

Telling Sexual auto-ethnography: (fictional) stories of the (homo)sexual in Social Science

NEIL MARTIN CAREY

Faculty of Health, Psychology & Social Care,
The Manchester Metropolitan University
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Abstract

The dissertation is an autoethnographic exploration of some of the meanings available, from within a contemporary British urban context, in naming and locating male same-sex genital relations (Moran, 1996). In particular, the dissertation analyses some of the dynamics at stake in locating male same-sex genital relations under the sign 'gay'. An argument is made for the pervasiveness of this nomenclature in contemporary liberal western contexts in describing male same-sex desire/attraction/activity and, concomitantly, what might be lost in consigning male same-sex sexuality thus.

Autoethnography is adopted as a methodological approach in (re)tracing some elements of my biography in order to disrupt the potentially assimilationist impulse attaching to 'gay' as a way of normativising male same-sex relations. I adopt this approach given the uneases by which I recognise my own same-sex sexual proclivities as fitting (or not) within the homonormative (Duggan, 2004) excesses of 'gay'. The autoethnographic approach allows me to reflect on previous experience as a means of que(e)r(y)ing the seeming ease with which 'gay' might be seen as accounting for all those who labour under its sign. In particular, I explore (my) Irishness, (my) queered relation to gender, (my) in/disciplined engagements with psychology, (my) Class location and (my) early childhood sexuality in an attempt to explore how these might locate me more queerly in a contemporary socios that has a tendency to render (me as a) males with same-sex inclinations as identifiable and knowable.

Alongside this autoethnographic work I explore how writing creative fictions might complement/supplement the impulse to queer 'gay'. This aspect of the work is borne out of an interest in how Humanities-inspired academic discourses might be brought to bear in bending those Social Science discourses through which I became academic and through which I have come to understand (my) (homo)sexuality.

Ultimately, the dissertation is an attempt to find a writing voice that speaks to and for the multiply queered (dis)locations that I have become subject to in 'becoming' (academic). It is an attempt to (re)write (my) (homo)sexuality into social science discourse without recourse to those discursive frames that tolerate and/or pathologise. This is my journey into doctoring myself.

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Prologue

I think I have a story to tell, or at least, fragments of some stories that fracture any ease by which I might adopt the nomenclature of 'gay man'.

The story fragments, through which I recount some (re)visions of my 'inventing adulthood' (McGrellis, 2010), are chosen from the myriad of socio-cultural intersections that offer architectures for identity construction in those processes of "becoming" to which life's efforts are cast and in which they are recast in partial and particular tellings. These architectures span the microcosms of a personal history that lies (un)comfortably with those macro socio-cultural structures which make claims for identities (class, race, (dis)ability, gender etc). This work is especially interested in those socio-cultural understandings of national, gendered, classed, childhood (sexual) and academic identity, all of which have the propensity to discipline and regulate subjectivity's orientations to and with itself. The work also attends to the geographical locations in which such (mis)understandings of identity are made. As Panelli (2002, p. 117) argues when exploring the contexts in which young rural dwellers construct their identity,

cultural contexts will shape the practices and values in a young person's immediate rural experiences – through family and/or household, and community. ... [and] provide resources, constraints and even points of resistance through which young people live out their lives and construct knowledges of rurality, society and space.

This work attends to the geographies of becoming in how they provide those 'resources, constraints and points of resistance' (Panelli, 2002, p.117) to (re)script a narrative of subjectivity that disrupts 'gay' as the (uneasy and dominant) frame through which I construct, and am constructed in, the world.

This dissertation then, is an exploration of some of the contexts in which I have become and how they shape and que(e)ry a focus on, and away from,

that identity category, 'gay', which holds the potential to dominate any performance (written, spoken, enacted) in/by this body's work. It is an attempt to explore some of those alternative architectures of becoming that disrupt the 'master narrative of 'gay' (S. L. Crawley, 2009; Sara L. Crawley & Broad, 2004), architectures that compete with, take antecedence over and have the potential to disturb the neatness of 'gay' as *the* marker of male same-sex sexual identity. In doing so, I turn to ideas of (and that) queer(s) this formulaic story of male same-sex genital relations (Moran, 1996).

The dissertation is a 'theoretical memoir' (Bruhm & Hurley, 2004, p. xxxii) which adopts two forms of writing practice for its telling. In the first instance it uses autoethnographic writing (Chang, 2008; Carolyn Ellis, 2004, 2008) to recount some fragments of biographical trajectory that I can trace to this point. I use this method as a way of challenging the impress of 'gay' as the master narrative for my identity, and explore instead how some features of those biographical trajectories, in which I claim a sense of self/subjectivity, queer my relation in/to the world beyond, and in conjunction to, the same-sex genital relations that characterise my sex/uality. The dissertation also adopts creative fiction (Clough, 2002; Sparkes, 2009; Ungar, 2011; C. Watson, 2011) as a form of (re)writing some of those biographical trajectories referred to in the autoethnographic sections. I adopt this form of writing as a means of taking seriously the idea that representing biographies is far from straight-forward, that the selves that tell and are told in biographical and autoethnographic writing are themselves fictions, and that such selves can be (re-)inscribed against those narrative tropes that dominate the cultural milieu in which present and future 'self' might find itself located (Evans, 1998; Paula Saukko, 2003; Stanley, 1995).

I offer these autoethnographic and fictional explorations as an attempt to critically question those claims made for a fixed or even resolved (homo)sexual identity. These explorations offer alternative constructions of sexual identity – not of fixity, but of fluidity, of incomprehension, of (un)being

and (un)becoming beyond the grasp of knowing – necessarily and queerly of uncertainty and ambivalence. The tellings offered here, both autoethnographic and fictional, hanging as they are as décor for this dissertation, are stretched along a thread that retains (un)knowing as its major theme. By this, I mean that the work casts a critically queer eye towards academic claims for what is known and knowable, how and on what bases such claims are made, and how does this knowing fit with (or not) that which is (already) claimed as known in the cultural milieu in which the knowing occurs. They are reflections on and of(f) ontology, epistemology and axiology in social science, especially as they pertain to (homo)sexual identity.

The dissertation leans on the anti-identitarian impulse of Queer theory, a tendency that recognises that

There is an arbitrariness about identity construction, which will inevitably entail the silencing or exclusion of some experiences. [And that one need be] constantly aware of the fictitious character of identity and of the dangers of imposing an identity. (Petersen, 2003, p. 62).

However, the work also recognises the compulsions to and for 'identity' as a means of sense-making, rights-making, and as a way of staking claims to belonging in an increasingly fragmented world. The work takes seriously the idea that

Queer theory, though flourishing in recent years, still lacks models for the multiple ways in which deviant, perverse sexualities are formed and how they survive. (Kent, 2004, p. 184).

This work construes male same-sex genital sex/uality (Moran, 1996) as pertaining to Kent's notions of deviance and perversity, registers the vitality and potential productivity of its aberration from the (hetero-)norm, and attempts to disrupt its assimilation into the tolerated respectability of western urban idea(l)s of 'gay'.

Given that the work of this dissertation, and especially its theoretical orientations towards the postmodern and Queer, adopts such a (hyper)conscious turn towards male same-sex genital relations as it is configured through the homosexual and the 'gay', it seems apposite to acknowledge and make explicit the very con/text in which these (sexual) phenomena are excavated and evacuated. (I am conscious here how 'text' has a body and an etymology that invests it with the weave of tissue). At heart, the PhD represents an attempt at writing in the face of having long been part of the academy without fully engaging with the opportunity and requirement to write for publication. In the nightmarish moments when I can even glance in the direction of this lack, shame-faced and with the whiff of a nervous sweat, my habit is to diagnose in the most negative way. The reflection I catch in the contorted mirror of my writing failure is one of absolute deficiency: inadequacy, incompetence, sham. Inevitably, this reflection has reinforced a destructive, if strangely comforting, cycle of continuing silence and has perpetuated the pathology of me as inept and unable; a very unacademic academic. It is a cycle of miserable failure.

I want to use the current work to disrupt this cycle and to reflect the lacks of my academic writing career through the uneases with which I position (homo)sexuality, and how (homo)sexuality is positioned in the academy. With the exception of the last chapter, this reflection is mostly implicit in the work: it is a strain that haunts the praxis of the writing, a praxis that is, itself, suffused with the (im)possibilities for articulating (homo)sexuality in a largely erotophobic academy. However, throughout the dissertation, the praxis is wholly apparent in my (very conscious) failure to adopt a conventional form and format for the PhD, in the indiscipline that I exercise in attempting to find a queer academic voice.

I take Judith/Jack Halberstam's *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011, p. 10) as my inspiration for exercising a kind of 'antidisciplinarity' or what I would like to

call an 'intemperate indiscipline', for crossing failure with failure in the hope that I (we, me with you?) end up with something. As such, the work eschews

terms like serious and rigorous [as] they signal a form of training and learning that confirms what is already known according to approved methods of knowing, but they do not allow for visionary insights or flights of fancy' (Halberstam, 2011, p. 6).

A brief outline of the Dissertation:

Written texts are almost always about their author, but they work as texts only in the bargain made by their author and the reader. The latter is the ultimate arbiter in making it a 'proper' text. Otherwise, it is just writing on a page. As the writer of this text, I also want to forewarn you about the (seeming) disorganization of much of the work – in its form, its coherency, and in the chronology of the autoethnographic story along, and in, which some 'flights of fancy' reside.

The devices of (un)structure are meant as a deliberate strategy of disorientation, of questioning and que(e)rying the status of the modern (homo)sexual, the 'gay', as a function of his supposedly fixed orientations towards same-sexed (read also, gendered, classed (dis)abled, ethnic ...) object choice. In part also, it is meant to represent the incoherency and inchoateness that attaches to its authorship: there is no final accounting for any 'I' that authors this project. Further, the device is one that reflects the kinds of unease that, as author, I declaim for male gay (sexual) identity that, itself, claims a hegemonic status in the modern urban milieu from which the work is written. In as much as this device signifies the extant disorientations towards my own (uneasy) orientations to gay, it is also meant to disturb and disorient the position of the reader of male same-sex genital relations (Moran, 1996). This is not meant as a strategy to make things difficult for difficulty's sake. Rather, it is a plea to the reader to put on hold some of the dominant

(some might say hegemonic) understandings of gay that are pervasive in contemporary western culture.

Aiming for (un)knowing:

The Dissertation then is an attempt to (mis)represent, from within an academic social science context, a (homo)sexual subjectivity that has traditionally been seen as abject and, more recently, as the acceptable and (somewhat) tolerated 'gay' version of that former figuration.

Aims should, for the most part, enact a very straight and linear sighting of and for its target. The current work, adopting the bent and bending licence that I take to Queer, claims the following as its (dis)organizing principles:

- (a) To disrupt the possibilities for knowing male (homo)sexual subjectivity within social science. In particular, the work targets the homonormed 'gay' as the inevitable or preferred site for male same-sex genital relations.
- (b) To explore the productivity of representational forms more closely associated with the Humanities (memoir, creative fiction) in wresting male (homo)sexuality from the confines of 'gay'.
- (c) To attend to my failure to write in the academy into a PhD, that 'Doctors' me with a very different kind of capital ('D'), and that finds a resonant voice for the future.

In reading straight, from left to right, from beginning to end, you will encounter the following chapters:

- (1) **Si(gh)ting a thesis** ... in which I outline some of the experiential baggage that I carry to this work and some of the theoretical ideas that inform the process of starting out on the project.

(2) **Geographies of gay.** This is an autoethnographic exploration of making sense of 'gay' in two very different urban locations – Manchester and Belfast. The former locates a heady rush in/to 'coming out' as 'gay' and the subsequent disillusionment with it as a space of liberation from the (homo)sexual closet. Belfast is used: as a contrast to dispel the myth of the urban as centre of sexual liberation; as a way of beginning to reframe the tarnished gloss of Manchester as a locus of sexual liberation, and as a way to re-cite (homo)sexuality in its relation to place and space. The chapter is structured in two movements, each of which maps the terrain of its location and how that terrain shapes understandings of (homo)sexuality.

(3) **Disciplining Psychology** is an autoethnographic chapter in which I ruminate on my engagements with the discipline of psychology in attempting to make sense of (homo) and non-normative sexuality. The chapter adopts a fragmentary mode in its representation.

(4) **Bidd(able)y masculine.** In this autoethnographic chapter I explore my relation to Ireland, Irishness and to (Irish) masculinity. In each of these explorations I (dis)locate myself from any easy relation with/to nation and gender in an attempt to re-locate non-normative sexuality differently in its relation with nation and masculinity.

(5) **The Queer Child.** This chapter takes the childhood and the (a/sexual) child as its target in attempting to re-locate non-normative sexuality. Child/hood is marked as the site in which the individual is disciplined into civility. In marking it thus, this chapter highlights childhood's schooling about sexual propriety and preferred cultural capital.

Between each of these autoethnographic chapters lies a piece of creative fiction. These fictions sound out some of what is explored in the following chapter, but they float more freely than that, with echoes from preceding chapters and send reverberations back and forward through all of the work. These inter-chapter respites, of fictions freed from the academic necessities

of *rigour* and *seriousness*, mark the fabrication of the narrator of these creatively authored texts. But, in tracking the content of the autoethnographic chapters, they also harbour suspicions about the solidity of authorship in the wider work.

(6) **Telling Stories/Finding a Doctored voice.** This is the last substantive chapter and it offers a space of recollection and review. It reviews whether and how the dissertation works to highlight the identity category 'gay' as having the potential to occlude and elide its intersections with other dimensions of being, becoming and belonging (class, gender etc) which, themselves, might orient (homo)sexuality into alliance with wider social justice agendas than is the case with a single-identity agenda.

(Pre-) Post-Script:

Turning to Bleakley (2000, p. 20), I am desirous that this work at least attempts to disturb the 'paucity of aesthetic value' that characterises the personal-confessional mode of writing which, he argues, is 'monological rather than dialogical, caught in a wash-and-spin cycle of interminable introspection based (unreflexively) upon self-examination as an idealist cleansing and purging' (p.20). In starting out with an explicit refusal to conform in this dissertation, to the proprietary claims of writing most commonly claimed for and by a naive-realist, foundationalist, modernist-framed (social) scientific writing (Bleakley, 2000; Maclure, 1994, 2003, 2013), I hereby announce my intention to commit as many of the 'writing crimes' that Maclure (2003; see especially Ch. 6) outlines as those most often seen as impropriety, heretical and corrupting of the 'purity' of scientific writing. These crimes 'including jargon, obfuscation, rhetoricity, long-windedness, literariness, irony, play, cleverness and authorial self-indulgence'; what, she argues, Derrida brings together under the name of 'frivolity' because this latter 'consists in being satisfied with tokens' rather than 'the real thing'

(Derrida (1980): cited in Maclure, 2003, p. 111). Maclure continues her argument about the offense caused by literary flourishes in academic writing as an offence against the idea that writing can easily and mimetically represent what it “stands for” – reality, the referent, the inner self, lived experience, first principles, final truths, the culture of ‘others’, and so on’ (2003, p.115). She cites Derrida’s argument that Western thought has coveted the kinds of access to these phenomena in what Derrida calls ‘the desire for presence’. Instead, concurring with Derrida about the impossibility of this prized, direct relationship between the ‘object’ and writing, she suggests that

Writing crimes are criminal because they offend against presence. They remind us that direct access to those prized entities is eternally blocked, and that we are always obliged to look at them ‘awry’, through the medium, or across the gap, of writing (Maclure 2003, p.115).

Chapter 1: Si(gh)ting a thesis ...

Welcome to the world of my PhD. It has laboured on the rack of doubt at its inception and vacillated in the dramas of bewildered disbelief throughout its production. But then, I suspect, that does not distinguish it from many other such projects.

The PhD is conceived across the more than two decades of my indisciplined wandering within, and enthralled wondering at, the British academy. Much of this time has been occupied with the kinds of drone labour on which the academy depends for its existence but is less able to acknowledge with favour: student recruitment, undergraduate teaching, programme and wider university administrative work. Significantly, my time in the academy is marked by a distinct lack of scholarly writing. It is in conversation with this lack of writing that the PhD speaks.

The PhD is constituted through my relation with the range of academic locations in which I have found myself during that time. It is formed in reaction to an early undergraduate disciplining in Psychology with strong positivist and foundationalist tendencies, and to applied postgraduate study in organisational/occupational psychology when, in retrospect, I finally cracked and realised that the satisfactions of abstracted intellectual knowing were such thin gruel in sustaining any kind of richer life, a life of body, of soul, and of social justice. It is formed in a long period of tentative recuperation spent teaching in a Communication Studies department where I spent much of my time in conversation with colleagues with a tradition in and bent towards the Humanities rather than the Social Sciences. It is formed in a short flirtatious summer school with Anthropology in studying sex and sexuality which marked my 'outing' within the academy as having an interest in that cognate area. For a short time, before illness forced me to leave the academy for a number of years, there was a temporary and part-time home as a PhD candidate in

Women's studies which adopted a necessarily sceptical approach to mainstream academic knowledge. And, on my return to the academy, the PhD is formed in another period of undergraduate teaching in a department of Social Change/Care in which my previously closeted fascination with Queer Theory and things queer has finally had an opportunity to develop and be tentatively recognised as legitimate.

Two other forms of labour shape the project. The first, legitimately coalesced in the academy, is a sustained interest in the epistemological and axiological claims made for knowledge of the social. The second, borrowing freely from life outside the academy but constructed as peripheral, sometimes prurient and, until fairly recently, a largely unwarranted concern within the academy, is a fascination with sex and things sexual. This latter concern forms the quotidian backdrop to my academic labours and has shaped my attempts at finding an academic home for my commitments to an intellectual life within the academy. Concomitantly, I am interested in this work in (re)constructing a sexual identity of male non-heterosexuality that refuses the pathologising gaze of heteronormativity (Ingraham, 1994, p. 204) in which I have formerly become, and simultaneously resists the homonormativity (Duggan, 2004) of a docile homosexual subject most usually attaching to contemporary notions of 'gay' in early twenty-first century, liberal western discourses

Across the sweep of this academic journey, the focus of the PhD snags¹ on a number of considerations that signal the nature of my (pre)occupations and which I outline below by way of an introduction to the project.

¹ Snag is used here to denote the idea of something catching on a sharp object and being stretched out, or out of shape, as a consequence. Taken further then, to snag might result in an unravelling. Its use is mindful of the word's etymology in denoting 'a trunk or branch in a river, etc. interfering with navigation' (OED of Etymology). My supervisor also reminds me that, in the sense of house building or renovation, to snag means to point out faults that need to be rectified. I am happy with the ambiguity of the metaphor for this project – that it

... in knowing and naming (homo)sex and (homo)sexuality:

Sex and sexuality are complex and contested terms in social science discourses (Baker, 2008; Bristow, 1997; Ortner & Whitehead, 1988; Weeks, 2009), and this complexity is heightened by the fact that sex and sexuality are marked 'as one of the most charged battlegrounds of the twenty-first century' (Correa, Petchesky, & Parker, 2008, p. 1). At the most fundamental level, sex has at least two significations: the first denotes the physical act of sexual intercourse; the second denotes the physical and biological markers which purportedly distinguish female and male (Baker, 2008). The latter use was promulgated in particular by second-wave feminisms to conceptually differentiate biologically determined categories of sex from those socially constructed gender roles achieved or acquired by girl/woman and boy/man. Despite such attempts to theoretically delineate sex and gender, the terms are often conflated and used synonymously. Additionally and significantly, based largely on the work of Judith Butler (1990; 1993) and taken up in a range of more recent critical approaches to the study of sex and gender, the neat separation of these concepts has been challenged (although, see Brickell (2006) who argues that these ideas originate in earlier theoretical frames from within sociology). This challenge is especially critical of the idea that biological sex is unaffected by social and cultural influence, insisting that it 'can never exist outside prevailing frames of intelligibility' (Ingraham, 1994, p. 214).

Within what Ingraham (1994) outlines as a system of heterogender, sexuality has traditionally signified an understanding of behaviours and characteristics most commonly referred to as masculinity and femininity. Another common use of the term is as a short-hand denotation for sexual orientation – and a

signals a 'catching' and perhaps an unravelling on the one hand and, on the other, a putting right at the same time.

metonym for non-heterosexual orientation at that. Traditionally and enduringly, sexual orientation is conceptualized dichotomously as either heterosexual or homosexual, gay/straight (Brickell, 2006; Callis, 2014; Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 1994). However the increasing visibility of a range of movements related to sex/uality that sit outside and/or reject that binary (bisexuality, intersexuality, trans, queer, gender-queer, asexuality, polysexuality, two-spirit sexuality) has questioned any easy settling on the idea that our understanding of sex/uality should focus exclusively on the gender of sexual object choice (Callis, 2014; Valocchi, 2012). Whilst recognising the diversity of sex/ualities exemplified above, and recognising the dangers in collapsing these radically different identity positions and practices, much activist and academic work in the area of sex/uality studies (and beyond) adopt what Correa et al (2008, p. 8) call an 'alphabet soup' approach in referring to the range of non-normative sex/ualities in contemporary western societies. Thus, some form of the clumsy and unsatisfactory initialism 'LGBTQI' is most often adopted as a compromise when referring to the range of non-normative sex/ualities that are deemed outwith heterosexuality. The current work of this thesis adopts this 'alphabet soup' convention whilst recognising that the diversity of sexual identity positions indexed by it are as often at odds with each other as they are unified in any practical or ideological sense (Correa et al., 2008).

Herd and Howe (2007, p. 1), like many with an interest in the field of sexuality, argue that in the last couple of decades the term has expanded its referents; that it 'has come to mean not simply sex, but gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy, and reproduction'. It is in an attempt to foreground the complexity of this concept, especially in its indexing gender and sex roles within the heteronormative landscape (Brickell, 2006), as well as its signification of a broader range of erotic/intimate sex acts, that I adopt the convention of sex/uality in my writing here.

The current work is focussed most specifically on male same-sex sex/uality and, in extending the alphabet soup metaphor, recognises the fallacies in attempting to separate out only and all the 'G's from the broader amalgam of non-normative sex/ualities for its delectation. Further, the work also registers the fact that the 'G' in this alphabet soup is a leaky signifier given the heterogeneity of male same-sex desire/attraction/intimacy/practice that it claims to refer. Whilst recognising these difficulties with the term 'gay', the current work also acknowledges that, especially in the latter half of the twentieth century, the term 'gay' became the dominant signifier of homo-intimacies of male same-sex desire and practice within a heteronormatively gendered economy (Bersani, 1995; Plummer, 1994; Seidman, 2002; Weeks, 2007).

The thesis is conceived through an enduring interest in how homosexuality – and especially the figure of the homosexual – has been relied on to tell more general stories of sexuality in academic and cultural discourses. The work is shaped in the extensive social constructionist writing on sexuality that demonstrates how the homosexual acts as a cultural and socio-political foil in discourses of sex/uality more broadly (Fuss, 1991; Katz, 2007; Sedgwick, 1994). It is in acknowledging this debt that I adopt the convention of writing (homo)sexual and (homo)sexuality to denote the part that the figuration of the homosexual (and ideas of homosexuality) play in the construction and reproduction of knowledge about sexuality more generally (see e.g. Katz, 2007). However, this writing convention also denotes the hesitations and ambivalences inherent in adopting the term to signify my own location in the contested terrain of sex/uality. On one hand, the term is loaded with a conceptual baggage that denotes a fixed category of person with natural and essential characteristics (Bywater & Jones, 2007; Carabine, 2004; Foucault, 1990), and connotes the history of pathology and deviancy attached to male same-sex sexual practice. On the other, the 'homo' of the term connotes, much more closely than the term 'gay', the kinds of socio-cultural revulsion and opprobrium that continues to be attendant on (some forms of) male

same-sex genital practice (Moran, 1996). I have an affinity with this latter sense of the term given its potential to both mark and disrupt the stigma attaching to those sexual practices associated with it. It is the very historical baggage that it drags along that allows me to queer (see below) the veneer of tolerance and acceptability that pervades the socio-cultural landscape in which I live, and the slippery notions of equality that the term 'gay' assumes.

