Christ’s salvation of it). The spiritual enemy threatens all of humanity and the kingdom of God, while the political enemy threatens US citizens and the nation’s glorious future. Within an apocalyptic framework, then, political threats to the nation become spiritual threats to the destiny of humanity. Moreover, this rhetoric increases the fear of political enemies among the apocalyptically inclined within the population and, to borrow a line from George II, strengthens their resolve against such enemies of the nation.

Gay Antichrist Versus the Nation

Relatively recently, in contemporary conservative Christian apocalyptic teaching, the antichrist has been interpreted as a homosexual or ‘sodomite’ (two preferred terms of the homophobic). In this description of the homosexual antichrist, improperly oriented sexual desire is aligned with the in/human desire of the antichrist who has his sights set on the US, and could ultimately destroy humanity itself. Such descriptions of the antichrist, as I will discuss, strongly indicate the connections made in this worldview between US nationalism, heteronormativity, the future and what it means to be human. At the same time, the deceptive antichrist poses the threat of contagion by non-normative desire, desire that cannot be constrained or banished by the categories of human or
inhuman, heterosexual or homosexual. The antichrist’s deceptiveness means that human and inhuman cannot be told apart, nor their apparent sexualities. As I will argue further on, it is this ‘threat’ that becomes a possibility for reclaiming the queer antichrist.

In conservative Christian discourse, the antichrist’s probable homosexual orientation is derived from a particular way of translating Daniel 11:37. Some translations render the middle part of the verse as follows: ‘He will show no regard for the gods of his fathers or for the desire of women’ (New American Standard Bible). The antichrist’s lack of interest in women allows for the suggestion that the antichrist may be homosexual. As television and Internet preacher Dr David R. Reagan expounds, ‘Daniel indicates that he will be a sexual pervert, most likely a homosexual. As Daniel puts it, the Antichrist will show no regard “for the desire of women” (Daniel 11:37)’ (Reagan 2005; see also Benoit 1997, 313; Boston 2006; The Family 1997–99; Remnant of God 1985–2005). Significantly, this sign of the antichrist is not simply affiliated with wrongly oriented desire, but with lack of desire itself, as if desire must be for a woman to be called desire at all.

The sexuality of the antichrist appears to be produced as a response to societal changes with respect to sexuality and gender. Paul Boyer situates the origins of the homosexual antichrist in the culture wars following the increasing acceptance of homosexuality in the 1970s (1992, 234). It would seem that as sexual norms have changed, some religious interpreters have reacted by trying to restabilise the status quo through moral imperatives. Not surprisingly, given the
contemporary configuration of the ongoing culture wars, some commentators extrapolate from their understanding of the antichrist’s sexual orientation a diagnosis of the problems facing marriage in the twenty-first century. So for instance, Joseph Chambers of Paw Creek Ministries suggests in pamphlet and video form that the spiritual prototype of heterosexual marriage, described in Revelation as the marriage of the Lamb (that is, the marriage between Christ and the church), is under threat from ‘sodomites’ (2005). He lays the blame at the feet of the antichrist:

Satan is on a rampage to defile the family of humankind and the future family of the redeemed … I do not believe that there is any question but that the Antichrist will be a homosexual. The world is literally hell-bent on making the sodomite lifestyle the order of the day … Sodomites are thrilled to destroy any institution that stands in their way [!!]. Their motives and methods cannot be called anything but demonic.

Likewise John Torell of the European American Evangelistic Crusades suggests that the homosexual antichrist found in Daniel is the same force that enables support for gay marriage, and the Episcopalian appointment of gay bishops. Other sites call gay marriage the work of the beast, and of Satan, without necessarily citing Daniel. So for instance, the Watchmen Bible Study Group finds the acceptance of homosexuality and gay marriage to be a sign of the first beast: the emergence of a ‘one-world political/religious system … which will make it possible for the antichrist to step in, take the reins, and assume control of most every soul on the planet’. Within that one-world system, ‘Satan’s false teachers’ try to convince people of unbiblical truths, including acceptance of gay Christians and gay marriage.

Gay marriage is thus associated with the demonic and the totalitarian one-world system, and so its supporters are rendered inhuman and anti-democratic (so also un-American). This discourse agonises over what it considers to be sexual and political desire gone so terribly awry that it threatens the future. ‘Sodomites’, like the pervert antichrist they follow, are not only a threat to redemption’s final goal (the marriage of the Lamb), but to the earthly mirror of that goal. Notably, for Chambers, that earthly goal is not marriage, but the family (that is, husband, wife and children). The threat to the world, to the family and to Christians’ final future is the same.

Renowned evangelical leader on the family, James Dobson, makes similar arguments about the family, society and the nation, also motivating his arguments through apocalyptic threat. His ‘Eleven Arguments against Same-Sex Marriage’, excerpted from his book, *Marriage Under Fire: Why We Must Win This Battle*, culminates with two arguments that draw family and nation back into the apocalyptic scenario. Throughout his text, he predicts disaster:
the accelerated end of the family on every continent, total collapse of the health care system on the national front, bankruptcy of social security, the end of religious freedom. His tenth and eleventh arguments focus on the threat to the eschatological future: the impediment to spreading the gospel that unstable homes for children will create, and the resulting apocalyptic crisis that acceptance of same-sex marriage might provoke. All over the globe, the lack of gospel teaching ‘will create millions of motherless children and fatherless kids’, as if in the wake of a natural disaster. If the nation is to stay healthy, marriage must be preserved. So the threat to the family is also a threat to the future of the nation. Here, as in the discourse of Bush on (antichristic) terror, the threat to the nation extends to the future of the globe, and one can extrapolate, to the future of humankind.

With respect to gay marriage, Bush used a similar nationalist reasoning to that of Dobson and Carlson, when in February 2004 he called for a constitutional amendment protecting marriage. As he opined, ‘ages of experience have taught humanity that the commitment of a husband and wife to love and to serve one another promotes the welfare of children and the stability of society’. Further, because ‘preservation of marriage rises to this level of national importance’, the strongest legal action must be undertaken. Note the slippage between humanity and the nation characteristic of so many of Bush’s speeches (italics mine in both quotations) – with its implication that the nation has an obligation to lead humanity in its universal truth. Though Bush did not mention Christianity, his tone was sermonic, and his message one of an almost prophetic access to timeless verity.

The rhetorical use of procreation, nation building and apocalypse in homophobia and the fight against same-sex marriage is helpfully contextualised through Lee Edelman’s critique of the futurity of the Child. With caustic humour, Edelman shows that in the US, pervasive political appeal to the Child and the Child’s future, that is, ‘the fight for the Children’ (2004, 3), ‘shapes the logic within which the political itself must be thought’ (2004, 2). The appeal to the Child is ubiquitous from the right and the left, and comes to ‘every political vision as a vision of futurity’ (2004, 13). Politics becomes ‘the politics of reproduction’. Edelman points to the work of Lauren Berlant, who draws out the way in which the Child/foetus, has come to stand in for the future and for ‘anxieties and desires about whose citizenship – whose subjectivity, whose

---

15 For an excellent discussion of the uses of ‘freedom of religion’ within conservative Christian discourse, see Castelli (2005, 2006).

16 See Kintz (1997) and Burlein (2002) for a much wider discussion of the way that conservative or far-right Christian preoccupations with family, nation and race intersect.
forms of intimacy and interest, whose bodies and identifications, whose heroic narratives – will direct America’s future’ (Berlant 1997, 6). The Child becomes almost synonymous with the narrative of the nation’s future.

Edelman makes reference to the apocalyptic theology behind much of this futurity, without foregrounding it. Apocalypse appears in his citations of the language used by the religious right to explicate the Child’s role in securing futurity. For instance, he cites Donald Wildmon of the American Family Association who worries about the destruction of Western civilisation through acceptance of homosexuality, ‘plummeting ourselves, our Children and grandChildren into an age of godlessness’ (Edelman 2004, 16). Likewise, the militant pro-life Army of God, were, in their words, willing ‘to disrupt and ultimately destroy Satan’s power to kill our Children, God’s Children’ (Edelman 2004, 22). It would seem they were after the antichrist. Edelman’s work subtly indicates that the futurity of the Child is envisioned as part of a particularly apocalyptic futurity, in which the Child becomes a signifier for all future, and for the fate of humanity (see also 2004, 75, 66, 91, 113–14). His work thus opens a space, as I will show presently, for revaluation of the place of the gay antichrist as that queer element that will helpfully resist and disrupt the homophobic discourses that insist that sexual desires be properly oriented toward the successful future of the (Christian) nation and humanity.

Homosexualised Enemy

Let me now turn to the way in which political enemies are frequently homosexualised in the secular US imagination. Independently of religious depictions of the antichrist as politically malicious or gay (but not both), other secular, often satiric sites, portray bin Laden and Hussein as homosexual. Portraying Saddam Hussein as homosexual – and thus bestial – goes back to the first Gulf War. Queer theorist Jonathan Goldberg has analysed the ad Rolling Stone ran at that time for a T-shirt reading ‘America will not be Saddamized’, with Saddam’s head sketched over the ass of a camel (1992, 1–5). Since the beginning of the second Gulf War, perhaps the most mainstream of this type of image currently adrift on the Internet, is the spoof Queer Eye for the Straight Guy poster, advertising a show about the make-over of Hussein. Appealing to a different audience, Weekly World News has also launched stories of Hussein’s and bin Laden’s sexual preferences. Bold headlines tell of Saddam’s sordid history as a porn star, his penchant for male lovers, his lurid diaries in which he confesses his love affair with bin Laden, their marriage, their broken penile implants, and their adopted ape baby. Other, less prominent media and political humour websites, make use of similar themes. StrangeCosmos.com
displays ‘Osama and his gay masochist pal’, in which bin Laden’s head has been Photoshopped onto one party of a leather couple. The same site also hosts an animated image entitled ‘Saddam giving Osama bin Laden a “Lewinsky!”’ in which Hussein’s head compulsively bobs up and down over bin Laden’s lap. The political humour page at About.com contains dozens of Photoshopped images of Hussein in drag (and several of George W. Bush as well), including one of Hussein seductively posed as a pin-up girl in a red devil suit. In an effort to interrogate the ‘humour’ that finds images of homosexualised Arabs funny, I would suggest that these political spoofs portraying Arab, Muslim, or otherwise orientalised men as gay or gender queer are part of a larger tradition about humanity, nationalism and sexuality in which the religious and the secular are intertwined.

Though in many ways different from the religious depictions of the political and gay antichrist that I have been discussing, these secular images of the queer Arab enemy can be understood to come out of a combined religious and secular tradition that defines heterosexual marriage as a human trait (as per Bush’s speech endorsing a constitutional amendment on marriage, cited above). Let me briefly point to two convergences between the secular and religious that form a tautological argument about the heterosexual human. First, in both secular and religious traditions there is a slippage between the universal and the particular in conceptualising humanity. As illustrated in the religious assessments of same-sex marriage discussed thus far, the use of apocalyptic language relates the category of human to the ‘universal truth’ of Christianity. True humanity is saved. It is comprised of those who have accepted Christ’s salvation; true humanity will, in the next world, sit at the marriage supper of the Lamb. The human is particularised by the ‘truth’ of Christianity. A similar slippage, this time between the universal human and the nation, appears in secular discussions of human rights. As Talad Asad points out, the ‘human’ in human rights is assumed to be universal, but is only protected by the laws of any given nation-state:17 ‘the identification and application of human rights law has no meaning independent of the judicial institutions that belong to individual nation-states (or to several states bound together by treaty)’ (2003, 129). He draws out the point that ‘the human’ is simply an abstracted notion ‘imagined in a state of nature’ (143), and therefore nowhere an actual reality in political terms. A tension arises, therefore, ‘between the moral invocation of “universal humanity” and the power of the state to identify, apply, and maintain the law’ (138). In both religious and secular

---

17 Here Asad follows Hannah Arendt’s (1973/1950) similar observation in The Origins of Totalitarianism (299–300).
discourse, then, the ‘universal’ human is limited by the particular (religion or political governance).

Secondly, a commensurate overlap between religious and secular views of the body further defines the human in terms of sexual morality. Janet Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini explicate this dynamic in showing the central role that the body plays in joining religious and secular discourses. As they argue, the body is the site on which morality (secular in guise, though religious in form) is enacted. From early modernity into the contemporary period, they argue, religious views about the body were mandated by the secular state: ‘the newly secularized state enforced specifically religious ideas about, for example, “natural” versus “unnatural” sexual acts and appetites, precisely through enforcing body regulation’ (2000, 2). Christian values become secular human morality through the regulation of the nation-state. Tautologically, heterosexuality becomes a human trait. The discourses on the antichrist’s sexuality and gay marriage I have been discussing emphasise the Christian roots of what might be called a Christian secular discourse – to borrow a phrase from Jakobsen (2005). There, religious ideas about sex are imbricated with Christian secular discourses about the health of the nation and humanity. Universal humanity is particularised as Christian and safeguarded by the US. Sexuality is regulated according to Christian values, in order to save the nation and humanity, which are understood to be universally Christian. Since the nation and humanity is ultimately preserved by heterosexuality, ‘true’ humanity is ‘saved’, affiliated with the US and heterosexuals. Here secular ideas about sexual morals are thoroughly part of the temporal structure of apocalypse and also part of secular discourses that affiliate the human with the nation.

The fact that the enemy is also homosexualised in secular images can be seen as a result of the overlaps between secular and religious discourses on the human, and should come as no surprise. If sexual and civic desire must line up with the apocalyptic narrative of the nation and humanity, those considered to be outside of the narrative are represented through non-normative sexual desire. High-profile Muslims, seen as hostile to the nation and therefore to the Christian universal, are ascribed unnatural appetites, and also assumed to be a threat to humanity.

Orientalist art exemplifies this tradition about the in/human queer Arab in its secular and colonial facets. Orientalist art is filled with virile, attractive, gender queer and not quite human villains and antiheroes. Goldberg, for example,

---

18 For a longer discussion of the secular regulation of religious ideas about the body and sexuality, see Jakobsen and Pellegrini (2003); Jakobsen (2005).
19 For a discussion of the shift from religion to morality in modernity, see Baird (2000).
points out the way that English Renaissance texts repeatedly understand male homosexuality as a particularly Mediterranean and Islamic trait (1992, 3). What analyses of orientalist art have so helpfully shown is that non-normative desire is not totally excluded from the realm of the human, but rather is allowed to be present in so far as it can also signify cultural superiority for the viewer. In the words of film theorist Adrienne McLean, orientalism acts ‘as a liminal dreamscape on which to project displaced Western erotic and political desires’ (1997, 133). In other words, in orientalist art and film, Eastern backgrounds and characters are given erotic license and penetrability that permit viewers’ sexual fantasies, and at the same time function as allegories of territorial conquest. McLean points to the work of other cultural critics, such as Susan White and Michael Moon. They notice that viewers’ desires are inscribed in depictions of ‘corrupt sexuality, a degraded or treacherous femininity and male homoeroticism’ (White 1988, 132), or in alternate masculinities, fantasised as intensely desirable, more human than human, and at the same time, not quite human (Moon 1989, 28).

Though the kind of orientalism that flourished in the early part of the twentieth century has diminished, the trend has persisted, as made evident in the depictions of Hussein and bin Laden discussed above. It is these kinds of images that the writers of South Park pick up on in satirising US attitudes toward the Middle East. There, Saddam, the Middle Eastern enemy, is portrayed as stereotypically male wanting sex all the time; yet his humanity is in question, since he has sex with Satan, and enjoys torture. Conversely, Satan is more gender queer, a hard body with inner sensitivity, ironically more human than Saddam. Satan’s character, at least, has his own charm, and may provide a possibility for alternate points of queer identification. He is able to get out of his unhealthy hetero-modelled relationship, in which he has to read Saddam is from Mars, Satan is from Venus in order to cope; he is able to move on to better things. But Saddam is destroyed, skewered through the middle on a mountaintop in hell. The orientalist and racist homophobia so typical of US aggression toward the Middle East is parodied through Saddam, evident in his death, and in Satan’s angry parting insult to Saddam, ‘You sandy little butt hole’.

Such orientalist homophobic cultural roots may fuel the amusement provoked by homosexualised images of political enemies, such as those of bin Laden and Hussein mentioned above. In these images, as in orientalist art, homoerotic desire is simultaneously explored, permitted and demonised, as

20 McLean (1997) analyses Jack Cole’s orientalist camp choreography in 1940s and ’50s.

21 I am grateful to my colleague Aaron Kunin for this insight that complicates a reading of the film as straightforwardly homophobic.
politically antithetical and perhaps – given the general US politico-apocalyptic zeitgeist – also spiritually hazardous. And because they depict enemies of the United States, these images insist that US national identity is tied up with heteronormativity. Further, the masculinity of these figures appears as somehow out of the ordinary. As Goldberg notices of the ‘We will not be Saddamized’ T-shirt, ‘Saddam – homosexual, bestial, foreign, inhuman, feminine – is the target of a proper masculinity’, by which the US will be on top (1992, 4–5). Yet this kind of gender heteronormativity is allowed to be homosexualised in the context of orientalism and war: the US must penetrate the camel with a missile, ‘in a word, “America” says, “we will sodomize”’ (1992, 4). One might say, as Gaylyn Studlar has said of orientalism in early film, these types of images allow ‘the viewer to project his “unthinkable” sexual fantasies into an exotic imaginary space’ (Goldberg 1992, 102). But erotic projection is done in a way that is safe because it justifies aggression toward the very object of desire. In a word, these images express, ‘the Western male’s externalization and vicarious destruction of is own fears and desires’ (White 1988, 133). Here non-normative desire, fear and aggression merge.

The Union of Antichrists: An Eschatology of Inhumanity

One of the more common of the homosexualised images of Hussein and bin Laden to be found on the Internet is what appears to be a Weekly World News front page story, ‘Osama and Saddam’s gay wedding’.22 One can only wonder what this wedding portrait would signify to apocalyptically minded Christians. Surely, even in jest, it would be an icon of everything gone wrong with the world: two potential antichrists engaging in a truly godless ritual, defying both the family and the nation. From the perspective of an apocalyptic worldview, this image aligns enemies of the state with the enemies of the family – the threats to their futures merge. It depicts the antichrists’ gay wedding, par excellence.

This image and the apocalyptic scenarios with which it might interpictorially intersect have both to do with anxieties about domestic policies and about foreign policies. What I have tried to show thus far is that the logic that grounds these anxieties is the same: on both fronts, the danger envisioned is to the future of the nation and to humanity, as well as to God’s final kingdom. The antichrist and his followers (whether gay, or, as per Bush, Islamic radicals) are what block

22 The image of Hussein’s and bin Laden’s wedding can be found at <http://politicalhumor.about.com/library/images/blsaddamosamamariage.htm>. Though it appears to be a Weekly World News story, employees at the tabloid itself could not confirm whether or not they had run the story.
that future; they are portrayed as those who do not care about humanity or the kingdom of God, indeed they are depicted as inhuman. Within this logic, they should be annihilated by constitutional amendment, or by war; they should have no future. In an apocalyptically oriented religious worldview, the threat posed by the terrorist is ultimately the same as that posed by gay marriage: both are a menace to the future of the nation and of humanity. It would appear that the fight against gay marriage and the fight against terror operate to protect the same set of apocalyptically oriented desires.

But what intrigues me, given the uniformity of apocalyptic desires, is the stark dissimilarity in the legal strategies used to pursue them on domestic and foreign fronts. On the domestic end, the tactic has been to fortify the law to ensure the nation’s future. Bush’s proposed constitutional amendment prohibiting gay marriage precipitated a landslide of similar legal strategies on the state level (Peterson 2004). By contrast, in war, and specifically with respect to torture in pursuing the war, the policy has been to undermine the law, by vetoing law-making at home and defying international law abroad. Why the explosion of legality in the proposed constitutional amendments, when at the same time legality is eschewed in the more pressing issue of torture?

Perhaps not surprisingly, Bush’s apocalyptically loaded speech of 6 October 2005, cited above, in which he subtly compared Islamo-fascists to the antichrist, was given the day after the Senate voted in favor of an amendment to the Department of Defense Appropriations Act 2006, limiting interrogation techniques, that is, torture.23 Bush’s speech provided the religio-philosophical rhetoric for the administrative policy, issued five days before the Senate’s vote on torture, which stated that the president should veto any attempt ‘to regulate the detention, treatment, or trial of terrorists captured in the war on terror’. Practicality specified that such measures would ‘restrict the President’s ability to conduct the war effectively under existing law’, and would ‘restrict the President’s authority to protect Americans effectively from terrorist attacks’ (Statement of Administration Policy 2005). Given Bush’s apocalyptic description of the war on terror, however, one wonders if such limitations on law have as much to do with the religiously framed descriptions of the in/humanity of the enemy as they have to do with practicality.

What is more remarkable than the disregard of international law is the threat to veto any domestic US law-making that would infringe on the progress of the

23 The amendment was proposed by Senator McCain (R-Ariz.) (Babington and Murray). For the text of the amendment limiting interrogation see the records of the 109th Congress, Bill no. H.R. 2863, amendment no. 1977, which became Public Law 109–48. Though Bush signed the bill, his signing statement (Bush 2005b) suggested that it be interpreted in the context of his role in protecting the US from terror (Savage).
war in Iraq. Why such trust in the power of law to regulate affairs within the US and such dismissal of its ability to do so overseas? While it is tempting to write off this dynamic as power-hungry cynicism, I would like to suggest that there may be more at work – it may be precisely the apocalyptic determination of appropriate human desire that binds the proliferation of law-making at home to the refusal of law abroad.

Giorgio Agamben’s ruminations on the limit between the human and the inhuman may be instructive, in answering these questions. As is increasingly well known, Agamben’s work on power and politics – begun in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1998/1995) and elaborated further in *State of Exception* (2005/2003) – seeks to interrogate the historical connections between what Michel Foucault has distinguished as pre-modern and modern forms of power, that is, between authoritarian power and biopower.

Agamben explores this continuity between archaic and modern forms of power by looking at the way the excluded inclusion of ‘bare life’ is common to them both. He identifies the role of ‘bare life’ in establishing sovereignty as the hidden point of intersection between the juridico-institutional and the biopolitical models of power’ (1998/1995, 6). He follows Aristotle to suggest that bare life is animal life that is not quite yet human. Only when biological life comes into the realm of language and law is it transformed into something that is no longer simply bare life; it becomes humanised as it enters into the realm of the political (ibid., 7–8). Effectively, in becoming more than itself (that is, in becoming humanised), bare life is repudiated by, and excluded from, the political order. But, Agamben argues, bare life is also included in political life via exception to the law. In the ancient world, this happened through the sovereign’s designation of the *homo sacer* (the sacred man), the person who could be killed with impunity, but not sacrificed. Through this exception to the usual laws of the land, bare life was exposed to death; it was left open and exposed to the will of the one making the exception (88–9). Analogously, Agamben argues, in the modern world the inclusion of bare life in the political realm comes about through the state of exception, wherein an emergency situation allows political leaders to suspend laws for their own purposes.24

Agamben’s analysis suggests that the state of exception makes use of the very thing that the political/juridical order eschews, that is, ‘bare life’. In the state of exception, laws protecting some people’s lives are suspended by the sovereign power (83). Yet because it is life upon which power acts to assert itself as sovereign (101), bare life grounds the political (thereby also becoming

---

human). Bare life is necessary for the establishment of sovereignty. Thus, for Agamben, bare life is paradoxically both excluded from and included in the political system. Indeed, he suggests, politics is founded on this originary structure of inclusion/exclusion: ‘There is politics because humans are the living beings who, in language, separate and oppose themselves to their own bare life and, at the same time, maintain themselves in relation to that bare life in an inclusive exclusion’ (8). What reappears in the state of exception is the ‘bare life, i.e., biological life, that has been excluded from politics and the good life’. Lee Spinks helpfully characterises Agamben’s notion of ‘bare life’ as a limit marker for the human (2001, 26). In Agamben’s terms, it is ‘a threshold of indistinction and of passage between animal and man … precisely neither man nor beast’ (1998/1995, 105). Effectively, bare life is excluded as inhuman and included as human at the same time.

Read alongside the apocalyptic framework for desire made visible by the homosexual enemy as antichrist, Agamben’s work explains perfectly the paradox I have been discussing, whereby law is increased at home, and abandoned abroad. Bare life, or the in/human, is excluded from the social order at home, while included abroad through exception to the law, in order to establish US sovereignty. Let me posit, for a moment, raw sex as at least one aspect of bare life. By raw sex, I mean sexual expression of non-normative desire. Raw sex is something like what Guy Hocquenghem calls (following the critique of Sigmund Freud by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari) ‘polymorphously perverse non-human sex’, that is, sex that has not been brought into the realm of the human through the family relations of the Oedipus complex (1993/1972, 74–9). Raw sex is sexual expression understood simply through the desire and physicality of the moment, rather than through some future goal, whether relating to the solidification of a monogamous relationship, or the construction of a family. It is the opposite of heteronormative sex and of normative apocalyptically oriented desire. In other words, it is the opposite of what queer-straight theorist Calvin Thomas calls ‘justifiable’, ‘teleologically narrativized sex: sex with a goal, a purpose, and a product [children]’ (2000, 33). Raw sex is sexual expression that is not justifiable within this (apocalyptic) teleological narrative.

In the US, within the rhetoric of family values, raw sex is like bare life in that it is excluded from the social order. It is only included through the exception, as for example in orientalist art, or through discussions of the inhuman antichrist. Raw sex is considered inhuman, even demonic, the work of lawless, anarchic destroyers of institution, as shown above. Within an apocalyptic framework, raw sex can only move beyond the status of bare life, if it is brought into the ‘good life’ of the polis, that is, heterosexual family and nation. Sex only becomes ‘human’ if it at least has the possibility of aiming at this particular
eschatological goal. Indeed, in the homophobic imagination, any sex acts (as well as some imagined sexual practices) that do not fall into this trajectory are lumped together and become a site of fear and loathing. Yet – as Foucault has taught, as orientalist art illustrates, and as the industry built around ‘illegal’ sexual activity demonstrates – the social order requires and even revels in the possibility of raw sex, even as it tries to shut it down through fear or regulate it through law. Raw sex is included in the social order through exceptions to the law and the norms guiding law, even as it is excluded.

For conservative opponents of gay marriage, same-sex acts remain in the realm of raw sex, despite the arguments of those, such as Andrew Sullivan, who suggest that opening marriage up to include homosexuality could be incentive for gay monogamy and fidelity (1995, 107), thus bringing same-sex acts into the good life. For conservatives, same-sex unions remain raw sex precisely because the eschatology of the strong nation requires sex to produce children with mothers and fathers. Rights-based arguments about the economic disadvantages of being excluded from marriage (for instance, the Human Rights Campaign) are likewise dismissed because they disregard moral ‘truths’ of heterosexuality and procreation. Oddly enough, conservative arguments against gay marriage do not worry about the threat to the heterosexual family that might come from the queer argument against marriage – predicting that gay marriage would stigmatise and regulate both the non-monogamous sexual liberation achieved in the queer community and the alternate forms of family and relationship that have developed there (Ettelbrick 1997; Browning 1997).

Particularly offensive to the apocalyptic worldview, it seems, is the desire for the unattached pleasure made manifest in raw sex (or anything that is perceived to be raw sex): such desire is not properly oriented to the future of the nation and of humanity. Perhaps any desire that is not circumscribed by these goals is a reminder of what Leo Bersani calls ‘a self-shattering and solipsistic jouissance that drives [people] apart’ (1987, 222); such desire is in a way threateningly antimunal. It also far more centred on pleasure than is comfortable for the national Protestant ethos. As Lee Edelman bitingly remarks:

The child of the two-parent family thus proves that its parents don’t fuck and on its tiny shoulders it carries the burden of maintaining the fantasy of a time to come … No fucking could ever effect such creation: all sensory experience, all pleasure of the flesh, must be borne away from this fantasy of futurity secured, eternity’s plan fulfilled, as ‘a new generation is carried forward’. [2004, 41]

For those propounding heterosexual family values, fucking remains outside the future time of the good life. Not surprisingly then, desire that does not conform to this eschatology is called unnatural and inhuman, it is the work of the antichrist.
Law is seen as the avenue by which desire will be regulated and brought into conformity with the eschatology of the nation. National and state constitutional amendments flourish on this theology. In the US, laws and attempted laws prohibiting gay marriage work hard to exclude at least one component of bare life, raw sex, and to bring that sex into the fold of the national future.

By way of stark contrast, the inclusion of bare life through the opposite approach to law overseas (that is, contempt for it) is also necessary to ensure US apocalyptic, nationalist, eschatology. In the state of exception, forever occasioned by the war on terror, domestic and international law is waived aside and torture is permitted. This fact – at issue in Guantanamo Bay and in the practice of rendering suspects to other countries where they are tortured – was made most visibly manifest in the abuse at Abu Ghraib prison. Of course, the individual soldiers and contractors have been reprimanded for their deeds at Abu Ghraib, but as reports have shown, it was a higher command that ordered prisoners to be loosened up (Karpinski 2005, 210; Hersh 2004; Blasberg and Blasberg 2005). Indeed, the Statement of Administration Policy of 30 September 2005 advocating that the president veto any regulations on ‘interrogation’, suggested that the state of exception which enabled such acts still remained operative almost two years later. Clearly, those tortured were considered what Agamben would call ‘bare life’: they could be killed with impunity (as some detainees were). They were seen as inhuman, and treated accordingly. Janis Karpinski, now demoted commanding Brigadier General of Abu Ghraib, recalls her superior, Major General Geoffrey Miller telling soldiers ‘to treat these prisoners like dogs … If they ever get the idea that they’re anything more than dogs, you’ve lost control of your interrogation’ (Karpinski 2005, 197–8). Yet such inhuman treatment is predicated precisely on detainees’ humanity, their ability to talk, to inform, to be in human pain, to be humiliated. Though treated as inhuman, their humanity is necessary to the process. According to the administrative policy, such treatment is what grounds US sovereignty. Torture preserves the powers of the president, by allowing for the latitude apparently needed to successfully fight the war on terror. This policy, designed to ‘protect Americans’, safeguards the eschatology of the US, holding out the promise of safety (presumably to procreate) for its citizens.

Particularly shocking for a nation so aligned with heteronormativity was the fact that many of these photos used homophobia as a form of torture and dehumanisation. Prisoners were piled naked, forced to simulate fellatio, to masturbate. Bare life looks, to the homophobic eye, much like the distorted and fearful/aggressive way it imagines raw sex (including its relation to the inhuman). In the scenes of torture, in/human bare life and same-sex acts are somehow equated, a connection that is commensurate, as I have been arguing, with the
future-oriented theology of the administration and its conservative bastion of support. Sexualised non-heteronormative behaviour is aligned with lives exposed to death. Here again the line between human and inhuman becomes visible. The naked bodies were treated as if they were not human, and yet, they were somehow expected humanly to desire each other. This expectation for human desire was made evident in Private England’s reported taunt, ‘he’s getting hard’, made to a prisoner forced to masturbate (Hersh 2004). Presumably, the titillating enactment of power in these events came in humiliating humans by treating them as inhuman, in forcing humans into positions approximating forbidden, inhuman desires. The same could be said about the media’s treatment of the torture scenes. As Jasbir Puar has so astutely analysed in her discussion of the media coverage of the Abu Ghraib scandal, the photos and the discourse about them follow the orientalist tradition of marking ‘the supposed Muslim terrorist … both as sexually conservative, modest and fearful of nudity … as well as queer, animalistic, barbarian, and unable to control his (or her) urges’ (2005a, 18).25 Puar points out the way in which the photos were glossed as doubly humiliating for the sexually repressed cultures of Islam (further othering the victims). This media commentary rendered the victims human, while the photos played on fears of inhuman sexuality.

Moreover, within the state of exception, US soldiers’ sadistic desire for these sexualised atrocities is permitted, precisely because it still accedes to the (eschatological) goal of establishing US superiority. As in the more ‘humorous’ or ‘exotic’ orientalist representations of the colonised person as gay or gender queer, here too desire is made safe because the seductive in/human object of desire could be aggressed at the same time as desire is enacted. One would think the soldiers’ deviance from the paradisic trajectory laid out for desire by the Christian right would be considered far more serious than the deviance of pleasure for pleasure’s sake. But true to form, as reported by Christianity Today, conservative Christian groups placed the blame for such acts on the purveyors of misguided desire: pornography, MTV, relativism and, predictably, homosexuality (Olsen 2004). Indeed, the director of Concerned Women for America’s Culture and Family Institute, Robert Knight, proposed that US Christians work to restore moral order by, among other things, trying to ban homosexuality in the military, and by ‘strengthening state and federal marriage laws and ceasing the creation of civil unions and domestic partnerships’ (Knight 2004). Thus, the blame for the sadistic desire of the US soldiers at Abu Ghraib is laid, at least partially, at the feet of gay marriage. Further, Gary Bauer, president of Values,

25 For a longer essay on the relationships between race, homophobia, terrorism and imperialist violence, see Puar (2005b).
a non-profit group for ‘life, marriage, family, faith, and freedom’, suggests that enemy prisoners have no right to complain since they are ‘murderers and thugs’, as are the enemies of the US throughout the Muslim world (Bauer 2004). His language seems to mimic Bush’s description of the enemy/antichrist as cold-blooded. According to this logic, if in/humanity at home meets in/humanity abroad, why should the latter complain?

So I come back to my question about the relation of the proliferation of law at home to its disregard abroad. I would suggest that what holds together this paradox is the apocalyptic regulation of desire through law and exception to law. The writing and suspension of laws acts on ‘bare life’, that limit marker between the human and the inhuman. So much is clear from Agamben’s work. But what the homosexualised antichrist as enemy makes visible is that the determining factor in the limit between human and inhuman is the apocalyptic orientation of desire. Law or lack of law is about bringing desire into line with the temporal ordering associated with US determinations of the eschatological role of a particular group of people. The move toward constitutional amendments assumes that bare life/raw sex within the US can be redeemed, reformed, converted and ‘healed’ by law. Bare life at home can be brought into the potential of furthering humanity (and of course, the nation). The suspension of law in the state of exception assumes that bare life captured abroad (Middle Eastern bare life) is ‘cold-blooded’ and ‘evil’, in/human, likely queer (in the derogatory sense of the term) and bent on the perverse end of destroying humanity. It cannot be redeemed through law. Outside the law, perverse desire is permitted, and indeed, enforced. Moreover, in order to enable the suspension of law in dealing with those deemed expendable (in/human) in Iraq, the US state of exception must write and enforce heteronormative laws for its own population, in order to define humanity.

Queer Antichrist

I have been reading the image of the homosexualised antichristic enemy as emblematic of the apocalyptic negotiations inherent in US regulation of desire for the purposes of US sovereignty. The logic that produces the homosexualised enemy as antichrist is the same logic that is central to the delimitation of the in/human, which enables the imperial project and the dehumanising techniques

26 See Castelli (2005) for an interesting analysis of the way in which US foreign policy concerns itself with (other people’s) practices of torture when it is understood as persecution for religious beliefs (with ‘religion’ being closely associated with Christianity).
that it requires. The apocalyptic logic used to bolster arguments for family values and to write laws against same-sex marriage is very much like logic that allows for exception to the law and torture. Within the nation, laws protect the human, comprised of those who correctly desire integration into family, nation and Christian secular humanity. Raw sex – or what is perceived as raw sex – is banished by law. Exceptions to law are made for those who are outside of this eschatological trajectory, and who therefore must be associated with the hated (yet desired) raw sex.

All of this is more than a little depressing, given the deep entrenchment of these views. So, by way of conclusion, I would like to make a final turn, to try to queer the image of the political enemy as homosexualised antichrist. Like bare life, and like raw sex, the antichrist is both included and excluded in the political (and religious) symbolic order. I have shown that this liminal position can pose physical danger to those who are identified as antichrists; but I would also like to explore the resistant potential for the danger that the antichrist poses to the symbolic order.

As I have argued, what has been so potentially threatening about the antichrist for apocalyptic exegetes through the ages is that he mixes the human and the inhuman, to the degree that they cannot necessarily be told apart. The antichrist represents both a perverted sexuality and a desire for one-world order. In the antichrist’s kingdom, presumably, all humans are lumped together with the inhuman (the demonic), without attention to religion, national affiliation, gender, or sexuality. Antichristic desire is not confined by borders (national or otherwise), by categories of difference (human/inhuman). A similar point about queer desire is made with some urgency by Edelman in his short essay, ‘Unstating Desire’, which argues against using the language of family or political state/affiliation to describe the queer intellectual enterprise. He writes, ‘Queer theory might better remind us that we are inhabited always by states of desire that exceed our capacity to name them. Every name only gives those desires – conflictual, contradictory, inconsistent, undefined – a fictive border’ (1994, 345). Antichristic desire confuses identity, transgresses borders and confounds telos. It is polymorphously perverse.

Moreover, the antichrist is deceptive. This danger is what makes the figure of the antichrist so powerful: he cannot simply be recuperated as another point of identity; his deceptiveness threatens every identity. There is no telling who might be the antichrist, and whether or not there might be more than one. The antichrist could be anyone (even someone married). The double and separate identification of the antichrist – as political enemy and as gay – suggests that the political enemy might not be outside the nation at all, might not even wield weapons, but might simply desire wild, non-heteronormative, non-teleological
sex. Indeed the very capitalist mechanisms (for example, marketing) that the US strives to protect alongside humanity depend on raw sex. Isn’t everything sold through appeal to wildly promiscuous desire, even as the selling forecloses on desire and attaches it to telos? The uncertainty as to the locus of antichrastic desires (domestic or foreign) works against the claims of empire. While the racialised, Muslim (non-national), homosexualised antichrist is essential to the production of the US’s mission to save marriage and humanity, the inhuman antichrist within the nation troubles the straightforward assessment of the US’s relation to being, having and saving universal humanity (strangely queer already). The deceptive presence of the antichrist within – via raw sex – troubles the US’s suitability to protect heteronormative sex, and with it the family, the nation, humanity and the very concept of the human. Of course, this is precisely why efforts are so strong to ban gay marriage, as an attempt to rid the nation of raw sex and antichrastic desire. The right to protect the future of humanity – that is, US hegemony – is at stake. The deceptive presence of the antichrist puts the (heteronormative) messianic claims of the US into question.

Here Edelman’s use of Jacques Lacan to reclaim queerness as the death drive, in No Future, is instructive. Edelman’s project is to use the antisocial impulses of desire to deconstruct the oppressions made in the name of identity. In his analysis, identity is bound up with teleology, with time and with the future; it is through hopes for the future that identity is given meaning. Futurity, as he so cuttingly argues, is tied up with the Child ‘as the preeminent emblem of the motivating end’ (2004, 13), and therefore with heteronormativity. Queer desire disrupts the future-oriented trajectory of identity, and with it, the social. Queer desire is oppositional, it embodies negativity, it disrupts rather than conjoins. Edelman wishes to take queer difference seriously, to reclaim the proliferation of queer desires, as a negativity that can disrupt identity and the social. The point is to disrupt ‘normativity’s singular truth’ (2004, 26). In his words, ‘queerness attains its ethical value precisely insofar as it … accept[s] its figural status as resistance to the viability of the social while insisting on the inextricability of such resistance from every social structure’ (2004, 3). For Edelman, queerness is that difference that has been repressed in subjects’ entry into the heteronormative symbolic order for the sake of unity and coherence, yet without which difference the subject could not function. Queerness, like raw sex, and bare life, is both included and excluded from the social order and its exclusion must be mined for its potential to disrupt the borders of inclusion. Queerness is like the death drive; it is that force emerging from ‘the gap or wound of the Real that inhabits the Symbolic’s very core’ (2004, 22). It moves backward away from the future. Queerness, like the death drive, ‘refuses identity or the absolute privilege of any goal’. It denies teleology and ‘reject[s]
… spiritualization through marriage to reproductive futurism’ (2004, 27). It disrupts the eschatological future that is established by the Child. It is, therefore, what Lee Quinby might call anti-apocalyptic.

The figure of political enemy as queer antichrist embodies the queer function of the death drive. Like queerness, the antichrist is inimical to the future and its logic of heteronormativity. Like queerness, the figure of the political enemy as queer antichrist is necessary to the functioning of the system; it is that which allows the machine to move into imperialising place. The queer enemy as antichrist must be recognised in its role in motivating and enabling the production of US politico-reproductive eschatology as truth. Yet it stands as a wrench in the system. It threatens to disrupt the future of the family and with it the future of the nation. Its desire erupts everywhere, anywhere. It threatens to unsettle certainty about the human, and therefore also certainty of the US mission in the world. The importance of this role needs to be acknowledged and affirmed, if the ‘truth’ of US sovereignty is to be contested.

The role of the political enemy as queer antichrist ought not to be repudiated. Acceptance and valorisation of this figure’s disruption of national eschatology might assist in what Edelman calls, ‘the impossible project of imagining an oppositional political stance exempt from the imperative to reproduce the politics of signification (the politics aimed at closing the gap opened up by the signifier itself), which can only return to us, by way of the Child, to the politics of reproduction’ (2004, 27). The antichrist disrupts meaning through the proliferation of uncontainable desires (called perverse), and through deception. The antichrist demonstrates what post-structuralism has been insisting: meaning may not be what it seems. The queer antichrist defies certainty.

Perhaps the political enemy as queer antichrist can become a figure of what Judith Halberstam might call a queer time (2005, 1–13). As I imagine it, an antichristic time would be generated by an antichristic collectivity (here counter to Edelman’s anti-social thesis – see Caserio et al. 2006), formed through discontinuous and deeply pleasurable encounters. Rather than forming collective unities (bound to fracture) moving toward a future end point, it would revel in collective discontinuities, using desire to rupture goal-oriented politics. It would be an anarchic, frolicking time and relationality, frustrating serious ends with play. It would be a collectivity modelled on an alternate time, a non-reproductive time, a pleasure-filled time. It would be a deceptive time and sociality, putting into question the decision between friend and enemy, undermining the certainty required for such distinctions all together. It would be a space in which non-heteronormative desire did not make the distinctions based on telos. It would make liminal connections with difference across accepted boundaries of the human, based on the nation-state and the Christian. Importantly, as Halberstam
emphasises, it would be an anti-imperialist time and collectivity. It would celebrate raw sex and bare life (the in/human) at home so that it could not become fodder for imperialising tactics abroad. It would frustrate laws based on the exclusion of bare life; it would enjoy lawlessness at home so that it did not need to be practiced abroad. It would be a politics operating in the name of the in/human, the antichrist.

Acknowledgements

This chapter was first presented at the Institute for Signifying Scripture at Claremont Graduate University (February 2006), and the international meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in Edinburgh (July 2006). I would like to thank Aaron Kunin, Zayn Kassam and Michael Casey for their time and careful attention to earlier drafts. Three anonymous reviewers also gave exceedingly helpful and detailed comments; I thank them for their attention and insight. I am grateful to Hannah Crumme and James Page for valuable research assistance. Finally, I would like to thank the editors of this volume for suggesting that I write about the antichrist in the first place.

References


Left Behind: World at War (2005), dir. Craig Baxley (feature film).


Chapter 5

Queering the Un/Godly: Christ’s Humanities and Medieval Sexualities

Robert Mills

Single vision produces worse illusions than double vision or many-headed monsters. [Haraway 1991, 154]

Around fifty miles north-west of Rome, in the province of Viterbo, is the medieval town of Tuscania. Forty years ago, the town achieved a brief period of recognition as the setting for Franco Zefferelli’s 1968 film *Romeo and Juliet*; it made the headlines again in 1971, as a result of an earthquake that almost levelled the place. But on the eastern edge of town, perched on a hill, lies the most enduring point of interest in Tuscania: the Romanesque church of San Pietro, with its celebrated twelfth-century façade. The marble reliefs on the façade represent a bizarre concoction of sacred and profane. Birds, beasts and reptiles find their place alongside angels, saints and devils. To the right, above the doorway, appears perhaps the most striking carving of all (Figure 5.1).

Two figures spew twisted vines from their mouths, the foliage curling around the window in a dramatic symmetrical arrangement. The heads of the figures are ‘trifacial’, each sporting a triple visage. Three mouths and three noses have been sculpted, and these features are accompanied by two eyes staring out ahead; the eyes are shared between the two faces in profile and a third, full-frontal face. The head above the window sprouts two devilish horns, while the figure below, lacking horns, wrestles with a menacing serpent.

The iconography of this relief has sometimes been interpreted as a commentary on medieval Trinitarian doctrine. The upper figure can be viewed as an embodiment of the devil, while the lower figure, differentiated by a hornless head, might be a manifestation – or possibly caricature – of the divine Trinity (Pettazzoni 1946, 150–51). Since the formalisation of Christian Trinitarian doctrine at the Council of Nicaea in 325, medieval artists had deployed a number of strategies to represent the concept of ‘three-in-one’ visually. One solution, adopted after the twelfth century, was to portray the Trinity as a three-headed or three-faced figure, and instances of
the tricephalous Trinity can be found in most media and geographic locations in Western Europe in the later Middle Ages (Hackel 1931, 98–117; Hoogewerff 1942–43; Iacobone 1997, 218–27, 429–45; Mills 2003, 37–47; Pamplona 1970, 39–53). A late fifteenth- or early sixteenth-century prayer book in the British Library, for example, contains a miniature depicting the three heads united beneath a crown and surrounded by a cosmic aura (Figure 5.2).
It was only in the fifteenth century that members of the Church hierarchy formally drew attention to the potential misunderstandings that the tricephalous arrangement might provoke in the minds of viewers – a Florentine archbishop declares the iconography of the three-headed Trinity ‘monstrous in the nature of things’ – and it was not until the seventeenth century that the genre was
explicitly prohibited by the pope (Mills 2003, 38, 47). In some respects, the absence of official attempts to regulate this mode of representation during the Middle Ages is surprising. After all, the same triune arrangement was also occasionally appropriated as a means of conveying diabolism. An account explicitly concerned with demonic parodies of the Trinity occurs in an early twelfth-century chronicle, which records the story of a friar who, while meditating on the ‘ineffable Trinity, who is God’ in church, was confronted with a vision of the Devil, who ‘appeared to him wearing three heads, pretending

---

1 The archbishop in question was St Antoninus of Florence; the statement appears in his *Summa Theologica*. For a more detailed contextualisation of Antoninus’s remarks, also see Gilbert (1959) and Steinberg (1996, 333–40).
that he was the ‘Trinity’ (Migne 1854, 365). Another example appears in the list of charges brought against the Knights Templar in France in 1308, subsequent to their arrest on the grounds of heresy, which includes the allegation that they worshipped heads, some of which had three faces (Barber 1978, 249). Visualisations of three heads as an embodiment of evil also appear in thirteenth-century moralised bibles, which regularly depict Antichrist himself as a multi-horned, three-faced creature (Figure 5.3).

Thus, in a climate in which both the Trinity and its obverse could be visualised as triple-faced entities, it is possible that the facade of San Pietro, Tuscania, represents an attempt to juxtapose diabolical hybridity with its sublimation in a divine counterpart, who is shown grappling with the infernal fiend.

Whatever the ultimate significance of the Tuscania relief, it helps generate the lines of enquiry that motivate this chapter. If, as David Williams (1996, 133) has argued of medieval aesthetics, ‘God is the ultimate monster’, Christian divinity is not simply produced on the basis of abjecting that which fails to conform to a model of perfect, transcendental unity; there are moments in medieval culture when divinity itself inter-cuts with (as well as being defined by) the ungodly, the artificial, the fleshly and the perverse. This is a process that manifests itself most clearly in the context of aesthetic production: medieval visual culture could be said to operate, through the transformation of ideas and concepts into material form, as a kind of ‘meditation machine’. But the process also works to unravel distinctions between human and nonhuman, by highlighting the excesses that arise when analogies are made with human forms. In the Middle Ages, Christ himself was irretrievably hybrid, fusing both flesh and spirit; his representation in devotional texts and images necessarily resists bounded notions of divinity as a state disassociated from humanness. At the same time, in their relentless efforts to uncover the heightened focus on Christ’s ‘humanity’ in late medieval spirituality, modern scholars have been less willing to interrogate the nonhuman qualities of that state. One of the aims of this chapter is to open up the topic of what it might mean to shift the focus to Christ’s ‘nonhumanities’, by concentrating, for instance, on the potential for his body to function in monster-like ways. However, an emphasis on the nonhuman also helps to draw attention to aspects of medieval religious culture that rely on hybridised or even a machine-like artifice to convey Christ’s humanity to a wider audience. At the most basic level, visualisations of his body extend outwards into the wood, paint, ink and parchment of art and literature, as well as into the

---

2 The phrase ‘meditation machine’ is borrowed from Carruthers (1998, 230), who uses it to describe the ninth-century Plan of St Gall, an attempt to embody, architecturally, the monastic ideals of the Benedictine Rule.
bodies of medieval devotees. But there is also evidence that Christ's humanness was sometimes conveyed in a more explicitly ‘artificial’ manner, by medieval artists, through machine-like apparatus – a phenomenon that underscores the constructedness of medieval concepts of humanity.

What exactly is queer about these constructions of humanity, divinity and monstrosity? Generally speaking, queer eludes definition as a positivity except in relation to particular structures of power – structures such as the legitimate, the dominant, the orthodox, or the normative (Schultz 2006, 28). While to date the concept has been most frequently applied to constructions of sexuality and gender that deviate from or exceed a given society’s norms, it may be worth asking, with Karma Lochrie, whether medieval people ever aspired to be normal and whether it therefore makes sense to characterise queer simply as the obverse of heteronormativity, not least in a period when concepts of the sexually ‘normative’ were arguably alien. A more heterodox, idiosyncratic (or as Lochrie puts it ‘heterosyncratic’) approach would be to discard the queer/heteronormative binary in favour of perspectives that attend to the potential inconsistencies and incoherencies of any expressions of gender, sexuality, or desire that provoke cultural anxiety in a given historical moment (Lochrie 2005; see also Burger 2003, xiii–xv; Schultz 2006). This more unruly definition of queer offers a means of grouping together several distinct phenomena that elicited concern, outrage, even censorship in medieval culture as a result of categories being intermingled, exceeded, or overridden; although my first set of examples concerns sodomy, the interest in this particular body of material is its characterisation of the vice as a mode of sexual activity in which monsters quite literally indulge. Shifting the focus to moments when the lines separating ‘human’ and ‘nonhuman’ were interrogated, challenged and redrawn, I work with a different kind of premise: that constructions of humanity and monstrosity may offer alternative yardsticks with which to measure the medieval queer to the normatively heterosexual.

The theme that I wish to pursue here also concerns the relation specifically between divinity, monstrosity and sexuality – the latter being a term that is often assumed to be coextensive with the ‘human’ and only associated, via allegory or parody, with gods and monsters. Attempts have been made, controversially, to draw attention to the representation of Christ’s sexuality in medieval and Renaissance art. Leo Steinberg’s 1983 study The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion, for example, sparked a vigorous debate about the terms in which pre-modern cultures declared God’s descent into humanness and more specifically into a theologically orthodox version of manhood. In these discussions, sexuality and humanity often seem to stand in metonymically for one another, as well as finding themselves squeezed into heteronormative-looking
boxes. In what follows, I present instead examples that negotiate relations between human and divine, sexual and affective, godliness and monstrosity, in ways that exceed the view that history is heteronormative and that its sexualities have always been predominantly human. The chapter is structured around clusters of what I’ve termed ‘visions’. Each vision makes a case for the need to complicate our conceptions of sexuality and humanity in medieval culture, by focusing on their complicity with the nonhuman and the inorganic. The juxtaposition of gods and monsters is not designed to reify the opposition between these categories, or conversely to meld them together into a seamless, unified whole. Instead, I want to enact pluralised versions of the past – ‘many-headed monsters’, in a tribute to Donna Haraway’s antihumanist cyborg manifesto – so as to open up pathways to queerly proliferating, nonhuman pasts as well as futures.

**Vision I: Monstrous Sexualities**

In Easter 1196, at the Benedictine monastery of Eynsham, a few miles from Oxford, a young novice called Edmund fell into trance and, over a period of two days, experienced a vision of purgatory and paradise. A Latin account of the *Revelation of the Monk of Eynsham* was apparently composed in the same year by Edmund’s older brother Adam; the text was translated into English and published by a London printer in the late fifteenth century. The *Revelation* describes how Edmund is guided on his otherworldly journey by an old father, who we later learn is St Nicholas, who leads him through three zones of purgatorial torment. The first place is described, in the fifteenth-century English translation, as a region of ‘thicke cley’ [thick clay], full of men and women suffering a great diversity of pains; in the second region, which consists of a deep valley and a pond of stinking water, Edmund encounters a number of his former acquaintances who have died and endure torments for their sins (43–75). The third place, deliberately segregated from the others so that the

---

3 Steinberg’s argument concerns images in Renaissance art that draw attention to the Christ-child’s or the mature Christ’s groin. He argues that these depictions centre on ‘God’s descent into manhood’, that ‘the art of the West sought to realize that same manhood as the common flesh of humanity’, and that ‘the evidence of Christ’s sexual member serves as the pledge of God’s humanation’ (1996, 10, 14, 15). For a critique of Steinberg’s normalising impulses, as well as those of his most prominent critics, see Rambuss (1998, 17–18, 42–4).

4 References here are to the English text printed in London c. 1483 by William de Machlinia and edited by Easting (2002). Easting’s edition prints the Middle English text alongside the Latin *Visio Monachi de Eynsham*. Subsequent references to this edition are given in the text by page number.
only sinners who can access it are the ones who are already being or ought to be punished there, is described as the worst place of all: ‘aboue alle thyng that may be conceyued of any mannys mynde, hyt excedeth of cruelnes and dedly tormenting’ [above all things that may be conceived in any man’s mind, it exceeds in cruelty and deadly tormenting]. In a field covered by thick cloud, worms, ‘with an onspekable deuowryng’ [with an unspeakable devouring], tear the company of sinners to pieces, after which they are liquefied in flames by devils, reconstituted and tormented again, in an endless repetitive cycle. The rhetoric of unspeakability bespeaks the nature of the sin being chastised: the ‘folk’ here are being punished for the ‘vnclene and foule vyce and synne of sodemytys’ [unclean and foul vice and sin of sodomites] (77–9).

There is, moreover, one torment that the sodomites are compelled to suffer that is more painful and shameful than the rest. The visionary describes how certain ‘great monstrus’ [great monsters], ‘onnaturally shapyne’ [unnaturally shaped], violently ‘came apone hem’ [came upon them] and also, ‘in a fowle damned abuse compellyd hem to medylle with hem, howe-be-hyt that they refusyd and wulde hyt not’ [in a foul, damnable assault compelled them to meddle with them, even though they refused and did not desire it] (79). It is rare in medieval culture to be afforded graphic insights into the sexual activities of sodomites: we only catch glimpses of the physical activities associated with the vice infrequently, normally in the context of its punishment, and even then references are often made only by way of indirect allusion or a rhetoric of circumspection. The fourteenth-century Middle English poem *Cleanness*, for instance, describes the sin of males joining sexually with other males in the city of Sodom as the ‘fylth of the flesh’ [filth of the flesh], avoiding the word ‘sodomy’ to describe it, while paradoxically disclosing the nature of the vice through puns with anal associations (Frantzen 1996, 458; Keiser 1997, 55–7). In Edmund’s *Revelation*, however, the picture seems unusually precise: in a grotesque parody of the vices that they themselves performed in life, the sodomitical sinners are represented being raped by monsters and forced against their will to touch – or more precisely ‘medylle with’ – their unsightly flesh.

The Middle English term ‘medylle’, which translates the Latin *permiseri* [‘to be intermingled, thrown into confusion’], is a form of the verb *medlen*, meaning

---

5 For a detailed discussion of the visualisation of sodomy in the *Visio Monachi de Eynsham*, as well as in other medieval visionary texts such as the *Vision of Paul*, the *Vision of Ansellus Scholasticus* and the *Vision of Tundale*, see Limbeck (1998). Camille (2001) discusses the representation of sodomites in manuscripts of Dante’s *Inferno*, but the images he discusses represent sodomy figuratively, through the gestures and differentiated embodiment of the sinners, rather than as a clearly identifiable sexual act. On the instability of sodomy as a category in medieval theology, see Jordan (1997).
‘to blend, mix together, mingle, become confused with’ (Kurath et al., 1952–); this is the sense in which it was used earlier on in the description of the field of sodomitic torment in Edmund’s Revelation, where brimstone and pitch-black flames were described as ‘medyld togedir’ [meddled together] in the dense clouds that cover the zone (77). Sometimes the word conveys the modern sense of ‘interfering’ or ‘meddling’. But it is also common to find the word being used explicitly in the sense of sexual mingling or coupling, between humans or sometimes between animals (Kurath et al. 1952–; Simpson et al. 1989). In most instances, the word describes cross-sex sexual intercourse. The Book of Margery Kempe (c. 1436–38), for instance, an account of the life, travels and visionary experiences of an East Anglian housewife, pilgrim, and mystic, describes how Margery asked her husband ‘what was the cawse that he had not medelyd wyth hir viii wekys befor, sythen sche lay wyth hym every nygth in hys bedde’ [what was the reason that he had not meddled with her the last eight weeks, since she lay with him every night in his bed], to which her husband replied that he was afraid to do so. Later in the same passage, when Margery refuses to accede to her husband’s demand that she break her Friday fast, the husband threatens to ‘medyl’ with her again (Windeatt 2000, 86–8). Malory, describing the conception of the biblical Abel in Le Morte Darthur (printed by Caxton in 1485), recalls how Abel was begotten at the same time that his parents, Adam and Eve, ‘medled’ together, after Adam had been told by the Lord to ‘know hys wyff fleyshly’ [know his wife in a fleshly sense] (Vinaver 1971, 584). The link between sex and miscegenation in these examples is designed to play up the fleshly motivations behind the acts: ‘meddling’ betrays a concern with the dissolution of bodily boundaries, a mode of lustful co-mingling symptomatic of fallen sinfulness. Likewise, in the Revelation of the Monk of Eynsham, it is the blurring of borders between monster and sinner – generated by acts of monstrous meddling – that triggers some of the visionary’s most powerful condemnations: ‘I abhorre and am asschamed’, he moans after beholding the scene, ‘to speke of the fowlnesse and vnclenes of that same synne’ [I abhor and am ashamed to speak of the foulness and uncleanness of that same sin] (79). Sexual practices are hybridised in the monk’s Revelation, a fusion of human sinfulness and monstrous embodiment. ‘Onnaturally shapyne’ creatures engage in unmentionable acts with sinful ‘folk’, acts that together constitute the ‘synne agaynest nature’ [sin against nature] (79–81). Although the thirteenth-century theologian Thomas Aquinas presented ‘sodomitic vice’ as a subspecies of the

6 See also the B-text of Langland’s Piers Plowman, which mentions how horses and other animals ‘meddled not with their makes [mates]’ when they were pregnant (Langland 1995, 183).
queering the non/human

vitium contra naturam, an act characterised specifically by male or female same-sex intercourse, he also described other modes of unnatural intercourse that, in altering sexual positioning, make use of ‘monstrous and bestial techniques’ [monstruosos et bestiales ... modos] (Aquinas 1968, 244–5). What is especially monstrous about the techniques deployed by the creatures in the Eynsham vision is their violence, a characterisation that conforms to biblical narratives portraying the sins of Sodom as acts of mob violence and attempted rape.

Genesis 19 tells how the inhabitants of Sodom besieged Lot’s house and called on him to deliver his guests (the angels sent by God to investigate sins in the city) ‘that we may know them’; the rape of the Levite’s concubine in the city of Gibeah, described in Judges 19–21, was itself occasionally portrayed by medieval commentators as being perpetrated by evil sodomites. Edmund’s Revelation likewise imprints in the minds of readers an image of sodomy as ‘abusion’ and rape. This is achieved by presenting the punishments being inflicted on sodomites as a mirror image of the sexual activities they themselves performed in life – a visualisation that effects sodomy’s characterisation as a boundary-breaking, nonhuman violation.

The account of sodomitic torment in the Revelation is followed by a description of a certain doctor of law of whom Edmund, though he ‘refusyd’ [refused] as much as he could to behold the sinful practices in that place, cannot avoid ‘knoweleg’ [knowledge]. The lawyer, who refrained from confessing his sins in life lest he damage his reputation, is riddled with shame at the thought that the ‘fowle and onclene leuyng’ [foul and unclean living] that he practised in the world is now being replicated visibly, in what he calls an ‘vnhappy presentacion’ [unhappy presentation]; now in this place, he says, he is ‘compellyd to doo actually the same foule passyon’ [compelled to do actually the same foul passion] and in so doing is made ‘abhomynable’ [abhominable] in the sight of others (81–5). Edmund also stumbles upon another former acquaintance in the purgatory of sodomites: a recently deceased prior, who is punished for the misgovernance of the monastery over which he had charge. On account of the fact that he had closed his eyes to the ‘fowle abusyons’ [foul assaults] of his charges, allowing them to ‘doo and folowe her desyrys and lustys’ [do and follow their desires and lusts] without censure, he himself has been placed in this zone of ‘onspekehabule tormentys’ [unspeakable

7 For a general account of the significance of sexual violence in Genesis 19 and Judges 19–21, see Carden (2004, 14–41). The Benjaminite rapists in the story of Gibeah are explicitly figured as sodomites in thirteenth-century Bible moralisée manuscripts, such as Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, MS 2554, fol. 65r (Guest 1995, 103). The poem Cleanness similarly constructs the inhabitants of Sodom primarily as brutish ruffians (Keiser 1997, 136–63).
torments]. The prior laments that some of his charges who still live continue to fall into ‘that fowle and abhominable synne that ought not to be named’ [that foul and abominable sin that ought not to be named], thus further increasing the pains that he himself endures, ‘for Y know wele that the greuys peyne of that same stenche ys more intollerable and peynfull than any other peynys that synners sofryn’ [for I know well that the grievous pain of that same stench is more intolerable and painful than any other pains that sinners suffer] (93–5).

Aside from a handful of late medieval frescoes in Italy that depict sodomites being skewered by devils in hell, in a clear allusion to anal and oral sex (Mills 2005, 83–105), monstrous ‘meddling’ with sodomites is not commonly represented in medieval art. But there is a scene on the carved frieze of Lincoln Cathedral,
roughly contemporary with the monk of Eynsham’s twelfth-century vision, that appears to be comparable in tone (see Figure 5.4).8

The scene, now badly weathered, is part of a stretch north of the main portal of the church, which depicts the torments of the damned. The relief shows two naked figures in an almost identical pose, crouching down in profile and encircled by a horned devil. The demonic creature is represented perching on the backs of the couple and pulling at their hair, as he wraps his legs around their waists; his feet, perhaps deliberately, are positioned over their genital regions. The two sinners, positioned so that the rump of one almost touches the groin of the other, are entangled with one another in a manner that brings to mind anal or inter-femoral penetration; serpents coil around the sinners’ arms to the left and right. The couple have been identified by George Zarnecki as two males, who ‘presumably thus suffer punishment for sodomy’ (1988, 68).

There is no direct parallel to the scene elsewhere in medieval sculpture. The standard representation of the deadly sin of luxuria shows a woman having her breasts bitten or sucked out by serpents in a typical conflation of fleshly desire with femininity.9 The Lincoln scene is contrasted with a second scene depicting another manifestation of disorderly desire: a man and a woman are represented being separated from one another by monsters, two of whom also chomp on their genitals. In the light of this juxtaposition, it is feasible that the reliefs operate as a pair, condemning both cross-sex and same-sex sexual vice. Moreover, viewed in conjunction with the Revelation of the Monk of Eynsham, it is possible to gain further insights into the messages that the relief was designed to convey. The scene communicates very clearly the mingling of demonic and humanoid forms: it is only in the context of the sin’s chastisement that it becomes permissible to present the most ‘unspeakable’ of human vices as visually comprehensible. Sinful sexuality is presented here as hybrid sexuality, a fusion of monstrosity and fallen fleshliness. Moreover, the sinful ménage à trois on the Lincoln frieze, like Edmund’s Revelation, only manages to present sodomy meaningfully with recourse to figurations of monstrous, ‘inhuman’ violence. Pulled or dishevelled hair was often deployed by medieval artists as a sign of rape, and there are records of women being ‘dragged through the streets by their hair’ prior to being sexually assaulted (Wolffth 1999, 70–71). Although the symbolism was normally reserved for female victims set upon by male aggressors, here the implication seems to be that two partners in a

8 Easting (2002, 194n) also makes a connection between this scene in the Revelation of the Monk of Eynsham and the carved frieze at Lincoln.

9 See, for instance, the scene on the porch of St-Pierre, Moissac, c. 1125, reproduced in Binski (1996, 176).
same-sex couple are being forced against their will to ‘meddle’ with one another in the manner of feminised victims, as well as intermingling with the infernal violator.

Another witness to the process of bringing sexual nonconformity into view with recourse to an aesthetic of monstrosity is William Dunbar’s ‘The Dance of the Seven Deadly Sins’, a Middle Scots poem probably dating to the opening decade of the sixteenth century (Conlee, 2004). The poem is structured as a grotesquely comic dream vision, in which the dreamer beholds the Seven Deadly Sins, each accompanied by a train of damned souls guilty of the particular sin concerned, who perform a dance for Mahoun (the Muslim prophet Mohammed and here a synonym for Satan), for his personal entertainment. The dance itself is followed by a brief satirical pageant of Highlanders; the poem concludes with Mahoun’s call for a tournament between a tailor and a shoemaker, which quickly assumes a scatological tone, replete with farts, vomit and excrement.

Of interest here is the section of the poem focusing on the dance itself, which includes a stanza on Lechery, who comes on like a ‘bagit hors’ [pregnant horse], leading ‘Lythenes’ or Wantonness along with him (ll. 80–81). Accompanying the two personified sins is their personal entourage, ‘ane ugly sort’ [an ugly assortment], as well as many foul, stinking ‘tramort’ [corpses] who had died in a state of sin (ll. 82–4). The description of the dance this particular troupe perform seems to leave little to the imagination:

Quhen thay wer entrit in the dance,  
Thay wer full strenge of countenance  
Lyk turkas birnand reid.  
All led thay uthir by the tersis.  
Suppois thay fycket with thair ersis,  
It mycht be na remeid.  
(ll. 85–90)

[When they had entered into the dance, they were very strange in appearance, like Turks/a smith’s tongs burning red. Each led the other by the penis. Although they fucked/fidgeted with their arses, it could not be helped].

Lechery’s characterisation as an expectant horse, fertile with lust, betrays a customary association between unbridled desire and femininity, but also smacks of sodomy, itself regularly portrayed as feminine and dangerously feminising (Lochrie 1999a; 1999b, 178–226). The imagery compares well with the narrator’s notorious assessment of the Pardoner in the General Prologue
to Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* as a ‘geldyng or a mare’ (Benson 1987, 34). The fusion of monsters and sinners in Dunbar’s poem is thus inflected by a fusion of genders: Lechery, pregnant with desire, is simultaneously masculinised in the sexual spectacle put on for Mahoun’s amusement. Lechery, Wantonness and their entourage conjoin penises with arses, and ‘fycket’ like red-faced ‘turkas’. The term *fycket* clearly plays on the word *fukkit*, meaning ‘fucked’, which appears elsewhere in Dunbar’s oeuvre and is one of the earliest occurrences of the word in written form. Turkas, related to the verb *turken*, ‘to twist, writh, wrap about’ (Simpson et al. 1989), is generally glossed in editions of the poem as an allusion to a smith’s red-hot pincers (Conlee 2004). But the word is also a homonym for ‘Turks’, represented here as ‘streng of countenance’, foreigners on the edges of Christendom. In the same way that Mohammed embodies Satan himself, sodomy in Dunbar’s poem is collapsed with religious and racial alterity.

Monsters, as meaning machines, permit the invention in reverse of humanity as Christian, masculine, European and sexually pure. Libidinal relations between males are presented primarily as nonhuman relations, engaged in by demonic beasts and the dead.

Monstrous sexualities manifest themselves in medieval afterlife visions as the obverse of the human and the natural. At the same time, they bear the traces of human specificity: marks of polluted or victimised femininity; messages about same-sex and clerical desire; constructions of religious difference or even race. They also denaturalise human agency, revealing it to be bisected by or even co-mingled with modes of ungodly bodily practice. Evil, at base, is monstrously other, but it is also fantasised as a monster within, a symptom of fallen, sinful humanity. In their ability to siphon off fragments of otherness into a single body – the misshapen, unnatural, piteously ugly demonic *corpus* – these creatures are over-determined, meaning-making entities. It is precisely their ability to accumulate and appropriate human particularities – bits and pieces from different versions of sinful selfhood – that makes these monsters analogous to the ‘medieval identity machines’ described by Jeffrey J. Cohen: historically specific bodies that become, through a conjoining of fragments of

---

10 On the significance of the Pardoner’s gendering as ‘geldyng’ or ‘mare’, see Dinshaw (1989, 156–84); McAlpine (1980). For an account of sodomitical relations producing monstrous progeny, see Hugh of Flavigny’s eleventh-century *Chronicon*, which tells a story about a royal chaplain in the court of William Rufus of England who confessed that he had been impregnated by a man and died from the monstrous growth that resulted (Barlow 1983, 409).

11 See, for instance, Dunbar’s ‘In a Secret place’, l. 13 (poem 72) in Conlee (2004).

12 On slippages between sexual, religious and racial categories in medieval narratives, see Kruger (1997).
the human with particles both organic and inorganic, ‘transformed via generative
and boundary-breaking flux into unprecedented hybridities’ (2003, xiii).13

**Vision II: Christ’s Non/Humanities**

It remains to be seen how, at the other end of the spectrum, the Christian deity’s
body itself becomes a cipher for human or nonhuman alterity. At first sight,
the iconography of Christ in his suffering humanity may look like a haven from
monstrous aesthetics, worshipped, as it was, as a locus of the sublime. But medieval
narratives also let slip moments where abjection interrupts these transcendental
lines of sight, revealing the Saviour himself as a monster-like or hybridised figure.
I would like to focus on one particular configuration of divinity and hybridity
here: the representation of Christ’s crucified body in three-dimensional carvings
made from wood. As we shall see, Christ’s somaticity and indeed his humanity
were often manifested most powerfully – and controversially – through their
interaction with inanimate materials: carved crucifixes provide the occasion for
some extraordinary acts of censorship, as well as for the construction of a vision
of humanity through the medium of a machine.