... in gay formations and their intersections:

Bersani (2009, p. 43) argues that the homosexual has the cultural positioning of a 'failed subject' or, at best, that homosexuality is 'a subtraction' from one's being. In any case, there is a great deal of consensus that the homosexual has traditionally been cast as deviant and abject (Abelove, Barale, & Halperin, 1993; Halperin, 1995). More recently this figure has been rehabilitated, under a discourse of liberal tolerance and equality, into the acceptable figure of the respectable 'gay'- although even this rehabilitation is by no means complete! I play with some of the many discursive constructions that attach to the figure of the homosexual/gay in a short, parodic ditty before the next chapter. The ditty, adopting the metre of the limerick, catalogues what I suggest are some of the many fictions that inhere in the homosexual and continue to connote the 'gay' in a contemporary cultural imaginary.

The increasing acceptability of the gay in some western societies is policed by a rigorous vigilance against the virulence of a homophobic culture towards those identifying as sexually non-normative. A parallel academic literature is emerging that suggests that the identitarian-based categories of sexual difference that mattered so much to those fighting for same-sex rights no longer have the same sway and weight for a contemporary generation of young people (McCormack, 2012; Ripley, Anderson, McCormack, Adams, & Pitts, 2011; Seidman, 2002a). According to this emerging discourse, young people engage with and think about their sex/uality as fluid and contingent

rather than as fixed and bounded in categories, and that this reflects an increasing forbearance on the part of mainstream society to accommodate sexual difference. I am imbued by the hope that this literature signals with its optimistic view of a society in which young people might explore and experiment with sex/uality unfettered by the moralising caprice that stigmatised earlier cohorts who laboured with a sense of non-normative sex/uality. However, at exactly the same time, I am cognisant that I live in a society that is deeply conflicted in its relation with sex/uality. On the one hand, sex/uality is cited and sited as the very core of our being; it is in expressions of sex/uality that we reveal our true and hidden nature. On the other, sex/uality is conjured as the ultimate degradation, an elemental influence threatening the very fabric of a civilized and civilizing culture. In these moments, I am especially reminded of how the virulent debates surrounding the delivery of sex and relationship education in our schools are beleaguered by the mantra of protecting the innocence of childhood. And I am only too aware of how the monstrosity of an imaginary rampant homosexual(ity) – the quintessential threat to the innocence of childhood – looms large in such debates. At such times, I can see the sense in Castiglia & Reed's (2011, p. 9) point about the meaning of sex/uality for contemporary youth in the US: 'When young Americans today say that sexuality "just doesn't matter," it is often heralded as a progressive triumph. But sexuality *should matter*: it should be the thrilling, dangerous, unpredictable, imaginative force it once was and no doubt still is, although more often quietly and out of public sight. If sexuality does not matter anymore, it is not because we won but because of how much we have lost.' Like these authors I hold to the idea(I) that sex/uality retains a productivity in its unruliness, its resistance to the taming impulses of civilization; that sex/uality has the potential to act as a positive force for social change in the face of those normalising impulses that regulate in the service of division and inequality.

Bersani (2009, p. 28) refers to the rehabilitation of the once reviled homosexual into the modern 'gay' as a form of 'aversion-displacement'. Like

Bersani, I am interested in questioning what is at stake in the move that elides male homosexual(ity) into 'gay'. This move is more than merely a matter of renaming, a simple discursive shift. It is, I contend, also a reflection of the kinds of political manoeuvrings to argue for the rights of same-sex sexuality into the accepted mainstream; a righteous fight that demanded an extension of the franchise of equal citizenship for same-sex sexual relationships, a fight against the homophobia that characterized a largely heteronormative culture.

Several features of this move are examined in this work – especially in Chapter two. I argue that these features are codified in the architectures of becoming that instantiate and legitimate male same-sex genital relations in contemporary western culture as 'gay': namely, *the closet* and the imagined act of *coming out*.

In the first instance, I explore how these architectures² of becoming 'gay' have a tendency to reign all expressions of male same-sex sex/uality. This colonizing impulse of 'gay' has the effect of rendering all expressions of male same-sex/uality as the exclusive purview of the modern homosexual, the 'gay', and occludes the cultural and subjective heterogeneity of such desires/practices. I explore how these architectures of becoming 'gay' present a dominant and singular conceptualization of male same-sex sex/uality, one to which all such expressions ought to aspire – even in those geographical locations in which the apogee of 'gay' is far from possible. In doing so, I argue that these architectures erase the ways in which the potential of such expressions of same-sex sexuality might be understood in radically alternative ways: as a positive force for challenging what is known

² 'The closet' and 'coming out' stories are, I argue, signal features in constructing male same-sex genital relations as 'gay'. These features, what I call architectures of gay identity, are part of the landscape of knowing that I construct as 'snagging' the work represented in this thesis.

and knowable, as a political lens through which to disrupt the mark of norm and normality.

A second feature of these architectures of becoming is their tendency to homogenise all those who labour under the sign 'gay'. A corollary of this homogenization is that the 'gay' is rendered a fixed, known and knowable character. I argue that this character then acts as a foil in re-inscribing a fixed and rigid hetero/homo binary in thinking about sex/uality which, on the one hand denies a more fluid, contingent and performative conceptualization of sex/uality and, on the other, reinforces the naturalness of a heterosexuality that can remain dominant and visible but importantly, unexamined (Halperin, 1995; Sedgwick, 1994).

A related feature of the discursive shift from homosexual to 'gay', one that I explore in some detail in chapter two, and more generally across the dissertation, is inextricably related with the first. The fight for (near) equal sexual citizenship rights in western heteronormative societies is cast as a fight against a pervasive and monolithically experienced homophobia – despite ample evidence that suggests otherwise (O'Brien, 2008). It is argued that homophobia operates and is subjectively experienced in radically different ways depending on the gender, class, race and disability status of those on the receiving end of it (e.g. Ferguson, 2012; Nagel, 2003; Taylor, 2011). Indeed, the modern gay rights movement is much criticized for how it almost exclusively tends to speak to and for a narrow constituency of white, middle-class, able-bodied males in urban contexts.

Such criticisms of a modern gay rights movement cohere in Duggan's (1994) formulation of 'homonormativity', a term that signifies the privilege accorded this particular constituency of non-normative sexual citizens in western neo-liberal socio-political contexts which render them as ideal citizen-consumer-subjects who adopt an apolitical lifestyle characterized by domestic consumption and privatized sexual practice. This paragon of the respectable

and acceptable 'good gay' is held as testimony to extending the franchise of citizenship to homosexuals. This 'good gay' is contrasted with the unruly 'bad queer' (Bell & Binnie, 2000b) who seeks to harness the disruptive quality of sex/uality to challenge normativity. Munt (2008, p. 25) argues that 'in order for 'rights', minority groups must make the bourgeoisie their aspirational model, they must 'talk the talk and walk the walk', assimilate those values and proselytize those norms, in order that their claim gains credibility.' I am interested in exploring how this aspirational model of the bourgeoisie modern gay fails to fit the variety of biographical trajectories that are often assigned under its label.

Despite entering middle age, adopting a lifestyle that settles into a slower pace and which, from the outside at least, has many of the trappings associated with a more settled homonormativity, I remain uneasy with the nomenclature of 'gay' and the denotative and connotative entailments that go with it. This unease is not, I would argue, some sort of internalized homophobia. I subscribe to the late twentieth century LGBT invocation to be 'out and proud'. Indeed, in asserting my objections to the heteronormative panorama in which I am located, I have often been accused of 'shoving it down the throats' of those interlocutors who adopt a liberal 'what are you making such a fuss about it all' attitude. However, my attitude and everyday praxis of being 'out and proud' is troubled by a deeper consideration of the construction of the homosexual in a late modern, western urban imaginary; one in which the clearly reviled homosexual of an earlier and liberatory period is traduced into an apolitical, asexual, and anodyne figuration of the 'gay man'. As such, I have a great deal of sympathy with Bersani's (2009, p. 40) invective against the emaciations of contemporary gay and lesbian affirmatory politics that 'can no longer imagine anything more politically stimulating than to struggle for acceptance as good soldiers, good priests, and good parents.'

Like Coston & Kimmel (2012, p. 98) the current work is interested in exploring the 'sites of inequality within an overall structure of privilege'. It attempts to

do this through autoethnographic explorations of how male same-sex sex/uality intersects with those other features of my biography that have potential to define me. I speak to Irishness and the cultural specificities that inhere in a formative rural location in Ireland, to ideas of socio-economic and cultural class that sit outside British sociological theorisations, to understandings of gender/masculinity within those contexts, and of childhood sex/uality that disturb idea(l)s of innocence and/or abuse.

In seeking to think through this past and present, and imagine a future - without the sense of unease that 'gay' garners – I wish to (re)write a past. I am keen to remember although am also aware that, as Frawley (2008, p. 70) suggests

In postcolonial locations like Ireland, constructions of identity are particularly fraught; how the past is remembered, and how it is interpreted, is much contested. ... As we remember, we shape a sense of ourselves which is based on a past that we participate in imaginatively – a past that we actively create through acts of remembrance.

... in constructing a (homo)sexual self:

Chapter five explores my early engagements as a male growing up with same-sex sexual attraction and practices. A significant feature of this experience was spent vexing at the *why* of my 'condition'. A focus on the *why* of same-sex sex/uality is considered an inevitable feature of a heteronormative culture in which heterosexuality is assumed as natural and given, and non-heterosexual attraction/practice is considered problematic (Probyn, 1995). This focus on *why* followed me through my early journey in the academy as I became subject to and a subject of humanist Social Science discourses and, in particular, as I became disciplined in the foundationalist discourses of psychology with its central concern for rendering the individual known and knowable (Rose, 1999).

A dominant theme – either explicit or implicit – in the discipline of Psychology is in mapping the development of an abstracted, universal, normed and ‘normal’ individual (Burman, 1994). Such mapping is largely forged in technologies that scrutinize the ‘abnormal’, establishing it as the mark(ed other) against which an assumed and largely unexplored normal is calibrated. Ingraham (1994) argues that the homosexual has a particular place in the heterosexual cultural imaginary that ‘depends on an abject “other,” which is regulated as deviant’ (See Ingraham, 1994, p. 210). The homosexual, and its modern equivalent of ‘gay’, as enduring motifs of abnormality, are imbricated in psychology’s claims to know, and to know sex/uality in particular. A consideration of my engagements with such knowing are explored in more detail in chapter three. My inclination to refuse psychology’s understandings of my formative sexual experiences through the lens of ‘abnormality’ was seeded in and nourished through my later engagements with a range of critical literatures emanating largely from the Humanities, through an affirmative Lesbian and Gay Studies (e.g. Abelove et al., 1993) and subsequently through a literature on Queer Theory (Seidman, 1996; Warner, 1993)

Encountering the critical flavour that the Humanities brought to the Social Sciences (Crotty, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Sarantakos, 2004; Slife & Williams, 1995; Smith, 1998), and especially the genealogical analyses made popular by Michel Foucault (1990; In Halperin, 1995) which he applied in relation to the history of sexuality, I realised that in the pursuit of *why* lay an endless madness, a never ending chase for the equivalent of the big bang, the starting point of it all, the cause, the source, the originary. Instead, in attempting to make sense of my own relation to sex/uality, my focus shifted more wholly to an understanding of the *how* of (homo)sexuality. In doing so, I attended to some of the many ways in which (homo)sex/uality has become known and knowable across time and culture (Baker, 2008 esp Ch.7), and especially to those stories that lay claim to the figure of the homosexual. I felt that I might begin to understand more fully some of the ways by which I

make sense of my own sex/uality within the prisms of roles (Weeks, 1998), scripts (Gagnon, 2004; Parker, 2010) and stories (Plummer, 1994) that circulate more broadly in culture about sex/uality in general and male same-sex sex/uality in particular (Cohler & Hammack, 2006; McAdams, Josselson, & Lieblich, 2006; Whitehead & Baker, 2012). This exploration might also inform me about how I (have) internalise(d) those cultural architectures in structuring an ideology of those selves engaged in same-sex genital practice and desire (Brickell, 2006).

Much of my subsequent musings in this direction were located in social constructionist approaches to the study of sex/uality which offer a radical challenge to the essentialist and biologically determinist ideas of sex/uality most commonly associated with diverse schools of sexology popular in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries (Brickell, 2006; Weeks, 1998; 2007), and which continue to inform much knowledge within the discipline of Psychology (Teo, 2005). Social constructionist approaches argue that understandings of sex/uality are always contingent on the social and cultural milieu in which those understandings occur. For example, Correa et al (2008 see esp. chapter 5) highlight Simon and Gagnon's work on 'sexual scripting' which posits sex/uality as a function of the interplay of scripts at three distinct levels: 'cultural scenarios, interpersonal scripts, and intra-psychic scripts' (1999, 29; quoted in Correa et al., 2008, p. 110), suggesting that how one continues to make sense of one's sex/uality is predicated on the scripts that frame interpersonal relations and that these, in turn, are contingent on the scripts that are legitimated at the socio-cultural level. In a similar vein, Kenneth Plummer's work on sexual stories (1994) argues for the centrality of stories that operate in our culture in making sense of the sexual.

As such, the work presented here is aligned with what Weeks (2012, p. 531) claims as the longer term project of social constructionist and poststructuralist theorists of (homo)sexuality whose work inheres the idea that 'sexual

identities are formed in the intersection of social and subjective meanings, with meanings and discourses intricately intertwined with power relations.'

In particular, it is shored up in poststructuralist-informed, discourse-based approaches that 'conceptualise subjectivity as produced in the discursive practices that make up the social world.' (MacLure, Jones, Holmes, & MacRae, 2012, p. 448), and in particular as they constitute a range of ideas germane to the project: sex, gender, sexuality and sexual practice. Using a range of queer/feminist theorists like Judith Butler, Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, Griffin (2007) explores how these concepts operate and are operated within neoliberal discourses. Her analysis echoes the rudiments of the constructionist approach to sex/uality when she posits that

'sex', 'gender', 'sexuality' and 'sexual practice' are intrinsically constitutive, contingent, but sometimes incoherent and discontinuous, categories of identity; their apparent coherence is predicated, pre/proscribed and (re)produced by prohibitive and disciplinary discursive practices' (2007, p. 224).

As Duggan reminds us

Never created out of whole cloth, never uniquely individual, each narrative is a retelling, an act of social interaction, a positioned intervention in the shared, contested narratives of a given culture' (1993, p. 794).

The concepts of script, story and narrative are central to the current project. They provide the basic frame through which I question the idea(l) of 'gay' as an appropriate designation for my own subjective experience. In doing so, the work aims to que(e)r(y) the fit of those stories associated with 'gay' that claim knowledge for and about the richer variety of identity and experience that is most often subsumed under its sign.

... in Que(e)rying identity and the stories that are told:

Bari (2013, p. 53) asserts that one should

... recognise sex and sexual life as the work of self-intelligibility, as a practice and set of relations in which we make and are made intelligible to ourselves, not only in the acts that we permit and the pleasures we restrict but the conversations we have inside and outside the bedroom.

This view, for me, speaks to one of the most significant moments of my academic journey when I wrapped my head around Sedgwick's (1994) queer distinction between the minoritizing and majoritizing views of sex/uality. The former calls attention to sex/uality, mainly as an issue of private, bedroom activity, and as it pertains to a narrow group of sexually non-normative people and the issues attendant on their living in a heteronormative culture. The second, disrupts the private/public distinction, drawing attention to the ways in which sex/uality pervades phenomena beyond the bedroom, and how more than those with non-normative sex/ualities are implicated.

Sedgwick's distinction signals, in part, the growth of queer theory in the academy, itself inspired by the street-level politics of a community facing annihilation in the face of HIV/AIDS and the increasing sexual conservatism attendant on the growth of right-wing, neo-liberal politics in Anglo-American contexts of the 1980's (Smith, 1994). This community-based activism 'endorsed a politics of subversion, dissidence, and transgression' (Weeks, 2012, p. 526), and offered a radical challenge to what was characterised as the identity-based, assimilationist and ethnocizing politics of an earlier gay movement (ibid). This defiant activist movement was paralleled by an advance of queer theory within the academy, that arose especially in the Humanities but started to make some in-roads into the Social Sciences in the late '80's and into the '90's (e.g. Seidman, 1996).

At the level of both politics and theory, queer is a 'confrontational gesture' (Weeks, 2012, p. 525) that shifts the focus of sexuality from an affirmation of lesbian and gay identity in the face of a homophobic culture to 'an analysis of the institutional practices and discourses producing sexual knowledges and the ways they organize social life, attending in particular to the way these knowledges and social practices repress differences' (Seidman, 1996, p. 13)

Jagose (1997) argues that 'Queer' is a commodious term which gives space to a range of referents and to the contested claims made in its name. 'There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers' (Halperin, 1995, p. 62). It is used as short-hand for the multiplicity of non-normative sex/ual identities that resist or escape the regulatory binaries of hetero/homo. But it does not 'refer to some determinate object; ... It is an identity without essence' (ibid). More broadly the term signals a refusal to 'designate a class of already objectified pathologies or perversions; rather, it describes a horizon of possibility whose precise extent and heterogeneous scope cannot in principle be delimited in advance' (ibid). More importantly, in the context of this work, queer signals a desire

to envision a variety of possibilities for reordering the relations among sexual behaviours, erotic identities, constructions of gender, forms of knowledge, regimes of enunciation, logics of representation, modes of self-constitution, and practices of community – for restructuring, that is, the relations among power, truth, and desire' (Halperin, 1995, p. 62).

Rather than attempting to marshal the sprawl of territory mapped and mined by and for queer theory, the current work imagines itself through the constant deferral of fixed identities that queer theory disavows. It also rests in the curious cartographic knowledge practices through which queer refuses settlement and questions the stories by which such settlement might be claimed as secure. The current work then adopts the privileged (and, in queer's own terms, fictional) position of 'gay', but only as a temporary accommodation from which to sight the lines of its own construction. It is

then desirous to re-sight the very grounds from which such a subjectivity might be differently constituted.

Gamson (1995), in an early exploration of how 'queer' disrupts identity-based organizing, argues that queer exposes the very categories and bases on which sexual identity is argued for both at the individual and collective level. He shows how queer highlights 'the instability of identities both individual and collective, their made-up character'. (p. 390). Similarly, Pile and Thrift (1995, p. 49) point to the fictitious nature of identity which

must be continually established as a truth. Indeed, the practice of authority is revealed in the moment where identity is considered as a truth and forgets that it has been authored at all: hence, the attraction of identity politics as a way of establishing the legitimacy of alternative bodied subjects.

Weeks (2012), building on the work of Judith Butler and recognizing the fabricated nature of identities, argues that sexual identity categories – and especially the homosexual category – are fraught with tensions and ambivalences. On the one hand, sexual identities 'shaped within categories are ... troubling and cause trouble, but they appear inescapable. They may be fictions ... but they are necessary fictions'. On the other hand, these categories 'however resonant, can never encompass fully the complexity of lived sexualities.' (Weeks, 2012, p. 533); that we should be alive to 'the reductive and seductive ways that narratives constitute sexual identity' (Hall, 2009, p. 1)

It is principally into these tensions and ambivalences of (homo)sex/uality that this project is located. Like Bernstein (2005, p. 59), this work is interested in analysing in more detail the relationship 'between personal experience and political stance'. In Valocchi's terms this thesis is an ideographic attempt 'to restore a complex sexual terrain to the study of [(homo)]sexuality' (2012, p. 469). I see this project as a yearning for the plenitude of a significantly

different future potentiality - itself fleshed by the fat of possibilities from a past (re)created in the memorised facts/fictions of a life, contradictorily lived in the present with regret and joy. As such, 'factions'³ of memory and remembering feature strongly in this work with all the inconsistencies and leakages that attend any such act of biographical memory work (Evans, 1993; 1998; Gray, 2003; Plummer, 1994; Stanley, 1993; 1995). However, I am desirous that Carsten's (2007, p. 6) invocation that

Paying attention to the mixing, discarding, and accumulation of apparently incompatible elements in projects of self-fashioning, necessarily also illuminates wider processes of political affiliation and identity-making ...

be appreciated in what comes from this project. More specifically in this memory work, I am keen to align myself with Castiglia & Reed's (2011, p. 10) call to resist the kind of 'de-generational' forgetting that comes about from the normativizing discourses of equality that pervade the rhetoric of (homo)sex/uality in contemporary western culture. For these authors, remembering is a political form of praxis that aims '... to challenge the disciplines imposed upon – and often internalized within – gay culture.' In doing so, the dissertation seeks to explore and flesh out some of the many contexts and sense-making activities that might be said to shape, or at least pave, the way to an identity that is subsequently identified as 'gay'. As a project, it is akin to the wider critical historical project that is

not to celebrate but to question, not to confirm a settled history but to problematise, not to systematize the past or order the present, but to unsettle it ... [so as to reveal] in all its richness and complexity, the diversity of the sexual past and of the present (Weeks, 2012, p. 532).

³ Faction is a portmanteau word that signals the combination of both fact with fiction.

The dissertation then, adopts a lens that is more queer in its sighting, siting, and citing of male same-sex/uality more contemporaneously and liberally referred to as 'gay', insisting on the 'queer impulse to blur, deconstruct, and destabilize group categories' (Gamson, 1995, p. 402). More particularly, the project attempts to explore the potential of male same-sex genital practice (Moran, 1996) and desire as 'transgressive not simply of sexual customs, but, more radically, of the very notions of relationality in which such customs are grounded' (Bersani, 2009, p. 39).

Lee Edelman suggests that 'queerness can never define an identity; it can only ever disturb one' (2004, p. 17) and Jones (2013, p. 605), in an examination of how children are 'fabricated' in the context of schools and schooling, posits '... identity categories as "fictional" products of regimes of power/knowledge and power discourse'. As such, I see queer as much a matter of methodology and epistemology as it is of ontological status and certainty of identity. I am interested in the disciplinary epistemological architectures that claim (sexual) knowledge, and especially facticity, in and for the social sciences (Halberstam, 2011). Perhaps, like Freeman (2011), I am interested in the ways in which queer is as much about representational form as it is directly and strictly about sex and sexual identity, that I find queerness more 'in method than in object' (p.31). In this vein, in the peristaltic pulse and pump of interest, I am attracted to Hall's (2009, p. 2) project of queer(y)ing the interplay between the narratives of sex/uality and those of theory:

Like sexual identity, theoretical identity is both reductive and seductive, a necessary fiction and also a trap that deserves a good struggle. These are not separate topics.

Hall's project treats as central those theories that claim 'to explain how and from where our senses of the self arise and the ways those selves are then expressed socially and culturally'. He argues that those 'theoretical tools and the investments they require are also narratives that work on us, even as we

work with and sometimes against them', and questions the extent to which 'the processing of narratives of theory, fiction, or nonfiction affect or infect our narratives of sexual self-understanding?' (Hall, 2009, p. 2)

... in que(e)rying disciplinary knowing:

If the current project concerns itself with the relationship between personal experience and the political productivity of that experience (Bernstein, 2005; above) – especially as it manifests and is invested in the contemporary figure of 'gay' – then it is also about representation and knowing.

The indiscipline that characterised my undisciplined meanderings on the edges of the Humanities sensitises me to a range of disciplinary discourses more wholly suffused with the critical insights and challenges laid down by the 'posts' (post-modernism, post-structuralism, post-humanism) and 'turns' (biographical turn, literary turn, representational turn) that are said to characterise academic knowledge production in the latter decades of the twentieth century (e.g. Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Maclure, 2003). Engaging with those discourses that take such 'posts' and 'turns' seriously, discourses that consider the profoundly critical challenges posed by a range of Feminist, Postcolonial and Queer theories, forced me to question many of the taken-for-granted assumptions redolent of the social sciences through which I had become part of the formal knowledge production complex. These discourses offer the salve of confirmation for the creeping suspicions that had already infected and were slowly dis-easing the certitudes of the naïve-realist and foundationalist ontologies offered by my formative disciplining in Psychology.

More significantly for this project, these challenges also queried and queered the epistemological certainties of that formative discipline. During my early time in psychology I relished (was it more like fetishized?!) the head-bound intellectual acrobatics required in learning and applying techniques of quantitative research: there was a neatness and control that, without being

explicit, promised a route to mastery. Qualitative research was, for most of that quest, seen as a supplement, a mere adjunct to the instruments of truth offered by a (neo)positivist-based scientific approach (Slife & Williams, 1995). Interpretivist-inspired critiques of traditional research, especially from feminist researchers, threatened this hegemony. In the context of doing a Masters in applied organizational psychology, those critical ethnographic approaches derived from the work of a neo-Marxist Chicago School that informed the foundations of much Organization Studies, seemed to add weight to this challenge. Often justified on moral and ethical grounds, qualitative research traditions spoke to and against the power of the researcher as the objective, neutral and invisible voice of truth, the ultimate arbiter in the production of knowledge about! These approaches extended an invitation to researchers to listen to and trust the voices of our research participants, to work *with* rather than *on* them, to respect them as co-producers of knowledge rather than as objects of an omniscient research gaze. Its invective was to recognise the many voices either marginalised in or pathologised by the positivist-inspired search for those elusive nomological laws that would predict and narrate solutions to the problems of the social.

Qualitative and quantitative approaches to research in the social sciences were conjured as characters pitted in a titanic struggle of good and bad, right and wrong, of David and Goliath. With the need to reassure myself of my credentials as a bleeding heart on the side of the underdog, and as someone beginning to recognise himself as marginalised by their non-normative sex/uality, I set out my stall with those advocating for a qualitative/interpretivist approach – even in (or perhaps because of?) the knowledge that the odds were stacked in favour of a quantitative, scientific method that claimed the objectivity and neutrality of ‘natural’ science.

However, my subsequent engagement with the Humanities drew attention to the possibility that the internecine epistemological battles positioned across the binary of quantitative/qualitative might occlude the possibility that there

were other methods of knowledge production (Teo, 2005). In addition, and in recognising how problematic it is to characterise the broad sweep of methodological approaches indexed by the quantitative/qualitative binary, I would argue that there are at least two features that are characteristic of both. In the first instance, these approaches to research in the social sciences are wholly based on a literalist empiricism (Bleakley, 2000) which rests on an unproblematized conceptualisation of 'data' (Koro-Ljungberg & MacLure, 2013) through which one can make a claim to 'both the "presence" of essential voices and the foundational nature of authentic lived experience' (Lather & St. Pierre, 2013, p. 630). Both traditions offer the lure of 'the real', the true – even when acknowledging the corrupting taint of their methodological techniques or positing the multiple realities/truths of those whose voices that are sought. In the second instance, although epistemologically and methodologically distinct, both approaches seem to me to be similar in their empirical foundations. I would argue that they are similar in their epistemological conservatism: their reliance on collecting/generating data from 'brief encounters' with participants are (mostly) going to elicit, and therefore, confirm those cultural tropes that already exist in the cultural milieu within which the researcher and researched are embedded.

The current work seeks to queer this assumed relation between social science research and data by offering a mix of autoethnographic (Chang, 2008; Ellis, 2004) and creative fiction writing as the data on which further explorations of 'gay' are based. This epistemological move is further disrupted through que(e)rying the ontological basis of autoethnographic writing (see sections below, chapter six, and Appendix 1⁴ for further detail).

⁴ Appendix 1. For readers looking for greater detail about the methodological basis for the work in this dissertation, autoethnography and creative fiction, see Appendix 1. This is a very unfinished piece of writing; it is, in effect a 'working out' on my part and displays all the characteristics asserted by Kiberd (1996) for postcolonial writing: fragmented, unfinished, lacking overall structure whilst displaying almost manic attention to the form of some of its

... in queer(y)ing method:

The narrative offered above about an ever-progressive (?) journey through the academy is characteristic of the classic *bildung*, in which a fraught encounter with an obstacle of some sort is accompanied by epiphanic insight of Damascene proportions and a consequent resolution toward a new path that incorporates the lessons of such existential struggle (Stanley, 1993). The comfort of realisation in, and the subsequent clarity suggested by, this model of paradigm shift is bent and clouded in the messy quotidian of living a life. The everyday passes without the privilege of omnipotence: it is, for many, leveraged in the droning necessities of waged labour and the fantastically mundane escapes that moderate its relentless demands; it is distracted in the tentative sense-making of the immediate, the frenetic to-and-fro of fitting and forming trajectories to norms; it is experienced in the loom of psychic shadows that undermine self-belief, nourish doubt and intimate the perils of failure. Recognising the messiness of the everyday, the resistant drag of its quotidian labours in the personal and professional, is meant to signal the ambivalence and uncertainty that characterised my own academic work in the face of those insights about knowledge and knowing that I highlight before. In particular, it is meant to signal something about

parts. This form of writing is, for Kiberd, exemplified in the work of Samuel Beckett and is more contemporaneously evident in Moreira's (2008; 2012) performance autoethnographic work in which he refuses the gloss of the well-formed text as a reflection of his own feelings of inchoateness in reaction to the putative rigours of methodological gloss. The form of the writing in the Appendix also reflects, on the one hand, my own compulsion/impulsion to conform to the rigours and seriousness (Halberstam, 2011) of traditional Social Science discipline for foregrounding methodological discussions as the guarantor of knowledge and, on the other hand, my desire to que(e)ry the trope in my work, to become more undisciplined (Halberstam, 2011) in finding a new way to know. As such the unevenness of the writing performs the contradictory orientations adopted towards and away from the disciplines of Social Science.

the paralysis that has characterised my failure to write whilst being part of the academy thus far.

Apart from the messiness of the everyday that I allude to here, there are more structural narratives for claiming victimhood as a non-writer in the academy. There are claims that position writing about sex and sexuality in the academy as far from straight-forward (Abelove et al., 1993; Tierney, 1997), that the stance of erotophobic professionalization required in the academy 'demanded that certain other identities had to be forsaken' (Munt, 2000, p. 9). I can invoke parallel arguments about the problematic for academics with working-class origins in finding a voice in a predominantly middle-class academy (Berube, 1996; Borkowski, 2004; Raffo, 1997) that induces a feeling of '... general hopelessness that we don't belong, can't belong, are just pretending, fearful of exposure' (Munt, 2000, p. 9). Or I could claim the difficulties that inhere in attempting to voice the postcolonial subject (Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008; Diversi & Moreira, 2009; Graham, 1996; Moreira, 2009) and particularly that of the Irish academic in the British academy (Graham, 1996; Harte, 2000; Moriarty, 2005; Palmer, 2005; Schrank, 2007). These are fundamental features of my claims to an identity and are not ones that I can dismiss readily. These features intersect with and compound any simple relation that I might envision for an identity as an academic writer; they haunt any and all previous attempts to inscribe such labours as academic writing.

However, before this story drowns both me and the reader in a pale of pathos, even before I get started on this journey to writing PhD, I would like to signal the possibility of another kind of academic writing praxis, one that offers an alternative to the self-perpetuating victimology that threatens to dominate my current and future attempts to write. This alternative praxis engages wholly with and represents the fractured tensions of these identity positions in an academy that is, at best blasé, at worst downright antagonistic to them.

Some of these explorations in praxis are borne out of a desire to story a more agentful refusal to write, a refusal to (re)produce the forms of knowledge more conventional in the psychology of my formative university education. It is a story that acknowledges how 'field norms regulate one's writing and thinking' (Burnier, 2006, p. 414). This alternative narrative invokes a praxis of stubborn resistance against writing under the lash of social science convention, an active political praxis of silence which should be attended to 'not as a lack, an absence, or negation but rather as an important and even vital aspect of the fabric of discourse.' (Mazzei, 2007, p. xii). I have in mind here a back-story that plots (with) me as an academic who refuses to write until I find a form of writing that speaks to the incoherencies immanent to my marginal experience of the academy. In suggesting this alternative I am buoyed by (if intimidated by its implications for this work) Halperin's suggestion that an impasse in writing 'may be a clue to something real, an indication that one has stumbled upon something of potentially wider significance than one's own limitations, onto some major organizing structure of social meaning or some irreducible law of cultural discourse' (Halperin, 1995, p. 10)

Autoethnographic writing is, for me, an obvious retreat when I position myself thus (Ellis and Bochner, 1996; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011; Ellis, 2008). It is a home into which I rest the troubled and troubling ideas about the seemingly neutral disembodied researcher who acts on, and is disciplined to excise the 'I' from research accounts in order 'that we are seen, rhetorically, to be doing science' (Aldridge, 1993, p. 60). Even when the 'I' is used unsparingly, in the personal-confessional reflexive mode of research (Bleakley, 2000) germane to interpretivist-inspired qualitative research, there remains a whiff of neurosis that the confessing researcher wishes to draw a them-and-us line so as to guarantee their authority and credibility as one who has refused to turn native (Stanley, 1995). Autoethnographic writing responds to this problematic by centralizing the self (auto) and its relation to

cultural phenomena (ethno) in the practice of writing (graphy) (Chang, 2008): in this writing practice the vulnerabilities of the native in the power complex of producing research knowledge are exactly the vulnerabilities of the researcher.

Autoethnography makes claims to open up space for those otherwise marginalized in or by the production of research knowledge (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Ellis et al., 2011; Richardson, 1997). Ronai's (1995) evocative and provocative paper on child sex abuse, provides a classic example of how autoethnographic writing allows a researcher to legitimately explore sensitive topics that would ordinarily be the sole premise of 'the Other': I use this work as a ledge from which to examine my own childhood sex/uality in chapter five. Adams (2011) demonstrates how autoethnography is an ideal medium through which to articulate the pernicious entailments of the closet in a heteronormative culture: I use his work as a legitimating spark by which I light my own explorations of and wresting from the narrative of 'coming out' across several geographical locations in chapter two. Moreira (2008) shows how the incoherencies of experience inside and outwith the academy, and a sense of inchoate being attaching to an immigrant heritage, can be represented through fragmented and fragmentary writing modes within autoethnography: I use this as a model form on which I recollect my engagements with the colonizing fold of psychology in chapter three. It is on the bulwark of autoethnographic writing that a great deal of the current project rests.

I explore at greater length the nature and problematics associated with autoethnography in the context of the current work in Appendix 1. I have consigned these methodological explorations to the background in the current work, not because I think they are unimportant but rather as part of the wider attempt in this work to queer and query the form and practice of writing that I initially developed in my formative academic discipline of psychology. Consigning these methodological discussions thus, signifies my desire to queer academic text in this work and is, further, an attempt to

represent how such discussions/explorations are imbued with contradiction and contrariness in my attempts to find a new writing practice. In the embodied world of academic praxis such discussions provoke visceral reactions that knot and roll and snag me in paroxysms of conflict: I am alive to the disciplined invocations to attend to methodological clarity and rigour whilst, simultaneously, I am desirous of exploring the kinds of 'undiscipline' (Halberstam, 2011) and 'frivolity' (MacLure, 2003) associated with the call to disrupt 'methodolatory' (Harding, 1987: Cited in Honan, 2007, p. 532) and that is adopted by scholars with a queer and/or poststructuralist orientation towards knowledge production.

The autoethnographic story fragments, through which I recount some visions of my 'inventing adulthood' (McGrellis, 2010), are chosen from the myriad of material and socio-cultural intersections that offered architectures for identity construction in my processes of becoming. These are fractured stories, as are most narrations of the self. They are a constellation of tellings, a bricolage of artifice that paves a way through the dissertation as well as (re)storying the accepted formula story of 'coming out' and the male homosexual to whom that applies. They are also a praxis of academic identity, of writing a self against the norm of 'gay' and into the norm of academic writer – even when that writing goes against the grain of (or is at least considered suspect in) what is seen as conventional in social science discourses. Storytelling "composes" a subjective orientation of the self within the social relations of its world, enabling it to be imaginatively entered-into and inhabited. The story that is actually told is always the one that is preferred amongst other possible versions, and involves a striving, not only for a formally satisfying narrative or a coherent version of events, but also for a version of the self that can be lived with in relative psychic comfort — for, that is, subjective composure' (Dawson, 1994;22-3 quoted in Waters, 2008, p. 148). On the other hand, this thesis is interested, not so much in psychic comfort but in the exploration of 'What novel kinds of discursive images of the self and experience, what different kinds of identity, what fresh image-

concepts, what new maps of subjectivity, which new *figurations* are available?' (Pile & Thrift, 1995, p. 17)

... in a queer-ing self?:

If you know what my whole self and my only self is, you know a lot more than I do. As far as I can make out, I not only have many different selves but am often, as they say, not myself at all. (W B Yeats, 1941, 146: cited in Harte, 2007, p. 6)

There is a further twist in the doing of this thesis. As well as attempting to represent the tensions and incoherencies of my own sexual identity, the current work adopts an approach that queers the stability of the very identity category 'gay'. Indeed, the work must queer and put aslant the very idea that there is a real 'I' about which and by which this writing is some mere mimetic reflection. It must accommodate the idea that the writing and written 'I' is as much a product of language and its tropes and genres as it is a producer of those. Bleakley (2000, p. 19) argues that the reflective and reflexive genre forms of writing that, in the main, dominate narrative ethnography, what he calls the 'secular humanistic, personal-confessional mode' actually 'reifies, literalises, or concretises the 'I'.

The thesis floats in the maelstrom of stories that claim to speak for and about (homo)sexuality and, as importantly, the form of the stories that are told. It is about what counts as knowledge of the (homo)sexual, what comes to matter and, perhaps more poignantly, to whom? Johnson (2008) argues that 'Representations contribute to the production of normative and shared understandings about individuals and groups. Furthermore, they have an interpellative capacity in calling into being particular subjects, bodies and identities'. The work presented here is about disturbing the ways in which such stories are produced in the social science academy. More particularly, it

is about disturbing the stories that most obviously account for me whilst also making me most at unease: the stories of 'gay'.

Given that this dissertation focuses on querying the status of the (homo)sexual, and in particular its relation with the 'gay' man, I will of course track some of the journey to 'gay' through the closeted spaces that facilitate and permeate that cultural identity. Like Weeks' (2012, p. 533) invocation to attend to the 'lived realities of personal lives' which 'give due weight to the diversity within the queer world, the complex axes of power, and the variety of social worlds that have developed, organized around differences of gender, sexual tastes, class, race, age, and a variety of other factors', the current thesis attempts to use a range of autoethnographically-inspired reflections to explore the diversity of experience in one such lived experience. What this project seeks to do is to create a space in which 'the multiple differences' (Waters, 2008, p. 151) between those men whose subjectivity is invested with same-sex sexual desire/practice/fantasy/politics might be opened up and freed from the tyrannical dominance of the homonormativity invested in the figure of the modern, urban gay man. The project is part of a wider and more recent project of queer(ing) which aims at 'destabilizing those very categories of [sexual] identity that have often been taken for granted since the 1970s' (Houlbrook & Waters, 2006, p. 144).

This dissertation is then, one which 'envisions theory as intrinsically a manner of praxis [and/or] a form of exploration or an exercise in practice ... revealing theory as a form of enactment and practice as a means of creating new understandings' (Russell & Bohan, 2006, pp. 343–4). It attempts to 'produce different knowledge and produce knowledge differently' (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000, p. 1).

The stories that I offer here, these fragments, are not offered in the modernist vein of confessional explanation, they do not tell the truth of the writing subject laid out before you in this dissertation. Rather, they are

offered as signals, as tropes that reveal some of the ways by which (queer) encounters with the world 'maps the subject into discursively-constituted, embodied identities' (Pile & Thrift, 1995, p. 41). They rest on the bulwark of poststructuralist critique, and run counter to the modernist ideology of a speaking subject that is conceived of as a sovereign, coherent individual. They rely on a particular notion of the self as 'relative, constituted linguistically, genealogically and culturally in plural ways' (Bleakley, 2000, p. 17). These stories reflect the postmodernist realisation that the self is nothing more fabulous than 'fabrication' (Maclure, 2003, p. 120).

As such, the project must enfold the writhe into the uncanny that this venture represents, it requires the crease and fold of fiction, that desire to disturb which holds and hauls both you and me to this page. Like Royle's (2003) characterisation of Freud's attempt to capture what is *unheimlich*⁵ – did I just defer Freud, through Royle, through me, then declaim that me as a fiction?! – this thesis is imbued with doubt, with the dawning recognition that it is both impossible and futile to attempt to fully characterise its object. The autoethnographic self and the journey that are represented here escape any final formulation. It refuses to '... be collated, classified, taxonomized', recognising instead that '... one uncanny thing keeps leading on to another. Every attempt to isolate and analyse a specific case of the uncanny seems to generate an at least minor epidemic.' (Royle, 2003, 13).

Perhaps my attraction to this aspect of writing here, this queering of the autoethnographic 'I', is resonant with Harte's (2007, p. 5) generic characterization of Irish autobiography which he views as contradictory and ambivalent, necessarily resisting closure and completeness 'in which the self emerges as a series of productive masks and doubles rather than a singular

⁵ Freud's use of *unheimlich* is most often translated as 'uncanny'. It connotes that which is weird, uncomfortably strange and unknown yet familiar to the conscious self. See Royle (2003).

essence'. Further, he argues that, '... poised between definition and dispersal, enunciation and erasure, affirmation and dissolution. ... suggesting that the Irish autobiographical self is most itself in the very process of becoming.' Simultaneously, I am reminded of Havers' (1997, p. K)⁶ invocation for queer writings 'to practice invention to the brink of intelligibility'. This latter sways my impulse to articulate an autoethnography that begins to fracture a modernist, authentic 'I', referencing instead the potentiality of what and how I imagine that 'I' might be made. My strategy of practicing 'invention to the brink of intelligibility' is through the insertion of creative fiction writing in an attempt to queer and query the formulaic nature of story that conventionally attach to the confessional autoethnographic researching self.

It is this transformative characteristic of creative fiction that is key to the current work; an attempt to inscribe an alternative set of ideas for thinking about and imagining a world in which the 'gay' man might be seen as something other than the more usual quotidian fictions that are already extant for this kind of subject position.

... of writing queerly:

I am used to disassembling. I, like many other men who labour under the sign 'gay', have had ample practice at living a host of parallel lives; of concealing, of passing, of being required to present and perform multiple fictional selves. These selves, these lives are never truly representative of some sense of oneness. And yet, they are always ultimately and simultaneously authentic. Halperin (1995, p. 81) suggests that 'self-invention is not a luxury or a pastime for lesbians and gay men: it is a necessity'.

⁶ I use p.K here and elsewhere to signify a quote from a text read via Kindle. In many cases books viewed on Kindle do not have page numbers as the page position is reconfigured depending on the size of the text adopted by the reader.

This admission is not an appeal to the psychological and social pathologies that allow both the closet and the performative act of coming out to function as the dominant tropes in storying same-sex genital desire and practice – that dissembling is a performance of conceit and deception, a cover until the real, the true self, will out. I argue instead that another reading is possible for those of us who have had to dissemble in order to exist; that this adventure in dissembling merely awakens in us a recognition of the fallacy of the unified self, a recognition that we are necessarily other to ourselves in the daily becoming of our queer selves as we perform in the everyday; that it recognizes the ‘effort required to produce the social and psychic ruptures that lesbians and gay men must engineer daily in order to detach ourselves from heteronormative society, so as to be able to lead our queer lives without apology or compromise, and to continue to forge new and better ways of being queer’ (Halperin, 1995, p. 108). And I insist that it is not just, or simply, a matter of sexual orientation that requires aspects of dissembling. I suggest, in addition, that dissembling is a feature of a whole host of other (mis)placings and (dis)locations on the map of subjectivity (Pile & Thrift, 1995) and that haunt both the geographical and symbolic violences of becoming non-normative.

This reading of dissembling suggests, rather forcefully, that there is not one coherent self; that the world is big enough for many of us, and that there is productivity in our ability to see beyond the lie of the integrated self. This vision of multiplicity refuses the diagnosis of pathology most readily given in the psy professions (Rose, 1999). Instead, this vision holds to the plenitude, the synergies of many, against the emaciations of singularity. Each of the selves that we produce and perform contiguously either daily, or across our days, furnishes me with the opportunity to carry truths, knowing and ambiguous certitude to my every/day praxis. There is nothing false or deceitful in my dissembling – every performance merely allows me to play and experiment with, to invest in and invent through the poetics of living. It allows me the safety of not having to do the work of finding, retaining, and

endlessly negotiating the contradictions and incoherencies inherent in the fallacy of any 'true' self.

When I talk about performance here, I am not signalling an actor who attains and retains an omnipotent and rational viewpoint from which to perform the wholly known character already scripted. Mine is not a positionality that has any solid or finite claim to either this self or any other 'other' for whom these ditties might be made to claim knowability. They are not the past false positives of the required labour of reflexive mining and re-mining the depths of an essential self until the 'true' one emerges in the enlightened glow of whole-ness. Neither are these performances woven from some sort of non-material, existentialist angst, endlessly stitched and re-stitched at the seams of a fragmented but potentially integratable whole and true self. The performances that I speak to here are those that I express in the spaces and constrained fissures present and available in settling the scores of some of the many and all moments in each day. They are the performances doodled, etched and drawn on and in each of those potential landscapes that require painting and passing in the everyday. They adopt the queer stylistics of self which uses 'one's relation to oneself as a potential resource with which to construct new modalities of subjective agency and new styles of personal life that may enable one to resist or even escape one's social and psychological determination' (Halperin, 1995, p. 76). They are the spontaneous inventions, the fictions, played out at the simultaneous curtain call of past, present and future.

Of course they have a history, a pattern, a habit. Of course, they are negotiated in and through the weave of cultural and psychic narrations that pattern such performances. Indeed, one could argue that they have intent – but only in as much as they are cognitive re-negotiations of situations previously encountered (Bari, 2013). The intent here does not signify some pre-existing knowledge, some a priori, (sub)conscious essence, that cogitates and subsequently drives behaviour and thus identity positions (Peterson,

2009). The etchings given here are an attempt to represent, in the necessarily and endlessly deferrable medium of language, the tales and entrails of this subjectivity that, following Deleuze, aches to rest in and speak of/from a subject/ivity imagined from

... the folding of the outside into the inside, and the past into the present, for the sake of thinking the future; where the situated subject acts, and is acted upon, by numerous lines of force; where the self is a 'slow' inside space that is multiple, productive and continuous; where encounters are both exterior and interior (Pile & Thrift, 1995, p. 38).