Christ’s body as machine was rendered most explicitly in devotional images
that appeared to bring that body to life, such as renditions in wood used especially
for liturgical performance in the run-up to Easter, which endowed the Saviour
with a movable head, arms and legs (Taubert and Taubert 1969). An image of
this sort was apparently displayed in the Abbey of Boxley, near Maidstone in
Kent, in the later Middle Ages; celebrated as the ‘Holy Cross of Grace’, it was
the focus for pilgrimages on account of the miracles it supposedly performed
for at least a century before its suppression in the Reformation (Page 1926,
154). In 1538, at the time of the Dissolution of the Monasteries, the image
was confiscated on account of the ‘idolatrie and crafte’ that it was perceived
to represent: according to the Tudor chronicler Charles Wriothesley, ‘it was
made to move the eyes and lipps by stringes of haire, when they would shewe a
miracle, and never perceyved till now’. The Archbishop of Canterbury inspected
the cross, which was afterwards set up in the marketplace at Maidstone:

… and there shewed openlye to the people the craft of movinge the eyes and lipps,
that all the people there might see the illusion that had bene used in tyme out of
mynde, whereby they had gotten great riches in deceavinge the people thinkinge

13 The comments on monstrosity in this paragraph have also been shaped by Judith
Halberstam’s insight that monsters bear the markings of a ‘plurality of differences’
that the sayde image had so moved by the power of God, which now playnlye appeared to the contrarye. [Wriothesley 1875, 74]

Subsequently, we are told, the rood was brought from Kent to St Paul’s Cross in London, where it was exhibited during a sermon by the Bishop of Rochester. On this occasion:

… the abuses of the graces and engines, used in olde tyme in the said image, was declared, which image was made of paper and cloutes [cloths] from the legges upward; ech legges and armes [each of the legs and arms] were of timber; and so the people had bene eluded and caused to doe great adolatrie [idolatry] by the said image, of long contynaunce, to the derogation of Godes [God's] honor and great blasphamie of the name of God. [Wriothesley 1875, 75]

A letter of 1538 from one of Henry VIII’s inspectors, Geoffrey Chamber, to the reformer Thomas Cromwell adds further details. Chamber reports on how he discovered, at the back of the image:

… certen ingynes and olde wyer [certain engines and old wire], wyth olde roton stykkes [rotten sticks] in the backe of the same, that dyd cause the eyes of the same to move and stere [stare] in the hede thereof lyke unto a lyvelye thing [like a lively thing]; and also the nether [lower] lippe in lyke wise to move as thoughe itt shulde speke. [Ellis 1846, 168]

The exposure of the Boxley Rood of Grace as a mechanical imposture was dramatic proof, for sixteenth-century reformers, of the impoverishment of medieval devotion to images. But it also speaks eloquently about the consequences of signifying God in three-dimensional form. In the Middle Ages, Christ’s humanity was often conveyed through representations of suffering, which aimed to connect beholders, through empathy and identification, with what they and he were believed to share. But the Boxley crucifix, in an effort to produce the illusion of Christ’s simultaneous transcendence of human fleshliness, also manifests itself as a ‘cyborg’-like fusion – a hybrid of organism and machine. What were taken to be the image’s humanoid attributes – its ability to move and speak and see, as if it were ‘lyvelye’ – are discovered to be a product of its reliance on ‘ingynes’. At the same time, the machinery itself is fundamentally organic, as in the ‘stringes of haire’ that form part of the mechanism for moving the eyes and mouth, or the sticks found in the back of the image, which are discovered to be rotten. What should be inorganic and sublime is discovered to be abject, fleshly and decayed; what ought to convey Christ in his suffering humanity is revealed to be an assemblage that is disturbingly ungodly in its reliance on human artifice alone.
The account of the Boxley Rood of Grace is unusually detailed, but the animistic mental framework it betrays – the idea that human-made images are in some senses alive and that, in so being, they do very human things, such as crying, speaking, or even bleeding – is encountered repeatedly in Gothic art. There are several stories of Christ coming alive on the cross and lowering his head, or bending his entire body down in order to embrace and kiss the devotee, as well as various narratives in which statues of the Virgin Mary and saints miraculously stare, wave, weep, bleed, or lactate (Camille 1989, 220–25; Dahl 1978, 188–9; Mills 2005, 177). Secular automata are also attested in numerous documentary sources, as well as in descriptions of works of art in literary texts, for instance the story of the palace of the Old Man of the Mountains in Mandeville's Travels, which contains sculpted beasts and birds who sing ‘delectably’ and move, as if they are alive, ‘by a craft’ (Camille 1989, 244–58; Moseley 1983, 171). This ability to comprehend images as lively entities renders attempts to separate human from machine, or divine from human, potentially futile: a medieval machina was intimately connected with human selfhood and embodiment, to the extent that in Christian thought love itself could be conceived as a ‘machine of the mind’ (Carruthers 1998, 22; Cohen 2003, xiv). Yet to the degree that it was born out of a coincidence of artifice and fleshliness, the machina also risked being devilishly motivated, an object not of nature (at least, not in the idealised, prelapsarian sense) but of nature’s perversion (Camille 1989, 248–9). An eighth-century Latin penitential attributed to Bede (but not written by him) requires nuns who fornicate with other nuns per machinam, that’s to say by means of an artificial device, to complete seven years of penance.¹⁴ Likewise Hincmar of Rheims (d. 882) takes issue with the demonic properties of mechanical sex aids, describing how he has heard of women who transform the ‘use’ of their ‘fleshy genital member’ into an ‘unnatural’ one, by using ‘instruments of diabolical operations to excite desire’ (Benkov 2001, 204). The gap between devilish dildos and carved crucifixes is potentially vast, of course, but both are modes of technology designed to generate particular kinds of bodily affect. Moreover, although the feelings elicited by a carved crucifix were clearly intended to provide a starting point for spiritual meditation and insight, the responses of beholders were not always predictable or easy to regulate. My last ‘vision’ considers the circumstances in which the image of Christ’s body itself functioned as a scandalously fleshly ‘desiring-machine’, a machine that elicited sexual as well as spiritual arousal.

Bernardino of Siena, a fifteenth-century Italian preacher renowned for his virulent condemnations of sodomy, remarked once in a treatise: ‘I know a person who, while contemplating the humanity of Christ suspended on the cross (I am ashamed to say and it is terrible even to imagine), sensually and repulsively polluted and defiled himself’ (1959, 259). His comments appear to highlight the capacity for meditation on Christ’s humanity to generate responses across the full range of human experience. But it also demonstrates the potential for both sexual and spiritual relations to be relations with nonhuman – albeit imaginatively animated – objects. The aim of this final ‘vision’ is to point to other instances where carved crucifixes elicit desires that exceed the bounds of acceptability and the limits of the human.

A notorious instance of sensual and spiritual intermingling, across the medium of a miracle-working cross, is recorded in a late fourteenth-century chronicle from the Cistercian abbey of Meaux in Yorkshire. The document describes how the abbot Hugh, around 1339–49, desired to have a new crucifix placed in the choir of the lay-brethren, and commissioned the piece from a sculptor who only carved on Fridays, when he ate nothing but bread and water.15 The artist’s asceticism, however, does not preclude taking steps to make the image itself aesthetically pleasing: the chronicler tells us how the sculptor ‘looked upon a naked man [hominem nudum] standing in his presence, after whose beautifully formed likeness [formosam imaginem] the crucifix might be carved more fittingly [aptius]’. What concerns the chronicler is the capacity for the image to stir the wrong kinds of passion, especially if women laity have access to it; initially the monks see an opportunity to profit from an increase in ‘common devotion’, but the chronicler points out that, after the granting of a special licence to admit men and women of ‘good repute’ into the abbey to see the image, ‘women, to our misfortune, often flocked to this crucifix, although their devotion was mainly grown cold, yet they would only visit to look inside the church, and increase our expenses through the hospitality thereof’ (Bond 1868, 35–6; Binski 2004, 228–9).

In addition to what it says about the perceived susceptibility of female spectators to carnal modes of piety, this anecdote highlights very clearly the creator’s wish to portray Christ’s carnality with reference to the ‘beautifully formed likeness’ of a live model. Notwithstanding the sculptor’s attempts to

15 This echoes an account in the *Gesta Abbatum Monasterii Sancti Albani*, compiled by Thomas Walsingham in the mid-fourteenth century, of a cross ‘devoutly carved’ by the clockmaker Roger de Stoke, who was said to have worked ‘on Fridays only, on which days he is said to have fasted on bread and water’ (Riley 1867, 335).
contain his own carnality through rigorous asceticism, humanity in this account is epitomised by the body of a living, good-looking male. But there are also instances where the frame of reference is conversely ugliness, as in German wood sculpture designed with female religious audiences in mind, which employs a disturbingly cadaverous aesthetic (Hamburger 1997). In 1305, the Bishop of London Ralph Baldock found himself so disgusted by the appearance of a new-fangled crucifix carved by a German ‘foreigner’ and displayed for a short time in the chapel of Conyhope that he took steps to ban the offending artefact, on account of the fact that he viewed it as a *crux horribilis*, a terrifying or fearsome cross. In his recollection of the events a year later, the bishop added that the cross had a gibbet lacking a crossbeam, ‘which does not represent the true shape of the Cross’. That is to say, the object of Baldock’s attack was a yoked or Y-shaped cross, known in German as a *Gabelkreuz*, of the sort fashionable in Italy and Germany in the 1300s (Binski 2001; Binski 2004, 201–209).

These examples suggest that Christ’s humanities extend from aesthetic perfection to its obverse, and that their depiction in devotional art variously induces in beholders outbursts of intense piety, episodes of sensual arousal, and occasionally even feelings of repulsion. To the extent that it functions as a locus of meditation, Christ’s body is a boundary-breaking body, like the monster’s, collecting together opposite extremes of human embodiment into a pulsating, limit-defying *corpus*. For this reason, strident efforts were also made intermittently to effect that body’s containment. Steinberg’s study of the sexuality of Christ in Renaissance art brought to light, more than two decades ago, a cluster of paintings from the second quarter of the sixteenth century that apparently showed the resurrected Christ with an erection discernible beneath his loincloth (1996, 81–9), to which critics had subsequently averted their eyes. Depicting Christ with a phallus in Renaissance art bodied forth the Saviour’s sexuality as a sign of his utter carnality. There are indications, however, that in earlier periods this aspect of human embodiment was deemed a form of ungodly excess – no more so than in a French fabliau where the endowment of a carved crucifix with genitalia gets one of the protagonists in a terrible pickle.

The *Fabliau du Prestre crucifié* relates how a sculptor, renowned for carving crucifixes, leaves home to deliver one of his *ymaiges* or sculptures to a customer, but soon returns home to find his wife having sex with the local priest. The ill-fated lover frantically searches for somewhere to hide and eventually resorts to stripping naked, mounting a cross in the sculptor’s workshop and masquerading as one of the unfinished crucifixes. The husband, having an inkling of what is going on, keeps his cool and eats his dinner. Later that evening, the sculptor enters the workshop by candlelight and, in the process of conducting an
inspection of the carvings, is dismayed at what he considers to be a grave error in one of the crucifixes – the priest’s exposed sex organs:

‘Dame’, dist-il, vilainement,
‘Ai en cest ymage mespris:
J’estoie yvres, ce m’est avis,
Quant je ceste chose i lessai;
Alumez, si l’amendrai’.
Li prestres ne s’osa mouvoir;
Et ice vous di-je por voir
Que vit et coilles li trencha,
Que onques riens ne li lessa
Que il n’ait tout outre trenchiè.\(^{16}\)

[‘Lady’, he said, in an vulgar manner, ‘I’ve made this statue badly; I must have been drunk when I left it like this! Light up and I’ll put it right’. The priest didn’t dare move, and, I tell you truly here, he sliced off his cock and balls so that he left him nothing that he hadn’t completely sliced off.]

The allusions to castration in this story convey an important difference in attitude between artists painting phallic Christs in the sixteenth century and sculptors depicting naked crucifixes in earlier periods. Christ’s body can be represented as human in this narrative, to the extent that the point of reference is a male nude. But to represent Christ in his sexuality, with reference to a sexually active male, is deemed too human by half, with the result that – like the unfortunate priest’s members – it signifies obscenely, as a representational surplus that must be eradicated (Camille 1989, 213). The elimination of that surplus is designed to prevent the male body from signifying sexually; but the emasculated body that results produces as a corollary a vision of Christ’s humanity that is partial and incomplete. Fabliau tales commonly link priests with hypersexual excess, but in this instance the joke relies on the assumption that one form of humanity in particular – extreme bodily suffering – legitimates the priest’s transformation into a body that can stand in for Christ’s; other facets of humanity will not do.

Conclusions

It may be possible to describe the priest’s body as a queer body, conveying as it does the annihilation of an identity organised around a purportedly foundational, ‘biological’ understanding of gender. The priest’s genitally defined masculinity

\[^{16}\text{Du Prestre Cruceie, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS fr. 837, fol. 183, in Montaiglon, 1872, 196. For a more detailed contextualisation of the text, see Scheidegger (1994).}\]
is juxtaposed with Christ’s suffering humanity and found to be wanting; the
dismembered body that remains resists earthly gendered binaries. Yet there are
other dimensions of queerness that I would like to bring out in conclusion.
Rather than essentialising queer as the opposite of heterosexuality, which risks
queering the Middle Ages only with reference to modern manifestations of
queer, the interrogation of categories such as humanity and monstrosity may
help foreground versions of queerness that are historically distinct and spin
outwards along other axes than gender and sexuality alone. In the instances
uncovered, a suspended ‘middle’ potentially engages viewers’ imaginations – a
space in which gods and monsters, human and nonhuman, begin to lose their
definitional distinctness. In such moments of becoming, Christ’s humanities
begin to look monstrous, artificial, constructed, or incomplete; sexual and
gendered behaviours deemed unnatural are presented as such in so far as they
are indulged in by nonhuman entities.

However, it is not possible to isolate humanity from nonhumanity in these
examples, or to discover a coherent medieval concept of the human as a positivity.
Like queer, human is a relational concept that can only be defined in its moments
of becoming. As such, the visions presented in this chapter may also be queer
to the extent that they counter the idea of a single medieval ‘worldview’. After
all, they consistently refuse to be contained neatly within conventional critical
paradigms – categories such as homosexuality or heterosexuality, monstrosity
or humanity, carnality or divinity. What they convey instead is a messy Middle
Ages, a Middle Ages of partiality and compromise, a Middle Ages that refuses
to signify monolithically. Christ’s all-too-human body is simultaneously an
inorganic body, animated both in the mind’s eye and by virtue of its machine-
like apparatus. It is not clear in these contexts whether Christological humanity
is a function of its interaction with humans or machines; sexual embodiment
itself does not come into being simply against a backdrop of ‘human’ frames
of reference; monstrous aesthetics generate visions of sexual nonconformity,
visions that refuse clear distinctions between monstrosity and humanity. Haraway
characterises the cyborg principally as a late twentieth-century phenomenon, the
product of a world in which ‘we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids
of machine and organism’; ‘our machines’, she suggests, ‘are disturbingly lively,
and we ourselves frighteningly inert’ (1991, 150, 152). Yet I wonder whether
medieval bodies were themselves sometimes ‘cyborg’ bodies, to the extent that
their figuration blurs artifice with nature, organic with inorganic, divinity with

17 On the usefulness of ideas of a productive ‘middle’ for queer theory, in which
audiences and makers are caught up in conflicted moments of becoming, see Burger
(2003).
humanity, sexuality with monstrosity and excess. If cyborg subjectivity has a past, then it is not simply high-tech culture that presents a challenge to Western dualistic traditions. Cyborg imagery is potentially also embedded in historical landscapes too, and, as the examples presented here hopefully demonstrate, symptomatic of a Middle Ages that refuses to be One.

References


—— (2005), *Heterosyncrasies: Female Sexuality When Normal Wasn’t* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press).


This page intentionally left blank
As ‘posthumanists’, we have begun to chart the costs and limits of the classic effort to maintain an essential species barrier and have sought to diminish those costs and to press against those limits in our own conceptual and other practices. The telos – aim or endpoint – of these developments is conceived here, however, not as the universal recognition of a single, comprehensive order of Nature or Being but, rather, as an increasingly rich and operative appreciation of our irreducibly multiple and variable, complexly valenced, infinitely reconfigurable relations with other animals, including each other (Smith 2006, 166–7).

Queer studies as a field of academic enquiry began, arguably, when critics started to identify sexuality as a key nexus of cultural and social power and, therefore, as a crucial object of analysis in its own right. Although the exact moment of this prioritisation is difficult to ascertain, Gayle S. Rubin’s essay, ‘Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality’, first published in 1984, certainly does point to this decision to ‘think about sex’ (3) and to develop ‘an autonomous theory and politics specific to sexuality’ (34). Although this kind of analytical separation was necessary in the early days of the field, most critics and theorists assume that to study sexuality in itself is impossible. Sexual subjects are produced not only in the discourses of sexuality but also, and perhaps even more so, in other discourses – the discourses, that is, of anatomical sex, gender, race, nation, class, ability and age, to name just a few. The recent work of Gayatri Gopinath (2005), Robert F. Reid-Pharr (2001), Marlon Bryan Ross (2004), Robert McRuer (2003) and Siobhan B. Somerville (2000) immediately come to mind as important and innovative examples of this problematisation of sexuality-in-itself and this radical reunification of ‘the sexual’ with other forms of discourse. Being truly interdisciplinary, each of these critics takes seriously the ostensibly paradoxical axiom that sexuality is socially constructed outside of the field of sexuality and helps to rearticulate the notion
that sexuality is indeed everywhere. In this particular academic climate, then, why has queer theory been so disconnected from environmental studies? The disengagement of queer theory from, say, critical race studies or globalisation studies would be inconceivable in contemporary criticism, so why does that extrication work so well with environmental studies? To put the question in an more appropriate manner, why do queer theory and environmental studies figure as so naturally disconnected?

At first glance, queer theory and environmental studies seem entirely oppositional. Like the ‘unnatural predator’ itself, a ‘queer environmental theory’ appears to be a contradiction in terms. One is interested either in queer issues or in environmental issues – rarely both, and very rarely simultaneously. In one way or another, though, both queer theorists and environmentalists articulate a profound interest in ‘the natural’. Although this discursive formulation and deployment takes on radically different meanings and values for queers, on the one hand, and environmentalists, on the other, queer theory and environmental studies have much to learn from each other. In texts such as Jennifer Terry’s “Unnatural Acts” in Nature: The Scientific Fascination with Queer Animals’ (2000) and Roger N. Lancaster’s The Trouble with Nature: Sex in Science and Popular Culture (2003), queer theorists express their frustration with the naturalisation of nature, especially in terms of the violent repercussions of naturalising a heteronormative nature, while many environmentalists have viewed these efforts to denaturalise nature as part of the problem – indeed crisis – in the environmental movement. Michael Soule and Gary Lease, for example, sum up this anxiety when they say, ‘certain contemporary forms of intellectual and social relativism can be just as destructive to nature as bulldozers and chainsaws’ (1995, xvi). While Soule and Lease articulate a persistent – perhaps ubiquitous – anxiety, many other environmental critics, or ecocritics, have been receptive to efforts to denaturalise nature. This problem, or what I call the social construction of nature controversy in environmental studies, has taken centre stage in the field since its inception (Cronon 1995).

Environmental studies as an academic field began, like its queer counterpart, as a political intervention into a university system that largely ignored urgent political questions being raised by activists outside the academy. In the US, the first environmental studies programme offering a college major was chaired by environmental historian Roderick Frazier Nash at the University of California, Santa Barbara in 1970, after he, his colleagues and students witnessed the

---

1 I use the term ‘ecocritic’ and ‘ecocriticism’ as shorthand for environmental critic and environmental criticism in general, although the terms have been used historically to denote a specific mode of literary criticism, see Glotfelty and Fromm (1996); Branch and Slovic (2003); Cohen (2004).
environmentally devastating Union Oil disaster that spilled 200,000 gallons of crude oil off the California coastline on 28 January 1969 (Balakhanpour 2002). Since that time, other environmental studies programmes have been established as a response to an acute understanding of the increasingly present environmental crisis. During the relatively short history of environmental studies as a specific disciplinary field, many people working in the field have discussed – often heatedly – the relationship between environmental theory and praxis. As I noted above, relatively little environmental progress, especially on a global scale, has produced a particular brand of justified anxiety and has caused some critics to equate constructivism, especially constructivist theories of science and ethics, with ‘bulldozers and chainsaws’.

According to Soule, Lease and other critics in this camp, the position that nature is socially constructed is indicative of a greater human hubris that they identify as the cause of the environmental crisis in the first place. This hubris and its attendant tragic consequences are part and parcel of the postmodern condition. On the other hand, however, many environmentalists do embrace constructivism and believe it is the only sensible – logically, politically, ethically – way to think of nature. Environmental philosopher Steven Vogel, for example, writes, ‘To view the environment as socially constructed is to see it as something for which we are literally responsible; it is in this recognition of our inextricable connection to and responsibility for the world we inhabit, it seems to me, that the source of a morally justifiable “environmental ethic” is to be found’ (1996, 10; see also Vogel 2002).

Although there is a large philosophical gap between most queer and most environmental approaches to ‘the natural’ created as a result of their very different discursive histories, there are also some important connections between queer theory and environmental studies that I would like to try to unpack in this chapter. With this objective in mind, then, I will present a set of close readings of Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897), a text that specifically and dramatically points to various discursive histories of the natural. I will use this novel as one particular example of the ways in which queer theory and environmental studies are always already connected, that is to say, the questions and politics of human sexuality are always entwined with the questions and politics of the other-than-human world.

In approaching the novel in this way, I do not want to think of *Dracula* as a literary text to which theory can be ‘applied’, but rather as a theoretical text in itself, fictionally crafted, to be sure, but teaching theoretical lessons. In this highly influential novel, Stoker constructs a kind of queer nature that refuses the binary opposition between the natural and the unnatural, especially in terms of the sexual. I begin by grounding my discussion of this queer nature in an
examination of the character of Renfield and his orchestration of a food chain, and then by extending this critique to examine the character of Dracula as a highly sexualised, taxonomically problematic – in short, queer – predator. I will moreover detail the ways in which queer ecocriticism can act as a productive disturbance in both queer theory and environmental studies.

Enter Renfield

One of the most haunting characters in Bram Stoker’s Dracula has the least obvious role in the narrative. The character, R.M. Renfield, certainly occupies a niche in the thoughts of the characters, especially his psychiatrist, Dr Seward, but he nevertheless seems to be relatively peripheral in the main plot. He is certainly a prominent character, but unlike the protagonists, their threatened women, and the antagonist, Renfield seems tangential. In much criticism, too, Renfield takes on a negligible significance relative to the primary critical issues: the homosociality of the male protagonists, the proper gender performances of Mina and Lucy and the threat of a foreign, social disease presented by Dracula (Boone 1993; Craft 1984; Schaffer 1994; Stevenson 1988; Tomaszewska 2004; Pick 1988; Spencer 1992; Arata 1990). But who is Renfield and how does he function in Dracula? Why, in such a plot-driven, action-packed, singular narrative does Stoker include this madman in the asylum, a man who is always so close yet so far away?

Stoker gestures to two ways of conceptualising Renfield’s presence in the narrative: first, as a prophet representing an impending doom. He exclaims, quite paradigmatically for this role, ‘It is coming – coming – coming!’ (98), while we also hear him referring to Dracula as ‘Master’, insinuating further the prophet/disciple quality of his character. Later, as the protagonists become more familiar with the structure of their problem, Renfield himself becomes a clue in their efforts to hunt down and slay Dracula. Seward explains this second role by identifying Renfield as ‘a sort of index to the coming and going of the Count’ (199). In other words, he serves as a piece of interpretable, physical evidence for the existence of an utterly supernatural, metaphysical phenomenon. Much of Renfield’s work or purpose in Dracula however is left unexplained.

Although I do not intend to solve the problem of the character, I would like to suggest that Renfield does serve as an indispensable component of the author’s ideological universe. During the time Stoker wrote Dracula, the binary opposition between the natural and the unnatural was a ubiquitous ideological framework that had been enjoying an exceptional amount of social power and authority beginning with the Industrial Revolution, but especially by the end of the nineteenth century. Renfield, then, acts as a pointed and effective
epistemological disruption of *knowing* these two categories. Although his presence does appear relatively insignificant, Renfield is central to understanding the ways in which Stoker’s *Dracula* reveals its historical context and critiques, or at least problematises the dynamics of authority and power inherent in the *fin-de-siècle* scientific classification of nature – human and otherwise.

During the nineteenth century, nature (both human and other-than-human) came under the intensive scrutiny of self-proclaimed scientists, their popularisers and an eager audience. Finding the truth of nature through scientific methodology became an obsession with wide-ranging socio-economic and cultural repercussions. The German Max Nordau’s *Degeneration* (1895) and the American Eugene Talbot’s *Degeneracy: Its Causes, Signs, and Results* (1898), for example, registered, succinctly articulated and expanded the anxiety surrounding racial impurity and ‘degenerative decay’ produced by the publication and (mis)interpretation of Charles Darwin’s *Origin of Species* (1859) and *Descent of Man* (1871).2 Adding to this anxiety, of course, was the intensification of colonisation at an accelerated speed and on a larger scale, in addition to the horrifying possibility, in the minds of the colonisers, of its reversal (Arata 1990).

Literary critic Dana Seitler comments on this discursive situation:

Facing what Max Nordau calls ‘the horror of world annihilation’, scientific taxonomies and their violent wrenching of certain social practices into binaric categories of abnormal and normal became the central practice of human science in its attempt to explain the rapidly changing social world. Sex acts, gender roles, and social behaviors fell under the scrutiny of a structuring process that organized whole populations in terms of their evolutionary progress on the one hand and degenerative decay on the other, thus rigidly reinforcing racial, social, sexual and political hierarchies. [2001, 530]

These ‘scientific taxonomies’ and ‘violent wrenchings’ did not go uncontested, however. Consciously or unconsciously, *fin-de-siècle* writers responded to this scientifically authorised violence in many ways and for a number of reasons. As almost all of the criticism suggests, *Dracula* simply cannot be understood outside of its very specific discursive context.

This chapter, then, is part of a larger project of historicising not only the always already fraught relationship between the human, the natural and the

---

2 The year 1895 refers to the English translation of the second German edition of Nordau’s *Degeneration*. He published the original text in 1892. In addition to Nordau and Talbot, Cesare Lombroso was highly influential in linking evolutionary theory with criminology in his *L’uomo delinquente* (1876). Stoker refers both to him and Nordau in describing Dracula as ‘a criminal and of criminal type’ (296). For a detailed analysis of Lombroso’s ‘criminal man’ in the novel, see Fontana (1988).
sexual in Dracula and, by extension, in British fin-de-siècle culture, but also the discursive reverberations of this matrix from 1897 up to well into the twenty-first century. Using Dracula as a historical text, however, presents a unique set of challenges that Daniel Pick succinctly identifies:

To try to read Dracula historically, rather than anthropologically or trans-historically, involves, initially, a certain capacity of resistance on the part of the reader. For it is tempting to ‘fall prey’ to the mythological, folkloristic connotations of the vampire story and declare the novel merely a new twist to an old tale, the reiteration of antique taboos on death. [1988, 74]

Although I acknowledge this temptation, I none the less believe Dracula must be read in a way that it resists so fundamentally and so automatically, and urge my readers to remember that the characters and scenes I discuss here are not the ones that may appear so familiar, timeless and universal. Indeed, Bram Stoker’s Dracula is not Francis Ford Coppola’s Bram Stoker’s Dracula (1992). Louise Fradenburg and Carla Freccero’s comments on queer historiography seem particularly important here:

The discourses of history continue to produce knowledges of ‘life’ – including knowledge of who or what is most alive and vital, who or what makes the most life for the ‘country’ or is useless or dangerous to the country. The question of how our histories become ‘beneficial’ to us is an urgent one precisely because historical discourses for so long has been central to the cultural uses of life and death that have defined and persecuted – and sometimes defended – ‘lethal’ sexualities and erotic practices. [1996, xiv]

In reading Dracula historically, then, and to expand upon Fradenburg and Freccero’s observations on ‘the discourses of history’, I will focus first on Dr Seward’s interest in Renfield, his favourite patient who is ‘so unlike the normal lunatic’ (61), a patient whose description is as interestingly contradictory as the unnatural predator.

At the beginning of the Renfield sub-plot, Dr Seward notes of his patient, ‘His redeeming quality is a love of animals, though, indeed, he has such curious turns in it that I sometimes imagine he is only abnormally cruel’ (69). In other words, Renfield presents such an interesting case for his doctor because the patient is virtually uninterpretable. In this short passage, Seward articulates his inability to distinguish between two usually easily distinguishable categories – love and cruelty – while this inability exposes the exercise of power under the sign of science. What authority does the doctor have to imprison this individual and implement psychiatric treatment if he cannot even differentiate between ‘a love of animals’ and ‘abnormal cruelty’? Although Stoker is quite clearly
undermining the epistemological authority of scientific methodology, especially in the psychiatric ward, his description of Renfield suggests something deeper about the natural and the unnatural.

One of the central legacies of Darwinian evolutionary theory has been the blurring of the line between the human and the animal, and concomitantly, between the natural and the unnatural. Indeed, if humans are animals how can they behave unnaturally? This logistical formulation, of course, has had a strange discursive life – almost universally acknowledged and rejected simultaneously. But its emergence in the mid-nineteenth century does mark a dramatic paradigm shift in the ways human beings think of themselves in relation to other-than-human nature. Stoker’s Renfield registers this Darwinian human animal as a very particular construction: capable of loving animals as an animal himself. In other words, Dr Seward remarks on Renfield’s very human (even humanitarian) ‘love of animals’, but this love emanates from an animalistic body and behaviour. Renfield ‘sniff[s] about as a dog does when setting’ (96). He fights ‘like a tiger’ (98). He is, in short, ‘more like a wild beast than a man’ (98). And later, Seward even refers to his patient as his ‘own pet lunatic’ (206).

Although Stoker is clear in his foregrounding of Renfield’s animality, or what Eric L. Santner has called ‘the creaturely’, he also makes the character conform to his idea of the quintessential human by giving him the power to consciously study and alter natural processes: in this case, to imitate a food chain. In the comfort of his asylum bedroom, Renfield recreates an ‘insane’ ecosystem, first setting out sugar to attract flies, then keeping the flies to attract spiders, then taming a group of sparrows and feeding them spiders. In the end, he asks his doctor for a cat. Renfield not only orchestrates this food chain, but he also participates quite intimately. Dr Seward writes in his diary:

He disgusted me much while with him, for when a horrid blow-fly, bloated with some carrion food, buzzed into the room, he caught it, held it exultingly for few moments between his finger and thumb, and, before I knew what he was going to do, put it in his mouth and ate it. I scolded him for it, but he argued quietly that it was very good and very wholesome; that it was life, strong life, and gave life to him. [69]

---

3 Or perhaps I should say ‘to simulate a natural ecosystem hyperrealistically’. See Eco (1986) for an essential theory of the intense play between the authentic and the artificial when it comes to nature. Eco asks a particularly poignant question after his visit to the San Diego Zoo during which he experiences ‘the reconstruction, on a vast scale, of an original environment’ (49). After meeting ‘Chester’, the terrifically adorable grizzly bear, he asks: ‘Where does the truth of ecology lie?’ (49). For a discussion of this text and its implications for literary study, see Phillips (2003, 20–24).
Identifying the reason for his participation in this staged imitation of a natural ecosystem as his hunger for life, Renfield presents a major problem to the scientific method and suggests, in fact, the limits of science itself. The proper Victorian scientist should be detached, objective and certainly not act like an animal by inaugurating himself in the role of top predator and by eating the subjects of his experiment. If the scientific investigation of nature presupposes a human agent outside of the experiment – indeed, outside of the nature he is studying – what happens to science as an authoritative discourse when science itself is revealed to be animals studying other animals?

While Renfield does unquestionably problematise science and performs his animality by eating ‘a horrid blow-fly’, he also undoubtedly acts as the exemplary man of science himself, studying ecological community dynamics and attempting to recreate an entire food chain in his asylum bedroom. Renfield begins, like any good scientist, with a hypothesis: ‘He has evidently some deep problem in his mind’ (69). He then moves in line with formal scientific methodology to gather evidence – ‘he keeps a little notebook in which he is always jotting down something’ (69) – and we can then see clearly Renfield’s scrupulous notes, figures and calculations: ‘Whole pages of [his notebook] are filled with masses of figures, generally single numbers added up in batches, and then the totals are added in batches again, as though he were “focussing” some account, as the auditors put it’ (69). Quite clearly, Renfield is calculating the energy flow from one trophic level to the next in his food chain and Dr Seward is jealous of his scholastic endeavours. He, too, wants to participate in the scientific process, writing in his diary:

> My homicidal maniac is of a peculiar kind. I shall have to invent a new classification for him, and call him a zoophagous (life-eating) maniac; what he desires is to absorb as many lives as he can, and he has laid himself out to achieve it in a cumulative way. He gave many flies to one spider and many spiders to one bird, and then wanted a cat to eat the many birds. What would have been his later steps? It would almost be worth while to complete the experiment. [71]

Of course, this passage illustrates the late nineteenth-century fascination with typology and the pleasure involved in ‘discovering’ a new classification. Even the two-part name that Seward uses to describe Renfield – zoophagous maniac – is reminiscent of Carolus Linnaeus’s binomial nomenclature to classify plants and animals based upon genus and species. Implicit in the doctor’s interest

---

4 Carolus Linnaeus (1707–78) was a Swedish naturalist who developed binomial nomenclature, a classification system for plants and animals that would become the most widely accepted system by the early nineteenth century.
UNNATURAL PREDATORS

in Renfield is his understanding of his patient as natural, although Seward is quick to point out the ways in which Renfield’s behaviour may appear disgusting or unnatural to a sophisticated English man of science. In these interactions between the two characters, Stoker constructs an eerily perfect parallel: Renfield studies his ecosystem and Seward studies his Renfield. But I also want to suggest that Renfield’s very unnaturalness is a very important part of his naturalness. Oscillating wildly between the natural and the unnatural, he reaches a point in which the two become indistinguishable.

In the character of Renfield and his ‘insane’ imitation of an ecosystem, in short, Stoker not only calls into question the authority of science to identify the truth of nature (human and otherwise), but also, and perhaps more importantly, deconstructs the binary opposition between the natural (‘authentic’ food chains outside Renfield’s bedroom) and the unnatural (‘artificial’ imitations of food chains in the bedroom). Furthermore, Renfield’s insistence that consuming the bloated blow-fly ‘was life, strong life, and gave life to him’ also reveals a sexualised understanding of natural processes. Indeed, a knowledge of nature is, arguably, always already a sexual kind of knowledge. The nineteenth-century obsession with Life – especially Anglo-Saxon, Healthy, Normal Life – was grounded in the assumption of a heterosexual marriage, with discrete, non-pleasurable sex towards the sole aim of procreation. Renfield stands (or rather eats) in direct opposition to these assumptions. By identifying his purpose as his desire for Life, Renfield exposes an alternative mode of producing Life not in a sober marriage with an Anglo woman, but in the consumption of disgusting blow-flies.

In detailing the fin-de-siècle degenerate as an ‘umbrella term’, Dana Seitler suggests, ‘Sexual perversity thus emerges as a category of personhood specified and made intelligible through contiguous relationships with other productions of personhood conceived as deviant or perverse’ (2004, 73–4). In other words, when Stoker published Dracula in 1897, his audience would immediately make a connection between Renfield as an insane body, as an animalistic body, and as a sexually perverted body. A few years later Sigmund Freud, in his Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality, would succinctly articulate this link: ‘In my experience anyone who is … abnormal mentally is invariably abnormal also in his sexual life’ (1989/1905, 247). Even Havelock Ellis edited the influential Eugene Talbot’s Degeneracy (1898) a year after he published his own foundational text in sexology, Sexual Inversion (1897). The Ellis-Talbot connection certainly does underscore quite vividly the linkages between a variety of disparate ‘perversions’ in fin-de-siècle culture.

Renfield’s lust to consume life, then, is not separate from a queer sexual desire. In his attempt to catch and feed off of ‘horrid blow-flies’, the character – daringly, dramatically, disgustingy – disrupts what Lee Edelman (2004) has called ‘reproductive futurism’, or that ubiquitous ideological formation,
condensed in the rhetorical figure of ‘the Child’, that urges all to obey the biblical injunction to reproduce and that grounds all notions of what counts within the realm of the political. The queer, for Edelman, stands against this ideological injunction because the queer has ‘no future’. Although I do not adopt Edelman’s argument in its entirety, I find his notion of ‘reproductive futurism’ particularly relevant in thinking about Renfield. My claim that Renfield’s lust to consume life is a form of queer lust is intended to be problematic, but I want to make clear that I see this textual moment as offering one particular instance in which ‘the sexual’ is given meaning – or, in other words, is generated – only outside of its proper domain, only outside of the confines of its appropriate space. Queer here identifies a figural presence that highlights the problematic constructions of sexuality. Constantly pushing beyond its own limits, the sexual always has less to do with interlocking genitalia than with interlocking webs of discourse. It is in this way that Renfield, dramatising this understanding of sexuality, signifies queerness and is essential for understanding the problematic taxonomy of Dracula’s predatorial behaviour and his queer sexual desires.

**Enter Dracula**

If we can describe Renfield’s behaviour in the asylum as ‘unnatural predation’, with a hint of queer sexuality and with the compulsory caveat that it is not really unnatural, how does this problematic concept play out in the novel’s main character? When we first meet Dracula in Transylvania, Stoker is careful to underscore his resemblance to, and his ability to communicate with, other species. In the beginning, Stoker aligns his physiognomy with that of a wolf. Jonathan Harker, his English prisoner, says, ‘I could not but notice that [his hands] were rather coarse – broad, with squat fingers. Strange to say, there were hairs in the center of the palm. The nails were long and fine, and cut to a sharp point’ (24). In this initial introduction, the paw of a wolf stands out rather than the hand of a human being. Furthermore, when Dracula smiles, Jonathan writes, ‘his lips ran back over his gums, the long, sharp, canine teeth showed out strangely’ (27). Indeed, when Dracula makes his move from Transylvania to London, he does so in the form of ‘an immense dog’ (78) during a great storm

---

5 For an important response to an earlier version of Edelman’s argument, see Brenkman (2002). Brenkman ‘question[s] whether psychoanalytic concepts can provide the building blocks for political theory, whether they can sustain a viable theory or analysis of the body politic’ (174).
UNNATURAL PREDATORS

in which ‘the whole aspect of nature at once became convulsed’ (76).6 Like Renfield, Dracula oscillates wildly between human and animal.

The paw and the teeth are both physiognomic characteristics of the canine family, but Dracula shifts quite easily between the forms of the human and animals. The form of the bat, of course, has the most cultural force and has become the most familiar, but Dracula does not limit himself to the mammalian form. Jonathan describes Dracula after he has fed, writing in his diary, ‘It seemed as if the whole awful creature were simply gorged with blood; he lay like a filthy leech, exhausted with his repletion’ (53). And in another particularly disturbing scene, Harker writes of the reptilian way Dracula exits his castle:

I saw the whole man slowly emerge from the window and begin to crawl down the castle wall over that dreadful abyss, face down, with his cloak spreading out around him like great wings. At first I could not believe my eyes. I thought it was some trick of the moonlight, some weird effect of shadow; but I kept looking and it could be no delusion. I saw the fingers and toes grasp the corners of the stones, worn clear of the mortar by the stress of years, and by thus using every projection and inequality move downwards with considerable speed, just as a lizard moves along a wall. [39]

Dracula here first emerges as an epistemological problem – perhaps ‘some trick of the moonlight, some weird effect of shadow’ – and Jonathan’s job is to discern reality. Ultimately, though, Jonathan believes Dracula is doing what he sees him doing; ‘it could be no delusion’. So, although Jonathan knows Dracula exists with empirical certainty, he is still unable to solve another type of epistemological problem: is Dracula Homo sapiens? Canis lupus? Desmodus rotundus? Podarcis muralis?7 Dracula does indeed exist as a being capable of crawling down a wall, but, and perhaps more horrifying for Jonathan, he does not signal a single, recognisable species. In other words, as he descends the castle wall like a lizard to begin a night of hunting, the nomenclature of his existence is far from clear. He is both human and other-than-human. Indeed, Jonathan asks, ‘What manner of man is this, or what manner of creature is it in the semblance of man?’ (39).

6 I intentionally limit my discussion to the binary opposition between the natural and the unnatural, although the role of the supernatural is, obviously, very important in this text and gothic stories in general. For two examinations of ‘the urban gothic’ and ‘the occult’ in terms of Dracula’s historical context, see Spencer (1992) and Holden (2001) respectively.

7 Homo sapiens is, of course, a designation for human beings, Canis lupus is for grey wolves, Desmodus rotundus is for vampire bats and Podarcis muralis is for common wall lizards. These scientific classifications are based on the University of Michigan Museum of Zoology’s Animal Diversity Web (Myers et al. 2006).
Stoker clearly presents Dracula as a quintessential natural predator, but we still see the concept of the unnatural entering the picture. Jonathan is terrified of ‘the unnatural, horrible net of gloom and mystery which seemed closing round [him]’ (38). Again like Renfield, Dracula problematises the distinguishability between the natural and the unnatural: the two vital concepts upon which Jonathan’s understanding of reality is built. In a particularly striking passage, Stoker extends this eco-deconstructive structure to illustrate the erotics of feeding. This encounter illustrates the length and intensity of this highly erotic foreplay between predator and prey. Jonathan writes of his encounter with Dracula’s women:

I lay quiet, looking out under my eyelashes in an agony of delightful anticipation. The fair girl advanced and bent over me till I could feel the movement of her breath upon me. Sweet it was in one sense, honey-sweet, and sent the same tingling through the nerves as her voice, but with a bitter underlying the sweet, a bitter offensiveness, as one smells in blood. [42]

Jonathan begins his narrative by adopting the stereotypical role of the female during sex. He becomes passive and even his physiognomy seems to change; he now has visibly long, feminine eyelashes.

But this textual moment quickly becomes ideologically disruptive and theoretically interesting. This scene is not the old gender roles being rehearsed with the conventional script. Stoker registers quite powerfully Victorian gender and sexual conventions, but he does so in a completely inappropriate manner. By making Jonathan – a man – the subject (or perhaps agent) of his register of normal female behaviour, Stoker critiques the stability of the categories themselves. The paradox – ‘in an agony of delightful anticipation’ – continues with the other images – bitter sweet, offensively attractive – to signify a very new sexual experience outside of the male/female binary. Jonathan continues:

The fair girl went to her knees, and bent over me, fairly gloating. There was a deliberate voluptuousness which was both thrilling and repulsive, and as she arched her neck she actually licked her lips like an animal, till I could see in the moonlight the moisture shining on the scarlet lips and on the red tongue as it lapped the white sharp teeth. Lower and lower went her head as the lips went below the range of my mouth and chin and seemed about to fasten on my throat. Then she paused, and I could hear the churning sound of her tongue as it licked her teeth and lips, and could feel the hot breath on my neck. Then the skin of my throat began to tingle as one’s flesh does when the hand that is to tickle it approaches nearer – nearer. I could feel the soft, shivering touch of the lips on the supersensitive skin of my throat, and the hard dents of the two sharp teeth, just touch and pausing there. I closed my eyes in a languorous ecstasy [sic] and waited – waited with beating heart. [42–3]
Ecocriticism, and especially a queer form of ecocriticism, can help to unpack the convoluted web of significations contained in the passage. In this long, intense and highly erotic scene of predation, we can see the ways in which, to adapt David M. Halperin, ‘there is no mastication without ideology.’ Presumably Jonathan knows he is about to become prey. All the signs point to the very obvious part each character must play: the vampire is down on all fours, animalistically licking her lips and exposing a sharp set of canine incisors before she begins feeding; Jonathan lies there immobilised, waiting. Stoker is clear to detail the neck as a ‘supersensitive’ erogenous zone that is the aim of both the predator and, ironically, the prey, while also erotically charging the scene by prolonging the time before climax, the moments right before orgasm, and vividly describing these moments. Kathleen L. Spencer argues, ‘If we had any doubts about the equation of violence and sex in the novel, this scene would dispel them: Dracula’s own language conflates erotic desire and feeding; the mouth both kisses and consumes, the same organ gratifying two distinct hungers’ (1992, 216). While I agree with Spencer’s point about the conflation of erotic desire and feeding, I do not believe Stoker thinks of these, at least in Dracula, as ‘two distinct hungers’. Indeed, Dracula seems to have a single hunger that is satiated only with the erotic sucking of the blood. Furthermore, the prey, in this case Jonathan, seems also to have a single hunger that is satiated only by having his blood erotically sucked.

Stoker details the potentially violent outcome of this erotic feeding in the next scene in which a woman comes to Dracula’s castle looking for her abducted child. Jonathan writes in his diary:

Somewhere high overhead, probably on the tower, I heard the voice of the Count calling in his harsh, metallic whisper. His call seemed to be answered from far and wide by the howling of wolves. Before many minutes had passed a pack of them poured, like a pent-up dam when liberated, though the wide entrance into the courtyard. There was no cry from the woman, and the howling of the wolves was but short. Before long they streamed away singly, licking their lips. [48–9]

This scene in which Dracula calls the wolves to attack and eat the woman not only illustrates the potential outcome of Jonathan’s experience with Dracula’s women if they were not interrupted, but also underscores the naturalness of the vampire’s queer predatory habits. By juxtaposing the vampire’s intense licking of the lips with that of the wolves, those creatures that are supposed to behave violently, Stoker establishes both actions and outcomes as part of the

8 The original quotation reads, ‘there is no orgasm without ideology’ (Halperin 1992, 261).
natural. At the same time, though, Stoker characterises Dracula’s harsh whisper as metallic, effectively – though problematically – distinguishing this voice from a more organic form of matter.

Stoker continues this problematic taxonomy in his description of the encounter between Dracula and Jonathan’s wife Mina. In her diary, Mina writes:

With a mocking smile, he placed one hand upon my shoulder and, holding me tight, bared my throat with the other, saying as he did so: ‘First, a little refreshment to reward my exertions. You may as well be quiet; it is not the first time, or the second that your veins have appeased my thirst!’ I was bewildered, and, strangely enough, I did not want to hinder him. I suppose it is part of the horrible curse that such is, when his touch is on his victim. And oh, my God, my God, pity me! He placed his reeking lips upon my throat! [251]

In this description of Dracula as the erotic predator, Stoker is careful to describe the queer desire of his prey. In using the term ‘queer desire’ here I wish to suggest both the ‘strangeness’ of Mina’s desire and the unanticipated and diverse ways in which ‘queer’ has the ability to deconstruct the binary opposition between the natural and the unnatural. The desire to become prey undermines conventional notions of the natural, but the language of predator/prey cannot signify anything but the natural. Mina constructs a syntactically indirect statement – ‘I did not want to hinder him’ – in order to illustrate her characteristically-female passivity, but the problematic utterance reveals too much. Her seemingly passive obedience exposes her active, even enthusiastic, acquiescence; however, responding to her competing desire to be normal and natural she attempts to disavow her very clear, queer desire for Dracula. Indeed, as John Allen Stevenson argues, ‘The problem is one of loyalty: the danger is not that she will be captured, but that she will go willingly’ (1988, 139).

After hearing Mina relate her encounter with Dracula, her husband Jonathan understands the fine line between the passive – ‘I did not want to hinder him’ – and the active – ‘I wanted him to proceed’. He immediately reacts to this determinate sign of infidelity and ‘groaned again’ (251). Mina, however, further attempts to obfuscate her irrepressible erotic desire by trying to explain it away: ‘I suppose it is part of the horrible curse’. The ‘I suppose’ here is important: Mina tries to retreat into her own ‘ignorance’, fails again to convince her audience of her normality and naturalness, and ends by calling out to God. But Mina’s experience with Dracula is not over. She says:

… he pulled open his shirt, and with his long sharp nails opened a vein in his breast. When the blood began to spurt out, he took my hands in one of his, holding them tight, and with the other seized my neck and pressed my mouth to the wound, so
that I must either suffocate or swallow some of the – Oh my God! my God! what have I done? [252]

By prefiguring this scene of erotic, symbiotic predation with Renfield’s insane ecosystem, Stoker constructs a truly queer nature. More specifically, though, in this scene Stoker exposes the disruptive moments in an obsessively monogamous, fanatically procreative, system of compulsory heterosexuality in nineteenth-century Britain. In this exposure, however, it is important that Stoker does not naturalise this disruption even though he intentionally links the scene of Mina’s ‘infidelity’ with fin-de-siècle scientific discourse of the natural. Instead, the clear line between the natural and the unnatural is blurred. In this scene, in other words, the binary opposition between predator and prey, victimiser and victim, active and passive, breaks down. We can no longer distinguish between Dracula’s desire for Mina and Mina’s desire to be desired by Dracula. Implicit in this deconstruction of predator and prey, furthermore, is the concomitant deconstruction of the natural and the unnatural. Predator and prey, a foundational concept in evolutionary and ecological theory, is called into question, but it is done so through the concepts of gender and sexuality.

Many critics have discussed the ultimate effect of Dracula as either politically progressive or regressive, but I think this ironically ‘evolutionary’ debate misses the point. While I agree with most critics’ identification of Stoker’s Dracula as reactionary in its attempt to stabilise Victorian power structures and socio-discursive systems, especially along axes of gender and race, Dracula does something else as well. It registers, expands and disseminates a sexually charged, taxonomically problematic – queer – nature that does have the potential to productively disrupt contemporary queer theory and environmental studies. Indeed, in – and not in spite of – its attempt to tame the heteroglossic raucousness of its discursive context, the novel reveals an uncontrollably wild array of political potentialities. In ‘Universal Donors in a Vampire Culture’, Donna Haraway writes that she is guided by the figure of vampire:

… the one who pollutes lineages on the wedding night; the one that effects category transformations by illegitimate passages of substance; the one who drinks and infuses blood in a paradigmatic act of infecting whatever poses as pure; the one that eschews sun worship and does its work at night; the one who is undead, unnatural, an perversely incorruptible. [1995, 322]

This image of the vampire is surely familiar and has long been used to shore up disgust and hatred for the ‘deviant’, especially in the context of sexually
transmitted disease. This vampire, in other words, has been used in reactionary discourse to project a very specific social anxiety onto a naturalised body. Like Judith Halberstam however, I would like to think of Dracula, or this specific image of the vampire, as a ‘technology of monstrosity’:

The monster, in its otherworldly form, its supernatural shape, wears the traces of its own construction. Like the bolt through the neck of Frankenstein’s monster in the modern horror film, the technology of monstrosity is written upon the body. And the artificiality of the monster denaturalizes in turn the humanness of his enemies. [1993, 349]

It is here – in the denaturalisation of his ‘truly’ human counterparts – that Dracula is at the height of his powers and here – in the tracing of his own physical and discursive genesis – that he has the most to teach.

Enter the Queer Ecocritic

I will turn now to the ways in which Dracula is a very suggestive text in thinking through queer ecocritical issues and, in the process, suggests how we might establish some sort of programme for queer ecocriticism. Although in environmental studies, especially in queer geography and some forms of ecofeminism, there is some work that explores the intersections between queer politics and environmentalism, in much of these efforts I recognise a tendency to essentialise the human, the natural and the sexual. In her pioneering ‘Toward a Queer Ecofeminism’ (1997), for example, Greta Gaard speaks of queer eroticism and nature as if they are stable things, capable of being ‘liberated’, rather than historically contingent constructs that have changed profoundly – even if we just look at the past fifty years – and will change profoundly in the next. As should be apparent, I support instead a commitment to constructivism and historical analysis, one that takes seriously the profound differences not only of the social construction of sexual identity through time and space, but that of nature as well.

Dracula’s influence on twentieth-century culture is more profound than in its foregrounding of homoeroticism in the vampire tradition. It accentuates and dramatises complex notions of, and the intense play between, the human,

---

the natural, and the sexual from the fin-de-siècle to our own commencement-de-siècle. Indeed, from Lolita to the recent To Catch a Predator television series, the unnatural (sexual) predator has become a ubiquitous discursive formation. A queer ecocriticism, then, could help us make better sense of these texts and to unpack the origins and political effects of the social construction of a queer nature. In short, queer theory can benefit from the kind of nuanced historical analysis of nature and environment practiced in environmental studies and an urgent attention to the ways in which environmental problems affect human and other-than-human beings. Environmental studies can benefit from the nuanced historical analysis of the sexual available in queer studies, as well as from the political potential of constructivism, particularly the ways in which, as Edelman writes, ‘the queer insists that politics is always the politics of the significer’ (2004, 6). Environmental studies must begin to take account of anti-queer sentiment in the history of the environmental movement and to acknowledge the ways in which a knowledge of the natural is always already a sexual kind of knowledge and often with heterosexist assumptions (Evans 2002, and work in environmental justice ecocriticism more generally).

In a sense, the ‘proper object’ of queer ecocriticism would be queer nature and the ‘proper goal’ would be the formulation of a queer environmental ethics (Butler 1994). In these analyses, queer nature should not recapitulate the insistence on the distinguishability between the authentic and the artificial, on the knowability of the ‘true’ matrix between the human, the natural and the sexual. In Dracula, and perhaps as part of some kind of modernism, a queer

---

10 The American television series, To Catch a Predator, began as a Dateline NBC ‘special investigation’ in 2004 with correspondent Chris Hansen and producer Lynn Keller. Its premise is to document potential paedophiles by luring men into an undercover house by posing as under-age children looking for sex on the Internet. The men arrive at the home, thinking they will meet their future sex partners, only to be confronted by Hansen for a dramatic, hidden-camera interview before being arrested by the police. Although To Catch a Predator has both ardent supporters who argue for the show’s disciplinary function in society and vocal detractors who cite legal issues regarding entrapment, no one to my knowledge has addressed the show’s dramatisation of familiar narratives of the hyper-sexualised, deviant adult and the de-sexualised, innocent child.

11 See Sandilands (2001), who argues, ‘the naturalization of heterosexuality has been, historically, accompanied by the heterosexualization of nature’ (179). I am not calling for a queering of nature that tries to find real, authentic lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender animals in nature. Although Bagemihl’s (2000) and similar texts are valuable for their disruptive potential within scientific discourse, larger, theoretical reconsiderations of science such as in Haraway’s (1990) and Fausto-Sterling’s (2000) are better foundations for building a queer ecocriticism. As I have said at the beginning of
nature is introduced into artistic and political discourse. We should find a way to chart the emergence of this queer nature and to value its productive disturbance in contemporary theory and criticism. Queer nature requires that we as readers confront our own assumptions about which constructions of the human, the natural and the sexual are valid, appropriate or ‘true’. Indeed, queer nature requires us to ask how these constructions are emphatically, indeed obsessively and compulsively, authorised. Queer nature, by refusing the opposition between the natural and the unnatural, dramatises its own ontological impossibility and asks us to consider alternative modes of representation, new constructions of humans, natures and sexualities, and unconventional ethical systems grounded in the indeterminate subjects of queer theory and environmental studies.

References


UNNATURAL PREDATORS


UNNATURAL PREDATORS


Chapter 7

The Werewolf as Queer, the Queer as Werewolf, and Queer Werewolves

Phillip A. Bernhardt-House

Queerness Through Yellow Eyes

The figure of the werewolf is familiar to most people through the medium of the Hollywood horror film, but werewolves have also been well represented in European literature, the historical witch-trials in the late medieval period through to the early modern period, and in fiction, comics and television shows in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The werewolf is generally seen as a ‘hybrid’ figure of sorts – part human and part wolf – and its hybridity and transgression of species boundaries in a unified figure is, at very least, unusual, thus the figure of the werewolf might be seen as a natural signifier for queerness in its myriad forms. By ‘queerness’ in this context, I mean to indicate at least one of several conditions: the most common definition being homoeroticism of any sort, in the werewolf’s case especially reflected as the beastly, unnatural and atavistic natures often imputed to queer people; but equally important in the case of werewolves is the idea of ‘queer’ as anything which actively disrupts normativity, transgresses the boundaries of propriety, and interferes with the status quo in closed social and sexual systems. This judgement of werewolves is one from an etic perspective, the viewpoint of an outsider evaluating the werewolf as a symbol and understanding it in terms which are imposed upon it through comparative models rather than on its own merits and through its own self-definitions. What would the werewolf figure itself think of queerness through an emic perspective, which is to say, from its own viewpoint and from its own native self-understanding? If the assessment of werewolves, whether

1 Both the emic and etic perspectives will be utilised in this chapter, the etic primarily for the purposes of a global and semi-comprehensive history and analysis of patterns in the material considered, and the emic for an examination of the internal dynamics of each case of lycanthropy discussed.
as admirable and superhuman or as malignant and subhuman, occurs in a particular portrayal of them in literature or in scholarship on these subjects, it is a human (and therefore etic) judgement. The emic outlook would question such issues of separation and variation entirely. So, one might ask, what would queer theory itself look like through the yellow-eyed gaze of the werewolf?

What would be considered ‘queer’ within the context of a werewolf’s emic viewpoint? ‘Queer’ is an inherently comparative term, and thus one would have to assume that an entire lycanthropic social schema were in place for anything to be considered ‘queer’ within it; while some modern portrayals of werewolves in film and fiction have posited such lycanthropic societies, they are a fairly recent phenomenon for the most part. A diachronic view of the subject of lycanthropy (therefore, of necessity, an etic view) shows that the earliest forms of this concept known to humans were exactly that, as reflected in the youthful wolf-identified warrior-bands of early European societies, of which some of the later werewolf tales are distant reflections.

It should be stated that the present historical summary cannot possibly do justice to the fullness of the complexity and richness of the werewolf figure in Western European literature and tradition, much less Indo-European or world-wide cultural contexts. A great deal of these traditions have their roots in late prehistoric and early historic social practices and institutions, rituals and holidays (Bernhardt-House 2002, 60–63). What all of these traditions have in common is the usage of a canine or lupine image as both metaphor and totem for a group of people – usually youthful males, but often equally females – who are semi-outcasts within their respective societies, who live as hunter-gatherers and occasionally serve in an auxiliary (or in some cases first-line) warrior capacity, able to bring about an ecstatic battle frenzy (McCone 1986; 1987). Oftentimes, these youths lived or fought nude, thus identifying as outside the social order, animal-like and not unlike the dead (and as social outcasts, they were in effect ‘dead to society’). These homosocial age-sets functioned in various rituals as the embodiment of ‘living dead’ ancestors and other gods or spirits, and because of their liminal existence many other beliefs of a shamanic or supernatural category became attached to them. The male dimension of this equation, within Indo-European studies termed the Männerbünde, has been detailed extensively in scholarly literature (Kershaw 2000). The female dimension of this picture, which includes such groups as the Greek maenads and the virginal huntress company of Artemis/Diana, has not been fully integrated into this more comprehensive view of the phenomenon very much.

---

2 Overviews of werewolf traditions include Baring-Gould (1865); Smith (1894); Eisler (1952); Summers (1976/1933); Otten (1986); Douglas (1992).
3 A possible exception is Eisler (1952).
In addition to being the archetype of the fierce warrior, the wolf is almost universally a sexual creature, as is its canine domesticated counterpart, no doubt due to the very visible nature of its sexuality – often to the embarrassment of their human owners – which our modern neutered-and-spayed pet population is prone to make us forget. Indeed, the earliest attested Indo-European instance of humans transformed into wolves (whether literal or figurative) is a Hittite law describing the social consequences of a ‘marriage by abduction’, the warrior-class marriage essentially amounting to kidnap and rape (Weitenberg 1991), with the metaphor of ‘wolves taking sheep from the fold’ obviously bearing sexual implications. Furthermore, the ‘queer’ dimension of these warrior groups – which were homosocial, sometimes engaging in what might be thought of as transgendered behaviour, often prohibited from relations with the opposite sex (and thus permissive of homoerotic relationships), and yet sometimes allowed great sexual licence generally – has not been acknowledged by very many scholars. This same idea of the lustful wolf preying upon sheep with a specific homoerotic connotation is found in the writings of Plato (Fowler 1914, 456–7), as well as in an epigram of Strato in the Greek Anthology (Paton 1918, 406–407 §250). In the first century BCE, both the fifth elegy of Sextus Aurelius Propertius (Butler 1912, 294–5) and Virgil’s eighth eclogue (Boyle 1976, 86–7) speak of women using spells to become wolves and pursue their lovers. The modern expression ‘doggy-style’ in terms of rear-entry sexual intercourse and the vague similarities of this position to anal sex (whether homosexual or heterosexual) might account for the rather obvious and yet ambiguous queer dimension attached to canine and lupine symbolism in a number of cultures.

An opportune occasion for this latter connection to be established was missed in the rather disappointing film The Howling (1981), in which the freedom of atavism is praised by a psychologist who is the leader of a group of werewolves living in secret. A prominent female amongst the group – depicted as a dark, alluring, leather-clad witch-like figure – lures the husband of the main character into a sexual liaison in which he becomes a werewolf for the first time (having been bitten earlier), and the two engage in quite vanilla ‘rough sex’ accompanied by howls, in the missionary position with the aggressive seductress on the bottom. In this instance, the werewolf identity seems entirely synonymous with the most definitive werewolf activity – neither predation nor transformation, but howling (unsurprising, given the film’s title). As disruptions to society, these werewolves (from society’s etic perspective) would certainly

---

4 Several Indo-European cultures have accounts of werewolves enshrined in their legal sources, for example, Germanic and English (Gerstein 1974) and Irish (Binchy 1934–38, 26 §32, 28 §34); in the latter case female werewolves specifically.
be queer; but from an emic viewpoint, both within the film itself and from a wider lycanthropic outlook, these things seem normal, even boring, and might be viewed the same way that a lesbian might view heterosexual porn depicting female homoeroticism: the ridiculous fantasies of a community that exoticises an unrealistic set of circumstances for the purposes of fantasy and titillation.

The general historical arc of the treatment of werewolves begins in the youthful social contexts discussed previously, in which the werewolf identity was simultaneously more metaphorical (a physical transformation does not take place) and more literal (the people involved were frenzied, fierce killers), from the ancient Hittite laws, but lingering into the early Middle Ages (as with the Irish legal texts of the eighth century CE). The next phase in the transformation of etic werewolf portrayals is characterised by a literalisation of the metaphor: humans were thought to actually become wolves physically; this phase begins as early as the fifth-century BCE ancient Greek historian Herodotus’s account of the Neuri (Waterfield 1998, 270), and proceeds through to the late medieval period. While earlier treatments of werewolves were somewhat ambivalent, and this ambivalence persists in this period, there is also a flowering of the ‘sympathetic’ werewolf who is the hero and protagonist of the story; this trend continues into folk versions of werewolf tales collected well into the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the late medieval through to the early modern periods, the question of werewolves and whether their transformations were literal or figurative, physical or spiritual or simply the products of fantasy was the essential question that played itself out in witchcraft trials, in which belief in werewolves was cited as deluded and heretical, and yet trials of suspected and confessed werewolves also took place.

In a werewolf trial from the seventeenth century in Livonia, an elderly werewolf named Thiess proudly but reluctantly admitted that he was a werewolf, and he detailed what his actions were in this form (involving fighting against evil sorcerers who would blight crops, and doing other good works as the ‘hounds of God’), but his ecclesiastical inquisitors believed that this bestialisation was entirely evil and wrong and a debasement of what it was to be human and rational (Ginzburg 1992, 153–8). Such basic tenets on the opposition between the rational and human and the bestial and lycanthropic are also found in the fifteenth-century inquisitorial manual Malleus Maleficarum (Summers 1928, 122–4), a guidebook which influenced the witch-trials throughout this period. After such witch-hunt hysterics were abandoned in favour of more reasoned and scientific hypotheses, much of what used to pass for lycanthropy was diagnosed as mental and physical illness, and this interpretation persists quite often in the literatures of earlier cultures as reflecting non-scientific, fear-based assessments. Lycanthropy was thought of as first a demonic possession, then a form of
THE WEREWOLF AS QUEER ... AND QUEER WEREWOLVES

extreme melancholic temperament (symptoms of which included depression, insomnia, light sensitivity and severe dehydration), and eventually a delusional psychological disorder which, in some cases, is marked by sexual irregularity of all kinds (Rosenstock and Vincent 1986, 31). In the latter category, witness for instance Sigmund Freud’s famous case of the repressed homosexual with certain scatological and anal fixations that he called ‘the Wolf-Man’ (Gardiner 1971; Edelman 1991; Davis 1995) – which is exactly what ‘lycanthrope’ or ‘werewolf’ means. Freud interpreted a dream involving wolves as the infant Wolfman’s witnessing a primal scene in which his father engaged in coitus a tergo with his mother. There are also the more physical forms of this perceived disease, which include and can be connected to porphyria (Illis 1986), epilepsy, asthma, rabies and the degenerative disease called ‘lupus’, that is, wolf (a disease which can involve seizures).

The question of sex and of queerness within sex does resurface, whether implicitly or explicitly, in a great deal of modern werewolf fiction and film. The werewolf has been portrayed in most of these cases as schizophrenic (from the emic perspective), as a human divided against itself, unable to control its emotions or its body, and often amnesiac in the aftermath of such episodes, waking up in odd places naked, bloody and bruised; and when the transformation takes place, it is rarely a full transformation into a lupine quadruped, but instead a vaguely humanoid, hirsute figure with a wolf’s head (much more like the cynocephali of the ancient monstrous races). This is in contrast to the sympathetic werewolves of medieval literature who, even in their fully lupine forms, had total human rationality and sense, despite the general absence of speech and other features which were taken as constitutive of the rational human state. The schizophrenia of so many modern werewolves is a symptom, perhaps, of the rather poor relationship a great deal of human society has with sexuality – its most animal and bestial set of behaviours.

With the question of sexuality comes a further question: how do werewolves procreate? Not unlike vampires, this becomes a vexed question in the vast majority of werewolf portrayals; few indeed are the presentations of a lycanthropic character as a ‘constitutional’ werewolf, both in the pre-modern and modern periods. Because werewolves and vampires have been understood as somehow ‘unnatural’ and perversions of the expected order of the cosmos and nature (with all of the negative moral assessments such a state would

5 In the Navaho culture, in which human-wolves are recognised and feared, a dimension of sexual irregularity and magical manipulation of sexual organs is also recognised (Morgan 1936, 26-7).

6 One must make allowances in some of these portrayals, however, for the abilities of special effects and makeup technicians, especially in the pre-digital effects age.
QUEERING THE NON/HUMAN

... imply), both monsters must find other ways to propagate their species. Since they cannot reproduce in conventional manners, instead they must ‘recruit’ and pass on their cursed state to others through various means (usually biting). The ways in which this schema allegorises some of the prevailing negative understandings of homosexuality – since being gay is unnatural and against the will of God and is strictly a lifestyle choice, then no one is born gay and therefore more gays must be created through recruitment and toxic exposure to the gay lifestyle or its affirmation – would appear to make both werewolves and vampires apt metaphors for the exploration of modern society’s homophobia and heterosexism.

Some discussion of vampirism in relation to queerness (Case 1991; Hanson 1991; 1999) has occurred, but before now, there has been little or no discussion of lycanthropy.7 The relationship between lycanthropy and vampirism has its own varied and colourful history and receives an interesting treatment in the film *Bram Stoker’s Dracula* (1992), in which the transformation of Lucy into a vampire takes place during a sexual encounter, and the famous vampire – who transforms constantly throughout the film – is in a form quite typical of the twentieth-century cinematic werewolf. Perhaps due to the implied bestiality involved in werewolf sex, the werewolf has not been a feature of much erotic literature either. It is further noteworthy in comparison to the always-enticing, seductive and sophisticated figure of the vampire, especially considering the latter’s conjuration of necrophilia. It seems that the figure of the vampire, who sexually embodies the dual drives and desires of *eros* and *thanatos* (sex and death), can be explained or rationalised in a somewhat mystical way. Brushes with death and mortality are often the basis for metaphysical realisations or philosophical enquiries, and the ecstatic heights of love (and the phrase ‘eternal love’) are also seen as divinely inspired or even holding the possibility of divine union. Thus, the contemplation of these forces amidst the sexual encounter and enticement of the vampire, and the mystical dimensions of eternal life in whatever form, are never far from the surface in such erotic vampire scenes. However, the basic form and function of the most popular werewolf images are often portrayed as ones of horror, utmost brutality and total animality, and thus a sexualised werewolf encounter would be degenerative and atavistic, threatening the most

7 An exception is the various discussions of werewolf films is Benshoff (1997).

A very brief line – which repeats some of the etic stereotypes of lycanthropy already mentioned – is that by Barbara Creed in relation to werewolves, zombies, vampires, ghouls and other creatures as figures of abjection: ‘The werewolf, whose body signifies a collapse of the boundaries between human and animal, also belongs to this category [of the abject]’ (1996, 39).
basic sense of humanity (which is in opposition to anything strictly animal) for those involved.

While vampirism offers the possibility of transcending the human condition, lycanthropy appears like a step not only backward, but downward on the evolutionary scale, into the dirt and excrement of earthly existence, a world both visible and distant from ordinary human operations. And, though the brutality of such an existence is well known from nature documentaries and the like, the Darwinian reality of ‘kill-or-be-killed, ‘all that moves is either friend or food’ world of the werewolf is more feared and threatening than the unknown shadows of the vampire realm: familiarity breeds not only contempt, but terror. But, perhaps more fundamentally, the difference between vampires and werewolves is a difference between transcendental permanence and permanent transformation. The vampire, in its immortality, can remain the same as it was on the day it became a vampire for potentially all of time (unless it meets a final and ultimate change in the form of its death through the intervention of outside forces), whereas the werewolf’s form changes constantly and unexpectedly, and the promise of immortality is generally not a feature of the lycanthropic life. Werewolves, thus, are a much greater threat to any enduring sense of identity, even for those who might be queer-identified; they can be queers even amongst the queers.

**Barking Up the Wrong Tree: The Medieval Werewolf**

For a proper understanding of much pre-modern werewolf material, one must jettison most of what one assumes about werewolves from modern film and fiction. Werewolf transformations usually have nothing to do with lunar cycles. The lycanthropic curse is generally not transmitted by biting, and some werewolves are constitutionally lycanthropic. There is no suspension of the rational faculties of the character in lupine form, and such characters are able to retain their memories of their lupine existence when they resume human form. In some cases, no ‘cure’ is sought for the lycanthropic ‘curse’, and it is not always viewed as negative.