The stories invite the reader into a dialogue with the text, just as I am in dialogue whilst constructing them. They are fragmented, a reflection of Mair's (2010) ideas about fractured (sexual) identity, of contested narratives that negotiate and fabricate the living of a life. This idea of the fragmentation of life is represented in the textual reproduction of that life. These textual fragmentations of self, of subjectivity, accord with the poststructuralist rejection of a Cartesian and Enlightenment 'subject as a unitary being made up of disparate parts, mind and body, which is universal, neutral and gender-free' (Pile & Thrift, 1995, p. 11). Instead, it embraces the idea of fragmentation and fabrication that inheres in the idea that 'the self is slippery, elusive' (Bell & Valentine, 1995, p. 149), and that storying such a self is itself a slippery business. I am reminded of Tamas' (2008, p. on-line; citing Helene Cixous) ideas about the inability to know stories before they are written 'because I myself don't know the story that is sliding around in me, looking for an opening.'

In explicitly acknowledging the troubled and troubling nature of the autoethnographic stories told in this work, I am compelled to similarly acknowledge the expansive field of academic work that questions the truth-status of any and all (auto)biographical narratives (see for example: Evans, 1998; Goldie, 2012; Stanley, 1995). This stream of academic work worries the ontological lays that, more traditionally, separate 'fact' from 'fiction'.

Much of this work highlights some of the many ways that these genres bleed and blend together in telling lives through narrative, whilst also attempting to make claims for the value and status of narrative as the truth/truths by which lives are told (Bruner, 2004). In line with the que(e)rying tendencies of the current work, I eschew any attempt to establish the narrative truth of the autoethnographic work contained here. Instead, I lean explicitly on the uncertainties of truth/truths available in the slippages between narrating autoethnographic story fragments and in in/asserting fictional components: a ploy and play that has the intention of disturbing any ease by which truth/s might be sought for and imputed on this work.

These are the bases on which I offer a fiction \leftrightarrow auto-ethnography \leftrightarrow fiction. Everything in the thesis is authentically a re-presentation of data, of observation, of cultural ethnography. But these data do not represent the voice, or indeed the bared soul, of the authentic ethnographer who can in any way be simply signed as Neil Carey: this work is in no way meant as an act of the personal-confessional genre of writing that dominates humanist-inspired, supposedly liberatory, reflection that posits authentic selves (Bleakley, 2000). The participant/s in this study exist, they are possible, potential and authentic selves whilst simultaneously they are not me, they are fictional. It is in their fictionality that their veracity lies. They are the edges of those other planes which this author authorizes in self-representation. They are the selves that exist in another set of social and cultural dynamics that I imagine and breathe. As the author of a narrative legitimised by and worked within a rational Humanist framework of the integrated self, I therefore give credibility to and authorise these other selves to voice their take on that resistant and hope-filled milieu in which all of these selves breathe, live, appear and re-appear. At exactly the same time I claim the anonymity of any ethical researcher to protect the identities of my 'subjects'.

Fictional/autoethnography is then, just another side-stepping, a familiar manoeuvre (I've just now notice the English 'man' conjoined with the French

'oeuvre' here) for me as an academic queerly located in the social sciences. It allows me, to hide, to continue to dissemble, to not 'out' myself once again, to not feel the need to teeter precariously around the door jams of the closet, trying to recognise it whilst simultaneously trying to shirk it. And, as importantly, fictional/autoethnography allows me, from within Social Science, to play, to duck and dive, to resist the necessity and fixity of the authentic me (whatever that might be), and to dabble and dribble with and as a queer one: the 'quare' one once again. Here I invoke 'quare' as an indicator of the intersections of queer in an Irish context that is similar in feel to Giffney's (2007) articulation but is focussed more specifically on queer/homosexual/gay rather than on the confluences of queer/feminist/lesbian in an Irish context. My use of 'quare' retains the contextualization of Ireland (as in Brendan Behan's *The Quare Fellow*) and is closer (from an Irish perspective) to Johnson's (2001) use. Like Johnson, I am reminded of the use of 'quare' from my own background

... to denote something or someone who is odd, irregular, or slightly off kilter [and] to connote something excessive – something that might philosophically translate into an excess of discursive and epistemological meanings ... (Johnson, 2001, p. 2).

[In/Assert] An Ode to the poof

Data Playground: Culture's fictions and the homosexual

My PhD asks how creative fiction might invert or pervert Social Science's (creative and fictional) additions to knowing the homosexual. In that spirit, I offer a limerick-esque ditty which anthologises some cultural fictions (legitimised in Social Science over the years) that haunt the homosexual in culture and thus hail me as someone nurturing both a desire for and a set of practices of male same-sex genital relations. These fictions, I argue, continue to lurk under the veneer of tolerance that characterizes the politics of equality shaping a sexual citizenship in Western neo-liberal democracies, and construct a subject position of either docile homonormativity, or of heteronormative pathology.

My poetic ditty attempts to enumerate some of these cultural fantasies/fictions that pervade the culturescapes that I inhabit. I offer it as an invitation to the remainder of the dissertation to figure alternatives that story male same-sex attracted subjectivity; a subjectivity that perverts the docility offered respectable gay men, and inheres a more transgressive cultural politics for the sex that skirts and scums the shiny grey polished surfaces of a precarious equality.

In the spirit of engaging with a practice of poesis as a practice of writing, and inspired by a paper by Rollings Jr (2004) in which he caricatures the trope of the African American in US culture, I'd like to anthologise what I see as some of the (fictional) images of the homosexual, the gay, the quare boy, that have been (and continue to lurk under the veneer of tolerance) available to me in positioning my (sexual)self.

The poof in the cultural imaginary:

I'm artistic, dramatic, rather too much the aesthete, at home in crushed velveteen.

I was born for the theatre, modern dance and the opera; the high Arts my natural scene.

But for popular culture, I'm also a vulture, devoted and fawning pre-teen.

Victoria Woods' sketches, I cite them verbatim, Ab Fab's a bible d'you see.

The Golden girls' camp, Corrie's Elsie, my vamp. A Beautiful Thing, oh ... and Glee.

Black and White classics and soppy biopics. Oh, dramas with costumes, a dream.

Crawford and Davis, Deitrich and Garbo. Judy nor Liza's no scream.

Elizabeth Taylor, for ever in flavour. Doris - light hearted, never mean.

Suffering and tragic? Iconic magic! A whiff of the martyr, what's wrong?

With demons they battled, but never looked rattled. Heartbreak's for losers, they're so strong.

I love Streisand and Shirley, Madonna and Kylie. And Cher, for her gay boys will sing.

Eartha and Gaga, and Carmen Miranda – a torch song, a ballad, that's the thing.

Show time mirage, and lippied visage; unslippable front for our heroine.

But intimate body? You'll get misogyny. Our women as symbol, not real!

It's their glamour and hits, not ever their bits. A fetishized idol, that's the deal.

Now Homo-norm's cage can rile me to rage. Exclusion! Erasure? Too narrow already.

The trap from inside's, a hell'uv'a ride. But from outside the turmoil's more heady.

When hetero-norm's grip is steering my ship: the journey's volatile, unsteady.
Its culture and science, providing it licence to fashion a cure, with intention.
Its abnorm still tells, from the depth of its wells. A freak? An Outlier?
Aberration!

I'm foppish and faddish, an out-and-out dandy and oft times a little too fey.
I've a fondness for labels, couture a religion. Performance and Dress-up, the
end to a day.

Leather and rubber, and fetishlike lycra. To gender-fuck carnival? I very well
may.

My Queer eye can sharpen the drab guy who's straight.

My hunger for fashion, a design you'll not sate.

I'm a queen and a molly, a nancy-boy folly; a homo, a gay boy, a sissy.
My faggottry flames, I'm a fairy who's lame, a pansy, a clone and I'm prissy.
I'm light on my loafers, a pretty-boy queen, when crossed I'm famously hissy.
Fudge-packer, a fruit; arse-bandit to boot, corn-holer, knob-jockey, and bent.
I garden uphill, lift shirts for the thrill, in business you'll call me for rent.

I'm peculiar and odd, a wink and a nod. I'm touched and inclined in "that
way".

A "little bit funny", I'm nobody's honey; for their choir, I'll sing all day.

When batting at sport, I'm an underhand sort; footie and rugby - I'll not play.

I'm Dorothy's friend, my ways not to mend; I'm definitely a touch ginger
beer. Limp-wristed and swish, I flounce and I mince, and mostly just an
effing queer

Chapter 2: Geographies of 'gay'

I am largely discomfited with the identity position of 'gay', and especially 'gay man' that is available in and through the coming out story. This chapter outlines some of my own (political) unease in accepting the (homo) 'norm' of having already 'come out' of the closet into a liberal British urban context. It is an autoethnographic exploration of my relation with male same-sex genital relations and, more especially, with the identity position 'gay' that claims to speak for and of such relations.

This chapter aims to analyse this discomfiture by que(e)r(y)ing the truth-claims made for and in relation to the ostensibly coherent figuration of the gay male's emergence from the closet, its 'coming out'. I argue that 'the closet' and 'coming out' are pivotal discursive architectures that circulate in a tolerant liberal British cultural imaginary (Ingraham, 1994) and that render the modern homosexual as knowable and known. This queer(y)ing seeks to disrupt the dominant discursive frameworks that (con)figure the homosexual, frameworks that act as a '... master narrative that was the product of a long struggle for recognition and rights over the twentieth century ...' (Hammack & Cohler, 2009, pp. 3–4).

My interest in the refusal to resolution available in the 'coming out' story, stems not only from considerations at the level of my own conscience. As a 'recovering' psychology graduate and as someone who has wandered in a seemingly futile and undisciplined way across academic terrains, I have become more and more aware of the significance and mutually reinforcing relation between stories at the level of the individual and those that circulate at the socio-cultural level. This mutually reinforcing circulation of individual/social stories is seen as particularly true in the production of narratives of 'gay' identity (e.g. Hammack & Cohler, 2009; 2011; McAdams et al., 2006). Given that this 'coming out' narrative is what Crawley & Broad

(2004) call a 'formula story' , or what Bruner (1987, cited in Hammack & Cohler, 2011, p. 163) refers to as a 'canonical form' for narrating contemporary (homo)sexual orientation, I suggest that, in line with Ahmed it '... deserves a close and careful reading.' (2004, p. 1). In doing so, I want to explore some of the complexities that I carry with me in my journey out of the dark closet, and to complicate the simplifications that this formula story signals for this one signed as 'out', as 'gay'.

The idea of orientation, functions as the dominant metaphor in configuring (non hetero)sexual identity positions and indexes the movement away from concealment in the (homo)sexual closet into the enlightened and liberated space of a tolerant and accepting mainstream. Drawing on this metaphor, I am wont to explore more fully the entailments that such spatialized metaphors might have in positioning (homo)sexuality and the homosexual in wider socio-sexual terrain. More specifically, I explore how geographical locations, places and the consequent translations of those places into socio-cultural spaces, shape and constrain particular versions of sexual identities. I do this by reflecting on my experiences of two very different urban centres in which I have lived: firstly Manchester which is my adopted home; secondly Belfast, in which I lived as an undergraduate. As a corollary to these reflections, and in taking seriously the idea that the dominant narrative of (homo)sexuality is produced in geographical space, the chapter offers a critique of the coming out trope in accounting for male same-sex genital relations (Moran, 1996).

This chapter then opens up some wider reflections in subsequent chapters in which I examine a range of experiences that already queer any easy relation with the supposedly settled identity of 'gay man'. For example, in chapters four and five I speak to Irishness and the cultural specificities that inhere in a formative rural location in Ireland, to ideas of socio-economic and cultural class that sit outside British sociological theorisations, to understandings of gender/masculinity within those contexts, and of childhood sex/uality that

disturb idea(l)s of innocence and/or abuse. These subsequent chapters offer an extended reading of how such previous experiences disrupt and queer my subjective relation to and orientation towards 'gay' – even when thinking those experiences through male same-sex genital relations and how they seem to inexorably to steer me towards the position of gay. In this way I examine the dominance of 'gay' in claiming and colonising identity for those who engage with male same-sex genital relations. I exhibit these experiences, through the drag of mundane being, not on the basis of their uniqueness but rather to signal the heterogeneity of subjectivities that labour under the signifier 'gay'. In doing so I wish to flick to and flash at those excesses of subjectivity that reside in the semi-darkness of any such cinematic projections but might otherwise be elided in the straight-forward look towards the acceptable and respectable gay.

Map 1: The contours and terrain of (sexual) place and space.

(Just) another gay in the village:

Constructing a legitimate subjectivity that included my desire for same-sex male genital relations (Moran, 1996) felt, at times, like the singularly most important project in becoming the 'real me'. Although the process of constructing that identity involved a great deal of labour it was, simultaneously, full of the joys and pleasures associated with adopting a non-heterosexual practice in an increasingly sex-liberal urban centre in 1990's UK. Largely I 'came out' into a (homo)sex-tolerant urban idyll, and enjoyed the many pleasures afforded a rural peasant affecting anonymous 'gay' urban chic in Britain's (contested) second pinkest city, Manchester. As well as the particular genital gratifications available in the city's newly established 'gay village' – and I engaged in this newly found haven with particular forms of embodied zeal! – there was a concomitant euphoria of finally reaching the exalted end-point of what seemed a long and arduous travail; a resolution to be 'gay' at last.

An urban utopia, governed at least in part, by the increasing recognition of the economic weight of the 'pink pound' in an economic context of regenerating a city laid waste since the glories of its industrial past, seems now like the best and worst context for my 'coming out'. The night-time economy, a seemingly endless expansion of city-centre dwelling (led largely by poofs and lesbians swarming from the rural hinterlands to the urban confines in which there was safety in numbers (Hindle, 1994)) seemed, at first sight, to be the ideal habitus into which much of my previously troubled and hidden musings could finally have out. Manchester, contentiously marketed as a gay-friendly city (Hughes, 2003), took a lead from North American urban regeneration strategies and worked to create a "Gay Village" (Bell & Binnie, 2004). In a part of the city formerly and largely colonized by various denizens of a sexual underworld, Canal Street was pedestrianized and positioned as the increasingly cosmopolitan hub of the city's gay village (Hindle, 1994). This area of the city laid claim to the newest and best model of a Lesbian & Gay village (Rushbrook, 2002). A gay dentist, doctor, solicitor's office, barber, gym, book shop and other 'gay' businesses grew up alongside a new kind of 'gay' bar, club and restaurant that catered for an increasingly visible lesbian and gay clientele (Hindle 1994; Smith and Richardson 1995). No longer were these venues hidden in and by the shadows of the traditional twilight world of the homosexual, now they flaunted a new kind of queer assertiveness through their open glass windows (Bell & Binnie, 2004). Their balconies and street tables were the preserve of the newly minted lords of the sexual over-world. Visibility was the key – we were now out and proud, willing and exhorted to party like no one else. We became the new cool, the new in-crowd, models for and arbiters of that must-have life-style chic which might, itself, help to regenerate the city more broadly as a competitor in the race to become a European city of destination (Bell & Binnie, 2004; Quilley, 1999) or even a 'wannabe global city' (Peck & Ward, 2002; Rushbrook, 2002).

Manchester's 'gay village' emerged from a long tradition of sexual identity-based political activism at both the local and national level that had emerged especially in reaction to the rapacious HIV/AIDS crisis, and the particularly repressive New Right legislation and politics (Bell & Binnie, 2000; Smith, 1994), characterising Britain in the 1980's. Examples of this policy climate include the enactment of Section 28 banning the promotion of 'pretend families', an un-equal age of consent for homosexuals, and the Chief of Police's comments about homosexuals dying in a cesspit of their own making (Binnie & Skeggs, 2004; Hindle, 1994; Smith, 1994). Socialist-inspired municipal governance strategies in the early and mid-1980's, based on resistance to national (Conservative) politics and a rainbow alliance with formerly marginalized and disenfranchised social groups (Quilley, 2000), created a local political climate which fostered a confident and assertive voice for the lesbian and gay community. A later turn towards a private-public based entrepreneurial 'city chauvinism' and place-based marketing of the city (Quilley, 2000, p. 611) facilitated a visible 'queer space' in the form of the gay village in which that voice could be located against a formerly hostile style of policing and a wider conservative city/nation. Russell T Davies' *Queer as Folk* added further caché to a nascent and burgeoning 'gay scene', and Manchester's Canal Street hinted at new strident possibilities signalled not least by the cheeky defacing of that street's sign to read *anal *treet!

'Gay' spaces in the city are not a new phenomenon. Many, attracted by the lure of anonymity, had sought out and found such spaces before (Cook, Mills, Trumbach, & Cocks, 2007; D'Emilio, 1992; Houlbrook, 2005; Weeks, 2007). But the creation of a dedicated gay space 'consolidated by compact visibility' was indeed new in British cities (Binnie & Skeggs, 2004, p. 48). Unlike the closeted nature of gay spaces in Christchurch, New Zealand which Brown (2000 see chapter 3) outlines, in which gay spaces had an 'inconspicuous presence in the urban landscape', Manchester's gay scene represented a much more confidently visible manifestation of the way in which cityscapes might be queered (Rushbrook, 2002).

This new urban architecture was not lost either for or on me. Lycra chic and café culture, designer drugs and bare-chested dance dens were all signs and spaces that guaranteed a safer 'out' passage to becoming gay (see Hegna, 2007). The boys were 'up for it' and didn't take that much persuading to 'give it up' in a celebration of these new-found, carnivalesque spaces of liberated fleshly freedom. Was this finally home? Surely now I was able, at last, to exercise the 'true' me, whilst also exorcising the shadow and shame of the closet in which that immanent, former me had ostensibly remained concealed. This new space allowed me to belong, to know finally who I was, to be with others who were the same as me, who could also celebrate the consonance of head, heart and body. I could celebrate in the corporeality of belonging. At last I was 'at one' with them, with me, with this new real self.

A fading glory: familiarity breeds recognition

The glittered gloss of this new-found nirvana became increasingly overshadowed by the sneaking realisation that not all were equally acceptable in the spaces created here. Hierarchical regimes of acceptability operated here too: the seeming homogeneity of the gay village masked exclusionary practices that marked and excluded those deemed unfit to inhabit its sparkle. For example, Binnie and Skeggs (2004, p. 40) argue, in the context of the development of Manchester's gay village that 'class entitlement plays a major role in articulating *and* enabling who can be included and excluded from this space'. Equally, Rushbrook (2002, p. 195) argues that 'Spaces centered on white middle-class consumption do not necessarily welcome queers. ... Gay urban spectacles attract tourists and investment; sexually deviant, dangerous rather than merely risqué, landscapes do not'. Conservative and sex-negative concerns that marketing the city as a gay tourist destination would, in effect, index the sale of sex (Hughes, 2003) was misplaced as policing efforts were directed at clamping down on public sex of all kinds.

The realisation that this queer space might not be as utopian as I had once imagined most likely reflected the unrealistically projected imaginary that I held for the decadent and dissident sexual city prior to arriving here. As Weston (1995, p. 275) would have it: 'Homelands can be easier to desire from a distance than once you arrive on their figurative shores'. It transpires that the imagined gay space of the city was anything but queer in its constitution. It may have acted as a space performing opposition to the heteronormalisation of place/space more generally, but it certainly instituted its own hierarchies of subjectivity. These hierarchies discriminated on the basis of 'a fixity of identity, a possession of the right personae to pass through and occupy the space' (Binnie & Skeggs, 2004, p. 40).

I could see that the ideal habitus to which I had run was no less regulating in its production of the acceptable, of the norm, than those spaces that I had inhabited previously. The mechanisms were different, in many ways no less subtle, but the targets and the effects had a familiar ring to them. The shine had gone from the bling to which I aspired, there was no gold waiting at the end of this particular rainbow. I had left the dark lonely confines of my closet and cast off the isolations and degradations of passing. I had 'come out' as was my wont, re-entered the world anew, with a set of ideals about alliances and alternatives set against the tyranny of the heteronorm. My hopes were seemingly far too weighty for the world that I had imagined and to which I had revealed the 'true' me. Naïve? Perhaps. But a boy can live in hope.

But not all sights had equal weight in what was becoming a 'homonormative enclave' (Browne & Bakshi, 2011). In this village of the newly respectable gay, we were all aware of the imperative to look good. Bodies mattered, there were standards to uphold, ideals to emulate! Apart from the more general social tyranny to healthism, there was a particular need to avoid the signs of a ravaging HIV positive status – especially given that the new anti-retrovirals were proving successful in transforming certain death into a chronic sentence. We all knew that bodies for display should reflect a new

(gym-only) discipline of 'work hard, play hard' (Halperin, 1995); they should be scrubbed clean, trimmed or completely depilated and definitely dressed in the best. Labels mattered too: they signalled A-gay status and marked those unwilling or unable to conform as unsophisticated, not quite cosmopolitan, further away from the mark. The list of bodies and performances of homosexual subjectivity that failed to live up to the mark was expressed by the infamously cutting tongue of the caricatured and biting homosexual, and then tacitly held as the purview of an imagined discerning few - introducing economies of within-community acceptability, that effect particular exclusionary cultural practices.

Those 'Clones', with their preferences for bars with small darkened windows and an imagined penchant for radical and political public sex, were surely an anachronism in this most recently liberated gay world in which celebration and life-style excess were the watchwords. Clones were spectres from a by-gone age, stuck in some sort of reactionary pose to hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995) that itself was being questioned by an increasingly visible metrosexuality. At another point on the spectrum of unacceptable masculinity were the flighty 'chickens', the queens, with their bauble-laden fake tans, their highlighted hair and their screaming performances of Madonna and Kylie. These performances, worthy of classic John Inman and Larry Grayson camp without any of the ironic parody, were equally in question in the move to respectability required of the visible gay. And the ladies who Sparkle⁷ were just anomalous freaks who encouraged the kinds of unruly drag and genderfuck performance that gave everyone a bad name. Surely no one could argue that point?!

The mainstream homonormative disdain directed at these young queens, and those who further provoked normative gender categories, as unacceptable models of respectable gay masculinity indexes a more deeply felt misogynistic

⁷ Sparkle is a Trans activist event run annually in Manchester. See www.sparkle.org.uk

effeminophobia in male gay spaces (Annes & Redlin, 2012; Hennen, 2008; Richardson, 2009). Surely, our misogynistic pique could be excused as the inevitable and inverted outcome of the symbolic violence operated on us through the closet. Pointing out that “fish”, “limp lettuce”, and “eew, ladies bits” took on the same hue here as did the, obviously (?), homophobic derogative ‘gay’ in the schoolyard, was just too churlish.

And yet, the mark of the feminine continued to haunt the resolutely straight-acting respectable gays who marked and derided the effeminacies of those whose performances failed to match the acceptable norm of male gay. In those public spaces for legitimate male same-sex encounters the mating rituals of courtly engagement, more legibly scripted for heterosexual conventions, were performed with an awkward hyper-consciousness. Effecting the coyness of respectability in the delicate dance of ‘Is he looking? Does he like me?’ (Middleton, 2001; cited in Hegna 2007) sat uneasily with the caricatured sexual incontinence of the homosexual of the popular imaginary. These dalliances in sexualising the respectable, in a ghettoized public sphere where straight-acting came at a premium, presaged the private negotiations to come: What were you into? Were you a top or a bottom? Did you take or receive? Were you ‘Arfur’ or ‘Marfur’? It never failed to surprise me that a highly gendered and heterosexual frame would be imposed on much of the sexual activity that subsequently happened. Invariably, at least one of the bodies involved in the fleshly squelch was destined for that girl-dom that each had been so meticulous in their public performances to deny.

The effeminophobia, directed at those who visibly refused the gender norms of respectable gay was also extended to their ‘fag-hag’⁸ friends who, shown the full excesses of our tolerating hospitality, went off and told their own female friends about the joys of the gay village. They clearly promoted a

⁸ ‘Fag-hag’ is a particularly derogatory term to denote a heterosexual woman who spends a lot of time with a homosexual friend.

view of the gay village as a space of freedom and safety: about how the gays' camp allowed space for their own version of feminine camp, free from the predatory gaze of the heterosexual male. And this, of course, seemed to augur the beginning of the end: the protected and protective bubble that was our gay village became the site of those very sights that we'd fought so hard to avoid. Unruly and raging hen parties of chavvie women, chased by savvy naff scallies (weren't they sexy at some point?!) polluted the well-accepted etiquette of our (re)claimed gay space in the wider heteronormative city⁹.

The one wheel-chair user visible in the village, treated with the kind of deferential and tokenistic tolerance for disabled bodies in the wider culture, was hardly an indicator of how other, differently (dis)abled bodies were scoped and scrapped in this village. Male bodies marked by the deprivations of lower socio-economic class – "common", "povs" and "chavs" – were distanced and channelled into particular venues or, at best, eroticised as objects through a mimicked aping of their chavviness – club nights with a strictly enforced dress code marked their difference from the discernment of those appearing to be truly respectable (Brewis & Jack, 2010). These particular economies of acceptable bodies in the gay village speaks volubly to the contentious intersections of gender class and (dis)ability with the 'master narrative' of gay in such spaces (Binnie & Skeggs, 2004; Skeggs, 1999, 2000, 2003, 2004; Skeggs, Moran, Tyrer, & Binnie, 2004).

Economies of race also operated in this milieu. 'Dinge-queen' hailed me queerly when arrowed from the sling of rejection or from the casualised

⁹ Chav is a derogatory term (mainly British) for lower or working-class persons who are considered loutish and brash in their behaviour and tastes. (Hayward & Yar, 2006; Hollingworth & Williams, 2009; O. Jones, 2011; Martin, 2009; see: Nayak, 2006). Scally is synonymous with chav (more often male) but is more localised in the NW of England. The figure of the male scally/chav has a contentious relation to male gay respectability (Brewis & Jack, 2010) and indexes a much longer tradition of intersecting class with (homo)sexuality in Britain (Cook, Mills, Trumbach, & Cocks, 2007).

crotch of campy conversation. "Once you go black, you don't go back." Uncanny thinking, I thought, in this cosmopolitan village of difference, accessed via bus routes that cut through Rusholme and Moss Side¹⁰ in this vibrantly multicultural city. That my encounters were under surveillance of any kind, given the promissory of urban anonymity, shocked sharply, but these conversations lingered and left me with plenty else to ruminate. In what ways did the observation render my non-white lovers as nothing other than addenda to my unquestioned whiteness, their darkened exotica as a mere quench of an imagined desire for the exotic? I wondered whether, and why not, those same 'tinged' men might be labelled as 'potato-queen' given my Irishness? Not unlike the sign of the 'fag-hag', 'dinge-queen' (or 'rice-queen' or the many other linguistic markings of racialisation that operate within the homonorm) worked in particular ways by which the white (male) homosexual was firmly located in the centre with nameable objects in its orbit, dismissible ephemera on its arm, the latest accessory to be weighed in the scales of life-style fashion. Like many categorical labels, they operate as derogations, mark by naming and in doing so, render (in)visible that which is considered normal and acceptable.

The disappointments that characterised the eventual settling in my chosen gay city are not, seemingly, that unusual. Weston (1995, p. 289) points out that 'to the extent that individuals were differently positioned within relations of gender, race, age, and class, they entered the urban space of the gay imaginary from very different trajectories'. This narrative, of heterogeneous entry into outness within the legitimating milieu of the gay village is, at least in part, that to which I lay claim in feeling unease with the 'gay' which I first imagined, then found, and subsequently found unsettling. It is a narrative echoed in voices that precede me:

¹⁰ Rusholme, sometimes known as 'Curry mile' is an area of the city famed for its profusion of restaurants and shops selling food and goods from the Indian subcontinent. Moss Side is an area of the city heavily populated by people with Black Afro-Caribbean heritage.

Whether introduced by words of surprise, satisfaction, disillusionment, or disappointment, the stories confirm the power of participation in a sexual imaginary at the very moments they dispute its existence. (Weston, 1995, p. 289).

Constructing gay through closet exits/coming out

The vampy, parodic caricature of life within the space of Manchester's celebrated gay village serves as a composite grotesque, holding up for question several issues that attach to the ideal of liberal urban queer space and for the visibility of those labouring under the sign 'gay' therein. In particular, the reflections signal the (homo)normativisation of subjectivity in such spaces in spite of the heterogeneity of material subjectivities that occupy the space. The reflections also speak to the forms of that homonormative impulse, the marking of difference of those subjectivities hierarchicalised under the apex of the what Duggan (Duggan, 1994; 2004) and others refer to as the 'homonorm'.

Having done so, this chapter now turns to a more critical academic literature that examines the potential pitfalls inherent in making claims for equal citizenship rights on the basis of an identity politics that pivot on sexual orientation in Anglo-American, neo-liberal contexts. Rather than engage directly with the extensive literature on sexual citizenship (Bell & Binnie, 2000a; Concannon, 2008; D. T. Evans, 1993; Kaplan, 1997; Oleksy, 2009; Richardson, 1998; Sabsay, 2012; Seidman, 2001; Wilson, 2009), I look at academic work which focusses on the 'coming out' story. This 'formula story' (Crawley & Broad, 2004) is considered the dominant trope in the figuration of the (homo)sexual citizen in the latter half of the twentieth century, especially in these Anglo-American contexts.

In holding this 'formula story' up for question, I want to note that I do not wish to negate the value of the story trope in contexts where non-heterosexual sensibilities and practices mark one's life as precarious – both within and outwith the Anglo-American scope of this literature. I am too

cognisant of the ways in which the 'coming out to gay' trope structures and perhaps secures a place of stability for those in need of staking a claim to a sense of community and/or identity (for a discussion see e.g. Hegna, 2007; Herman, 2005; Jolly, 2001) in such contexts. I am also keen to acknowledge the ways in which the 'coming out' narrative continues to frame a set of sexual identity practices and a political discourse which is easily accessible, that has productive lure in its ability to knock (un)civilized mainstreams into change, and provides an historical context for those adopting it. Instead, the analysis seeks to offer an examination of the effect and power of the coming out story in (con)figuring the contemporary (homo)sexual in liberal Anglo-American contexts, its productivities and, perhaps more importantly, some of its limiting effects. The analysis takes seriously the idea that "One enters the hegemonic space of gayness through coming out" (Decena, 2008, p. 405). Before doing so, the chapter sets the concept of 'coming out' in the political and psychological contexts in which it takes hold and then questions whether and for whom the coming out story has effect.

Sex/uality will out:

Traditionally, we are told, sex/uality is a private issue, and not of relevance to the public domain (e.g. Bywater & Jones, 2007; e.g. Carabine, 2004). Feminisms of various hues have successfully reminded us that this is hardly the case; that the personal is always political. Sexuality studies and activism in various forms continue to disturb the traditional location of sex across the public/private binary (see especially the edited collection: Leap, 1999). These studies provoke an acknowledgement that the state constantly intervenes in the realm of the private: that in terms of sex/uality, notions of the private and privacy 'are always subject to the intrusion, supervision, and/or disruption of others. In this sense, *all* sites of sexual practice are public locations, and any claim to privacy which unfold there are *fictional* claims' (Leap, 1999, p. 11 emphasis in the original). Likewise, Bell and Valentine (1995, p. 146) disturb the public/private binary of sex in arguing that:

sexuality is not merely defined by private sexual acts but is a public process of power relations in which everyday interactions take place between actors with sexual identities in sexualized locations.

Activisms based on sexual identity (at the street, community and academic levels) came to prominence in the late 20th century and cohered initially on building a politics based on coalitions between those whose sexual desire/practices were orientated to same-sex object choice. The success of this kind of sexual identity movement took as its basis, at least in part, the argument that insists on the political centrality of sex/uality in late 20th century Western liberal democracies; an argument based on the idea that places the sexual as central in constructions of the social (Fuss, 1991; Quinn & Browne, 2009; Weeks, 2007, 2010).

A nascent but visible Lesbian & Gay movement emerged in some Western societies during the latter half of the 20th century (D'Emilio, 1992) and, profiting from the dramatic rise of other identity-based political movements – primarily along lines of gender and race – lobbied for an extension of the franchise of equal citizenship (Weeks, 2007). The Lesbian & Gay movement (both activist and intellectual) extended its growing successes in the direction of a range of other non-heterosexual identity positions (Bisexual, Transsexual) voicing their own struggles with an inherently conservative and heteronormative sexual mainstream. In this way, the clumsy and contentiously coalitional categorical nomenclature of LGBT rights (Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Interested, 2 Spirited are added in some contexts) emerged as a loose coalition of voices claiming 'minority' sexual rights (Medhurst & Munt, 1997). A fundamental rationale in building such coalitions was in highlighting the pivotal role of the closet in characterising the experiences of these sex/gender minorities in a largely heteronormative culture.

A key element in the early successes of the Lesbian & Gay movement was in drawing attention to how the stigmatization attaching to homosexuality could wreak psychological havoc for same-sex oriented individuals (Rust, 1993). Closeted homosexual lives were characterised as being dramatically split and compartmentalized between public performances and some carefully chosen private contexts lived in 'the closet'. Sedgwick (1993, p. 48) argues that 'the closet is the defining structure for gay oppression in this [twentieth] century'. The closet 'tropes on meanings of concealment, elsewhere-ness-yet-proximity, darkness and isolation, with the potential for movement or escape' (Brown, 2000, p. 8).

The antidote to the repressions of the closet was/is the invocation to 'come out'. Chauncey (1995) demonstrates how contemporary use of the term closet connotes the idea of hiding, of fear, of pretence, of passing and of isolation for the homosexual, prior to the relief of disclosure, of 'coming out'. As posited by psychological theories of (homo)sexual identity development, the closet is shattered in the act of 'coming out', denoting the point at which an individual discloses their same-sex sexual orientation and reveals themselves as gay. In late twentieth century social science, and concomitantly in popular culture, discourses of coming out came to represent a 'rite of passage' for lesbians and gays (Cohler & Hammack, 2006, p. 52) involving a move 'from guilt/shame to positive self-esteem' (D'Augelli, 2003, p. 343).

Chirrey (2011, pp. 283–4) demonstrates, through an analysis of contemporary online advice and support sources for LGB people, that coming out advice constructs the act of coming out as not only 'a predictable, routine event' for those identifying as non-heterosexual, but also as the only sane and inevitable thing to do. In this kind of discourse, those who come out are 'formulated positively as being reasonable, emotionally healthy, moral and loving ... whereas not coming out is psychologically damaging to an LGB individual'. Coming out then is constructed as the logical and inevitable thing

to do for those identifying as non-heterosexual in relation to their sexual desires: not coming out is an aberration, a damaging, unhealthy abnormality that marks the closeted against the liberated and healthily developed individual.

Likewise, at the level of collective politics, the metaphor and practice of 'coming out' has a long tradition in homosexual activist politics, and in the discursive formation of gay and lesbian identities (Hegna, 2007). Disclosure has been advocated as a means of demonstrating the extent of same-sex sexuality in the broader population, thus generating political leverage in changing an exclusionary heteronormative socio-political landscape. Harvey Milk, the first self-confessed publicly elected US homosexual, used it as a political strategy in resisting 1970's discriminatory legislation which aimed to ban homosexuals from teaching in public schools (Hindle, 1994, p. 14). Milk's invocations for lesbians and gay men to come out as a political statement of strength, can be contrasted with the 'outing' politics adopted in 1980's and 90's LGB activism in the UK by radical organizations like Act Up and Queer Nation as part of the campaigns to repeal Clause 28 and for the equalization of the age of consent for homosexuals. This latter strategy was one by which lesbian and gay public figures were involuntarily out-ed if they were seen to support homophobic structures.

Coming out for/to whom?

Cohler & Hammack (2006) analyse the sexual identity autobiographies of three generationally distinct US writers born respectively in the 1930's, the 1950's and the 1970's. Their analysis leads them to suggest that the story told by the younger of these writers differed from his older peers in the relative ease with which he came out into a gay identity. This younger writer never questioned the legitimacy of adopting a gay identity despite recognising the ways in which such an identity was *unacceptable*. The argument here is that life-span theories of 'normal' development – including those of sexual identity development – should be sensitive to the historical and social

contexts in which that development comes into being (Cohler and Hammack, 2006). Similarly, Rust (1993, p. 68) argues that sexual identifications and the stories attaching to those identifications are themselves a product of the conceptualisations and discourses that legitimate sexual identifications at particular socio-historical moments (Foucault, 1990; Richardson, 1998, 2004; N Richardson, 2013; Weeks, 2003, 2010, 2012).

Plummer (2009, p. xii) asserts that the trope of the coming out story is 'archetypal' and '... hangs omnipresently and omnisciently over many gay lives ...'. However, at an earlier point he suggested that such stories may be '... so tired and clichéd that their immanent death can already be sensed in some circles' (Plummer, 1994, pp. 131–2), and argues, in line with Cohler and Hammack above, that the narrative frame is by no means universal, and that it attaches specifically to a particular generation. Additionally, Plummer argues that contemporary stories of sexuality '... have become more ambiguous—less organized around singular identities, more complex, diverse, and contradictory' (cited in Crawley & Broad, 2004, p. 43). Similarly, Hammack & Cohler (2011, p. 176) talk about 'polyphony' in the stories by which desire and identity are negotiated contemporaneously; that 'master narratives do not *replace* one another but rather form a cumulative "web of discourse" to which individuals have access' in accounting for their sexual desire, practices and identity.

Despite Plummer's (and others') call to recognise the pluralism in storying contemporary sexual identity, I continue to be concerned by how this formula story - framed in/by the closet and 'coming out' – remains the dominant one in accounting for LG(BT) identities, both to/for themselves and to/for those who demand an understanding of them. Likewise, Crawley & Broad (2004, p. 65) point out the resilience of the coming out frame in a US context and suggest that:

... we have not reached the historical moment and political circumstances whereby modernist sexual stories are no

longer relevant, especially the modern “coming-out” narrative of LGBT selves. (See also Hegna 2007).

Metaphorical entailments of Coming Out for (homo)sexual identity:

The ‘coming out’ frame has been especially productive in marking the stigmatization of non-heterosexual subjectivities and, in critiquing the trope here, it is not my intention to disparage the ways in which the frame might be put to similar productive use in other locations. My aim here is to highlight some of the entailments of the coming out frame and the closet and examine how these dominant metaphorical architectures shape and constrain an understanding of (homo)sexuality in very particular and partial ways.

Connell (2012, p. 169) offers a succinct summary of the main critiques of the coming out frame in outlining three ways in which the coming out frame is resisted. In the first instance, there is the rejection that coming out is a stable and linear process, arguing instead for a conceptualisation that recognises the iterative, on-going and contextually contingent nature of coming out (e.g. see Rust, 1993, p. 51). Secondly, the coming out frame is critiqued because it has the propensity to render (sexual) identity in ‘binaristic and stable’ ways, acting as a means by which identity positions become constructed as ‘essentialised’ and fixed. Thirdly, she argues, that the coming out frame pays too little attention to the ways in which sexual identity intersects with other markers of social difference – race, class, gender, (dis)ability etc. – in constraining the ways in which different LGBT people experience and enact ‘coming out’. All three of these critiques inform the next section of this chapter, and indeed the autoethnographic chapters that follow.

Coming out has been conceptualized as a process of negotiating the complex dynamics of the closet in its dynamic relation within heteronormativity rather than as a discrete point of disclosure. This conceptualisation is more akin to Stuart Hall’s ideas about the formation of dynamic and contested identifications than the formation of a singular and fixed (sexual) identity

(Hegna, 2007, p. 584 See also Connell, 2012). The focus on process as a key aspect of coming out does not merely signify the on-going and endless feel of the closet for those who find themselves potentially (re)confined within its architecture with every new social setting (Sedgwick, 1993). We are here encouraged to engage with Fuss' (1991) arguments about the imperative to deconstruct the in/out-ness of the closet:

The problem, of course, with the inside/out rhetoric, if it remains undeconstructed, is that such polemics disguise the fact that most of us are both inside and outside at the same time. (Fuss, 1991, p. 5).

Moreover, conceiving of coming out as a complex and contradictory process and queering the architectures of the in/out-ness in terms of the closet additionally engages the centrality of (every)one's relation to the closet: in this sense, the metaphor does not simply signal the transformation of the non-heterosexual individual into liberated and liberal (sexual) freedom (Brown, 2000). Rather, the process critique here underlines the broader political argument that recognises how the closet signals the configuration of homosexuality in its relation to the wider (hetero)sexual terrain; what Butler refers to as the 'heterosexual matrix' (1990, p. 9) or, more classically, what Rich (1980) refers to as 'compulsory heterosexuality'

Chauncey (1995, pp. 7–8) notes at least two distinct uses of the 'coming out' frame in New York during the 20th century. In the earlier form it was used to parody the female debutante's entry into society: the homosexual then came out into his own society. The later, and more contemporary, form of 'coming out' is one in which the homosexual confesses his sexual orientation to the wider heterosexual context. Chauncey points out that the change in the use of the term marks a significant movement in the term's productivity: 'The critical audience to which one came out had shifted from the gay world to the straight world' (p8). Similarly, Chirrey (2011) notes how the closet, and the coming out frame attaching to it, implicate the

... asymmetric power relations that hold between heterosexuality and LGB sexualities, for without the assumption of heterosexuality there would be no reason or need for LGB individuals to come out, and without the stigmatization of LGB identities, coming out would not be a problematic event about which individuals seek advice and support (Chirrey, 2011, p. 284).

The coming out narrative then, marks the hetero/homo binary in characterising western sexual identities and potentially works to re-inscribe an essentialising frame for understanding the homosexual and the heterosexual (see: Fuss, 1991, p. 1). Given that Hammack & Cohler (2009), like many others, have claimed 'coming out' is a process rather than a 'task to be achieved', then in what ways does a recourse to 'coming out' tend to solidify sexual identity as a practice of 'arriving' into particular positions that feel fixed and essentialised? I'm wondering how the 'coming out' frame reinforces particular 'fixity-claims' (Waites, 2005) that, in turn, reify the homo/hetero binary, and also homogenizes those whose identity is signalled under those sexualized signs.

At a more political level the 'coming out' story has the potential to work in such a way that sexuality remains an issue only for those who are marked in the sexual landscape; those who do not fit easily within the norm of what Rubin (1993) refers to as the 'charmed circle' of sex. Kosovsky Sedgwick, in her *Epistemology of the Closet* talks about this as the 'Minoritizing view' of sexuality (Sedgwick 1992). According to this view the 'problem' of sexuality is seen solely as the preserve of those not readily belonging to the 'norm', and is thus contained as a minority issue. Duggan (1994, p. 6) warns against all discourses that allow 'sexual difference and queer desires to continue to be localized in homosexualized bodies. It consigns us, in the public imagination, to the realms of the particular and the parochial, the defense team for a fixed minority, that most "special" of special interest groups – again, letting everyone else off the hook.'

Crawley and Broad, in discussing the use of the coming out narrative as a 'formula story' to structure understanding for publics in the US analyse the ways in which it

... focuses the public discussion about sexuality into "types" of people (characters = victims and villains) with a limited number of "truths" (narrative plots) that can be spoken about them. In the first instance, the formulaic nature of the narrative decreases the variability and diversity of experiences that LGBT people might otherwise narrate (Crawley & Broad, 2004, pp. 49–50).

Thus, they argue, a reliance on the formula story tends to '... create a coherent narrative [that] ultimately works against the possibility of envisioning LGBT people as fully unique, diverse, and nontypical' (2004, p. 50). Similarly, Waites (2005) argues that stories of sexual fixity, namely those relying on the 'coming out' narrative frame, remain dominant in political discourses of sexual liberation and tend to occlude identity positions that do not fit easily within the lesbian/gay experience. In particular, he points to the ways that the story trope elides bisexual and other queer forms of sexual identification because these latter disturb the hetero/homo binary that dominates contemporary western conceptualisations of sexual identity (see also Rust, 1993).

In this way, a sexual identity framed in and by the closet followed by an epiphanic moment of release, of coming out, is one that eschews the poststructuralist and postmodernist claims for a decentred and socially constructed self. Instead, these discursive tropes reinforce ideas of a fixed and essentialised (sexual) self that limits and constrains how sexual identity might be envisaged in different and in potentially productive political terms.

Intersecting (homo)sexuality with other/ed identity:

The coming out frame has been particularly useful as a metaphor for identifying and then alleviating the excesses of a largely heteronormative and homophobic society. However, this conceptualization of a monolithic

homophobia tends to occlude some of the many ways that other identity positions intersect with (homo)sexuality and are thus differently experienced in relation to heteronormativity. The point here is that it is critical to examine how "... contemporary literature and the identity practices on the subject of homosexuality have allowed 'gayness' to masquerade as a master status that presumably transcends other forms of difference." (O'Brien, 2008, p. 498).

This construction of sexual identity as a master narrative in figuring identity concerns for male same-sex genital relations to the exclusion of other dimensions of identity, is one which exercises a great deal of debate and raises questions about the very nature of identity-based campaigns for equality (Richardson, 2004) as well as how this political strategy works to include and exclude particular subjectivities.

How does 'coming out' facilitate an assimilation of formerly perverse sexual desires/practices, thus robbing them of a politics of sexuality – if male same-sex genital relations ever did have a sexual politics attached?! Ironically, how does it re-consign such potential politics to the closet for all but a new-found and highly selective homonormativity which Duggan defines as a 'politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency in a privatized, depoliticised gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption' (2003, 50: cited in Oswin, 2008, p. 92)? As O'Brien (2008, p. 498) argues:

... queer cultures appear more and more similar in values and lifestyle choices to those whose lives reflect the values and resources of a western heterosexual middle-class. This trend is reflected sloganistically in the shift away from the historically recent call to action, 'we're here, we're queer, get used to it', toward the more banal and assimilationist, 'we're here, we're queer, let's go to Ikea'.

This argument is not dissimilar to that made by McRobbie (2004; 2008) in relation female to subjectivity in an post-feminist era in which it is a condition

of the supposed liberal freedoms afforded femininity that women refrain from criticising the status quo; that in a neoliberal political economy 'the individual is compelled to be the kind of subject who can make the right choices.' (2006;261. Quoted in Bryson & MacIntosh, 2010, p. 118). On the basis of this logic one might ask which subjectivities can 'come out' and enter the world of what Duggan (2004) refers to as the homonorm; who is included in and excluded from the norm of acceptability accorded the newly liberated and tolerated gay? In the dynamic of 'coming out', what happens to those who Browne (2011) refers to as the 'queer unwanted'? Does one then have to come out as a 'Dogger', as a 'Fister', as polyamorous, as HIV-ed or are such subject positions left 'no choice but to be the unwantedly queer' (Browne, 2011, p. 100)? Hubbard (2002) notes that within contemporary discourses of sexual citizenship the 'distinction between good and bad sexuality is not simply drawn between heterosexuality/homosexuality, but also between monogamous/polygamous, procreative/commercial and polite/perverted heterosex' (p. 368). This kind of distinction is akin to Gayle Rubin's (1993) earlier theorisations about how sexual activities are hierarchicalised depending on how far from 'the line' of acceptability they are seen to lie. In this way then one might question the cloak of homogeneity that the master narrative of coming out tends to accord an ostensibly homogenous group.