In the eleventh-century Welsh tale, the Fourth Branch of the Mabinogi, *Math vab Mathonwy*, the brothers Gwydion and Gilvaethwy contrive a complex situation in order to give the love-sick Gilvaethwy a chance to rape their uncle King Math’s virgin footholder. When Math discovers their crime, he punishes them by changing them into opposite-sexed pairs of animals for three years, each of whom must produce offspring – first a doe and a stag, next a sow
and a boar, and third a wolf and a she-wolf (Ford 1977, 96–8).\footnote{Gwydion later goes on to be the benevolent uncle and surrogate father (and possibly genetic father) of Lleu in the story, in a rather ‘gay uncle’-like role. Werewolves as surrogate fathers occur in many versions of ‘the werewolf’s tale’, including the various versions of \textit{Guillaume de Palerne} (Sconduto 2004) and the late Irish folktale ‘Morraha’, in which a child refers to his wolf-protector as ‘shaggy papa’ (Jacobs 1894, 92–3). Such stories as this might suggest a possible metaphor for queer parenting or godparenting.}

These three animals are warrior totems \textit{par excellence} in the Celtic milieu and fit into the broader Indo-European warrior-culture complex perfectly.\footnote{One of the only commentators to speak about the ‘homosexuality’ of this episode is the famed comparative mythologist Georges Dumézil (1970, 144–7; 1986, 31–4), whose theories have been taken up with verve by many Celticists. This minor aspect of his work has been ignored in subsequent scholarship. The use of terms, such as ‘homosexuality’, among many interpreters of Celtic material is done in ignorance of Michel Foucault’s idea of the social construction of homoerotic acts and identities in different periods. Karma Lochrie (2005) has questioned the entire edifice of ‘heteronormativity’ in the medieval period, since not only did both homosexuality and heterosexuality as we now understand them not exist, but also the idea of norms and normativity was not established. While this is a true and fair point, I am uncomfortable with the comprehensive employment of this idea: perhaps the idea of a heterosexual ‘norm’ did not exist as such, but the idea that the only acceptable sexual act was penile-vaginal penetrative intercourse within marriage, not on the Sabbath or during penitence, and only for the purposes of procreation rather than pleasure or for the benefit of the couple’s relational dynamics, has the added severity of being the only non-sinful sexual act, which I would suggest has a greater force in compelling action and preventing transgression than any idea of ‘normativity’.}

One of the closest analogues to this tale is in the later Irish story, \textit{Eachtra an Mhadra Mhaoil}, an Irish Arthurian romance incorporating the werewolf theme. In the story, Sir Gawain goes on a series of adventures with an earless, tail-less, talking wolf, later revealed to be Alastrann the Wonderful, one of five transformed sons of the king of India. The five were deceived by their evil stepmother and were enchanted to become three male canines and two bitches, who in the course of time produced fourteen pups (Macalister 1998, 34–43). All members of this family of canines, except for Alastrann, are killed subsequently, and the tale is primarily concerned with restoration and revenge against those responsible for the killings and enchantment. In both stories, we see fluidity in terms of form and sex, and in both we have the occurrence of incest, another sexual taboo. The familial brotherhood of these warrior societies, and yet the homoeroticism allowed or expected within them, might have been rationalised in this way by the later storytellers (Bernhardt-House 2004, 86–7).
One of the most artistic treatments of the medieval sympathetic werewolf is that by Marie de France, *Bisclavret*, from her mid-to-late twelfth-century collection *Lais*. After introducing her subject by saying that in times past some men were werewolves, feared and loathed because of their animalistic behaviour, Marie introduces our title-protagonist, a knight beloved of his lord, whose name is the same as the Breton word for ‘werewolf’.

The knight’s wife, curious about his weekly absences, wheedles from him that he becomes a wolf, transforming only when completely naked; after further pressuring, he reveals his clothes’ hiding place (near an old church in the forest), a deep secret since his humanity is unattainable without them. After this revelation, his wife is sexually repulsed, and plans his ruin by enlisting a previously refused lover to steal the clothes. Eventually, the werewolf attaches himself as a pet to the court of his feudal lord. When he acts violently towards his wife and her lover, biting off the wife’s nose, the lord’s court assumes the best of the wolf’s intentions, interrogates the couple and the clothes are retrieved. The werewolf, reluctant to resume human shape before the entire court, is secluded in the lord’s chambers and is found afterwards sleeping in his lord’s bed. His lord restores his fiefdom and the knight’s wife and her lover are banished, and many of their female descendants are born nose-less thereafter.

Bruckner (1991, 251) sympathises with the wife in this tale, as a (heterosexual) woman who would be disgusted by the thought of sleeping with such a brute; and indeed, the wife’s initiative in stealing her husband’s clothes reverses the common trope of many supernatural marriage stories, in which a male steals the clothes of his bathing prospective wife. This provides an interesting voice for transgressive women in medieval stories, opening up the possibility for the male nude as spectacle rather than only women being objects of the gaze (Baldwin 1994, 99). However, this tale has been read with an eye to its homoerotic possibilities on a few occasions (Bruckner 1991, 264; Conner 1993, 172; Burgwinkle 2004, 164–9) and it is noteworthy that in the end, completely atypical of medieval tales generally, the werewolf protagonist

---

10 It was long ago suggested that the name ‘Bisclavret’ might mean ‘short-breeched’ (Sayers 1982, 82, n. 19), and while this has been challenged by Sayers and others (Bailey 1981), the meaning ‘short-breeched’ does not rely upon any linguistic reconstruction into unattested protoforms, and it would make perfect sense in medieval French culture, because to only be clad in short breeches would be, for a noble, equivalent to being naked. Therefore, taken as synonymous with ‘naked’, and with the common connection of werewolves to nudity, especially exemplified in this story, there is no problem with the name as it stands.

11 Several subsequent adaptations of *Bisclavret* become progressively misogynistic (Hopkins 2003).
remains unmarried afterwards (Burgwinkle 2004, 168–9). But rather than read this tale as problematic in terms of Bisclavret remaining in his lycanthropic state – for he is one of the few ‘constitutional werewolves’ found in literature (Smith 1894, 5) – the fact that Bisclavret is a werewolf ‘by nature’ rather than as a passing phase, and that he has somehow accommodated his life to this fact, is a fascinating one for the idea of the queer werewolf. His wife’s sin is transmitted genetically to her offspring, but he who was born a werewolf remains the story’s only werewolf.

In these three narratives, a variety of viewpoints are presented. Bisclavret does not reproduce in any manner and seems to be a permanent werewolf, whereas Gwydion, Gilvaethwy and Alastrann do reproduce, but are only temporarily werewolves (though for an extended period in Alastrann’s case). The sympathetic and generally benign Bisclavret is constitutionally queer and yet not allowed to reproduce, whereas his faithless wife and her lover produce a progeny whose sin is reflected physically. While we might be able to laud the way in which Bisclavret has achieved some sort of integration or acceptance of his lycanthropy (and his lord and the court seem to have done likewise), his sexuality seems to have been as tamed as his animality in the process. After the revelation of his lycanthropy, he is almost asexual, another example akin to modern instances of desexualised queers, who have had to sacrifice their sexual activities in order to reach some sense of accommodation and acceptance within mainstream society. Gwydion and Gilvaethwy’s punishment was intended to be humiliating and degrading in retaliation for their sexual offences; transformation from male to female in Celtic stories is always reversed eventually, and often functions in a manner to deride its victims (Bernhardt-House 2006). Only Alastrann seems to have endured his queerly lycanthropic stage without much comment or censure, as one among many possible adventures and wonder-narratives that contribute to the appeal and fascination of his exoticised character. None of these werewolf portrayals are, strictly-speaking, emic, and they tend to be therefore examples of the ‘queer as werewolf’ rather than ‘queer werewolves’.

The Bitch is Back: Female Werewolves

It should come as no surprise, in the milieu of feminist and queer perspectives on mainstream culture, that werewolves have often been used as symbols of the uncontrollable and dangerous nature of female (and especially teenage female) sexuality. While some pre-modern examples of female werewolves do exist, the suggestion of female groupings similar to the youthful male warrior-societies has also been posited by Robert Eisler (1952). In his wider discussion of werewolf traditions, he briefly discusses the Dianic virgin huntresses, who
have left vestiges of their lesbianism in some of the myths associated with them (159). Eisler himself was a survivor of Dachau, and in his appendices he connects the flagellation rites of the Lupercalia, for example, to the atrocities of the Nazis in the ghettos and death-camps (254–8).12 While his scholarship is informed for its day and near-encyclopaedic in its breadth, his analysis goes a bit far on occasion. He suggests that women who wear furs and paint their nails red play upon male desires to be dominated, much like Leopold von Sacher-Masoch’s *Venus in Furs* (2000/1870, 48, 226–7), or that women who wear flower-dresses invite sadistic males to devour them, each respectively luring sheep or wolves. He compares the former to a maenad who has just torn an animal limb from limb and the latter to a nymph fit to be chased by a satyr. One would wonder what Eisler would think of the black leather-clad contingents amongst modern gay pride celebrations, or for that matter the vast no-longer-underground community of BDSM practitioners of all sexual orientations, and especially those who utilise storm-trooper iconography or uniforms in their practice (Kantrowitz 2001). In the only volume of specifically werewolf erotica (a significant bit of which is lesbian) that I have yet been able to find, *Women who Run with the Werewolves* (Keesey 1996), one of the constituent elements of the erotic encounters is a predominance of biting and scratching, which is also what Eisler characterises as the lycanthropic impulse in his book, no matter how light it may be, down to the level of pinching (Eisler 1952, 226).

Treatments of female sexuality and sexual initiation in relation to wolves have often focused on the tale of *Little Red Riding Hood* (Zipes 1993; Orenstein 2002), which forms the basis for many variations on the theme of emergent female sexuality in the writings of Angela Carter (1995) and in the film based on some of these, *The Company of Wolves* (1984). A connection between the lunar cycles, menstruation and lycanthropy has also been posited in some modern treatments (Moore, Bissette and Totleben 1985). For present purposes however, I will focus on the *Ginger Snaps* film series (2000; 2004a; 2004b), as well as the short story ‘Boobs’ (1996) by Suzy McKee Charnas.

In my opinion, the best werewolf film of the twenty-first century has thus far been *Ginger Snaps* (2000), a Canadian film starring mostly unknowns. Two sisters, Ginger and Brigitte Fitzgerald, have a macabre obsession with gore and images of death and are in the same grade in high school because the younger Brigitte skipped a grade. Though Ginger is near sixteen, neither sister has begun menstruating and the arrival of the dreaded feminine ‘curse’ comes at a bad time for Ginger, when the two sisters are in the proximity of a werewolf who

---

12 The werewolf image was utilised heavily by Hitler (Eisler 1952, 169; Skal 1993, 212–16).
has been decimating their neighbourhood’s dog population. With the werewolf lured by the scent of blood, Ginger is bitten and over the next twenty-eight days until the next full moon (which happens to be on Halloween), Ginger slowly turns into a werewolf as the virus infects her, making her violent but also extremely sexual. The sisters’ relationship is very close, and borders on erotic – as, for example, when Brigitte pulls down her sleeping sister’s underwear to inspect her developing tail, or when Brigitte straddles Ginger on her bed to pierce her navel with silver as a possible remedy for her disease. The main image of the werewolf in this film is as the uncontrollable youthful teenage sex-drive, and the terms ‘bitch’ and such phrases as ‘keep her on a leash’ are bandied about throughout the film. A particularly subversive moment occurs when Ginger is in a car with the character Jason, about to have sex, having been warned by Brigitte earlier that she is ovulating, and when Jason tells her to lie back and relax, she turns the order around on him. He protests by saying ‘Who’s the guy here?’ and Ginger turns him over and attacks him, and the sexual werewolf’s activities lead to reproduction of the werewolf in Jason.

Jason begins his transformation the next day, while Brigitte protests her sister’s belief that all of this is hormones and it doesn’t make her a monster, ‘You’re getting stoned with boys, there’s definitely something wrong’. The unprotected sex – or is it severe biting and scratching? – and subsequent infection makes Jason begin manifesting symptoms, urinating blood and eventually harassing trick-or-treaters. Ginger begins killing mercilessly, speaking about eating a dead popular girl as impossible because it would be like fucking her, and eventually she speaks of her condition as powerful, ‘It’s like touching yourself … I’m a goddamned force of nature!’ In the end, Brigitte uses an injection made from monkshood on Jason, finding it effective in curtailing the lycanthropic transformation process before trying it on Ginger. In order to gain her sister’s trust when the decisive moment is about to come, Brigitte cuts herself and becomes her ‘blood sister’, thereby infecting herself, but the transformation for Ginger is complete. In a show of sisterly solidarity in the final scenes, Brigitte attempts to feast on the corpse of a slain victim, only to begin vomiting because she can’t handle the situation. With the monkshood injection in one hand and a knife in the other, Brigitte accidentally stabs Ginger. The film ends with the dead Ginger-wolf in Brigitte’s arms, with the unused injection nearby.

Whether implied or actual, Brigitte’s lesbianism is again hinted at – rather hilariously – in Ginger Snaps Unleashed (2004a), during a scene in which Brigitte is in group therapy at the drug rehab centre to which she has been sent. When she shares with the group how she has been having violent fantasies and her difficulty in fighting off these tendencies, the group facilitator writes down on a clipboard ‘Lesbian?’. In the final film of the series, Ginger Snaps Back: The Beginning (2004b),
the distant ancestresses of the two sisters, also called Ginger and Brigitte, are caught up in a nineteenth-century werewolf attack in the Canadian wilderness, and through a bite by the infected son of the commander of a frontier fort, Ginger herself becomes infected. Eventually, the two sisters fight off and kill all the inhabitants of the fort who stand in their way (as well as a Native American male who attempts to assist them), and the mutually infected sisters decide to brave their future together as werewolves. Though the latter two films are nowhere near as effective as the original Ginger Snaps, the theme of sisterly solidarity, at times erotic but certainly against all the heterosexist assumptions of the world and of the wish to return to ‘normality’, are emphasised throughout. These werewolves are voluntary, bestial and destructive, but in their own way they are also sympathetic and queer from both emic and etic viewpoints.

Suzy McKee Charnas’ short story ‘Boobs’ (1996) also presents a young female werewolf who willingly embraces her identity, with all of its savagery and destructiveness, and thus again gives us an emic perspective on lycanthropy. In contrast to the Ginger Snaps films, the werewolf here is a teenager called Kelsey Bornstein who is an early-developer rather than a late-developer, who has transformed from a girl to a busty young woman over the summer, and is about to have her first period. She soon learns that she is a werewolf, and instead of a monthly menstrual cycle, she transforms into a werewolf, which for her is an experience of full embodiment and utter freedom. To take revenge on Billy, a boy at school who constantly teases her for her early development, giving her the nickname ‘Boobs Bornstein’, she lures him out with promises of letting him inspect her chest on the night of her transformation and kills him, and whether it is because she is the first-person protagonist or simply because of the brilliant reversal of patriarchal society’s expectations involved, our sympathies are again with the young she-wolf rather than her victim. She enjoys her night-time runs on the full moon, killing late-night prowlers and other undesirables on her forays and ends the story with the looming possibility of a double-date with a friend, which will be her first ‘real date’. Whether she will pass on her lycanthropy sexually and genetically (thus suggesting she is a constitutional werewolf), or if she will pass it on in some other fashion, I would suggest that – despite the likelihood of her eventual heterosexuality – Kelsey is a queer werewolf rather than a ‘queer as werewolf’.

The Werewolf Gets Neutered: Celibate Werewolves

As mentioned previously in the discussion of Bisclavret, the desexualisation of queer people is often a condition of their mainstream social acceptance: their sense of style, witty retorts and effeminate manners can be tolerated and even
celebrated as long as no spectre of sexual activity or even a suggestion of it is made. Such portrayals of queer people are found in many places on television and film.

Children’s literature and television has featured a number of werewolves and thus perhaps appropriately the sexuality of such figures is downplayed if not outright ignored. One of the most recent widely known werewolf characters from children’s literature is Remus Lupin\textsuperscript{13} from the Harry Potter series. He is first introduced in the third volume, \textit{Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban} (Rowling 1999), which is full of canid metaphors, including Aunt Marge’s derision of Harry’s lineage when she says ‘If there’s something wrong with the bitch, there’ll be something wrong with the pup’ (Rowling 1999, 24), and the appearance of the Grim – a large quasi-spectral black dog whose name is attested in British folklore (Brown 1958) – which turns out to be Harry’s transformed godfather, Sirius Black, a.k.a. Padfoot.\textsuperscript{14} In both the film (2004) and book of \textit{Prisoner of Azkaban}, Lupin is presented as sexually ambiguous, not necessarily attractive, and not particularly interested in women; this is carried through into the fifth book, \textit{Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix} (2003), especially during a flashback scene in which Sirius Black, Harry’s father James Potter and others are attempting to impress Harry’s mother, and Lupin, despite being one of the inner circle of James Potter’s friends at Hogwarts, is entirely aloof and attempting to be good and responsible (564–72). When it is revealed to all that he is a werewolf at the end of the \textit{Prisoner of Azkaban} film and he is dismissed as a professor at Hogwarts, he remarks ‘parents will not want, well, someone like me, teaching their children.’\textsuperscript{15} In \textit{Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince} (2005), it is revealed that Lupin was infected with the disease while young by a nefarious werewolf called Fenris Greyback,\textsuperscript{16} whose wish it was

\begin{footnotes}
\item[13] ‘Remus’ is the twin brother of Romulus, both founders of Rome, who were said to have been nurtured after their abandonment by a she-wolf; they later had a period of brigandage in their youth, which is certainly the Roman legendary reflex of a wolf-identified youthful warrior society (Bernhardt-House 2002, 61–2). ‘Lupin’ quite obviously alludes to ‘lupine’, that is, ‘wolf-like’.
\item[14] ‘Sirius’ is the name of the ‘dog-star’, the brightest star in the sky, named after the dog of Orion. The rising of Sirius in the summer is marked in many European cultures by canine-associated holidays and myths (White 1991, 14, 26–43). ‘Padfoot’ is also a name employed for the black dogs of British folklore.
\item[15] ‘[S]omeone like me’ is, more plainly stated, ‘a werewolf’ (Rowling 1999, 309).
\item[16] ‘Fenris’ is the name of the wolf from Norse mythology and one of several lupine or canine offspring of the god Loki, the latter a figure who is redolent with queer associations (North 2001), who will eventually bring about the end of the present world and the devouring of Odin, leader of the gods (Pluskowski 2001).
\end{footnotes}
to infect as many people as possible with his disease – perhaps, if the queer subtext of the werewolf plots in this series is taken as established, a reference to the indiscriminate spread of sexually transmitted diseases by certain perceived members of the queer community.

This picture is further problematised by the fact that if lycanthropy equals queerness, then queerness is acquired or even bestowed and permanent, despite being manageable through seclusion and medication, which is how Lupin prevents destructive rampages.\(^{17}\) Though Lupin gets married to Tonks (with some difficulties) in the final book of the series (Rowling 2007), it is to be noted that his spouse is a metamorphomagus – a species of shapeshifter herself – and (apparently) heterosexual marriage does not disqualify a person from being queer in any sense. There is something of a complementary relationship between this portrayal and that of Bisclavret: whereas the Breton werewolf’s lycanthropy is the occasion for the suspension of his (hetero)sexuality in the narrative, Lupin’s lycanthropy is known by all, and yet his refusal to be (hetero)sexual is his own choice rather than one imposed on him by circumstance.

The celibate werewolf, however, is also presented in a further film: Ladyhawke (1985)\(^{18}\) starring Matthew Broderick as Philippe Gaston – nicknamed ‘the Mouse’ – a youthful thief who meets up with Etienne of Navarre, portrayed by Rutger Hauer, and his fine hawk. Navarre and the hawk disappear around sunset, and a wolf is encountered by night accompanying the beautiful Isabeau of Anjou, played by Michelle Pfeiffer. As the plot progresses, we learn that Isabeau and Navarre are the victims of a curse by the Bishop of Aquila (whom the Mouse escaped from at the film’s beginning). The bishop learned of the couple’s love and was jealous, and since he could not have Isabeau himself, he cursed them so that she is a hawk by day and he is a wolf by night, ‘Always together, eternally apart, as long as the sun rises and sets’. This sort of jealousy, which sometimes leads to murder on the part of the spurned male, is spoken of by Robert Eisler as a definitely primate characteristic (Eisler 1952, 241–2). The point is made at one stage of the film that both wolves and hawks mate for life, but the bishop did not know that when he created the curse. In this film

\(^{17}\) Hanson’s (1991) discussion of AIDS in relation to the image of vampires is appropriate to this example of werewolf aetiology, as well as that reflected in the first Ginger Snaps film.

\(^{18}\) In The Werewolf Book (Steiger 1999), this film is sadly not listed in the quite extensive Werewolf and Shapeshifter Filmography in the Appendix (365–88), despite films involving other animal transformations (for example, snakes, rats, wasps) being detailed at great length. It is unfortunate that because the story’s situation is so unique – and indeed much more in line with certain medieval depictions of werewolves – many who have seen this film do not count it amongst werewolf films.
the hero Navarre wears black, the bishop is little more than a feudal tyrant and hypocrite always wearing white, and the one desirable love-object for everyone is the enchanting Isabeau, the only female character of note in the film.

Apart from the many things which can be said about further symbolism in the film, in terms of the story’s sexual economy, there is no sex whatsoever; even the previous love of Navarre and Isabeau is spoken of in terms that sound troubadour-like, chaste and from afar. The bishop sends a hunter after the couple, telling him to find a woman whose ‘sun is the moon’ who travels with a wolf, and to capture the wolf, ‘the wolf who … loves her’. What results is an implied bestiality as the only option, and that only on the part of Isabeau, a problematisation of ostensibly normal heterosexual love in comparison with the restrictive and unproductive clerical celibacy that the bishop enforces on everyone because he must endure it himself. Though the werewolf curse is only a phase, and though we can expect that in the aftermath Navarre and Isabeau were happily married without further impediment by the bishop (and thus permitted to have sex in the medieval understanding), the overall situation is one in which the difference between human and animal is highlighted, and transgressing of this boundary becomes either impossible or undesirable. This is an instance of the ‘werewolf as queer’: the condition of lycanthropy used to problematise an already problematic situation and to make the ‘virtue’ of a celibate troubadour-like love a ‘vice’ through imposition of the bishop’s curse (understood in both the sense of ‘the curse originated by the bishop’ as well as ‘the bishop’s own curse’, that is, enforced celibacy). The only solution for this difficult situation was the ‘miracle’ (something by definition ‘not natural’) of a day on which the sun and the moon were in the sky at the same time, thus allowing both Navarre and Isabeau to confront the bishop in human form and for the bishop to recognise them together.

The suspension of sexuality in celibacy (especially when it is not chosen and is enforced from outside) and the neutering of both sexuality and the inherent power (or ‘potency’) of the werewolf’s character is as unusual and therefore just as ‘queer’ as acts of homoeroticism in many respects. And from the viewpoint of expected celibacy, any sexual actions at all would be ‘queer’. From these difficult situations, we have come to understand both Lupin in the mould of

19 In this manner, the desexualised gay person might be viewed as homosexual, but not as queer, by mainstream society; mainstream society tends to prefer that gay people be homosexual rather than queer. It is these sorts of assumptions that have allowed many Christian denominations to, for example, ‘love the sinner but hate the sin’ and make doctrinal statements that there is a difference between sexual orientation and sexual activity, so that it might be permissible to ‘be’ gay as long as one does not ‘act’ gay in any manner (including, perhaps especially, engaging in genital sexual activities).
the ‘queer as werewolf’ and Etienne of Navarre as a form of the ‘werewolf as queer’. There are three final examples that I will now examine, which further problematise the schemata discussed thus far through their direct treatments of either homoeroticism or homophobia through the werewolf image.

**Lycanthrophobia and Lycanthrophilia**

The most frequent association of the word ‘queer’ in the modern world is with homosexuality and homoeroticism (although it is also used as a general term of derision that simply horrifies and infects those to whom it is imputed, whether or not the sexual dimensions of it are seriously implied). By those who have sought empowerment, it has been taken up as an identity which freely and proudly celebrates one’s dedication to homoeroticism and to a transgressive approach to many forms of conventionality. As acceptance for lesbian and gay (and, to a lesser extent, bisexual and transsexual/transgendered) people increases, homophobia is becoming less widespread in its most overt forms, and its more virulent espousers have often been taken as bearing the symptoms of repressed homosexuality. Homophobia, in a sense, might in fact be a queer thing in itself therefore, and thus two of the examples which follow deal with the werewolf as homophobe.

The first instance is the very poor, low-budget film *Wolves of Wall Street* (2002), which has a men’s society-esque group of stockbrokers who work excessively and competitively but then enjoy a hedonistic lifestyle by night that sometimes involves the murder of their female sexual quarry. Animalistic hierarchical posturing occurs throughout the story, including one scene in which Dyson Keller, the head of the brokerage firm, urinates on the protagonist to demonstrate that he owns him and he is ‘marked’. All of this sexualised imagery, however, is expunged of its homoerotic content when the protagonist encounters a pretty vinyl-clad young man (obviously meant to be gay, despite his never speaking and his ten seconds of screen-time) while out on a nightly prowl, who he mercilessly kills and presumably eats. While other encounters of his atavistic tendencies are recalled in flashbacks *ad nauseam* – including one in which he and one of the other characters successfully seduce a lesbian and her straight female friend – this one is never mentioned or shown again. The brutal, heterosexualised werewolf figure, in a strange twist, seems downright disgusting and wrong in comparison to the many more benign queer werewolves already discussed. One wonders whether the writer or director decided to insert

---

20 Recent scandals in the US political system and amongst religious organisations seem to bear this assumption out.
the short scene simply to alleviate the ‘homosexual panic’ that the rest of the film’s incidents created and to demonstrate that all of the characters really were proper, red-blooded heterosexuals. If that was the case, then would the killing and eating of this nameless gay figure in fact ‘infect’ the protagonist, since killing and eating female sexual partners was the apparent confirmation of the werewolves’ heterosexuality? In a strange twist, by inserting this scene, the creators of the film may in fact have ‘made’ the character queer rather than alleviating the possibility of his queerness.

The homophobic werewolf also emerges in the character of Oz from the television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003). Oz became a werewolf when he was bitten by his baby nephew (Riess 2004, 109–10), and while lycanthropy is an important part of his evolving character and a source of difficulties for him and his friends, he is never portrayed as evil. As a result, the werewolf-transformation (which looks and acts more ape-like than lupine) is another example of the schizophrenic werewolf, who loses all emotional and rational control and does not remember what happened during his lycanthropic frenzies. Oz is in a relationship with Willow, the resident geek and budding witch of the group, but eventually leaves the series after he has an animalistic affair with another werewolf, Veruca (Riess 2004, 110–11). In his absence, Willow finally explores homoeroticism, which had been hinted at in a ‘parallel universe’ episode in which her vampiric counterpart was ‘kinda gay’ (Golden, Bissette and Sniegoski 2000, 137). Oz returns in one episode and demonstrates that through meditation and control of himself, though ‘the wolf is always inside’ him, he is not compelled to change forms at the full moon any longer (Jowett 2005, 49–50, 125–6). This does not last long however, as he soon learns of Willow’s lesbian relationship with Tara and, in a fit of jealous rage, he resumes his werewolf form. Willow and Tara – though their relationship was fairly new at this point in the series – became iconic as positive television role-models for lesbians and bisexuals (despite whatever fantasised and fetishised notions were also conveyed), and the opinions of the other characters were generally positive and affirming. Oz’s brief reintroduction into the series and his disruption of this atmosphere with his jealous and destructive homophobia, demonstrated through his unrestrained werewolf fury, was an apt metaphor for the harm homophobia can cause in an affirming and accepting society.

In the majority of modern examples discussed here, the explicit connection of werewolves to homoeroticism has rarely been made. The final example for

21 In line with the series’ general mythology of vampires and other creatures, these transformations are the result of the intervention of demons and have nothing to do with the positive or negative moral stance of their human victims/hos.
analysis here, therefore, is *The Wolves of Kromer* (1999), a low-budget British film, which makes this connection explicit and plays with much of the imagery I have already discussed, and in its own fashion is unknowingly more medieval than its writers and producers may realise. In it we are introduced to two characters, Seth and Gabriel, who are wolves (they are portrayed as humans in fur coats with wolf-tails), which is a rather heavy-handed metaphor for gay men. The society of wolves is an outcast one, formed by individuals who eke out an existence in the woods away from the rejection of their families and society, occasionally preying upon ‘humans’ literally and through stealing – not unlike the youthful warrior societies in which werewolf beliefs have had their origin. However, the malevolent designs of Doreen and Fanny, two old unmarried women (who are associated with cats at various stages, as well as possibly lesbianism) plot to kill Fanny’s employer Mrs Drax and gain her inheritance due to a will written before she had a family; they are initially thwarted but eventually accomplish the murder and blame it on the wolves.

The local priest learns of this, and mobilises wolf-patrols and hunts to root out the evil from their community.22 Meanwhile, the granddaughter of Mrs Drax meets and seduces Seth in a scene reminiscent of an empowered Little Red Riding Hood, and Seth returns to Gabriel saying that he is no longer a wolf. The two break up, but Seth comes to his senses and decides he loves Gabriel, and after an amicable parting with his erstwhile heterosexual fling, seeks out Gabriel in a ruined church.23 However, the priest and his angry mob have already arrived and killed Gabriel, and Seth enters and plights his troth to Gabriel unaware of his death. No sooner has he realised this, then the priest enters and kills him as well, and as he leaves the church, a wolf’s tail is seen protruding from beneath his cassock. The film ends with the priest attempting to sermonise on the evils of wolves, which is drowned out by the spontaneous hymn-singing of the remaining family of Mrs Drax, who is seen in the final shot together with Gabriel and Seth dancing in heaven. The human and wolf societies in this film exist side-by-side, ambivalent and even hostile to each other. Gabriel is a wolf at the beginning of the film and dies a wolf; the priest is a closeted wolf firmly in a position of authority in the human world; but Seth is the one who actually seems to undergo character development and true change as he progresses through the film.

22 In an image that would have pleased the medieval Irish clergy, due to the latter’s antagonistic stance towards the warrior culture (Sharpe 1979; McConé 1986), the priest pursues the two wolves – who have just stolen a motorcycle, the emblem of the modern youthful outcast – in a jeep, firing a shotgun in the pursuit.

23 While perhaps coincidental, recall the location of Bisclavret’s hidden clothes near a ruined church.
Both *The Wolves of Wall Street* and *Oz* in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* present examples of the ‘werewolf as queer’, the (in these cases negative) disruptor of closed systems. In the former case, the protagonist werewolf becomes even more queer (‘disruptive’) by becoming queer (‘connected to homoeroticism’), and he is ultimately the cause of the destruction of the wolf society, while in the latter case Oz’s queerness (‘disruptiveness’) in relation to the queer (‘homoeroticism’)-affirming society of Buffy, Willow and their friends in Sunnydale is cause for him to be ostracised. In *The Wolves of Kromer*, both the priest and Gabriel are illustrations of the ‘werewolf as werewolf’, both in their existence as homoerotically inclined individuals as well as their roles as attempted initiators and transitional/liminal figures mediating between human and wolf culture. However, it is only Seth who is the ‘queer werewolf’, who is not only homoerotically inclined, but from the emic perspective, he is the character who transforms back and forth easily and happily, crossing the boundaries of the human and wolf worlds, the heterosexual and the homosexual, the emotional extremes of love and hate, and even death, with little difficulty.

**The Last Howl**

This exploration of a wide range of werewolf portrayals has shed some light on the inherent queerness (in every sense) of the lycanthrope figure, but also highlighted how our notions of queerness do not always apply or may not quite match what is found in literature. This discussion has concentrated mainly on modern films (and some examples drawn from literature), particularly examples of the werewolf image which are not mainstream or well known. This chapter’s exploration of a few ancient and medieval examples has been intended to serve comparative purposes, illustrating the possibilities that – in a most queer move – werewolves might not be as queer as one initially surmised. The connection of BDSM to lycanthropy and other sexual practices and identities will have to remain an intriguing further possibility for future discussion. My assumptions

---

24 I would suggest that the queerest treatments of werewolves are these ones which have taken place on the fringe of mainstream consciousness. *Underworld* (2003) and *Underworld Evolution* (2005), two high-profile films, place questions of werewolves and vampires, hybridity and social transgression at their centre, and yet the werewolves and vampires in them are rather boring and cliché in their basic characteristics, and technology and scientific rationalism attempt to take the place of mystery and magic in a manner that leaves much to be desired.

25 Contrary to what many might assume, the gay subculture known as the ‘bear’ community has absolutely nothing to do with lycanthropy. Bears fetishise hairy and often overweight males as being hyper-masculine and enjoy a very sensual eroticism;
on the etic and emic dimensions of this question might also be cause for question: is it really possible for someone who is not a werewolf to theorise an emic perspective or is such a hypothesis an ‘etic emic’ perspective? I leave these questions for the moment and queries about my own self-identifications both within this process and outside of it, for others to speculate upon.

Werewolves have been consistently portrayed as outlaws, not only because they transgress the laws of society and stand outside of its boundaries, but because the ordered logic of society is unable even to account for, classify, or assimilate their existence. Even within this limited discussion, there has been so much variation and transformation in viewpoints within the stories, as well as in the emic and etic interpretations of them, that solid theorising has been resisted and even rendered impossible. To examine queer theory from the yellow-eyed gaze of the werewolf, therefore, questions the plausibility of any overarching theory at all, and rather demands that each ‘scent’ of evidence be appreciated and recognised on its own merits, and followed to its own locations. Theory must be firmly muzzled and leashed by the dictates of evidence and these will – by nature – be difficult to quantify or taxonomise in any comprehensive manner. Looking for exceptions is easier than looking for patterns in this body of evidence. Perhaps this is something that needs to be emphasised and re-emphasised in the realm of queer theory.

In closing, I would suggest that if lycanthropy is taken as an alternative form of humanity which acknowledges and celebrates the animal side, this is an image of queerness which, though still castigated and rejected by wider society, could prove empowering for those willing to accept it. While this collection’s theme is ‘Queering the Non/Human’, what might be the queerest thing of all about werewolves is that, ultimately, they are probably neither queer nor nonhuman.

References


in such a situation, the implied brutality of the werewolf figure is not only unknown, it is unwelcome. Further, there is the ‘furry’ community (amongst both heterosexuals and homosexuals), which fetishises fur and animal costumes as part of their preferred sexual expression; again, the assumed ferocity of werewolves would not be welcome in such communities.
QUEERING THE NON/HUMAN


Jowett, L. (2005), Sex and the Slayer: A Gender Studies Primer for the Buffy Fan (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press).


THE WEREWOLF AS QUEER ... AND QUEER WEREWOLVES

This page intentionally left blank
Chapter 8

The Face of a Dog: Levinasian Ethics and Human/Dog Co-evolution

Karalyn Kendall

‘I am thinking of Bobby’, Emmanuel Levinas explains in ‘The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights’ (151). This short essay, first published in 1975, stands out among Levinas’s work as his only explicit attempt to address the ethical question posed by nonhuman animals. It has thus elicited commentary from a number of critics interested in ‘the animal question’ (Atterton 2004, 51). But thinking of Bobby has proven to be no easy task. Peter Atterton observes that, as a ‘hybrid mixture of biblical criticism, whimsy, autobiography, and philosophy, written with humor and pathos, [the essay] leaves the reader amused and bemused, ultimately unsure how to interpret it in the context of Levinas’s work as a whole’ (51). Indeed, it is difficult to determine the nature and degree of Bobby’s significance even in the context of this essay, let alone in relation to Levinas’s entire philosophy. Despite its title, the text avoids sustained discussion of Bobby. Levinas names the dog in question in only the first and penultimate paragraphs, and it is not until the second half that he describes his imprisonment in the Nazi prisoner-of-war camp where he and Bobby met. The essay’s focus shifts rather abruptly from the banal cruelties of modern meat consumption to the dogs who ‘will not growl!’ in Exodus 11:7 to the dehumanising experience of Camp 1492 and, finally, to Bobby (152). ‘And then’, Levinas recalls as the essay nears its conclusion:

… about halfway through our long captivity, for a few short weeks, before the sentinels chased him away, a wandering dog entered our lives. One day he came to meet this rabble as we returned under guard from work. He survived in some wild patch in the region of the camp. But we called him Bobby, an exotic name, as one does with a cherished dog. He would appear at morning assembly and was waiting for us as we returned, jumping up and down and barking in delight. For him, there was no doubt that we were men. [153]
Perhaps the brevity of his appearance is befitting the wandering dog who, though he appears only to bookend this short essay, seems to haunt Levinasian humanism. My chapter will likely engage in some meandering of its own, winding its way to an exploration of how and why Bobby is uniquely equipped to queer Levinas’s concept of the human.

Several critics have argued that Bobby presents an especially potent challenge to Levinasian humanism, which reserves full subjectivity for the human alone. David Clark notes that ‘Bobby doubles for the human, yet he is not human, and this indeterminacy about his ontological and moral status at once triggers Levinas’s most dogmatic claims about nonhuman life and tests the limits of their coherence’ (1997, 166). In particular, the dog seems to trouble the ontological boundary between the humanist subject and the nonhuman animal, as evidenced by Levinas’s provocative assertion in the essay’s final paragraph that Bobby ‘was the last Kantian in Nazi Germany, without the brain needed to universalize maxims and drives’ (153). Here, as Atterton suggests, ‘Levinas appears to grant something like a human status to the nonhuman animal, and, in a non-parallel way, to attribute animality to humans, two gestures that serve at one and the same time to redraw and blur the traditional humanist line between humans and animals’ (51–2). Richard Nash similarly notes that, in the ‘shifting terrain’ of this peculiar essay, ‘categories of “human” and “non-human” become hard to trace’ (2006, 101). The Nazis, Levinas recalls, ‘stripped us of our human skin. We were subhuman, a gang of apes’ (153). The subhuman animality of ‘brutalized’ Jew and ‘brutalizing’ Nazi ‘trumps the very claim to subjectivity that constitutes for Levinas, as well as for Kant, a necessary condition for ethical relations’ (Nash 2006, 101). Bobby, with ‘his friendly growling, his animal faith’, seems to do what Levinas claims the prisoners cannot: ‘deliver a message about our humanity’ and thus transcend the subhumanity which has been deemed his (and their) proper place (49, 48). Levinas thus seems unwilling either to affirm or deny the validity of Bobby’s apparent recognition of humanity (which, in turn, would necessitate the attribution of something like humanity to the dog), and his ambiguity facilitates this avoidance. Atterton confesses an inability to determine ‘whether Levinas meant his comment to be taken literally or whether he was merely speaking figuratively, perhaps anthropomorphizing Bobby to show how it is possible for an animal to rise above human beings when they treat each other as animals’ (53). Bobby’s inability ‘to universalize maxims and drives’ would seem, at least, to foreclose a literal reading of the passage. Given this addendum, John Llewelyn asks, ‘How … can Levinas be speaking otherwise than figuratively?’ (1991, 236). Yet even if we read Bobby’s Kantianism in the purely figurative sense, there remains for Atterton and others questions as to ‘why Levinas was clearly uncomfortable talking about the animal question, and
why on the few occasions that he did he relegated it to the margins of his philosophy’ (51). Levinas’s general reluctance to engage with the problem of the animal and his insistence on the ethical primacy of the human make his open-ended meditation on Bobby’s moral standing all the more perplexing.

So why think of Bobby at all? Even in ‘The Name of a Dog’, Levinas is heavily invested in, as Nash puts it, ‘policing the species border’ (101). Despite his anthropomorphic aggrandisement of Bobby’s welcome, he refuses to clarify whether Bobby must in turn be welcomed into the community of ethical subjects, and he labours elsewhere to maintain a categorical distinction between human and nonhuman animals, reserving for the latter a secondary moral status when he is willing to consider them at all. Atterton calls attention to a segment of a 1986 interview in which Levinas’s responses ‘present a rather more sober reflection’ on the question of the animal (51). For Levinas, the human, though undeniably animal, is not merely ‘the last stage of the evolution of the animal’ (2004, 50; 1988). While demonstrating an (albeit simplistic) awareness of some of the implications of Darwinian continuity, he insists that:

… the human breaks with pure being, which is always a persistence in being. This is my principal thesis. A being is something that is attached to being, to its own being. That is Darwin’s idea. The being of animals is a struggle for life. A struggle of life without ethics. It is a question of might. Heidegger says at the beginning of *Being and Time* that *Dasein* is a being concerned for this being itself. That’s Darwin’s idea: the living being struggles for life. The aim of being is being itself. However, with the appearance of the human – and this is my entire philosophy – there is something more important than my life; and that is the life of the other. [50]

The ‘Other’, for Levinas, ‘reveal[s] himself in his face’, a concept introduced in *Totality and Infinity* which constitutes the basis for ethical relations in Levinasian humanism (1969, 81). As Levinas’s reply to his interviewers indicates, ‘The face that calls me into question is not the face of an animal’ (Llewelyn 1991, 242). Derrida thus deems Levinas’s philosophy a ‘profound humanism’ in that he implicitly reserves for the animal ‘a place left open … for a noncriminal putting to death’ (1988, 278). Despite Levinas’s concession that humans should not ‘make an animal suffer needlessly and so on’, the ethical relationship enacted by the face remains an exclusively human contract (50).1 The inherent anthropocentrism of Levinas’s ethics stems from the ‘meaning’ of the face, which

---

1 Even this concession reinforces the primacy of human beings. Levinas explains that ‘the prototype of [the ethical treatment of animals] is human ethics. Vegetarianism, for example, arises from the transference to animals of the idea of suffering. The animal suffers. It is because we, as human, know what suffering is that we can have this obligation’ (50).
‘consists in saying: “thou shalt not kill’” (1985/1982, 87). As this commandment indicates, Levinas’s face, though figurative, draws much of its salience from a Judaeo-Christian tradition in which the human form alone is understood to have been created in God’s image (Genesis 1:26–7). The literal human face had long been posited as proof of an absolute distinction between human beings and the rest of creation when, in the wake of the Darwinian challenge to human uniqueness, theorists like Charles Bell sought to demonstrate ‘that man had been created with certain muscles specially adapted for the expression of his feelings’ (Darwin 1998/1872, 25). Darwin went to great lengths to discredit Bell’s position in *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* by demonstrating both the non-emotive functions of human muscles previously thought to be designed solely for emotional expression and the physiological capacities of animals to express emotions.

While Levinas would probably grant the existence of nonhuman emotions – he credits Bobby with the ability to express ‘delight’ – he nevertheless takes pains to uphold the uniqueness of the human face in spite of ‘Darwin’s idea’. Thus, the relationship between Levinasian humanism and evolutionary logic is thoroughly vexed. In response to his interviewers, Levinas attempts to mobilise an idea he attributes to Darwin in the service of his own ethics, reducing animal being to ‘being itself’, yet he exempts the human from Darwinian continuity, insisting that ‘in relation to the animal, the human is a new phenomenon’ (50). In the same interview, though, he implies a sort of continuum of what we might call ‘faciality’, even while attempting to maintain a categorical distinction.² His interviewers ask whether ‘an animal [can] be considered as the other that must be welcomed’, or if it is ‘necessary to possess the possibility of speech to be a “face” in the ethical sense’; Levinas replies, ‘I cannot say at what moment you have the right to be called “face.”’ The human face is completely different and only afterwards do we discover the face of an animal’ (49). Although Levinas ultimately reaffirms the uniqueness of the human face, his remarks here open up possibilities which were foreclosed in, for example, a 1951 essay in which he insists, ‘A being is a human being and it is as a neighbor that a human being is accessible – as a face … [T]he relation with a *being* is the invocation of a face and already speech’ (1996a/1951, 8–10). In the 1986 interview, by contrast, he leaves room for the possibility not only of an animal face, but of a face in the absence of speech.

---

² Clark also observes that Levinas here ‘implies that there is a continuum joining the faceless to the faced, when everything else about Levinas’s rhetoric points assertively towards an abyss of essence dividing the two phenomena’ (1997, 179–80).
THE FACE OF A DOG

The extent to which the question of the animal problematises the face as an ethical category reveals both the anti-speciesist and queer potential of Levinas’s humanism. It is perhaps the latter of these potentials which compels Judith Butler in the titular chapter of *Precarious Life* ‘to consider the “face,”’ the notion introduced by Emmanuel Levinas, to explain how it is that others make moral claims upon us, address moral demands to us, ones that we do not ask for, ones that we are not free to refuse’ (2006/2004, 131). It is through this concept of the face that Levinasian ethics ‘disrupt[s] a certain traditional humanism’ by unsettling assumptions which historically have defined and delimited the category of the human (Derrida 1995/1988, 279). Butler explains:

> To respond to the face, to understand its meaning, means to be awake to what is precarious in another life or, rather, the precariousness of life itself. This cannot be an awakeness, to use [Levinas’s] word, to my own life, and then an extrapolation from an understanding of my own precariousness to an understanding of another’s precarious life. It has to be an understanding of the precariousness of the Other. [2006/2004, 134]

As Butler indicates, ‘understanding’ in Levinasian ethics is achieved through ‘awakeness’ rather than ‘extrapolation’. This formulation of the face thus signals a thoroughly revised notion of the human. Levinasian ethics, Atterton notes, ‘displaces the Cartesian and Kantian definition of man as a rational being’, a definition which historically has served to defend the exclusion of nonhuman animals from (full) subjectivity (54). Humans exhibit their unique dignity not through the exercise of reason, but via ‘the relationship with the Other’ (Atterton 2004, 54). For Levinas, as he himself declares, ‘Man is an unreasonable animal’ insofar as he is compelled to put the Other before himself (2004, 50). The anti-speciesist potential of Levinasian humanism lies in his abandonment of the criterion of rationality in favour of an emphasis on the utter alterity of the Other. Indeed, Atterton suggests that, in principle, Levinas’s theory of ethics is among ‘the best equipped … to accommodate the inclusion of the other animal, and thereby truly go beyond the very humanism – and human chauvinism – that has served as a philosophical justification for the mistreatment of animals for over two millennia’ (61). Moreover, by not merely decentring but giving the lie to reason as the basis for ethical relations, Levinas’s assumption of human irrationality constitutes an important step toward queering the traditional humanist subject.

It is all the more surprising, then, that Levinas continually insists on the uniqueness of the human face. Even when he reveals that the face is ‘not exclusively a human face’, this is only to illustrate that it can be expressed via other parts of the human body; whether conveyed through the ‘face’, ‘neck’, ‘back’, or
QUEERING THE NON/HUMAN

‘shoulder blades’, it remains always-already human (1996c/1984, 167). The face is not reducible to the body; it ‘breaks through the form that nevertheless delimits it’ (1969, 198). Yet that the face, delimited by the body, must therefore be ‘read’ via the body points to the problem of mimesis which plagues the Levinasian ethical contract. In Alterity and Transcendence, Levinas explains:

I have attempted to carry out a phenomenology of sociality, starting out from the face of the other man, reading, before all mimicry, in its facial directness, a defenseless exposure to the mysterious forlornness of death, and hearing, before all verbal expression, from the bottom of that weakness, a voice that commands, an order issued to me not to remain indifferent to that death, not to let the other die alone, i.e., to answer for the life of the other man, at the risk of becoming the accomplice of that death. [1999, 29]

How, though, can we access this ‘before’? Butler points out that, in positing ‘Thou shalt not kill’ as the commandment performed by the face, Levinas ‘presumes that the desire to kill is primary to human beings. If the first impulse towards the other’s vulnerability is the desire to kill, the ethical injunction is precisely to militate against that first impulse’ (137). It is my recognition of the extreme precariousness of the Other which instigates the commandment not to efface that Other. The commandment therefore cannot precede my realisation that I am tempted to commit a violence against the Other – in Levinas’s words, ‘to reabsorb every other into the Same and to neutralize alterity’ (1996b/1964, 48). This first impulse, then, is to annihilate the Other’s alterity through mimesis. The ‘mimetic faculty’, Michael Taussig explains in Mimesis and Alterity, is ‘the nature that culture uses to create second nature, the faculty to copy, imitate, make models, explore difference, yield into and become Other’ (1993, xiii). This ‘yielding into’ is precisely what the ‘Thou shalt not kill’ prohibits. Yet mimesis remains an inescapable part of the Levinasian ethical contract because there can be no contract before I experience the impulse to incorporate the Other violently into the Same.

Bobby, through his Kantian gesture, unwittingly exploits the mimetic component of facial recognition. In his encounter with the dog, Levinas finds himself face to face (in the literal if not ethical sense) with a mimetic savant. The dog, biologist Michael W. Fox explains, historically has been credited with the ability to ‘[mimic] the human grin’, but this would seem to be the least of his mimetic powers (1978, 236).3 In his analysis of ‘His Master’s Voice’, the famous RCA Victor logo more popularly known as the ‘talking dog’, Taussig observes:

3 Darwin conversely suggests that the canine grin is not imitative of the human ‘smile’ but rather indicative of ‘a tendency … whenever they feel lively pleasure combined
THE FACE OF A DOG

Everything, of course, turns on the double meaning of fidelity (being accurate and being loyal), and on what is considered to be a mimaetically astute being — in this case ... a dog. Blessed with that famous ‘sixth sense’ this creature ... possesses a formidable mimetic faculty, the basis for judging similitude. [1993, 212–13]

Bobby, like the ‘talking dog’, is ‘a mimetic superpower in action, the mimaetically capacious dog straining itself pleasurably to distinguish copy from original’, to identify the humanity in the prisoners which the Nazis have so thoroughly effaced (213). His performance of ‘delight’ both evinces his pleasure and brings pleasure to the prisoners and Levinas’s reader; everyone involved wants his to be a genuine recognition, and thus a confirmation of the existence, of humanity. Levinas’s unwillingness to dismiss Bobby’s welcome as purely anthropomorphic is also a reluctance to undermine the dog’s mimaetic astuteness and thereby negate the humanity to which he so convincingly attests. Yet Bobby's mimetic prowess also enables him to call the intelligibility of that very humanity radically into question. This is precisely why, as Llewelyn argues, ‘we must take [Levinas] seriously when he insists that the ethics of which he speaks is a humanism of the other man’, for this characterisation of facial recognition implies that the human must paradoxically be anthropomorphised in order for an ethical relationship to exist (244). Bobby’s ability to perform (albeit unwittingly) this anthropomorphism of the Other does not merely challenge human uniqueness; it queers the very notion of the human precisely by exposing its constructedness. If the recognition of humanity — which is also a demonstration of humanity — can be performed, then the authenticity of the original is thoroughly undermined. As Cary Wolfe argues:

... the figure of the ‘animal’ in the West ... is part of a cultural and literary history stretching back at least to Plato and the Old Testament, reminding us that the animal has always been especially, frightfully nearby, always lying in wait at the very heart of the constitutive disavowals and self-constructing narratives enacted by that fantasy-figure called ‘the human.’ [2003, 6]

In the course of this history, no animal has been more ‘frightfully nearby’ than the oldest domesticated species. Bobby belongs to one of the primary species alongside and against which the human has been defined, to the extent that ‘the dog’ and ‘the friend of man’ are nearly synonymous in Levinas’s essay (152). Yet in his proximity, Bobby threatens to rupture the very category he has helped to construct. His testimony to humanity must therefore be read as ‘silence’ in order to preserve the coherence of the human in Levinasian ethics (Nash 2006, 101).

... with affection, to act through habit and association on the same muscles, as in playfully biting each other, or their master’s hands’ (1998/1872, 121).
Thus, Bobby, for all his jumping and barking, cannot seem to show his face in ‘The Name of a Dog’. He appears quite literally in name only, for Levinas’s account of Bobby’s behaviour offers no sense of a specific canine body of a given size, shape, or colour. How, then, do we read the dog’s name which, after all, is the subject of Levinas’s essay? Derrida discusses the implications of naming an animal in his famous account of standing naked before his cat:

If I say ‘it is a real cat’ that sees me naked, it is in order to mark its unsubstitutable singularity. When it responds in its name (whatever respond means, and that will be our question), it doesn’t do so as the exemplar of a species called cat, even less so of an animal genus or realm. It is true that I identify it as a male or female cat. But even before that identification, I see it as this irreplaceable living being that one day enters my space, enters this place where it can encounter me, see me, even see me naked. Nothing can ever take away from me the certainty that what we have here is an existence that refuses to be conceptualized. And a mortal existence, for from the moment that it has a name, its name survives it. It signs its potential disappearance. Mine also, and this disappearance, from that moment to this, fort/da, is announced each time that, naked or not, one of us leaves the room. [2004/1997, 116]

Bobby’s name clearly survives him, appearing as it does in an essay written decades after his obscure death. Insofar as it signs his potential disappearance – the precariousness of his life – does it also grant him a face? It seems at least to constitute a move toward literalising Bobby, especially as Levinas’s essay turns on a transition from the nameless (and therefore, he implies, ‘figurative’) dogs of Exodus to the named (‘literal’) dog of Camp 1492 (152). As Nash points out, Bobby’s name is the one thing in the essay that ‘emerges with startling clarity’ (2006, 101). In a place where their speech will be heard only as ‘monkey talk’, the prisoners’ naming of Bobby seems to humanise both the dog and themselves (Levinas 1975, 153). But Levinas’s investment in legitimising the prisoners’ humanity via Bobby competes with the need to silence the dog and thus secure the borders of the human. Nash argues that Levinas’s account of the dog’s welcome echoes:

… the sentimental logic of the pet — those special “domesticated” animals who function to confer upon us a greater humanity by actions and articulations that simultaneously transcend their “animal” status and accept the logic of domination and domestication in which such transcendence is recontained. [2006, 101]

The name of the dog both marks his individuality and reinscribes him in the systematic (albeit well-meaning) domination that is pet-keeping. Here, Levinas presents the act of naming unproblematically as something ‘one does with a cherished dog’, subscribing to the pet logic whereby the name of the dog indirectly
affirms the humanity of the prisoners and elevates the dog to the status of a beloved companion (153). Elsewhere, though, he contends that naming:

… [accomplishes] a violence and a negation. A partial negation which is violence. This partiality is indicated by the fact that, without disappearing, those beings are in my power. Partial negation, which is violence, denies the independence of a being: it belongs to me. Possession is the mode whereby a being, while existing, is partially denied. [Levinas 1996a/1951, 9]

For Levinas, then, the act of naming constitutes a manifestation of the mimetic impulse to incorporate the Other’s being, which by definition ‘escapes comprehension’, into ‘my comprehension and possession’ (9). Thus, the name of a dog, while it bestows on him a certain individuality, can be read more cynically as a means of containing the threat he poses to the intelligibility of humanist subjectivity by absorbing his jumping and barking into an anthropocentric affirmation of ‘what the friend of man means’ (1990/1975, 152).

Yet the dog clearly resonates with the anti-speciesist potential of Levinas’s ethics, tempting the philosopher to breach his exclusive contract with the human. That Bobby presents a particularly potent challenge to the humanist discourse of the face is evident in the regularity with which Levinas returns to the dog as a test-case when pressed on the issue of the animal face. In the aforementioned interview, when asked whether there is ‘something distinctive about the human face which … sets it apart from that of an animal’, Levinas replies:

One cannot entirely refuse the face of an animal. It is via the face that one understands, for example, a dog … The phenomenon of the face is not in its purest form in the dog. In the dog, in the animal, there are other phenomena. For example, the force of nature is pure vitality. It is more this which characterizes the dog. But it also has a face … [T]here is something in our attraction to the animal … In the dog, what we like is perhaps his childlike character. As if he were strong, cheerful, powerful, full of life. [2004, 49]

Although his interviewers use the generic ‘animal’ in posing their question, Levinas specifically (and repeatedly) references the dog when offering his response. It is perhaps not surprising that Levinas would look to man’s proverbial best friend when trying to make sense of the relationship between the human and ‘the animal’. To some extent, Levinas replicates the interviewers’ generic move in positing the dog as a representative of that category; ‘In the dog, in the animal’ suggests a conflation of the two. Yet as the evolutionary relationship between humans and dogs – and the encounter between Levinas and Bobby – would suggest, his choice is far from arbitrary. Levinas is willing to grant a face (albeit an impure one) specifically to the dog. By contrast, his consideration
QUEERING THE NON/HUMAN

of another species is notably more dismissive: ‘I don’t know if a snake has a face. I can’t answer that question. A more specific analysis is needed’ (49).

It appears that, when asked to consider the possibility of an animal face, Levinas once again finds himself thinking of Bobby. No wonder, then, that the short essay devoted to the wandering dog has received so much critical attention. But, while others have productively explored the ways in which Levinas struggles to preserve his categorical distinction when literally faced with Bobby, the tendency has been to read the dog largely as representative of ‘the animal’, that unfathomably diverse category which Derrida problematises so thoroughly in ‘The Animal that Therefore I Am’:

Whenever ‘one’ says, ‘the Animal,’ each time a philosopher, or anyone else says, ‘the Animal’ in the singular and without further ado, claiming thus to designate every living thing that is held not to be man (man as rational animal, man as political animal, speaking animal, zoōn logon echon, man who says ‘I’ and takes himself to be the subject of a statement that he proffers on the subject of the said animal, and so on), each time the subject of that statement, this ‘one,’ this ‘I’ does that he utters an asinanity. He avows without avowing it, he declares, just as a disease is declared by means of a symptom, he offers up for diagnosis the statement ‘I am uttering an asinanity.’ And this ‘I am uttering an asinanity’ should confirm not only the animality that he is disavowing but his complicit, continued and organized involvement in a veritable war of the species. Such are my hypotheses in view of these on the animal, on animals, on the word animal or animals. Yes, animal, what a word! [2004/1997, 124]

By no means do I want to suggest that Levinas’s aforementioned critics posit ‘the animal’ as a stable category. That they read Bobby primarily as a salient manifestation of ‘the animal’ in Levinas’s work is entirely warranted by Levinas’s own tendency to ‘utter an asinanity’ when affirming, for example, ‘a surpassing in the human of the animal effort of life’ as if the activities of all nonhuman animals could be conceptualised as a single ‘effort’ (1987, 215). Reading Bobby as ‘the animal’ par excellence in Levinas’s work has thus served as a useful starting point in exploring the problem of the animal in Levinasian ethics, but it cannot account for the disproportionate amount of attention which Levinas devotes to the dog in his few attempts to address this enormously complex question, nor for his insistence in the essay that the animal in question is ‘Literally a dog!’ (1975, 152). Although he later wonders whether ‘the dog that recognized Ulysses beneath his disguise on his return from the Odyssey was a forebear of our own’, he immediately differentiates Bobby from this figurative dog, exclaiming, ‘But no, no! There, they were in Ithaca and the Fatherland. Here, we were nowhere’ (153). It cannot be overstated that this ‘nowhere’ is somewhere – a literal place where a literal human and a literal dog meet. The banality of
this nevertheless profound encounter is worth noting, for upon meeting Bobby, Levinas and the prisoners simply do ‘as one does with a cherished dog’ (153). For his part, as Wolfe observes, ‘Bobby strayed into the prison camp … and offered, as dogs will do, friendship and loyalty to the prisoners, greeting them at the end of each day with bright eyes and wagging tail without regard for their “inhuman” condition’ (2003, 60, my emphasis). There are obvious reasons why dogs have become usual suspects in discussions of ‘the animal’, not the least of which is ‘the omnipresence of the canine race’ in human cultures (McHugh 2004, 11). But for Levinas, the dog is not merely a readily available stand-in for ‘the animal’. What interests me is that it is precisely as a dog that Bobby seems uniquely equipped to queer Levinasian humanism.

Indeed, reading Bobby as a literal dog complicates the relationship between him and the other animals referenced in the essay, problematising his seemingly representative status. Levinas opens by quoting Exodus 22:31: ‘You shall be men consecrated to me; therefore you shall not eat any flesh that is torn by beasts in the field; you shall cast it to the dogs’ (quoted in Levinas 1975, 151). Yet he postpones discussion of the dogs mentioned in the verse, though the reader might well expect them to be of primary interest in an essay entitled ‘The Name of a Dog’. His thoughts turn instead to the animals whom most humans encounter:

… at the family table, as you plunge your fork into your roast. There is enough, there, to make you a vegetarian again. If we are to believe Genesis, Adam, the father of us all, was one! There is, at least, enough to make us want to limit, through various interdictions, the butchery that every day claims our ‘consecrated’ mouths! [151]

Here, it is not Bobby but those other domesticated animals – cows, chickens and other victims of slaughter – who seem on the verge of making moral claims on Levinas. And unlike the living dog whose name denotes his companion-animal status, these animals have become what Carol J. Adams calls ‘absent referents’; she explains, ‘Animals in name and body are made absent as animals for meat to exist … Without animals there would be no meat eating, yet they are absent from the act of eating meat because they have been transformed into food’ (2000/1990, 51). So, too, are they absent from Levinas’s description, made (in)visible by the word ‘roast’. In alluding to these animals and thereby threatening to make them disturbingly present, Levinas compels his reader to reflect on ‘ideas [that] make one lose one’s appetite’, thus bringing the question of the ethical treatment of animals to the forefront at the start of his essay (1975, 151). Despite this gesture, though, Levinas preserves the primacy of the human in merely suggesting that we might ‘want to limit’ the suffering which our appetites routinely inflict on nonhuman animals. His is a roundabout plea for animal welfare – not, as the addendum to his title might imply, animal rights –
because he ‘does not sacrifice’, as Derrida will later insist; ‘The “Thou shalt not kill” … has never been understood within the Judeo-Christian tradition, nor apparently by Levinas, as a “Thou shalt not put to death the living in general”’ (1995/1988, 279). Yet his allusion to industrialised slaughter in the context of what Clark calls ‘a Holocaust testimony’ intensifies what might otherwise be read as a facetious critique of the inherent animality of human carnivorism (1997, 170). By opening his essay with these reflections, Llewelyn observes, Levinas ‘all but proposes an analogy between the unspeakable human Holocaust and the unspoken animal one’ (1991, 235). The subtlety with which Levinas suggests this analogy is, in part, a reaction against Heidegger’s declaration in a 1949 lecture that ‘As for its essence, [the mechanised food industry] is the same thing as the manufacture of corpses in the gas chambers and the death camps’, a cursory comparison which Levinas deems ‘beyond commentary’ (1989, 487). Yet in stopping short of an explicit comparison, he also shields the implicit analogy against the obvious objections which Heidegger’s claim invites by its very brazenness. It is through Levinas’ subtle rhetoric that the analogy exercises its power to ‘make one lose one’s appetite’ for animal flesh.

But in the midst of this metaphorical meandering, where is the dog about whose corporeality Levinas is so insistent? For, while the essay concludes with Bobby’s apparent recognition of humanity and its implicit challenge to his secondary ethical standing, the first and most straightforward appeal for extending ethics beyond the human realm (if anything in the essay can be called straightforward) comes from a cow, albeit in the form of roast beef. Clark argues that Bobby enters into this introductory paragraph by way of analogy:

For a scandalous instant, Levinas acts the part that Bobby will more or less play at the end of the essay, that is, as the one who, in the absence of others and in the absence of a respect for the other, testifies to the worthiness of the imprisoned and the murdered. Indeed, he reminds us that these others are murdered, butchered so that we may eat well. [1997, 170]

By bookending his essay with these acts of testimony, Levinas constructs a parallel between himself and Bobby which is reinforced by his allusion to the

---

4 Tom Regan explains that proponents of animal welfare ‘accept the morality of human utilization of nonhuman animals in principle but … seek to improve it in practice by making it more humane’, whereas the animal rights perspective ‘is opposed to human utilization of nonhuman animals in principle and seeks to end it in practice. Its practical applications are abolitionist, not reformist’ (2001, 24).

5 Clark argues that the comparison which Levinas suggests, because it remains unspoken, ‘resonate[s] strongly with and constitute[s] a subtle renunciation of Heidegger’ (1997, 171).
The Face of a Dog

Wandering Jew in his description of the ‘wandering dog’. And just as they both serve as witnesses to the suffering of another species, they are likewise both victims of ‘the humanist and speciesist structure of subjectivization’ which, Wolfe argues, not only assumes ‘that it is all right to systematically exploit and kill nonhuman animals simply because of their species’ but historically has been ‘available for use by some humans against other humans as well, to countenance violence against the social other of whatever species – or gender, or race, or class, or sexual difference’ (2003, 8).

More specifically, both Levinas and Bobby are victims of the Nazi discourse which associates Jews with mixed-breed ‘mongrels’ and Aryans with dogs of ‘pure blood’ (Sax 2000, 82–3). Bobby, it should be noted, is never explicitly described as mixed-breed, nor is he likened to any breed. This is a somewhat surprising omission on Levinas’s part, given that the combined efforts of countless breed enthusiasts over the past three centuries have elevated the highly constructed concept of breed to its current status as one of the primary means by which ‘people make sense of the broad range of possibilities among dogs’ (58). As Susan McHugh points out, the existence of terms like ‘mixed-breed’, ‘mongrel’ and ‘mutt’ – and even the more politically correct ‘non-breed dog’ – ‘indicates how breed conceptually has come to colour all dogs’ (2004, 128). Perhaps it is ‘their use as ethnic and racial epithets among humans’ which prevents Levinas from describing Bobby in these terms (128). Yet the association of mixed-breed dogs with transience, almost as ubiquitous as the concept of breed itself, virtually guarantees that Bobby will be presumed a mongrel (129–30). Indeed, the image of the mixed-breed pariah underlies Levinas’s speculations about the dog from Exodus 22:31:

So who is this dog at the end of the verse? Someone who disrupts society’s games (or Society itself) and is consequently given a cold reception? Someone whom we accuse of being rabid when we are trying to drown him? Someone who is given the dirtiest work – a dog’s life – and whom we leave outside in all weathers, when it is raining cats and dogs, even during those awful periods when you would not put a dog out in it? [151]

This wordplay, like the essay’s title (Levinas’s translator explains that ‘nom d’un chien’ is also in French a mild expletive, and recognizably a polite version of

---

6 Atterton also observes that Levinas’s description ‘[invites] an obvious comparison between the “wandering Jew” and the “errant dog” named Bobby’ (2004, 55).

7 The favourite breed of Hitler and his followers was the German Shepherd, believed to be descended exclusively from the wolf (another of the Hitler’s favourite animals), in contrast to other breeds which were thought to have ‘varying amounts of jackal blood’ (Sax 2000, 84).
QUEERING THE NON/HUMAN

nom de Dieu’), exploits the often paradoxical cultural meanings attached to dogs (151 n.1). Only a human, it would seem, can lead ‘a dog’s life’. In fact, Levinas ultimately reveals the ‘someones’ in this passage to be not canine but human outcasts when he explains that ‘all these, in spite of their misery, reject the affront of a repulsive prey’; by contrast, the dog, ‘Beyond all scruples, by virtue of its happy nature and direct thoughts … transforms all this flesh cast to it in the field into good flesh’ (152). Even the most marginalised humans would seem to be differentiated from dogs by virtue of their eating habits.

Yet Levinas does not exploit this distinction as he might in order to undermine the Nazi discourse which would equate him with undiscriminating mongrels (perhaps because this comparison, too, is ‘beyond commentary’). Instead, his opening paragraph positions humans and dogs not as victims of institutionalised violence but first and foremost as beneficiaries of the systematised butchery of other animals. In the industrialised West, mass-produced meat has replaced the flesh once torn from the field, and its by-products – even the flesh of sick and euthanised animals – are funnelled into commercial pet food where they are ‘legally allowed to be listed on packages under the innocuous-sounding ingredient names “meat meal” and “meat and bone meal”’ (McHugh 2004, 34). Though their tastes might differ, both humans and dogs are thus complicit in this system of flesh consumption, an act which Levinas portrays as grotesquely – and, indeed, unavoidably – animalistic. The positioning of ‘beasts in the field’ alongside humans at the ‘family table’, Clark argues, implies that ‘We are those beasts, devouring each other in “the horrors of war”, sublimating our carnivorous desires into “hunting games”, and finally, eating meat’ (1997, 169). In fact, the effect of this sublimation has been wholly to divorce the act of eating meat from the violence which produces it; as Levinas puts it, ‘the sight of flesh torn by beasts in the field seems meat too strong for the honest man who, even if he is a carnivore, still feels he is watched over by God’ (151).

Although Exodus 22:31 commands men to cast undesirable meat ‘to the dogs’ (as the meat industry quite literally does), Levinas implies that the distinction between filth and food – flesh and roast, as it were – is largely semantic; that perhaps the verse ‘attach[es] too much importance to what “goes into man’s mouth” and not enough to what comes out’ (151). Thus, while these opening paragraphs do establish a relationship between Levinas and Bobby, it is informed

---


9 This is an apt description on Levinas’s part, because, as McHugh explains, ‘dogs defy conventional standards about what counts as food – greedily consuming the carrion, rubbish, excrement, and poison reviled by other animals’ (2004, 31).

10 This is an argument which Adams (2000) makes compellingly.
not by the friendliness of their eventual meeting but by something rather less appealing: the human obligation to cast unwanted flesh to the dogs and the canine ‘right [to] this feast’ (152). Read this way, the verse positions dogs not as representatives of ‘the animal’ but (to borrow Donna Haraway’s apt phrase) as ‘Partners in the crime of human evolution’ (2003, 5). Not only do dogs share humans’ appetite for flesh, but this shared appetite enabled them to become domesticated ‘as hunting companions’, teammates in those ‘hunting games’ Levinas references, thereby serving as humans’ accomplices in acts of violence (and, indeed, the institutionalisation of violence) against nonhuman, noncanine animals (Diamond 1999, 158; Levinas 1975, 151). Moreover, as Levinas is all too well aware, they have aided throughout history in the subjugation of some humans by others, for Bobby’s unnamed counterparts are the canine conspirators of the Third Reich, dogs whom the SS trained ‘to jump on a prisoner who made any sudden or irregular move’ and who were reportedly ‘sometimes set … on prisoners simply for entertainment’ (Sax 2000, 86–7).

Dogs and humans, as Levinas implies, are thoroughly enmeshed in a messy partnership which is not reducible to a straightforward tale of human agency and canine passivity. Thus, narratives of domestication as a process of ‘wild animals’ being transformed into something more useful to humans’, because they figure domestication simplistically as something that happens to animals, cannot account for the complex natural-cultural history we share with dogs (Diamond 1999, 159). This much is clear in Levinas’s essay, despite his tendency to accept ‘conventional assumptions about animality’ (Clark 1997, 166). Of course, I do not mean to suggest that Levinas consciously sets out to challenge the traditional model of domestication, especially given that this concept has only recently come under intense scrutiny; rather, he dismisses as figurative precisely the meanings attached to dogs which emerge from a simplistic understanding of their complex origins. In his second attempt to identify that elusive dog from the verse, he asks:

So does [Exodus 22:31] concern the beast that has lost the last noble vestiges of its wild nature, the crouching, servile, contemptible dog? Or, in the twilight (and what light in the world is not already this dusk), does it concern the one who is a wolf under his dogged faithfulness, and thirsts after blood, be it coagulated or fresh? [151–2]

11 Diamond’s account, it should be noted, underscores the complexity and limitations of the human role in domestication, but his repeated use of the passive voice reinscribes the familiar narrative of animal passivity: ‘Wolves were domesticated … to become our dogs’ (1999, 158, my emphasis).
Here, Levinas describes two popular and competing notions of caninicity, both of which figure domestication as degradation. In their dealings with humans, it would seem that dogs are reduced either to pathetic servants or repressed predators – wolves in dogs’ clothing, if you will. McHugh explains that ‘the crucial element’ in theories of domestication premised on human dominion ‘is the (re)creation of the dog as a dependent; re-made as servant or parasite, the dog is thus cursed for perverting nature’ (2004, 25). It is precisely these notions of caninicity which prompt Levinas to exclaim, ‘But enough of allegories! We have read too many fables and we are still taking the name of a dog in the figurative sense’ (152). Because Levinas has a particular dog in mind, the available canine tropes seem grossly inadequate. He certainly does not want to figure Bobby as ‘the crouching, servile, contemptible dog’; to do so would be to undermine the validity of his welcome by positioning him as mindlessly subordinate to all humans, including the prisoners. Yet if Bobby were really ‘a wolf under his dogged faithfulness’, then his welcome would be equally invalidated by his ulterior motive – hunger for food scraps. Significantly, Bobby’s behaviour is figured as neither servile nor opportunistic in Levinas’s account, suggesting that it cannot be conceptualised within a narrative of domestication that positions dogs as either unwitting slaves or self-interested scavengers.

In fact, recent work in both the sciences and humanities indicates that the canine tropes Levinas resists are indeed products of an inaccurate understanding of our evolutionary relationship with dogs. Evolutionary biologists and cultural theorists alike have proposed that the human/dog relationship is better understood as a product of co-evolution. While domestication implies the primacy of human agency, biological anthropologist Colin Groves argues:

The human-dog relationship amounts to a very long lasting symbiosis. Dogs acted as humans’ alarm systems, trackers and hunting aides, garbage disposal facilities, hot water bottles, and children’s guardians and playmates. Humans provided dogs with food and security. The relationship was stable over 100,000 years or so, and intensified in the Holocene into mutual domestication. Humans domesticated dogs, and dogs domesticated humans (1999, 11).

Recent research by Groves and others suggests that evidence of co-evolution might actually be inscribed on the human brain. It has been established that domestication often results in reduced brain size because it renders certain energy-expensive neurological functions superfluous (Diamond 1999, 159; 12)

12 McHugh cites findings which ‘suggest that Canis familiaris dates back as far as 500,000 years’, though she discusses the complications which plague researchers’ attempts to draw definitive conclusions (2004, 13).
THE FACE OF A DOG

Grandin 2005, 305). But recent findings indicate that co-evolution may have caused both human and dog brains to shrink by 10 per cent (Groves 1999 quoted in Simonds 1998; Grandin 2005, 305). Moreover, the human brain appears to have shrunk in parts which manage ‘emotions and sensory data’ (especially olfaction) while the dog brain shrank in areas responsible for ‘planning and organizing’ (Grandin 2005, 306). Dogs and humans may have thus adapted to become a more refined evolutionary team – and more adept ‘partners in crime’. Preliminary research findings supporting the co-evolutionary claim, of course, require further investigation and corroboration. However, if we understand evolution as a highly relational process in which species continually adapt to each other in parasitic, symbiotic, competitive and predatory relations, it would be the height of anthropocentric egotism to view ourselves as miraculously unmarked by the effects of these phenomena, especially in our evolutionary relationship with the oldest domesticated species.

If in our shared evolutionary history the dog has left its ineffaceable trace on the human body, then the notion of a separable human subject becomes radically unintelligible. So, too, does Levinas’s notion of the face, and this is perhaps why Levinas, for all his insistence on taking the name of a dog in the literal sense, cannot seem to come to terms with Bobby’s corporeality. For even as the face of the Other transcends the body, it remains in this transcendence crucially separate from the self. Although, for Levinas, ‘Being is exteriority’, he clarifies: ‘The relation with the Other does not nullify separation. It does not arise within a totality nor does it establish a totality, integrating me and the other’ (1969, 290, 251). Leora Batnitzky even argues that Levinas’s ‘central argument in Totality and Infinity is for a separable, independent subject’ (Batnitzky 2004, 8, my emphasis). Co-evolution challenges precisely this separability, for on an evolutionary scale, though we are perhaps accustomed to believing that we have made dogs what they are, they, too, quite literally have constructed the human. As Butler argues in Gender Trouble, ‘For inner and outer worlds to remain utterly distinct, the entire surface of the body would have to achieve an impossible impermeability’ (1999/1990, 170). It is precisely this boundary between inner and outer which dogs, by virtue of our co-evolution, so doggedly permeate, as Haraway describes in her Companion Species Manifesto:

Ms Cayenne Pepper continues to colonize all my cells – a sure case of what the biologist Lynn Margulis calls symbiogenesis. I bet if you checked our DNA, you’d find some potent transfections between us. Her saliva must have the viral vectors. Surely, her darter-tongue kisses have been irresistible … I’m sure our genomes are more alike than they should be. There must be some molecular record of our touch in the codes of living that will leave traces in the world, no matter that we are each reproductively silenced females, one by age, one by surgery. Her red merle Australian
QUEERING THE NON/HUMAN

Shepherd’s quick and lithe tongue has swabbed the tissues of my tonsils, with all their eager immune system receptors. Who knows where my chemical receptors carried her messages, or what she took from my cellular system for distinguishing self from other and binding outside to inside? [2003, 1–2]

Dogs persistently and irresistibly queer the human form, revealing its profound evolutionary contingency through their very presence. So, too, has the wondering dog who enters the prisoners’ lives always-already permeated their bodies, and therein lies his power to queer the boundary between human and animal which Levinas continually struggles to maintain.

In ‘thinking of Bobby’, Levinas draws attention to both the inadequacies of traditional models of conceptualising the human/dog relationship and the challenge of rethinking this relationship in light of these limitations. Given that traditional narratives of domestication rely on a relatively stable notion of the human as an immutable agent, queer theory provides an especially useful framework for rising to this challenge insofar as it addresses ‘the broader problem that normative schemes of intelligibility establish what will and will not be human’ (Butler 2006/2004, 146). Co-evolutionary theory, in turn, suggests that dogs, having shaped the human both literally and conceptually, are uniquely positioned to challenge these normative schemes, yet this potential is lost when we fail to take dogs literally. In a co-evolutionary context, Haraway proposes, ‘the major demand on the human is precisely what most of us don’t even know we don’t know how to do – to wit, how to see who the dogs are and hear what they are telling us, not in bloodless abstraction, but in one-on-one relationships, in otherness-in-connection’ (2003, 45). Thus, although Atterton suggests that Levinas did not learn ‘The lesson he should perhaps have learned’ from Bobby, there is something to be said for Levinas’s insistence on taking the dog literally, and more broadly for the respect for otherness which informs this insistence (61). One of the multiple valances of the verb ‘to domesticate’ is ‘to familiarise’, with the result that the domestication model of the human/dog relationship breeds the uncritical assumption that we know dogs.13 Yet dogs’ proximity to the human obscures their fundamental alterity, inhibiting our awareness of ‘what we don’t even know we don’t know’. ‘So’, asks Levinas, ‘who is the dog at the end of the verse? Who is the dog I call by name, whose face I encounter every day?’ In raising but crucially refusing to answer such questions, Levinas brings us face-to-face with the unknowability not only of the dog, but of that radically contingent creature called the human, and of the complex web of embodied relations which have brought both species into being.

References


In a riotous, picaresque novel entitled *Cosmopolitan Girl* by Rosalyn Drexler, the narrator Helen declares: ‘I am getting married to Pablo because I truly love him and because we have formed an alliance against those of you who think you know the way things should be … Living with Pablo will be the ultimate in gracious sexual living … I won’t have to use the Pill … no diaphragm, gel, foam, or abstinence’ (1974, 174). The fiancé in this instance happens to be a dog, albeit a talking dog. He still, though, retains his instinctual nature, as can be seen at the wedding, when, upon being instructed to kiss the bride, he first sniffs under her dress and then slobbers over her face. Further parodying the conventions and tedium of heteronormative wedding rituals, Drexler places Helen in a quandary:

Instead of going to a pet store for Pablo’s wedding gifts I wandered around town picking up things he might never use. I wasn’t sure whether or not to satisfy his fantasy that he is a man. For instance, what would he do with a Hermes tie? Drag it across the floor? And that language record for his trip to France … he barely speaks his own language. [173]

Conjugal life is no better: a female friend warns Helen of getting hitched to a lazy, unemployed slob and that they will have battles over such trivialities as ‘hair on the floor and in the bath’ (177).

Likewise parodying heteronormative marriage and sex is a poem by Margaret Kemp Ross entitled ‘I Married My Dog’, that appeared in the *New Yorker*. It whimsically and briefly recites the incidence of a conventional wedding (‘I was simply beautiful/and my dog looked nice, too’), mundane nuptials (‘We put on our nightgowns and fell asleep’), and a typical morning after. The bride arises first, so as to greet her ‘husband’ when he comes down. But when she says good morning, ‘he didn’t notice/He just lay on the floor, eating’ (2000, 190). She combats her fleeting disappointment by wedding her cat, whose sex remains queerly unspecified as would befit a socially uncustomary alliance. In
QUEERING THE NON/HUMAN

the accompanying illustration, William Steig depicts wife and cat curled up together on the couch smiling.

Both Drexler and Kemp Ross, by insisting on the appropriateness of one’s passion for a pet, sprightly challenge assumptions about what constitutes the appropriate marital-sexual relationship. They delight in silliness and satire as if to divert attention away from the seriousness of their provocation – that dog and woman indeed form ‘an alliance against those of you who think you know the way things should be’. These two works redefine where intimacy, even eroticism can lie, and articulate a desire for a different passion, intensity and tactile knowledge. In so doing, they present dog love as natural, not in the sense of normative, average, or socially prescriptive, but as unaffected and genuine, even as an ideal of harmony. They thereby poke fun at the general public’s unease with the slightest hint of bestiality. Indeed, if romantic attraction is ordinarily expressed as fascination with a mysterious someone of the opposite sex, Kemp Ross and Drexler seem to ask, why cannot this someone be of an opposite species? Mimicking conventional romance, Helen proposes that she and Pablo should ‘know everything about each other … Here we are, just the two of us … let’s open our hearts to each other’ (1974, 48). Thus, at the same time that both works call into question heteronormative prescriptions, they also express a keen desire for the comforts of intimacy and domesticity. As is by now clear, although Kemp Ross and Drexler fantasise about heterosexual heterospeciality, their works resonate remarkably with a host of queer issues.

In this chapter I want to examine how dog love and same-sex love are indeed intertwined in various twentieth-century literary works – from Michael Field to Rebecca Brown and from J.R. Ackerley to Dan Rhodes. These authors bring together the two kinds of love in a blasphemous, irreverent and shameless sort of way, frequently involving a triangular situation. The potential for social oddity or queerness in dog love lends itself well to treatment in works on same-sex love: both kinds of attachment raise the issue of propriety and pit the intimate against the public. Like Drexler and Kemp Ross, these are works that skirt the charge of bestiality, enquiring as they do what sexuality could possibly mean if the distinctions between the species collapse. Dog love, moreover, has the potential of continuing and furthering the work of queer studies that interrogates the binaries that arise from inflexible gender and sexual identity categories. Our affective life with its fluctuating sensual needs, devotions and obsessions can be complex and inconsistent in ways that call into question self-definitions based primarily on sexual preference. Object choice as in the case of the pet can complicate, as does the fetish, a simplistic adherence to male-female or hetero-homosexual binaries when defining one’s intimate self. In other words, to admit that one’s object choice might not always be restricted to
one’s own species means to loosen the power granted sexual identity categories
to socially regulate the individual.

In addition, one of the major repercussions of pet love is that it reorients
companionship and kinship away from the normative strictures of heterosexual
coupling and the traditional family. Taken seriously, it enjoins us to redefine
bonds of privacy, succour and habituation. Indeed, the relation to the dog cannot
be restricted to the singular role of guardian, lover, companion, or child but
incorporates all of those modalities and shifts between them. More often than
not, however, dog love is taken to be a meagre substitute for a variety of human
contacts – just as homosexuality has often been judged as the only option left to
those regarded as heterosexually maladjusted. Marjorie Garber, in her chapter
‘Unconditional Lovers’ from her book Dog Love, questions this assumption that
affection for a pet is a second-class replacement for human companionship or
kinship rather than being something wholly different. She observes:

The point is perhaps not to argue about whether dog love is a substitute for human
love, but rather to detach the notion of ‘substitute’ from its presumed inferiority to
a ‘real thing.’ Don’t all loves function, in a sense, with a chain of substitutions? …
To distinguish between primary and substitutive loves is to understand little about
the complexity of human emotions. [1996, 135]

Donna Haraway goes even further in questioning the assumption that dog love
is a substandard replacement; she rejects the logic of substitution entirely:

I resist being called the ‘mom’ to my dogs because I fear infantilization of the adult
canines and misidentification of the important fact that I wanted dogs, not babies.
My multi-species family is not about surrogacy and substitutes; we are trying to
live other tropes, other metaplasms. We need other nouns and pronouns for the
kin genres of companion species, just as we did (and still do) for the spectrum of
genders. [2003, 96]

The verve and sassiness with which Haraway, Garber, Kemp Ross and Drexler
approach the topic of dog love comes in part from their refusal to associate
such affection with disgrace, for the dog is often regarded to be the repository
of shame. Freud, for instance, remarked that the two traits of the dog that
make it repugnant to man are its lack of shame about its excrement and its
sexual functions (1930, 459). Even admittance of emotional reliance on the pet
can be shame-inducing, for it can be regarded as an improper, unclean object
of attention. Julia Kristeva in Powers of Horror has called the abject a ‘border’
(1982, 9) and the borderline case a situation ‘where identities (subject/object,
etc.) do not exist or only barely so – double, frizzy, heterogeneous, animal,
metamorphosed, altered, abject’ (207). She observes that ‘The abject confronts
us … with those fragile states where man strays on the territories of *animal* (12). The scenario thus becomes intriguing when two sorts of shameful, unorthodox love are set in tandem with each other. Some individuals may find both dog love and same-sex love non-natural merely for being non-heterosexual. But is dog love so shameful and non-normative? Given that people of all kinds love their dogs, this outlet for affection can actually be outwardly safer and more accepted than same-sex love: it therefore can bestow a domesticity and comfort otherwise lacking in a homophobic society. In addition, if earlier in the twentieth century gay and lesbian love could not speak its name, then it can do so indirectly via allusion to dog love. As if to deflect away from the shame of homosexuality, the chronologically earlier literary works I am about to discuss camouflage gay and lesbian preferences with delicious irony, dog love providing a means for expression otherwise prohibited their silenced, abjected voices.

To put it another way, perhaps the reassurance and calm a canine companion brings arise because trans-special love transcends the constrictions that gender and sexuality place upon the human body. Pet devotion has the potential to question the regulating strictures and categories by which we define sexuality, eroticism and love, though not in the banal sense that it offers different forms of genital stimulation,¹ indeed quite the opposite. Dog love corroborates Lacan’s famous dictum: ‘quand on aime, il ne s’agit pas de sexe’ [when one loves, it is not a question of sex] (1975, 27), whether ‘sex’ be interpreted here as intercourse or as the sex of the person one loves. Those who have an ardour for dogs know that their passion is unavailable and inaccessible elsewhere: it opens up the subject in unique ways that, precisely because independent of gender and sexuality, are liberating. Insofar as sexual identity borders are immaterial to it, dog love can therefore be said to be queer beyond queer!

But what precisely does the phrase ‘queer beyond queer’ signify? I am here playing meanings of queer off of each other, drawing on the term’s rich potential for ambiguity. Very commonly, queer is taken to be synonymous for gay and lesbian. Accordingly, I have culled texts on the premise that their authors examine same-sex love via parallels to cross-species love. But by doing so, these authors also draw out the nonconformity, transgressive potential, and at times redemptive elements of dog love – thereby invoking another usage of queer. To rephrase using Alexander Doty’s definition in his well-known essay ‘There’s Something Queer Here’: ‘By using *queer*, I want to recapture and reassert a militant sense of difference that views the erotically “marginal” as both (in bell hooks’s words) a consciously chosen “site of resistance” and a “location of radical openness and possibility”’ (1995, 73). Similar to feminist

¹ On the topic of bestiality, see Dekkers (1994).
'I MARRIED MY DOG'

theory, queer pet love participates in the questioning of the norms of patriarchy by redefining such notions as kinship, family, propinquity, the quotidian and affection. As Drexler, Ross and Haraway indicate, a woman’s amorous attentions and partnerships do not have to be directed to men. But what is queer beyond queer in these examples is that they do not assume that, instead of to men, the woman turns to women. By seeing her ‘significant other’ in her dog, she goes beyond the humanist-centred norms and strictures that can govern same-sex relations. Despite their allegorisation of gay and lesbian lives, then, in all the texts I am about to discuss the envisaged canine-human alliances offer a radically open alternative to common social partnerings.

Although I follow a simple chronological ordering of texts, I want to underscore their similarities and differences – here reviewed in brief. In the turn-of-the-century poetry of the lesbian couple who wrote under the pseudonym of Michael Field, the intensity and purity of their love for their dog allegorises the innocence, even sacredness of their love for each other. Invoking the Christian Trinity to characterise the perfectly symmetrical triangular love between them, the Fields deflect any shame and disparagement that their passion might elicit. The second piece, by contrast, is all about shame. In Jean Dutourd’s social satire, a man with a dog’s head is painfully mocked by others for his odd appearance. His species in-betweenism suggests both gender inversion at the same time that his sexual attraction to other dogs evokes homosexuality. In short, Dutourd allegorises the shame of the invert/homosexual in the figure of the socially outcast Edmond. With J.R. Ackerley’s autobiographical novels about his Alsatian, we return to a triangular love scenario, however here the dog becomes the choice attachment, superseding the impossible gay relation. Writing like Dutourd in the socially conservative post-war years, Ackerley’s personae confront heteronormist barriers. By contrast, the erotic literature of André Pieyre de Mandiargues eschews the affect of shame in order to explore sensuous bodily pleasure. Like Dutourd, he creates in his 1971 story ‘Adive’ a kind of fictive canine-human androgyne or, more properly, shape-shifter, who makes love to the female protagonist. Finally, contemporary lesbian novelist Rebecca Brown likewise moves in a fantastical realm, though her hybrid canids surpass in their hallucinatory, nightmarish quality the creations of Jean Dutourd and André Pieyre de Mandiargues. Brown redefines intimacy by taking quotidian physical closeness to pets to disturbing extremes of physical and mental shame, surveillance and suffering. Her novel brilliantly reverses the assumed dominance of human over animal. Simply put, in all these texts the gay or lesbian thematic is rendered more intricate, complex, indeed queer by one’s passion for the dog.
Lesbian suffragette and composer Ethyl Smyth wrote a book about her devotion to her Old English Sheepdogs called *Inordinate (?) Affection* (1936). The question mark in the title challenges us to ask whether the fondness with which we treasure our dogs really should be labelled as immoderate and intemperate. Enamoured as she was of Virginia Woolf, Smyth was highly aware of how society regulates what is supposed to constitute the proper object of one’s affection. Perhaps she was recalling, even inspired by the poetry of a lesbian couple who, a generation earlier under the *nom de plume* Michael Field, felt that the love they bore their dog could never possibly be inmoderate enough. Moreover, Katherine Bradley and her niece Edith Cooper saw in the love and loyalty their dog had for them the passion and commitment they bore each other.

The puppy, a three-month old with long red-gold hair, was a birthday present to Edith on 26 January 1898 and was named after a family friend, Edward Whymper. The chow came to fill an absence in Katherine and Edith’s household, for he arrived shortly after the death of the latter’s father. The dog’s own death ushered in another major transition in the couple’s life, for the year following it they converted to Catholicism. Biographer Emma Donoghue remarks that the women ‘claimed that the intensity of [Whym’s] love had caused his life to be “consumed” after only eight years, and that he was now their “guardian angel” or spirit guide’ (1998, 122). She explains the conversion as inevitable: ‘the Michaels were so lonely and isolated after their dog’s death that they needed a new kind of ready-made family’ (26). *Whym Chow: Flame of Love* (written 1906 and published 1914 in a terracotta suede limited edition) was the title of the collection of thirty ardent poems the couple wrote in impassioned eulogy to their deceased pet. It blasphemes both in its lesbian passion and association of the dog with the sacrificial Christ.

To illustrate this heresy, consider the fifth poem in the series, ‘Trinity,’ cited here in full:

I did not love him for myself alone:
I loved him that he loved my dearest love.
O God, no blasphemy
It is to feel we loved in trinity.
To tell Thee that I loved him as Thy Dove
Is loved, and is Thy own,
That comforted the moan

---

2 On the relationship between Woolf and Smyth, as well as a lengthy discussion of Michael Field, see Vicinus (2004).
Of Thy Beloved, when earth could give no balm
And in Thy Presence makes His tenderest calm.

So I possess this creature of Love's flame,
So loving what I love he lives from me;
Not white, a thing of fire,
Of seraph-plumèd limbs and one desire,
That is my heart's own, and shall ever be:
An animal – with aim
Thy Dove avers the same …
O symbol of our perfect union, strange
Unconscious Bearer of Love's interchange.

The pronouns are initially confusing and need to be paid close attention. The addressee of the poem is the Godhead; ‘he’ refers to the chow, who loves ‘my dearest love’, thus the female partner. The act of loving traverses various vectors: the dog is loved, for loving the other woman, who is loved in turn by the speaker. In ‘so loving what I love’ the chow doubles the ‘I’ (‘he lives from me’). And, giving a whole new dimension to the phrase, ‘flaming creatures’, in so far as the dog is ‘this creature of Love’s flame’, he resembles the Holy Spirit of the Trinity, iconographically depicted either as a flame or a dove. Although the phrasing ‘this creature of Love’s flame’ might suggest the offspring of heterosexual union, it is precisely not a child but something more spiritual.

This love, forged as it is at the juncture of heterospecial and homoerotic desire, is doubly transgressive. In dissolving so completely the boundaries between species in the unity and symmetry of love that ‘Trinity’ envisages, Katherine and Edith challenge the boundaries that define what proper and natural love is, whether it be directed to a canine or human being. The intensity of the dog’s devotion becomes a model for their own fervour toward each other. For instance, in the ninth poem that begins ‘My loved One is away from me/ Whom thou dost love’, when her partner is gone, the speaker is solaced by her joint undeterred vigil with Whym: ‘By the unbounded pressure of one yearning/ Vaster than we, no pause in it, no turning!’ She then enjoins her pet, now that he is in heaven: ‘O Chow, my little Love, you watch above her/ Watch still beside me, be with me her lover.’ The description of the love the dog holds towards them thus serves to illuminate the passion they bear each other and that might not otherwise find voice. Moreover, now that Whym is the one to have left, the women reciprocate his love in the common vigil that is their poetry.

The Fields’s love has two contradictory facets to it: it provocatively mixes both innocence and daring, and this ambiguity is what links their devotion to Whym and to each other. In praising the quotidian life with their pet, they claim
that dog love is natural and pure; so too the personal intimacy between the two women creates its own genuineness. Both conservatively dressed late Victorians who would never dare to wear pants to signal the gender invert, they use innocent, unsullied animal love to portray what they regarded as an uncomplicated, natural commitment to each other. And yet it is also a transgressive love that requires a degree of allegorical couching. It is significant that nowhere in the entire series is the word ‘dog’ used. The poem ‘Trinity’ only mentions that ‘he’ is ‘An animal’ like the dove of the Godhead. Just as the species goes unnamed, so too is their companionship not overtly identified as lesbian. And, of course, the authors camouflage themselves under the pseudonym Michael Field, although at this late date in their publishing career they had been already outed as two female authors. This indirectness deflects the labelling or admittance of moral impropriety. Yet, although, as in ‘Trinity’, the Fields repudiate the heretic nature of their triangular passion by calling it sacred, the very words, ‘no blasphemy/ It is to feel’ betray that they are in fact acutely aware of their transgression. They combine utter sincerity with clear-sighted ironic self-consciousness about both their religious and societal sacrilege.

Poem 27 can be read as an example of this allegorical veiling, whereby it is significant that the Fields chose to write in the florid, highly wrought, dissimulative style that characterises allegorical discourse in general. It begins: ‘Full of the passions nurtured in the wild/And virgin places of the world. Whym Chow,/Thou camest to thy Mistress, as a child.’ As Katherine also knew her niece Edith as a child, she could be said to have moulded the girl’s ‘untranslatable,/And native being’ and to have lit in her ‘heart a star/First love’. To then call Whym’s love ‘infinite and savage’, divulging ‘recesses never shown’, and ‘a new/Compulsion from … Eros’ could also be to name the powerful erotic desire that drew the two women together. Friends of Oscar Wilde, the Fields allude to him when they ask ‘What is the other name of Love?/Has Love another name?’ (Poem 6), here too brilliantly conjoining dog love with the ‘Love that dare not speak its name’. In yet another veiled erotic allusion, in Poem 22 that begins ‘Sleeping together: Sleep’, the dog is described as leaping into their common bed in a stanza that begins with an echo of the first, ‘Loving together, love’. The mystic transcendence and transport that this triangular love embodies hence also signifies its transgression. So intensely to love either a dog or a member of the same-sex is to explore a passion veering from the societal norm.

Jean Dutourd

In contrast to the purifying passion between Whym and his mistresses, in Jean Dutourd’s short satiric novel Une tête de chien/À Dog’s Head (1998/1951) the
shame and embarrassment of being a visible misfit in society are foregrounded. The protagonist Edmond Du Chaillu, borne of human parents but inexplicably endowed with a spaniel’s head, is a disquieting mutant hybrid suffering from species dysphoria. As a child, Edmond in all else — intelligence, speech and sensitivity — seems normal. But the picaresque tale focuses on the unhappy course of his life: he soon faces the extent of his parents’ disappointment and rejection, the taunting of schoolmates, hazing in the military, difficulty in finding and keeping employment, and unhappiness in love and marriage.

Allusions to homosexuality punctuate the story from the start. Edmond is not allowed to pet dogs as a child for fear of nurturing an unspeakable sin. His father refers to his ‘unnatural proclivities’ (23), and in the army a quartermaster sergeant with Socratic tastes makes advances towards him. When he comes to live on his own and adopts four male dogs as pets, his Great Dane ‘had such short hair that he seemed naked. Edmond always stroked him with reserve. To stroke such a naked animal seemed reprehensible to him. He protected himself from all confusion of feeling’ (100–101). As to his setter, Edmond believes that the dog loved him, and he ‘reproached himself for the voluptuous pleasure this idea incurred’ (102). ‘When he bethought himself to explore this instinct which constantly urged him towards dogs, which caused him to desire their company and made him vaguely melancholy and restless in their absence … He held logical arguments with himself … [and] completely failed to recognize his problem’ (97). He gives his dogs all human names, hoping to convey to them ‘a sort of ambiguity which would bring [them] closer in spirit’ (52). More explicitly alluding to homosexuality, Edmond’s landlord tells him a cautionary tale of a man who encountered trouble from the sailors and little boys he picked up. Edmond, though, fails to see the parallel with his own love of dogs.

A highly cultured individual, Edmond is sensitive to the shame he has internalised and remains perplexed by the bent of his natural desires. He wonders why it is that others treat him as if his condition were his own fault: ‘The whole world seems to think it is I who have made myself such as I am’

---


4 Although Dutourd does not explicitly address this issue, one wonders whether Edmond’s eroticised love of dogs is not so much because he is half dog but because he is also human. Is it part of his human nature to want to be closer to animals and animality? Do we love dogs because part of us wants to abandon our anthropocentrism, our anthronormativity? As in all desire, one wants in dog love to move beyond oneself.
(79). He seeks consolation and self-assurance by studying ancient mythology with its numerous tales of humans turned into beasts and such half-human creatures as the Minotaur. He loves that there is no vice in Ovid and that ‘young men lust after Narcissus as much as the maidens’ (87). He then travels to Egypt for six months where he ‘rediscovered hundreds of ambiguous creatures who enchanted him’ (110) and brings back to Paris countless statues of Anubis, the god of death with the jackal’s head. Fitting the gay stereotype, Edmond leads a rich, affective life and sublimates his passions through collecting art (statuettes by the animal sculptor Bayre and a painting by Rosa Bonheur of ‘Sheepdog Pursuing a Sheep’).

As to women, they are attracted to him because of his alleged bestiality, and one in particular passionately wants to marry him in the crazed belief that, if she loves this Prince Charming enough, he will turn into a human. It is not a happy marriage. As Wendy Doniger writes in the foreword to the English translation, Edmond’s wife is ‘a satire on women who hope to “reform” homosexuals’ (xii). At the close of the novel, Edmond finds his true calling in life as a game warden, while Anne, now gone completely mad, becomes resigned to her spouse chasing after all manner of dogs. Here he ‘constrains himself no longer and pursues males and females with the same ardor. This equal attraction toward either sex deserves to be pointed out: it is completely animal’ (147).

As these details from *A Dog’s Head* intimate, it can easily be read as an allegory of male homosexuality told through Edmond’s attraction to dogs. Dutourd’s novel thereby fits into a small but significant tradition of dog-stories that are used as vehicles to express human dilemmas in the face of either internal or external censorship. What is prohibited from being uttered directly by a human being is represented via the dog. In the political allegory, because the focus is not on the human but a mere dog, the author can feign that his topic is an innocent one and not a subversive criticism of the state. Such is the case in Russian Ivan Sergeyevich Turgenev’s ‘Mumu’ (1854), Hungarian Tibor Dery’s *Niki: The Story of a Dog* (1956), and Russian Soviet Georgi Vladimov’s *Faithful Ruslan: The Story of a Guard Dog* (published 1974 in the West).5 In these stories the charade of naïveté actually serves to mock and taunt the political and social status quo. It is possible that Jean Dutourd faced a similar dilemma: in the face of homophobia of the 1950s, he could only write indirectly and with subtle irony on the topic of homosexuality. In the 1997 preface to the work he confesses, though still elliptically, ‘I wrote in the third person as if the hero were not me, although in part he was … I had to, as it were, kill myself off – I had to change myself into a dog in order to be born again from my own ashes’ (xiv).

5 See my discussion of these works in Kuzniar (2006).
But to read *A Dog’s Head* either as a roman-à-clef of Dutourd’s life and/or as a strict allegory about homosexuality, would be reductive – and not only because Edmond could represent any social outcast. From the standpoint of sexuality alone his case is far too ambiguous and queer to be categorised solely as a gay man’s tale. Like ‘Adive’, canine love introduces polymorphous desires that eschew divisions into human/nonhuman, masculine/feminine, gay/straight and homosexual/bisexual. Edmond’s natural proclivities are hard to pinpoint, as his abandonment to his animality, his chasing after males and females alike at the end of the novel, saliently demonstrates. Dutourd creates ever-shifting vectors for his protagonist’s desires – for the opposite sex and for the same species, covering for the same sex. Edmond thus resembles Ovid’s ‘amorous beings, with their yearning after shapes and substances utterly different from their own’ (88). In addition, his ambiguous appearance as a cross-breed – his external species-incoherence and internal species-confusion – evoke gender in-betweenism or the third sex, which is to say a gender non-conformity that also hints at sexual non-conformity.

Given the ever-shifting nature of his identity and desire, it is not surprising that Edmond senses the ineffability of his dilemma. In reading Ovid, he has profound compassion for the ‘grief of men changed into beasts [and their] inability to express themselves’ (88). And he discovers ‘that his nature was incommunicable’ (108). His condition is thus unspeakable on various fronts – his dog’s head is shameful to expose and his desires are both repressed and as ambiguous as his appearance. His condition is also unspeakable because it is difficult to determine precisely to what it allegorically refers. In order to represent such obliqueness or circumlocution, Dutourd takes recourse to what only fiction can create: a man with a dog’s head. His imaginary creature thus embodies what the Germans call verquer – the oblique, transverse, deviant and queer.

It is this ambiguity in Edmond’s condition that society cannot grasp and tolerate, leading to his difficulty in assimilation. Every person he encounters makes cruel assumptions about him, especially as regards his sexuality. Edmond is then forced to internalise societal shame and tries to be a proper man, the need of which his father impressed upon him from early childhood. He suffers incessantly under this regulatory, normalising regime of masculinity, but his apparent escape from his earlier attempts to comply with society’s approbation do not result in liberation either. In Wendy Doniger’s words, the ending is ‘horrifying and tragic’ (xii). But perhaps Doniger takes this picaresque novel somewhat too seriously, for at the same time *A Dog’s Head* investigates the workings of shame, it also counteracts the shaming. By focusing on the hapless, naïve character of Edmond, Dutourd ultimately creates an amusing tale and thus displaces the humiliation that otherwise would be difficult for the reader.
to bear. The queerness of this story, its ironic ambiguity, makes it deliciously humorous and witty.

Dan Rhodes and J.R. Ackerley

How to cope with one’s desire for acceptance is also a dilemma in J.R. Ackerley’s novels which deal with gay love in tandem with dog love. As does Michael Field in ‘Trinity’, Ackerley creates a triangular structure, though not one of perfect balance in mutual love: instead, tensions arise between one’s conflicting obsessions and commitments. But, first, as an entry to the world of Ackerley, I want to turn to a recent novel that reads as a sardonic inversion of him – Dan Rhodes’s *Timolean Vieta Come Home: A Sentimental Journey* (2003). Like Ackerley’s *We Think the World of You* (2000/1960), Rhodes’s novel depicts an older gay man lusting over rough trade, a strapping, straight man whom he pays for sex. A dog also comes between them. But whereas in Ackerley’s novel the protagonist gets the dog in the end, in Rhodes’s he lets his pickup dispose of the dog, who happens to hate the interloper. At the close of the first half, Carthusians Cockroft agrees to the Bosnian’s recommendation to abandon the mongrel in the streets of Rome, saying to the dog: ‘You’re just the same as all the others, aren’t you? You all get sick of me in the end. You all fall out of love with me, if you ever even loved me at all, which I don’t suppose you did’ (90–91).

The irony is that Timolean Vieta does love his owner and, like his predecessor Lassie, undertakes an arduous, months-long journey home, only to be knifed by the Bosnian on the driveway to Cockroft’s house. With its parodic subtitle *A Sentimental Journey*, this novel censors emotion, thus fitting the paradigm of the ‘fear of the familiar’ that Steve Baker (2000) locates in the postmodern visual art of the animal. Whereas Ackerley is open about the transferral of attachment on to the Alsatian Evie, Rhodes broaches affection for Timolean Vieta only to shy away from it. Although sexual encounters between men abound in the novel, it is taboo to display dog love. Sentimentality over a dog is so inconceivable and impermissible, the true object of contempt and pity, that the entire narrative is structured on getting rid of the dog so as to facilitate gay sex. Indeed, through his henchman, the Bosnian, Rhodes intervenes at every moment when Cockroft voices attachment to this dog with the loveliest of eyes. Similarly, Rhodes ruthlessly repudiates the fulfilment of love in the novel’s second half: here the pathetic tales of the various humans, with whom the dog comes into brief contact on his way back home, all end miserably.

If in Rhodes canine love is rejected in the search for sexual adventures, the opposite occurs in Ackerley, where the quest for the ideal gay friend is transferred onto the love he bears his dog. In juxtaposition with Rhodes, one sees, even
fifty years after his novels were written, how unconventional Ackerley’s candour is vis-à-vis his passion for his Alsatian. Ever since his 1925 play *The Prisoners of War*, called the first openly gay play, British man of letters J.R. Ackerley has been known as a gay writer and thus by 1960 did not have to allegorically conceal his erotic leanings in *We Think the World of You*. But potential publishers were concerned about libel suits and Ackerley spent much time reworking and camouflage references in this autobiographical novel about his dealings with ‘Johnny’, a handsome working-class pick-up and a petty thief; and he did excise explicit references to sex between them. In order to maintain contact with Johnny, the first-person narrator Frank constantly doles out money to his family, while Johnny strings him along, always providing excuses, usually his wife’s jealousy, for why he cannot keep appointments or doesn’t respond to letters. Johnny owns a young bitch named Evie whom he plans to breed for money, but when he lands in prison, Frank manoeuvres to take care of the dog, who too is locked up in a backyard with no freedom to roam. Indeed, this is how Ackerley came into possession of the dog who is the focus of his autobiographical narrative *My Dog Tulip* (1999/1956), a novel which was harshly reviewed for its unabashed depiction of the dog’s defecatory and sexual needs (or what Ackerley perceived as such), in stark contrast to the absence of any descriptions of gay sex in *We Think the World of You*.

In a work about the asymmetries of speech, education, class, and intensity of desire, parallels between the main characters nevertheless abound. To mention only a few of the ingenious doublings and overlapping triangular configurations that permeate *We Think the World of You*: just as Frank struggles with Johnny’s wife Megan over her husband, so too Frank machinates for control over Evie. The dog, like money, becomes the means by which Frank can maintain contact with Johnny. Johnny himself realises that he and Evie have been treated alike: they both would have been content with humbler arrangements but the offer of money and comfort has spoiled them. Moreover, the beautiful Evie becomes a substitute for handsome Johnny, first while he is in prison and then when Frank manages to buy her away from Johnny. Because marriage and class hinder the gay relation, Frank’s desire to be adored and to lavish affection are transferred onto the dog.6 Frank seems incapable of analysing his behaviour within the infeasible

---

6 To list a few of the other triangles: Megan is resentful of time Johnny spends walking the dog (2000/1960, 182) – so that Ackerley refers to both her and the dog as being jealous, possessive bitches (Parker 1989, 348). Evie also forms triangles between Frank and his housekeeper and his cousin, for she is watchful and suspicious of them both and they of her. Conceivably, Frank uses Evie to arouse jealousy in others, because that is how he was treated in his relationship with Johnny. And just as Frank had expended himself for everyone with little gratitude in return, so now Evie compensates
situation that develops with Johnny, just, as in his final words, he cannot fathom ‘the darkness of [his] own mind’ (2000/1960, 211) in how it came about that he sacrificed so much freedom and independence for Evie. His obsession with her displaces what he cannot resolve in the other affair, almost in social commentary on how encumbered the life of a gay man is in the 1950s. In an article published in *Critical Inquiry*, Susan McHugh thus remarks that ‘increasing involvement with the dog marks clear breaks [from a] frustration with bipolar sexual identification’ (2000/1992, 29). McHugh notes how Evie allows Frank to abandon his ties to Johnny which were always compromised by the interference of the heterosexual, normative marriage and observes that ‘cross-species intimacy helps the gay man to shed his despair of coupling on the heteronormative model’ (33).

McHugh calls both sodomite and canine love outlaw sexualities. But I think what is even more radically depicted than Frank’s attraction to rough trade and his abject subservience to Johnny and his family is the shameless confession of his bewitchment by Evie. Ackerley openly admitted that his interest in sex waned when he acquired Queenie, and friends such as E.M. Forster were dismayed that, as Ackerley’s biographer puts it, ‘he appeared to have ended up with a dog rather than a boy’ (Parker 1989, 263). In Forster’s disappointment and mockery rings a tinge of contempt for the domesticity and content Ackerley eventually found. However anti-assimilationist Frank may be in finally rejecting ties to the substitute, extended family surrounding Johnny, Ackerley, despite the unconventional candour with which he adores his dog, still seeks a normal life, now dictated by the daily schedule demanded by the care of an animal. He both escapes the normative through dog love only to find it again. As Ackerley describes it in the novel that depicted their subsequent life together, the new family co-ordinates revolve around the Alsatian. For most of *My Dog Tulip*, the narrator is preoccupied by finding the appropriate stud dog for his bitch and dealing with her litter. Yet even this attempt at establishing a family routine and obeying the natural rhythms of the bitch’s seasons are deeply unsettling.

The questions pose themselves: does Ackerley find in his relationship to his dog freedom from the constraints experienced in his gay relations or are his former obsessions with loyalty and devotion as well as sexual adventures and nonconformism transferred onto the dog? Does he escape the incessant triangular relations that inform *We Think the World of You* for the more domestic pairing of a life exclusively devoted to his ‘imperial bitch’ (1999/1965, 187)? Or

---

7 In *My Dog Tulip*, the narrator encounters, through his attempts to find the proper Alsatian mate for his bitch, a newly wedded husband who has an imperious wife: ‘I
does *My Dog Tulip*, too, introduce triangles, here a succession of possible suitors with whom Tulip flirtatiously abandons in order to return time and again to her true love and master? The narrator says at the close that ‘she would come galloping after me, this grand lady with her entourage of inadequate wooers’ (188). Is this, then, a gay man’s fantasy of having acquired heterosexual fidelity? *My Dog Tulip* indeed presents all of the above options: in the complexity of Ackerley’s novels one encounters one’s rich and contradictory affective life with the canine companion.

**André Pieyre de Mandiargues**

Another case of a shifting triangle where canine and same-sex love trade places occurs in the short story ‘Adive’ by André Pieyre de Mandiargues (1971). Here, however, woman and dog fully mesh together. This French erotic tale is written in the vein of the Todorovian Fantastic, whereby the protagonist Stéphanie, and with her the reader, cannot discern whether her lover is a woman, a hound, or the former transfigured into the latter. After depositing her boyfriend at the Orly airport, Stéphanie strolls distractedly through the streets of Paris window shopping. Stopping before a fine art and jewellery store, she notices an emerald stone carved with the head of an animal she cannot quite distinguish – perhaps that of a dog or a wolf. At the same moment, she notices the shadow of a young woman flitting by and also tarrying in front of the shop window. At least she thinks it is a girl, for she has been told that transvestites haunt this vicinity. Already in the tale, gender identities start to dissolve. Stéphanie’s eye then catches sight of a moonstone ring which, de Mandiargues mentions in passing, she takes to hold the secret symbolism of the hermaphrodite.

Stéphanie soon finds herself tracking the young girl, who is clad from head to toe in a rose-brown outfit and who canters through the Paris streets with an animal-like gait. Our protagonist finally accosts her, not without being aware of her own aggressive, masculine behaviour and uncertain whether her pickup could be a prostitute. Travelling on the Métro together where Stéphanie presses her legs and breasts up against the girl, they ride to the apartment of the young ‘Adive’. ‘La fille fauve’ (wild girl), as Stéphanie calls her in her mind, turns off the lights and disappears, leaving the latter in the dark. The door reopens after some time and Stéphanie, undressed on the sofa, welcomes abandoning herself to a persistently lapping tongue: it dawns on her, though with only brief regret, ‘que had already learnt that it didn’t do to be late for tea [the wife had left it cold], so I did not press him [to stay] and he hurried off, this good, kind, once adventurous, now lost young man to his doom, while I ascended in the elevator with mine’ (1999/1965, 88).

---

had already learnt that it didn’t do to be late for tea [the wife had left it cold], so I did not press him [to stay] and he hurried off, this good, kind, once adventurous, now lost young man to his doom, while I ascended in the elevator with mine’ (1999/1965, 88).
c'est à une chienne qu'elle s'est soumise’ (that she has surrendered herself to a bitch) (1971, 144). After prolonged love-making and after the deep relaxation and peace that descend upon her body dissipate, Stéphanie searches for her clothes and leaves the apartment, but not before discovering in the kitchenette what could be a dog, a small wolf, or large fox. Whatever the case, the young female creature has the same fiery eyes as Adive, of whom there is no trace.

It matters little to Stéphanie whether she was made love to by a bitch or a girl. In giving herself over to voluptuousness, it is not a question of sexual preferences or, even more restrictedly, sexual identity. In other words, it is hardly a case of Stéphanie exploring bisexuality and bestiality and putting a name to them. Just as Stéphanie dissolves in intense pleasure, sexualities melt into each other, as do species. Not only does the woman change into a dog, but this dog itself escapes precise species classification. What makes the protagonist notice Adive in the first place is her shadowiness; then she is explicitly attracted to her gender indeterminacy as well as animal-like characteristics, which place her between ‘fille’ and ‘fauve’. Stéphanie herself shifts from a masculine aggressive position towards the girl to a passive, feminine abandon to the dog. In this space of the erotic reverie, dream and reality fuse as well. In sum, de Mandiargues creates the perfect suspension of possibilities, in other words, a perfect, queer, balanced triangle of desires. As in Michael Field’s poetry about Whym Chow, there is no contradiction or tension between cross-species and same-sex desires. The one articulates the other.

Rebecca Brown

The most unorthodox, bizarre and unsettling, in other words, the most queer of all the texts discussed so far is The Dogs: A Modern Bestiary (1998) by American lesbian writer Rebecca Brown. This remarkable novel daringly redefines intimacy and, like a number of works we have seen, tackles the subject of shame. Moreover, like ‘Adive’ and A Dog’s Head, it moves in the realm of the fantastical human-canine hybrid, intimating the dangers of gender or sexual non-conformity. The story begins with a strange, terrifying, black dog appearing one night in the protagonist’s apartment. The commanding creature watches every inch of her, but the first-person narrator doesn’t know what the dog wants of her (1998, 6, also 139). The dog comes to stay and lead a life so intimately bound with the narrator’s that she writes, ‘She lived inside my life’ (7), ‘I loved the way she looked the way I felt’ (11), and ‘I’d close my eyes and know what she desired’ (16). They curl around each other in bed to fit together (144). The narrator adores her animal beauty. As in any love affair, the narrator learns to accept the manners of her companion and adapts herself to them. Household
dogs indeed regulate our daily routines, intuit our feelings, anticipate our moves, even take over our furniture, but Brown uses these ordinary occurrences to turn them into a nightmarish relation where the dog disciplines the human, reversing dominant/submissive roles. Miss Dog and her numerous offspring creep not only into the narrator’s life but into her very brain: ‘But I couldn’t hide myself when they moved in. They numbered every hair of me, each gasp of fear, each clutch of want, each shrug of hope that ever spasmed through me. They tapped my phone, my brain, my heart. I swear it’s true, they monitor my dreams’ (66).8 In this personal relation, they know more about the narrator than the latter knows about herself (74).

Hence The Dogs transforms the daily, near-and-dear closeness we have with pets into their manifesting an inner, untold part of our selves. It is not unusual to confide in our dogs, while knowing that they cannot understand every word we say. So, too, the narrator whispers her secrets to Miss Dog (10), but as the dog must be hidden away from a landlord that prohibits pets, their alliance comes to represent secrecy itself. The narrator in fact lives alone so that no one would embarrassingly see how she truly is (66). Their relationship adopts a queer dimension, in so far as it is closeted and unfit for public view. Through intimacy with the dogs, the narrator desires to overcome her sense of being a queer, single woman and lonely misfit, but it only exacerbates her inner torturedness. Apart from the echo of the word in the title, there is no indication of sexual bestiality in the novel. Yet from the start the dog sleeps with the woman, and the bed becomes the site of both closeness and torture. They stick rods up her limbs and force her to eat her own heart.9

Medieval bestiaries served as compendia of actual and mythological creatures (making no distinction between them), listing their physiological, medicinal and symbolic attributes, and including didactic fables. Many animals were bizarre or demonstrated unusual behaviour chosen to depict a Christian moral allegory. Alluding to such moral instruction the chapter titles of Brown’s novel read ‘DOG: in which is illustrated Immanence’, or ‘BONE: in which is illustrated Constancy.’ The allegorisation is opaque, however, for how the chapters illustrate the various virtues they announce can only be conjectured, especially

---
8 Similarly, ‘The dogs sit on my face and eat my brains’ (75).
9 Brown thus reverses the assumptions of such cultural theorists as Yi-Fu Tuan who in Domination and Affection: The Making of Pets (1984) asserts that affection, whether it be toward pets, children, or women, conceals its true motives – dominance, superiority, condescension, indulgence, patronage and paternalism (see similar conclusions reached by Shell and Serpell). Brown’s protagonist explores what it means to relinquish domination toward the pet in the endeavour to explore one’s own abject creatureliness.
given the cruelty of the dogs. Most perplexing is how to determine what these animals themselves signify. It would be too simple to postulate that they point to a dark side of the narrator’s psyche. Instead of a referential equivalent, their staging of scenarios (dressing up in her clothes to parody her, or performing a dominatrix number) suggests sheer representationality. They serve as a screen whose function it is precisely not to point at something behind it but to block meaning. If they point to a trauma in the narrator’s childhood past (such as her being abused), such a trauma cannot be pinpointed or overcome, only repeated and re-enacted in a sado-masochistic relationship.

Perhaps the dogs’ invasive presence indicates the protagonist’s profound need to be acknowledged or, what amounts to the same thing, to understand and see herself, to fit together into wholeness her fragmented self. In the final chapter, after the dogs unearth the bones of a deceased girl, the narrator shoos them away and resurrects the girl, that is, her own memories: ‘I saw inside what covers me, I see inside the skin: I see the child swimming whole’ (166). But before arriving at this end and from the start, the narrator is engaged in deadpan self-deprecation. She is self-mockingly aware of her poor quarters and her dull appearance. She repeatedly experiences mortification from her bungling and is not particularly noticed by others. In her social invisibility she resembles the dogs, whom no one but she herself sees, as in the episode full of black humour where they enter the supermarket. Maladroit and isolated, the narrator therefore needs the gaze of others and unconsciously desires to provoke it, even if solely in the humiliating scrutiny of the dogs. She calls the dogs ‘Inquisitors. Their job is to observe and see, to catch one in the act’ (174); ‘They know about me what I don’t. They know what I would not and they are merciless’ (74). The pack stands around her, inspecting her, as if she were ‘on show, an auction block’ (120). When the narrator brings a girlfriend home, all attempts at love-making are thwarted because she sees the dogs snickering at the performance. Conceivably, the dogs embody the narrator’s internalisation of the criticising gaze of others, her melancholic self-punishment for being queer and not fitting in with the rest of society. But because the dogs are also part of herself, even though her unspeakable, bestial self, she loves and cherishes them. Paradoxically, so as

10 Cf. the bestial, visceral self-abandon in Djuna Barnes’s novel *Nightwood* (1936). At the close, Robin who has left Nora, her devout lover, returns to a decaying chapel on the latter’s property. When Nora’s dog, suspicious of an intruder, runs into the church, Robin goes down on all fours and challenges the beast: ‘The veins stood out in her neck, under her ears, swelled in her arms, and wide and throbbing rose up on her fingers as she moved forward … Then she began to bark also, crawling after him – barking in a fit of laughter, obscene and touching’ (1961, 169–70). Robin’s becoming-dog resonates on multiple levels. Her ferociousness betokens the animality and instinctuality of her inarticulate desires, yet
to retain their gaze, the woman stays with these obnoxious creatures, ‘Because each hate and fear she knows, each longing, every clutch of love, and that which turns desire into need abides in them’ (92).

Thus what is emotionally unsettling yet beautiful about Rebecca Brown’s novel is that, in spite of the sadistic roles the dogs assume, a searing intimacy binds the woman to them. Brown terrifyingly brings shame and intimacy into proximity with each other. The legendary faithfulness of the species here results in the closest of bonds: the dog ‘never growled about me kicking or sweating up the sheets or the shouts I made when I bolted awake from a nightmare. She remained, despite her constancy, my truest friend. She was my only comfort. She met my every single need that she had made in me’ (20). Later, the puppies are described as ‘loyal, patient, prescient … sent to teach’ (108). However indirect, a link exists between their virtues and the chapter titles that point to the moral element of the story, in other words, how the chapters illustrate ‘charity’, ‘perspicacity’, ‘obedience’, ‘solace’, and so on. Moreover, the appreciation for the dogs is not restricted to such virtues but extends to their physical beauty. Even while an acquiescing victim of the dogs, the narrator cherishes their loveliness, elegance, even stylish glamour. Their intimacy is paradoxically best expressed when, after the narrator strikes out at the unsuspecting puppies with a hammer, bruising but not, as intended, killing them, they look back with ‘blaming, knowing, begging eyes’ (142). Gazing into her, they relentlessly and patiently forgive her. The same puppies then sleep around her ‘warm as milk’ (143). Conceivably, it is forgiveness which allows the narrator to be reconciled with her past in the end. Thus, however cruel the dogs appear, at every stage they are a reminder to the narrator of an intimate warmth, and hence they lead her back to her intrinsic self.

**Conclusion**

The various works discussed here hail from various genres, the encomium, erotica, picaresque novel, autobiography, even bestiary. Whereas the Fields and Ackerley tell of their own dogs, de Mandiargues, Dutourd and Brown move also confirms the wayward innocence and unreflectedness of her remorseless deserting of husband, son and lover in order to pursue her nocturnal adventures. In adopting the pose of another creature, she demonstrates her decentredness as a human being. Yet in returning close to Nora she also, despite her wild abandon, suggests an unvoiceable loyalty. Nora herself is doggedly devoted to Robin and embodies the degradation of loyal, spurned love. That Robin’s encounter with the dog and with the animal in herself occurs in a church also marks the profanity and yet intensity bordering on spirituality that characterises Nora’s and Robin’s lesbian relation.
into the arena of the mythological and fantastic. Often the relationship with the dog, or even being a dog, serves as an allegory of homosexuality. But just as it is in the nature of desire to be dark and impenetrable, so too are these allegories enigmatic and richly suggestive. The parallels and overlappings between canine and human love are simultaneously dissimulating and illuminating. These works run the gamut from harmonious triangle between dog and lovers, even merging of canine and human partner, to antagonism and jealousy within the triangle. But in all cases, the queer momentum lies not solely in the gay or lesbian element in the text but even more in the socially dissonant and daring love of dogs. Such a love has the potential to challenge the speciesism of queer studies and move it to new ground. At the same time, in this extended application, queer theory can open up new avenues in animal studies, which has not only tended to disparage the affective intensities of pet love but also phobically consigned consideration of sexuality to the category of bestiality.11

A final word, then, on the topic of shame.12 In all of these works, there is an acceptance, even flaunting of the shame of loving a dog, which is to say, a refutation and overturning of the disapproving gaze of others. This affirmation of shame has powerful implications for gay and lesbian pride as well as feminist ethics. The Fields insisted on seeing purity, innocence, even transcendence in both their dog love and lesbian love. In the end of the mock Bildungsroman, A Dog's Head, Edmond gives in to his desires and feels shame no more. Ackerley unapologetically exposes his obsessive preoccupations with Tulip and her physical needs and, to the vexation of friends such as E.M. Forster, becomes more preoccupied by this bitch than by men. The young protagonist in ‘Adive’ demonstrates no hint of shame at having been made love to by a girl/dog. And, last but not least, Rebecca Brown’s dogs force the narrator to perform humiliating acts, as they cruelly watch on, leading, however paradoxically, to her acceptance of herself in all her creaturely needs, longings and failings. Via the dog, then, the human being comes to a deeper sense of what it means to be human, which is to say, to discover one’s love for this totally other creature, together with one’s full, compassionate identification with it.

References


11 The former is the case, to name only the most famous studies, by Berger, Shell and Ritvo. The latter is the case with Dekkers.

12 For a more sustained discussion of shame, see Kuzniar (2006).
‘I MARRIED MY DOG’

Donoghue, E. (1998), *We are Michael Field* (Bath: Absolute Press).


Chapter 10

Animal Trans1

Myra J. Hird

The universe is not only queerer than we suppose, it is queerer than we can suppose. [Haldane 1928, 298]

When animals do something that we like we call it natural. When they do something that we don’t like, we call it animalistic. [Weinrich 1982, 203]

Introduction

Punky and Elvira, two female red-faced Japanese macaques, have lived together for fifteen years and raised three adopted juvenile monkeys together. Whether or not they want to marry (or have any recognition of this distinctly human concept) remains beside the point for the moment, as the state of Ohio, and indeed the whole of America it seems, is embroiled in a heated debate about gay marriage. On one side of the debate, Angela Murray, executive director of the Human Rights for Animals organisation argues that it is Punky and Elvira’s right to have a full wedding that carries the same legal entitlements as human marriages. At the opposite end, Roberta Crombs, president of the Christian United Movement disagrees: ‘Animals marrying? That’s beyond being “under attack”. These zealots have scaled the walls and society has begun to crumble!’ (Busse 2004, 2)

Nonhuman animals have for some time been overburdened with the task of making sense of human social relations. In most cultures, and for most people, nonhuman animals are symbolic. It matters less how nonhuman animals behave, and more how we think they behave. Nonhuman animals supposedly exemplify human animal qualities like the family, fidelity, selfless care for young and, perhaps above all, sex complementarity (that femininity and masculinity are categorically different and complementary). As the quotes at the beginning

of this chapter allude, nonhuman animal morphology and behaviour are most often cited to confirm our assumptions about the nature of things and human beings’ relationship to this nature, even though these meanings may indeed have very little to do with the biological and social realities of nonhuman animals (Bagemihl 1999). Moreover, and as in the case of Punky and Elvira, discussions of animal behaviour often move quickly to moral debates about topics such as gay marriage, the nuclear family and gender relations. As I will argue, morality and nature enjoy an interesting relationship: nature is often invoked in discussions of morality in so far as natural behaviours are considered to be morally superior. Punky and Elvira incite debate because they are nonhuman animals (natural) who are engaged in homosexual behaviour (unnatural and therefore morally inferior), thus disrupting the historic Judaeo-Christian association between nature and moral superiority.2

It is certainly of value, then, to exercise caution when the behaviour of nonhuman living organisms is cited in the service of discussions of human socio-cultural relations. And yet, in recent years there has been a rejuvenation of feminist interest in ethology and biology, with a number of scholars making the specific argument that the study of nonhuman living matter might usefully inform debates about social structures and relations. Lynda Birke, Mette Bryld and Nina Lykke (2004) argue that animals are both common and rare in feminist studies of science in so far as feminist theory is strongly concerned with the biological sciences that use and define nonhuman species, but rarely considers how we think about animals specifically. Birke, Bryld and Lykke argue that animals should be of interest to feminist theory because they are deeply implicated in discussions of sex, gender, race and sexuality. Feminist scholars and social scientists more generally have provided a number of thought-provoking analyses of nonhuman species. For instance, Donna Haraway’s path-breaking Primate Visions (1989) and Simians, Cyborgs and Women (1991) provide critical analyses of the myriad consequences of a topography grounded upon the distinction of human being from all other living beings. A number of analyses focus on the human ethical treatment of animals such as Lynda Birke’s Feminism, Animals and Science: The Naming of the Shrew (1994), Carol Adams’s Neither Man Nor Beast (1995), Josephine Donovan and Carol Adams’s edited collection Beyond Animal Rights (2000) and Greta Gaard’s edited collection Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature (1992). Other analyses focus on the hybridity of particular human-animal relationships such as Haraway’s The

2 Punky and Elvira’s case evinces one side of the ambivalent relationship between nature and morality. Animals also represent all that is base or inferior in humans. See Daston and Park (1998).
ANIMAL TRANS


A number of feminist studies have also begun to think through the implications of analysing human understandings of embodiment, sexual difference and sexuality with nonhuman studies. Arguing more generally for the recognition of sex and sexual diversity amongst nonhuman animals, Sharon Kinsman states:

> Because most of us are not familiar with the species, and with the diverse patterns of DNA mixing and reproduction they embody, our struggles to understand humans (and especially human dilemmas about ‘sex’, ‘gender’ and ‘sexual orientation’) are impoverished … Shouldn’t a fish whose gonads can be first male, then female, help us to determine what constitutes ‘male’ and ‘female’? Should an aphid fundatrix (‘stem mother’) inform our ideas about ‘mother’? There on the rose bush, she neatly copies herself, depositing minuscule, sap-siphoning, genetically identical daughters. Aphids might lead us to ask not ‘why do they clone?’ but ‘why don’t we?’ Shouldn’t the long-term female homosexual pair bonding in certain species of gulls help define our views of successful parenting, and help [us] reflect on the intersection of social norms and biology? [2001, 197]

Elizabeth Wilson (2002) furthers this invitation to consider nonhuman species through her analysis of Charles Darwin’s work on barnacles. Whilst first assuming that the classification of this organism would occupy little time, it would eventually take years to accomplish, involve correspondence with scientists and collectors around the world, and require the dissection of hundreds of specimens. Through dissection, Darwin discovered that most species of barnacles are intersex: each barnacle has female and male organs. Other barnacles first appeared to be sex dimorphic, but closer inspection led to an interesting discovery. What Darwin initially discarded as tiny barnacle-infesting parasites turned out to be male barnacles. Completely different in bodily shape and microscopically small, the male barnacles lived, embedded, inside the body of the female. This was not ‘simply’ the case of one sex living inside the other; *multiple* (sometimes thousands of) males live inside single females. So barnacles can be intersex but they can also be something else — something we have yet to have a common term for. Wilson points out that ‘these females and hermaphrodites with many husbands are not simply the intermediary stages in the evolution of barnacle form; they are also evidence of the somatic diversity that nature produces’ (284).

To some extent, then, feminist interest in nonhuman animal morphology and behaviour has extended beyond feminist evolutionary biologists and ethologists. I see this interest as part of a wider concern with ‘new materialism’
Briefly, new materialism attends to a number of significant shifts in the natural sciences within the past few decades to suggest agency and contingency (Grosz refers to this as ‘emergence, which is neither free nor determined but both constrained and undecidable’ (1999, 19)) within the living and nonliving world. New materialist developments within the natural sciences have made a significant impression on feminist scholars who increasingly find themselves grappling with issues involving life and matter (for instance, in debates about the body, the sex/gender binary and sexual difference). These analyses acknowledge the reluctance of feminist theory to engage with the natural sciences in so far as matter has been traditionally understood as inert, stable, concrete, unchangeable and resistant to socio-historical change; and that the principle means of studying matter, science, has been used to shore up the subordination of women within patriarchy. The reluctance on the part of feminist theory has meant that, while feminism has cast light on social and cultural meanings of concepts such as sex, gender and sexual difference, there seems to be a hesitation to delve into the actual physical processes through which stasis, differentiation and change take place. Only a minority of feminist studies analyse how physical processes, and particularly nonhuman processes, might contribute to feminist concerns.

This chapter aims to contribute to the growing interest in new materialist approaches to understanding sex, gender and sexual difference. More specifically, I want to bring together two hitherto largely mutually exclusive literatures – new materialism and transsex/transgender/trans – in order to suggest that the study of nonhuman trans might make a useful contribution to a number of debates engendered within the trans literature. These debates include questions about

---

3 For examples of these shifts see De Landa (1997a; 1997b); Deleuze and Guattari (1987); Jonson (1999); Kirby (1997; 1999, 2001); Margulis and Sagan (1997); Rabinow (1992); Sagan (1992).

4 Indeed, elsewhere I suggest that some of the most thought-provoking and promising explorations of new materialism have recently been produced by Australian feminists (Hird, 2003b).

5 For example, much has been written within feminism on eating disorders and the body, including the social construction of dieting, fitness, beauty and the patriarchal system that regulates women’s relationships with their own bodies (see Orbach 1986; Bordo 1993). Despite the enormous number of feminist analyses on the gendered construction of eating disorders, ‘these analyses consider the cellular processes of digestion, the biochemistry of muscle action, and the secretion of digestive glands to be the domain of factual and empirical verification … only a certain understanding of the body has currency for these feminist analyses, an understanding that seems to exclude “the biological body”’ (Wilson 1998, 52).
The analysis of trans is important for feminist theory in as much as it keys into wider debates about the ontology of sexual difference, the vicissitudes of sexuality and the limits of subjectivity. I will argue these debates tend to occur within cultural analyses, as though assuming that trans is a distinctly and exclusively cultural phenomenon. This has serious consequences for some of these debates, such as the authenticity of trans in so far as the debate is anchored by a sense of what is natural about sex. Janice Raymond’s *The Transsexual Empire* (1979) may have to some extent pioneered the view that trans represents an inauthentic claim to (natural) womanhood, but this argument remains central to more recent analyses of trans.

I want to explore evidence that trans exists in nonhuman species and what this evidence might suggest about cultural explanations that implicitly rely upon a nature/culture distinction. In this effort, I want to extend feminist interest in trans as a specifically sexed enterprise (as in transitioning from one sex to another), but also in a broader sense of movement across, through and perhaps beyond traditional classifications. As such, I share Haraway’s interest in trans species/cendence/fusions/gene/genics/national that disturb the hierarchy of taxonomic categories (genus, family, class, order, kingdom) derived from pure, self-contained and self-containing nature. For Haraway, trans ‘cross a culturally salient line between nature and artifice, and they greatly increase the density of all kinds of other traffic on the bridge between what counts as nature and culture’ (1997, 56). What appeals to me about the concept of trans is that it works equally well both between and within matter, confounding the notion of the well-defined, inviolable self which precedes Western culture’s ‘stories of the human place in nature, that is, genesis and its endless repetitions’ (60). As Haraway argues, in these Western stories

… history is erased, for other organisms as well as for humans, in the doctrine of types and intrinsic purposes, and a kind of timeless stasis in nature is piously narrated. The ancient cobbled-together, mixed-up history of living beings, whose long tradition of genetic exchange will be the envy of industry for a long time to come, gets short shift. [61]

With this in mind, I turn now to a short review of feminist approaches to trans with a view to then exploring how animal trans might usefully inform these approaches.

**Debating Trans**

Since the media publicisation of autobiographical narrations of transsex people that began to proliferate in the 1960s and 1970s, feminist scholars have
systematically analysed the social, political, economic and cultural implications of trans in society. For the most part, these analyses tend to argue against trans in so far as it is seen to reify patriarchal constructions of femininity and masculinity. Feminist scholars are familiar with the widely cited analyses of Janice Raymond and Sheila Jeffreys and elsewhere I have critiqued the ontological and epistemological grounds of these analyses (Hird 2002a; 2004d). Here I want to distil the major criticisms that transsex has engendered within feminist theory with the aid of a recent feminist analysis. In her 2000 article ‘Out/Performing Our Selves: Sex, Gender and the Cartesian Dualism’, Tamsin Wilton argues that transsex women represent a ‘shallow’ reading of the body resulting from an uncritical endorsement of Cartesian dualism. Wilton’s critique includes the claim that being a woman despite male corporeality reifies hegemonic regimes of gender, and that transsex people reproduce rigid gender performances.

The first observation is that, despite recent post-structural emphasis on performativity, discussions of transsex remain deeply concerned with authenticity, which is itself anchored in a distinction between natural and artificial sexual difference. In Wilton’s work, for example, authenticity hinges on the notion that experience of gender (phenomenology) and embodied gender (corporeality) must cohere: Wilton combines vaginas (as corporeality) and menstruation (as phenomenology). Whilst it is possible through surgical reconstruction, Wilton argues, for a transsex woman to possess a vagina, she does not have the experience (phenomenology) of womanhood which menstruation apparently constitutes. Nor, according to Wilton, is the transsex woman’s vagina real as it is surgically constructed to the requirement of penile penetration rather than delivering a baby. This, for Wilton, depends on a “shallow” and chronologically static model of the gendered and sexed body which bears little resemblance to its phenomenology’ (244).7 Thus, on Wilton’s terms, transsex fails the authenticity test on two counts: first, it is socially artificial in that transwomen and transmen are precluded from experiencing the meanings of womanhood and manhood; secondly, trans is materially artificial in that the ontology of sexual difference as naturally grounded renders any transition from one sex to another impossible.

This second point coincides with a related critique, that transsex is materially artificial in so far as it relies on human-made technology.

---

6 There is an ironic similarity between Wilton’s description of transsexual women’s vaginas, and Justice Ormrod’s heteronormative, two-gender description of April Ashley’s vagina. See Whittle (2003).

7 Wilton parenthesises the word ‘shallow’ to allude to her critique that the sex change of post-operative trans bodies is only skin-deep such that a technology-made vagina is not connected to a uterus. Elsewhere, I detail the problems with this account of phenomenology and corporeality (Hird 2003c).
Feminist analyses have also concerned themselves with the extent to which trans renders obsolete the modern relationship between sex and gender. Recent transgender and queer studies employ trans as a key queer trope in challenging claims concerning the immutability of sex and gender. As such, trans studies invest heavily in trans’s transgressive potential. For example, Leslie Feinberg refuses to legally conform hir sex to hir expression of gender, instead directing hir efforts towards questioning society’s need to categorise by sex at all – the requirement to pass for Feinberg is itself a product of oppression (Feinberg 1996). Kris asks ‘does the fact that everywhere I go everyone calls me “sir” make me a man? Does the fact that I have breasts and a cunt make me a woman?’ (158). Kate Bornstein argues transpeople are not men or women, not because they are inauthentic, but because transpeople, by their very existence, radically deconstruct sex and gender. Emerging analyses focus on deconstructing the modern two-sex system. As Jacquelyn Zita writes, ‘queer scramble[s] the categories of heterosexual sex/gender ontology and open[s] up the possibility of playing against the edge of meaning with the body’ (1998, 55).

Although trans and queer studies offer very interesting analyses of the gender system, feminist analyses remain ambivalent about the potential of trans to render sex and gender obsolete. The principle problem is that although queer theory contests the attribution of any character to masculinity and femininity, performing or doing gender seems to principally consist in combining or parodying existing gender practices, for instance in assertions of a third sex (Taylor 1995). After the meteoric rise of Gender Trouble as the definitive work on gender transgression through drag, Butler spent some time clarifying her position. In Bodies that Matter, Butler asks whether ‘parodying the dominant norms is enough to displace them; indeed, whether the denaturalisation of gender cannot be the very vehicle for a reconsolidation of hegemonic norms’ (1993, 125). Butler goes to some length to clarify that ‘there is no necessary relation between drag and subversion’: this relationship is more accurately ambivalent in the sense that the parodic imitation is always implicated in the power that it opposes (125).

---

8 Transsexualism currently defines an individual’s relation to gender reassignment – pre-transition/operative, transitioning/in the process of hormonal and surgical sex-reassignment, and post-transition/operative. Transgender and trans signify an attempt to loosen the association between transitioning from one sex to another and hormonal and/or surgical intervention. As such, transgender and trans (and more recently still the term ‘queer’) eschew a foundational essence and focus instead on performativity within socio-cultural relations of power.
Feminist analyses of trans, like those by social scientists generally, have tended to argue from socio-cultural perspectives, as though trans is a distinctly human enterprise. I now want to consider how the concerns about authenticity and transgression outlined above might be affected by a consideration of trans in other species. The diversity of sex and sexual behaviour amongst (known) species is much greater than human cultural notions typically allow. This diversity confronts cultural ideas about the family, monogamy, fidelity, parental care, heterosexuality, and perhaps most fundamentally, sexual difference. For instance, nonhuman animals engage in a very wide range of sexual behaviours. Socio-biologist Edward Wilson notes that ‘monogamy, and especially monogamy outside the breeding season, is the rare exception. Parent–offspring bonds usually last only to the weaning period and are then often terminated by a period of conflict’ (2000, 315). Single parenting, or indeed no parental investment at all, is the norm in the nonhuman living world (only 5 per cent of mammals form lifetime heterosexual pair-bonds). Yet, in human cultures, single parenting is seen as the antithesis of the natural order of things. Amongst nonhuman living organisms, day-care, fostering and adoption are common, as are infanticide (many parents eat their children) and incest. To take one example, in a study of spotted sandpipers, Oring and colleagues (1992) found that fully half of the offspring had been produced by more than two birds, and thus had a complex parental origin.