Further, disturbing the notion of homogeneity within the lesbian and gay community also raises a host of questions about how a focus on sexual identity based on sexual orientation occludes some of the many ways that it intersects with other broad dimensions of identity considered important in both psychological and socio-political terms. For example Taylor (2009, 2011) explores how the master narrative of (homo)sexuality often neglects an exploration of the ways in which class intersects with and differentiates experiences of (homo)sexuality. Taylor's theoretical work is most often empiricised within a British lesbian population, but her concerns reflect a dominant theme of Allan Bérubé's work in the US over the last three decades in which he questions the occlusion of his own cultural background from a

poor working class and rural Canadian immigrant background in discourses of (homo)sexuality. Susan Raffo's (1997) classic edited collection *Queerly Classed*, in which Bérubé's autoethnographic essay is included, is considered ground-breaking in drawing attention to the ways in which socio-economic class differentiates the experiences of (homo)sexuality, especially in Anglo-American contexts. More recent work continues to explore some of the many dramatic and more nuanced ways in which socio-economic class status and/or background highlights the heterogeneity of (homo)sexual experience (Armas, 2007; Barrett & Pollack, 2005; Binnie, 2008, 2011; Borkowski, 2004; Brewis & Jack, 2010; Casey, 2007; Dowling, 2009; Flowers & Buston, 2001; Heaphy, 2011; Hollingworth & Williams, 2009; Houlbrook & Waters, 2006; Johnson, 2008; McDermott, 2011; Munt, 2007; Raffo, 1997; Seidman, 2011).

Throughout the history of the Lesbian and Gay movements' fight for equality, there has been a (sometimes rancorous) debate about how gender differentially impacts on the experience of coming out to visibility in a heteronormative society. John D'Emilio (1992) has explored the relatively separate foundations of the Sisters of Bilitis from the male-led Mattachine Society in mid-twentieth century US activism, demonstrating the uneasy alliances between lesbians and gay men, from a very early stage, in their (respective) campaigns for social equality. Numerous writers (Carrera, DePalma, & Lameiras, 2012; Corwin, 2009; Dempsey, Hillier, & Harrison, 2001; Hennen, 2008; Humphrey, 1999; Pezzote & Angelo, 2008; Slesaransky-Poe & García, 2009; Wilton, 2000) have questioned the respective roles of gender and sexuality in fashioning the everyday experience and socio-political positioning of lesbians in the ostensible fight for lesbian and gay equality. Diane Richardson (2000, 2007; Richardson, McLaughlin, & Casey, 2012) provides an exemplar in a rich British tradition which explores the intersections of sex/uality and gender in determining the disparate experiences of lesbian and gay men in the socio-political order.

Similarly, issues of race and ethnicity have been brought to bear in making our understandings of the shaping and experience of (homo)sexuality more complex (Anderson et al., 2009; Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2012; Johnson, 2001; Kulpa & Mizielska, 2011; Kuntsman & Miyake, 2008; Mair, 2010; Nagel, 2003; Shannahan, 2010; Teunis, 2007; Ward, 2008). Oswin (2008) argues that those very spaces that claim to be queer, or at least lesbian and gay friendly, are seldom explored extensively for the ways in which they are (silently) marked in and by racialised discourses of whiteness. As a corollary to issues of race and ethnicity there is some further and more recent recognition that discourses of sexual identity are enmeshed in complex ways with flows of globalisation (Bell & Binnie, 2000a) and that the specificities of national and cultural identity offer rich sites of contestation when exploring the heterogeneous experience of and discourses adopted in accounting for non-heterosexual identities in locations other than those considered Western. Jolly (2001) points out that the story of coming out, with its focus on the travel and travails of the individual journeying into the blessed tolerance of the mainstream, exclude stories that are not enmeshed in the individualizing frame of the liberal West. Jolly reminds us that many third-world activists such as the Hong Kong critic Zhou Huashan and Philippine theorist Martin Manalansan have explicitly rejected the idea that the coming out story is transferable to other geographical contexts. In recognising the globalizing and colonizing impulse of the coming out frame (Cohler & Hammack, 2006, p. 166), one might question how it works to silence alternative stories of same-sex desire and behaviour.

(Dis)ability, as another major marker of social identity, has equally been deemed missing in theorising (homo)sexual experience. Although there is an emerging literature that seeks to address this dearth (Abbott & Burns, 2007; Fraley, Mona, & Theodore, 2007; Noonan & Taylor Gomez, 2010; Rainey, 2011; Shildrick, 2007; Shuttleworth, 2007; Wilson, Parmenter, Stancliffe, & Shuttleworth, 2011), there is general agreement that (dis)ability is an identity marker that requires further attention in seeking to disturb the monolithic

character of gay identity, and the intersecting impacts of a disabling and heteronormative culture.

The current work does not intend to rehearse the arguments that trace the social injustices inherent in explicitly acknowledging such intersections. However this thesis takes seriously such intersections. The dissatisfactions with the identifier 'gay' outlined above, in relation to my experience in Manchester's gay village, recognises some of the ways in which 'gay' intersects with these dimensions of identity and marks an emergent disappointment with the exclusions that applied in what I had originally imaged as a utopia of alliances based on an amalgam of marginal identities. Acknowledging the normativising impulses of this queer space to hierarchicalise the heterogeneity of sexual dissidents presages some of the explorations that occupy much of the rest of this dissertation. In particular, chapter four seeks to explore masculinity in its relation to wider structures of hetero-gender. Chapter four also examines the role of national identity in locating me awkwardly in the homonormed British urban centre. I argue that my journey out of the closet into and within this urban queer space locates me more 'out of place' than it does 'out' as it more commonly attaches to the configuration of 'gay'.

Additionally, chapter five addresses the contentious issue of childhood sexuality. In doing so, the thesis adds to the argument that 'gay', as entailed in the coming out trope, fails to engage seriously with the contentious issue of childhood sexuality and how that might differentiate those who labour (and are consigned) under the sign of 'gay'. Waites (2005) questions how the dominant discourses used in arguing for equality of homosexuals, does so only for adults who, it is assumed have already had their sexual orientation 'fixed' and then require equal treatment in liberal contexts of non-discrimination. Moreover, he argues that this kind of discourse works to avoid the much more thorny issues of (the formation of) sexuality in childhood. This, he argues, is a decisive and divisive evasion of engaging with the crux

of sexual identity and of sexuality more generally, particularly given that 'childhood has come to be invested as the originary/alternative site of authentic (non-alienated, whole, happy ...) subjectivity.' (Burman, 2011, p. 21). Monk (2011) highlights the contradictory nature of contemporary discourses of homophobic bullying in UK schools which sits in an uneasy alliance with the reluctance of the education system to engage fully in campaigns directed towards safer sex and HIV prevention. The latter position is one which underscores what many have referred to as the mythology of the sexual innocence of the child and childhood more generally. In Edelman's terms queer, and queerness, is subtly but continually represented and understood as antithetical to childhood in ways that ensure that 'the cult of the child permits no shrines to the queerness of boys or girls' (Monk, 2011, p. 61).

One final facet of 'gay' which takes more seriously the geographical entailments of the closet and 'coming out' in positioning non-normative sexual identity (Brown, 2000), and how this disturbs the ostensible homogeneity accorded such identifications, is that of location. This is an implicit theme in several of the upcoming chapters, in which I explore sexual experience claims from formative points in my life. It is addressed directly in the section below. Specifically, in this next section, I explore the intersections of sexual identity with the dimension of urbanity/rurality through a reflection on my first experiences of the city in Belfast where I did my undergraduate degree. In doing so I wish to analyse the spatiality of the closet in its production and (con)figuration of the western liberal 'gay' subject: what Brown (2000, p. 118) refers to as the ways in which the closet metaphor imbricates spatial theories about desire and space: 'how sexual identity and desire are geographically mediated' and more specifically 'where we desire enables and constrains how we desire'.

Map 2: The borders and routes of (sexual) becoming.

Geographies of (homo)sexual identity: an imagined city.

Having located some of my dissatisfactions with the queer spaces afforded by my adopted city, I am interested in how the city is figured as a mecca for gay men within an easily 'recognizable tale of the big city as a space of affirmation, liberation, and citizenship – the city as a queer space' (Houlbrook, 2005, p. 3). Following Bech (1993) who is characterised as adopting a humanist perspective in describing Western cities' sexuality, Knopp points to the '... eroticisation of many of the characteristic experiences of modern urban life: anonymity, voyeurism, exhibitionism, consumption, authority (and challenges to it), tactility, motion, danger, power, navigation and restlessness.' (1995, p. 151). Thus the city, is constructed 'as a world of strangers in which people relate to each other as objects and surfaces, [and] becomes an archetypal space of modern sexuality.' (Knopp, 1995, p. 152). Waters (2008), in a review of recent *'New British Queer History'*, highlights some of the ways in which the city has been implicated in constructing a particular and valorised homosexual identity. He identifies some of the many claims made for the historical city (namely London) as housing a slew of male same-sex erotics, sociality, intimacy, affection, camaraderie and 'ever-changing constellations of feeling' between same-sex attracted men (2008, p. 145). However, we are warned that these historical forms of male same-sex attraction in urban contexts should not be assimilated into contemporary conceptualisations of how the gay man inhabits the city.

Whittle and his colleagues' (1994) siting/sighting of gay men's paradoxical location 'on the edge of the middle of our cities' positions gay men as potential key stakeholders in the regeneration of former urban decay through their contribution to night time economies. It is the nature of the 'Twilight Zone' at the margins of the city, and how that space allows gay men to see themselves as belonging and even essential (Whittle, 1994, pp. 1–2) to its regeneration, that recurs as a theme in urban sexual geographies (Knopp,

1995). This siting/sighting of gay men as gentrifiers of the city is part of what Bell and Binnie (2000a, p. 88) refer to as a tendency to 'mythologise and romanticise the city' as a space for the emergence and development of an idea(l) of sexual citizenship for gay men.

Knopp (1995, p. 149) points out that 'Cities and sexualities both shape and are shaped by the dynamics of human social life.' Similarly, Houlbrook (2005, p. 4) argues that 'Male sexual practices and identities do not just take place *in* the city; they are shaped and sustained *by* the physical and cultural forms of modern urban life just as they in turn shape that life.'

Bell and Binnie (2000a) problematize the utopian ideal held for the city not least in terms of the intersections of sexual citizenship with other markers of identity outlined above. They analyse some of the many ways in which the imagined sexual city, and the material reality of the commercialised gay scene, excludes a range of subjectivities based on gender, class, immigration patterns and more transgressive approaches to sexuality that mark the 'good gay' from the 'bad queers' (2000a, p. 26). In this latter analysis they trace the development of a wider debate that I signal above in relation to such intersections.

Browne (2009, 2011), in studying the embodied lives of lesbians in small town locations, argues that 'imaginings and realities 'co-exist and interact' in the constitution of urban/rural places. Browne here relies on Doreen Massey's idea that 'the homosexual urban ... exists as an equally mythological site to its rural counterpart, a place made in the imagination and unmatched in reality' (p. 187; cited in Browne, 2009, p. 27)

In a more explicitly geographical way, and more apposite to this chapter, Bell and Binnie (2000a) also point out the fairly obvious maxim that 'cities are different from one another' and therefore have very different approaches 'in their treatment of sexual diversity ... [thus] sexual citizenship is constructed

differently in different cities' (p. 83). It is in pointing this critical lens towards how 'regional or provincial cities have often been conceptualized within queer culture as uniformly oppressive places, set against global 'gay meccas' that the next section explores how Belfast – a very particular provincial British city – shaped a (sexual) identity that slung a sideways orientation (Kathryn Bond Stockton, 2009) to the idealised forward direction of (homo)sexual identity development that is conjured in and by the 'coming out' frame. Belfast, with its religiously anchored homophobia and cultural conservatism (Duggan, 2008, 2012), clearly disrupts the notion that Anglo-American cities are centres of utopia for those wishing to effect a 'deviant' sexual life, and underlines the fallacy in those attempts to 'mythologize and romanticize the city' (Bell & Binnie, 2000b, p. 88).

Moving out of the closet?

A recurrent theme in the overall trope of coming out of the closet is that lesbians and gay men have to move from their original homelands in order to leave the confines of the closet (Brown, 2000; Plummer, 1994). It is most often the case that the movement described in this trope is in one particular direction; that gay men move to the city in order to become fully instantiated as sexual citizens.

Despite the resonance of this notion of salvific nomadism out of the closet into the imagined space of the city, both with the wider literature on coming out and with a post-hoc analysis of my own experience, the story trope relies rather too heavily for comfort on the idea of a gay originary. Within this story trope there is an underlying implication of an already formulated, pre-existing gay identity waiting for the anonymity and liberal tolerance of the city to facilitate the emergence of the real subject. In this next section I wish to hold this trajectory, and the assumed gay who is tracked on this journey – of coming to the city, of coming out into gay – up to question. In doing so, I wish to question whether there need be a putatively essentialised gay in order to populate this 'coming to' and 'coming out' narrative; whether, in fact, there

are other dynamics, between place, space and identifications that structure and facilitate the formation of urban gay subjectivity.

Brown (2000, p. 15) argues that taking seriously the geographic entailments of the closet metaphor in signifying sexual identity 'might also provide insights into how we know the closet, and the import of that knowledge for how we know society'. In relation to sexual identity, he argues that

... the closet can be thought of as a space that is contextually important for the performance of sexuality – and the sex it drives. It is part of the iterativity of concealed sexuality since each space is slightly different, and thereby enables a slightly different manifestation of same-sex desire to be performed in each site. (Brown, 2000, p. 47).

Brown's arguments fit within a wider debate developed in social and human geography which question the ways in which subjectivity is (re)produced in time and space: how 'the co-ordinates of subjectivity are, thereby, reproduced both through discursive practices and through power-laden regulatory practices' (Pile & Thrift, 1995, p. 5). This idea of subjectivity relies on the 'situatedness' of practice, practice that is aligned in and through judgements of their appropriateness in time and space and that these judgements are contingent on 'the specificities of place ... In other words place is constitutive of the subject's understanding of the world' (Pile & Thrift, 1995, p. 29). Rose (1995, p. 335) suggests that 'identities are constituted in part by the kind of space through which they imagine themselves'. Similarly, Hubbard (2002, p. 367) argues that 'sexual subjectivity is inevitably negotiated in spaces that are real and imagined'. In these terms then, the next section takes seriously this proposition that the places and spaces in which (sexual) subjectivity is imagined and made sense of are also fundamental to how such subjectivity is understood and produced. In this vein, Pile and Thrift – following Deleuze – invite us to imagine subjectivity as:

'the folding of the outside into the inside, and the past into the present, for the sake of thinking the future, where the

situated subject acts, and is acted upon, by numerous lines of force; where the self is a 'slow' inside space that is multiple, productive and continuous; where encounters are both exterior and interior' (Pile & Thrift, 1995, p. 38).

Locating the academy – closeted geographies:

My initial migration was from a very rural north-east corner of Donegal to the bright lights of Belfast city. My move to Belfast was ostensibly about education, but was, in large part, about escape. In thinking back to the decisions I made about entering Higher education across the border in Belfast, I am not completely clear about the nature of those decisions. I have a vague memory of knowing that the Republic of Ireland would not fund Higher Education in 'mainland' Britain but, because of its historical claim on the occupied six counties of Northern Ireland, they would fund my education across the border. These rules about funding Higher Education contrasted sharply with the Republic's historical and state-sanctioned migration of Irish youth to England and Scotland where most of them ended up as unskilled labour.

Economic material issues aside, university education in Belfast represented an opportunity to start anew. As is the case for many lower and working class people, Higher Education represented a very particular way out of poverty. More specifically, studying psychology at university in Belfast promised a new cohort of peers, a new discipline of study, a freedom to (re)imagine the non-normative sexuality that was a significant aspect of my earlier life (see chapter five). Student life in Belfast appeared like a blank slate on which I might re-inscribe a new sense of self, free from the kinds of histories attained and assigned in a small rural community where familiarity and familiarity are the driving vectors of one's being (Gray, 2009). Although the idea of Belfast as a large city certainly held an allure in which I might also understand anew the sexual dynamics of an earlier life, there was little explicit or, at least, conscious desire to use this escape to the city as a way of exercising a pre-existing gay sensibility. This migration to Belfast was not really the kind of

movement that dominates the stories of gays and lesbians in their search for community amongst like-minded sexual dissidents; a story which 'locates gay subjects in the city while putting their presence in the countryside under erasure' (Weston, 1995, p. 282). Although I realise that the main impetus was to disassociate myself from all that had defined me to that point, I am convinced that this impulse was not one driven by a need to establish myself as (homo)sexual in this new-found urbanity.

Belfast, as the capital of the most homophobic western country (Borooah & Mangan, 2007), was NOT that kind of city. Although homosexual acts were decriminalised in the rest of the United Kingdom in 1967, they continued to be illegal in Northern Ireland up until 1982 with the threat of up to life imprisonment if convicted (Conrad, 2009) and, even beyond this point (I started undergraduate study in 1986), the socio-political climate could hardly be described as offering a liberal stance towards homosexuality (Duggan, 2008; Ferriter, 2012b). Kitchen and Lysaght (2003) detail some of many ways in which fear has shaped the lives of lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals in Belfast. This homophobic fear was imbricated in the more generalised fears attaching to the sectarianism which characterised this social landscape and shaped the lives of most people there. Of course, the city was not monolithic in how it was experienced as heterosexist. Kitchen & Lysaght's interviewees found some spaces – particularly around the (Queen's) University area – that were experienced as more liberal and tolerant. However, the dominant zeitgeist was one in which a virulent homophobia existed in the context of

sexual conservatism and heterosexism ...[which] is widely manifested in a number of ways, including weak legislation, unsympathetic and hostile policing, and homophobic intimidation and violence (Kitchen & Lysaght, 2003, p. 493).

(Transgressive?) Border Crossing:

In retrospect, my decision to attend university across the Irish border seems like a very strange one even to myself. This border, between the Republic of Ireland and the UK -controlled North-eastern six counties, had loomed large for those of us growing up in its immediate shadow. Its presence operated on both the symbolic and material levels although this distinction seems like an artifice of writing rather than a valid descriptor of its operation in the everyday. The border was a perpetual reminder of more than a millennium of Irish-British colonial history, and it emblematised the on-going violence carried out by and in the name of nation-states. Its contours, following the boundaries of counties, felt arbitrary and had clearly been drawn up in a politically defensive act of including and excluding those whose loyalty to the crown might (or might not), at some point in an imagined future, be counted upon. The material conditions of the roads that traversed the border were an abiding mark of the economic deprivation of the Republic and acted as a reminder, for all those of a reasonable persuasion, of which side they should be on (an English friend later points out that the roads on the other side of the border had to be much better as they were the conduits of British military might!). In writing this now, I realise how much of this knowing about the border was, at the time, tacit and implicit. Anderson (2006) points out the ironic silence attaching to this particular state border, the 'Fawlty-esque, "Don't mention the border"', belies its 'centrality in Irish life over several generations.' It has, he argues,

constituted a complex and evolving political context between Irish nationalists and pro-British unionists, Catholics and Protestants, both north and south of the present borderline (Anderson, 2006, p. 2).

The border also acted as a physical barrier that shaped our geographic relation to the rest of the island of Ireland. Travelling from the remote peninsula on which I grew up to the rest of the Republic meant making

lengthy circuitous journeys to avoid it. The alternative was to encounter it head on and cross it.

Seamus Heaney, in his poem '*From the Frontier of Writing*', describes the felt character of the crossing, especially for those whose view of the border could only be as an embodiment of British domination. He writes that there was a 'tightness and a nilness round that space'; there was little mistaking the state-sanctioned, militaristic physicality of the border and its crossing, no metaphorical refraction here to veil the visceral materiality of encounter, of leaving and going on your way. It is a border crossing where:

*everything is pure interrogation/ until a rifle motions and you
move/ ... a little emptier, a little spent/ as always by that
quiver in the self,/ subjugated, yes, and obedient. (Heaney,
2009)*

Such crossings were clearly embodied, and marked one's subjugation and subjection. The crosser could be anything but aware of the imbalanced relation between themselves as precarious individual and a (/the) state(s) that claimed their being. But such border crossing also (re)presented other forms of sense-making in their passing. In van Houtem's (2012, p. 50) terms, borders should be interpreted more broadly than as a physical object or demarcation alone. In these terms, border becomes a verb, an action played out in the collaborative practices and beliefs of those who are enjoined with and to it: 'Borders are the construction of a reality and truth in a certain context,' (p. 51). Borders delimit ideas of belonging, of inside and outside, of inclusion and exclusion of 'them' and 'us'; they mark the comforts of the familiar and known, of even knowing and knowability. However, just as borders and bordering potentially mark and fix, they also offer the potential for disruption. 'Crossing a border makes one from a human from the interior into a human from the exterior, a foreigner, someone from them over there.' (van Houtum, 2012, p. 49). Although such crossing marks one as different, as potentially vulnerable in the visibility that it occasions, they also locate one

outside of the repressive dynamic that contains and sustains insiderness. Crossing borders then, can also represent a transgressive act. In crossing the line, the crosser offers an active snub to the border's ostensible impermeability. In doing so, border crossing can rupture ideas of what is (known as) accepted and acceptable; it invites desire for that which was formerly unknown, it opens possibilities 'to leave behind what is familiar, ... to become strange and to stay strange' (van Houtum, 2012, p. 59).

At a geo-political level, crossing the Irish border, and heading to my particular destination in Belfast, represented some sort of play with being in Ireland, and of running away from Ireland too. As Edna Longley would have it, Belfast is a funny place with shades of being in many places at once, of being in the Republic, in Northern Ireland and (at least for some) already in Britain (2005; cited in Anderson, 2006, p. 2). This 'play' on being Irish, in a space where Irishness was deeply contested, heightened an awareness of the contradictory ideas of national identity that played out in this location and my relation to such ideas (I explore these ideas in greater detail in chapter four). My position as a 'Southerner' amongst my embattled 'Northern' Loyalist and Republican peers – even when I came from a more northern geographic location than did they –queered my understanding of the tropes that defined and caricatured the boundaries of those communities to which I belonged (and didn't) in the convolutions of Irish ethno-political identity (Lojek, 2002). More broadly, this geo-political crossing queried and queered the politics of a cartographic regime that locates the world – and the racialisations of those subjectivities within it – as locatable at particular points of the compass: north and south, east and west.

In addition, crossing this border signified the many other ways in which I might be in transition. I was moving up in socio-economic terms (the six counties under British occupation were more economically affluent than the Republic (Anderson, 2006)). The first from my family to go to university, I was garnering the kind of social capital that had been the vaguest yearning of

my family. I was breaking the familial mould of a boy's trajectory in the world: it wasn't at all clear what it might mean, but university meant that this youngest boy would learn and earn his crust with head not hands. The precociously precarious peasant was on his way! I was on a trip to the great unknown!