Nor do many animals have sex solely or primarily in order to reproduce. There is a general lack of acknowledgement of pleasure as an organising force in relations between nonhuman animals, and neoDarwinism generally. Wilson (2000) notes that male house-flies remain copulating with female house-flies for a full hour after all of its sperm are transferred, despite the fact that this prolonged copulation decreases its ability to have sex with other flies (and thus produce more offspring). Indeed, some insects have sex for an entire day. Animals also derive pleasure through masturbation. For instance, one ethologist recounts the following observation of stags:

He may masturbate several times during the day. I have seen a stag do this three times in the morning at approximately hourly intervals, even when he has had a harem of hinds. This act is accomplished by lowering the head and gently drawing the tips of the antlers to and fro through the herbage. Erection and extrusion of the

---

9 For a discussion of child abuse within nonhuman primates, see Reite and Caine (1983).
ANIMAL TRANS

penis … follow in five to seven seconds … Ejaculation follows about five seconds later. [Darling in Anne Fausto-Sterling 1997, 51]

Many female animals engage in sex when they are already pregnant. Birth control is not restricted to humans; many animals practice forms of birth control through vaginal plugs, defecation, abortion through the ingestion of certain plants, ejection of sperm and, in the case of chimpanzees, nipple stimulation. Embryos are also known to kill each other before birth.

Perhaps the single most popular debate about sexual diversity, however, is whether or not homosexual behaviour is natural or unnatural. Homosexual behaviour is part of our evolutionary heritage: it can be traced back at least 24–37 million years (Vasey 1995). Homosexual behaviour occurs in over 450 different species of animals, is found in every geographic region of the world, in every major animal group, in all age groups, and with equal frequency amongst females and males (Bagemihl 1999). Homosexual behaviour in animals is enormously diverse, and in some species is more diverse than heterosexual behaviour (Pavelka 1995). Lifetime pair-bonding of homosexual couples is not prevalent in mammal species, but nor is heterosexual lifetime pair-bonding. More than half of mammal and bird species engage in bisexual activities. Nonhuman animal homosexual behaviour varies in frequency within and between species, from non-existence (that is, it has not been reported by ethologists) to levels that meet or surpass heterosexual behaviour.

Whether homosexual behaviour is still considered a deviation from the heterosexual norm, there is a list of other sexual behaviours classified as abnormal that few people question. Sex between different species is one of them. Yet findings are beginning to emerge to suggest that sexual behaviour amongst nonhuman animals is again much more plastic and diverse than human culture allows. Sexual behaviour between flowers and various insects is so commonplace that it is rarely recognised as transspecies sexual activity. But other examples have been found. For instance, Krizek (1992) documented a sexual interaction between two different orders of insects, a butterfly and a rove beetle. The rove beetle was perched on a leaf with its abdomen elevated. The butterfly approached and for several seconds explored the beetle’s anogenital organs with its proboscis. Krizek notes that other such interactions, between different orders of human and nonhuman animals, have been observed.

In sum, nonhuman living organisms display a wide diversity of sexual behaviour. But nonhuman living organisms also display a wide diversity of sex. Nonhumans eschew the assumption that sex involves two (and only two) distinct (and opposite)
entities (female and male) and further, that these two sexes behaviourally complement each other. Virtually all plant, and many animal species are intersex. That is, living organisms are often both sexes simultaneously – which means that there are not really two sexes at all. Most fungi have thousands of sexes – Schizophyllum, for example, has more than 28,000 sexes. And sex amongst these promiscuous mushrooms is literally a ‘touch-and-go’ event, leading Jenni Laidman to conclude that for fungi there are ‘so many genders, so little time … ’ (2000). Nor are living organisms genetically sex dimorphic. Studies of people with intersex conditions reveal that there are many variations of sex in humans: XXY, XXXY, XXXXY, XXYY and XXXYY to name only a few. There is also great diversity in nonhuman animal chromosome structures: male birds are homogametic with two Z chromosomes and females are heterogametic with one Z and one W chromosome – thus female birds determine the sex of their offspring (Snowdon 1997). Some reptile and amphibian species have no sex chromosomes, and the sex of offspring is determined by the temperature of egg incubation. The platypus has five X chromosomes and five Y chromosomes (Australian Broadcasting Corporation 2004).

Many species also transsex. For ethologists and biologists, sex change typically refers to an organism that functions as one sex during one breeding season and the ‘other’ sex during another breeding season. This definition excludes those organisms that can change sex within one breeding season. David Policansky (1982) documents some of the widely distributed geographically and taxonomically sex-changing species. Given the selective and reproductive advantages of changing sex, Policansky questions why more species do not change sex, rather than attempting to explain why some species do have this ability. In other words, in some families of fish, transsex is so much the norm that biologists have created a term for those ‘unusual’ fish that do not change sex – gonochoristic. The coral goby, for instance, changes sex both ways, between female and male, depending on environmental circumstances. As further examples, earthworms and marine snails are male when young and female when they grow older. Chaetopod annelids show a similar development, but in certain environmental circumstances will change back into males. For instance, when two females are confined together, one female may kill the other female by biting her in half or eating all the available food. When this female has had sex with a male, the male might then turn into a female and bite her in two (Denniston 1980).

Researchers have also found transvestism to be widespread amongst nonhuman animals. Sometimes transvestism takes a physical form, when animals physically resemble the opposite sex.11 Transvestism might also be behavioural,
when a nonhuman animal behaves in ways associated with the opposite sex of their species. Some entomologists, for instance, describe transvestism in various insect species. Denis Owen (1988) describes female *Papilio phorcas* (a type of butterfly) who take on ‘male pattern’ wings of other male butterflies that fly faster and are better able to avoid prey (see also Roughgarden 2004).

Thus, in so far as most plants are intersex, most fungi have multiple sexes, many species transsex, and bacteria completely defy notions of sexual difference, this means that the majority of living organisms on this planet would make little sense of the human classification of two sexes, and certainly less sense of a critique of transsex based upon a conceptual separation of nature and culture.

**The Curiosity of Sex Dimorphism**

In this concluding section, I want to reconsider the concerns of feminist scholars in light of new materialist evidence of sex and sexual diversity in nonhuman organisms. As outlined, the concerns include the authenticity of trans, the ontology of sexual difference, the material artificiality of human trans and the limits of trans as a transgressive identity or being.

**Authenticity**

Some feminist critiques reject the ability of a trans person (usually a trans woman) to authentically experience a gender other than the one assigned at birth. Wilton, for instance, rejects the ability of a trans woman to authentically
experience life as a woman. Whether or not nonhuman animals ‘feel’ themselves to be feminine or masculine is a difficult, if not impossible, question to answer, not least because it requires judgements about what constitutes femininity or masculinity in any given species as well as how this experience might feel, and how we might assess how this experience feels. However, we may assert that nonhuman animals do experience femininity and masculinity to the extent that any given species’ behaviour is gender segregated. To the ethologist, the coral goby fish experiences life as a female coral goby when she reproduces. To suggest that the coral goby is only female if and when she reproduces would be the equivalent of reducing human experiences of womanhood to sexual reproduction, something feminist scholars and activists have argued against for over a century.

The Ontology of Sexual Difference

The second, related, feminist critique argues for an ontology of sexual difference which makes impossible any transition from one sex to another. In the case of all nonhuman living organisms who do trans sex or who completely defy the categorisation of sex dimorphism, this argument cannot be sustained. It might be counter-argued that sex dimorphism is a characteristic of higher life forms and that sex diversity is reserved for lower organisms. To my mind, this hierarchical taxonomy invokes the worst kind of anthropomorphism. As Eileen Crist highlights in her book *Images of Animals* (1999), naturalists like Darwin have been heavily criticised for attributing supposedly unique human qualities (such as affection, fear, anger and joy) to nonhuman animals. Since then, the almost complete hegemony of ethology and sociobiology within neo Darwinism has asserted a rigid separation between human and nonhuman organisms, not only of degree but of kind. At one time, to challenge this hierarchy (and its Judaeo-Christian origins) was to risk being labelled ‘unscientific’. However, such challenges have now begun to filter into mainstream biology. For instance, while George Herbert Mead distinguished humans from all other animals through our supposedly unique ability to recognise ourselves as objects, recent studies conclude that chimpanzees and orang-utans recognise themselves, and subordinate simians hide copulations from other males (Mead 1997; Margulis and Sagan 1997). Language is another trait that human animals favour in distinguishing themselves as entirely unique and superior. However, all ruling, and a case that remains ongoing. See Prasad (2005); Namaste (2000). The case pivots on arguments about the authentic embodiment of femaleness.

13 Ontology tends to (as in Wilton’s case) be morphologically defined.

14 I refer to ethology as a postmodern synthesis of Darwinian theory here.
The recent discovery of symbolic communication by honeybees ‘upsets the very foundation of behaviour, and biology in general’ (Griffin, quoted in Margulis and Sagan 1995, 150).

From Darwin’s perspective, all surviving species are equally successful, and any other classification of superiority or inferiority is based upon human-made criteria. Further, the homogenisation of nonhuman animals shifts attention away from contemplating the possible similarities of organisms (humans share 98 per cent of the same genes with chimpanzees), and more disturbingly, the possible ‘superiority’ of nonhuman organisms in certain respects. We might, for instance, consider that particularly with regard to sex, humans and other primates should be considered inferior to some other organisms. Evolution is commonly assumed to favour sexual reproduction over non-sexual reproduction and sex differences over sex diversity. These assumptions, however, are based more on competing evolutionary theories than on Darwin’s original thesis. New materialism, on the other hand, has generated a renewed interest in what I argue have become more silent, yet nevertheless intrinsic, elements of Darwinian theory: contingency, diversity, nonlinearity and self-organisation (all of which are distinctly non-functional). As Wilson argues, ‘there is no pre-given identity of form or function to be found anywhere in nature [Darwin] argues; rather there is mutation, inconstancy and radical interconnectivity that produces the identities and differences we recognize as individuals and species’ (2002, 284).

Take bacteria for instance: ‘Bacteria are biochemically and metabolically far more diverse than all plants and animals put together’ (Sagan 1992, 377). On their curriculum vitae, bacteria cross species barriers (indeed, bacteria cannot be referred to as a species), perform hypersex, pass on pure genes through meiosis, shuffle genes and successfully resist death. Although the subject of a paper in its own right, it is worth noting that much of the brave new world of reproductive technologies is human mimicry of well-worn, millions-year-old bacterial practices. Our remote ancestors continue to promiscuously exchange genes without getting hung up on sexual reproduction. Bacteria are not picky, and will avidly exchange genes with just about any living organism anywhere in the world, including the human body. Thus bacteria are beyond the female/male dichotomy of human discourse (Margulis and Sagan 1997, 89). Since bacteria recognise and avidly embrace diversity, they do not discriminate on the basis of sex differences at all. The bacteria that move freely into and within our bodies are already infinitely sex diverse.15

15 I am not the only social scientist interested in bacteria. For example, Donna Haraway provides a superb example of how knowledge of biological diversity can inform key feminist debates about embodiment and subjectivity. Haraway describes *Mixotricha paradoxa*, a minute single-celled organism that lives in the gut of the South...
But until recently, the bacterial world has been under-researched, precisely because of assumptions made about the unimportance of bacteria in sustaining the living and nonliving environment. But as Lucien Mathieu and Sorin Sonea note;

The every day contribution of bacteria to life on Earth is momentous’ in terms of the maintenance of global homeostasis, the dependence of living organisms (including humans) on bacteria for processes such as digestion, and, indeed, the origin of species themselves – perhaps it is telling that we feel the need to distance ourselves through a taxonomic hierarchy from our earliest ancestors. [1996, 3]

Sociobiologists and social scientists alike have tended to overlook the sex lives of bacteria in order to adhere to a paradigm that a priori defines the kind of sexual reproduction humans engage in as superior. But as Lynn Margulis and Dorion Sagan argue:

Our own biologically parochial existence as sexually reproducing beings does not mean … that there is only copulatory, genital-based sex or that sex has anything necessarily to do with reproduction … Sex is not equivalent to reproduction. On the one hand, any organism can receive new genes – can indulge in sex – without reproducing itself. On the other hand, plants bud, bacteria divide and cells with nuclei reproduce all without any requirement for sex. [1997, 17]

Evolutionarily speaking, sexual reproduction is a recent phenomenon. Margulis and Sagan argue that sexual reproduction evolved by accident as a necessary by-product of the evolution of multicellularity and cellular differentiation (Margulis and Sagan 1986). In multicellular organisms, cells begin to specialise and carry out different functions: ‘mixis … becomes a consequence of the need to preserve differentiation … mixis itself is dispensable and … was

Australian termite. For Haraway, this tiny organism engenders key questions about the autonomy of identity (we tend to assume that single organisms are defined by the possession of nucleated cells), or as Haraway puts it ‘the one and many’. Mixotricha paradoxa lives in a necessary symbiotic relationship with five other organisms, none with cell nuclei but all with DNA. Some live in the folds of the cell membrane, whilst others live inside the cell, whilst simultaneously not being completely part of the cell. Haraway asks: ‘is it one entity or is it six? But six isn’t right either because there are about a million of the five non-nucleated entities for every one nucleated cell. There are multiple copies. So when does one decide to become two? And what counts as Mixotricha? Is it just the nucleated cell or is it the whole assemblage?’ Advancing a similar argument, Joost Van Loon uses symbiosis theory within nonlinear biology to argue the parasite with the body as the ultimate ‘Other’, and invites a reconsideration of a politics of difference from inside the body. See Haraway (2001); Van Loon (2000).
never selected for directly’ (180). Put another way, ‘multicellularity provided evolutionary advantages and sex came along for the ride’ (Fausto-Sterling 1997, 53). Thus, rather than deliberate on how most living organisms are able to reproduce without sex, scientists are more puzzled by those species that do engage in sexual reproduction. Sexual reproduction consumes twice the energy and genes of parthenogenic reproduction (Bagemihl 1999). After an extensive search of the biological literature on sex, Mackay concluded:

> The most intriguing aspect of my research was why we have sex at all. After all, sexual reproduction in animals started only 300 million years ago. Life on earth got on pretty well for 3000 million years before that with asexual reproduction … Sexual reproduction] takes more time, it uses more energy, and mates may be scarce or uncooperative. [2001, 623]

The Material Artificiality of Human Trans

To argue that human transsex relies entirely upon technology is to significantly circumscribe the definition of technology to the human sphere. As Arthur Clarke points out, ‘we never invent anything that nature hasn’t tried out millions of years earlier’ (2000, 333). At a basic level, life itself is, and has always been, technological in the very real sense that bacteria, protocists and animals incorporate external structural materials into their bodies (Margulis and Sagan 1997). Bacteria also invented all major forms of metabolism, multicellularity, nanotechnology (controlling molecules in ways that continue to elude scientists) and metallurgy. Given that Western societies routinely deploy technology in a plethora of varying circumstances, the specific regulation of technology in the case of transsex becomes a more transparently moral exercise, raising again the association between morality and the nature/culture distinction. For instance, Wilton describes the from-birth vagina as ‘a complex organ, muscular, self-maintaining and dynamic’, compared with the surgical construction of a vagina in which ‘you flay the penis, turn it inside out, and insert it into the pelvic cavity between the bowel and abdominal wall’ (Wilton 2000, 245). Most surgery, I am thinking here particularly of eye and heart, makes for pretty grim reading, and yet may be attributed entirely positive meanings, as in skin ‘flaying’ for burn victim skin-grafting. This use of technology to distinguish between nature and culture obscures the very real and energetic invention and use of technology by nonhuman living organisms (termite high-rise cities include ‘birth chambers,

---

hatcheries, the insect equivalent of schools, hospitals, honeymoon quarters, workshops and morgues’ all under sensitive climate control) as well as the extent to which so-called human technologies actually mimic technology already invented by other species (Margulis and Sagan 2002). The continued focus on technology also further limits the discussion to transsex rather than considering the lived experiences of transpeople more generally.

**Trans as Non-transgressive**

In terms of the debate within feminist theory about the transgressive potential of trans, it seems to me that if trans and queer studies concern the ways in which we might work within current structures to transform sex, gender and sexuality, then the study of trans amongst nonhuman living organisms is a vital part of this project. Wilson notes that feminists have positively reclaimed the notion of perversity for its supposed defiance of nature, in so far as heterosexuality is venerated as normal because it is natural. By taking on board Darwin’s finding that ‘nature is already generatively and happily perverse’, feminist theory might reconsider the ways in which this ‘natural perversity [might] reorganize our culture-centric theories of difference, embodiment and identity’ (Wilson 2002, 284). Indeed, as Phil Macnaghten (2004) writes, ‘from this perspective, trans isn’t “transgressive” at all – it’s natural.’

Elsewhere I critiqued queer theory for what I saw as an implicit assumption that queer is constituted through the domain of culture (Hird 2006). I argued that the morphologies and behaviours of many living organisms are queer in that they challenge heteronormativity. The problem with my argument, it seems to me now, is that I read nonhuman living organisms through the lens of queer, rather than critically reflecting upon how we socio-culturally constitute queer and how we might read queer through a nonhuman lens. Referring to Darwin’s barnacles, Elizabeth Wilson distils this alternate term of reference:

… to characterize Darwin’s barnacles as queer is too glib – if by this characterization we mean that the barnacle simply mimics those human, cultural and social forms now routinely marked queer (the transgender barnacle! The polyandrous barnacle!). This characterization has more punch if it is used, contrariwise, to render those familiar human, cultural and social forms more curious as a result of their affiliation with barnacle organization. The queerness of Darwin’s barnacles is salutary not because it renders the barnacle knowable through its association with familiar human forms, but because it renders the human, cultural and social guises of queer less familiar and more captivated by natural and biological forces. [2002, 284]
We need to consider the viability of continued discussions of human trans as though it were an entirely socio-cultural phenomenon. To take Wilson’s point, we need to resist the temptation to name certain species as queer – queer barnacles, queer Schizophyllum, queer fish, queer lichen. It is much more interesting to consider how we might understand trans in humans from, say, a bacterial perspective. From such a perspective, given the diversity of sex amongst living matter generally, and the prevalence of transsex more specifically, it does not make sense to continue to debate the authenticity of trans when this debate necessarily relies upon a notion of nature that implicitly excludes trans as a nonhuman phenomenon.

Perhaps given its prevalence amongst living matter, we should be concerned with how infrequently humans transsex. As Birke, Bryld and Lykke point out:

… there are sets of practices and performativities, both human and non-human, which reproduce ‘the animal’ as something apart, as different … we need to understand more about ‘animality’ – and hence ‘humanness’ – and how that cuts across gender. But that must be done in ways that allow for animal agency, participation, and performativity – whether they are stag beetles, laboratory rodents, or companions by the feminist fireside. [2004, 178, emphasis added]

References


— (2004d), Sex, Gender and Science (Basingstoke: Palgrave Press).


queering the non/human


Mead, G.H. (1934), Mind, Self and Society (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press).


ANIMAL TRANS

This page intentionally left blank
Chapter 11
Lessons From a Starfish
Eva Hayward

Cripple and the Starfish

Mr Muscle forcing bursting
Stingy thingy into little me, me, me
But just ‘ripple’ said the cripple
As my jaw dropped to the ground
Smile smile

It’s true I always wanted love to be
Hurtful
And it’s true I always wanted love to be
Filled with pain
And bruises

Yes, so Cripple-Pig was happy
Screamed ‘I just completely love you!’
And there’s no rhyme or reason
I’m changing like the seasons
Watch! I’ll even cut off my finger
It will grow back like a Starfish!
It will grow back like a Starfish!
It will grow back like a Starfish!’
Mr Muscle, gazing boredly
And he checking time did punch me
And I sighed and bleeded like a windfall
Happy bleedy, happy bruisy

I am very happy
So please hit me
I am very happy
So please hurt me

I am very happy
So please hit me
I am very very happy
So come on hurt me

I'll grow back like a Starfish
I'll grow back like a Starfish
I'll grow back like a Starfish
I'll grow back like a Starfish
I'll grow back like a Starfish
I'll grow back like a Starfish
I'll grow back like a Starfish
I'll grow back like a Starfish
Like a Starfish …

(Antony and the Johnsons 2000).

I call this piece a critical poetics rather than a cultural account, so as to foreground the process of writing in it. For I want this to be a doing and a knowing that I get woven into — a kind of phenomenological telling. I am not only describing and articulating, not merely charting the geography, but am pulled into the gerunds of what I write out. That is to say, I am not creating a new narrative; rather I’m simply pulling at the stitches of ongoing processes. I am here not to confess, but to confect; I bear witness through relating.

Of Species and Sexes

I have been in an e-mail exchange with Susan Stryker.1 During this correspondence, Stryker brought to my attention a particular song, ‘The Cripple and the Starfish’,2 by Antony and the Johnsons. Stryker thinks that Antony is probably ‘trans or at least gender-queer’, and that the song seems to point toward ‘a yearning for transformation’. Although it is difficult to say anything definitive about someone else’s ‘transition’ or gender identity, I agree with Stryker.3

1 Susan Stryker has enormously influenced this essay. She was the first to suggest to me that the song was about transgender transformation, and that the song demonstrated how transformation is a means of ‘addressing a hurt, and of moving through that hurt’. Thank you, Susan.


3 In a Björk Podcast (#6), Antony explicitly defines as ‘transgender’. However, I think the content of the song illustrates a kind of transgender/transsexual embodiment
I listen to the song; I find the layered tones in Antony’s voice haunting, and the lyrics startling: ‘I’ll even cut off my finger’; ‘I’ll grow back like a Starfish’; ‘Happy bleedy, happy bruisy’. My iTunes player calls the song ‘alternative’, that ambiguous over-populated term. The music ‘ripples’ through styles and textures. Antony’s voice vibrates (vibrato), fluctuating and undulating with emotional expressiveness: sometimes soft and tender and ripe with satiety and fulfilment (‘I am very happy/So please hit me’) then shifting in cadence to declarative and triumphant (‘I’ll grow back like a Starfish’). Following the rise and fall of the song, Antony’s voice shifts between low and high, deep and bright. Antony’s voice creates a waving space, a singing sea – the pace and rhythm of his/her phrasing expresses frenetic and calm movements, the periodicity or the punctuated changes of things and events. Could it be that Antony sings the tones of whales calling, the syncopation of herds, the transfiguring surf? This is to ask: how do the tone and the wording of ‘The Cripple and the Starfish’ put us in touch with things that it mentions or hints at?

I wonder, thinking about the transsexual re-formations and the starfish re-generations that are suggested in the song, ‘What is the transformative and relational power of prefixes like trans- or re-?’ I mentioned this wonderment to Stryker. She wrote in response, ‘What this calls my attention to is the need to become more specific in how we think about the re-/trans-distinction in trans discourse.’ My question grew insistent; I wanted to understand how re-(as is re-turn or re-new) and trans-(as in elsewhere) were differently embodied. Beyond my own identity as a transsexual woman, or the political formation of transgender/transsexual,4 I wasn’t certain about the ontological processes of bodily transformation (my own or others’). How does re-assignment define transitioning for some trans-subjects? Moreover, I wondered if starfish – ‘I’ll grow back like a Starfish’ – or more properly ‘sea stars’, might provide some prefixial lessons or guides through language, metaphor and other tropological terrains. Do some starfish not re-generate themselves from injury? Is the ‘cripple’ not re-pairing him/herself through the act of cutting? Is transsexual transformation also re-generative? Am I not in part a transsexual through the re-working and re-folding of my own body, my tissue and my skin? In being transsexual, am I also becoming ‘like a starfish’ as the song suggests? When

regardless of Antony’s own identity – after all musicians do not need to be faithful to their identities.

4 I use transgender and transsexual interchangeably in this essay. I do so not to elide the significant differences between these identities, but to foreground the shared concerns and desires for embodiment. This is to say, being transgender does not exclude bodily change, nor does being transsexual mean one will have sex-reassignment surgery.
does metaphor transform into metonymy? Is the metaphorical device of ‘like-ness’ (‘like a starfish’ or like a woman) too clumsy a rhetorical device for the kind of poetic and material enactments of trans-sexing/speciating?

In addition to stirring my interest, Stryker also provided me with several interviews with Antony and other promotional materials. I have excerpted two key quotations from Antony that evocatively link the group (and Antony him/her-self) both to trans histories and human-animal relationships. During an interview with *Velle Magazine*, Antony, the founder of ‘Antony and the Johnsons’, discusses the emergence of the band:

The Johnsons’s name is a reference to a hero of mine named Marsha P. Johnson, who was a street activist from the mid 60’s [sic] all the way through to her death in the early 90’s [sic]. Marsha P. Johnson was a street prostitute and a very visible figure on Christopher Street through the 70’s [sic] and 80’s [sic], very renowned for her kindness. You know, her nickname was Saint Marsha. She was a very gregarious sort of outsider street presence and she was rumored to have thrown the first bottle in the Stonewall Riot – I mean whether that was true or not was a bone of contention among several different queens.5

Marsha Johnson,6 or Saint Marsha, and Sylvia Rivera,7 an important figure in the nascent ‘transgender’ civil rights movement, started a group in 1970 called STAR, Street ‘Transvestite Action Revolutionaries.8 In Antony’s own words, a transgender legacy is written into the music group; ‘she’, an ‘outsider’, a queen of colour, who threw ‘the first bottle’, who was murdered in 1992, structures the creative and political intent of the band. Johnson is Antony’s ‘hero’, perhaps, and I say this only speculatively, an ego ideal.

7 For a bio on Sylvia Rivera, which sadly is also an obituary, see <http://www.workers.org/ww/2002/sylvia0307.php>.
8 My suggestion that STAR was a ‘transgender’ political organization is a bit ahistorical, considering that ‘transgender’ as a social identity was still only emerging during these years. All too often, gender variant communities and their contributions to social change, however, get lost in more traditional gay/lesbian historiographies. So, I risk playing the part of a ‘bad historian’ in the hopes of encouraging more inclusive historical projects.
Antony is clear to emphasise the ‘collage’ quality of her/his music and sound in relation to her/his creative process:

I think my creative process has always been what I’ve described as accumulative. I collect a lot of different shards and pieces, and I create something that feels meaningful to me by finding relationships between them and putting them into a kind of a collage … You know, for me, I’m really drawn to singers that are full of feeling and are seeking transformation. I like transformative singing, you know, singing that starts one place and ends in another place.9

Classification is evaded for something more ‘transformative’, something ‘that starts one place and ends in another place’. Trans-, a prefix weighted with across, beyond, through (into another state or place), does the now-familiar work of suggesting the unclassifiable. To be trans is to be transcending or surpassing particular impositions whether empirical, rhetorical, or aesthetic. Antony speaks of the affective force of his/her transformation in songs and in singing. Transformations – not unlike transgenders – are produced through emotive forces. ‘Shards’ and ‘pieces’ (again, of something broken) are reworked into meaningful integrities, but not wholes.

In another interview with *The Guardian*,10 Antony discusses her/his album, *I Am a Bird Now*, which was included in the 2004 Whitney Biennial.11 The record has been described by Antony as ‘A record of transformations and survival. Its characters move between states – life and death, male and female, human and animal – searching for sanctuary and fulfilment.’ Antony proposes transformation as a trope for reworking the relationality of male and female, human and animal. Perhaps I am the only one hearing it, but in the texture of Antony’s voice, the instrumental variations and in the lyrics themselves, boundaries of sexual and species differences, artificial and authentic orderings, and nature and culture are affectively and literally trans-ed in their music.

‘Trans’ is meant to disturb purification practices; the well defined is confounded at multiple material and semiotic levels. Psychical and corporeal

---

experiences are blended. For example, gender and the embodiment of gender are contingencies that may hold for a moment then fall away into another set of relationships. Species exist in taxonomic differences (*Homo sapiens sapiens* are not the same as *Octopus vulgaris*), but species are also *always already* constitutive of each other through the spaces and places we cohabit — his of course includes language and other semiotic registers. Indeed, species are relationships between species — relationality is world-hood. Matter is not immutable, Antony and the Johnsons suggest, it is discursive, allowing sexes and species to practice trans-materialisation. The meat and meaning for humans and starfish have no structuring lack, no primordial division, but are sensuously intertwined.

**Trans-form**

In ‘The Cripple and the Starfish’, transformation is indeed a fusing of organisms, energies and sexes. I am intrigued by the phrase ‘cut off my finger, it’ll grow back like a starfish.’ Let us start with the cut — the ‘cripple’ wants ‘Mr Muscle’ to ‘please hurt me’ and ‘cripple’ will ‘even cut off my finger’. From what has been suggested by the song and Antony him/herself, I presume that ‘cripple’ wants to transform through cutting (amputation or castration); the ‘cripple’ can be heard as a transsexual/transgender M2F seeking transformation. At first, the cut finger leads me, and perhaps other listeners/readers, to think that the cut is an act of castration — the finger works as a substitute for the penis. ‘Cripple’ wants to become a ‘woman’ through the cutting-off of her penis. Certainly, some transsexual women ‘cut off’ their penises in order to have solidarity with females or to become female themselves.

I am not interested in how the cut is an absence (as in castration) but how it is a generative enactment of ‘grow[ing] back’ or healing. The cut enacts trans-

---

12 Again, I risk reading the ‘Cripple’ as a trans-subject not to iterate the pathologisation of trans-folks, but to explore the imaginings of the song. For the transsexual/transgender subject, gender assignments can feel ‘disabling’, even wounding. I’m speaking about this traumatic experience, not about transgressive exceptionalism in which gender/sex changes prompt ‘revolutionary potential’. I am simply returning to my own bodily knowledge — carnal logics — of pain and possibility.

13 I use solidarity to suggest something other than identification. I’m not suggesting that transsexual women do not become female (some certainly do), but I want to hold out the possibility that the transsexual woman can also become a kind of woman *made of* her various ontologies. I want to value the experience of becoming transsexual as something particular to transsexuals, even as that experience is constitutive of other sexes and their constitutiveness — together all the way down. This line of reasoning is explored in Stone (1993).
embodiment – to cut is not necessarily about castration, but an attempt to re-cast the self through the cut body. The whole (body) and the part (cut) are metonymically bound in an attempt to trans-form in toto. However successful or not, however uncomfortable for listeners/readers, however seemingly masochistic, ‘cut off my finger’ and ‘please hit me’ can be understood as wished-for metamorphosis by the ‘cripple’. To cut off the penis/finger is not to be an amputee, but to produce the conditions of physical and psychical re-growth. The cut is possibility. For some transsexual women, the cut is not so much an opening of the body, but a generative effort to pull the body back through itself in order to feel mending, to feel the growth of new margins. The cut is not just an action; the cut is part of the ongoing materialisation by which a transsexual tentatively and mutably becomes. The cut cuts the meat (not primarily a visual operation for the embodied subject, but rather a proprioceptive one), and a space of psychical possibility is thereby created. From the first, a transsexual embodiment does not foreground a wish to ‘look like’ or ‘look more like a woman’ (that is, passing). The point of view of the looker (those who might ‘read’ her) is not the most important feature of trans-subjectivity – the transwoman wishes to be of her body, to ‘speak’ from her body.

When I pay my surgeon to cut my penis into a neo-vagina, I am moving toward myself through myself. As the surgeon inserts the scalpel and cuts through the thickness of my tissue, my flesh immediately empurples. For weeks afterward, my groin remains discoloured and swollen. Between the surgeon’s efforts and my body’s biomechanics, my cut spills blood and affect. My cut enacts a regeneration of my bodily boundaries – boundaries redrawn. Through my cut, I brush up against invocations and revelations; my cut is not passive – its very substance (materially and affectively) is generative and plays a significant role in my ongoing materialisation. My cut is of my body, not the absence of parts of my body. The regenerative effort of my cut is discursive; my transfiguring cut is a material-discursive practice through which I am of my body and of my transself. My cut penis entails being and doing, materiality and affect, substance and form. My cut is generative within material limits but not with affective fixity, my tissues are mutable in so far as they are made of me and propel me to imagine an embodied elsewhere.

Not surprisingly, scholars, activists, students and artists have questioned the meaning and significance of transsexual/transgender embodiment. Some have suggested that the experience of transsexuals is determined, both negatively and positively, by the forms of our bodies. Rather simplistically, it has been suggested that the pre-operative transsexual feels constrained by the ‘wrong body’ and longs to acquire the whole or healed body, which is represented by the male or female form. According to this account, transsexual selfhood is
entangled with images of bodily wholeness – what’s more, there is an idea of ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ of the body that are at odds. The body is a container – a body-bag of nouns to keep the proper ones in order. The transsexual aspires to make the so-called ‘defective body’ intact, entire, complete, in order that it may be owned as mine, as me. It is undeniable that such agonising experiences of bodily disownment are true and important for some transsexuals, nor is it difficult to believe that transsexual alterations are not simply chosen or kinds of mutilation, but the transformation of an unliveable, fragmented body into a ‘liveable whole’.

What I find disconcerting about this description of the transsexual is not the trouble of containment; it is the limiting of the body to containment alone. To be comfortable in one’s own body is not only to be restricted, limited, contained, or constrained, or not this alone. It is to be able to live out the body’s vicissitudes – its (our) ongoing process of materialisation. The body (trans or not) is not a clear, coherent and positive integrity. The important distinction is not the hierarchical, binary one between wrong body and right body, or between fragmentation and wholeness. It is rather a question of discerning multiple and continually varying interactions among what can be defined indifferently as coherent transformation, de-centred certainty, or limited possibility. Transsexuals do not transcend gender and sex. We create embodiment by not jumping out of our bodies, but by taking up a fold in our bodies, by folding (or cutting) ourselves, and creating a transformative scar of ourselves. For example, neo-vaginas are made from originary penises or skin grafts, and the beards of F2Ms emerge from their own testosterone-invigorated hair follicles. There is no absolute division, but continuity between the physiological and affective responses of my different historical bodies. Again, I am of my body in order that I might experience a subjective, energetic transformation.

A transsexual (myself, for example) is never discontinuous from different states of embodiment, or at least I am only generally distinguished from different historical states of my own beingness. By nature, the body has something tautological about it: skin here is always intractably skin. It is as if a M2F transsexual always carries her various embodiments with herself. Let me be clear here, I am not suggesting anything as banal as that ‘male privilege’ is carried into female embodiment – I am not making a socio-cultural argument about authenticity (such arguments should be put to rest by now!). If my subjective embodiment has always been ‘transgender’, then my material transformation is meant to congeal my differently trans-embodied experiences of body and mind. What I am suggesting when I say that embodiment is coherence, is that I am always of my tissue even in its ongoing transformation. Whatever the transsexual grants to vision, the subjective embodiment is always only partially visible. We
see the physical efforts, but the psychical energies only express themselves within the limits of the body.

Changeability is intrinsic to the transsexual body, at once its subject, its substance and its limit. Our bodies are scarred, marked and reworked into a liveable 'gender trouble', sex trouble, or uneven epidermis. Transsexuals survive not because we become whole, but because we embody the reach and possibility of our layered experience – we have no choice. This is all to say, the transsexual body, my body, is a body created out of necessity, ingenuity and survival – to carry the heft of social identity. I, like many transsexuals, may desire some mythic wholeness, but what is truly intact for me, what I live, what I must be part of, is a body pliant to a point, flexible within limits, constrained by language, articulation, flesh, history and bone.

Re-form

‘I’ll grow back like a starfish.’ From the start, I notice two things: first, my finger has been substituted for ‘I’; secondly, we have moved from the metonymy of the cut to the metaphor of trans-speciation. The starfish seemingly appears as a stand-in for transsexual transformation – the animal appears only as a tool for thinking about beingness. Let us not forget, the metaphor is a displacement: a nominative term is displaced from its everyday context and placed elsewhere so as to illuminate some other context through its reconfiguration. Thus, the relationship is based on the relationship of ideas rather than objects – metaphor does not owe any allegiance to the literal object. The ‘cut’, in contrast, is structured by a metonymy of embodied correspondences and correlations. Metonymy is a tropological operation quite different from metaphor. Metonymy brings together two objects, each of which constitutes a separate whole. Metonymy refers to conditions of correspondence: cause to effect, instrument to purpose, container to content, ‘cut’ to trans-body.

I wonder if the starfish is more than metaphor (not that metaphor isn’t enough). Playing on the side of zoomorphism, I wonder if being starfish shares in the ontological imaginary of becoming trans-sexed. I don’t want to propose that transsexualism is the same as trans-speciation, but rather that both share in the materialisation of the trans-figure described in ‘The Cripple and the Starfish’. Both the starfish and the transsexual ‘grow back’, differently but with similar phenomenological goals of bodily integrity and healing. Is it possible, and here I take a leap, that while the ‘cut’ has a metonymic force in trans-embodiment, could not ‘like a starfish’ also suggest a metonymy of trans-speciation. For example, literal animals are always part of figural animals; animals cannot be displaced by words, rather words carry the nervous circuitries, the rhythms, the
tempos of the literal. Animals are always constitutively formed in language – human and not, animal and not. Animals (though not necessarily animals alone – but that is for another collection of essays) are bound in language such that language cuts into flesh but does not completely devour the body. The literal ‘cut’ bleeds around the word ‘cut’, which is where the conditions of subjective transformation emerge. Likewise, the starfish, an echinoderm, a regenerating body, an invertebrate that can in some species reproduce new individuals through bodily divisions, exceeds the metaphoricity of ‘likeness’ because the starfish is only ever partially digested, defined, explained, used by language.

Some species of starfish also reproduce asexually by fission, often with part of an arm becoming detached and eventually developing into an independent individual sea star. Some sea stars have the ability to regenerate lost arms. Most species must have the central part of the body intact to be able to regenerate, but a few can grow an entire starfish from a single ray. This bit of morphological knowledge leads me to wonder about trans-formative versus re-generative. Trans-prefix has more to do with the sense of across, through, over, to or on the other side of, beyond, outside of, from one place, person, thing or state to another. If we think about re-prefix however, the original sense of re- in Latin is that of ‘back’ or ‘backwards’, but in the numerous words formed by its usage, the prefix acquires various shades of meaning. For example, re-generate: to form, construct, or create anew, especially in an improved state; to give new life or energy to; revitalise; and in biology, to replace (a lost or damaged organ or part) by the formation of new tissue.

How might the ‘Cripple’ yearn for re-generation in order to transform? ‘I’ll even cut off my finger. It will grow back like a Starfish.’ To me, this is a literal instantiation of sea star biodynamics – s/he will re-grow her/his finger, but not necessarily transform her/his finger. In broader terms, s/he is also re-sexed body just as she/he also becomes subjectively transsexual. Although subtle, the work might be in how prefixes shape and re-shape the prepositions of the discourse; re- is of the body, not in the body (as trans embodiment is often articulated – for example, ‘trapped in the wrong body’). Re- makes all enactments constitutive of the ‘form-er’ (even if that ‘form-er’ is an ongoing process of materialisation). Re- might offer a more ‘crippling’ approach to the limit and containment of the flesh. Re-generative is a process that is enacted through and by containment (the body). In this way, regeneration is a re/iterative enactment of not only growing new boundaries (re-bodying), but of imperilling static boundaries (subjective transformation). Re-generation can attend to desire, pathos, trauma, but also to modes of corporeal intimacy, fleshy possibility and, most importantly, re-embodiment.

Re-generation is something that both transsexuals and starfish do. Transsexuals and starfish do other kinds of prefixial relationships between
inside/outside, subject/object, or predator/prey, but in re- they share a phenomenological experience of re-shaping and re-working bodily boundaries. How might prefixes help us to understand the ways that we (starfish, transsexuals and others) autonomise and generate embodiment? Re-grow, re-differentiate, re-pattern, re-member, re-nucleate: our bodily structures, our biodynamics, are materiality enacted through ongoing relationships with the world, as part of that world. Transsexuals and starfish challenge disembodied metaphors (such as ‘like,’ resemblance, or simile), and propose ways in which we are metonymically stitched to carnal substrates. In other words, I’m not like a starfish; I am of a starfish. I am not trapped in my body; I am of my body.

**Meat of Meaning**

As for language, I turn to Akira Mizuta Lippit’s important discussion of ‘animetaphor’ (a play on anti-metaphor and animal-metaphor; that is, animals exceed metaphoricity). Lippit writes, ‘The animetaphor is … never absorbed, sublimated, or introjected into the world but rather incorporated as a limit … The animetaphoric figure is consumed literally rather than figuratively’ (Lippit 1998, 1115). The ‘animetaphor’ (that which tries to speak for/about specific animals) is metonymic, foregrounding the ways that the lived being always already inhabits language, grammar, syntax and metaphor. The ‘animetaphor’ is about how animals exist within practices of signification – nonhuman animals are not merely subjected to primate language; nonhuman animals are always already reworking language. The real animal is constantly present in Adam’s Genesis. Animals, in their own ways, inhabit language. Language emerges from an ontology that is ecological, *anima*, the animal den, the wave and the invertebrate.

Lippit suggests that the ‘animetaphor’ foregrounds the complex ways that animal representations are always haunted, vexed, reworked and enfolds by real animals. Animals expose the limits of representation. Lippit shows how animality, animal spirits and organisms themselves reside as ‘real’ within representations. He writes:

On the verge of words, the animal emits instead a stream of cries, affects, spirits, and magnetic fluids. What flows from the animal touches language without entering it, dissolving memory, like the unconscious, into a timeless present. The animal is magnetic because it draws the world-building subject toward an impossible convergence with the limits of world, toward a metaphysics of metaphor. The magnetic animal erases the limits of the metaphor, affecting an economy of the figure that is metamorphic rather than metaphoric. It forces a transformation of the figure. [1998, 1120]
Lippit posits that metaphors and representations create spaces where nonhuman animals can be pointed to ‘without naming’, subsumed ‘without securing.’ That is to say, the animetaphor, the living metaphor, is always pointing to a space (even if it is always already in language) outside of language, exposing the limits of language.¹⁴

Working with the ‘animetaphor’ figure of Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok (1994), Lippit is suggesting here that, animals in language are always transforming figure into flesh, always dis-figuring representation. Animals are always troubling the language that attempts to name them. In this way, nonhuman animals seem to put an oral void into language. Animals cannot be named without invoking the limits of the process of naming. This is not a tautology. Animals are in and of language and representation, but their lived bodies are always restoring words to beings. Lippit writes, ‘When the metaphoricity of the metaphor collapses, the concept becomes a metonymic thing that can be eaten’ (1998, 1122). Animals in language rest at the edges of the mouth, my mouth; I taste the failure of language to describe animals, and savour the presence of real animals flanking my sentences, my words. My language cannot digest the tissue and meat of nonhuman animals – a meal that cannot be digested.

Taking Lippit’s ‘animetaphor’ and applying it to ‘The Cripple and the Starfish’, ‘starfish’ point to the limits of representation, where ‘like a starfish’ has corporeal meaning. The starfish referent is constantly touching me and devouring its representation. Antony’s starfish is fiercely present as a regenerating body in the song about it. Eating and hearing are collapsed as phenomenological modes of encounter within this starfish song. Antony’s starfish consumes me through the excess of its referentiality. The listening subject (myself, for example) is wholly or partially touched by the soma of the named starfish. The referent itself establishes itself as that-which-is-re-embodifying-this. As I listen to Antony’s song, rather than anthropomorphising the starfish through identification, I am simultaneously chewing on and being chewed on an economy of excess, carnality, materiality and indexicality.

The word ‘starfish’ puts me in contact with starfish themselves. As Antony sings ‘starfish’, the literal starfish resounds in his/her voice. The word maps out the dense tissue of starfish lifeways. For me, Antony intensifies the encounter, the meeting between the bodies of species. ‘Like a starfish’ enacts an artistry on the starfish and the subject of the ‘animetaphor’. ‘I will grow back like a starfish’ solicits both ‘I’ and the starfish to inhabit those words; with those words we move into life. ‘I’ is a word that finds roots in oneself; ‘starfish’

transplants a figural element into a literal one. Out of the murmuring sensations of ‘The Cripple and the Starfish’ come words and the babble of others that are uttered into oneself, into one’s bone marrow, one’s anatomy and one’s circadian rhythms. This inter-somaticity of starfish (material) and ‘starfish’ (semiotic), of ‘I’ and me is a kind of loving, a kind of nearness that invokes a voluptuary of trans-speciation, and imagines a co/passionate kind of presence. Language and music enacts a caressing, a sensuous immersing in the ardent materiality of world-hood.

Ripple

‘Ripple’ (Oxford English Dictionary):

1. A slight cut, scratch, or mark. Verb: to scratch slightly; to graze or ruffle.
2. A piece of shallow water in a river where rocks or sand-bars cause an obstruction; a shoal.
3. A light ruffling of the surface of water, such as is caused by a slight breeze; a wavelet.
4. A wave on the surface of a fluid the restoring force for which is provided by surface tension rather than by gravity, and which consequently has a wavelength shorter than that corresponding to the minimum speed of propagation.
5. A sound as of rippling water.
6. To mark with or as with ripples; to cause to undulate slightly.

‘Ripple’ creates the ruffling within the subject that allows ‘Happy bleedy, happy bruisy’ to become the conditions for bodily regeneration, psychical transformation and trans-speciation. ‘Ripple’ tears and fiddles with the idea that language/representation is a cut between the phenomenal world and the knowing subject. ‘Ripple’ with the ‘The Cripple and the Starfish’ creates the carnal foundations forrefixial enactments that take meat and meaning seriously. The ‘cripple’ and ‘like a starfish’ provide an extreme collapse between the figural and the real. In other words, prefixes (trans- and re-) are kinds of relationships that ripple and rupture the field of representation. The starfish and the transsexual point beyond the limits of language, allowing both figures to exceed any kind of palliative function (‘like a woman’ or ‘like a starfish’).

The transsexual – again I speak of this experience not to the side of my body, but because of my body – energetically ripples the body, marks the meat, with re-form, re-grow, re-shape so that subjective transformation may occur: transition, transsex, trans-be; this is prefixial rippling. The prefix re- must take up the body in order that trans- might become. The starfish, depending on species, can re-
grow a damaged ray. The lost ray, again in some species, may become another individual, rippling into another state of being. This is to say, the starfish changes its bio-geometry in relationship to its environment – it is entangled and reshaped and transfigured through encounters. Moreover, the metonymic qualities of embodiment always links semiotics to matter. ‘Starfish’ is a representation with tube feet; transsexual is an identity that bleeds and is cut.

‘Ripple’ reminds me of starfish locomotion. Starfish have hydraulic water vascular systems that facilitate movement. Ocean water comes into the system via the madreporite (a small opening in the aboral surfaces of starfish). Saltwater is then circulated from the stone canal to the ring canal and into the radial canals. The radial canals carry water to the ampullae and provide suction to the tube feet. The tube feet latch on to surfaces and move in a wave, with one body section attaching to the surfaces as another releases. ‘Ripple’ defines the biomechanics of tube feet.

‘Ripple’, on a somatic level, reminds me of my own physical vulnerability – my animate transsex flesh. Might I share this same somatic sensitivity with the starfish in the most basic sense of redressing harm: regeneration as an act of healing. Transsexing is an act of healing. This is some kind of mutuality – some kinds of shared ontology. Trans-morphic as zoomorphic – if we can understand the cut as an act of love, then can we not imagine that ‘like a starfish’ is an enactment of trans-speciating? We, transsexuals and starfish, are animate bodies; our bodies are experienced and come to be known through encounters with other animate bodies. These epistemological moves describe a shared phenomenological ontology. This is sensate intertwining – inter-corporeal zones between these bodies in language and in experience. Starfish and transsexuals share world-hood both semiotic (as metonymic kinds) and phenomenological enactments – is this not some form of inter-somaticity?

‘It’s true I always wanted love to be hurtful’, sings Antony in ‘The Cripple and the Starfish’. If, as I hope I’ve illustrated here, the literal and the figural – the matter that means and the meaning that means – emerge as interlocking and dynamic. ‘Hurt’ is not a masochistic enactment (or, at least, not this alone), but signals a breach in language and a tear in the traditional subject/object formation. The material, the literal matter of being, surfaces and resurfaces as a constitutive force that cannot be digested in the acid fluids of anthropic concerns. ‘Animetaphor’ and metonymy applies a figurative sense as a literal one, while yet retaining the look or feel of figurality. A phenomenology of the rippling subject having and making sense of the song reveals to us the inter-corporeal function of lived bodies – as both carnal and conscious, sensible and sentient – and how it is we can apprehend the sense of the song both figurally and literally.
Correlatively, a phenomenology of the experience of this lived intersomaticity and differentiation in the song reveals to us – in the metonymic articulations of language – the reversible and oscillating structure of the lived body’s experience of language. To put it simply (if densely): in the act of ‘making sense’ of the song, metonymy is to language as rippling is to lived bodies. Ambivalently subtending fusion and difference, ambivalent in its structure and seemingly ambiguous in meaning, metonymy not only points to the ‘gap’ between the figures of language and literal lived-bodies experiences but also inter-corporeally, rippling, ‘bridges’ and intertines a sensate ontology. Thus, ‘The Cripple and the Starfish’ mobilises, differentiates and yet entangles lived bodies and language, and foregrounds the inter-somaticity of sensible matter and sensual meaning. As zoomorphic, re-morphic and trans-morphic subjects, then, we possess an embodied knowledge that both opens us beyond our discrete capacity for listening to a song, opens the song far beyond its containment in iTunes’s ‘alternative’ and opens language to a metonymic and biodynamic knowledge of specific carnal origins and limits. This is what my being transsexual knows about being a starfish.

References


Modern Love?

In a book on ‘Alternative Political Imaginaries’ (Halberstam in progress), I examine the political and critical possibilities of alternative epistemologies, and particularly the modes of knowledge production associated with queer modes of being. In recent years, the ‘alternative’ has been cast in academic studies as a utopian and potentially naïve project that fails to address the ‘real’ engines or issues of power. Usually, theories of culture have sought to locate alternatives to dominant ideology in avant-garde production but my book argues instead that allegedly unknowing popular texts, particularly animated films that have been produced in mainstream contexts, may in fact present viewers with more open fields of play and allow for much broader interpretive practices. Hence this book articulates a theory of the alternative as an oppositional but not an elitist practice and form of critique that contests dominant logics of power in the age of global capitalism. In this chapter, I explore ideas about humanness, alterity, alternative imaginaries and animation in relation to two odd pieces of animation; one presents itself as a nature film and the other features animated dolls.

I will be defining ‘animation’ here in relation to the notion of ‘transbiology’ developed by Sarah Franklin via Donna Haraway. For Donna Haraway, and for Sarah Franklin, the ‘transbiological’ refers to the new conceptions of the body within the new technologies of cloning and cell regeneration; Franklin builds upon Haraway’s theorisation of the cyborg in her infamous ‘Cyborg Manifesto’, and she returns to earlier work in Haraway that concerns itself with biogenetic extensions of the body and of the experience of embodiment. Franklin explains:
I want to suggest that in the same way that the cyborg was useful to learn to see an altered landscape of the biological, the technical, and the informatic, similarly Haraway’s ‘kinding’ semiotics of trans can help identify features of the postgenomic turn in the biosciences and biomedicine toward the idioms of immortalization, regeneration, and totipotency. However, by reversing Haraway’s introduction of trans- as the exception or rogue element (as in the transuranic elements) I suggest that transbiology – a biology that is not only born and bred, or born and made, but made and born – is indeed today more the norm than the exception. [2006, 171]

The transbiological can be conjured by hybrid entities or in-between states of being that represent subtle or even glaring shifts in our understandings of the body and of bodily transformation. The female cyborg, the transgenic mouse, the IVF methods that Franklin researches, the Tamagotchi toys studied by Sherrie Turkle, new forms of animation, all question and shift the location, the terms and the meaning of the artificial boundaries between humans, animals, machines, states of life and death, animation and reanimation, living, evolving, becoming and transforming. But there are forms of becoming and being that evolve outside of reproductive dynamics and logics and while the spatial and temporal logics of hetero-reproduction quietly map themselves across entire corporeal circuits of intimacy and kinship, other non-reproductive logics and practices just as subtly assert other modes of being and attest to the interdependence of reproductive and non-reproductive communities.

In this chapter, I want to examine the narrative and visual transbiological leaps that we have made in our understandings of terms like ‘heterosexuality’ and ‘homosexuality’, male and female, individual and community, in an age of artificial insemination, transsexuality and cloning. I also want to propose that popular culture has already imagined multiple alternatives to male and female, masculine and feminine, family and individuality and, that contemporary popular culture, specifically horror film and animation, can provide a rich archive for an alternative politics of embodiment, reproduction and non-reproduction. Such alternatives are important to visualise and recognise if only because what Franklin and Haraway term as the ‘transbiological’ is all too often absorbed into new formulations of the same old notions of kinship, relationality and love. The porous boundary between the biological and the cultural is quickly traversed without any sense of rupture whatsoever, and the biological, the animal and the nonhuman are simply recruited for the continuing reinforcement of the human, the heteronormative and the familial. In other words, while it is true that reproduction and kinship relations become more and more obviously artificial, the concept of the ‘human’ tends to absorb the critique that inevitably follows from the natural and it does so because we reinvest so vigorously and so frequently in the scaffolding that props up our flailing humanity.
While the relationship between sexuality and reproduction has never been much more than a theological fantasy, new technologies of reproduction and new rationales for non-reproductive behaviour call for new languages of desire, embodiment and the social relations between reproductive and non-reproductive bodies. At the very moment of its impending redundancy, some newly popular animal documentaries seek to map reproductive heterosexuality onto space, and particularly they seek to ‘discover’ it in nature by telling tales about awesomely creative animal societies. But a powerfully queer counter-discourse in locations as diverse as evolutionary biology, avant-garde art productions, animated feature films and horror film, unwrites resistant strains of heterosexuality and recasts them in an improbable but persistently queer universe.

In this chapter, I explore the notion of ‘animation’ in much the way that Haraway and Franklin unpack the ‘transbiological’. Animation will mean variously: recent computer-generated cartoon imagery; ventriloquism, puppetry, liveliness. But it will also mean politicisation (as in the projection of political meaning onto otherwise potentially neutral activities), dynamism, the production of allegories. The purpose of this chapter is to animate alternatives wherever we may find them. The two examples of animation that I have chosen to explore here represent two very different models of the nonhuman and of animated life. In the first, *The March of the Penguins* (2005), an examination of the life-cycle of Antarctica’s emperor penguins, becomes the occasion for a far-fetched narrative about human love, family and reproduction. This narrative frame, in fact, animates the penguins’ activities and reads them into an already existing narrative about the human. In the second, *Seed of Chucky* (2004), the narrative of the human quickly exhausts its own narrative potential and the doll narrative becomes far more compelling, lively and perverse. As we move from the ‘natural’ narrative of reproduction to the highly artificial narrative of doll sex, we also enter the very queer terrain of the animated.

**Penguin Love**

If I turn now to my first of two case studies, we can begin to see reproheterosexuality as a belated, anachronistic and frantic but internally contradictory ideology, in the Euro-American context, which works hand in hand with capitalism and gender stability to try to bolster the ‘rightness’ of our forms of social organisation at the very moment when they seem to be morphing into other, as yet indiscernible, modes of being in the world. My first case study is the ‘penguin porn’ from summer 2005: *The March of the Penguins*. In his absorbing documentary, *The March of the Penguins*, about the astonishing life-cycle of Antarctica’s emperor penguins, Luc Jacquet frames the
spectacle of the penguins’ long and brutal journey to their ancestral breeding grounds as a story about love, survival, resilience, determination and the hetero-reproductive family unit. Emperor penguins, for those who missed the film (or the Christian Right’s perverse readings of it), are the only remaining inhabitants of a particularly brutal Antarctic landscape that was once covered in verdant forests but is now a bleak and icy wilderness. Due to global warming, however, the ice is melting and the survival of the penguins depends now upon a long trek that they must make once a year, in March, from the ocean to a plateau 70 miles inland where the ice is thick and fast enough to support them through their breeding cycle. The journey out to the breeding grounds is awkward for the penguins, which swim much faster than they waddle, and yet, the trek is only the first leg of a punishing shuttle they will make in the next few months back and forth between the inland nesting area and the ocean where they feed. While this does not immediately sound like a riveting narrative, the film was a huge success around the world.

The film’s success depends upon several factors: first, it plays to a basic human curiosity about how and why the penguins undertake such a brutal circuit; secondly, it provides intimate footage of these animals that seems almost magical given the unforgiving landscape and practically pornographic given the access the director provides to these creatures; finally, it cements the visual and the natural with a sticky and sentimental voice-over about the transcendence of love and the power of family that supposedly motivates the penguins to pursue reproduction in such inhospitable conditions. Despite the astonishing footage, the glorious beauty of the setting and of the birds themselves, The March of the Penguins ultimately trains its attention on only a fraction of the story of penguin communities because its gaze remains so obstinately trained upon the comforting spectacle of ‘the couple’, ‘the family unit’, ‘love’, ‘loss’, heterosexual reproduction and the emotional architecture that supposedly welds all these moving parts together. However, the focus on heterosexual reproduction is misleading and mistaken, and, ultimately, it blots out a far more compelling story about cooperation, collectivity and non-heterosexual, non-reproductive behaviours, a story to which we will return later.

Several sceptical critics remarked in reviews that, amazing as the story might be, this was not evidence of romantic love among penguins and ‘love’ was targeted as the most telling symptom of the film’s annoying anthropomorphism.1 But heterosexual reproduction, the most insistent framing

---

1 See, for example, Roger Ebert (2005) and Stephen Holden (2005). Holden writes: ‘Although “March of the Penguins” stops mercifully short of trying to make us identify with the hardships overcome by a single penguin family, it conveys an intimate sense of the life of the emperor penguin. But love? I don’t think so.’
device in the film, is never questioned either by the filmmakers or the critics. Indeed, Christian fundamentalists have recently promoted the film as a moving text about monogamy, sacrifice and childrearing. And this despite the fact that the penguins are only monogamous with their mates for one year, and that they promptly abandon all responsibility for their offspring once the small penguins have survived the first few months of arctic life. While conventional animal documentaries like *The March of the Penguins* continue to insist upon the heterosexuality of nature, evolutionary biologist Joan Roughgarden insists that we examine nature anew for evidence of the odd and non-reproductive and non-heterosexual and non-gender stable phenomena that characterise most animal life. Roughgarden’s wonderful study of evolutionary diversity, *Evolution’s Rainbow* (2004), explains that most biologists observe ‘nature’ through a narrow and biased lens of socio-normativity and they therefore misinterpret all kinds of bio-diversity. And so, while transsexual fish, hermaphroditic hyenas, non-monogamous birds and homosexual lizards all play a role in the survival and evolution of the species, their function has been mostly misunderstood and folded into rigid and unimaginative hetero-familial schemes of reproductive zeal and the survival of the fittest. Roughgarden explains that human observers misread (capitalist) competition into (non-monetary) cooperative animal societies and activities; they also misunderstand the relations between strength and dominance and they overestimate the primacy of reproductive dynamics.

As an example of sexual diversity among animals, Roughgarden cites the case of clownfish. Among clownfish, according to Roughgarden, the mating couple does tend to be monogamous; so much so that if the female partner should perish (as she does, for example, in the animated Pixar feature *Finding Nemo* (2000)), the male fish will transsex and become female. She will then mate with one of her offspring to recreate a kinship circuit. Roughgarden explains clownfish behaviour, along with all kinds of other such morphing and shifting, less as evidence of the dominance of the reproductive circuit and more as an adaptive affiliative process that builds social structures around stable community rather than around reproductive familial ties. Roughgarden’s models of animal community deliberately break with Darwinian readings of animal behaviour that have coded human values like competition, restraint and physical superiority into interpretations of eclectic and diverse animal behaviours.

Which, of course, brings us right back to the penguins and their long march into the snowy, icy and devastating landscape of Antarctica. It is easy, in fact, especially given the voice-over, to see the penguin world as made up of little heroic families striving to complete their natural and pre-given need to reproduce. The voice-over, indeed, provides a beautiful but nonsensical narrative that remains resolutely human and refuses to ever see the ‘penguin logics’ that structure their
frigid quest. When the penguins mass on the ice to find partners, we are asked to see a school prom with rejected and spurned partners on the edges of the dance floor and true romance and soulmates in its centre. When the mating rituals begin, we are told of elegant and balletic dances while we see awkward, difficult and undignified couplings. When the female penguin finally produces the valuable egg and must now pass the egg from her feet to the male’s feet in order to free herself to go and feed, the voice-over reaches hysteria pitch and sees sorrow and heartbreak in every unsuccessful transfer. We are never told how many penguins are successful in passing the egg, how many might decide not to be successful in order to save themselves the effort of a hard winter, how much of the transfer ritual might be accidental and so on. And so the narrative goes, ascribing stigma and envy to non-reproductive penguins, sacrifice and a Protestant work ethic to the reproducers and always seeing capitalist hetero-reproductive-family rather than the larger group.

Ultimately, the voice-over and the Christian attribution of ‘intelligent design’ to the penguins’ activity must ignore many inconvenient facts: the penguins are not monogamous; they mate for one year and then move on. The partnered penguins find each other after returning from feeding by bird calls, not by some innate and mysterious coupling instinct. And, perhaps most importantly, the non-reproductive penguins are not merely extras in the drama of hetero-reproduction: in fact, the homo or non-repro queer penguins are totally necessary to the temporary reproductive unit! They provide warmth in the huddle, probably extra food, and they do not leave for warmer climes but they accept a part in the penguin collective in order to enable reproduction and to survive. Survival, indeed, in this penguin world, has little to do with fitness and everything to do with collective will. And once the reproductive cycle draws to a close, what happens then? The parent penguins do protect their young in terms of warmth, but the parents do nothing to stave off attacks by aerial predators; there the young penguins are on their own. And once the baby penguins reach the age when they can also take to the water, the parent penguins slip gratefully into another element with not even a backward glance to see if the next generation follows. The young penguins now have five years of freedom, five glorious, non-reproductive, family-free years before they too must undertake the long march. The long march of the penguins then is neither proof of heterosexuality in nature, the reproductive imperative nor evidence of intelligent design. It is, in fact, a resolutely animal narrative about cooperation, affiliation and the anachronism of the homo-hetero divide. The indifference within the film to all non-reproductive behaviours obscures the more complex narratives of penguin life: we learn in the first five minutes of the film that female penguins far outnumber their male counterparts and yet repercussions of this
ANIMATING REVOLT/REVOLTING ANIMATION

gender ratio are never explored; we see with our own eyes that only a few of the penguins continue to carry eggs through the winter, but the film provides no narrative at all for the non-egg-carrying birds; we can presume that all kinds of odd and adaptive behaviours may take place in order to enhance the chances for survival for the penguins (like the adoption of orphaned penguins, for example) but the film tells us nothing. In fact, while the visual narrative reveals a wild world of nonhuman kinship and affiliation, the voice-over relegates this world to the realm of the unimaginable and unnatural.

The March of the Penguins has spawned a whole new genre of penguin animation, beginning with Warner Brothers’ Happy Feet in 2006 but soon to be followed by Sony picture’s Surf’s Up (2007) and Bob Saget’s animated spoof The Farce of the Penguins (2007) for Thinkfilms. The primary appeal of the penguins seems, based upon the success of Happy Feet anyway, to be the heart-rending narratives of family and survival that contemporary viewers are projecting onto the austere images of these odd birds. On account of the voice-over, however, we could say that The March of the Penguins is already an animated feature film, and in fact in the French and German versions, the penguins are ventriloquised by individual voice-overs rather than narrated by a ‘voice of god’ trick. Here the animation works not to emphasise the difference between humans and nonhumans, as it does in so many Pixar features, but instead it makes the penguins into virtual puppets for the drama of human love which cinema is so eager to tell.

Many animated features for kids, ‘Pixavolt’ films as I call them, focus upon certain thematics which would never ever appear in adult films but which are central to the success and emotional impact of the Pixar narrative. The Pixavolt films proceed by way of fairly conventional narratives about individual struggle but they mostly use the individual character only as a gateway to intricate stories of collective action, anti-capitalist critique, group bonding and alternative imaginings of community, space, embodiment and responsibility. In one recent film, Over the Hedge (2006) by Dreamworks, just for example, the film stages a dramatic stand-off between some woodland creatures and their new junk food-consuming, pollution-spewing, SUV-driving, trash-producing, water-wasting, anti-environmentalist human neighbours. As the creatures awake from their winter hibernation, they discover that while they were sleeping, a soulless suburban development stole their woodland space and the humans have erected a huge partition or hedge to fence them out. The creatures, raccoons and squirrels, porcupines and skunks, turtles and bears, band together in a cross-species alliance to destroy the colonisers, tear down the partition and upend the suburbanites’ depiction of them as ‘vermin’. We only see the humans through the eyes of the woodland creatures and, as in countless other animated features, the humans look empty, lifeless and inert – in
fact, unanimated. *Over the Hedge* (OTH) like other films in the Pixarvolt genre makes animation itself into a feature of kinetic political action rather than just an elaborate form of puppetry. The human and nonhuman then are featured as animated and unanimated rather than real and constructed or subjects and objects. The band of creatures in *Over the Hedge* makes up a complex compendium of the nonhuman and they even feature a Hegelian possum who plays dead when in danger and explains to his daughter wisely: ‘Playing possum is what we do. We die so we may live!’ Ultimately, this children’s feature offers more in the way of a vision of collective action than most independent films and critical theory put together, and the film’s conclusion points to queer alliance, queer space and queer temporalities as the answers to the grim inevitability of reproductive futurity and suburban domesticity.

A short list of films that I would feature in my Pixavolt genre would include: *Finding Nemo, Over the Hedge, Shrek 1* (2001) and *Shrek 2* (2004), *Chicken Run* (2000), *Babe* (1995), *Wallace and Gromit in the Curse of the Were-Rabbit* (2005), *The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie* (2004) and *Monsters, Inc.* (2001). It would not include *The Incredibles* (2004), *Toy Story* (1995), *Madagascar* (2005), or *Chicken Little* (2005). In the Pixavolt flicks, animated animals or odd animated human-like subjects, like SpongeBob, or animated animals like Gromit who live with animated humans like Wallace, all transform our understanding of relationality, morality and social change by inhabiting worlds where common sense leads not to home-owning, or family values, or individualistic aspiration, but rather the Pixavolt world is comprised of a strangely radical combination of socialist and anarchist notions mixed with odd translations of ‘animal values’. The chickens in *Chicken Run*, a matriarchal group for the most part, recognise that they are not only the labour on the Tweedy farm but soon to be the product; the fish in *Finding Nemo* understand that the dangers of the deep are less the sharks than the fishermen; SpongeBob and his buddy Patrick take on the greedy entrepreneur on the ocean’s bed; the monstrous and pathetic rejected fairytale characters in *Shrek* form a refugee camp outside Shrek’s swamp, and so on.

Not all animated features fit the Pixarvolt bill. And so a film like *The Incredibles* builds its story around the supposedly heroic pathos of male mid-life crisis and invests in an Ayn Randian or scientologist notion of the special people who must not suppress their difference in order to fit in with the drab masses; *Happy Feet* similarly casts its lot in with individualism and makes a heroic figure out of the dancing penguin who cannot fit in with his sick-making, sentimentialist, heart song-singing community … at first. Eventually, of course, the community expands to incorporate him but they, sadly, learn valuable lessons along the way about the importance of every single one of the rather uniform penguins learning to ‘be themselves’. Of course, if the penguins really were being
‘themselves’, that is, penguins, they would not be singing Earth Wind and Fire songs in blackface as they do in the movie, and searching for soulmates; they would be making odd squawking noises and settling down for one year with one mate and then moving on!

In fact, Happy Feet, disappointingly, takes the most sentimental aspects of the ‘documentary’ or at least of the narrative told in voice-over in The March of the Penguins, and it transforms the dignified spectacle of emperor penguins cooperating with one another in order to survive brutal winters and global warming into a Broadway musical about an individualistic penguin who resists penguin conformity. It also performs race in some rather strange ways by using a Black idiom for the notion of freedom (dancing and singing to songs by Black performers, inspirational pulpit preaching, gospel songs), but having white actors provide the voices for all of the main characters. In an inadvertent form of minstrelsy, the dancing and singing penguins are easily identified as ‘Nicole Kidman’, ‘Hugh Jackman’ and ‘Robin Williams’ while they are speaking but when they sing, they channel Stevie Wonder, Prince, Patti LaBelle and others! In fact, Happy Feet actually swims against the tide of the newly popular genre of computer-animated films for children.

In Over the Hedge and other Pixavolts, desire for difference is not connected to a neoliberal ‘be yourself’ mentality or to special individualism for ‘incredible’ people, rather, the Pixarvolt films connect individualism to selfishness, to untrammelled consumption and they oppose it with a collective mentality. Two thematics can transform a potential Pixarvolt film into a tame and conventional cartoon: family and romance. The Pixavolt films, unlike their un-revolting conventional animation counterparts, seem to know that their main audience is children and they seem to also know that children do not invest in the same things that adults invest in: children are not coupled, they are not romantic, they are collective creatures, they are in a constant state of rebellion against their parents and they are not the masters of their domain. Children stumble, bumble, fail, fall, hurt; they are mired in difference, not in control of their bodies, not in charge of their lives and they live according to schedules not of their own making. The Pixavolt films offer the child an animated world of triumph for the little guys, a revolution against the business world of the father and the domestic sphere of the mother – in fact, very often, the mother is simply dead and the father is enfeebled (as in Robots, Monsters Inc., Finding Nemo and Over The Hedge). Gender in these films is shifty and ambiguous (transsexual fish in Finding Nemo, other-species-identified pig in Babe); sexualities are amorphous and polymorphous (the homoerotics of Spongebob and Patrick’s relationship and of Wallace and Gromit’s domesticity); class is clearly marked in terms of labour and species
diversity and bodily ability is quite often at issue (Nemo’s small fin, Shrek’s giganticism). While recent animations tend to be all too unrevolting (see aforementioned Happy Feet but also Flushed Away), the genre itself seems to have made a commitment to the quirky, the rebellious and the queer; while Happy Feet dances the new penguin chic all the way to the bank, perhaps there’s another grim and less cheery animation in the making, one where dancing penguins give way to more of the unsettling and perverse animal narratives that we have come to love and trust.

But despite the disappointing transmutation of the Pixarvolt genre into a more domesticated product, animation still holds out hope for the disruption of the cheery tales of heterosexual courtship. As Sianne Ngai (2005) comments in an excellent chapter on race and ‘animatedness’ in her book Ugly Feelings, ‘animatedness’ is an ambivalent mode of representation, especially when it comes to race, because it both reveals the ideological conditions of ‘speech’ and ventriloquism, but it also threatens to reassert grotesque stereotypes by fixing on caricature and excess in its attempts to make its nonhuman subjects come alive. Ngai grapples with the contradictions in the television animated series The PJs, a foamation production featuring Eddie Murphy and focusing upon a Black, non-middle-class community. As Ngai shows in a meticulous analysis of the show’s genesis, its genealogy and its reception, the foamation puppets provoked an array of responses, many of them negative and many focused upon the ugliness of the puppetry and the racial caricature that the critics felt the show revived. Ngai responded to the charge of the ugliness of the images by arguing that the show actually ‘introduced a new possibility for racial representation in the medium of television: one that ambitiously sought to reclaim the grotesque and/or ugly, as a powerful aesthetic of exaggeration, crudeness, and distortion’ (105). And she examined The PJs scathing social critique and its intertextual web of references to Black popular culture in relation to its technology, the stop-motion process, which, she claims, exploits the relationship between rigidity and elasticity both literally and figuratively such that: ‘The PJs reminds us that there can be ways of inhabiting a social role that actually distort its boundaries, changing the status of “role” from that which purely confines or constricts to the site at which new possibilities for human agency might be explored’ (Ngai 2005, 117). Obviously, Happy Feet does not exploit the tension between rigidity and elasticity in the same ways that The PJs do in Ngai’s reading of the show.

**Seed of Chucky: Transbiology and the Horror Flick**

And so we must look into the genres where the unimaginable and the unnatural form the terrain of representation itself in order to counter the dominant
narratives of ‘natural reproduction’. In my next case study, I want to track transbiology to the animated horror film. In an age when massive debates about the meaning of life take place across representative ambiguous forms of embodiment – the embryo as neither baby nor simply proto baby, the cyborg as human and machine, the comatose Terri Schiavo as vegetative, the family pet as companion and irreducibly other, the human partner as both family pet and symbiotically the same – the horror film has become and remains a fabulously rich site for imagining and working out the relations between the human and its others, or the nonhuman and its queering of the site of embodiment. In earlier eras, the horror film theatricalised the unstable relation between inside and outside, or it located the inhuman as already part and parcel of the human, or it scrambled the gendered relations between sexed bodies. Indeed, the slasher film has always been a site for alternative configurations of embodiment, belonging, family, desire and identification.

What Sarah Franklin refers to in her work as the legacy and the future of ‘transbiology’, or rather, ‘the contemporary reorganization of living matter’ takes place not only in the laboratories she studies and surveys but also in the incorporation of the new technologies of artificial insemination, cloning and regeneration into new narratives about the horror of human embodiment. While studying science can tell us about our dreams of transformation, studying horror can lead us to contemplate our fears and misgivings about the human, the posthuman, the unhuman and deliberately nonhuman. One horror film series, *Child’s Play*, starring Chucky, a reanimated doll, and his animated bride, Tiffany, exemplifies the power of the neo-splatter film, its ability to dismantle not only the so-called real world of men and women and repro-heteronormativity but also its peculiar talent for imagining true alternatives in the queer social relations and counter-publics that the films imagine and call into being.

I am interested here in the fifth film in the series: *Seed of Chucky*. The teaser trailer opens with an image of an embryo suspended in the womb and a voice-over intones: ‘With every new life, with every new generation, comes the hope that they will make the world a better place … to kill! Deliver us some evil.’ As if riffing on Lee Edelman’s acid-tinged polemic against the child in *No Future* (2004), where he argues that the heteronormativity of the political realm is guaranteed by the use of the metaphor of the child as a symbol of hope for a better tomorrow, this trailer upends our expectations about parental ambition. The humanist hope that seeks to find the present extended in the future and the narcissistic wish structure, that demands that the child repeat the sins of the parents, comes to a grim and bloody end in *Seed of Chucky*. Chucky’s parents, the match made in Hell of Chucky, the reanimated Good Guy doll, and his hideous bride, Tiffany, have brought their union to unholy fruition in *Bride*.
of *Chucky* (1998), the fourth instalment, and reproduction, natural, unnatural and downright queer, becomes the central drama in this hilarious episode. But the Chucky series also refuses Edelman’s flat rejection of the child as a place of resistance and it builds its hope, very differently, around the body of the unsexed and ambiguously gendered child.

For Sarah Franklin, hope plays a role in the new embryology as infertile couples deposit sperm and eggs and embryos in science labs. When they give reproductive material to science, as Franklin says:

… couples therefore *trans-substantiate* their embryo from being ‘their own’ to becoming an anonymous, publicly funded medical-scientific embryonic cell line that, rather than being a specific entity, becomes part of a shared, collective commitment to scientific progress – a value that is almost inextricable from hope. [2006, 18]

But hope for what? Hope for the extension of life by another ten years? Hope that more wealthy parents with fertility issues can reproduce themselves? Hope that the continuing trend of a steep decline in the number of babies born to white families in the US and Europe and Australia will not be outpaced or eclipsed completely by the steady rise in populations of colour? Hope, as Edelman suggests, goes hand in hand with repro-normativity and can be, must be countered by ‘the negativity of the queer’ which allows us to ‘refuse the insistence of hope itself as affirmation, which is always affirmation of an order whose refusal will register as unthinkable, irresponsible, inhumane’ (2004, 4).

In place of hope, life and affirmation, Edelman offers the anti-social theory of negativity, impossibility and the death drive. The death drive, the counter-intuitive but insistent limit to all imaginings of an ever-extended body and the endpoint to survivability itself, inscribes itself over and across the annoyingly buoyant scientific dreams of forever, of the end of disease, of regeneration. And the death drive, in the end, is as important to transbiological imagination as the seemingly altruistic, but actually simply corporate, desire for extended life.

Horror film is the home of the death drive and *Seed of Chucky* is transbiology in the unmaking. *Bride of Chucky*, the fourth film in the *Child’s Play* series, ended with a horrific scene of birth from death – Tiffany has been pulverised and stabbed by her loving husband Chucky but she gives birth while seemingly on her death-bed. The sequel, inevitably, explores the outcome of the birth of Tiffany and Chucky’s ‘seed’ and it extends the search by Tiff and Chucky for human bodies into which they hope to transubstantiate their souls in order to leave their plastic casings behind once and for all. I want to close my chapter with a reading of reproductive and transbiological politics in *Seed of Chucky* because the film so insistently refuses the sentimental or altruistic narrative of child rearing and, like the penguin porn film, it offers some fantastic scenes
of alternative and queer modes of non-reproduction and transbiology laden with critiques of the human and of normative gender. If, as Franklin suggests, transbiology ‘carries its own politics, and they are, as Haraway insisted so rightly, essentially sociological’, then we must look for the ripple effects of those unpredictable, sometimes queer and sometimes all too normative politics, in the stories we tell ourselves, in all seriousness, and with heaps of irony about ‘unnatural’ and engineered reproduction. The extracorporeal embryo, Franklin’s work proposes, is not any longer an exceptional feature of human kinship, it is now part of the postmodern family and it interjects its own convulsive and sinister politics of hope and human improvement into otherwise sad and dreary narratives about reproductive failure. And so, while the spectacle of the cyborg embryo in another historical moment represented an altered and potentially queer vision of human progress and transformation, today the cyborg embryo merely extends the ‘naturalness’ of family and the rightness of reproduction.

In Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein (2004/1818), she created a fantasy of scientific control of reproduction and she imagined both the freeing-up of women from the burden of childbirth and the horror of assigning the responsibility of birth to the scientific lab. The queer potential of nonhuman reproduction came to life in the monster and was eradicated in the same gesture as Dr Frankenstein seeks to eradicate his creation. The Chucky series thematises and keeps alive the queer effects of making reproduction and sex into laboratory techniques. Shelley’s monster eclipses its maker, kills his master’s human chances of love, romance and hetero-reproduction and creates a new pairing of maker and monster which triumphs over the heterosexual couple. In the Chucky series, the dolls see humans as inferior life forms, as fleshly pods for the incubation of their own seed, and heterosexuality as completely outmoded.

There are three scenes/figures for transformative and queer embodiment in this film: first, Tiffany and Chucky’s child and his/her ambiguous gender; second, the technology of doll animation and its interaction with ideologies of humanism; finally, the use of a human female, Jennifer Tilly, in the film as a surrogate mother for Chucky’s babies. Each figuration offers a critique of the human, exposes the relations between human and normative gendering and reproduction, and offers an alternative formulation of embodiment, desire and identity. I will now offer a brief description of these three transbiological moments in the film.

No Gender

Tiffany and Chucky are reanimated in Seed of Chucky by their own offspring who gives birth to his parents rather than the other way round. When he finds them
in a props studio, with cables coming out of their backs, the oddly melancholic
doll child recognises his parents by the ‘made in Japan’ stamp on their wrists,
identical to the one he bears on his own. Chucky and Tiffany have ended up in
a film about Chucky and Tiffany and so the whole film within a film becomes
a reflection on the production of spirals of discursive truth in the realm of
transbiology. Confronted with the strange figure that has reanimated them,
Tiffany and Chucky are horrified by the ugliness of their saviour. However,
when he claims to be their child, both parents rush to claim him and name him.
At this point, the question of gender arises and Tiffany calls him Glenda while
Chucky names him Glen (riffing on Ed Wood’s hilarious B movie, Glen or Glenda
(1953)). Glen/da turns out to be anatomically incorrect and in a hilarious scene
of the construction of sex, the proud parents stare at the naked crotch of their
child and both claim to ‘see’ the genitals they want to see. Glen’s gender is only
resolved in the film’s conclusion when he kills his father to save his mother – it
is the social and Oedipal act which genders him. In this brilliant intersexual
thematic, gender legibility is shown to be important for the parents, not the
child, and the film foregrounds the ways in which normative identity requires
stable gender. In refusing to be either Glen or Glenda and in insisting on being
both, Chucky and Tiffany’s kid focuses our attention on the horrific effects
of heteronormativity and turns attention away from the monstrosity of the
ambiguous gendered body.

No Human

Just as hetero/homo seems like an afterglow of an earlier discursive structure,
so the human in this film fades to black and leaves the Chucky doll in its place.
While the Chucky films seem like ‘child’s play’, as the subtitle of the series
implies, actually, they are masterful creations of cyborg technology and each
doll requires about seven or eight puppeteers or human technicians. Each doll
has two neutral heads and one screaming head, multiple arms and several bodies.
The three main bodies for each doll include: positionable, floppy and stunt. These
three body types might best describe the fate of the body in the laboratory
of transbiology: through discourses of science, nature and reproduction, we
become positionable and we perform within an arc of prescribed motions and
responses. In our floppy mode, discourse makes the body and unmakes it often
in the same gesture: what makes us perform a gender say, also implies some
kind of floppiness, it implies that we are performed by gender. In the stunt
mode, the body does something that is seemingly impossible and in its survival,
a new understanding of the body is born. In Chucky’s case, Chucky desires
a permanent move from his limited doll body to a real live human body. But
after watching the spectacle of human childbirth, courtesy of the Jennifer Tilly character, Chucky decides he actually is better off in his positionable/floppy/stunt body.

Transbiology

After the bloody birth of Chucky Jr, Tiffany announces that she is done with reproduction and she decides that Chucky must donate sperm to impregnate a human with their babies. This way Glen/da will have a human body to transubstantiate himself into. Two hilarious scenes follow: one in which Chucky masturbates to a horror magazine in order to provide the seed, and another ‘lesbian’ scene in which Tiffany uses a turkey baster to impregnate Jennifer Tilly. Here IVF leaves the purity of the lab. Franklin explains:

Like the cyborg, transbiology is also made up out of the complex intersection of the pure and the impure, where quality and biological control are literally merged to create new kinds of organisms, but this purity is hedged about by pathology of various kinds. Like the cyborg too, the transbiological is not just about new mixtures, playful recombinations of parts, or new assemblages: it is fundamentally defined by the effort to differentiate these dirty descent lines into functional, safe, and marketable human biology. [2006, 20]

Or … the transbiological emerges in the gothic imaginary as the very pathological fringe described here by Franklin as the ‘dirty descent lines’ which are rejected in favour of ‘marketable human biology’. The plastic and lesbian scene in which Tiffany impregnates Jennifer Tilly with Chucky’s sperm to produce human babies, parodies the entire IVF project and its barely submerged eugenic trajectory and hope for the improvement of the species.

Conclusions

Obviously I am not locating the Chucky narratives in the same relation to IVF technologies that Frankenstein occupied in relation to early nineteenth-century fears of population control and the dangers of childbirth and the hope for new technologies of contraception … but then again, why not? The animated dolls, with their constructability, manipulability, plasticity and queer gendering, like the non-reproductive penguins in The March of the Penguins, are particularly well suited to tell another story of transbiology, one in which the meaning of human, gender, body, reproductive, failure, hope, life and death have been remade; one in which art and biology nestle alongside each other; a transbiology, in other words, that finds the body remade not merely in genetic experimentation but
in the reimagining of the body, the human and its others in film, in the so-called natural world and in art. The world of animation, ultimately, distorts, manipulates and messes with human form in a way that makes humanist ideals like heterosexual love and individualism seem creepy and that elevates post-human, stunt subjectivity from revolting animation to animating revolt.

References

Chicken Run (2000) dirs P. Lord and N. Park (animated cartoon).
Glen or Glenda (1953) dir. E.D. Wood Jr. (feature film).
Wallace and Gromit in the Curse of the Were-Rabbit (2005) dirs S. Box and N. Park (animated cartoon).
This page intentionally left blank
Chapter 13

The Nanoengineering of Desire

Luciana Parisi

**Affective Relationality**

It is difficult not to feel a strange familiarity when hearing about genetically modified food, cloned mammals, and artificially grown cells and tissues. In this biotechnological age, the evolution of the human species is bypassing sexual exchange and the threat of the death drive. Yet, biotechnology seems to be caught in the middle of a positive paradox: the more it guarantees control of the reproduction of life the more it challenges its biological forms and functions. The more it promises the absolute regeneration of *bios*, the more it exposes the autonomy of the inorganic from the organism.

Biotech amplifies the uncertainties about the body-sex and sexual difference at the core of evolutionary dynamics. Darwin himself suggested that sexuality is not always compatible with the reproduction of the species and that sex’s variations are dependent on environmental pressures (1993/1859, 117–20; 319–74). Nevertheless, sexual reproduction and sexual difference have continued to maintain a certain identity in biotechnologies. It has been argued that the biotech’s apparatus of power – from IVF treatments to medical discourses – acts to reinforce the biological determinants of gender. Biotech’s techniques of fertilisation, such as ectogenesis, indeed seem to accelerate the desexualisation of difference and the disembodiment of the maternal.

Yet, we may need to ask: is a body-sex the mirror of discourses? Is sex the end-product of ideological structures? Is sexuality determined by sex? And if the body, sex and sexuality were instead primarily thought of in terms of movements, affects, percepts, ecologies of desire? How would we explain the impact that biotech realises on the body-sex and sexual difference? In other words, how can we account for the way biotech contributes to changing the perception of sexual difference below the level of the discursive, in the imperceptible layers of affective relations? These seem to be crucial questions

---

to ask if we want to detract sexuality from ontologies of essence and structures, identity and signification.

In the field of science studies, there have been considerable attempts to disentangle sexuality from ontologies of essence. In particular, the notion of type at the core of the Aristotelian metaphysics of nature has been questioned by scholars of evolution suggesting that the body-sex changes over time according to environmental conditions. This crucial mobilisation of natural science against the metaphysics of fixed essences has opened notions of sexuality and sexual difference up to a new spatio-temporality of the body-sex now embedded in evolutionary contingencies. Yet, the reattachment of sexual difference to nature has also served as a scientific source to redetermine the essence of sex, the normalities and the abnormalities of sexuality, a new system of perfect correspondence between sex and gender, the natural and the cultural, the biological and the sociological.

Many feminists in science studies have crucially shown that such a system of correspondence is based on an ideological reification of nature as the ultimate source of truth of human culture. Much work has then been devoted to detaching gender from sex, to exposing the material-semiotic constructions of sex, sexual difference and queer sexuality, and to reformulating the autonomy of gender from its biological source. The works of feminists, such as Judith Butler, have marked a novel approach to sexuality as performance, with an emphasis on doing and undoing gender rather than biologically being of this or that gender. In brief, to avoid the trap of naïve essentialism, the biologism of sexuality, a critical tendency towards the emphasis of (semiotic) techniques of gender performance has acquired a central voice in modes of conceptualising sexual difference and queer sexuality.

From this standpoint, biotechnologies, or cyborg technologies of communication and extension of the body, have become a favourite instrument to mobilise radical critiques against the natural. Since Donna J. Haraway’s publication of the ‘Cyborg Manifesto’ (1991), such critical tendencies against the natural have pushed the debate about sexuality, sexual difference, queer sex towards an emphasis on the artificiality of the body, suggesting that despite the advancement of cybernetic technologies, genetic engineering, transgenesis, and so on in a specific historical context, it is possible to dare to say that we

---

2 Elisabeth Grosz, for example, has recently reread Darwinian theories of evolution in the light of Henri Bergson and Friedrich Nietzsche’s philosophy of difference and has argued that sexual difference at the core of all evolutions needs to be rethought as a process of differentiation or bifurcation of one sex into two (Grosz 2004).

3 Amongst many theories taking on such a critical task in the field of queer studies, see Sullivan (2003).
have always been cyborgs. There has never been an ultimate essence to nature. Rather, nature cannot be disentangled from the cultural artefacts through which we live, experience, affect the natural. In feminist science studies, the concept of the cyborg has helped to reformulate the specificity of a body-sex within a set of connections – historical, cultural, racial, gender, class, and so on. The cyborg has then become, as Haraway says, our ontology, the nesting of the technological into the biological has only shown that the natural has always been artificial since the technicality of the body-sex, its being embedded in situated knowledges of production – for example, scientific, social, cultural, historical, geographical, communal, technological, and so on – defies all attempts at assigning a metaphysics – an abstract dimension – to the changing experience of sexuality. More than that, the cyborg figurations of gender provide a way out of the relativism of a structure of power where all relations are systematised in an order of representation and ideological encoding of the body – the abstract geometrico-mathematical grid of positions – imposed on lived experience. Indeed, the flickering signifiers of gender in the everyday, which in turn act to subvert such order through the unstable performances of gender, are always ready to construct new narratives of what a body-sex is.

The centrality of such cyborg-performance visions of sex in queer theories and theories of sexual difference is however predicated on a highly problematic assumption. If the natural order is the site where power congeals difference within a pregiven grid, then, it is here assumed, the place to resist repressive determination is culture, since it is the historical lived experience of gender that triggers change, that subverts the natural state of things, that produces new avenues for a feminist politics of liberation. What remains assumed here is a historicised nature, a human-centred materiality, an anti-abstract concept of sex, which separates the concrete from the abstract, the lived from the conceived. Even when new technoscientific paradigms of science, from thermodynamics to chaos and complexity theory and quantum mechanics have been used to radically revisit concepts of nature in terms of a nonlinear order, the attachment to non-causal practices of gender performances has left a metaphysics of nature behind.

Most recently, however, there has been a shift in feminist science studies from engaging with a technoscientific reconceptualisation of nature to emphasising the material causalities for a new vision of the body-sex. The emphasis on gender performance in theories of sexual difference and queer sexuality has indeed left the legacy of an inadequate reading of the body-sex as a passive container of socio-cultural techniques of modification. By reworking the concept of performativity in the light of technoscientific visions of materiality, some feminists theorists, such as Karen Barad (2005/2003), have argued for a post-humanist
conception of performativity for queer studies. In particular, borrowing from the quantum mechanics theorisation of the atom by Neils Bohr, Barad sets the scene for a performatively metaphysics challenging the separateness between the observer and the observed. The crucial re-elaboration of the notions of relation as intra-actions between specific physical arrangements serves to rethink the ontological inseparability of distinct agents acting together. In short, for Barad quantum mechanics enables a reconceptualisation of causality as embedded in specific agential practices, intra-actions and performances that defy any attempt at splitting the material from the discursive, offering a material-physical dynamics to the production of meaning. By reworking Butler’s performing bodies to include nonhuman material agencies involved in the process of the active and not just discursive materialisation of a body-sex, Barad proposes a concept of performance beyond its assumed anthropomorphic limitations. Thus matter is not delimited to the linguistic or discursive acts or to the human-centred vision of the organic body. The body-sex is opened up to an empirical process of materialisation that includes the atomic, invisible microworlds of matter.

By regiving historicity to matter, rather than imposing human history on materiality, Barad argues, ‘reality is not composed of things-in-themselves or things behind phenomena, but “things-in-phenomena”’ (2005/2003, 202). This implies that specific intra-actions produce, perform and enact a changeable being: a materiality in continual change is derived from its interactions between its constitutive components. The discursive therefore is always already the material intra-production of phenomena, which Barad defines as ‘agential intra-actions’ constituting apparatuses – that is, particular physical arrangements – that give meaning to certain concepts rather than others (204). These apparatuses, resonating but not matching with the Foucauldian discursive practices, are material reconfigurations that produce material phenomena – that is, a dynamic relationality that is locally determined in a particular phenomenon, through specific causal intra-actions (205). In short, Barad reworks, in the light of quantum physics, the material-discursive practice of gender performance as entailing specific iterative enactments – agential intra-actions – through which matter is differentially articulated (207).

---

4 Barad clearly explains that the notion of performativity adapted by Judith Butler is derived from British philosopher J.L. Austin’s study on speech acts and the relationship between saying and doing. Butler’s notion of gender performativity indeed proposes an engagement with gender in terms of ‘doings’ rather than being. Whilst, as Barad points out, Butler articulates the linkage between gender performativity and the materialisation of the sexed body, the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argues that performativity’s genealogy is inherently queer. See Barad (2005, 193); Sedgwick (1993); Butler (1993; 1997).
By assigning no priority to a given materiality or discursivity, Barad points at how intra-actions are constraining activities that do not determine the future, but rather remain uncertain because of the intra-activities of phenomena – which entail human, nonhuman, cyborgian forms of agency: an enactment or doing. By this, Barad concludes that a posthumanist materialist account of performativity challenges the assumption that nature is passive or the end-product of the activities of culture, defying the belief in an ultimately exterior observational point. Rather, as elaborated in quantum theory, she suggests that the queerness of performativity is delimited not to human interactions in the world, but to the enacting intra-actions that are of the world (213), where agential intra-actions – human and nonhuman – are causal enactments of the world in its dynamics of differentiation.

Whilst Barad’s work significantly emphasises the materiality of performativity and thus directly shifts the notion of queer sexuality and sexual difference away from discursive apparatuses and towards a renewed physico-discursive production of sex, exposing the relevance of technoscientific propositions to a rethinking of nature, it may be useful here to investigate further the question of intra-action between nature and culture, the material and the discursive, the metaphysical and the physical. If the impact of technoscience on the ontology of sexual difference and queer sexuality has to be taken seriously (that is, causally) beyond its mere textual effects, then it may be helpful to develop a philosophical concept of relationality that derives not from technoscience but that engages in a speculative fashion with technoscientific experimentations in matter. From this standpoint, the material-semiotic axis of performativity may be rethought not merely in terms of the intra-actions between the biophysical and discursive in so far as these still risk remaining actions added a posteriori to relations as if these were set in motion by an external motor. Rather, this chapter argues for an engagement with the abstract activities of relationality, the concrete incorporeality of relations exposing ‘zones of indistinction’ (Deleuze...
and Guattari 1994) between thinking and doing, between philosophical concepts and technoscientific functions, which may enable us to rethink at the ontology of queer sexuality and sexual difference in the current climate of technoscientific experimentation, as an ontogenetic variation of material desire.

In order to do this, we may need to turn to the philosophy of the virtual-actual relationality as developed in the works of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, and their rearticulations of the philosophy of nature through Henri Bergson, Alfred North Whitehead and Baruch Spinoza. It may be useful here to briefly explain how such philosophy contributes to a materialist metaphysics of sexual difference and queer sexuality. In the first instance, Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of the body as a machinic ecology is crucial to exploring distinct layers of connectivity that compose a body in terms of extensive degrees of affinities – that is, non-exact measures – rather than given categories. These affinities are mental, social, technological, biological, desiring, physical, intuitive and perceptual, and operate beneath (and across) the macroaggregations of positions such as gender, class, race, as well as human, animal and machine. Hence a body always entails an environment of relations between distinct milieus, which are however associated by intensive – amodal or virtual – links. Such links are arranged in accord with velocities of compositions – speeds and slownesses of conjunctions and disjunctions – and affective impingement – the non-emotional yet felt activities amongst bodies triggering transformations in the states and conditions of each composition. There is no inherent naturalness in such ecology since this latter envelops a primary process of relational invention. Yet such relationality entails not simply the way different components come together to constitute a specific body, the way in which material relationality is thought of in terms of historical formations of a body-sex. More than this, relationality is above all machinic, entailing the residual capacities of every intra-action between components to enter a new composition, to mutate by virtue of a potentiality inherent in matter, connecting actual worlds with a constellation of virtual worlds.

In short, a machinic relationality here stands for the mutual activities of differentiation between the abstract and concrete dimensions of matter, which are not easily reconducible to a set of intra-actions between components. Here materiality acquires a new sense: it is a virtual materiality, the amodal relationality that cannot be disentangled from the actual intra-action between elementary components. Relations therefore are never relations between parts summed up together to make the same whole. Rather machinic relationality entails a primary invention of the new out of mismatching connections between the abstract and concrete worlds of a body. A sense of machinic nature is then derivable from Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of the machinic, pointing at how the impasse between nature and culture and the articulations of the relations between
the mental and the physical, requires a radical rethinking of what matter is in terms of what matter can do. This is the crucial adaptation of Spinoza’s ethics-ethology of nature in the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987).

From this standpoint, only a reconceptualisation of the ontology of nature in terms of virtuality, potentiality, capacities to become, is able to abstract from the actual intra-actions between components, a relational metaphysics that exceeds the empirical sums of parts. A new empiricism is indeed at work here. A radical empiricism as William James (1912) calls it, concerned not so much with the intra-active behaviour of things in phenomena, established by sensory measures of observation, but with the abstract dimensions of affectivity, with the capacities of a body to experience abstraction, to prehend virtual relations.

Spinoza argues that all affective relations – any mode of encounter between bodies – are imbued with affect, an unrealised capacity to engender an unexpected change in the bodies affected. Affective relations therefore entail not simply the action of a body over another action and vice versa, but their mutual participation in the abstract capacities of affect, into a metaphysics of the not-yet actualised, which whilst preceding and exceeding, directly accompanies, all actual intra-action. This is the sense in which a body can only be defined in the spatio-temporal interval between here and there, now and before, again and anew. It is the abstract – or virtual – relationality that opens the question of what a body-sex can do.6

This question remains crucially important to a reconceptualisation of sexual difference and queer sexuality since it explicitly points at the autonomy of affective relations from the biological and discursive organisations of the body-sex. It opens the very notion of nature to an ontogenetic process, involving above all the capacities of nature to modify itself, to engender and be engendered by change. This may be conceived of as a historical vision of nature, in terms of a genealogical formation through material intra-actions of distinct components in time and space. And yet such a vision cannot account for the nonlinear reversibility between cause and effects, where actual intra-actions are not in royal isolation from virtual relationality. Indeed, a machinic nature entails the viral contagion between technology and biology, the cross-pollination between natural genes and genetically engineered genomes, the microaffections between atoms and nanoatomic machines that expose how micro-socialities of invisible relations act on what we perceive-experience a body-sex to be.

---

6 The contribution of Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy of sexual difference has been extensively discussed in the field of feminist theories and science studies. The works of Elisabeth Grosz, Moira Gatens, Sadie Plant and Rosi Braidotti in particular have been crucial in adopting a materialist philosophy of difference in conjunction with the philosophy of sexual difference developed by French feminist Luce Irigaray.
This is where this chapter locates the impact of nanotech. Such impact does not concern the atomic constitution of a body-sex, but, more importantly, the abstract activities of atomic sexes as fully part of the material experience of sexuality. Hence, the impact of nanotech implies no simple dematerialisation of the body-sex, a sort of pulverisation of the specificity of sexual difference and sexual desire into digital components, ultimate units of calculation, a combinatorics of sex. Quite the contrary, this chapter argues that such an impact cannot but be felt, it is a touch at a distance, a contactedness in matter prior to sensory contact. This feeling indeed is not directly translatable via sensory perception or mental recognition. It is not the feeling of actual phenomena – a transparent intra-action between phenomena ready to apprehend the existence of each other – but of an affective involvement in the virtual, the physical resonances of the abstract capacities of matter to change, vibrating across bodies of all sorts.

Feelings, as Whitehead points out, are vectors ‘for they feel what is there and transform it into what is here’ (1978, 87). An impact then pushes the body-sex outside of its actual conditions to transform what is there into what is here. An impact primarily defines the affect enveloped in the affective relations, a transduction between distinct phases of matter. Yet affect is autonomous from emotional and cognitive awareness (Massumi 2002, 30–31). It is primarily intensity or vibrations passing through bodies, connecting extended parts through abstract (virtual) dimensions. The impact of nanotech is then virtual. It is related to the body’s capacities to be affected, its opening towards its own imminent mutability.

Trans-sexual Nature

Before discussing the implications of the virtual impact of nanotech on the body-sex, I wish to turn to critical discussions of sexual difference and queer sexuality engaged with the natural sciences and biotechnologies. In particular, I wish to draw attention to the way technoscience – from molecular biology to reproductive technologies and xenotransplantation biotechnologies – has been used to rethink notions of transsexuality and chimerism in nature, challenging culturalist assumptions about the natural whilst developing a neo-materialist engagement with sexuality. Myra Hird, in particular, clearly addresses the problem of rethinking the natural away from the predominant critique of science as a patriarchal tool that constructs nature from the outside. Recently, she has written on the importance, for queer theories, of not remaining anchored to notions of sexual authenticity in the formulation of trans-sex. She has argued that the nonhuman living world of animals, where the natural
order based on monogamy, fidelity, heterosexuality, two-parenthood, sexual reproduction, is turned upside down (2006, 39–40; reprinted here), serves not as natural justification for human transsexuality, but as a way to challenge the naturalness of nature by highlighting the unfamiliar — non-assumable — forces of nature itself.

Hird addresses the ‘trans’ of transsex from the standpoint of animal sex, where homosexual behaviours, intra-species sexes, display a wide diversity of sexuality. Whilst all plants and animals are virtually intersex — two sexes at the same time — humans’ heterosexuality remains instead strangely anchored to the biology of the two sexes. Hird pushes this virtuality further and importantly points at the microworlds of bacterial genomes trading genes without any respect for the heterologic of sexual reproduction at the core of species boundaries. She echoes Lynn Margulis and Dorion Sagan’s claims that there are as many sexes in nature as there are colonies of bacteria, exposing not the authenticity but the unnatural complexity of natural sex. Hird also highlights that to separate biology from technology — nature from culture, the authentic from the artificial which still determines debates on queer sexuality — is a way to overlook the ‘energetic invention and use of technology by non-human living organisms (termite high-rise cities include “birth chambers, hatcheries, the insect equivalent of schools, hospital”), as well as the extent to which so-called human technologies actually mimic technology already invented by other species’ (44).

Indeed, biotechnologies, such as genetic engineering, the transfer of genetic material amongst cells, have brought back one of the most ancient modes of sex on the biotic strata: bacterial sex. Bacteria — non-nucleic cells — invented genetic engineering three billion years ago: a viral borrowing of genes to repair genetic material damaged by harsh atmospheric conditions. In a sense, bacterial sex is the virtual biotechnology of non-nucleated cells, preceding and exceeding the sexual reproduction of eukaryotic species: animals, plants and humans. Similarly, biotechnologies are also virtual triggers of new bacterial superbugs. The novelty of the relation between biotechnology and the biotic sphere is not however the technological imitation of biology (biomemetics). Such a relation remains open-ended: is biotechnology a vehicle for bacterial transmission or has bacterial sex become a new technical medium? There is no easy mode of defining such a complex, mutual modulation of nature and culture. Sexual difference and queer sexuality are not simply to be rethought as natural or artificial but also, as


8 Bacteria are prokaryotic (without nucleic DNA) cells. Eukaryotic cells are organised around a nucleus (Margulis and Sagan 1986, 38–53; 153–69).
Hird suggests, in terms of an unfamiliar transsexuality that exceeds modes of assimilating nature, where natural forces cannot simply be anthropomorphised.

Drawing on a feminist neo-materialist approach to biology, Hird challenges the feminist critiques of science as the cultural analysis of materiality where technoscience is mainly thought of as a tool of patriarchy (2002, 95). Beyond language and discourse, a materiality of sex lays at bay. Hird proposes to give a non-linear account of biology so as to rethink the materiality of sexual reproduction beyond the naturalness assigned to biological sex. Drawing on Manuel DeLanda’s nonlinear accounts of matter, inspired by Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of the ‘machinic phylum’, Hird crucially asks how such accounts can be used by feminists to rethink the reproducing body (99). Her detailed exploration of the heterogeneity of biological reproduction sets out to challenge any easy ontological resolution between nature and culture, the pure and the artificial. Indeed, she points to the bacterial world of inter-sex as a way to rethink notions of human bodies as ‘engaging in constant non-binary sex, as biologically queer’ (103).

Hird also addresses reproductive technologies, which complicate the naturalness of blood-governed notions of kinship by unravelling the unintended proliferation of chimerism and mosaicism (2004, 221). Genetic filiation is here put into question by nonlinear molecular transmissions between the same species and across species – for example, xenotransplantation – which are not simply caused by human technological interventions, but rather are part and parcel of a chimeric bio-logic, which radically challenges the cultural assumptions of biological sex. Such cultural assumptions are here challenged by a technoscientific knowledge of the biological and not merely by human technological innovations. Indeed, the uncertainties of technoscientific understandings of nature may serve to change cultural discourses on kinship, sexuality and reproduction.

Whilst sharing Hird’s point about the importance of addressing the materiality of sexuality away from the emphasis on the normative and discursive conceptions of science, this chapter wishes to consider whether it is possible to readdress the relation between nature and culture from another standpoint, where there is no ultimate bio-logic that resists the cultural determinations of sexuality. This chapter indeed sees an implicit falling-back – in emphasising the indeterminate bio-logic of sexuality – onto the ground of organic nature, where biological complexity is always already disrupting cultural norms, where the unnaturalness of the organic remains external to the naturalness of culture.

---

9 She draws, in particular, on Rosi Braidotti and Elizabeth Grosz for such a definition of feminism (Hird 2004)
Rather, this chapter points to the possibility of engaging with abstract material relations encompassing nature-culture on a continuum, a cultural evolution of the natural and a natural evolution of the cultural variations of a body-sex.

From this standpoint, it is important to point out that the natural is as stratified as the cultural and that the biological imperative of sexual reproduction and sexuality is part of the nonlinear organisation of bacteria cells entering into nucleic sexual and reproductive orders under certain environmental pressures, which have indirectly affected the cultural formations of bodies ordered in a grid of biological positions. This chapter however stirs towards another, more invisible, path of engagement with materiality emphasising the abstract or virtual expressions of an ontogenetic sexuality that is directly prehended by all bodies participating in the speculative exercises of technoscience. Technoscience, it is true to say, is not a human invention since technical machines are able to enter in direct relations with the biophysical layers of matter. Yet this does not mean that technoscientific inventions are a direct imitation of biological complexity since the bio-logical order does not remain immune from the technoscientific touch. Their abstract relationality implies that new biological kingdoms can emerge from technological interventions and similarly new technological machines can emerge from biological realms. In short, what remains to be addressed in debates about natural sciences, technosciences and new ontologies of queer sexuality and sexual difference is the abstract relation between nature and culture entailing the direct – affective – prehension of changes in matter, resonating across micro and macro scales of the orders of sex.

This relation entails the heterogeneous formation of an event, where all components – concepts, affects, percepts – participate in the transformation of matter. Here culture is not the place for technoscientific normalisations of nature, but is primarily caught up in the prehensive feeling of abstract relations, the material potential of culture to change, which challenges its primary functions as the governor of matter. From this standpoint, the impact of nanotechnology on the biological and cultural order of sexuality and sexual difference is implicated in the material prehension of their transformation stemming from the micro-perceptual activities of subatomic sexes – a non-organic sub-world running beneath yet throughout the bio-logic of organic sex and the cultural determinants of gender.

**Atomic Sexes**

If, as argued by many feminists, biotechnologies – genetic engineering and cloning – have pushed the conception of sexual difference away from the biological imperative of sexual reproduction, based on genetic essence, and have therefore
exposed the plasticity of genomes, the genetic ambivalence between animals and humans, it is possible to say that nanotech pushes the indeterminacy of this entire biotic realm of mutations further. In short, what we know of sexual difference before the impact of nanotech still pertains to the biospheric realm of organic life in accord with the cultural bio-order. Even when biotechnologically re-engineered, sexual difference, reduced to the elementary components of chromosomes, or egg cells, mitochondria, artificial wombs, and so on, still maintains a certain stability in social relations: acquired parenthood, extra-partner filiation, multiple genealogies have all modified the stabilised norms of cultural procreation, and the social structures of the family, and yet still fall on the ground of a biologically complex order of organic life. The impact of nanotech is of another nature however. At stake here is no longer the biotechnological manipulation of genetic networks, but the inorganic nanodesigning of the entire biosphere – the entire biology of sexuality. Nanotechnology (Scientific American 2002; Turton 1995; Regis and Chimsky 1996) moves well beneath carbon-based life, affecting the fluctuating movement of atoms, entering the scale of inorganic dust to redesign carbon-based life.  

To redesign atoms and molecules from scratch implies resculpturing the genetic and neural patterns of a body-sex. Nevertheless, despite all efforts, the nanoprogramming of matter entails no transcendent top-down designing of bio-physical organisations. Nanodesign is structurally open to the variability and contingency of molecular and atomic relations. Nanodesign is directed by encounters between elements, whose potentialities are not predictable beforehand. This is not a simple pre-programming of the body-sex echoing the digital logic of information science. The atoms of nanotechnology do not coincide with the 0s and 1s of digital computation, since the mathematics of digital calculation itself does not simply coincide with exact equations. In other words, the claims of the first wave-cybernetics about the reduction of complexity to building-blocks, elementary units, atoms, or codes out of which entire universes could be calculated, have undergone a new turn towards nonlinear complexity, unexpected randomness, fuzziness, inexact equations, incompleteness, incomputable quantities and differential relations, which, as often argued, have been problems in the mathematical enquiry into calculation since pre-Socratic times (Chaitin 2005, 56–85). Whilst a significant body of critical work has been devoted to debunking the reductionism of digital computation by showing how computer and network culture is productive of sociabilities – artistic, political, communal sociabilities and so on – the argument

developed here is more strictly concerned with the way atomic and subatomic sociabilities are affected by nanotechnologies and how these sociabilities are implicated into new experiences of sexuality. The underling grey-goo scenario in nanotech indeed points to a mathematics of fuzziness and vagueness made not of building elementary blocks but of intricate complexity and inorganic variation cutting across the organic order of matter.

Nanodesign then forces us to account for a pre-emptive strike on the virtual or abstract materiality of a body-sex – the capacity of matter to be affected. And yet, the nanocapture of ‘chaotic molecules’ does not just reduce their potentials to probable activities – specific tasks – but produces new nano activities of the atoms as eventuations of new assemblages in matter. This suggests more than a new technoscientific paradigm or discourse, which can serve us when rethinking queer sexuality and sexual difference. Nanotech is here involved in ‘ecologies of practices’ (Stengers 2002b, 262), articulating new techniques of relations and the proximity between science and nature, nature and culture and thus participating in the ontogenetic expressions of matter, the nanomodification of sex ready to act back on what we take a body-sex and sexual difference to be.

In 1959, the physicist Richard Feynman already envisaged this nanocontrol of matter. In his famous talk, entitled ‘There’s Plenty of Room at the Bottom’, he stated that there was no principle in physics that could prevent the rearrangement of atoms. Much later, in The Engines of Creation (1986), Drexler explained that with the atom-by-atom structuring of matter, it is possible to design molecular machines that could reproduce themselves at incrementally smaller scales. Nanotechnology acts upon atoms and molecules ranging from 0.1 to 100 nanometers (a nanometer is one millionth of a millimetre). Atoms aggregate into larger compounds or molecules. By interacting with each other they build up inorganic and organic compounds. After more than fifteen years of research, companies, such as Intel, IBM, Bayer and Merck, are designing real nanoproducts (from atomic computers to smart drugs and from intelligent buildings to smart clothing) by using assemblers to modulate the chemical behaviour of atoms. Assemblers or nanosystems are general-purpose devices capable of directing chemical reactions by positioning molecules in a certain way and thus enabling their specific replication. As Drexler reminds us, nanomachines such as ‘Cell repair machines could reassemble the misarranged patterns of atoms that cause cancer, and build bodies from scratch’ (1986, 98).

The novelty here is that nanomachines can rearrange the position of every atom. Each atom can be placed in a selected position to become an active or

---

11 On commercial developments in nanotech, see Nanobusiness. On nanocomputers, see Brown (2001); Goho (2004).
structural component of a living system to design. Positional control suggests that the high-speed oscillation and fuzziness of molecules is not an absolute but a relative indeterminacy open to the conditions of nanoengineering. The chaotic instability of molecules is here turned into a kind of dynamic productivity. The quantum fluctuation of atoms implies that atoms cannot occupy a series of discrete positions in space. This position therefore does not correspond to a permanence of the same atom, but to the permanence of a pattern that repeats itself through vibrating energy in far-from-equilibrium conditions (Prigogine 1997, 129–51).

By redesigning atomic patterns, nanotech captures their chaotic behaviour into new actualisations; by neutralising chemical reactions in the nanofabrication of new compounds, nanotech intervenes in the emergence of new molecular architectures capturing the quantic behaviour of atoms. Yet this implies no predetermination of molecular patterns. To capture also entails the reversal activities of being captured. Capture thus implies the potentials to actualise new compounds, the transformation of molecular indeterminacy towards novel determinations. Hence matter is programmable only to the extent that nanosystems actualise new atomic functions whose future potentials remain unpredictable. At the core of nanotechnology is not so much the artificial manipulation of molecules, but the production of molecular-designing machines: nanomachines able to direct quantum patterns towards new actualisations.

A perfect example of contemporary strategies of pre-emption, nanobots are virtual agents inbuilt in a body and ready to act at the incipience of threat. Nanobots will cruise our blood stream, taking blood samples, updating diagnosis at our own design, releasing drugs targeted to certain synaptic zones and performing self-repairing molecular surgery. As all strategies of pre-emption, nanotech operates on the level of the virtual – future threats emerging from the body’s atomic fluctuations. Yet all pre-emption acts to capture futurity in new actualisations, reducing the unpredictable to the invention of the possible.

Strategies of pre-emption need not be confused with the digital calculation of atoms based on discrete quantities and exact positions on a grid. If pre-emption entails the anticipation of the future in the conditions of the present, the nanodesign of atomic complexities cannot occur without the tiniest variations creeping into the present from the future, without the irruption of uncertainty in atomic design. Bill Joy, the co-founder of Sun Microsystems, warns us against the unforeseeable dangers of nanobots in the strange new combination of genomics and robotics: ‘Our most powerful 21st-century technologies – robotics, genetic engineering, and nanotech – are threatening to make humans

12 On pre-emptive power, see Massumi (1993, 11–12); Parisi and Goodman (2005).
an endangered species’ (2000, 1). The imminent threats of nanorobots to the nature of the human species and, more importantly, to the biotic strata of life often assume the form of dangerous self-replicating devices spreading disastrously beyond control. In 1986, Drexler also considered the double face of the nanotech coin, the dark side haunting the perfect nanodesigning of matter, and named it the ‘grey-goo scenario’: when non-biotic machines start to grow autonomous characters, behaviours, intelligences, mobilities that surpass the ability of existing devices of control. It is when machines take on a life of their own.

The nanocontrol of molecular patterns reintroduces the threat of nonliving matter to biotic life: the inorganic remaking of the organic strata. The grey-goo scenario envisages nanodesigned molecules spinning out of control and taking over living systems. Moving beneath carbon-based life (the use of protein to generate new proteins), nanotech aims to refabricate the body through controllable abiotic nanobots. Yet, the extent to which nanobots are not inorganic agents able to control themselves in their remaking of biotic systems remains an open question. Nanobots do not abide by Asimov’s laws of robotics (the human-robot distinction) or the bioinformatic rules of the cyborg (the human-machine hybrid). Nanobots entail the inorganic redesigning of the organic composition of matter all together. Bypassing the genetic engineering of biotic life, nanobots force biotic life to confront the far from equilibrium dynamics of its quantum condition. Pre-emption here works to actualise new nanomachines of quantum matter by amplifying – or distributing – the impact of atomic sexes throughout all scales in evolution.

Machinic Expansion

The atomic fabrication of nanobots yields neither the artificial outdesign of evolution nor the imitation of the biosphere. Nanotech rematerialises the biosphere by redesigning patterns of chaotic quanta in two different directions: bottom-up molecular self-assemblage and top-down mechanical – microelectronic – assemblers. Yet the bottom-up and top-down controls of atomic patterns are not sufficient to map the impact of nanotechnology on the biosphere. If nanobots are inorganic machines of the kind of those existing in an ancient past preceding the biosphere and an imminent nanotech present-futurity redesigning the biosphere then, we may ask, what does this connection between inorganic matter and nanotechnology tell us about the relation between the nature and culture of sex?

Call this connection, the extended experience of a body-sex. Stretch the actual present far back towards a virtual past and then forward towards a virtual
future. And stretch again the future back in the past towards the actual present. Then name this extended experience, duration. Here a body-sex is caught in the topological expansion of events where the indeterminacy of a future-past is at work in the imperceptible speeds of the present.

The materiality of a body-sex is embedded in the events of such a future-past. Henri Bergson affirms that time in evolution lies in the continuity of duration where past and future are at work in the present: an elastic temporality rubbing against the past and opening up to the future (1983, 5). Each present experience emerges from the influence of the virtual actions of the past and future. Yet such action concerns no psychological memory of the past haunting the present. For Bergson, this is an ontological past linked to every present and future. The virtual past does not lie in us, but vice versa we lie in it. The virtual action of the past on the present pushes the present outside of itself towards the ontological conditions of time (beyond the human condition). For, in duration the past like the future remains virtual, undetermined in the yet-to-be-lived passing of the present.

The past is not simply supplanted by the present, but rather becomes the field of invention for a present-futurity: the reversal ingression of change in the present-past. Nanotech profoundly intervenes in the body’s network of durations – connecting the abiotic sphere of matter to the virtual actions of a future-past. By redesigning the inorganic atomic composition of biotic matter, nanotech exposes living systems to a novel aggregation of atoms opening the inorganic past of the biosphere to a new present-futurity. Call this abstract temporality re-engineering the irreversible trajectories of evolution, a machinic phylum (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 406)

A machinic phylum is neither determinable by biological dynamics nor technological machines. Running beneath (and transversally) the biosphere and technosphere – organic nature and culture – a machinic phylum highlights abstract relationality in the extended experience of a body-sex, topologically stretching beyond acquired forms in the continual variations of matter. In a sense, nanotech is precisely embedded in such machinic trans-connection

---

13 Duration is inspired partly by Bergson and by Whitehead. For Bergson, duration ‘is the continuous progress of the past which gnaws into the future and which swells as it advances’ (1983, 5). For Whitehead, duration ‘is a concrete slab of nature limited by simultaneity which is an essential factor disclosed in sense-awareness’ (2004, 53). Here duration is not a continual and indivisible experience of time. Duration entails events coming into being and perishing. Like a sequence of cinematic frames, events interweave and pass on part of themselves to the next event. On these different notions of duration see Whitehead (1967/1925, 148–9); Stengers (2002a, 71–3).
implying a point of inflection, a curling line or a fold, in the encounter between distinct layers of duration in the matter of nature and culture.

**Mutant Culture**

The ingression of scientific objects in the passage of nature entails an immanent contact between physical and sense objects in abstraction. An event: something that happens not in the world (as if it were its representation), but to the world as much as technoscience partakes of its changes. Neither essence in things nor mental construction of things determines the relation between nature and culture. It is the material experience of such relation, of a zone of indistinction between nature and culture indeed to be productive of a culture that evolves. Scientific objects indeed do not reduce physical objects to bare facts or cultural norms. Instead ‘All bare facts are born factoid’ (Massumi 2002, 214), embedded in a certain virtuality that produces certain facts rather than others. Technoscience is not primarily an interpretation of nature. Rather, it adds its knowledge to nature, folding into relational virtualities one more time.

Drawing on Whitehead, Stengers questions the paradigmatic understanding of science (1997, 3–18). Science is not primarily an institution that reproduces dominant knowledge, hegemonies and discourses. Similarly, the singularity of the sciences has not to be reduced to the ‘privileged expression of a rationality that would be set against illusion, ideology, opinion’ (134–5). Science is itself subjected to the ‘chance-event’ characterised by non-scientific procedures, which define scientific history and knowledge as ‘transituational’: produced by the passage, the interval from one phase to another. Rather than disqualifying scientific events as always derived by structures of dominion, Stengers argues for the ‘ecology of practices’ producing scientific facts: an *affective* rather than a paradigmatic method of relating nature and culture, the sciences and the humanities. The scientific object is an adventure in experience concurring to nature’s own activities of change.14 In other words, a risky business: ‘Scientific hypotheses always attempt to situate what is given within a much vaster set of possibilities. One can, in most cases, make them commence with “And if?”’ (136–7)

14 Whitehead’s metaphysical redefinition of experience challenges the critique of science and scientific knowledge as reductive. What is given in experience does not belong to the intentional human subject and to the lived world. Whitehead like Bergson is interested in the experience of the cosmos, what exceeds the subjective world. Bergson uses the concept of duration to push human experience outside, yet he criticises modern technoscience as unable to grasp the *élan* vital of time. Whitehead instead embraces science to map the world’s own activities through its involvement in the ‘passage of nature’. See Latour (2003).
‘And if?’ is a way to jeopardise what is taken to be normal and common sense. ‘And if?’ is the starting point of ‘a problem imposed on the collective by any innovative fiction, and through which the sciences invent their histories’ (138–9). Scientific knowledge thus concurs with the construction of novel fictions of a body-sex. Yet this construction cannot occur without abstraction: an immanent invisible relationality between distinct phases of matter, a continual invention triggered by the passing of events.

Nevertheless, we may still ponder: isn’t the ‘and if’ of nanotechnology (for example, and if the atomic composition of matter could be redesigned from scratch?) another way to privilege (dominant) stories about the ontology of the body-sex? Isn’t nanotechnology postulating new functions of matter that enclose the virtuality of extended experiences within a set of possible – already actualised and thus programmable – conditions of sex, sexuality and sexual difference?

To engage with these questions, science must be redefined not as the source of new ontologies, as the cyborg ontology tends to do, but as operating on a plane of reference able to actualise the virtual (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 118). Science then depends on states of affair – formed matter – which are limits set on a plane of immanence (the virtual). Every science tends to limit the field of relationality between objects, by integrating variables together. Whilst all sciences rub against virtuality through productive speculations, they continue to bind functions to the event and to actualise the event into one specific thing that can be referred to. Scientific knowledge attaches a recognisable face to its outside limits, turning virtuality into probabilities. Deleuze and Guattari argue that the philosophical concept, on the contrary, maps ontologies as it abstracts from states of affair their abstract connection. In philosophy, it is the consistency of the event to be pulled out from objects. Consistency entails amodal or virtual links: a sort of holding together of potential situations. Rather than appropriating potentials, philosophical concepts ‘give the virtual a consistency specific to it’ (118).

It would be misleading however, to affirm that scientific functions are deductions of philosophical concepts. Rather ‘Concepts and functions … appear as two types of multiplicities or varieties whose natures are different’ (127). Virtualities do not actualise without changing in nature. Science and philosophy are confronted with multiplicities emerging from a common field of problems responding to what is not known (128). For Deleuze and Guattari, philosophical concepts and scientific functions do not cease to enmesh via a certain sensibilitia towards the unknown (131).

In a sense, science and philosophy have the task of responding to problems posed by events in the passage of nature. Science and philosophy are symbiotic activities in mutual complicity with the becomings of nature. They are held
together by a ‘dynamics of infection’ as Whitehead names it (Stengers 2002, 182–90), a contagious relationship unable to transcend from variations in nature. Infection here stands for an enduring excitation between concepts and functions, science and nature, nature and culture, culture and science, geared towards the immanent fabrication of ontomolecular changes. Call this enduring excitation in the techno-cultural becomings of nature, affective contagion.

Affective contagion is a term that cannot do without calling forth a body. For Spinoza, arguing against all mind-body dualisms, a body is a mode of thought and extension. The idea of the body can only derive from the way a body is primarily affected by other bodies. Thus the mind is always the idea of a body (Ethics, II, ax. 3, prop. 11; II, prop. 13, schol.; II, props 12–31). Similarly, Whitehead affirms that concepts are conceptual feelings which ‘primarily derive from physical feelings, and secondarily from each other’ (1978, 247). Affect entails the rhythmic encounter of biophysical energy-particles enveloping abstract capacities to think. The reverse is also true; all thoughts are as if they were themselves feelings prompting from a transmutation in physical feelings. In short, modes of extension and thought are linked by abstract contagion.

The affective contagion between science and nature, nature and culture cannot but be felt. New technics of manipulation, such as nanotechnologies, are not only techniques of observation of atomic matter, but are more importantly implicated in the abstract relations between physical and conceptual feelings, adding modifications to the extended experience of a body-sex. In other words, nanotech is involved in the eventuation of new assemblages of desire on a nature-culture continuum. Yet, we still do not know how this nanoengineering of matter is adding variations to the feeling-thoughts of sexual difference.

Desire and Futurity

If a nanobody is not to be defined by what we take the natural and artificial to be, then how can we rethink sexual difference in the age of nanoengineering? If a body-sex can not only be genetically engineered, but its atomic neuro-genetic determinants can be rearranged at will, then what will count as sexual difference? Does this imply that sexual difference – in accordance with Luce Irigaray’s conception of a mode of feminine desire detracted from the imperative of heterosexuality based on the phallic organisation of the body-sex – will no longer matter? Answer this question with a more difficult one: can we account for variations in modes of desire, in sexual experience without holding onto organic essence or discursive structures of sex? Does sexual experience coincide with the organic order of the body-sex or the mental representation of natural sex?
Experience, Whitehead suggests, entails the living body as a whole (1978, 105–109). Each experience has its origin in the physical activities of a body, which change when any part in nature undergoes variation. Thus, experience extends outside the living towards the entire nature – including the smallest parts, atoms, electrons, and so on. Difference in experience then cannot be disentangled from what happens to all particles of a body, which are at the same time entangled with what happens to all scales of matter. Experience therefore is always extended, pushing the living outside its bio-physical architecture so as to construct itself again in changing ecologies of connection.

For Whitehead, the basic elements of experience are ‘prehensions’ (or concrete concepts and feelings) of actual entities, and the ‘nexus’ (or system of relationships) which connects the development and functioning of all actual entities (or actual occasions) (1978, 18–20). Prehensions are concrete modes of analysis of the world. To prehend something is to have a concrete idea or concept of that thing. But prehension is not merely a mode of thinking. A prehension is a material process of appropriation of an element of an actual entity, or of an element, which is derived from an actual entity. A prehension of an object, or of an element of an object, changes the internal constitution of the prehending subject.

Change in experience thus involves the assembling by material prehension of particles-thoughts on a nature-culture continuum. Here the passage of events in nature corresponds to its double ingressions in culture: the event virally propagates across regions of feeling (physical and conceptual feelings) across scales of sociabilities – atomic, molecular, organic, technical, affective, mental – without in turn ceasing to change its composition. It is not one and the same event that connects nature and culture. It is the virtuality – or abstract relationality – of an event that remains as if it were in common in an expanded experience linking nature again to its becoming and culture to its evolution.

The nanoengineering of matter intersects with the virtuality of experiences on nature-culture continual variation. Here, sexual difference does matter, but in a new sense. It is not biological experience that makes sexual difference autonomous from the cultural organisation of desire into the binarism of the two sexes. Similarly, it is not the complex biology of sex that makes feminine sex uniquely distinct from or fully intermixed with masculine sex. In other words, the ambiguous biologisms of sex fail to account for how sexuality is implicated in the virtual relationality between inorganic and organic matter, between the concrete and the abstract experience of sex on a nature-culture continuum.

What matters in sexual difference is the way experience is extended across nature, the way it participates in all kinds of sex disclosing the organisation of the two sexes to molecular affections operating at the subatomic levels (of
extension and thought) of a body-sex. What matters then is the way sexual difference is involved in the nanoprehensions of that which happens to the world and thus in the eventuation of new feeling-thoughts of sex. In short, it will be a challenge for concepts of sexual difference to account for how sexuality acts as a heterogeneous milieu of attraction of the abstract connection between inorganic and organic matter, for how such abstraction becomes expression of a lived sex on a nature-culture continuum.

Nanotech entails a new level of abstraction of subatomic matter initiating a virtual action on the capacities of nature to become culture: the capacities of inorganic subatomic matter to become nanotechnological and in turn the capacity of nanotechnology to become enveloped in subatomic worlds. Here we are confronted with the experience of abstract relations or transitions between inorganic and organic nature-culture coinciding with the prehensions of the quantic composition of matter. Nanotechnology does not explain the quantic fluctuations of matter, but it rather adds quantum dynamics to the extended experience of an infinitesimal world, intervening in the past-futurity of a body-sex. Call this new layer of experience: the nanoengineering of desire. The latter has unprecedented implications for what we take sexual difference to be.

For Deleuze and Guattari, assemblages of desire do not cease to produce new modes of living the body or new modifications in nature-culture. Yet it is clear that these assemblages are not determinable by objects, aims or sources, identity or subjective essence (1983, 1–8). Desire here is to be defined in terms of collective bodies, turbulent networks, viral transmutations relinquishing all logic of lack, scarcity, survival, alterity, and the repressed unconscious. Assemblages of desire are directed not by intentionality but by the fluctuating movements of particle-forces implicated in ecologies of layered relations between their internal external and associated milieus of composition connecting one phase to another.

By nanodesigning the movement of molecular quanta, nanotech acts to preempt the movement of desiring assemblages, the un-calculable fluctuations of the tiniest sexes acting back on the larger aggregates of organic sexual difference. As such it takes sexuality, the site of modification of desiring assemblages par excellence, as its field of action. The nanoengineering of desire demands the biotic qualities of sexuality to face new onto-evolutionary implications: the atomic redesigning of matter intervenes in assemblages of desire – mental, affective, social, technical, ethical, cultural – recombining present conditions of

experience with an ancient inorganic past and with the incipience of an atomic future yet to come.

In such reversal of causal relations, sexual difference can no longer remain attached to the bio-logic of organic sex, whereby the difference between the sexes is defined by an onto-evolution of the two sexes governed by organic sexuality. If, as Grosz has recently argued (2004, 67–70), sexual difference resonates with the unique differentiation of the species in two sexes, whereby sexuality is independent from survival, then it is also true that sex extends beyond the biotic distinction of the sexes as much as nature precedes and exceeds carbon-based life. Similarly, if the ontology of sexual difference is always already embodied, then it is important to highlight that a body is not definable away from the passage of nature, desiring assemblages extending throughout the sublayers of inorganic matter.

The impact of nanotech then raises new questions about what we take sexual difference to be as it adds to the genetic variation of biological sex – trans-sex, xeno-sex, and so on – an inorganic layer of atomic sexes redesigning the biosphere of organic sexes anew, whilst exposing the unforeseen architectures of an inorganic nature in culture. Whilst abstracting atomic assemblages from bio-physical objects, nanotech enters invisible assemblages of desire. This indicates no disappearance of sexual difference, but the expansion of sexuality onto the atomic field of matter: inorganic nanosexes acting back on the organic architecture of a two sexes culture.

Whilst focusing on the impact of nanotech on what we take sexual difference and sexuality to be, it may be important to specify here that this is not just a way to favour nanotechnological possibilities of redesigning sex and gender, the genetic and neural patterns of sexual difference, the plurality or neutralisation of sex-gender. Rather, this is a speculative philosophical gesture that probes into the abstract conception of sexuality as the lived experience of a processual nature-culture composed of events linking (pre-biotic inorganic) past and (nanobiotic) future in the occurrences of the present, where technoscience intervenes to question the biological ground of nature-culture, reopening the body-sex to the durations of a past faced by a new present-futurity. Hence, it is not a question of privileging the biological ambiguities of sexuality – the nonlinear natural ground that exceeds the ideological, discursive, technological structures of culture. On the contrary, this entails the importance of opening nature and culture to the material experience of abstract relations whereby sexuality is implicated in the imperceptible movements of assemblages of desire – not simply the cross-pollination of parts but their collective participation in the production of a new constellation of universes stretching beyond our cosmos. The experience of the fuzzy quantities of atomic matter acts to transform the feeling-thought of sex
beyond the biological and towards the abstract materiality of a sexuality already felt and yet still to come.

Nevertheless, it may be misleading to assume that the expansion of sexual difference onto the quantum field of matter is a way to favour, for example, nanotechnological possibilities of redesigning organic sex, inciting therefore a disappearance of the biological order of sexual difference. Rather, such an expansion can only be thought of as implicated in the abstract architectonics of sex, the relational experience connecting the actual occasions of sex in the quasi-felt durations of matter, which remain autonomous from the chronological evolutions of organic sex. Hence, this is not a question of the techno-evolution of sexuality, but a way to challenge the bio-logic of sex, the organic order of nature-culture. Here the nanoengineering of desire entails not a mechanisation of sexuality – a queering of the future through nanobotic sex. On the contrary, such nanoengineering is only important in so far as it is implicated in the futurity of desire, the reversal causality between nature and culture embedded in the abstract fabric of sexuality, whereby new kingdoms of sex can spread out of the inorganic assemblages of nanobots, a nanoculture of sex. Here the experience of sexual difference entails a feeling-thought for the ingression of futurity into the present-past of a body-sex, acting to queer the nature-culture of organic sexuality in an unforeseen fashion.

References


QUEERING THE NON/HUMAN


James, W. (1912), *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press).


This page intentionally left blank
Causality is a queer creature. Or so it appears in the hands of some notable queer theorists. For example, Michel Foucault and Judith Butler, in turn, trouble the identification of cause and effect as linked points in a chain of causation. Feminist theorist Ewa Plonowska Ziarek notes:

As early as ‘The Discourse on Language’, Foucault warned his readers that what is at stake in historical genealogy is not ‘consciousness and continuity (with their correlative problems of liberty and causality)’ but events and series. As he writes, ‘If it is true that these discursive, discontinuous series have their regularity … it is clearly no longer possible to establish mechanically causal links or an ideal necessity among their constitutive elements.’ [2000, 199]

As Butler points out, for Foucault this lack of causal continuity is linked to his conception of power: ‘Power is established in and through its effects, where these effects are the dissimulated workings of power itself. There is no “power”, taken as a substantive, that has dissimulation as one of its attributes or modes’ (1993, 251, n. 12). Crucially then, power is not determining, but rather ‘an immanent dispersed cause’, and subjects are not passive products or mere effects of historical formations.¹

Butler is most explicit about the stakes in queering causality in her theorisation of the relationship between materiality and discourse. She cautions that ‘materiality’ is not to be understood as ‘an effect of a “discourse” which is its cause; rather, it is to displace the causal relation through a reworking of the notion of “effect”’ (1993, 251, n. 12). This displacement foils the presumed calculability of cause and effect by calling into question the temporal and ontological primacy of a presumed discrete cause over its consequent

¹ See Ziarek (2000, 204). In this article, Ziarek contends that feminists have often undervalued Foucault’s contribution to radical politics as a result of a widespread failure to attend to the causality of power as Foucault reformulates it.
effect. Though it is seldom made explicit, in the way that, for example, the displacement of traditional conceptions of identity is regularly signalled by queer theorists, queering standard notions of causation is a critical intervention for opening up possibilities for resistance and agency in a space evacuated by deterministic conceptions of causality.

In ‘Fashionable Subjects: On Judith Butler and the Causal Idioms of Postmodern Feminist Theory’, Timothy V. Kaufman-Osborne offers a coarse-grained taxonomy of the predominant kinds of causality that have interested Western philosophers, along with a speculative genealogy that accounts for different ways of thinking causality in relation to different technologies of intervention. He draws attention to what he identifies as two of the most common conceptions of causality: organic and mechanistic causality. The former he links with agrarian practices and the latter with craft practices. In particular, he points out that the pre-Socratics borrowed farming metaphors, like self-generation, from local agrarian practices so that an organic conception of causality sprouted from this fertile soil of analogic thinking (1997, 651; by contrast 651). That local material practices might somehow be linked to the specifics of local discourse-knowledge practices reverberates nicely with the post-structuralist themes that form the core of his paper. And presumably Kaufmann-Osborne isn’t suggesting technological determinism as the means by which the transfection of metaphors takes place. However, in an interesting move that stands out as a distinctively disjointed and experimental moment in the paper, Kaufman-Osborne reveals that his thinking about causality is grounded in what he takes to be a foundational difference between himself and his guinea pig:

At the risk of gross oversimplification, and absent virtually all of the argumentation necessary to sustain this claim, I want to suggest that our most common ways of talking about causality have been informed by two distinct metaphorical clusters, each of which is teased out of a different sort of craft. My phenomenological presupposition here is that beings to whom things merely happen, i.e., beings who undergo events in a state of qualitative immediacy, will never articulate a conception of causality. Consider, for example, the guinea pig unhappily caged in my basement. That mammal is a participant in a wide variety of causal interactions, the most visible relating to the consumption of food and the excretion of waste products. But never, I am confident, will that being articulate an intelligible account of these interactions. Although perhaps not the only way, human beings are unlike guinea pigs in their capacity to alter causal sequences which they would otherwise simply endure; and such intervention, I am persuaded, is an indispensable condition of any discourse about the causal relations between this and that. [650–51]
This paragraph has a markedly confessional tone to it, not only in the admission by the author of the caging of an unhappy guinea pig in his basement, but also in its acknowledgement of a distinctive rupture in an otherwise tightly argued paper. Indeed, this tale of a tailless mammal who can’t speak or act for itself constitutes a particularly telling moment in the paper. There is an important sense in which the guinea pig tells all, or at least speaks volumes about stories we tell ourselves about causality and agency, even queer ones.

The question of whether or not the guinea pig would make an able political theorist should perhaps not be skipped over too quickly (despite the fact that we wouldn’t expect this domesticated South American cavy to show up for a job talk any time soon), but of much greater importance are the meta-questions and underlying presuppositions that form the unspoken support for this line of reasoning (prompting us to wonder who the real guinea pigs are in this experiment). In particular, there are significant underlying assumptions that ground Kaufman-Osborne’s suggestion that the ability to intervene in, rather than simply endure, causal events is a condition for producing discourses about causal relations (the implication being that it matters what the nature of those interventions and technologies for intervening are). Kaufman-Osborne ultimately grounds the possibilities for theorising causality on a presumed essential difference between humans and nonhumans, and an opposition, or more specifically, an inverse relation, between agency and causality (as if the presence of one entails the absence of the other).

I belabour this rather surprisingly and distinctively un/queer moment in a paper where the focus is otherwise entirely on humans, because it is symptomatic of a widespread predilection, shared by post-structuralist, feminist and queer theorists, as well as more traditional theorists, for presuming that causality and agency need to be thought and rethought once again in terms of the human. The constitutive outside – the nonhuman, in its entanglement with the inhuman, the differentially human, and the otherwise than human – haunts these accounts that think and rethink causality in terms of the field of human sociality and processes of subjection. What is needed is a queering of queer conceptions of causality and agency. In this chapter, I bring these issues into focus by seeing what we can learn from some very queer creatures, including one creature whose lack of an evident visualising apparatus shifts the focus from essential differences to diffraction patterns and differences-in-the-making. These creatures make evident the fact that the very nature of difference and the very differences that constitute nature are entangled with issues of causality and agency, and I might add, with the specific nature of entanglement itself.
Silently and efficiently, the new team member toils away in a chemistry lab at the University of California at Santa Barbara. With perfect precision, she lays down an ultrathin layer of an organic substrate. Onto this, she deposits interlocking calcite crystals, atom by atom. The two layers bond into a delicate crystal lattice. Under a microscope, it calls to mind the flawless thin-film layers on a silicon chip:

But there is no clean room, vacuum chamber, or chip gear in this lab, where professors Galen D. Stucky and Daniel E. Morse brainstorm new materials. For that matter, the ‘team member’ is no ordinary staff researcher. She’s a mollusk – an abalone. And like so many of nature’s creations, she has acquired, through millions of years of evolution, an exquisite form of molecular machinery to create her shell – machinery that leaves today’s best fabrication tools in the dust. [Gross and Port 1998]

‘The only true nanotechnologist today is Mother Nature’, explains Michael Roukes, a California Institute of Technology physics professor, ‘but slowly, humans are learning to mimic her handiwork’ (ibid.).

In Biomimicry: Innovation Inspired by Nature (1997), nature writer and conservationist Janine Benyus names ‘an emerging discipline that seeks sustainable solutions by emulating nature’s designs and processes’ (PaxIT). According to Benyus, biomimicry marks the beginning of a new postindustrial era: ‘Unlike the Industrial Revolution, the Biomimicry Revolution introduces an era based not on what we can extract from nature, but on what we can learn from her’ (PaxIT). Benyus has received several awards, including the Rachel Carson Environmental Ethics Award. She is the co-founder of the Biomimicry Guild which brings biologists, industrialists, inventors and designers to the drawing board, teaching clients which include Nike, HP and Novell to draw inspiration from nature to solve human problems. Biomimicry is being hailed as nothing less than an answer to Rachel Carson’s Silent Spring, but even its strongest proponents, Benyus included, acknowledge that, like other technologies, it will not necessarily be spared the dangers of misuse and abuse:

… biomimics develop a high degree of awe, bordering on reverence. Now that they see what nature is truly capable of, nature-inspired innovations seem like a hand up out of the abyss. As we reach up to them, however, I can’t help but wonder how we

---

2 This section and the one that follows were previously published in Barad (2007).
3 Benyus is a director of the California-based engineering company PaxIT, the chairman and CEO of which is Paul Hawkin, author of several books on sustainability and industry.
will use these new designs and processes. What will make the Biomimicry Revolution any different from the Industrial Revolution? Who's to say we won't simply steal nature's thunder and use it in the ongoing campaign against life? [PaxIT]

This is not an idle worry. The last really famous biomimetic invention was the airplane (the Wright brothers watched vultures to learn the nuances of drag and lift). We flew like a bird for the first time in 1903, and by 1914, we were dropping bombs from the sky (Benyus 1997).

Mimicry is the highest form of flattery, or so the saying goes. Perhaps this familiar adage provides a clue to why biotech companies might be interested in biomimesis, not only as method, but as camouflage against the prying eyes of would-be critics, as they attempt to hoist their projects above the murky pool of ethical, legal and social concerns, posing as benign inventors, if not downright all-natural Mother Nature-loving sustainability advocates. Camouflage, of course, is nature's own biomimetic technology, imitated and popularised by the military during the First World War. Imitating imitation is nothing new but the forms mimesis is taking are.

A Canadian biotech company has recently purchased an old decommissioned US Air Force base on the American side of the border just outside Plattsburgh, New York to farm goats, thousands of them; however, Jeffrey Turner, founder, president and CEO of Nexia Biotechnologies isn’t interested in cloning goats per se. Referring to Dolly the cloned sheep as a ‘scientific stunt’, Turner explains to one reporter:

Nexia’s project is less about altering nature than harnessing it. The company’s goal isn’t to create weird goats; they’re merely a means of producing useful quantities of spider silk, a simple substance created eons ago by natural evolution … what Nexia is really up to isn’t mere genetic engineering, it’s ‘biomimicry’. [Osborne 2002]

Spider silk is the holy grail of material sciences – it’s five times stronger than steel and stretches 30 per cent farther than most elastic nylon – with a host of medical, industrial and military applications, including biodegradable sutures for surgery, replacement ligaments or tendons, industrial fibres and bullet-proof vests. There are even recreational applications like fishing line and tennis racket strings. Even the haute-couture fashion world is already salivating over the possibilities of spinning new fabrics.