Passing/Hide-and-seek in Belfast:

Belfast was a strange place in ways more material than is suggested by the post-modernist sensibility that Edna Longley suggests above. Sloan (2009) discusses the Northern Irish novelist Ciaran Carson's descriptions of his formative life in Belfast and the negotiations of space and borders required in making sure that he was safe in a city riven with the sectarian separations of Irish/British, Republican/Unionist, Catholic/Protestant. These negotiations were technologies of apartheid that sharpened in their meaning and effect following "a phase of open hostility and violent conflict in the early 1970's [having the effect of] preserving, enhancing and entrenching the ethno-religious-political divide characterised as sectarian" (McGrellis, 2010, p. 762). The boundaries and borders that Carson refers to in his growing up in Belfast 'not only mark where it is possible to go, but also who it is possible to be' (McGrellis, 2005, p. 517). Knowing where to go and who to be in this city was/is indexed by a range of explicit symbolic markers such as flags, murals and gaudily painted kerbstones (Meulemans, 2013), but also in a series of more implicit cues based on an interlocutor's biography including: name, schools attended, sport played or supported and such like (McGrellis, 2005, p. 520). As such, spaces of (un)safety are marshalled in and through the quotidian of everyday speech (See also: Finlay, 1999).

Again, Seamus Heaney, attuned to the economy of such language, shows how there was a constant barrage of sleighted question that had as its aim the 'outing' of one's religious-political affiliations in the everyday talk of Belfast:

*Manoeuvrings to find out name and school,
 Subtle discrimination by addresses
 With hardly an exception to the rule
 That Norman, Ken and Sidney signalled Prod
 And Seamus (call me Sean) was sure-fire Pape.
 O land of password, handgrip, wink and nod,
 Of open minds as open as a trap,
 Where tongues lie coiled, as under flames lie wicks,
 Where half of us, as in a wooden horse
 Were cabin'd and confined like wily Greeks,
 Besieged within the siege, whispering morse.*
 (Heaney, 2009, from: *Whatever You Say Say Nothing*)

This 'morse' that Heaney refers to in negotiating safety in the everyday double-talk of Northern Irish speak, is reminiscent of the kinds of confabulating double-talk required to negotiate and disguise the sexual closet within heteronormativity. It speaks to and of the kind of dissembling that I presaged in the introductory chapter for those whose sexual practices and desires lie outside the norm and require particular negotiations.

Leonard (2009) demonstrates how even in post-Agreement Belfast young people ape the traditions in which they have grown and keep to their own territories - both geographical and cultural. Sloan quotes Carson's description of negotiating such space as a practice of double-ness and passing: 'Given our underground status, we constantly employed ourselves in hide-and-seek techniques, rehearsing the dimensions of concealed space' (Carson, 1998; 210. Quoted in Sloan, 2009, p. 236). Again, I can but be reminded in this analogy of the parallel 'hide-and-seek' attaching to the narrative of the closet in which the male homosexual most usually resides, fearing his 'outing', being tremulous in what he reveals through the heteronormative performance grammars of the everyday. In what ways did this embodied knowledge of

where one could go, and what one might say so as to not be marked as a target in the 'risky spaces' (McGrellis, 2010) of the demonised enemy's territory reinforce another set of concealment and pretence? This embodied and discursive hide-and-seek, characterising life in a sectarian Belfast, certainly disrupts the very imaginings of the city as a sexual utopia, an urban respite from the isolation and surveillance of the rural. But it also speaks to the ways in which discourses of (sexual) becoming are wholly dependent on the socio-political contexts in which they happen and the narrative frames available in those contexts. In Belfast the dominant narrative was that of ethno-religious affiliation. There was little discursive space to explore other forms of identity making – let alone that of sexual identity.

This exploration of being in Belfast with its slanted and sleighting discursive frames for constructing identity is not simply an entreaty against the virulence of its homophobia, a petition against its heteronormative conservative zeal – although these are quests for social justice that continue to have value in this very peculiar socio-political context. Making such straight-forward claims would require me to hold onto and heave an apriori, fixed (homo)sexual identity that simply lacked an appropriate context for finally and irremediably coming out. I want to hold out against this dominant idea(l) of an essentialised (homo)sexual identity and explore, instead, the ways in which the (discursive) constraint experienced in this milieu may have shaped very particular and overly familiar idea(l)s of (gay) sexual identity.

I went to Belfast with a particular set of early, non-normative and same-sex sexual experiences and a slew of sense-making that attached to these experiences (I explore the dynamics of these experiences and their attendant subjective sense-making in some greater detail in chapter five). These experiences did not necessarily determine a particular outcome in terms of (homo)sexual orientation - indeed, given the rural context in which they took place, and the subsequent move to a highly conservative urban context, a homosexual identity was probably the most problematic identity position to

opt for. However, these earlier experiences did set me somewhat 'out of time' and 'out of place' in relation to idea(l)s of 'normal' sexual development, and they were also part of a subjective history that I was unable and/or unwilling to cast aside.

The first two years of time in Belfast found me wholly engaged with a number of opposite-sex sexual relationships. I found in these relations an excitement and fulfilment that allowed me, momentarily at least, to understand through unproblematic flow the conventions of a heteronormative mainstream. Whole swathes of dominant and public culture became aligned and legible without the aslant queering lenses of previous non-normative sexual practice: I was the boy who loved and lost and found again the girl who'd be the next true love of my life; I could hold hands and snog in public, dismissing the (sometimes) disapproving looks as mere repressive jealousy; I could legitimately, and publically, worry about possible unplanned pregnancies with the privilege of male distance towards the glory of prospective (and materially abstracted) parenthood. However, in the midst of this ease, there continued a troubled and troubling unease. My earlier sexual experiences haunted the new-found centrality made possible in hetero/sexual practice. It was particularly the absence of spaces and ways of talking about these former experiences, of (re)shaping it in the largely unspoken entrails of male heterosexuality that perpetuated these hauntings. But it was not only in the immediate interlocutions with the actors involved in my day-to-day encounters of being a heterosexual male that occluded such talk. Despite the idea that contemporary society is one in which sex is mainstreamed (Attwood, 2009; McNair, 2002), it seemed, certainly in Belfast, that there were few or any spaces in which I might mainstream the non-normative nature of my previous sexual experiences.

It is this dearth of opportunity for talking about such non-normative sexual experiences, and the most obvious ways in which that dearth can be accommodated within the confines of the hetero/homo binary that I want to

signal and hold up for scrutiny. Such scrutiny que(e)ries my own particular relation with homosexual/gay whilst also raises questions about the wider relation of narrative and (homo)sexuality more generally. Rust (1993, p. 71) argues that 'much [sexual] experience goes unacknowledged and uncodified, particularly experience that does not fit into an existing perceptual schema or that is socially disapproved'. Taking this idea, I would argue that in any cultural milieu where the hetero/homo binary is the dominant and hegemonic frame for understanding sexuality, then it is most likely that that which is decidedly non-heterosexual will, by default, get understood and consequently consigned to the 'homo' pairing of the binary.

Cities, it is argued, are totemic in the construction of non-heterosexual sexual identities. I characterise Belfast here as a city in which ethno-religious identity, the dominant narrative of identity formation in this geographical location, was performed in everyday language. I argue that, for many, this performance had material effects in terms of ensuring physical safety and reinforcing ideas of belonging. I suggest that such performance is enacted in a kind of double-talk that has parallels with performing the closet for those whose sexual practice is non-normative. I argue also that discourses of sexual identity were, concomitantly, noticeable and significant in their absence, and those that did exist confirmed, and conformed with, an avowedly heterosexist culture. Heterosexism and heteronormativity, as I argue in the previous chapter, insist on the presence of a hauntingly absent homosexual: it is in relation to homosexuality that heterosexuality exists. I suggest that it is in knowing the existence of this wider master narrative of sexuality that one is hailed and makes sense of one's own sexual subjectivity. I suggest further that, given the imagined totemic character of cities in the construction of non-heterosexual sexual identities, and in the constraint in talking about non-normative sexual experience as was the case in Belfast, it is possible to at least question the assignation of gay as a product of the limited choices of possibility available in such a context. Perhaps this socio-discursive constraint, and the struggle of passing a non-normative sexuality within an

avowedly heteronormative context that it entails, shapes a longing towards the most readily available frame for construing that non-normativity, towards 'gay'?

There is another possibility here that points to the fabrication of 'gay' in a context where the hegemonic trope of identity – that part of the modern individual that ensures its very being – is cast along dimensions of ethno-political affiliation. Ferriter (2012b) outlines the fraught development of a nascent lesbian and gay community in Northern Ireland from the 1970's onward. He points to the activist work of Jeff Dudgeon, as founding member of the Northern Ireland Gay Rights Association (NIGRA), to extend the Sexual Offences Act (1967) to Northern Ireland. Dudgeon suggests that 'it is heartening that in a province where religious differences divide most of the community, the gay scene has never been sectarian ... the bond of a common sexuality is far stronger than adherence to sectarian differences. Heterosexual society in Ulster could well take a lesson from the homosexual minority in its midst' (Dudgeon, n.d. Cited in Ferriter, 2012b). Perhaps, it was merely in the spirit of Dudgeon that I made a claim to orient myself towards homosexuality?

Some reflections backwards and forwards:

How much does the city of Manchester position me as immediately pre-modern in my approach to (homo)sexuality? At exactly the same time as offering a model of full citizenship rights through the potentially open door of the closet into the playful spaces of the queer city, it also places me as an immigrant, as a former rural and low-class blow-in, somewhere outside the respectable homosexual or at least questions the solidity of that respectability. How much do these tensions reflect those outlined in the 1950s novel *The Heart in Exile*, subsequently analysed by a host of queer academics (see Houlbrook & Waters, 2006) who argue that this kind of contemporary fiction constructed the acceptability of the respectable middle-

class homosexual, often at the cost of those other 'types' of homosexual who were neither interested in nor susceptible to the 'cures' of either psychiatry or love: 'In the end, tickets to the fictional universe of homosexual love were only available to middle-class, respectable homosexuals.' (Houlbrook & Waters, 2006, p. 162)

Pile and Thrift (1995, p. 49) assert that subjectivity (like the map) 'reveal identity: its fluidity and fixity, its purity and hybridity, its safety and its terrors, its transparency and its opacity.' At the same time they remind us that 'some people's place in the world is more precarious than others'. Here I am reminded of Bersani's ideas about the homosexual as the 'failed subject' of the cultural imaginary, and that its failure as a unified subject is precisely its strength in representing a potential disruption to the sociality that instantiates subjectivities into hierarchies of inequality and oppression. This potential is what makes queer fabulous. Perhaps it is in the ritual of 'coming out' into homonormativity that '... denies the unique genius in being queer' (Halperin, 2012, p. 78); is it in entering acceptability and respectability, through the darkening doorjams of a heteronormative cultural imaginary, that this very same homosexual reaches the apogee of acceptance in its (trans)form into 'gay'? Like Halperin, I would argue that this popular idiom of representing 'gay life' in mainstream gay print media 'obscures the very things about gay life and gay culture that make them interesting and valuable' (Halperin, 2012, p. 78).

Is it too much to ask, without consigning myself to the well-worn label of a 'sex radical' (e.g. Robinson, 2006), to envisage an understanding of my sexual identity as something more than merely the pursuit of same-sex genitalia? The difficulties experienced in 'coming out' or of 'coming of age', as a male who is wont to indulge in same-sex desire, as well as the continuing problematics attaching to sex/uality that I note both within an urban LGBT

milieu and in contemporary culture more generally, leave me uneasy in accepting the seeming sanguinity of the legitimate, stable and fixed identity category 'gay'. I see this dilemma as encapsulating the paradox that Bernstein (2005, p. 62) outlines for any identity-based political movement in that 'seeking to erase boundaries requires recognising them, which ultimately confirms them or, in the process of confirming boundaries, underscores that they are, in fact, socially constructed.' It feels like there is much work to do. And the hardest work is in attempting to unsettle the ostensible gains of the LGBT movement, to make visible those politics that are rendered invisible by its success. And there is always the threat that in doing so in such a precariously liberal and inherently conservative context, I jeopardize some of the gains in legitimacy that I do not relish relinquishing.

In line with Fuss (1991), removing myself from the supposed isolation, self-hatred and loathing of the closet into the blessed toleration of legitimacy serves only to raise a further problematic. How does the closet set this 'out' me as the marked, tolerated, now-insider who has just come out? How does this movement to 'out' render me much more totally (in)visible than when I lived with the fears and illicit productive pleasures of being 'in'? What colonized death on the rigid escarpment of 'normalcy' does this declaration serve to me every mundane and un-playful day? I want to play in fields away from the hum-drum of being a (normal?) sexual citizen. I want to invest myself in discourse that speaks to/of those other fragments of this me allowing performance of/interlocution with/in other streams of possible me's. As Clausen (2000; cited in Jolly, 2001) would have it in the hegemonic journey 'from Margin to Center' (Hammack & Cohler, 2011, p. 172), I might look back from my position of tolerated normalcy and find the uncomfortable but knowable contours of my closet rather more 'enticing than membership in an [hegemonically] undifferentiated throng' – whether within the male 'gay' community or in a wider homo-tolerant sphere.

The coming out story tends to deny the possibility that adopting a 'minority' sexual identity is one of emancipation rather than constructing it exclusively as one of stress and struggle (Cohler & Hammack, 2006, p. 54). As Brown (2000, p. 148) argues 'the closet is typically viewed as a bad space, and there is a progressive politics in naming it as an oppression to create solidarity across time and space'. Following Deleuze and Guattari's schizoanalysis, Brown posits the possibilities for seeing beyond the oppressions most usually linked with the closet. Instead, he suggests that we consider, in a positive light, the 'cunning, heroic resistances to it' (2000, p. 130) that so many males who have – and act upon – same-sex genital desire enact despite the constraints enjoining the closet. Brown highlights a more radical literature that highlights an alternative reading of the closet, one that holds it as

a space where amazing things happen. It ... helps impel the heroic struggles that take place within it, the comfort and security many of us have found there, and the liberal democratic principles of privacy and respect and self-determination that underpin so many of our politics in the first place. (Brown, 2000, p. 148).

Sally Munt, in a discussion of pride/shame that speaks in their elisions to the in/out of closeted sexual being, asks us to take seriously the potentially productive politicality of shame 'as it can provoke a separation between the social convention demarcated within hegemonic ideals, enabling a re-inscription of social instability. The outcome of this can be radical, instigating social, political and cultural agency amongst the formerly disenfranchised' (Munt, 2007, p. 4). I wonder how and in what ways such a (re)formulation reframes the closet and those who might actively wish to enjoin it?

How might a politics based on LGBT identity lean us, unthinkingly, towards an essentialised and narrow formulation of identity based solely on sexual orientation, rather than exploring how the politics of such identifications might focus on the productive potential of sexual acts that, for me, seem to be the troubled and troubling core of a non-heterosexual subjectivity? This latter, I

would argue, has the potential for instantiating a politics that allows for coalition building across a range of social hierarchies of inequality.

The closet metaphor also inheres the sense of a 'true' generic self in hiding because a misguided, brutalizing, and oppressively homophobic mainstream world reinforces its exclusion by actively constructing spaces in which that 'homosexual' self cannot exist in its 'rights'-ful way. "'The closet" springs from the idea that identities are waiting to be discovered and unfold from the inside out' (Gray, 2009, pp. 1181–2), reinforcing ideas of 'authentic', 'natural' and 'real' LGBTQ identities that precede the social contexts in which such identities become. Likewise, the coming out narrative is one of stress and struggle, of conversion and revelation, of false before and true after. In rejecting this essentialising impulse in accounting for LGBTQ identities, Gray (2009, p. 1182) asseverates instead the highly constructed and mediated nature of such identities, and asks us to consider 'How might we come to see identities ... as a cultural process akin to what philosopher Gil Deleuze characterizes as the folding in from the outside?'

What are the ways then, beyond the resolution and fixity of 'coming out', by which storying male same-sex sexual identity might infuse it with a political agenda? It is in the spirit of Queer that the remaining chapters of this dissertation take their sensibility. Here Queer is not posited as merely a synonym for LGBT(QQII...), but rather as a sensibility that wishes to challenge the binaries that more usually shape and constrain ideas of sex, gender, sexuality and all those other markers of identity with which they intersect. This sensibility refuses to engage with even a supposedly radical 'queer subjectivity' – that which is posited by some as existing outside of the normalising impulses that frame any and all discussions of sexual identity politics. This queer sensibility recognizes that identity per se 'obscure particularities [even when it] cannot but work within the confines of power and normativity', and therefore works instead to think through the deployment of norms and identity categories (Oswin, 2008, p. 96). Oswin

(2008, p. 100) again here argues that 'Queering our analysis thus helps us to position sexuality within multifaceted constellations of power'.

Although stories of 'gay male' have been shown to have commonalities especially across the latter half of the 20th century, there is also an increasing recognition that stories of gay identity are cohort/generation specific (Savin-Williams, 2011; see also, Seidman, 2002), and it is argued that these cohort-specific differences reflect the divergent cultural milieu that contextualise those 'minority' sexual identifications, shaping and constraining them in particular ways (Cohler & Hammack, 2006; Hammack & Cohler, 2009, 2011; Hammack, Thompson, & Pilecki, 2008). Cohler and Hammack (2006, p. 55 citing Herdt and Boxer, 1996) argue that the sexual identifications of American youth reveal 'the ways in which individuals come to imbue their desires with collective meaning in the construction of a gay identity, realized in and through social practice', but that contemporary youth with same-sex desire tend to reject the longer-standing traditional narrative of struggle, more usually associated with 'gay', and eschew both the label and the dominant narrative of struggle and success that traditionally accompany that sexual identity position as inadequate in describing their contemporary sexual lives. Like these authors, I would argue that it is not only the inter-cohort specific socio-political contexts that shape and construct (and constrain) the narratives and experiences of minority sexual identifications (Connell, 2012). Rather, the specific social and geographical contexts in which those identifications occur have a role to play in constructing ideas of sexual identity; that there is a great deal of intra-cohort variability in the narratives that structure ideas of sexual identity. In accord with Savin-Williams (cited in Bryson & MacIntosh, 2010, p. 117; see also Hammack & Cohler, 2011), I want to attend to 'both the disjuncture and the extraordinary diversity within what are mistakenly construed to be natural-kind distinctions, or categories of people – lesbian, gay, and so on'. This is, I would argue, something that also inflects those of us who entered 'gay-ness' at the height of an era of liberatory socio-political consciousness raising - specifically in the latter

decades of the twentieth century and especially during and immediately after the early AIDS era which was itself compounded by a Conservative and reactionary real-politick that fostered anxiety and outright hostility towards same-sex sexual identity (e.g. see Brown, 2000, p. 119; Duggan, 1994). It is especially with this intra-cohort heterogeneity in mind that I ruminate, in an autoethnographic way, about my unease with the 'coming out' story as a frame for understanding my own location in this particular culture at this particular time, and, more generally, my unease with the identity category of 'gay'.

[In/Assert] Impossible Doubles

An eerie silence frames the chaos in the library archive room as Toman accompanies the head of security. The greasy scum filming the surfaces repels and fascinates in equal measure. Blunt translucent light dances on the grey fatty residue like mercury on a table-top. An odour, faintly sweet, smoky, and redolent of hastily singed barbequed pork, reminds him of cauterizing flesh. Combined, these sights and smells claw his attention towards the sooted empty space in the midst of the chaotic mess. The charred outline of a seated human figure etching itself in the carpet and against the reference shelves bids an uncanny welcome. Two feet, partially covered by incinerated leather, openly mock the body to which they had once been attached. There is little doubt that the lifeless fatty detritus smearing itself around this absence had once been living human tissue. A queer sensation palpates from the depths of his soul and crawls toward a forced recognition. The growing recognition of the ghoulish scene battles with and threatens his waning existence. How long could he stay here now?

Earlier, the radio alarm had pierced his consciousness, rudely tossing Toman from a dreamscape rich with the sounds and smells of the weekend past. With naked body still in knotted sheets, his fluctuating attention slowly digested the news of the mysterious disappearance of a university lecturer. Despite the temptation to cling to the raptures of sleep and continuing to savour the knotted pressure against his groin, his work head kicked reluctantly into action. He knew he would be required at the scene, and was fleetingly perturbed that he'd not been contacted directly. His role as the University's Academic Liaison Registrar said little of what he actually did, but shaped him as an intelligence sleuth – a covert seer of the academic body to which he did not quite belong, keeping a finger on its pulse, monitoring and

containing its equilibrium. His in-between status was ideal as translator and buffer, an unofficial 'fixer' for those jobs not quite befitting others' roles.

Getting out of bed required much more discipline than staying there over the last few days: no bondage restraints would propel him to dress. The room reeked of the submissions performed for others during the weekend. Such abrupt renting from those ghosts of rapture did not come readily. The bed, already unravelling its memories of ritualized transcendence, was where he wanted to stay. He would store to embodied memory his recollections and, instead, engage with a very different set of fleshly deprivations: the transformation from sated submissive sex slave to the empty rationality of work bitch was well forged by his morning routines.

Shower spray needles the newly scalloped bruises on his back and buttocks. Sharp sweet pain nurses his reminiscence of the weekend's seedy capitulations: the painful pleasures invited, the humiliations invoked, the twisted supplications performed. The generous lubed glide of shower gel a foil to those bound yearnings for touch, rationed and disciplined by loving tormentors - perfect strangers who gave freely in brutalizing his flesh for mutual pleasure. A well-meaning therapist friend had once, rather lazily he thought, framed these desires in his formative Catholic past. Although this reading yawned its coherency in his Protestant milieu, Toman derided such attempts to pathologise and explain, to rein and know this 'I' in any definitive way. The spirituality available in these cruciations had little to do with alabaster Christs or with the martyred ecstasies of sacrificing the body on the path to God. His own cruising on the edges of abjection was much more prosaic and mundane; much less a matter of the symbolic. The corporeal debasements and mortifications to feel, was, he felt, a simple but necessary compensation for the depravities of denial conventionalized in his public realm. The habit of dissembling, fashioned early for the closet, had become quotidian and then an increasingly easy way to deflect attention from his seamier private plays. However, try as he might, private and public breached

the neat confines of home and work, bleeding through each other and obliterating any sense of coherency available in either. Still, this habit of compartmentalizing was too familiar to divest himself of it now – even in this era of liberal toleration. And, in any case, he feasted on playing this double life: a form of resistance over the normed and rational performances invisibly scripted by the workplace.

Toman's attention to detail in dressing for work was no less rigorous than when staging his and others' roles in the weekends of consuming desire. The dark grey Boateng suit and black Paul Smith shirt would register the sombreness of the task ahead today, as well as fitting comfortably over the leather harness that caresses the welts on his torso. He dresses the steel chastity device - fitted on Friday night by his Master – to the right, relishing the constraint and the discomfort that will remain there for the day. The contraption is just prominent enough to justify the stolen second glances that he knows will come. Zipped and belted, he satisfies himself that, however veiled, the fantasies of his sex life protrude into that public world in which they remain largely unacknowledged and have a precarious legitimacy. Given that the academy, to which he is drawn daily, daubs such tricksterish sketches of him and his kind, he can't resist the impulse to queer its palate.

In a similarly playful gesture he knots his latest acquisition at his throat. The scarf – woven plaid satin in sable and muted coquelicot – will mark the dandy for those who notice. It will unsettle the somnambulant sobriety of the role he manages and assuage those who relegate him as exotic outsider. The educated liberals who populate his workplace run the gamut from tyrannously scruffy to nonchalantly smart. Ostensibly declaiming its significance, they insist that clothing is merely an accidental habit of their daily routine. Toman is under no such illusion; heteronormed uniforms reproducing their normative codes.