‘It’s way beyond anything we humans can make. Milled steel pales next to it’. Turner is awed by the ingenious engineering talents of this arachnid, which, he explains, were honed by the competitive pressures of Nature’s own military exploits: ‘The spider’s evolution comes out of a kind of arms race between spiders and bugs. The bugs start flying to get away from spiders, so the spiders
have to come up with a new weapon’ (Osborne 2002). (Who’s copying whom? Is copying ever not a form of self-replication? When it’s all done with mirrors it’s difficult, if not impossible, to find out who is spinning the sticky web.) What could be more natural than than scientists at the Canadian biotech company Nexia teaming up with the Materials Science Team of the US Army Soldier Biological Chemical Command to take some lessons from spiders? Emulating not only Nature’s best ideas for peaceful coexistence, but her ingenuity in the face of military challenges, this is taking nature as inspiration to a new level. And much like the envious fertility of Mother Nature’s symbiotic relationships, the relationship between Canadian-based Nexia and the US military is proving to be very productive indeed. In the journal *Science*, this international, interdisciplinary industrial-military hybrid team announced a major materials science breakthrough: a way to spin silk from goat’s milk (Lazaris et al. 2002). The implications and the payoff from this research are potentially enormous. Nexia now holds the patent on a recombinant spider silk, trade-named BioSteel®, and they are moving rapidly towards commercial development. BioSteel®, according to the company and its promoters, has the additional advantage of being eco-friendly both in terms of its composition (it’s biodegradable) and its production process (which is water-based), as opposed to most other synthetic fibres (Turner 2002a).

So while Nexia is busy making recombinant spider silk for a host of medical, military and industrial applications by taking genes from golden orb-weaving spiders and putting them into goat eggs so that the goat will secrete spider silk into its milk, which can be profitably harvested by the company, Turner is spinning the yarn, flattering the spider’s talents for manufacturing a materials science wonder – ‘a self-assembling, biodegradable, high-performance, nanofiber structure one-tenth the width of a human hair that can stop a bee traveling at 20 miles per hour without breaking’ (Turner 2002b). And so it shouldn’t surprise us that when Jeffrey Turner is asked the ‘big-E’ ethics question that many biotech company execs treat with great annoyance, as if they’re pesky little black flies that keep swarming no matter what public relations repellent is applied, he responds with the confidence of a jujitsu master, smiles at the futility of fly swatting and instead uses the fly’s own energy, working in concert with the spider, to outwit the flies at their own game: with great aplomb Turner calmly mimics the ‘biomimicry’ biomimics. What could be more natural than taking nature as inspiration? Even nature does it. No wonder Jeffrey Turner claims to be a practitioner.

---

4 See also Reiber (2002); Lazaris et al. (2002).
Benyus is well aware of the potential for the misuse of biomimicry. In fact, she points specifically to Nexia’s transgenic ‘mimicking’ (the scare quotes are Benyus’s) of spider silk, which turns goats into ‘cheap factories’ (this description is Turner’s), as a case in point: ‘Every fiber of my being cries when I hear that. That’s the antithesis of the kind of respect, the maturity that we need. So I think in terms of what we shouldn’t be doing, I think this transgenic engineering is the height of hubris. It’s a biological transgression of the worst kind’ (Benyus date unknown a).

Benyus has a principled complaint against transgenic engineering: nature doesn’t do it – nature doesn’t trade genes across classes of organisms – and so we shouldn’t either. That is, Benyus advocates adopting nature not only as model but also as mentor and as measure: ‘If nature as model says, “What would nature do here?”’, nature as measure says “What wouldn’t nature do here?”’ (ibid.). In other words, her ethical principle for biomimicry is biomimetic: ‘Biomimicry says: if it can’t be found in nature, there is probably a good reason for its absence. It may have been tried, and long ago edited out of the population. Natural selection is wisdom in action’ (Benyus date unknown b).

Now the suggestion of an ethics based on the principle of following nature’s lead will no doubt sound like an all-too-familiar drone for some, and for good reasons. Naturalist arguments for social policy abound and there are copious examples of misguided attempts to enlist Nature as justification for every possible social prejudice, including racism, sexism and homophobia. Social Darwinism is a well-known example illustrating the dangers of biomimicry as a social or ethical principle. Going back to Friedrich Engels, critics of social Darwinism have argued that Darwin takes his inspiration from social and economic doctrines based on competition and survival of the fittest, reads them into nature, and then social theorists use Darwin’s ‘nature’ to justify social policy based on natural selection saying that they are simply taking their inspiration from nature. But the dangers of entering this house of mirrors have not escaped Benyus, who explicitly warns against taking our ethical principles from the natural world:

… for people as they did during the period of Social Darwinism to look to the natural world to figure out who should live and who should die or who should breed. That’s really really dangerous I think. Because how other organisms are being

---

5 If OncoMouse is a patented laboratory tool, their kin, BioSteel® goats, are entire factories: ‘In the future, animals will be our factories … Very cheap factories’ (Turner 2002a).

6 Freidrich Engels issued biting critiques of Social Darwinism, exposing it as a poorly disguised ruse (Engels; in Sahlins 1976, 102).
judged by natural selection and the kinds of societies that they've knit together, we can’t pick a species and say we should be more like that. I think looking to nature for our mores and our ethics and our morality is really dangerous. We are a unique species, an ethical moral animal and there are some places that it just doesn’t fit.  

This advice – to look to nature as an ethical measure but not as a basis for our ethical principles, ‘to judge the rightness of our innovations’ based on nature’s designs but not to judge the rightness of our actions based on nature’s way of doing things’ – seems reasonable enough at first glance. However, this principle ultimately falters on the very issue that the example of social Darwinism brings to light: how are we to understand the notion of ‘nature’ that is being invoked? Benyus’s principle relies on a hard distinction between nature and humans. We humans are not only a species unique in all the animal kingdom by virtue of our ethical character, but nature has a givenness that is outside of culture. Nature is found in the rainforest and the swamp, environments threatened by (non-indigenous) human culture(s). Furthermore, Benyus’s distinction seems to presume that designs are simply transparently there in a way that actions may not be, that we have an immediate access to nature’s designs in a way that gets clouded when we turn to observing behaviours, that material designs can be separated from the agential practices that produce them. This presumption that there is a pure nature separate from culture is operative throughout Benyus’s work. As with all mirroring practices, biomimicry has a built-in optics based on a geometry of distance from that which is other. But is there a ‘pure nature’ (both epistemologically and ontologically speaking) that we can turn to for inspiration? And how pure is this implied notion of purity when its invocation throughout history has helped to perpetuate some of the most heinous crimes known to humankind? (Isn’t the very notion of ‘race’ nothing save the notion of ‘purity’ put into practice?) Furthermore, and with astonishing irony, the discourse of nature as separate from culture seems strikingly out of step with the very practices of biomimetics which, not incidentally but rather by virtue of its own principles, actively reworks the boundaries between ‘nature’ and ‘culture’. And isn’t the undoing of the very idea of an inherent nature/culture boundary, a useful tool if not a prerequisite for destabilising sexism, racism and homophobia and other social ills that are propped up by this dualism and its derivatives? It is ironic that while environmental activists are busy reifying a notion of nature based on purity, with all its problematic implications, the enterprise of bioengineering is making it crystal clear that the nature/culture dualism is a construction, a point that feminists and other social critics have

---

7 This quote from Janine Benyus is from the Boston Research Center interview Clip 8 – Seeing the ‘Other’ with Respect.
been trying to get across for some time. What is at issue and at stake is ‘what counts as nature, for whom, and at what costs’ (Haraway 1997, 104).

This is not an argument for or against biomimetics or other technoscientific practices writ large. On the contrary, the point is that these practices hold both incredible promise and unfathomable dangers. Which is not the end point but the beginning point for ethical considerations.

**Differences That Matter: The Ontology of Knowing, the Intra-Activity of Being, and the Ethics of Mattering**

The ‘eyes’ made available in modern technological sciences shatter any idea of passive vision; these prosthetic devices show us that all eyes, including our own organic ones, are active perceptual systems, building in translations and specific ways of seeing, that is, ways of life. There is no unmediated photograph or passive camera obscura in scientific accounts of bodies and machines; there are only highly specific visual possibilities, each with a wonderfully detailed, active, partial way of organizing worlds … Understanding how these visual systems work, technically, socially, and psychically ought to be a way of embodying feminist objectivity. ([Haraway 1991, 190]

Diffraction patterns record the history of interaction, interference, reinforcement, difference. Diffraction is about heterogeneous history, not about originals … Diffraction is a narrative, graphic, psychological, spiritual, and political technology for making consequential meanings. (Haraway 1997, 273)

‘Eyeless Creature Turns Out to Be All Eyes’ announces *The New York Times* (Abraham 2001). The article summarises the results of a study published in the 23 August 2001 issue of the scientific journal *Nature*, in which an international team of material scientists, theoretical physicists, chemists and biologists report their amazing finding that a brainless and eyeless creature called the brittlestar, an invertebrate cousin of the starfish, sea urchin and sea cucumber, has a skeletal system which also functions as a visual system (Aizenberg 2001).

---

8 I take my inspiration here from Donna Haraway’s astute assessment of this irony. See Haraway (1997) for a more in-depth critique of the notion of ‘purity’ and its problematic invocation by activists doing battle with genetic engineering projects. Haraway is quite explicit about the fact that, while this invocation of purity feeds right into contemporary anti-immigration (and other neoconservative) discourses, she is not saying that the concern these activists express is consequently ill-founded; nor does the very fact that bioengineering destabilises the nature/culture dualism thereby earn her unqualified endorsement. Rather her point is the following: what is at issue and at stake is ‘what counts as nature, for whom, and at what costs’ (1997, 104).
The brittlestar, a relative of the starfish, seems to be able to flee from predators in the murky ocean depths without the aid of eyes. Now scientists have discovered its secret: its entire skeleton forms a big eye. A new study shows that a brittlestar species called *Ophiocoma wendtii* has a skeleton with crystals that function as a visual system, apparently furnishing the information that lets the animal see its surroundings and escape harm. The brittlestar architecture is giving ideas to scientists who want to build tiny lenses for things like optical computing (Abraham 2001).

The researchers found that the approximately 10,000 spherically domed calcite crystals covering the five limbs and central body of the brittlestar function as microlenses, and that microlenses collect and focus light directly onto nerve bundles which are part of the brittlestar’s diffuse nervous system. Remarkably, the brittlestars secrete this crystalline form of calcium carbonate (calcite) and organise it to make the optical arrays. According to Dr Alexei Tkachenko of Bell Laboratories, one of the authors of the study, ‘The brittlestar lenses optimize light coming from one direction, and the many arrays of them seem to form a compound eye’ (quoted in Abraham 2001). ‘It’s bizarre – there’s nothing else that I know of that has lenses built into its general body surface,’ says Michael Land, who studies animal vision at the University of Sussex, Brighton, UK (Whitefield 2001).

The fact that certain species of brittlestars respond to light was already well established, but the mechanism of their superior visual capacity was not known. These photosensitive brittlestar are able to navigate around obstacles, flee from predators, and detect shadows. They also turn lighter in colour at night and darker during the day. At first glance, this evolutionary strategy seems ill-conceived since it increases their visibility to predators. But if the brittlestar’s goal is increase its vision (the better to avoid predators), to collect as much light as possible during the night, and likewise to protect its visual system from oversensitivity, overexposure to light, during the day (the better to put on ‘sunglasses’), then nature’s selective process seems justified.

To test their hypothesis that ‘these calcitic microstructures might have a function in directing and focusing the light on photosensitive tissues’ (Aizenberg 2001, 820), the researchers at Bell Labs used a technique called ‘optical lithography’, which is a process also used for inscribing circuits on microchips: ‘To detect and visualize the lensing effect, we designed a lithographic experiment. A DAP [dorsal arm plate] of *O. wendtii* [one of the species that exhibit photosensitivity] was cleansed

---

9 Photosensitive species of brittlestars exhibit responses to their environment that is superior to other marine organisms and seems to entail visual functioning. They move out of the way of predators and run into crevices they spy from a distance. The existence of photosensitivity was linked to diffuse dermal receptors in previous studies.
of organic tissue, and a low-magnification scanning electron micrograph (SEM) of its dorsal surface was recorded as a reference image. The lensing system was analysed by placing the prepared sample on a silicon wafer. Mimicking the process used to optically engrave circuits on a silicon wafer in the making of microchips, the researchers shined light through the lenses, which etched the wafer. By analysing the etchings, the researchers were able to deduce the focal length of the lenses. This was compared to a transmission electron microscopy study of thin sections of decalcified DAPs, which revealed bundles of nerve fibres located at the focal plane of the lens system. On the basis of this finding, the researchers were able to suggest that the array of calcitic microlenses with their unique focusing effect and underlying neural receptors may form a specialized photoreceptor system with a conceivable compound-eye capability. In talking with the press Joanna Aizenberg, Bell Lab scientist and the lead author of the study, also makes use of the more high-tech comparison to a digital camera that builds up a picture pixel by pixel (Whitefield 2001). But one quickly loses track of whether the digital camera is a metaphor for brittlestar vision or the reverse, especially as the metaphor begins to take on a strikingly material form:

Instead of trying to come up with new ideas and technology, we can learn from this marine creature … The [calcitic] lenses surround the whole body, looking in all different directions and providing peripheral vision to the organism … This is the quality we all want to incorporate in optical devices, in cameras in particular. Instead of having one lens pointing in one direction, you could have thousands of lenses pointing in different directions. This will give you perhaps a 360-degree view of the whole space. ['Can We Learn to See Better from a Brittlestar?' 2002]

In summary, the remarkable finding of this international multidisciplinary team of scientists is that the brittlestar’s skeletal system is composed of an array of microlenses, little spherical calcite crystal domes (the order of tens of microns in diameter) arranged on its surface, which collect and focus light precisely on points that correspond to the brittlestar’s nerve bundles, part of its diffuse nervous system, suggesting that the combined system seemingly functions as a compound eye (an optical system found in insects). Physicist Roy Sambles, who works on optics and photonics at the University of Exeter in Britain, expressed his enthusiasm for this brainless creature’s ingenuity:

‘It’s astonishing that this organic creature can manipulate inorganic matter with such precision – and yet it’s got no brain’, says Roy Sambles … The crystals’ growth must be self-organized – emerging from the right chemical environment rather than being engineered by detailed top-down control. ‘It’s starting with a soup of chemicals and pulling out this wonderful microstructure’, says Sambles, who fantasizes about emulating the process ‘in a bucket in a corner of the lab’. [Whitefield 2001]
Human ingenuity came up with microlens arrays only a few years ago, and they are used in directional displays and in micro-optics, for example, as signal-routing connectors for signal processing. Once again we find that nature foreshadowed our technical developments. The same applies to photonic solids, structures that can selectively reflect light in all directions. Photonic materials have stimulated much research over the past ten years because of their potential in light manipulation, yet they are to be found in opals and in the wings of butterflies. But then, nature has been in the business of developing functioning optical structures for a very long time (Sambles 2001, 783).

The brittlestar may not get full credit for its superior ingenuity, which exceeds the current technological ingenuity of humans, but a larger, older and wiser configuration called ‘nature’ does. As one National Public Radio reporter put it: ‘Even the most primitive creatures might have the edge over modern science.’

While this discovery is a fantastically interesting scientific result, it’s probably fair to say that the excitement surrounding this finding and the wide reporting of this story has more to do with its potential applications than pure amazement at the ingenuity of this creature’s bodily know-how, as this subtle acknowledgement in the closing sentence of the technical article suggests:

The demonstrated use of calcite by brittlestars, both as an optical element and as a mechanical support, illustrates the remarkable ability of organisms, through the process of evolution, to optimize one material for several functions, and provides new ideas for the fabrication of ‘smart’ materials. [Aizenberg et al. 2001, 821]

Understatement is a virtue in scientific publications, and while summaries such as the ones in the ‘News and Views’ section of *Nature* allow quite a bit more leeway, statements to the popular press follow a different etiquette altogether. Quoting Aizenberg, a *Discover* magazine reporter puts the point more bluntly:

Until now, engineers have only dreamed of such perfect microlenses, which could be invaluable in optical networking and microchip production. Aizenberg is inspired. ‘This is very clever engineering,’ she says. ‘We may be able to mimic it, borrowing from nature a design that has already been working for thousands of years.’ [Weinstock 2001]

As might be expected, the press releases from Bell Labs (owned by Lucent Technologies) are very upbeat about the discovery. A Bell Labs article, dated 22 August 2001, entitled ‘Bell Labs Scientists Find Remarkable Optics in Marine Creatures that May Lead to Better Microlenses for Optical Networks’, explains that this multifunction biomaterial may lead to better-designed optical elements
Scientists hope to mimic nature’s success and design microlenses based on the brittlestar model. Such biomimetic lenses may prove useful as components of optical networks, and in chip design, where they could potentially improve optical lithography techniques. ‘Biomimetics builds on nature’s expertise’, said John Rogers, director of nanotechnology research at Bell Labs. ‘In this case, a relatively simple organism has a solution to a very complex problem in optics and materials design.’

A year and a half later, on 21 February 2003, Bell Labs issued an enthusiastic report on Aizenberg’s latest achievement, published in the journal *Science*: ‘The creation of the world’s first micro-patterned crystals inspired by bioengineering found in nature’ (Aizenberg et al. 2003). The summary phrase, written in bold under the title and designed to catch the reader’s eye, is telling: ‘study of how nature designs crystals in sea organisms may be important to nanotechnology’. With a wink to the brittlestar, Aizenberg explained the project this way:

I have always been fascinated with nature’s ability to perfect materials … The more we study biological organisms, the more we realize how much we can learn from them. We recently discovered that nature makes excellent micro-patterned crystals, and we decided to see if we could copy the natural approach in the lab, since this technique may be useful in nanotechnology.

In contrast to the ‘top down’ approach currently used to make lenses, whereby glass is ground down to match the specifications of the lens, Aizenberg and her colleagues used a ‘bottom-up’ technique, popular in nanotechnology development, in which successive layers of calcite are built up to make the lenses. The report predicts nothing less than a revolution in manufacturing optical devices: ‘the new Bell Labs approach may revolutionize how crystals are made in the future for a wide variety of applications’ (ibid.).

The themes of visualisation, inscription devices, embodied sight, and biomimesis, are no doubt sufficient stimuli to generate a Pavlovian response in a host of scholars who focus on questions of representation and related questions of epistemology, but the brittlestar’s optical system is different in kind from the visualising systems that many science studies and cultural studies scholars are fond of reflecting upon. What is at issue is not the geometrical optics model that positions language/representation as the lens that mediates between the object world and the mind of the knowing subject, a geometry of absolute exteriority between ontologically and epistemologically distinct kinds. The history of Western epistemology displays great diversity and ingenuity in the generation of different kinds of epistemological/visualising systems – Plato’s is not Descartes’s is not
Kant’s is not Merleau-Ponty’s is not Foucault’s – but as long as representation is the name of the game the notion of mediation – whether through the lens of consciousness, language, culture, technology, or labour – holds nature at bay, beyond our grasp, generating and regenerating the philosophical problem of the possibility of human knowledge out of this metaphysical quarantining of the object world.¹¹

The brittlestar is not a creature that thinks much of epistemological lenses or the geometrical optics of reflection: the brittlestar does not have a lens serving as the line of separation, the mediator between the mind of the knowing subject and the materiality of the outside world. Brittlestars don’t have eyes; they are eyes. That is, it is not merely the case that its visual system is embodied; its very being is a visualising apparatus. The brittlestar is a living breathing metamorphosing optical system. For a brittlestar, being and knowing, materiality and intelligibility, substance and form, entail one another. Its morphology – its intertwined skeletal and diffuse nervous systems, its very structure and form – entails the visualising system that it is. This is an animal without a brain. There is no res cogitans agonising about the postulated gap (of its own making) between itself and res extensa. There is no optics of mediation, no noumena/phenomena distinction, no question of representation.

Brittlestars are not fixated on the illusion of the fixity of ‘their’ bodily boundaries and they wouldn’t entertain the hypothesis of the immutability of matter for even a moment. Dynamics isn’t merely matter in motion to a brittlestar when matter’s dynamism is intrinsic to its biodynamic way of being. A brittlestar can change its colouration in response to the available light in its surroundings. When in danger of being captured by one predator or another, a brittlestar will break off the endangered body part (hence it’s name) and regrow it. The brittlestar is a visualising system that is constantly changing its geometry and its topology – autonomising and regenerating its optics in an ongoing reworking of its bodily boundaries. Its discursive practices – the boundary-drawing practices by which it differentiates between ‘itself’ and the ‘environment’ with which it intra-acts and by which it makes sense of its world, enabling it to discern a predator, for example – are materiality enacted.¹² Its bodily structure is a

---

¹¹ This is not to say that language, culture, technology and labour don’t matter but rather the difficulty is the assumption that they serve a mediating function. Agential realism offers a specific understanding of how they matter.

¹² See Barad (2004, 2007) for a posthumanist account of discursive practices, materiality, and the relationship between them. The term ‘posthumanist’ marks an account that calls into question the givenness of the differential categories of ‘human’ and ‘nonhuman’, examining the practices through which these differential boundaries are stabilised and destabilised. I do not use the term to refer to postmodernist celebrations.
material agent in what it sees/knows as part of the world’s dynamic engagement in practices of knowing. Similarly, its bodily materiality is not a passive blank surface awaiting the imprint of culture or history to give it meaning or open it to change; its very substance is morphologically active and generative, and plays an agentive role in its differential production, its ongoing materialisation. That is, its differential materialisation is discursive — entailing causal practices reconfiguring boundaries and properties that matter to its very existence. The ongoing reconfigurings of its bodily boundaries and connectivity are products of iterative causal intra-actions — material-discursive practices — through which the agential cut between ‘self’ and ‘other’ (for example, ‘surrounding environment’) is differentially enacted (for example, on one agential cut a given arm is part of the former, on another it is part of the latter). The ability to distinguish ‘self’ from ‘other’, to track and dodge predators, for example, is a requisite for its survival, but this does not imply that the categories need to be fixed; on the contrary, the brittlestar’s survival depends upon its capacity to discern the reality of its changing and relational nature. Intelligibility and materiality are not fixed aspects of the world, but rather intertwined agential performances. This eye, this being, is a living optics topologically enfolding bits of the environment within itself and expelling parts of itself to the environment as part of its biodynamics. This apparatus serves as both the condition for the possibility of the intertwined practices of knowing and being and as a causally productive force in its further materialisations. Talk about a multifunction biomaterial!

(or demonisations) of the ‘posthuman’ as living testimonies to the death of Man, nor as the next stage of Man. Note that the example in the body of the text is an illustration of the fact that intelligibility need not be a matter of intellection but rather more generally may entail differential responsiveness to what matters.

13 This is not to suggest that materiality and discourse are therefore to be held as equivalent, but rather that the relationship is one of mutual entailment. Just like the fact that it is not that one cannot draw a distinction between its skeletal system and its visualising system; but rather, there is no skeleton without the calcite crystals that also make up the visualising system, and vice versa.

14 The notion of intra-action is a key element of my agential realist framework. The neologism ‘intra-action’ signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies. That is, in contrast to the usual ‘interaction’, which assumes that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction, the notion of intra-action recognises that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action. It is important to note that the ‘distinct’ agencies are only distinct in a relational, not an absolute, sense, that is, agencies are only distinct in relation to their mutual entanglement; they don’t exist as individual elements. Crucially, the notion of intra-action constitutes a radical reworking of the traditional notion of causality. See Barad (2007).
Brittlestars challenge not only disembodied epistemologies, but also traditional, and indeed many non-traditional, notions of embodiment. Bodies are not situated in the world; they are part of the world.\textsuperscript{15} Objectivity can’t be a matter of seeing from somewhere, as opposed to the view from nowhere (objectivism) or everywhere (relativism), if being situated in the world means occupying particular coordinates in space and time, in culture and in history. Just as the importance of the body as a performance rather than a thing can hardly be overemphasised, so should we resist the familiar conception of spacetime as a pre-existent Euclidean container (or even a non-Euclidean manifold) which presents separately constituted bodies with a place to be or a space through which to travel. ‘Position’ is neither an absolute nor an \textit{a priori} determinate feature of space. The spacetime manifold does not sit still while bodies are made and remade. The relationship between space, time and matter is much more intimate. Spacetime itself is iteratively reconfigured through the ongoing intra-activity of the world. The world is an ongoing intra-active engagement, and bodies are among the differential performances of the world’s dynamic intra-activity, in an endless reconfiguring of boundaries and properties, including those of spacetime. Technoscientific and other practices entail space-time-matter-in-the-making. No-thing stands separately constituted and positioned inside a spacetime frame of reference, nor does there exist a divine position for our viewing pleasure located outside the world (Barad 2007; Schrödinger 1944, 127). There is no absolute inside or absolute outside. There is only exteriority within, that is, agential separability (Barad 2007).

\textsuperscript{15} Haraway does not take location to be about fixed position (though unfortunately many readers who cite Haraway conflate her notion of ‘situated’ with the specification of one’s social location along a set of axes referencing one’s identity). She reiterates this point in different ways throughout her work. Situated knowledges is not merely about knowing/seeing from somewhere (as in having a perspective), but about taking account of how the specific prosthetic embodiment of the technologically enhanced visualising apparatus matters to practices of knowing. And if her use of the ‘@’ sign in Haraway (1997) can be understood as a mark of the specificity of location, then we can conclude that location is not equivalent to the local, but neither does the globality of the net imply universality but rather its distributed and layered nature (121). Location, for Haraway, may be about the specification of where the addressee is in the net, but the net is not fixed and neither are identities or spacetime. Though Haraway doesn’t seem to go as far in making the ontological points I want to emphasise here, on both accounts it seems that while location cannot be about occupying a fixed position, it may be usefully (con)figured as specific connectivity. (See Barad (2007) on the agential realist conception of objectivity not as a view from somewhere, but as a matter of accountability to marks on bodies. Objectivity is not solely an epistemological matter (a matter of seeing, albeit specifically embodied sight) but an ontological (ontoepistemological) one).
Embodiment is not a matter of being specifically situated in the world, but rather of being of the world in its dynamic specificity.

Interestingly, some ophiuroids have bioluminescent arms that continue to wiggle and emit light after breaking off. Marine biologists understand this as an effective survival tactic that a brittlestar performs in order to distract predators while it escapes. Is this jettisoned limb simply a piece of an organic-inorganic structure shuttering with remnant reflex energy or a companion species helping out? If the detached limb’s continuing movements are judged to be mere reflex on the basis of the fact that the fragment has no brain, what of the original organism that is a smart material without a brain, and a living contestation of the organic/inorganic binary? Brittlestar species exhibit great diversity in sexual behaviour and reproduction: some species use broadcast spawning, others exhibit sexual dimorphism, some are hermaphroditic and self-fertilise, and some reproduce asexually by regenerating/ cloning itself out of the fragmented body parts. When is a broken-off limb only a piece of the environment and when it is an offspring? At what point does the ‘disconnected’ limb belong to the ‘environment’ rather than the ‘brittlestar’? Is contiguity of body parts required in the specification of a single organism? Can we trust visual delineations to define bodily boundaries? Can we trust our eyes? Connectivity does not require physical contiguity. (Spatially separate particles in an entangled state do not have separate identities, but rather are part of the same phenomena.16) Is the connection between an ‘offspring’ regenerated from a fragmented body part and the parent brittlestar the same as its connection to a dead limb or the rest of the environment? Imagine the possibilities for lost-limb memory trauma when it comes to brittlestars! Rethinking embodiment in this way will surely require rethinking psychoanalysis as well.

Brittlestars are living breathing mutating liminal diffraction gratings – they live at the edge of being diffraction gratings. Negotiating complex sets of changing relations concerning bodily boundaries, brittlestars are evolutionarily attuned to processes of differentiation. As such they cannot afford to ignore potential diffraction effects. The brittlestar’s optical apparatus is limited by diffraction effects, a fate that befalls light microscopes and other visualising systems as well (even those that primarily operate on the basis of geometrical optics). Diffraction effects limit the ability of a lens (or system of lenses) to resolve an image. This is a fundamental physical limit (not merely a practical

---

16 Quantum phenomena suggest an ontology based on entanglement where relations take primacy over relata. See Barad (2007) for more details. NB: The issue here is not whether macroscopic entanglements at this scale are observed/observable, but rather the issue is one of ontology and quantum physics does not suggest different ontologies at different length scales.
The greater the diffraction effects the less determinate are the boundaries of an image. Brittlestars have evolved in intra-action with their environment in just such a way that their microlenses are optimised to maximise visual acuity (for the discernment of predators, hiding places and other important phenomena) in a creative tension, a trade-off, between the resolution of detail and diffraction effects, between geometrical and physical optics. How that tension is negotiated clearly matters: the possibilities for survival are at stake in its ability to differentiate bodily boundaries. Diffraction is not about any difference but about which differences matter. The brittlestar lives agential separability, the possibilities for differentiation without individuation.

Brittlestars know better than to get caught up in a geometrical optics of knowing. Clearly they are in a different genus than the mediating machines, inscription devices, lenses, panopticons and various other epistemological tools.

17 This optical limit is called Abbe’s Law. In theory, the diffraction limit can be mitigated (that is, the diffraction effects reduced) by taking advantage of certain features of the phenomenon of quantum entanglement, but a limit exists none the less for any finite number of entangled photons. See for example, Boto et al. (2000).

18 The focus of the analysis in the Nature article is exclusively on geometrical optics; there is no discussion of possible physical optics effects, such as diffraction. Diffraction effects limit the resolving power of a lens. For a given wavelength of light, the smaller the lens size the greater the blurring of the image by diffraction. This is an important factor for small animals such as insects. In fact, it is the reason they don’t have the kind of eyes that the human or the octopus has. If the human eye was scaled down to fit an insect, the insect would be unable to resolve images because the diffraction effects would be very significant for a lens that small. So insects use a different optical system, namely compound eyes. The compound eye is made up of many individual units called ‘ommatidia’. Each ommatidium is a simple light detector (a light pipe) that points in a different direction. The compound eye’s ability to resolve images depends upon a large number of small ommatidia: resolution increases the smaller and more numerous the ommatidia. But if the ommatidia are too small then blurring caused by diffraction becomes significant. The optimal size of the ommatidia is a compromise between these competing effects. That is, the optimal size for the individual ommatidia of a compound eye is a trade-off between the competing effects of angular resolution between neighbouring lenses (which like pixels on a monitor have better resolution the smaller their size and greater their proximity (density)) and the limits of resolution due to diffraction effects of an individual lens (which increase the smaller the individual lens (pixel)). For example, for a wavelength of 0.5 microns (yellow-green), the optimal diameter of an ommatidium is 27 microns (see McNeill 1997). Interestingly, the individual lenses of the brittlestar have a diameter of approximately 20 microns and so it seems that the brittlestar has also engineered a good trade-off between resolvability and diffraction.
that many science studies and cultural studies scholars fancy. Science studies and cultural studies approaches too often figure visualisation as a matter of geometrical optics, leaving important factors of physical optics aside. But this approach will produce a fuzzy image at best. Interestingly, limiting an analysis to the domain of geometrical optics, in the neglect of diffraction and other important physical optics effects, corresponds to limiting the analysis to the domain of classical physics in the neglect of quantum effects. There is a profound distinction between classical and quantum physics – the epistemology and ontology that each entails is strikingly different. In a sense, this neglect of physical optics (quantum physics) can be understood as marking the epistemological limit of science studies. There is more to nature than ‘nature-as-the-object-of-human-knowledge’. The latter constitutes a re-veiling (which provokes the seeming need for a revealing) of nature, yet again. Boundary-making practices do not merely pick out the epistemic object, backgrounding the rest. And scientific practices are not merely practices of knowing and the knowledge produced is not ours alone. Even in direct challenges to Western philosophy’s traditional conceptions of epistemology there is a tendency to continue to think of knowers as human subjects, albeit appropriately hooked into our favourite technological prostheses. In the absence of a vigorous examination of the ontological issues, the locus of knowledge is presumed to be never too far removed from the human and so the democratising move is to invite nonhuman entities into our sociality. But the nature/culture dualism is not undermined by inviting everything into one category (man’s yet again). The point of challenging traditional epistemologies is not merely to welcome females, slaves, children, animals and other dispossessed Others (exiled from the land of knowers by Aristotle thousands of years ago) into the fold of knowers, but to better account for the ontology of knowing.

Brittlestars literally enact my agential realist ontoepistemological point about the entangled practices of knowing and being (Barad 1993; 2007). They challenge our Cartesian habits of mind, breaking down the usual visual metaphors for knowing along with its optics of mediated sight. Knowledge making is not a mediated activity, despite the common refrain to the contrary. Knowing is a

19 This correspondence is a result of wave-particle duality and can be found in elementary textbooks on quantum physics.
20 The distinction between the two theories is profound (for example, consider the difference in objective referents for one thing), even though in some cases, in particular, in the limit of large mass objects (h/m → 0), the theories may produce numerically similar values (which practically speaking may be considered identical).
21 This phrase is Sandra Harding’s (1991, 147) but she is not alone in this insistence.
direct material engagement, a practice of intra-acting with the world as part of the world in its dynamic material configuring, its ongoing articulation. The entangled practices of knowing and being are material practices. The world is not merely an idea that exists in the human mind. To the contrary, ‘mind’ is a specific material configuration of the world, not necessarily coincident with a brain. Brain cells are not the only ones that hold memories, respond to stimuli, or think thoughts. Brittlestars intra-act with their ocean environment and respond to differential stimuli made intelligible through these intra-actions, adjusting their positions and reworking their bodies in order to avoid predators or find food or shelter, all without brains or eyes. (Was cell biologist Daniel Mazia being merely metaphorical when he remarked that ‘the gift of the great microscopist is the ability to think with the eyes and see with the brain’? Surely, a plethora of statements about tacit knowing, including a wealth of testimonials offered by scientists, suggests some more literal, material, meaning.)

‘I think therefore I am’ is not the brittlestar’s credo. Knowing is not a capacity that is the exclusive birthright of the human. The ‘knower’ cannot be assumed to be a self-contained rational human subject, nor even its prosthetically enhanced variant. There is no res cogitans that inhabits a given body with inherent boundaries differentiating self and other. Rather, subjects are differentially constituted through specific intra-actions. The subjects so constituted may range across some of the traditional boundaries (such as those between human and nonhuman, and self and other) that get taken for granted. Knowing is a distributed practice that includes the larger material arrangement. To the extent that ‘humans’ participate in scientific or other practices of knowing is as part of the larger material configuration of the world and its ongoing open-ended articulation.

Knowing is a specific engagement of the world where part of the world becomes differentially intelligible to another part of the world in its differential accountability to/for that of which it is a part. On traditional humanist accounts, intelligibility requires an intellective agent (a that to which something is intelligible) and intellection is framed as a specifically human capacity. But on my agential realist account, intelligibility is an ontological performance of the world in its ongoing articulation. It is not a human-dependent characteristic but a feature of the world in its differential becoming. The world articulates itself differently. And knowing does not require intellection in the humanist sense either, but rather, knowing is a matter of differential responsiveness (as performatively articulated and accountable) to what matters.

---

22 Where ‘holding’, ‘responding’ and ‘thinking’ are intra-active engagements with and as parts of specific configurations of the world.
Knowing, however, is not a matter of mere differential responsiveness in the sense of simply having different responses to different stimuli. Knowing requires differential accountability to what matters and is excluded from mattering. That is, what is required is differential responsiveness that is accountable to marks on bodies as part of a topologically dynamic complex of performances. As Rouse remarks:

There is nothing about the letters p-o-s-i-t-i-o-n or the po-zi-shun that magically … connects them to what is disclosed in measurements using apparatus with internally fixed parts; only their actual ongoing use in such circumstances, in reliably recognizable and normatively accountable ways, can account for their discursive significance. [2004, 153]

But recognition need not entail cognition in humanist terms. A brittlestar can recognise a predator and successfully negotiate its environment to elude capture despite the fact that it has no brain. A brittlestar is not some ideal Cartesian subject; but through specific practices of intra-active engagement it differentially responds (not simply in the sense of responding differently to different things that are out there but) in ways that matter. There are stakes – life and death stakes – in getting it wrong. Furthermore, ‘recognisability’ is

23 Inanimate phenomena, like atoms, may seem to be altogether quite another matter. Descartes would have us imagine atoms as little things running in the void and this conception would certainly seem to wreak havoc with any meaningful sense of recognisability. But the notion that atoms are self-contained objects with inherent properties that follow deterministic trajectories is no longer viable. On Niels Bohr’s account, ‘atoms’ are not simple objects, but rather they are complex open-ended configurations of intra-acting practices. That is, an ‘atom’ includes the apparatus that helps constitute it. To take one example, surely there is some recognisable sense in which entangled particles taking part in a quantum teleportation experiment can be said to ‘recognise’ one another for they communicate well enough with one another to transmit information across the Danube River (see Nature and BBC articles). One might object that this example is a human contrivance, a mere artefact of special laboratory conditions. However, the goal of the experiment was to get particles to participate in these ways outside the laboratory. But more to the point, atoms participate in the world’s differential becoming as part of many different complexes of practices so it isn’t a question of attributing the capacity of recognition to atoms-in-isolation (which are mere abstractions). That is, the point that often is neglected but that is truly central to what is at issue here is the fact that the ‘conditions’ ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ the laboratory are precisely what is relevant. Or, as Joseph Rouse puts it: ‘The language of ‘differential responsiveness’ has been used to characterize non-normative relations (e.g., iron responds differentially to its environmental conditions by rusting or not rusting), in contrast with both instrumental rationality and semantic articulation. Of course, your response and mine is to say that the appearance of non-normativity has been achieved
not a fixed and universal notion but rather it too obtains its meaning through its ongoing use in specific practices. What is at issue then is not mere differential responsiveness but normative differential responsiveness. Different material intra-actions produce different materialisations of the world and hence there are specific stakes in how responsiveness is enacted. In an important sense, it matters to the world how the world comes to matter.

Brittlestars are not merely tools that we can use to teach us about biomimesis and enhanced communication networks. Brittlestars are living testimony to the inseparability of knowing, being and doing. On the one hand, we trust our eyes when it comes to believing that boundaries that we see are sharp inherent edges marking the limit of separate entities, even though upon closer examination the diffraction effects – the indefinite nature of those boundaries – become clear (which is not to suggest that there really are no boundaries or that what is at stake is a postmodern celebration of the blurring of boundaries; we have learned too much about diffraction to think in these simplistic terms). On the other hand, we don’t trust our eyes to give us reliable access to the material world; as inheritors of the Cartesian legacy we would rather put our faith in representations rather than matter, believing that we have a kind of direct access to the content of our representations that we lack towards that which is represented. To embrace representationalism and its geometry/geometrical optics of externality is not merely to make a justifiable approximation that can be fixed by adding on further factors/perturbations at some later stage, but rather it is to start with the wrong optics, the wrong ground state, the wrong set of epistemological and ontological assumptions. Haraway’s move away from her early ‘an optics is a politics of positioning’ (1991, 193) to her later ‘[d]iffraction is an optical metaphor for the effort to make a difference in the world’ (1997, 16) signals the kind of shift that is required.

There is more to diffraction than meets the eye. As we learn from quantum mechanical studies of diffraction (Barad 2007), diffraction is a much more subtle and profound phenomenon than the classical understanding suggests. The phenomenon of diffraction does not merely signify the disruption of
representationalism and its metaphors of reflection in the endless play of images and its anxieties about copy and original and displacements of the Same elsewhere. Diffraction is an ethico-onto-epistemological matter. We are not merely differently situated in the world; ‘each of us’ is part of the intra-active ongoing articulation of the world in its differential mattering. Diffraction is a material-discursive phenomenon that challenges the presumed inherent separability of subject and object, nature and culture, fact and value, human and nonhuman, organic and inorganic, epistemology and ontology, and material and discursive. Diffraction marks the limits of the determinacy and permanency of boundaries. One of the crucial lessons we learn is that agential cuts cut things together and apart. Diffraction is a matter of differential entanglements; this is the deep significance of a diffraction pattern (Barad 2007, 247–352). Differentiating is not about othering/separating, but on the contrary about making connections and commitments. What is on the ‘other side’ of the cut is not separate from us; agential separability is not individuation. Ethics is not about right response to the other, but about responsibility and accountability for the lively relationalities of becoming of which ‘we’ are a part.

Brittlestars are not pure bits of nature or blank slates for the imprinting of culture. They are not mere resources or tools for human interventions. They are not simply superior optical engineers or natural inspirations for the enterprising ingenuity of humans. Brittlestars are phenomena intra-actively produced and entangled with other phenomena. They are agential beings, lively configurations of the world, with more entanglements than arms. They are not merely objects of our knowledge/product making projects. ‘Humans’ and ‘brittlestars’ learn about and co-constitute one another through a variety of ‘brittlestar’-‘human’ intra-actions. Biomimesis may be the goal of certain research projects that seek to appropriate the ingenuity of the brittlestar’s lens system, but this practice cannot be understood as a process of copying the other. Nature is not a pure essence that exists ‘out there’ or on a slide positioned under the objective of our microscopes. Is the brittlestar the lens that we look at or through or with? Brittlestars are not gripped by the idea of mirroring, imitation, reflection, or other modes of the tropology of Sameness. These echinoderms don’t reflect on the world, they are engaged in making a difference in the world as part of the world in its differential becoming and so are we. The specific nature of our intra-actions with brittlestars matters. For all we have learned from our intra-actions with brittlestars the issue is not whether or not we are willing to follow Nature’s example. The attending ethico-onto-epistemological questions have to do with responsibility and accountability for the entanglements ‘we’ help enact and what kinds of commitments ‘we’ are willing to take on (including commitments to ‘ourselves’ and who ‘we’ may become).
Brittlestars are living, breathing, mutating lensing systems that transgress the sacrosanct divides between organic and inorganic, machine and animal, episteme and techné, matter and intelligibility, macro and micro. Brittlestars not only already know how to do nanotechnology (so beautifully that they have evolutionarily done away with spherical aberration and birefringence in their perfecting of their nanoscale designs!), they live it. Indeed, for many biomimetic engineers there is an important sense in which brittlestars are a nanotechnology that lives and breathes and repairs itself, hinting at the cyborgs we may become.

It would be a serious error to mistake biomimesis for mere imitation. The emerging field of biomimetics is not about copies of originals or even copies of copies without beginning or end. On the contrary, biomimesis is a particularly poignant call for the incorporation of difference at every level in breaking the deadening and sinister symmetry of Sameness which uses the hall of mirrors to evacuate time, history and matter (leaving in its stead a culture of no culture and a nature of no nature).\(^{24}\) The biomimetic-inspired study of the brittlestar reveals the limitations of the geometrical optics of mirroring and shows us that the crucial point is not mirroring but its creative undoing, not sameness for its own sake but attentiveness to differences that matter. Contemporary practitioners of biomimesis do not claim to be making replicas of nature; rather they are engaged in practices that use nature as inspiration for new engineering designs. Biomimetics honours Mother Nature as the primo engineer, but it doesn't promise to abide by her methods. It embraces new innovations, new materials, new techniques, new applications. Bringing the new to light is its highest principle.

Biomimetics is a nodal point around which nanotechnologies, biotechnologies and infotechnologies become more and more complexly entangled. This accounts for a great deal of the current fascination with biomimetics, the enthusiastic support it is receiving from government agencies, universities and private industry, and the rapid growth of research centres that are fashioned on a model of hybridity (drawing together interdisciplinary, international, inter-organisation teams) that cultural studies, women's studies, ethnic studies and other critical social studies programmes only dream about, despite the fact that they have been touting the advantages of hybrid/interdisciplinary efforts for decades, with little structural or material support from the colleges and universities that claim to pride themselves on the interdisciplinary efforts that spur them to the cutting edge of education and research. As we entertain the

\(^{24}\) See Haraway (1997) on the ‘nature of no nature’ and the ‘culture of no culture’ (the latter is borrowed from Sharon Traweek).
possibilities for forming partnerships with brittlestars and other organisms for biomemetic projects, we are co-constituting ourselves into assemblages that mimic (but do not replicate) the entanglements of the objects we study and the tools that we make. Indeed, this is because ‘we’ and ‘they’ are entangled, and as ‘subject’ and ‘object’ are mutually constituted, so too these very entanglements are being iteratively reconfigured. The ethical questions that we will want to consider are not only about how nonhuman animals are being appropriated for human desires but also how our desires and our beings are co-constitutively reconfigured as well.

Optical lithography is a prime example of how biomimetics has transformed not only the notion of mirroring but our understanding of optics. Biomimetics is not interested in mirror images of the Same; it has a different optics in mind. Biomimetics is about bringing different difference patterns into existence; it is interested in running the rays of understanding back through the apparatuses of production to remake these very apparatuses. For example, notice how optical lithography is used to study brittlestar lenses and then brittlestar lenses are used as inspiration for improving optical lithography. Tools are used to rework tools. They are phenomena enfolded into the apparatuses of bodily production which contributed to their constitution as nanotechnology phenomena. What is the topology of this enfolding? It’s crucial that we understand this. This is not simply the iteration of simulacra (copies from copies without originals); this dynamics is much more topologically complex. Differences are incorporated at each level. Reflexive analyses don’t cut it; we need to understand diffraction effects: how differences are constituted and enfolded, and which differences matter.

Biomimesis is not about the Same, but rather about enacting new cuts and reconfiguring entanglements. We are much more intimately connected than the notion of mimesis connotes. We don’t have the distance required to make copies; in an important sense, we are already entangled with the diffractive apparatuses that iteratively rework what we study. Ethical practice will require specific case-by-case accountings of marks on bodies. Ethics is about accounting for our part of the entangled webs we weave.

Brittlestars and their kin (both organic and inorganic, animate and inanimate) disrupt humanist and antihumanist assumptions about the nature of identity, performativity, agency and ethical practice. It’s not that their polymorphic

25 Reminiscent of the living mutating differential gear assemblage (Barad 2007, 223–46).

26 For an agential realist rethinking of performativity, see Barad (2003; 2007). Whereas Butler works with a notion of performativity as iterative citationality, agential understands performativity as iterative intra-activity (including all the corresponding changes in our understanding of causality).
queer sexual practices give them privileged insights from which to build a queer theory (identity politics is surely not the point), and I am not suggesting that they be used as model, mentor, or measure for understanding human interactions, including human sexuality, sociality and political practice. The point is rather that an ethical accounting of our entanglements with brittlestars and their kin requires a radical rethinking of the nature of experience (for example, touch and vision), of theory, and their interrelationship, as well as many other core concepts that are still taken for granted by queer theorists. One crucial lesson we can take from our intra-actions with brittlestars (where the objective referent here is the phenomenon, not some allegedly pure bit of nature) is that ethics is not simply about the subsequent consequences of our ways of interacting with the world, as if effect followed cause in a linear chain of events, but rather ethics is about mattering, about the entangled materialisations we help enact and are a part of bringing about, including new configurations, new subjectivities, new possibilities – even the smallest cuts matter.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Myra Hird and Noreen Giffney for their abundant patience, the anonymous reviewers for their useful suggestions, and Fern Feldman for insightful comments.

References

(date unknown a), ‘The Height of Hubris’ (Boston Research Center interview, Clip 9), <www.biomimicry.org>, accessed 30 August 2007.
QUEER CAUSATION AND THE ETHICS OF MATTERING

— (date unknown b), ‘Seeing the “Other” with Respect’ (Boston Research Center interview, Clip 8), Biomimicry, <www.biomimicry.org>, accessed 30 August 2007.


‘Can We Learn to See Better from a Brittlestar?’ (2002), BBC News Service, 16 December.


Subjectivities configured as post-human may challenge investments in former configurations of what it means to be human, but there remains enough of a residue of ‘the human’ for culture to persist in defining the nonhuman, or specifically nonhumans. If it is conceived by what remains of culture as human, sexuality implies an involvement with the human. Whether it is within or between entities or as a ubiquitous dissipative force, sexuality effectuates alterations in patterns of subjectivity through desire, pleasure, sexual events and affects. Ethically, this definition impels the need to theorise those who don’t count. Corpses provide an ambivalent point within the human/nonhuman issue as they are both and neither human/nonhuman – the were that do and don’t count. The corpse is the actual material residue of ‘the human’. Necrophilic desire is located around this involvement. Even the discrepancy in describing desire for corpses or for the corpse raises issues of necrophilia being a generic sexuality – the necrophile – or a specific dialectic – desire for a corpse invested with particular individual qualities or memories of those qualities. ‘Non/Human’ invokes machines, animals, epistemes, powers, inanimate objects. Corpses share everything with humans except life, so the nonhuman element in necrophilia is the absence of life rather than genus or organic alterity. Animation, rot and other material differences follow. This chapter explores the navigations of the human raised when the corpse – human nonhuman and simultaneously nonhuman human – enters into a desiring pattern with a living force tactically described as human.

Transgressive sexuality has frequently been defined through the dominant paradigms which it transgresses. This means transgressive sexuality is often seen as either affirming these paradigms by being oriented in dialectic opposition to them, or politically challenging in reference to them. Perversion is, however, the multiplicity at the very heart of desire that dissipates and redistributes the body’s intensities. ‘Normal’ sexuality is one reiteration of these corporeal libidinal cartographies – reiterative because reliability in repetition is a key feature of normal sexuality’s nature and power. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s claim that all desire affords a becoming means that transgression is already within
all forms of desire. Theirs is a project of queering desire, rather than reifying any one form of sexuality as queer. This chapter will explore the queerness of one seemingly heterosexual desire – male/female sexual situations – as it is incarnated in necrophilia. Deleuze and Guattari, together and separately, as well as Michel Foucault, all critique the term ‘transgression’. Transgression is unable to exist independently as a haecceity. It can only be measured against and in reference to, while a Deleuzio-Guattarian reading is an interrogation of the different parameters, paradigms and plateaus within rather than against systems, an alteration of trajectories and velocities. Perhaps a more correct term would be ‘lines of flight’, however I use the term ‘transgression’ here because necrophilic trajectories have been truncated and reified through a variety of institutions and thus have a particular relationship with these institutions. The use of the term is, however, brief and tactical, and is only relevant while necrophilia’s relationship with these institutes is being discussed and reactive rather than active affect is maintained in the analyses.

Non-aggressive examples of necrophilia in three films, *Beyond the Darkness* (1979), *Macabre* (1981) and *Flesh for Frankenstein* (1973), which include both male and female corpses, emphasise the ways in which necrophilic desire requires a destratification of the body into a Body without Organs. Accidentally but none the less relevant, these three films have all been banned, thus conflating the transgressive nature of their content and the act of viewing them – another point at which the residue of the problematic notion of transgression arises. Forensics describes the ruptured body in death as ‘dishevelled’. Organs become genital, surgery sexual and the striation of the gendered body is dishevelled through the planes of pleasure\(^1\) offered by the corpse. Necrophilia is configured into a dialectic and onanistic practice, confusing subject and object, desire and disgust. These corpses are physically bodies with organs, but entirely reorganised, as is the desire of the necrophiles. When Deleuze and Guattari ask us to sing with our rectum, here we see those who fuck with their entrails, launching on becoming-viscera. Reading the body through gender signifiers of genitals is no longer relevant in these ‘heterosexual’ relationships. The larger structure of necrophilia in society will not form a major part of this chapter. However,

\(^1\) My use of the word ‘pleasure’ here is tactical. In response to Foucault’s disdain at the word ‘desire’ because it evokes a desire ‘for’ (and thus a lack of), Deleuze refuses the word ‘pleasure’. Deleuze claims pleasure ‘seems to interrupt the immanent process of desire … the only means for persons or subjects to orient themselves in a process that exceeds them’ (2000, 255). However, if Deleuze can posit a desire which lacks nothing, then my use of the term ‘pleasure’ comes because it evokes a ‘within’ rather than a ‘toward’, a pure spatial – and hence immanent – form of ecstasy, outside of temporal narratives. Both have issues which I do not have time to elaborate here.
recent changes to the laws in the US punish necrophilia as ‘immoral’ while vindicating institutionalised homophobia and misogyny seen in laws such as the homosexual panic law and the low incidence of prosecution for rape. ‘Perverse’ sexualities, from homosexuality and necrophilia to celibacy and lust-murder, are morally maligned as equivalent based on the ways all challenge ‘proper’ object choice. But non-violent perverse sexualities pose challenges to issues of corporeal volition and desire beyond traditional oppositional and hierarchical libidinal configurations.

In September 2004, Governor of California Arnold Schwarzenegger created California’s first law forbidding necrophilia as a criminal act. The felony is punishable by up to eight years’ incarceration. In March 2005, the media went into a frenzy over the 2001 study in which natural science documented the first observation of necrophilia in mallard ducks – homosexual necrophilia at that (Moeliker 2001). In 1973, Baron Frankenstein announced ‘to know death, you have to fuck life in the gall bladder.’

Perhaps it is difficult to define necrophilia as a dividuated sexual act at all. Primarily one must select the paradigm by which the corpse is defined. Item of respect? Fetish item? Forensic text? Victim of aggression in order to procure a corpse for a sex act? Object of nostalgia? Past-tense person, present-tense property? Meat? Flesh? What can one do with a corpse? Is traditional sex with a corpse queer? If, according to Monique Wittig, sexuality creates gender through opposition, is necrophilia still either heterosexual or homosexual? Is a corpse gendered if it is no longer a person? Is visceral necrophilia, using the entrails for pleasure, different to ‘straight’ necrophilia sex acts? Is this kind of necrophilia a form of surgical fetishism? What gender is a gall bladder? Guattari sees the repressive regime of signification as perpetrating a massacre of desire and the body. Can massacring the body – opening it out, cutting it up post mortem and achieving pleasure from it – end the massacre of the body? He states:

We can no longer sit idly by as others steal our mouths, our anuses, our genitals, our nerves, our guts, our arteries. In order to fashion parts and works in an ignoble mechanism of production which links capital, exploitation and the family. We can no longer allow others to turn our mucous membranes, our skin, all our sensitive areas into occupied territory – territory controlled and regimented by others, to which we are forbidden access … We can no longer allow others to repress our fucking, control our shit, our saliva, our energies, all in conformity with the prescriptions of the law and its carefully defined little transgressions. We want to see frigid, imprisoned, mortified bodies exploded to bits, even if capitalism continues to demand that they be kept in check at the expense of our living bodies. [1996, 32]
In this chapter, I am going to explore de-signified corporeally massacred bodies, in relation to the sealed, facialised and genitted body which is complicit with the massacre capitalist and Oedipal systems perform on the body and desire. The reason I have selected necrophilia in particular is not because it offers a privileged version of queer but because in death the body can be actually, physically reorganised – massacre not as murder but as physical eruption. The first part of this chapter will contextualise the ways in which necrophilia is a form of sexuality emergent through legal and medical discourse rather than volitional desire. The second part offers an exploration, through three Italian horror films which exemplify necrophilia in different ways as reorganising the flesh and desire. The torn-apart corpse as object of desire and the relation between two enfleshed entities are open systems of connection rather than dialectic between two organised bodies. The fleshes open out toward each other, one actually, the other in libidinal planes which disorganise the body Guattari points out is massacred through systems of signifying the body and desire relations.

Necrophilia and Discursive Massacres

I shall not even take into consideration those [perverts] who are condemned by a judge to choose between prison or psychiatric treatment. [Péraldi 1981, 170]

Before I elaborate my arguments lauding the pleasures and perversions of necrophilia in certain films as examples of Deleuze and Guattari’s Body without Organs, of Deleuze’s Leibnizian fold and of Guattari’s massacred body, I want to dispel any association of the forms of necrophilia upon which I will focus with traditional associations of necrophilia with (often violent) criminality. This section is, tediously but I think necessarily, about what this chapter is not. At the very least, what the need for the following shows is that the ‘sexuality’ of necrophilia is, like all sexualities, not a singular, predictable, or repeatable form of sexuality.

The case which resulted in Schwarzenegger outlawing necrophilia was initially charged as a break and enter into the morgue, because the law did not know how to prosecute necrophilia and had to charge the perpetrator with something (the moral outrage toward the act was intensified by what was perceived to be paedophilic necrophilia – the ‘victim’ was four years old). Corpse defilement is frequently charged as wilful destruction of property. This conforms with a Kantian perspective, which would position the corpse as property and thus the violation of which is an ethical consideration between a person and the property rather than the subjectivity of another. Does this new law invest the cadaver
with volition, thus in necrophilia the corpse is a victim of rape against its ‘will’? If so, the perverse (but not necessarily aggressive) sexuality of necrophilia and violent crime become mutually exclusive. Many films and clinical texts associate necrophilia with a precluding violent act perpetrated in order to procure the corpse. The criminal and the pervert are closely aligned, both share a relationship with clinical epistemology — the criminologist, the psychologist and, in the case of the corpse itself, the forensic pathologist. The modern serial killer is often made more interesting by focusing on their necrophiliac tendencies — Ed Gein, Ted Bundy, Jeffrey Dahmer and Dennis Nielsen. The role of psychiatrist and criminologist coalesce in the seminal 1886 work of Richard von Krafft-Ebing, the *Psychopathia Sexualis*. Lust-murder sits side by side with necrophilia. Case 24: Ardisson, is not simply a necrophiliac, in spite of being classified under this heading. He also drinks urine, eats rats and cats, as well as his own sperm, is paedophilic and apparently olfactorily retarded — the fact he finds the stench of putrefaction inoffensive seems galling to Krafft-Ebing. Happily Krafft-Ebing tells us Ardisson was ‘pleased with prison life’ (1997/1886, 40). Krafft-Ebing’s other case of necrophilia, Case 23: Sergeant Bertrand, despite being of ‘delicate physical constitution’ (37), killed animals to procure entrails. His necrophilia did not focus on sex with corpses but onanistic activity with entrails, thus he was named a monomaniac. While all monomania is based on the demarcation of a single-minded, obsessive and diviveduated libidinal practice, and thus necrophilia itself is technically a monomaniac, Bertrand’s focus on viscera, which is not a single object nor subjectivised, rather than a past tense person-corpse, seems to change the inflection of the monomania beyond a perverse dialectic of subject/object. In spite of bestiality necrophilia, Bertrand’s perversion with human bodies was entirely heterosexual as sex with male corpses ‘was always attended with a feeling of disgust’ (38). It is not mentioned whether the animals were male or female. Unlike Ardisson he was sentenced to one year court-martial. Krafft-Ebing ends this case with the observation:

The actual motive for exhuming the bodies however, was then, as before, to cut them up; and the enjoyment in doing so was greater than in using the bodies sexually. The latter act had always been nothing more than an episode of the principal one, and had never quieted his desires; for which reason he had later on always mutilated the body [39]

This last comment could as easily describe a forensic pathologist as a viscera-focused necrophiliac. The relationship is contingent with the use-function of the corpse in relation to ‘pleasure’. The sexual psychopath ‘uses’ the corpse differently to the scientist. The former is a necrophiliac, the latter perhaps an epistophiliac.
The corpse is territorialised by forensic medicine and religious ideology. Capitalism allows the corpse to be ‘used’ by forensic pathology, making the ultimate object of uselessness work, while making invisible the scientist who uses it. Stephen Pfohl and Avery Gordon’s description of criminology makes an interesting connection with the forensic pathologist. They describe the clinical formation of the criminal subject:

Erect before the bar he sees her as grave matter to be ordered knowledgeablely. His deadly nature and her law he rights, he writes, he rites – three rights and nothing left: the right of man, the writings of a science and the ritual construction of an empirical order … the pleasure of criminology is to displace the other’s unfixed pleasure. [1987, 230]

Various incarnations of psychology exert a similar power in their creation of the pathological pervert. But both perform a textual practice equivalent to the making-textual the matter of the corpse. Pfohl and Gordon’s cadaverial euphemisms are apt. The criminologist is deadly to pleasure by righting and writing it, seeing unbound pleasure as grave and placing it in its grave by classifying it within existing taxonomies of perversion. Pfohl and Gordon continue their forensic euphemisms in describing the practices of the taxonomist of pathologies:

The second pleasure of criminology involves his gaze. To keep an eye on her, to classify, count and cut her up; to make her visible as a certain thing; to dissect that visibility into rates and measure her incidents; to map her determined figure and to analyze her probable path; to uncover everything about her and to lay her bare; to arrest her so that he may operate upon her and see what happens. [230]

Massacring the self by expressing desire with a massacred body leads to a concept prevalent in psychological and medical theories of perversion, which is the supposed intrinsic inclusion of aggression and hatred towards the perverse object choice. In his book *Perversion: The Erotic Form of Hatred*, Robert J. Stoller posits the argument that all perversion is born of hatred towards the object choice, or what the object choice represents. By taking it as a sexual ‘partner’, the object which is hated is mastered in order to surpass a moment of trauma from the past. The perverse act is given an origin and thus a reason. He states:

In order to begin to judge these ideas, draw on your own experience. Think of perversions with which you are familiar … In each is found – in gross form or hidden but essential in fantasy – hostility, revenge, triumph, and a dehumanized object. Before even scratching the surface we can see that someone harming someone else is a main feature in most of these conditions. [1975, 9]
NECROSEXUALITY

Before annihilation of a human, dehumanisation must ask the question ‘What is human?’ and inevitably deconstruct the relationship between what is human and the subject. What is human is not opposed to what is not human but what is not a being at all; what is not an integrated object is placed in opposition to the human or a subject. Wholeness is implicit in what is human, and the crisis of transforming, shattering, or changing subjectivity is adamantly indicative of something not whole and not one. For this reason, dehumanisation should not be taken in a derogatory context. Only when the aim of dehumanisation is to affirm and reify the perpetrator’s own humanity does the act of dehumanisation raise issues of hierarchy and power. Through perversion, the condition of being human, with the limits and boundaries of perception of self and object this entails, is negotiated so that the self can no longer look at itself and its partner and say ‘I am human.’ Rather, at a loss for language, the self shifts towards a depth beneath the (or one) surface, with a different ‘feeling of self’ and hence, ‘feeling of object’. Stoller quotes 1930s perversion theorist E. Straus, ““the delight in perversions is caused by … the destruction, humiliation, desecration, the deformation of the perverse individual himself and of his partner” (Straus’s italics)” (quoted in Stoller 1975, 8). These ambiguities are further problematised when the object is itself a frontier between humanity (is a corpse human?), temporality (it was, what is it now?), ideologies of respect and disgust. Stoller chooses this quote despite the tacking-on at its end of ‘and of his partner’. Beyond the question as to whether a corpse counts as a partner, as a ‘someone’, the destruction of the self rather than the partner is more pertinent to my discussion though less so for Stoller. Stoller says nothing of the italicising by Straus of ‘deformation’. ‘Desecration’ (so frequently suffixed by ‘of the grave’) and ‘destruction’ are words that evoke the massacre of body and self. But destroy and deform are ideal words to describe becoming otherwise; here, to elucidate the ‘something different’ the necrosexually changing body is becoming, the massacred, destroyed, deformed body(ies) and intensities of proximity and connection with an actually massacred body.

To stay with the subject-object dialectic for a moment, the necrophiliac is positioned toward a deeply confounding ‘object’. Devoid of will, what is a corpse? Is it symbolic of a purely abstract memory, or an actual memorial object? What if the corpse is that of a dead lover? Does this mean that the necrophiliac is expressing a form of fidelity beyond the call of duty? When the sealed corpse becomes dishevelled flesh through opening up, is it a different kind of object

---

2 Such a feeling of posthumanism has ethical implications for those who were never given the luxury of being considered as true human, the marginal and the minoritarian, including women. See Butler (2004); Haraway (1989); Haraway (1991).
of desire? Does Bertrand's adamant heterosexuality show that the corpse always remains gendered? If so, how are the entrails gendered? I evoke these questions not to answer them, and certainly neither to vindicate nor derogate necrophilia, but to offer the corpse as a materialised version of a conceptual as well as actually massacred body. I am, however, adamantly not going to analyse cinematic representation of necrophilia when it is associated with crime because I wish to focus on necrophilia as part of a non-aggressive, non-violent massacre of the body. Criminal aggressive necrophilia reiterates traditional power paradigms of perpetrator/victim, often in murder incarnated as male/female. The compulsion to read necrophilia within this dynamic occurs before the instance of necrophilia. The corpse is, etymologically the most immediate definition of the expression ‘a body’. But what it is in relation to humanity and materiality is volatile and dynamic before the necrophiliac is positioned in relation to it. I have used the expressions ‘conceptually’ and ‘materially’ neither as opposed nor as extricable. Deleuze and Guattari’s Bodies without Organs and becomings show the materiality of thought and the structuration of desire and flesh as epistemic. The materiality of the corpse is emphasised here because the corpse is so material – stinkingly, rottingly, traumatically and viscerally so, actualising new layers of the flesh when the thorax is opened and fluid extravasated. The corpse is subjectivity as only matter and the ultimate symbol of humanity as nothing more than flesh, but flesh which is unknowable, whose pleasures evoke infinite possibility not available in a living body. The body represents both the most mundane and most frightening point of ideals and anxieties of the indivisibility of subjectivity, flesh, discourse, desire and pleasure.

In connecting epistemic with aesthetic systems (or symptoms), the following section will introduce a selected range of studies of necrophilia in academia, popular culture and film to introduce established structures of necrophilia which I will not deal with. These are selective simply to offer a range of examples, as this chapter is not a study of representations of necrophilia, but uses specific texts to explore necrophilia differently. Primarily, and at this stage rudimentarily, three ubiquitous aspects of these examples of necrophilia are challenged and alternatives offered through the work of Deleuze and Guattari. These are: the retention of a dialectic structure between object and subject, associated with fetishism, and particularly psychoanalysis; the maintenance of subjectivity within the corpse through the striated body, where the organs (particularly the genitals) retain their biological and metaphoric signification: the necessary association of necrophilia with criminality and explicitly (usually misogynistic) violence and aggression. Elisabeth Bronfen’s *Over Her Dead Body* (1992) deals with the objectification of the dead woman in art, poetry and literature. By affirming the gender of the corpse, the title suggests the non-consent aspect of necrophilia.
Lisa Downing’s *Desiring the Dead*, a psychoanalytic study of French literature, critiques studies which ‘focus somewhat erroneously on what the necrophile does, and are obsessed with the acts that appear most obvious – sexual intercourse’ (2003, 3). Against this, Downing emphasises ‘the choice of the corpse as subject matter’ (30). Downing and Bronfen both retain the sexual dialectic as positioning subject and object, and sexuality as predetermined act. For me, the materially de-subjectified corpse emphasises the affective space between the two: ‘Between the two there is threshold’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 250).

Aggressive violence, necrophilia as violation and frequently misogynistic act is perhaps the most prevalent representation of the desire. Contradictorily, however, while gory necrophilia is met with outrage (including gory lyrics), violent but clean deaths seem to conform with stereotypes of necrophilia and are responded to with less verve. Films such as *NekRomantik* (1987), *The Necro-Files* (1997), *August Underground* (2001) and *Lucker the Necrophagous* (1986) offer cinematic representations of clinical associations between criminality, murder and necrophilia, with greater or lesser degrees of complexity. In death metal, Slayer’s ‘213’ (1994) emphasises the control the necrophiliac can exert over the most docile subject-object: ‘Complete control of a prize possession’, and the relationship between memory and necrophilia: ‘Memories keep love alive/Memories will never die.’ Less nuanced, explicitly aggressive lyrics can be seen in Cannibal Corpse’s ‘Necropedophile’ (1992), where paedophilia, necrophilia and naughty swear words emphasise the act extravasated from desire at all, simply offered as something to shock by hitting sanctified lines of social values. Like *The Necro-Files*, the songs of Cannibal Corpse are more infantile and affirm the paradigms they cross rather than exemplify new forms of subjectivity, pleasure and desire. Without the maintenance of the subjectivity of the corpse and society’s systems of morality, the pleasure and point of these acts cease to exist. They seem to respond to the predicted reaction, so that the act itself seem at best purely symbolic and at its extreme completely circumnavigated. What is important is not what is done, but what is seen (or heard) to be done.3

Nacho Cerdà’s *Aftermath* (1994) and *I’ll Bury You Tomorrow* (2002) continue traditional urban apocrypha of the sexual habits of morgue workers, which, strangely, never seem to be associated with forensic pathologists, only their discursive (and presumably economic) inferiors. *Kissed* (1996) is a more mainstream example of necrophilia in film. *Kissed* needed to be branded ‘art’ in order to vindicate the practice of the female necrophile, affirming two stereotypes

---

3 This should not be taken as symptomatic of metal music or culture in general. For every Cannibal Corpse, there is a creative, and indeed Deleuzio-Guattarian, example of metal music (seen for example in doom metal band Halo’s 1998 album *Guattari: From the West Flows Grey Ash and Pestilence*).
that women’s sexuality is more delicate and less violent, and that only when necrophilia is filmed in an arty way can it offer anything more than offensive aggression to planes of desire. Even in popular understandings of cultural ‘phenomena’, such as AIDS, necrophilia is evoked. Tim Dean’s *Beyond Sexuality* associates necrophilia with the death drive but also, fascinatingly, as a safe sex option. Where there is no longer a risk of AIDS from a person – traditionally minoritarians such as homosexual men and drug addicts but increasingly Third World populations – the corpse as ‘waste’ threatens disease from its unsanitary condition and its seduction of the mentally invaded psychopath. Dean states: ‘Think of the symbolic order as a net settling over the corporeal form … the process does not happen in a uniform way because there is no single symbolic order that we all inhabit’ (2000, 197). Through a variety of epistemic structures necrophilia is foxed at every turn, a virus of psychiatry or nosology or even addiction as ‘213’ expresses: ‘physical pleasures an addictive thrill/An object of perverted reality’.

**In the Folds of the Flesh**

By way of connection, all of the following films I will discuss have been banned by Film and Literature Classification Boards around the world, in spite of not being aggressively violent. The viewer is then positioned as part of the taxonomy of criminals, a pervert for procuring illegal films, for enjoying these films and in the most simplistic argument, repeating what they watch in the real world. I wish to suggest that in order for the necrophile (this term is now used tactically, not to refer to a pathologised pervert ‘type’) to enter into a desiring intensity with the corpse, the subject/object opposition must shift. The corpse neither fails to nor fulfils entering into the spaces between subject and object. The corpse is not a symbol of the abject because the corpse – not spoken of, but immanently encountered – is the event which cannot be deferred to a second-order signification. The corpse opens out self, flesh, desire and pleasure as it is opened out. Foucault states: ‘One sees how in certain instances … the misuse of sexual pleasure might lead to death’ (1992, 133). Death of what? Does misusing the corpse offer a way out of subjectivity, a *petite mort* not through orgasm but de-subjectification? Necrophilia’s visceral pleasures is not subject and object in opposition, but pleasure in folding with the planes of flesh of the object – beyond metaphors of flesh and fold necrophilia signifies every part of the flesh, every nerve (no longer nerve because no longer perceptive), every tissue mass, every artery, every organ, the unfolded skin as libidinally provocative. In the event of necrophilia, skin may be peeled, entrails fondled, parts removed or moved around, corporeal minutiae explored and every plane of the body
NECROSEXUALITY

reorganised into a new configuration with new function and meaning. The films I will discuss offer three forms of corporeal massacre. In Macabro the female necrophile has only a head lover, in Beyond the Darkness the dead lover is enjoyed through tender acts of taxidermy, and the entrails are used as libidinal objects, sorrowful reminders and ecstasy-inducing aspects of the lover. The exploitation of entrails only available in necrophilia reaches its zenith in Flesh for Frankenstein where the viscera are the primary site of sexual obsession. The corpse is at once all sexual and signifying of nothing in particular. Because its rearrangement is limitless the corpse asks its lover not why, but what can it do and what can be done with it. What the corpse can ‘do’ refers to affect rather than action. This means the possibilities of affect fold the corpse as active entity with the necrophile in her/his open-ness to being affected and create new affect possibilities within the corpse through experimentation with the limitlessness of the corpse. The necrophiliac must be passive, as they forsake activity based on significations of sexual narratives and signified flesh. The necrophiliac is passive in the face of the vertiginous loss of self that occurs with loss of opposition and signification. No longer ‘I am, it is, hence I will desire it in accordance with the sexuality appropriate to object and subject’, but ‘how can I desire, how is this matter before me desirable, what can I do with it, what does it do to me, what connections do we enter into?’ The corpse is all at once past-tense person, infinitely experimental matter, flesh which both resonates with living flesh and is a fleshy something else altogether unique to the corpse. The films I have chosen to look at in the following sections are horror films; however, none are particularly violent beyond the ‘violence’ or violation of the corpse. The protagonists are not driven by aggressive impulses and the points of intensification in the films occur not in procuring death, with which many horror films are concerned, but with what affects can be elicited post mortem. Each film is different in terms of its necrophilia, in conformance with my point above that the only constant of necrophilia is the presence of a corpse – sexuality, the use of the body and the relations of fantasy and memory with it are not guaranteed. While some horror films dealing with necrophilia are described as gothic – films of Edgar Allen Poe stories, for example – because they deal with memory and the uncanny resonances between the corpse and a lover, the films I will look at I describe as baroque. These films are all made by Roman directors. They come from a genealogy beginning with Gian Lorenzo Bernini, rather than the British history of the gothic novel or the uncanny nostalgia of Poe. Thus geographically, historically and visually like baroque sculpture, they continue artistic and philosophical expressions based on the flesh, unfolded and refolded, what Deleuze calls the ‘pleats of matter’. While ghosts and memories haunt the suggested necrophilia of British gothic,
QUEERING THE NON/HUMAN

baroque necrophilia does not mourn the dead subject. It exploits the present materialisation of the lover, indulging in the new possibilities the flesh offers. The new flesh is explored rather than the old flesh memorialised. It exchanges mourning for ecstasy. Deleuze states of the baroque:

Why is the requirement of having a body sometimes based on the principle of passivity, in obscurity and confusion, but at others on our activity, on clarity and distinction ... Microperceptions or representatives of the world are those little folds that unravel in every direction, folds in folds, over folds, following folds ... and these are minute, obscure, confused perceptions that make up our macroperceptions. [2001, 86]

Through Leibniz, Deleuze sees the body as a necessary limit, both the site of passive possibility and required resistance. The body, a body, one's body, is, according to Deleuze, the deduction of affects and microperceptions, self as coalescent active, acted-upon expression rather than induction of subjectified body into world. Traditionally we are inducted into systems of pre-signified bodies and sexualities. There is no necessary opposition between the macro-self and the self as unfolding and folded in upon series of microperceptions. The necrophiliac exploits the actually unravelled and limitlessly unravell-able flesh, but requires the macroperceptive self to open up, to become passive in the presence of an object of desire that demands imagination, possibility and a relinquishment of the macroperception of 'lover' as an organised distinct entity which acts upon the self. The affective qualities of the corpse come not from its will but through folding with the necrophiliac. Desire, viscerality, possibility of act and dissipation of pleasures are pleats which configure the fold of subject and object differently at every turn. Self is fuelled by obscured desire in front of an obscure-able object. Through each act and wave of intensity, another fold of self is pleated – 'a fearsome involution calling us toward unheard of becomings' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 240).

The decision to act is not born of the act being pre-signified. Signification in medico-legal discourse comes from a resistance to discursive passivity, where we synthesise into being our acts as a series of linguistic habitus which 'constitutes our habit of living, [which ensures us as an] “it” will continue ... thereby assuring the perpetuation of our case' (Deleuze 1994, 74). Pre-signification massacres libidinal expression through inducing the necrophiliac into a defined form of sexuality – before the act – rather than a deduction, after the act(s), ablatting each aspect or element of each example of necrophilia as a unique folding of living with dead flesh. Necrosexuality is a form of sexuality not 'as a process of filiation transmitting the original sin. But ... as a power of alliance inspiring illicit unions or abdominal lovers. This differs significantly from the
NECROSEXUALITY

first in that it tends to prevent procreation’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 346). Epistemology is transmitted; we come into being as a transmission, procreated through discourse. Folds of necrophilic perceptions with the abominable lover include but are in no way reducible to the tactility of entrails, memory of lost love, confrontation with limitless possibilities of the flesh unavailable (without harm) in a living body, a body devoid of former signification but significantly desirable, and as I will discuss below, the massacre of gender and sexual narratives borne of sexuality as a preordained induction.

Opening new folds in the body creating new folds of perception ‘opens a rhizomatic realm of possibility effecting the potentialisation of the possible, as opposed to arborescent possibility, which marks a closure, an impotence’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 190). Being respected, thus saved from defilement, makes the flesh of the corpse impotent. Potentialising the possible comes from a certain passivity by the necrophile to different folds, which effectuate new aspects of each face of the fold, just as each peeling-away of a part of the corpse reorganises it into different planes of possible sexual ‘fun’. Necro-folding and unfolding, any proliferates pleats of Deleuze’s contemplation: ‘We speak of our “self” only in virtue of those thousand little witnesses which contemplate within us; it is always a third party who says “me”’ (Deleuze 1994, 75). Each aspect of self is a contemplation, its own independent element, connected to every other element in contraction, dilation, force, non-corresponding receptive and perceptive elements. Contemplation is a turning-in of self as not what it does but through its active and passive synthesis with its own elemental aspects and those of all others, resonant with Jean-François Lyotard’s libidinal band. Self is neither made up of ‘bits’ nor of post-acting contemplation of self as object of study. Contemplation is immanent, self as before and within its own relational affects, ‘contractile contemplation which constitutes the organism itself before it constitutes the sensation’ (Deleuze 1994, 79). Contemplation is therefore not perception through deferral nor repetition as sameness, but act as always different within itself through the specificity of the changes in expectation and contraction at each repetition which necessarily changes the elements.

Necrosexual acts (actually and contemplatively) de-part bodies and sexual acts iterated through perception as reification. The corpse, and the acts of the necrophile, are intensified examples of passive syntheses because their acts are not laid out as traditional sexual acts are, because the body has already been made particles and relations destabilised. But then how can we speak of the necrosexual at all? Does this example suggest a deferral once again to causality, both saying there is difference in even the most asinine sexual acts, and that using necrosexuality as exemplary re-fetishises and reifies it as ‘different’? I suggest that necrosexuality as representing a social and cultural limit forms
an assemblage, a fold, a passive synthesis (all different but all ways of the necrophile’s contemplation) as an abstract line of flight, belonging to the realm of the imperceptible: ‘There is no doubt that an assemblage never contains a causal infrastructure. It does have, however, and to the highest degree, an abstract line of creative or specific causality … this line can be effectuated only in connection with general causalities of another nature, but is in no way explained by them.’ Necrosexuality, the bodies involuted and undone, create a larval sexuality – immature and transformed at every synthesis, which acts not toward a thing but toward its metamorphosis, toward perceiving itself which cannot be perceived, toward the imperceptibility within repetition where all elements within syntheses are dissipated, disoriented and reoriented with each turn, each folding and each alteration in the aspects of involution (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 283). ‘The self does not undergo a modification, the self is a modification’ (Deleuze 1994, 79).

Preliminary Dishevelment – Getting Head

Lamberto Bava’s Macabre is the story of Jane Baker (Bernice Stegers) who, as a result of a car accident in which her lover is decapitated, keeps his head in the freezer (it is never made clear if the keeping of the head only is due to the pragmatics of having a small freezer). The revelation of Jane’s cranio-necrophilia comes at the end of the film, after ninety minutes of hearing Jane talking to the head, screaming in passion during their sexual encounters and generally acting as if she is living with her (rather silent) lover. This is all perceived through her blind lodger Robert (Stanko Molnar), and like he, we remain blind to the actual relationship until the film’s final scenes. Jane’s necrophilia is an interesting starting point in my discussion as it offers an example of the female necrophile with a male corpse (or part thereof). Stereotypically, the corpse is usually female and the necrophiliac male, be he scientist, poet (such as Poe), or artist. Jane’s necrophilia does conform to a certain type of necrophilia, that of nostalgia for a lost love. What is emphasised is that this love is not a substitute for the hope of an imminent new lover, nor a tragic memorial fetish. Jane seems authentically happy with her head lover. We do not know what she does with it, but, extricated from genitals, its gender becomes rather confounding.

What is the relationship between a head and gender? Is Jane still hetero, even if we read the possible sexual acts she can perform traditionally – cunnilingus, kissing? How is her body signified without genital alterity? For Deleuze and Guattari, the face is the primary site of signifance of subjectivity, the place where the organised body quickens all significations into one intensified point of textual transcribability. The face will tell us what race, gender, age and even
Necrosexuality

class the rest of the body is without the need to see its entire form. ‘It is precisely because the face depends on an abstract machine that it is not content to cover the head, but touches all other parts of the body … The question then becomes what circumstances trigger the machine that produces the face and facialisation’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 170). Through being territorialised by the face, the whole body becomes face. The flesh conforms to the face and the gender of the face will establish patterns of possible sexual paradigms for the body – female face equals female genitals. Against another female face, the female face is lesbian, against a male face heterosexual. Gender is found in the face and assures the genitals, which in these paradigms are taken as the primary and ‘appropriate’ site of sex. When it comes to established sexuality, getting head is getting face. Non-intercourse sex relies on the affirmation of the presumed genitals of the lover even if they are not naked. All non-genital sex is risky because it shows the body as divested of gender. (I do not include the anus as a genital here because it is not necessarily gendered unless its especially privileged proximity to the genitals is seen or felt). A mouth is a mouth, but a straight person probably won’t want a same-sex mouth near their body.

Genitals are territorialised and territorialising of the body when emergent through a binary machine. When the head is extricated from the torso does the face maintain its territorialisation of the entire body – ‘the head is included in the body but the face is not’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 170)? The de-facialised head alone cannot signify genitals – is a genital free body still a gendered body? If so, in the same way? The abstraction of signification as pre-formed rather than formed at the encounter of each body as unique event is both arbitrary and redundant when a head is all there is. Jane’s head-lover can be taken as an example of Deleuze and Guattari’s body-head system, liberated from the facialising machine … and the body. Jane’s head-lover is not a partial body object however. When the head is extricated from the facial territorialisation of the body, any single part no longer defers meaning to the whole. Each part can maintain its signification only to a certain extent. While a disembodied genital may still signify gender and thus sexuality, an arm or heart has only limited potential to do so. They may signify something else, but libidinally their meaning is unclear. Each part has a unique relationship to its former full-body organism signification, but remains signified none the less.

So how can a part deterritorialise subjectification and thus sexual paradigms, including gender, act and desire? ‘The question of the body is not one of partial objects but differential speeds’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 172). Whether or not Jane thinks she is heterosexual, the fact remains she can’t be heterosexual in any way familiar to her former sexuality. This isn’t ‘me and my head’, because the proximity between Jane and her head is what causes others to eventually
ship her off to the asylum. For each relation and connection between her lover and herself there must be a compensation or exploration to negotiate the new structure. Even if her sexuality is memorial heterosexual, sexual acts with her head-lover are rhizomatic – ‘short term memory or anti-memory. The rhizome operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots … a map that is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable and has multiple entryways and exists and its own lines of flight’ (21) The memory of heterosexual intercourse cannot help Jane as it is no longer an option. That she doesn’t seem particularly perturbed by the failure of this memory suggests hers is a happy rhizomatic sexuality(ies).

**Beyond the Darkness, Into the Body of Light**

At each stage of the problem what needs to be done is not to compare two organs but to place elements or materials in a relation that uproots the organ from its specificity, making it become ‘with’ the other organ. [Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 259]

Francesco (Kieran Canter) is a taxidermist. His girlfriend Anna (Cinzia Monreale) dies after Francesco’s housekeeper Iris (Franca Stoppi) places a curse upon her. Francesco is not particularly saddened by his loss, he does not cry; instead he disinters Anna, preserves her and places her at his side in his bed. Aristede Massacesi’s *Beyond the Darkness* has been criticised as offensively gory for the scene of Francesco preserving Anna. The scene plays in loving close-up unflinchingly and includes extraction of entrails and eyes, and body fluid extravasation and preservation. While I find the scene fascinating rather than offensive or shocking, I will presume that upon first viewing there is an element of surprise and perhaps squeamishness evoked in the viewer. When Francesco removes Anna’s heart, he bites into it ecstatically. Clearly, the traditional signification of the heart as site of love is evident here. Does eating the heart of a corpse maintain this signification? When we take a metaphor as an actual, does the metaphoric signification stand, or is it colonised by the actual? If the metaphoric without the actual were present, there would be no disgust at the scene. This scene offers an interesting involution of the organisation of the organs of the organism. Francesco clearly indulges his appetite for the love of his girlfriend by eating her heart (if I were to stretch the act into a transcribable sex act I would say cunnilingually). He is also eating a heart in a situation of love. The scene is extreme and gory because the heart fails to remain a metaphor only.

Emphasising Deleuze and Guattari’s notion that the Body without Organs is not a body devoid of organs but organisation, I would argue that internal
organs, in their resistance to use for pleasure and evocation of disgust, create Bodies without Organs by their very being as organ. By using an actual organ, a desiring connection ‘with’ other organs is created. The inside of the body, the internal organs, lose their metaphoric signification when the thorax is opened, in autopsy or medical imaging, because they become the property of medicine not desire. Is the organ the same organ when it is a physiological, anatomical organ, not a metaphoric organ? The organised body is organised differently depending on which system of signification it emerges through. This is emphasised when entrails are presented, as they belong predominantly if not exclusively to medical rather than sexual systems. The signification of genitals resonates with their metaphoric signification – the ‘passive’ egg, the ‘active’ sperm, the ‘empty’ vulva, the ‘rigid, forceful’ penis are also adjectives relatively appropriate for metaphoric ways of feminising or masculinising other attributes, qualities, or objects. This is why Deleuze and Guattari resist tails in becoming-dog because they are phallic. Entrails fail to translate their conceptual into their physiological attributes so readily. The same organ – the heart – is two different organs, in two incarnations, with two functions in the two systems of medicine and poetic metaphor. Incommensurable double signification leads to the massacre of this heart. The heart is therefore not ‘the’ heart but ‘this’ heart, a heart that confounds and conflates the visceral with the metaphoric. The heart which Francesco bites into may represent Anna’s heart to him, but it does not to the viewer or there would be no sense of horror. Is a heart ‘feminine’? Perhaps, but he shows no interest in her breasts or genitals, he doesn’t even have sex with her later in the film, so what precisely this heart evokes libidinally in Francesco is volatile. His mouth is the site of ingestion and outward-projected expression through kissing. To ‘kiss’ a heart would be more acceptable, albeit relatively gruesome. The relation Francesco makes between ingesting mouth and no-longer-metaphoric organ creates the new line of desire, the line of viewer and the line of flight.

In death as in life, the interiors of the body seem more ‘organ’ than external organs such as the genitals, the nose, or the skin. His mouth-to-heart act forms what Deleuze and Guattari call an unnatural participation. Against traditional metaphors of organs of love, Francesco removes Anna’s eyes because eyes rot. Eyes are often associated with love, with a connection to the soul, with an interface between mind and world. We gaze into our lover’s eyes; they express emotions associated with love – joy, sadness, and in pupil dilation, sexual excitement. In death, the soul supposedly leaves the body. So presumably the eyes can leave the body also. Yet there is something especially harrowing about eye extraction. Taking Anna’s eyes seems to be the last frontier in acknowledging that her ‘self’ is no longer present in this flesh. Because of the associations
between eyes and love(rs), this scene seems incommensurable with Francesco’s interest in the heart as purely symbolic of love. If it were such, surely the eyes would also be privileged for their equivalent metaphoric status? Like Macabre’s Jane, Francesco is not delusional in that he is not unaware of the necessary practicalities of having such a lover, prone as they are to decomposition. In spite of their functional purpose, the use of surgical tools in the scene, and tools of embalming, adds a surgical fetishism to the connection between Anna and Francesco.

While I do not have room here to go into the particulars of surgical fetishism, it is another form of ‘perverse’ sexuality which would be interesting to analyse in a Deleuzian-Guattarian context. Surgical ‘fetishism’ is somewhat of a misnomer, as it does not deal with psychoanalytic fetishism but with forming new and different connections between bodies, organs and tools. Surgical fetishism is more like Deleuze and Guattari’s masochism in that it is understood psychoanalytically and clinically in a different way to reading it as a becoming Body without Organs. While the films of Cronenberg, particularly Dead Ringers (1988), would seem appropriate examples, the uncanny doubling and particularly the use of investigative and explicitly gender-specific surgical tools in the film to interrogate the female interior prevents the film from really challenging psychoanalytic relations of desire. The Mantle twins are compelled to reveal an (albeit deformed) plane in the body of women rather than create new folds. Linda Ruth Williams celebrates Cronenberg because he unfolds the flesh to reveal. She speaks of Cronenbergian narratives and even ‘Cronenbergian identity’ (1999, 33). These terms replace ‘normal’ narratives and subjects with ‘weird’ ones, but singular and structured ones none the less. A more interesting example of surgical fetishism comes from another Antonio Margheriti film, The Virgin of Nuremberg (1963). Deformed servant Eric (Christopher Lee), former acolyte of a general known only as ‘The Punisher’ (Mirko Valentin), polishes daily the surgical tool set belonging to his general. The use of the tools is not specified. The relationship between Eric and The Punisher is similarly not structured but is adamantly libidinal. The conflation of sex and surgery as practical in Beyond the Darkness becomes purely libidinal in my next film for analysis, Flesh for Frankenstein.

Flesh, Fold, Film

Flesh for Frankenstein, directed by Antonio Margheriti (1973), is a particularly baroque take on the Frankenstein tale. Baron Frankenstein (Udo Kier) creates a master race of ‘zombies’ so he can repopulate the world with his perfect and obedient children. Megalomaniacal undeniably, but the real interest in the
NECROSEXUALITY

film lies with the incidental propensity of the Baron’s extracurricular activities. The Baron is repulsed by copulative sex, but relishes the opportunities he is afforded as an anatomist. He fondles the entrails of his female zombie (Dalila Delazzaro) until achieving climax, and literally fucks her gall bladder, espousing to his Igor-esque servant Otto (Arno Juerging), ‘to know death … you have to fuck life … in the gall bladder.’ The Baron’s adept performance raises questions regarding the pleasure science affords as an episteme, especially due to its more-intimate-than-intimate relationship with the various dishevelled plateaus of the flesh. The act of groping organs in particular can be nomenclatured as perverse – masturbatory and necrophilic – or it can express a reconfiguration of flesh and sexual dialectics. While the female zombie is opened up, the Baron opens up as well, exposing his perversion and, exploiting cinematic technique, his climaxing face in extreme close-up. The zombie opens her eyes during the act, awakened perhaps by the extraordinary experience, confounding the stereotypical aesthetised dead female that populates many Poe-esque horror films. Most emphatically, the viewer is opened up, presented sensorially with the force of the body unwound like a great visceral ribbon, and intelligibly with desire that exceeds hetero, homo or pathological.

The Baron breathlessly coos ‘spleen, liver, kidneys, gall bladder’. It may be argued that this is a version of the phalologic desire to name and know the female body in order to control it. But entrails are not gendered. This scene is as far from predictable praise in sexual scenes for ‘breasts, legs, ass, mouth’ – organs that have gendered resonance – as it is from a heterosexual act. The Baron exclaims ‘beautiful!’ when he first approaches the body, but suffixes this with ‘the incision is superb’, so his concept of corporeal beauty is immediately deterritorialisng, aesthetic perfection found in a non-contusive suture. There is, however, a tension here between the Baron’s naming of the organs and the act’s revolutionary potential. Naming risks structuring the pleasure, ‘since instead of being passages of abundant intensity, these metamorphoses become metaphors of an impossible coupling’ (Lyotard 1993, 23). The entrails are not metaphors. The Baron presents an impossible coupling as possible, and indeed as immanent.

Why is this apparently confounding and strange scene pleasurable to view? If we cannot describe the on-screen pleasure within established sexual systems, how can we describe our pleasure at viewing them? Watching the act and the pleasure experienced from viewing adamantly continues to resist being reified as a repeatable dialectic of pleasure. Thought traditionally, where on-screen flesh and pleasure set up a demand for a similar or simulated version in the viewing flesh, in what ways does our pleasure reflect these on-screen bodies and pleasures? As the pleasures of the necrophile involve becoming passive to de-
signification, so our pleasure as viewers requires an opening-up to the images and their intermingled repulsive pleasures and extraordinary bodies. Lyotard’s elaboration of Deleuze and Guattari’s Body without Organs in *Libidinal Economy* emphasises the unravelling of signified flesh with the unravelling evoked in desire. To take Lyotard’s definition of the flesh literally, the ‘body is undone and its pieces are projected across libidinal space, mingling with other pieces in an inextricable patchwork’ (1993, 60).

Our viewing bodies must be thought differently, stratified in a different pattern, undone and re-patched so that we are no longer dependent on genitals and gazing eyes as gendering and desiring organs. Viscera and confusion, even repulsion, enter into our pleased viewing bodies. Thus definitions of pleasurable scenarios, bodies and what is desirable at all become re-configured. It could be argued, of course, that this reconfiguration occurs at every libidinal situation. This scene’s unusual representations of desire and flesh perhaps make thinking the reconfigurations all desiring bodies go through more immediately accessible, even compulsory. In this instance our relation to cinema is an example of Lyotard’s libidinal band, where we ‘open the so-called body and spread out all its surfaces’ (ibid., 1) which, he continues, is made up of the ‘not only’ where nothing, organic, inorganic, minutely refined and dishevelled, grossly baunastic, forms desire as pleated, twisting membrane, one great ephemeral skin. The particular desiring membrane of screen and viewer I call the ‘cinesexual’ – the unique desiring relation between film and spectator:

Cinesexuality is the launch upon a line of desire where the outcome cannot be known – desire for a shadow, an inflection of light, quality of frame or contrast. The layers of expectation, pleasure and satisfaction are redistributed in the act of watching and so our desire must also redistribute. [Horror film], eliciting a turbulence of visceral reaction, a rhythmic refrain between viewing flesh and the speed of the film, may be an intersection at where our attraction and corporeal dispersion connect with the viewed. [MacCormack, 2002]

There is a risk in passivity to cinema, emphasised at the visceral response to which horror film is met. The viewer, like the cadaver on the table, is eviscerated into splanchnic proliferations:

Cinesexuality requires all viewers to come to cinema with an openness to the pure possible. Spectators ‘gift’ themselves to the indeterminability of affects and breaks in signifying systems. Submitting oneself to film is submitting to affects that indulge in the breaking down of logic and the flesh itself … Cinesexuality is expressed not in what one watches but how one is altered. [MacCormack 2005, 351, 352]
What is the Baron’s desire? Why do we watch it with such an intermingling of disgust, confusion and pleasure? Traditional desire, her body and our intelligible viewing flesh that attempts to make meaning of the image are all undone, coming together in a constellation of pleasure, perversion and openness, breaking down the material and discursive fissure between viewer and viewed. Remaining in a simple binary of ordinary/extraordinary or normal pleasure/perversion positions relies most often on the subjugated terms – extraordinary, perversion – being defined not by what they are, but by the ways in which they fail the regimental and specific criteria of the dominant terms. For example, the opposite of heterosexual is not only homosexual, but also any failure at heterosexuality, from bisexuality and heterosexuality that includes effeminate masculinity, to small fetishes and grand panic narratives such as paedophilia. But between the cracks and fissures of these epistemological pathologies are found an infinite amount of minor and major transgressions of the rigid parameters of normalcy.

The more confounding the perversion, the greater the resistance to it being reduced into a conceptual list of symptoms and reasons for these. Our pleasure at the Baron’s perversion is difficult to fix into an established perversion that includes the perversions on-screen and our pleasure at watching them, as well as our horror at our pleasure, and at what the Baron is doing and an endless list of further intensities difficult to demarcate and name. That we cannot comprehend the Baron’s perversion is essential to the scene’s powers of differentiating the spectator from a traditional viewing dialectic. Jacques Rancière points out that

… the response to the false question ‘Do you understand?’ implies the constitution of a specific speech scene in which it is a matter of constructing another relationship by making the position of the enunciator explicit. The utterance thereby completed then finds itself extracted from the speech situation in which it functioned naturally. [1995, 47]

To contend that we do not understand without answering that claim resists interrupting the visceral pleasure of the scene for a simulacrum of that scene which replaces the material and transformative with the discursive and repeatable, where pleasure reflects the already-thought instead of relishing the unknowable.

Attempting to explain why we take pleasure in the scene inserts us into a taxonomy of perversion. The parameters of the perversion then induct our pleasure instead of deducing the pleasure of the images, exchanging pleasure for external reasons for enjoying the images. The risks and needs to reduce confounding perversions to a series of symptoms and reasons preclude knowledge of them. The Baron’s pleasure at the perverse – his taste also ranges
over consensual incest, anatomo-epistophilia and autoeroticism (as he enjoys both the masturbatory pleasure the female zombie affords him, but also his ecstasy at dying with a barge pole through his gall bladder) – contrasts with an investigative purpose of the audience setting-up of specific questions that must be answered, closing off rather than splaying the pleasures in the film:

Perversion neither defines nor demarcates itself. It is the purity of the something-otherwise, available through the most radical or the quietest of acts. However act does not guarantee perversion. Nor does will. What perversion resonates is the redistribution of self through sensation and perception, a transformation of subjectification and signification. Perversion describes a project of risk and of hope. It is not a safe or predictable experiment. One of film’s great promises is impossible worlds, worlds unrealisable in the everyday, which fold us within the unperceivable cinema allows us to perceive. [MacCormack 2004]

Necrophilic Lines of Flight

In this chapter I have attempted, using a rather contentious form of sexuality, to explore the relationship between bodies and signification based on the taking of an object of desire which problematises the relationship between the body and being human. The immobile corpse can mobilise desire through forging new connections which exploit the ways in which the flesh can be excavated in death. I have purposefully shifted my argument from the epistemology of social necrophilia to necrophilia in films because films, like bodies, offer uses and activities with the flesh unavailable in the ‘real’ world with ‘real’ bodies. None the less, these films are explicitly able to affect the viewer into thinking – or unthinking – the body differently and the reorientations or challenges in reference to gender and sexual act afforded in necrophilia. As the relationship between the necrophiliac and the corpse creates a line of flight, so these often harrowing, fascinating and baroque images fold with the viewer to affect them and form new trajectories of pleasure, both in viewing images and experiencing the body. The representations show us a different sexuality not with which we can replace ours, but which affects us and our understanding of the purposes and functions of bodies as they relate to and are regulated by the massacre signification perpetrates upon flesh and desire.

References

NECROSEXUALITY


QUEERING THE NON/HUMAN


*The Virgin of Nuremberg* (1963), dir. Antonio Margheriti (Italy) (feature film).

Afterword

An Unfinished Conversation About Glowing Green Bunnies

Jeffrey J. Cohen

Queerness works by contiguity and displacement, knocking signifiers loose, ungrounding bodies, making them strange … It makes people stop and look at what they have been taking as natural, and it provokes inquiry into the ways that ‘natural’ has been produced by particular discursive matrices of heteronormativity. [Dinshaw 1995, 76–7]

The work of inhabitance involves orientation devices, ways of extending bodies into spaces that create new folds, or new contours of what we could call liveable or inhabitable space. If orientation is about making the strange familiar through the extension of bodies into space, then the disorientation occurs when that extension fails. Or we could say some spaces extend certain bodies and simply do not leave room for others (Ahmed 2006, 11).

The surrealist Meret Oppenheim wrapped a teacup in fur and entitled the work *Le Déjeuner en Fourrure* (1936). Her installation attempted to denaturalise a quotidian object by encasing it in a luxurious skin it could never otherwise possess. The teacup becomes useless but beautiful, and thereby useful because its aesthetic value renders strange a whole constellation of human and inhuman elements enmeshed around utensils, desire, consumption, gender and labour in the domestic economy, the uncontemplated rituals by which we structure our day. How would Oppenheim’s installation be different if, instead of making critical forms from lifeless matter, she had genetically altered a mink to assume

---

1 I conducted this unfinished conversation with Holly Crocker, Eileen Joy and Karl Steel, whose words appear here. What follows is a substantially revised and much condensed version of a post initially published at <http://jjcohen.blogspot.com/2007/03/are-bioluminescent-bunnies-queer.html>. Comments are reproduced by permission of the authors. I choose to riff upon a many-voiced blog post here in homage to this book’s own vectors, movements away from traditional networks of authority and singular forms of identity. A nonsynthetic conjunction of the disparate suits the materials discussed as well.
the form of a demitasse? If nature can enable the birth and viability of a bioluminescent fish, that’s one thing, even if the newfound glow has no adaptive value (the gleam could be pure surplus, or could lead to the creature more easily becoming prey).² If an artist like Eduardo Kac creates through ‘transgenic art’ a glow in the dark bunny, or an entire biosphere of self-illuminating creatures, that must be work of another order, mad science.

Kac works in the medium of living flesh. He employs methods that cross species lines and boundaries; he elicits ambivalent desires; he is potentially creating not only with the inhuman but through the inhumane. But can’t Eduardo Kac also be, like Meret Oppenheim, an artist who queers the non/human? Can’t nature be exactly such an artist as well?

**Are Bioluminescent Bunnies Queer?**

There is something disturbing about messing with genetics, consciousness and embodiment simply because you can: dreaming (as Nick Bostrom does) of uploading human subjectivity and memory into a robot, for example, to perfect the human.³ Where is the art in that? Where is the humanity? Such a coldly utilitarian project seems likely to produce nothing more than a patent and a product. Can queering as a tactile, incessant and non-culmination-oriented process exist in an alliance that lacks from the start the potential for – indeed, the desire for – mutual transformations?

_GFP_ (‘green fluorescent protein’) _Bunny_ (2000) is a transgenic artwork created by Eduardo Kac. The project centres upon Alba, a verdant and bioluminescent rabbit. Alba was formed by splicing into the genes of an albino bunny DNA extracted from the bacteria which cause jellyfish to glow. Born in a laboratory in Jouy-en-Josas, France, Alba was exhibited in public installations with real world and internet components, and then incorporated into the Kac family household in Chicago. Kac describes _GFP Bunny_ as encompassing Alba herself, the public debate her birth catalysed and the integration of the rabbit into an enduring social structure. He writes:

> Transgenic art … is a new art form based on the use of genetic engineering to transfer natural or synthetic genes to an organism, to create unique living beings.

---

² A persuasive argument against reading mimicry simply for its adaptive value was offered by another surrealist, this one a serious student of science. Roger Caillois offers a trenchant, anti-utilitarian analysis of animal artistry (2003, 91–103).

³ Nick Bostrom is the director of the Future of Humanity Institute at Oxford University. His work is most easily accessed via his website <http://www.nickbostrom.com> (see especially Bostrom 2007; Bostrom and Sandberg forthcoming).
This must be done with great care, with acknowledgment of the complex issues thus raised and, above all, with a commitment to respect, nurture, and love the life thus created. [Kac 2000a]

The *GFP Bunny* project is mindful of the history in which it participates, carefully emplaced within a long view of the enmeshment of humans within rabbit identity. This ancient interrelation of the species (similar in some ways to what Donna Haraway outlines between human and canine in her *Companion Species Manifesto* (2003)) is the pivot of Kac’s argument for why the production of Alba is not a breeding programme. He situates the project as an attempt to foreground the interspecies touch of bunny and human in ways that denaturalise the web of social relations ordinarily supporting human dominance over nature. By discomfiting a desire for predictability and mastery, by insisting upon the enduring life of the art (where the work is conceived as including the artist and the artist’s world) and by making visible the flimsy support upon which ‘the natural’ rests, Kac queers animal, human, laboratory, family:

Transgenic art … offers a concept of aesthetics that emphasizes the social rather than the formal aspects of life and biodiversity, that challenges notions of genetic purity, that incorporates precise work at the genomic level, and that reveals the fluidity of the concept of species in an ever increasingly transgenic social context. As a transgenic artist, I am not interested in the creation of genetic objects, but in the invention of transgenic social subjects. In other words, what is important is the completely integrated process of creating the bunny, bringing her to society at large, and providing her with a loving, caring, and nurturing environment in which she can grow safe and healthy. [Kac 2000a]

Aware that he might be accused of creating mere ‘genetic *objets d’art*’, Kac argues that his work is deeply philosophical, composed of a dynamic network rather than a static item, and therefore well fortified against the deadening effect that objectification would have upon Alba. Though such an active stance makes it impossible to say what the project will ultimately mean (lacking as it does a termination point), Kac states that what will not change throughout is an unwavering ethical regard for being:

Transgenic art must promote awareness of and respect for the spiritual (mental) life of the transgenic animal. The word ‘aesthetics’ in the context of transgenic art must be understood to mean that creation, socialization, and domestic integration are a single process. The question is not to make the bunny meet specific requirements or whims, but to enjoy her company as an individual (all bunnies are different), appreciated for her own intrinsic virtues, in dialogical interaction. [Kac 2000a]
The bunny is a biological and social symbiont, a robust nexus of forces and materialities: the gene-flow from bacteria to jellyfish to rabbit; the tactile relation between rabbit and human, genetically impure organisms that are already each alive with their own thriving cosmos of micro-organisms and already bodies more dispersed than bounded.\(^4\) A beautiful green bunny that glows in the dark, bouncing from the laboratory to the home of the artist to a network of admirers connected by their inhuman ardours … and from there to who knows what unimagined threshold. What could be more queer?

**Eileen Joy said …**

My hesitation to celebrate Alba as either ‘cool’ art or a new living form is two-dimensional: first, I think the forceful injection of a biologically ‘foreign’ substance into a living creature who lacks the language or gestural ability to give consent constitutes cruelty of the highest order, and second, concern over possibly ‘unnatural’ crossings between different species is not just some remnant of some outdated or outmoded traditional humanist claptrap: it is a highly serious concern of biologists who study living forms, the changes within which often take place over long expanses of time and through intricate chains of causality and effect that can be termed ‘natural’ or ‘naturally occurring’, and which possess their own interior logic (albeit they are sometimes under immense and sudden pressure by external, contingent and impersonal forces) … Alba may be fine as Kac’s domestic ‘pet’ – up to a point – but how might she do among other albino rabbits? Does anybody care about that, or is an animal bred and born in a lab, *ipso facto*, no longer an animal that belongs somehow to and with other animals? …

Is not our notion of ‘the queer’, as we have often discussed it here, intimately connected to what JJC often describes as type of desire that is so generous (and even exuberant) that it cannot be contained within singular bodies, even singularly ‘human’ bodies, and which, nevertheless, is always seeking connection (perhaps, an abundance of connections)? … It is not the rabbit who desires to be ‘queerly’ glowingly green – it is the artist, Kac, who desires it, and in

---

\(^4\) Myra J. Hird stated this beautifully in her helpful comments on this foreword: ‘the “interspecies touch” is between much more than bunny and human – it’s between bunny and human (already both are steeped in bacteria – heterogenomically as well as in each “individual” – challenging notions of genetic purity) and a whole host of microorganisms – bacteria so myriad that they cannot even be tamed within the definition of “species”. So, quite literally, the glowing bunny is a symbiont (as is Kac and his family for that matter).’
actualising that desire, he *.touches* too roughly, he invades the sacred domain (the body) of the rabbit without asking permission to enter in, and therefore he profanes its body, and perhaps, even, its soul … The rabbit that the ‘artist’ Kac claims he strokes often in his arms – his gesture, even his very public gesture, of love and affection —–is a stroking-onto-death. How horrifying and ugly and unbeautiful, and decidedly not ‘queer’.

**Holly Crocker said …**

I’m willing to leave the queer out of it for a moment: this is a stupid piece of art. I know that we pass off many of our aesthetic claims as moral claims (and I know that’s not what EJ’s doing), but I’m not sure why an aesthetic claim won’t do here, even before we get to the ethical implications of this bioluminescent creation. As far as I can see, this bunny hops nowhere between the beautiful or the good, promoting no notion of the *sensus communis* that I can think of (from Aristotle to Arendt). Maybe queer theory should work on formulating a *sensus communis* that is responsive to notions of beauty, the good, or something in between.

**J.J. Cohen said …**

I think of nature as being like god: it doesn’t actually exist, but we humans posit it retroactively as a kind of unified entity in order to view agency, unity and significance where those things are not necessarily to be found. So, it’s tough for me think of nature as being sacred or unified or full of meaning when in fact it is a useful shorthand at best. I’m obviously not an evolutionary biologist, but it does seem to me that transgenic creatures and freaks, sports, ‘abortive rooting hogs’ are created all the time. Most of them simply die horribly, in pain, and in oblivion. They’re not viable. That’s what ‘nature’ frequently makes … Weirdly, I also think Alba is stunningly beautiful. I find Kac’s *Eighth Day* project (2000–01) also quite moving, with its glowing column offering what appears to be a secret and undiscovered world, the universe that God forgot to make. Like EJ, I don’t think we should create things because they are cool, yet this project seems much more than that. But there is no accounting for taste.

**Holly Crocker said …**

The only accounting for taste is an accounting; one of the interesting features of aesthetic judgement, particularly when one is trying to find a shared sense,
is that it almost immediately moves into the ethical/political … Now, I think EJ’s done a mighty job expounding this little green rabbit’s ugliness from an ethical point of view (and I love that she’s actually talking about the rabbit), but I would suggest that the bioluminescent bunny project is stupid simply because it seeks to be visually stunning. I have no interest in staking a claim for the utility of art, and I also realise that getting someone to look at the natural (or the naturalised) in fresh ways can be a beautiful achievement. I’m also completely down with visual fascination (and before anyone objects, I do think there’s a huge difference between being stunning and being fascinating). But I’m not for art that treats the world as a spectacle from which we can stand apart. And, it seems that this project treats the bunny as an artistic ‘work’ that can be perceived from a cultivated distance – a distance created in this case by a genetic intervention that is prioritised as an object of fascination. The artist seeks to head off ethical objections, describing one of the ultimate aims of the project as the ‘social reintegration’ of Alba into his home. That pre-emptive justification, it seems to me, belies a central problem with the project: what was Alba when she wasn’t a pet? It sounds like she was an ethical thought experiment realised through the creative privilege of art. That thought experiment, it seems, works politically in furtherance of genetic/scientific licence, whether or not the particular artist is down with that.

**J.J. Cohen said …**

I’m not so sure the bunny is to be contemplated at a cultivated distance so much as she makes a distance both open and diminish through her beauty. Then again, I want to emphasise that I have absolutely horrible taste that runs towards the kitschy. Yet I don’t see Alba as ethically ugly. I think she entered the world with more forethought, love and desire than most humans do … or, to put it differently, with more love than is evident in the processes through which life on earth arose and has endured. I also don’t think bunnies have a primal, ‘natural’ state. Bunnies socialised into human communities aren’t necessarily different from bunnies socialised into warrens. None the less I’d like to stress that what I was trying to do in speaking of the **GFP Bunny** was to defeat the expected narrative that surrounds the production of new biology. We all know the ‘Dr Frankenstein’ syndrome: where would Michael Crichton be without it? If Alba’s story ever becomes a film I now predict the ending:

As it turns out, the same genetic mutation introduced into the bunny to provide her with a verdant glow also altered her dentition and gastroenterological configuration. Luminous and otherworldly Alba has developed a taste for human flesh … and she
breeds like a, um, rabbit! Soon the world is being depopulated by glow-in-the-dark, horrific versions of the Easter Bunny (it’s like Night of the Living Dead (1968), only with bone-chomping Leporidae taking the place of the zombies). Eduardo Kac realises to his dismay what he has done, but it is too late! Alba corners him in his lab, and as he pleads ‘I made you!’ she nibbles away his feet, his thighs, his torso …

What I was trying to do, though, was to take the side of the monster. As anyone who has read Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein (2004/1818) knows, the narrative is not a clear-cut condemnation of Victor. Much of the story is conveyed from Alba’s – er, the Creature’s – point of view. What does the Creature want of Victor? To be loved. To be given a ‘livable life’.5 Victor, though, turns away in horror from the thing he made, a cold and unloving god. Throughout this discussion I have had Bruno Latour’s Aramis (1996) in mind. My favourite passage unfolds as the rejected subway system imagines itself as both Victor’s Creature and Jesus on the cross, wondering why it was only partly imagined and then abandoned, disallowed a full life. Latour is provocative about what counts as natural, as human, as a being with agency, and is probably the best advocate nonhumans have for their rights.

I do not think that Alba is a victim of cruelty or megalomaniacal whim. Indeed, few rabbits have been as desired as she (look at all the fan art collected at Kac’s website). Few have been so shielded from ‘nature’, in its agentless coldness, in its lovelessness. Alba’s life seems to me more humanely guarded than the lives of most animals. If I’m not horrified by her glow, it’s because I’m not convinced that a boundary (natural/unnatural) has in fact been crossed: what has been queered is the very notion that such a boundary existed in the first place.

Eileen Joy said …

What might ultimately be more valuable to the individual psyche as it develops its own ‘history’ – the idea or image or representation of a glowing green bunny, bodied forth in the literature of fairy tale or cinema anime, or the ‘real’ thing, scuttling, first, between the rooms of the artist’s abode, but then multiplied (cloned) and made available to everyone as a mass-market commodity? Do you want your imaginary and fantastic creatures to come to life, transgenically, or to remain as a type of art that is only as animated as the thought you give to them? … If we impart to all living organisms too much sanctity, we risk making too much of ourselves, and of nature more generally. But if we withdraw the

---

5 ‘Livable life’ is Judith Butler’s beautifully resonant phrase, used throughout her work (see especially Butler 2004a; Butler 2000).
marker ‘sacred’ altogether, what are we left with? What are the moral limits, then, to what we can ‘make’ and ‘unmake’? It’s true, JJC, that Alba’s life seems more ‘humanely guarded than the lives of most animals’ – perhaps that is also the central problem.

**Karl Steel said …**

Rather than wondering about the limits of Science and Nature or the boundaries of the self, whether human, animal, or other, rather than wondering about which ‘alien’ genetic material is ours and which is not, I want to push at nature itself, to lead the bunny, so to speak, where it doesn’t want to go … Alba should make us wonder about bulldogs and pugs, popular animals, particularly here among New York yuppies, animals full of canine joyousness but animals that are prone to respiratory disorders, animals that can be birthed only through C-Section (at least for bulldogs), animals that really should not be. Maybe. I treat the dog run at Washington Square Park like my cheap zoo, and I see these dogs, and their pleasure at being alive is undeniable: but if they didn’t exist at all, I don’t think anything would be lost, at least not to them. It’d be easy to say that dogbreeding is ‘unnatural’ and that we should all own mutts, if we own at all. But I want to go after bringing anything into this world. I want to see Alba, or a pug, as the image of a human child. Reproduction, the foundation of the natural (and whose presence as such makes it the bête noire of queer theory?), is also an assault on agency, perhaps the assault on agency, that is, if we listen seriously to that teenage cliché: ‘I never asked to be born.’ Think of this:

Alba’s name was chosen by consensus between my wife Ruth, my daughter Miriam, and myself. The second phase is the ongoing debate, which started with the first public announcement of Alba’s birth, in the context of the Planet Work conference, in San Francisco, on May 14, 2000. The third phase will take place when the bunny comes home to Chicago, becoming part of my family and living with us from this point on. [Kac 2002b]

Note the traditional family narrative, where the glowing bunny fits nicely into the structure where a child normally would be. We have the selection of a name, the announcement, the delivery of Alba, created not so much against but indifferently to her will, to the family. This is the very image of the human family, of the child thrust into this world.
Eileen Joy said (‘More on Nonintegral Bodies’ 2007) …

I grabbed John Caputo’s More Radical Hermeneutics, and was immediately struck by this passage in relation to our conversations here about bioluminescent bunnies and the unbounded self and endlessly transmogrifying [N]atures:

The end of ethics means that the business of ethics is to be conducted with a little more fear and trembling than philosophers have been wont to show. To a certain extent, the end of ethics is like the death of God for people who still believe in God: it clears away the idols and allows a more divine God to break out … On the view that I am defending here, everything turns on a specific affirmation, beyond any positivity or positionality, of the ‘other’, the affirmation of … the ‘wholly other’, tout autre. As an affirmation of the wholly other, this view originates not in a no but a yes, not in a refusal but a welcome – viens and bienvenue – to the wholly other, opening our home to the stranger who knocks at our door like Elijah … In one sense, which is futural, the wholly other means something that takes us by surprise in a radical way, something that in some important way we did not see coming … The affirmation that moves and inspires thinking at the end of ethics is the affirmation of something to come, something deeply futural, something that we cannot foresee. [Caputo 2000, 172–90]

Caputo invokes, in a move that reminds me of George Kateb’s thinking in The Inner Ocean (1994), the importance of singularity over any commonly held assumptions and expectations, and by implication, the singular, extravagantly other individual over and against any group (and hence, over and against any group-thought, such as a ‘code’ of ethics, rule- and norm-bound, would represent). The singular, individual ‘person’ or ‘living entity’ – the idea of such a thing existing as singular, unexpected, always unanticipated ‘event’ – is central to ethics, and to thinking about ethics, and I guess I couldn’t agree more …

I also believe, I guess, that we live, often, through beautiful fictions, such as love, that sustain our lives, no matter how ephemeral, or even, ridiculously ungrounded in fact or reason. Let us admit, then (perhaps) that, while we know (via our intelligence) that the self may be unbounded, more fiction than material fact, that the idea and fiction of the singular self has some merit and can lead to some good in this world, and even more importantly, much happiness, which is, in my mind, a chief ethical good. Even an interrelationship between unbounded selves depends, to a certain extent, on the recognition that the singular other matters somehow enough to want to connect with it and thereby make oneself, somehow, more complete. This will involve a type of love that places, as Caputo puts it, ‘checks’ upon the ‘I’, ‘me’, and ‘mine’, and which allows one, not to grasp/touch the other, but to be grasped. Now, I know this will seem a sort of
ridiculous question, but in what manner did Eduardo Kac allow himself to be grasped by ‘Alba’ before she was born?

*Queering the Non/Human*

I introduced the preceding conversation as unfinished, but *interminable* would perhaps be the better adjective. The issues raised are so complex as to be done injustice by some stultifying closure or easy summation. I have therefore not attempted to place an artificial synthesis upon them, preferring to allow them to stand as four interconnected but unreconciled views, a nexus of vagrant trajectories. The most salient problems they raise remain at the heart of socially engaged humanistic inquiry: what are the limits of the human? How has that category changed throughout history? How does desire rupture the integrity of individuated subjects? Do nonhumans have desires? Can art be nonhuman? What unacknowledged violence do normalisations (of sexuality, of ability, of body) enact? How heavily does the past weigh upon the future, especially when that futurity is embodied in what seems wholly new? Can ‘human’ be thought in more capacious terms, within modes that enable a multiplicity of loves, including inhuman or animal or nonhuman loves? Can the world we inhabit be made more just, and would that mean rendering our world more beautiful, more queer … or does queering demand giving up entirely on social structures as they are currently configured? Is there in fact an entity that can be called ‘the human’, a being who exists in contradistinction to a world of inhuman or nonhuman agents and elements, or is the human a constraining and historically limited concept that queer theory demands we move at last beyond?

*Queering the Non/Human* powerfully articulates these aesthetic, ethical, humanistic and scientific issues. This collection of essays thereby takes the diverse array of critical operations known as queer theory into exhilarating new directions, tacks that offer some compelling answers to the questions the green rabbit conversation poses. Claire Colebrook quotes Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari to good effect, offering a kind of mantra for the book: creative and affirmative modes of analysis do not concern themselves so much with what things mean but how they work, what alliances are formed in and through them, what transformations they enable. Colebrook argues that queer theory must not seek stability and self-maintenance, but must instead ceaselessly undermine its own grounds. As Vicki Kirby writes, the Deleuzian notion of assemblage (a heterogeneous network of whole and partial human and nonhuman elements) also ensures that the human is never complete, always an act of *becoming human* without origin or terminus. Neither anchored in nor determined by an exterior,
the human is a perpetual engagement machine, inhabiting a world that can be thought and structured differently.

Noreen Giffney likewise analyses a becoming-human, but carefully details the exclusions inherent in such a process. As Judith Butler has observed, ‘dehumanization becomes the condition for the production of the human’ (2004b, 90), limning every community with its abjected others. Through the resonant neologism ‘apocal(o)ptic/ism’, Giffney urges us to take seriously the negative power of the queer, but in a sense that makes the term productive: queering the human entails the rejection of the system of normalisation upon which it rests, allowing the future to be imagined in terms that do not simply reproduce the present. Erin Runions finds the queer abiding in the most violently normalising of images and narratives, depictions of antichrist that intermix race, sexuality and conservative politics. Robert Mills goes further, finding in his exuberant essay ‘queerly proliferating, nonhuman pasts as well as futures’, discovering the monster dwelling in God. Robert Azzarello likewise intermingles the monstrous and the queer, using environmental studies to read Bram Stoker’s Dracula, and to estrange what we mean by Nature, a category that tends to normalise more than describe. Taking the monster’s perspective, Phillip A. Bernhardt-House investigates the powers of werewolves, finding that lycanthropy offers, beneath lupine skin, an alternative form of humanity. In the co-evolution of humans and dogs, Karalyn Kendall finds a dynamic ‘web of embodied relations that have brought both species into being’. Alice A. Kuzniar takes this intimacy further, detailing literary representations of human-canine nuptials.

In case the categories of human and nonhuman are not yet wholly confounded, Myra J. Hird uses recent scientific work to undo easy assumptions about the stability and dimorphism of sexuality in nature. Eva Hayward brings similar ‘trans histories’ to ‘human-animal en-foldings’, while Judith Halberstam likewise looks at animals and sex through transbiology, a reimagining of bodiliness that opens new potentialities rather than replicates reproductive identities. Through the term ‘affective relationality’, Luciana Parisi aims at the subdiscursive structures of human identity, the ‘new kingdoms of sex’ that intermingle the organic and the inorganic, the human with the inhuman. Karen Barad returns us to the questions of ethics and ability that haunt the human desire to ally with the nonhuman and produce what has not been created before. By focusing upon a human turned object, the corpse, Patricia MacCormack problematises the relationship between possessing a body and possessing personhood. By no means a dead end, MacCormack’s ruminations on necrosexuality, stressing as they do the vagrancy of desire, emphasise a lesson that Alba the green bunny declares as well. ‘Being human’ really means endlessly ‘becoming human’. It
means holding an uncertain identity, an identity always slipping away from us because always supported through the alliances we make with nonhumans, an identity that at its fullest never ceases to move and to change.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Michael O’Rourke for reminding me how deeply the quotation from Carolyn Dinshaw’s work touches my argument here, as well as for placing his hand upon the argument himself. I am also deeply indebted to Eileen Joy, Karl Steel, Holly Crocker and the many readers of the blog, In the Middle <http://www.jjcohen.blogspot.com>.

References


AN UNFINISHED CONVERSATION ABOUT GLOWING GREEN BUNNIES


This page intentionally left blank
Abu Ghraib prison 99–101
Ackerley, J.R. 209, 216, 217–19, 223–4
Adams, C.J. 195
‘Adive’ (André Pieyre de Mandiargues) 219–20
affective contagion 301
affective relations 289, 290
nanoengineering 283–90
Agamben, G. 81, 96–7, 99, 101
Aizenberg, J. 319, 320, 321, 323
et al. 322, 323
Alastrann (Eachtra an Mhadra Mhaoil) 166, 168
animal transexuality 227–43, 290–3
animation 265, 267, 271–9
‘animetaphor’ 259–60, 262
Anonymous Queers 69
Anthony and the Johnsons see Cripple and the Starfish
anthropomorphism 2, 186–7, 238, 268, 269–70
antichrists, political and gay 79–105
anxiety and projection of death drive 65–6, 69
apocalyptic perspectives 55–78, 79–105
Aquinas, Thomas 119–20
atomic redesign, nanoengineering 293–301
Atterton, P. 185, 186–7, 189, 202
authentic experience of gender 237–8
automata 125–7
bacteria 237, 239–40, 241, 291
Badmington, N. 72
Bataille, G. 68
Batnitzky, L. 201
Bauer, G. 100–1
Bava, L. (Macabre) 352–4
‘becoming-woman’ 24, 26, 29, 30, 31, 33
Bell, C. 188
Bell Laboratories 320–1, 322–3
Benyus, J. 314–15, 317–18
Berisani, L. 66–7, 98
Berlant, L. 89–90
Bernardino of Siena 128
Beyond the Darkness (film) 349, 354–6
Bible
Daniel 85, 87, 88
Exodus 198, 199
John 83, 85
Revelation 82, 85
bin Laden, Osama 79, 81–2, 90–1, 93–4
‘binary logic’ 3–4
biomimicry 314–19, 332, 333, 334–5
biotechnology see nanotechnology
Birke, L. et al. 228, 243
birth control in animals 235
Bisclavret (Marie de France) 167–8, 171–2
bisexuality 45–6, 235
bodily ego 47–8, 49
body boundaries 43, 45–6, 47, 50, 328
body/sex see nanotechnology
body/ies
affective relations 289, 290
brittlestar 324–5, 327–8
Christian and secular views 92
cyborg 131–2, 265–6, 284–5, 287, 300
evolutionary and queer theories 29–30
and face 187–90, 189–90, 192, 193–4, 201–2, 352–3
libidinal self-investment 43, 44, 45
machinic relationality of 288–9
trans 254–9, 261–2
‘Boobs’ (Suzy McKee) 171
*Book of Margery Kempe* 119
boundaries
  body 43, 45–6, 47, 50, 328
  species 159, 187, 209, 212–16
  see also self
bourgeois ideology 25, 26
Boxley Abbey, ‘Holy Cross of Grace’/
  Rood of Grace 125–7
Braidotti, R. 31
*Bride of Chucky* (film) 276
brittlestar visual system and microlens
technology 319–36
Bronfen, E. (*Over Her Dead Body*) 346, 347
Brown, R. 209
*The Dogs: A Modern Bestiary* 220–4
*Buffalo Gals and Other Animal Presences*
  (Ursula LeGuin) xxv–xxvi
*Buffy the Vampire Slayer* 176, 178
Bush, George W. 80, 85–6, 89, 91, 95, 101
Butler, J. 2–3, 4, 7–8, 20, 21, 27–8, 29, 39, 40, 42, 43, 44, 46, 47, 48–52, 56, 58, 61, 72, 73, 153, 189, 201, 202, 233, 284, 285, 311, 312
*Cannibal Corpse* (songs) 347
Caputo, J. 371
causation 311–13
Chambers, J. 88
*Chicken Run* (animated cartoon) 272
Child, heteronormativity and
  reproductive futurism 59–60, 63–73
  passim, 89–90, 98, 103–4, 145–6, 275, 276
*Child’s Play* (film series)
  *Bride of Chucky* 276
  *Seed of Chucky* 275–9
Christian perspectives
  animal marriage 227
  ‘intelligent design’ 270
  Judaeo-Christian tradition 187–8, 195–6
  medieval allegory 221–2
  crucifixion 115–16, 125–7, 128–31
  monstrous sexualities 117–25
  Trinity 111–15
  and secular views of sexual
  morality 92
  see also Bible; antichrists, political and
  gay
  cinesexuality 358
Clara, D. 186, 196, 199
Clarke, A. 241
‘Cleanness’ (poem) 118
cloning 293–4, 315
co-evolution of dogs and humans 200–1, 202
Cohen, J.J. 1, 6–7, 124–5
companion xxiii
companion species xxiii–xxiv
coral goby fish 236, 238
*Cosmopolitan Girl* (Rosalyn Drexler) 205, 206, 207, 209
criminology 343, 344
Cripple and the Starfish (Anthony and
  the Johnsons) 249–63
  lyrics 249–50, 254–5, 257–8, 260–3
  meat of meaning 259–61
  re-form/surgery 257–9
  trans-form/surgery 254–7
  trans/of species and sexes 250–4
Cronenberg, D. 356
  crucifixion 115–16, 125–7, 128–31
  cyborgs 249–63
  ‘Dance of the Seven Deadly Sins’
  (William Dunbar) 123–4
  Darwin, Charles *see* evolutionary/
  Darwinian theory
de France, M. (*Bisclavret*) 167–8, 171–2
de Mandiargues, A.P. 209, 219–20, 223–4
*Dead Ringers* (film) 356
Dean, T. 62–3, 348
dead death camps *see* Nazis
INDEX

death drive 57–9, 60, 61–4, 67, 68, 103–4
anxiety and projection of 65–6, 69
horror film genre 276
thanatos and eros 164
Le Déjeuner en Fourrure (Oppenheim) 363–4
Deleuze, G. 18, 21, 23, 24, 25, 26, 28–9, 30, 31, 32, 349–50, 351, 352
and Guattari, F. 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 26, 31, 32, 61, 62, 287–9, 292, 298, 300, 303, 339–40, 342, 346, 347, 350–1, 352–5, 358
Derrida, J. 2, 26–7, 36, 67, 73, 189, 192, 193, 195–6
Desiring the Dead (Lisa Downing) 347
diffraction 319, 327–8, 332–3
Dinshaw, C. 4, 363
Dobson, J. 88–9
A Dog’s Head/Une tête de chien (Jean Dutourd) 209, 212–16, 220, 223–4
dogs
co-evolution of humans and 200–1, 202
domestication of 200
in literature 185–202, 205–24
The Dogs: A Modern Bestiary (Rebecca Brown) 220–4
Dollimore, J. 67
Donoghue, E. 210
Doty, A. 5, 208
Downing, L. (Desiring the Dead) 347
Dracula (Bram Stoker) 139–52
eccritical perspective 152–4
enter Dracula 146–52
enter Renfield 140–6
Drexler, R. 295
Cosmopolitan Girl 205, 206, 207, 209
Dunbar, W. (‘Dance of the Seven Deadly Sins’) 123–4
Dutourd, J. (A Dog’s Head/Une tête de chien) 209, 212–16, 220, 223–4
Eachtra an Mhadra Mhaoil (Ailasthann) 166, 168
Edelman, L. (No Future) 56, 58, 59–61, 62–70, 71–2, 73, 81, 89–90, 98, 102, 103–4, 145–6, 153, 275, 276
ego, bodily 47–8, 49
Eisler, R. 168–9, 173
Ellis, H. 126
embodiment see body/ies
environmentalism and queer politics 152–4
epistemology/knowledge 328–31
eschartology see antichrists, political and gay
‘ethics of affirmation’ 31
Ettinger, B.L. 68
evolutionary/Darwinian theory
coevolution of dogs and humans 200–1, 202
and human/nonhuman characteristics 143, 238–9
and Levinasian ethics 187–8
sexual difference and sexual reproduction 29–30, 239, 240–1, 283
and sexual diversity in animals 229, 242–3, 269
Social Darwinism 317–18
face(s) 187–90, 192, 193–4, 201–2, 352–3
Fausto-Sterling, A. 39, 40, 241
feeling(s) 290
Feinberg, L. 233
feminist perspectives
animal transexuality 227–43
biological science 229–30, 284, 292, 293–4
causality 311
heteronormativity 59–60
Field, Michael 209, 210–12, 216, 223–4
Finding Nemo (animated cartoon) 272, 273–4
Flesh for Frankenstein (film) 349, 356–60
forensic pathology 343, 344
Foucault, M. 36, 64–5, 72, 96, 98, 311, 340, 348
Fradenburg, L. and Freccero, C. 142
Frankenstein (Mary Shelley) 277, 279, 369
Franklin, S. 265–6, 267, 275, 276, 277, 279
Freud, A. 65
Freud, S. 42–3, 44, 45, 46–7, 48, 51, 52, 57–9, 60, 61, 62, 69, 145, 163, 207
Fuss, D. 3, 55
futurity
Child, heteronormativity and 59–60, 63–73 passim, 89–90, 98, 103–4, 145–6, 275, 276
nanoengineering of desire 301–5
Garber, M. (‘Unconditional Lovers’) 207
gay marriage, US prohibition of 88–90, 91–2, 94–5, 98–9, 100–1, 102, 103
GFP (‘green fluorescent protein’) Bunny (Eduardo Kac) 364–71
Ginger Snaps (film) 169–71
Goldberg, J. 90, 94
Greco-Roman literature 161, 162, 214, 215
Grimes, K. 1–2
Gross, N. and Port, O. 314
Grosz, E. 29–30, 230, 304
Groves, C. 199–200
Guattari, F. 341
see also Deleuze, G., and Guattari, F.
Gutter Dyke Collective 70–1
Gwydion and Gilvaethwy (Math vab Mathonwy) 165–6, 168
Halberstam, J. 104–5, 152, 265
and Livingstone, I. 56–7
Hall, D.E. 5
Halley, J.E. and Parker, A. 5
Halpern, D.M. 149
Happy Feet (animated cartoon) 271, 272–3, 274
Haraway, D. 3, 4–5, 55, 111, 117, 131, 151, 199, 201–2, 207, 228–9, 231, 265–6, 267, 277, 284–5, 319, 365
Harry Potter series (J.K. Rowling) 172–3
Heidegger, M. 17–18
heteronormativity Child and futurism 59–60, 63–73 passim, 89–90, 98, 103–4, 145–6, 275, 276
and its (queer) discontents 69–73 parody (‘I Married My Dog’) 205–6, 207, 209
secular and religious discourse 91–2 splitting of the self 65–6
US prohibition of gay marriage 88–90, 91–2, 94–5, 98–9, 100–1, 102, 103
heterosexuality 59–60, 234, 268–70
Hird, M. 290–2
‘His Master’s Voice’ logo 190–1
HIV/AIDS 64
homophobia 52, 90–4, 175–6
homosexuality in animals 235
The Howling 161–2
human(s) 55–7, 58, 91–2
hylomorphic model 17
hypochondria 43, 46, 50, 51, 52
‘I Married My Dog’ (Margaret Kemp Ross) 205–6, 207, 209
identity 26–7, 50, 51–3, 94
see also self
incestuous beginnings 35–54
The Incredibles (animated cartoon) 272
Inordinate (?) Affection (Ethyl Smyth) 210
insects 234, 235, 241–2
intersexuality 229, 236
intra-actions 286–8, 289, 324, 325, 328, 329–30, 333
Iraq war 95–6
propaganda 79, 81–2, 85–6, 90–1, 93–4
concentration camp (Abu Ghraib prison) 99–101
Irigaray, L. 17, 301
Jacquet, L. 267–8
Jakobsen, J. 92
Jewish literature 83–4
Johnson, Marsha 252–3
Joy, B. 296–7
Judaico-Christian tradition 187–8, 195–6
Kac, E. (GFP (‘green fluorescent protein’) Bunny) 364–7
INDEX

Karpinski, J. 99
Kaufman-Osborne, T. 312–13
Kemp Ross, M. (‘I Married My Dog’) 205–6, 207, 209
Kinsman, S. 229
Kirby, V. 3, 7
Kissed (film) 347–8
Klein, M. 58, 59, 63, 65–6, 69–70
Knight, R. 100
knowledge/epistemology 328–31
Kraft-Ebbing, R. von 343
Kristeva, J. 207–8
Kurath, H. 118–19
Kuzniar, A. 3

Lacan, J. 43, 47–50, 51, 58, 68, 208
Ladyhawke (film) 173–5
Lancaster, R.N. 138
language 29
‘animetaphor’ 259–60, 262
metonymy 255, 257, 259, 260, 262, 263
‘ripple’ 261–3
symbolic communication by honeybees 238–9
LeGuin, U. (Buffalo Gals and Other Animal Presences) xxv–xxvi, xxv–xxvi
Lerner, R. 84
lesbian phallus 45, 46, 48–9, 50, 53
lesbians/ism
and cross-species desire 219–20
Michael Field 209, 210–12, 223–4
werewolves 168–9, 170–1
Levinasian ethics 185–204
LGBT/Q activism 70–1, 72–3
libidinal self-investment 43, 44, 47
libido/energy force 26–7, 42, 45, 46–7
Lincoln Cathedral 121–2
Lippit, A.M. 259–60
Little Red Riding Hood 169
Llewellyn, J. 186, 187, 191, 196
Lochrie, K. 116, 123
lycanthropy see werewolf; wolf
Lyotard, J.F. 58, 351, 357, 358

Macabre (Lamberto Bava) 352–4
Macabro (film) 349
MacCormack, P. 358, 360
machinic expansion 297–9
machinic relationality of body 288–9
McHugh, S. 198, 200, 218
Mackay, J.L. 241
McKee, S. (‘Boobs’) 171
Mallens Maleficarum 162
Mandeville’s Travels 127
The March of the Penguins (documentary) 267–71, 273, 279
marriage
animal (Punky and Elvira) 227, 228
gay 88–90, 92, 94–5, 98–9, 100–1, 102, 103
see also heteronormativity
Marulis, L. and Sagan, D. 238, 240–2, 291
masturbation 99, 100, 234–5, 279
material artificiality of human trans 241–2
material-discursive relationship 311, 312, 324–5, 333, 359
Math vab Mathomovy (Gwydion and Gilvaethwy) 165–6, 168
Mathieu, L. and Sonca, S. 240
‘Mazes’ (Ursula LeGuin) xxv–xxvi
Mead, G.H. 238
Meaux Abbey chronicle 128
medieval period
werewolves 132, 162, 165–8
see also under Christian perspectives
Melville, H. (Billy Budd) 31–3
metonymy 255, 257, 259, 260, 262, 263
Migne, J.P. 114–15
mimicry
biomimicry 314–19, 332, 333, 334–5
dog–human relationship 190–1
‘Mirror Stage’ 43, 47
Le Morte Darthur 119
mutant culture, nanoengineering of desire 299–301
My Dog Tulip (J.R. Ackerley) 217, 218–19
‘The Name of a Dog, or Natural Rights’ (Emmanuel Levinas) 185–202
nanobots 296–7
INDEX

Rouse, J. 331
Rowling, J.K. (Harry Potter series) 172–3
Saddam Hussein 79, 81–2, 90–1, 93–4
Sagan, D. 239
   Marulis, L. and 238, 240–2, 291
   Sax 199
   Sedgwick, E.K. 5
   Seed of Chucky (film) 275–9
   Seitz, D. 141, 145
self
   and Other 325, 333
   splitting 65–6
   see also identity
   sex aids, medieval 127
   sex dimorphism in animals 237–43
   sexual difference
      nanoengineering 283–309
      ontology of 238–41
      and sexual reproduction, evolutionary/
Darwinian theory 29–30, 239,
240–1, 283
   sexual diversity in living organisms 234–7
   shame 207–8, 209, 212–14, 215–16, 220,
223, 224
Shelley, M. (Frankenstein) 277, 279, 369
   Shrek (animated cartoons) 272
   single parenting 234
   sinthomosexuals 63, 67–8, 72
   Smyth, E. (Inordinate (?) Affection) 210
Social Darwinism 317–18
   social science vs natural science
      approaches 7
   sodomitic torment 117–22
Soule, M. and Lease, G. 138, 139
   South Park (film) 80–1, 93
   ‘species’ xxiii–xxiv
   species boundaries 159, 187, 209,
212–16
   species mis-recognition xxv–xxvi
Spencer, K.L. 149
   spider silk 315–16, 317
   Spinoza, B. 288, 289, 301
   splitting 65–6
   The Spongebob SquarePants Movie (animated
cartoon) 272, 273–4
   Stengers, I. 295, 299–301
   Stevenson, J.A. 150
   Stoker, B. see Dracula (Bram Stoker)
   Stoller, R.J. 344–5
   Stryker, S. 250, 251, 252
   surgery, transsexual 241, 249–63
   surgical fetishism 356
   Taussig, M. 190–1
   technology
      human and nonhuman 241–2
      microsense, and brittlestar visual
system 319–36
      nanotechnology 283–309, 314
      reproduction 267, 275–6, 292
   Terrell, J. 138
      theoretical perspectives 17–34
      thermodynamic model 23, 25, 26, 27, 31
Tkachenko, Dr A. 320
torture, Abu Ghraib prison 99–101
   ‘transbiology’ 265–6, 267, 274–9
   transdisciplinary approach 6–7
   transsexuality in animals 227–43, 290–3
   ‘transgender’ civil rights movement 252
   transgenic art 364–5
   transgenic engineering see biomimicry
   transvestism in animals 236–7
   Trinity 209, 218–19
      medieval iconography 111–15
      ‘Trinity’ (Michael Field) 210–11, 212, 216
   Turner, J. 315, 316
   ‘Unconditional Lovers’ (Marjorie Garber) 207
   vampires and werewolves 164–5
   The Virgin of Nuremberg (film) 356
   Vogel, S. 139
   Wallace and Gromit and the Curse of the
   Were-Rabbit (animated cartoon) 272,
273–4
   We Think the World of You (J.R.
   Ackerley) 217–19
Weinstock, M. 322
werewolf
  celibate 171–5
  etic/emic perspectives 159–60, 161–2, 178–9
  in European literature and tradition 160–2
  female 168–71
  lycanthrophobia and lycanthropelia 175–8
  medieval period 132, 162, 165–8
  sexuality 161–2, 163–5
  and vampires 164–5
White, S. 93, 94
Whitefield, J. 320, 321
Whitehead, A.N. 288, 290, 299, 300–1, 302

Whym Chow: Flame of Love (Michael Field) 210–12, 220
“The Wife’s Story” (Ursula LeGuin) xxv
Wildmon, D. 90
Wilson, Edward 234
Wilson, Elizabeth 229, 239, 242–3
Wilton, T. 232, 237–8, 241
Wittig, M. 60, 64, 341
wolf
  in Greco-Roman literature 161, 162
  male and female dimensions 160
Wolfe, C. 191, 195, 197
Wolfman case (Freud) 163
Wolves of Wall Street (film) 175–6, 178
The Wolves of Kromer (film) 176–7, 178
Wriothesley, C. 125–6

Ziarek, E.P. 311
Zita, J. 233