New Ferragamo boots realize his latest creation. He wonders if the effect will even be noticed.

* * *

Toman isn't sure that the security guard registered his entry to the University quad. Was it familiarity or a testament to his increasing ability to pass that allows him to roam so freely these days? Having worked hard at living under the radar he is, more recently, disconcerted by the ease of his invisibility, accentuated by suit on grey granite walls. His eyes lick the architecture that had impressed him as a fresh undergraduate. A moment's clarity crystallizes how inured he is to the contrived grandeur of this cathedral of knowing: leaded glass windows stained in the glories and canons and great men past; turrets warning interlopers who doubt the legitimacy of their belonging; gargoyles spitting their petrifying ignominy at all who pass. Ethereality threatens his sham existence, and he bemoans his neutered assimilation cloaked in the civilizing impulses of this august institution.

Against the institutional palate that attests its settlement are the fragmented ephemera of contemporary academic life. Scrappy notices code the fractured learning life of current Higher Education migrants hoping to buy their ticket to respectability. Posters for gigs and happy hour specials vie for attention amongst the banners selling the latest satisfaction survey monitoring the highs and lows of a fee-paying student body. Learning support workshops, and focus groups bent on harvesting the student voice sit alongside schedules for lectures and seminars, and mark the university's attempts to augment the commodity value of its raw material. These notifications emblemize the hesitant acknowledgment of the university's reproduction of the next compliant workforce, whilst ads for essential work experience on zero-hour contracts and for CV enhancing unpaid volunteering opportunities portend, for the learner-earners themselves, the volatile and capricious market waiting for their labour. The potential for revolution in these markers of radical change

remains silent in this communication clamour. Even the democracies of class and sexual politics calling for joint struggles in halcyon days are transmuted into atomizing discourses of dignity, of coping, of resilience. Equalities and diversity sound the death knell for the unruly times remembered by Toman's colleagues. But Toman is wary of their smug castigations, only too aware that their activism was enervated by the grants and benefits bestowed by the tail-ends of empire and the disruptions of a once organized proletariat demanding their place at the high table of a closed academy. Like him, they belonged to a generation persuaded by the rhetoric of lofty transformations rather than market-ready reproduction; of being rescued from the raucous jaws of peasantry into the liberated, if numbed jowls of middle-class chatter; of being lured from a life wearied by survival amongst the uncivilized rabble, into the cloying mediocrity of the educated and newly respectable masses.

Toman now struggles to story the dystopian changes of this life with such ease. The rationalized simplicities that framed his past knowing have fractured through the exits of a life performed in endless possibilities. There are no grand certainties to which he can cling. Even the authenticity of his embodied being is called to answer for itself.

* * *

The early shift of help-desk staff huddle at the Library entrance. Pale, red-eyed faces veil their shock in white clutched knuckles. The head of university security breaks away from a distraught colleague, allowing Toman to accompany him inside the building. Spread on the library counter is a memo from the Dean's office and the personnel file of Martin Deporres, the missing academic.

Deporres had failed to return home on Friday evening. His partner, anxious at this unusual turn of events, phoned friends and colleagues early Saturday morning without success. Lunchtime on the same day, Martin had sent the

first of a series of frantic e-mails assuring his partner apologizing for his absence, that there was no cause for concern, but that he needed some extra time out for work. He claimed that he was on the edge of a discovery that represented a breakthrough in his work and that may well revive his career. A relatively banal insight had led him to the University's archive which, it seemed, secreted details of the kind of workaday sexual chicanery that exposed the largely unnoticed heteronormativity frustrating his most recent academic work. He hinted at high-level transgressions and a series of discriminations in his own faculty that would explode the myths of equality that pervaded contemporary discourses of sexuality. The e-mails continued sporadically over the week-end, but all attempts to reply were bounced by the remote server from which he sent his progress reports. Earlier this morning, the last of the e-mails, still enigmatic and no clearer about the precise detail of his work ended. He suggested that there was a final reference which was key in unlocking the future of his work.

* * *

Toman had not really known Deporres although he'd been more than aware of him amongst the drab mass of university bodies. And he definitely remembered his first sighting. Deporres, talking conspiratorially with a female colleague in the senior common room, wore the standard white t-shirt and chinos of prey and intimated a naturally honed body underneath. Toman noted the flash of marriage band welded on Martin's finger. But it wasn't only that the ring marked Martin's monogamous respectability that vexed him. It was an exact replica of the ring bequeathed to him by his mother and which had signalled love, and now loss. Seeing the scallop-cut gleam of the rose gold ring, chipped by tiny diamonds along its ripple-finished edge transported him instantly to the warmth of their council flat kitchen on baking day and to the oven-heated comfort of his mother's crimplene skirts and love. He sees again the vivid flash of the ring as it appears and disappears in the fleshy dough of his mother's kneading. As a child, he'd been amazed that the ring,

hanging loose amongst fingers made slender by hard work and sacrifice, had never fallen off. As an adult, he appreciated the vigilance of her arthritic knuckles in keeping safe her only piece of jewellery – the one remaining sign of his enduringly absent father.

Toman struggled to return from a past best left alone and focused again on Deporres who, although casually draped over the back of a chair, exuded an easy sexuality unconcerned for attention. His seemingly lazy pose belied the aura exuding from every muscled curve. His full-length appraisal of Toman's body was perfunctory if knowing but refused easy translation into explicit cruise. Nonetheless, uninvited dark-room scenes erupted and wormed their way to Toman's groin. Despite his determination to compartmentalise his work life as a homosex-free zone, there was no denying the obvious twinge brought about by Deporres' perfunctory gaze. Toman scurried from the room as casually as his growing embarrassment would allow, and stubbornly swallowed memory reflux evoked by Martin's ring.

After this first sighting, Toman exploited his colleagues' treatment of Martin as a maverick allowing him to minimize further direct contact. However, the distance he maintained in public was matched by Martin's frequent appearances in Toman's private porn plays – scenes that compensated the asceticism demanded by his workplace, and that twisted Martin's uncanny familiarity into abstracted eroticism.

In a similar way, his colleague's reserve contradicted the gossiped intrigue from which Toman had learned Martin's back story and which was now confirmed in his personnel file. Martin had been appointed in a blaze of academic success almost two decades previously. Well known as a committed activist in the movement for LGBT equality, awarded a national teaching gong, and widely published, he was seen as a rising star in his discipline. From the start Martin had honed a particular voice in declaiming the inequality assigned to people of his ilk, and published prolifically on the

extent of homophobia in work organizations in general and in the academy in particular. He flouted the censure of Thatcher's pretended families, refused the vulnerability that gagged homosexuals working with young people, and flaunted his relationship as an emblem of his demand for equal sexual citizenship. This was an academic not so much interested in theorizing sexuality, but in naming the silences of a world clamorously noisy its sexual excesses. His energies focused on outing the contradictions of a supposedly sexless academy: the murky boundaries of tutor/tutee sexing, the policing passions of a patriarchal workplace, the impenetrable hegemony of the heterosexual academic couple. He showed how the demurely lauded sciences of the private bedroom were paralleled in the academic labour that reproduced its own sexonomy.

At one particularly heated conference Martin had intentionally inflamed his colleagues by challenging them to confront the latent homophobia on their own doorstep. Toman remembered with some embarrassment how he'd hung fascinated in the shadows, remaining unpolluted on the fringes of the debate. Bellicose in his refusal to accept his colleagues' liberal pleas that the sexual dynamics he highlighted were merely part of the natural order, an incidental and unimportant aspect of the way things are, Martin worked tirelessly in disturbing their common-sense truths. Whilst ambivalent about Martin's pleas for tolerance and equality for middleclass gay men whose pink pound had significant economic and political force, Toman secretly admired Martin's bravery in standing up and being counted.

For himself, Toman remained contented with his own much more subtle attempts at sexual subterfuge. Whatever Martin's own ideas about the political criticality of his work, he was largely dismissed by his colleagues and liberally relegated as a champion of diversity; a necessary token to the gods of inclusivity.

Much had changed in the cultural and political landscape since those heady days of identity activism in the academy. More recently, Toman had seen Martin, a mere shadow of his former fiery self, dragging his once amaranthine beauty around the regimented corridors of this corporatized institution. No longer the passionate adversary, the confident and deft trickster in debate, he now seemed completely lost and had even resorted to the shapeless garb of his liberal colleagues. Sexual citizenship rights, for which Martin had campaigned vociferously, were now enshrined in legislation. Gay men, the most obvious winners in this fight for equality, marched triumphantly ahead of their minoritized contemporaries who had formerly been allies. Toman could only imagine the dilemmas created in this terrain of legitimacy for a white, middle-class and respectably 'out' gay man whose career had been built on declaiming the exclusions of homosexuality. Had Martin lost his way in this new liberal landscape? Had the abiding resistance of his measured colleagues finally gained purchase in assimilating Martin's work? It seemed clear that the putative equality won had robbed Martin of the credibility offered by oppression surfing in highlighting the institutional heteronormativity of the academy. What was clear was that his new-found legitimacy had delivered a particular form of freedom for this, once feisty individual: the freedom to be as grey as the rest of his colleagues.

* * *

And now, in the library, yet another vision of this absent academic forced itself.

The archive reading room registered its bedlam like the residue of a tornado's squall. Computer terminals posed like bomb damaged cadavers on the carpet. Book stacks and journal racks spewed their contents in haphazard patterns around the space where a human body had once sat alive in its corporeality; the partially intact feet like the candle stubs safe from the

consuming reach of its burning wick. That something had happened here was not in dispute; that foul play was the order of the day was beyond doubt. But, for all this certainty, there was much that was not immediately clear, the uncanny definitely outweighed what was rationally knowable. Toman felt the bristle of hair on his neck. Warning bells clanked at the edges of his consciousness. The more he looked the more discomfited he became. He had a growing and pervasive instinct to get out of there. However, unlike the role-plays screened for his private pleasure, no safe-word guaranteed his exit from here.

* * *

Four months had passed. The mystery of the missing academic remained just that. Toman sat in on meetings with an equally perplexed Dean and senior Detective. In spite of pressure applied by the demands of the University's reputation, a more credible solution to the case had failed to appear. Science's facts and Literature's fictions were mined in an attempt to account for Martin's demise. Third party involvement had been ruled out but there was little agreement in accounting for Martin's combustion.

For Toman this stasis, of agreeing to disagree, fell painfully short in explaining his own concerns. It wasn't just his professional pique in failing to solve the puzzle. At best, Toman toyed with the idea that the University was unable to contain the pressurized frustrations of Martin's being. Other, more rational explanations failed to fully explain. Nor was it the cold fear that flailed his back when remembering the scene.

He was aggrieved with the uncharacteristic efficiency taken in ensuring no trace remained following the removal of the cordons and crime scene tape. What most amazed him was the erasure of the incident. Similarly, he was awed by his colleagues' attempts to sanitize their previous relations with Martin. The same people who had dogged his existence were now outing

themselves as his admirers. But this kind of revisionist history of Martin's life was not the well-spring of Toman's growing disquiet. A deep-seated dread troubled like a malignant growth from his core and fretted the chords of his very being. Since that morning in the library, he feared for his own existence: sleep deprivation did not make him feel tired; his failure to eat only seemed to sate his hunger. The lack of connection with colleagues, previously nurtured, now felt like an ache when visiting the university. Each new day wore a more exacting uniform of dislocation, a queer, spectral disembodiment. Perhaps at last, he could empathize with Martin's failed attempts to inscribe his incarceration in this liberal and heteronormative world of the academy?

Although knowing how unhealthy, he had recently haunted the archive room – drawn fatefully to stare from the vacuum where Martin's body had last rested. Time had no claim whilst sitting against the reference stacks waking Martin's absent corpse. Disconsolate at his inability to remember the scene of those final moments, he slumped on the floor, throat aching with the ghost of his tears. Fragmented questions plagued his unsettled and fading mind. What was this obsession? What did it matter that this troubled and troubling man no longer existed? Would this sinister fascination never end?

Emerging from what seemed like a deep sleep, a black-out, he fought to relocate himself in time and space. Opening eyes weary from unbelonging, he flinched from the blinding glare of winter sunshine refracted from under the heating pipes at the windowed end of the library. Tiring already in the glare of this mesmerizing light he crossed the floor, keeping the source of its brilliance in sight. Although struggling against the friction of the industrial carpet he felt himself float, unable to resist the trajectory of the beam. A sense of dread welcomed his arrival; destiny whiffed on the backs of dust mites settled since the deep-clean. Despite his reluctance he persuaded the gleaming object from under the pipes. The sheet of paper trembled as he weighed the object propelling toward him. As it came into view he refused to

apprehend its magnitude. But clarity assailed him, contriving the contours of his own life.

His doppelganger's ring lay on the dusty sheet of paper: no facsimile here. It was unmistakably also his mother's. The smell of burning flesh quelled the fear of his own departure. Martin's death felt only too real as he remembered his paralyzed awe in watching his flesh burn.

Chapter 3: Undisciplined¹¹ Psychology: Fragmented ins and outs

Or ... Becoming an (a/sexual) academic.

This chapter outlines some of my engagements with the discipline of psychology, given that this is the formative discipline in and through which I become academic. More specifically, the chapter examines some of the techniques/frames in mainstream psychological discourse and interrogates how they configure (homo)sexuality in general, and the/this homosexual in particular. The chapter attempts to unfold some of those discursive techniques through an autoethnographic exploration of my own encounters with the discipline.

As Maclure (2003, p. 120) would have it, 'We are caught in the web of language that gives us our worldview and, indeed, our very self-hood'. Similarly, Epstein (2010, p. 87) invokes us to think about sex/uality as 'something produced and normatively regulated through discourse and representation'. In the context of this discursive approach, and given that I position my relation to psychology and its discourses as formative, then I wonder at how the silences of a largely Behaviourist and Cognitivist approach to psychology – into which I became disciplined – might have shaped the processes of sense-making through which I achieved a very particular and partial understanding of my(sexual)self. The autoethnographic analysis contained in the chapter, then, addresses a range of questions, including: In what ways did the technologies of psychology seduce me to calibrate and

¹¹ Here I borrow 'undisciplined' from Halberstam's (2011) *The Queer Art of Failure* in which s/he argues for an anti-disciplinary orientation towards knowledge production. Halberstam suggests that 'We may, ultimately, want more undisciplined knowledge, more questions and fewer answers' (p.10). In this vein, I adopt a fragmentary mode of writing to disrupt the disciplinary sensibilities that I developed in Psychology.

then categorise myself into the binaried hierarchies of the hetero/homo? What were the effects of such classification, the normalising tendencies that this brutal disciplining requested/suggested (Rubin, 1993)? What were the allures of the 'disciplinisation' – as part of a larger 'psy' complex (Rose, 1998) – to which I became subject? In this way, I am interested in how some of the discursive techniques of truth-telling, encountered in psychology, shaped an understanding of earlier, non-normative sexual relations¹² as 'homosexual/gay'. This is an opportunity to finally put in writing the twists and taints of a disciplinising psychology in shaping this homosexual, this gay.

This chapter has been one of the most troubled and troubling sections of the dissertation to write. The trouble reflects something of my ambivalent relation to the discipline of psychology which is, itself, like polluted air to the consumptive: on the out-breath I am scorning and scornful; each in-breath seems only possible if I worry enough that that scorn might shatter its target and disappear me. I am only too aware of the glibness with which I describe myself as an 'anti-psychologist' when describing my disciplinary affiliation. Indeed, my current departmental work locates me outwith psychology. And yet, it is my knowledge of, and my relation to, psychology's discourses that sanction my paid labour in the academy. I am wholly aware that psychology forms the 'master narrative' of my academic identity: psychology paves my entry into the academy, and configures me in my trajectory from pre- to post- in its claims to modernity. It is the weft on which the fabric and fabrications for my identification as academic rests and is often legitimated. And, it is in reaction to that knowledge nexus that this PhD rests. In this way, critiquing psychology, seems like a precarious project, one that makes me catch my breath, and stumble, and stumble on – determined to unmantle myself from the tools of the master but ever fearful of what that uncovering might mean.

¹² These early, non-normative sexual relations are discussed at greater length in chapter 9

The ambivalent desire to critique psychology whilst recognising myself as being a subject of, and subject to, the discourses of that formative discipline haunt my head with shouts and doubts of my ability to do so. There are feelings of dread that welcome me to this aspect of the project – that I will finally be found out, unmasked in all of my most fearfully imagined inadequacies, exposed in my inability, and for the naïve foolishness that would even contemplate such critique. In this, I suspect, I am as any child who dares speak ill of its progenitor, the master of its house. However, there are particular characteristics of this disciplinary forebear that themselves weigh in on this feeling of dread.

Formal psychology is difficult to conjure as a unitary body of knowledge. It is an unruly body of knowledge, formalised and formalising for well over a century; a body of thought that traces its geneses in a network of rhizomatic root stems that endlessly propagate in its own defence (e.g. see: Hegarty, 2011; Johnson, 2013; Teo, 2005). The discipline is a loosely-coupled network of theoretical and applied branches that is constantly challenged internally and externally, and is constantly changing in order to assimilate that critique into its own mainstream. Psychology's resilience in the face of challenge and critique, and its ability to promote and sell both its services and the need for those services (Teo, 2005, p. 12) has been remarkable, allowing it to retain its status as the progenitor of a modern individual as a complex but predictable set of cognitions and behaviours (Parker, 2007). It is also a body of knowledge that has morphed and grown since I was subject to its grip.

Despite this shape-shifting and change, and the internal fragmentation that characterises the discipline's location both in the academy and in the wider socio-cultural sphere, there are enough commonalities amongst its divergent branches that render mainstream psychology a legitimate target for critique as a unitary body of thought. As a discipline it has been incredibly effective in its colonisation of everyday language and thought in contemporary western

culture. It pervades the cultural imaginary (Bengston, 1991), inscribing itself in a popular and tangled (il)logic that sustains and makes seemingly durable the rationality of that individual, born to a European Protestant Enlightenment (Smith, 1998), and universalised across all (sub)cultural contexts (Rose, 1985, 1998).

And in the midst of this rational Enlightenment subject, what character is constructed as more irrational or non-rational than the homosexual of psychology? This homosexual (con)figuration, although not always explicitly enunciated, often lurks in the shadows and haunts the linear development logic of normal human-ness on which most psychological theory is foundationally based. This homosexual subject is one that seems to defy and deny itself the rational logic of the healthy, self-actualising individual of psychology's mainstream. It is from within this power/knowledge nexus, the foiled and foiling imbrication of the homosexual in psychology's construction of the (ab)normal that I am at once borne out of and simultaneously desirous of extricating myself.

In managing to engage with the master narrative of my academic identity, in seeking to queer and query psychology's role in constructing this particular homosexual, I reflect through an exploration of the indefinite figuration of 'the (homo)sexual'. In doing so, I solicit the use of the "uncanny" as explored by Nicholas Royle's (2003) importuning of Freud's 1919 essay *Das unheimliche*. This double move, itself a sleight, is used in attempting to articulate my engagements with what seems foundational but simultaneously ephemeral in my encounters with psychology: at once familiar and known yet simultaneously beyond reach, strange. The chapter does so through a series of 'flickering moment[s] of embroilment in the experience of something at once strange and familiar' (Royle, 2003, p. vii). It offers a fragmentary articulation of fleeting moments of confessional knowing and unknowing, uncanny glimpses into a past that trail into the present, flashed sightings of 'uncertainty, in particular regarding the reality of who one is and what is

being experienced' (Royle, 2003, p. 1). The chapter attempts to conjure and reflect the uncanny nature of my engagements with psychology in making sense of my already queered sexuality, a sexuality that renders the subjectivity attached to the experiencing body as 'double, split, at odds with' (Royle, 2003, p. 6) the assumed heterosexuality of its normality and my current (homo)sexual/gay self. It seeks to illuminate, more specifically, how the histories and technologies of psychology (con)figure in the production of (me as) the homosexual. The chapter speculates on how the uncanny abjection of the (homo)sexual within discourses of psychology functioned for this acolyte of the discipline. The chapter presents the (homo)sexual of psychology as always already a beast of limits, of opposition, of otherness, of bent and leaking limits. Concomitantly, I argue that the experience of locating the/this (homo)sexual in psychology is one of limit-testing in the uncanny landscape of a discipline with unfixed borders, borders that are themselves erected and constantly policed through the discipline's ritualized reliance on a very particular version of (a) scientific method, on peculiar ideas and ideologies of the contained and hermetically sealed individual, on its fetishisation of the (ab)normal, and its demand for disciplinary regularity in terms of method.

In doing so, the chapter adopts a fragmentary form. This form might signify my inability to construct paragraph transitions, to master the modernist trope of smooth uninterrupted text. Alternatively, through this format, I hope to signify some of the indeterminacy, the uncertainty that haunts the confusions of my claims. In this latter I am indebted to Moreira's (2008) performance autoethnography '*Fragments*' for highlighting the sense in a seemingly chaotic form of representation. I am reminded of two footnotes from his paper that inspire my use of form in this chapter:

Note 17: 'I do not live life entirely. I live by fragments, hegemonic or not. I can only know the world through a politics of representation. My life does not come to me by

generalizations which are supported by stats equations. Nor does it come as a thick description or as well-written story. It comes in pieces. It comes in fragments that take many forms, such as memories, conversations, and so on. Fragments that change, moves, and dance around. The only part that is not a fragment is the body. My body is a whole and the paradox is, that has been the only entire thing in this performance, it cannot be represented as whole. Once my body transforms himself into words in this performance, it loses its entireness and becomes fragments.'

And

Note 23 'I can only represent glimpses, vignettes, fragments. My fragments. And through my fragments, I can show others' too. Just fragments because it is by them that I lived in my surreal postmodern "reality." This has been one of my struggles in academia. My fragmented surreal postmodern life is not neat enough to fit in a more traditional or complete understandable theory/ method. If my own life is not neat enough, how can I assume that the others' are? I cannot and do not. I do not have this imperialistic arrogance.'

In recognising the fragmentary nature of my workings out of the power/knowledge nexus of psychology's homosexual, I invoke Royle's (2003 See chapters 5 and 8 respectively) ideas of the 'bullet point' and 'starred item' (*), of night writing into the darkness, of unknowing, as points under which and from which a writing is made possible. This convention is, at times, also aligned with Moreira's attempts to represent the fragmentary, the deceit involved in representing as if the author were coherent.

* Psychology was not a first choice of study at undergraduate level, it happened serendipitously as part of what felt like escape. Originally, not so much an explicit choice, but a happenchance fitting with school grades, a late application and the availability of a place in a university away from the crowd who had populated my school years, facilitated by a newly established will to North/South cross-border cooperation in Ireland. On the back of a will

to help people, and challenge the social injustices of which I was becoming increasingly aware, I discovered a desire to study within the social sciences. In as much as my choices were invested with projections of post-university work opportunities, social work seemed an obvious choice – a recognisable labour destination into which I could pour the remnants of that priestly vocation that had harboured and played out through my dalliances with the Catholic Church when growing up. Social work, I reasoned vaguely, would allow me to minister to and for the underdog but would not prohibit the fleshly gnawings that blighted any real consideration of hiding my queerness in the seminary.

* Choosing to read Psychology at university, following a generalist year in social sciences, represented a real shift in orientation. Certainly there was a growing awareness of the myriad choices from within social sciences. But there was also a sharpening focus on the occupational possibilities and economically material potentialities of some of the branches within this burgeoning field of academic studies. The shift in orientation towards psychology reflected what I might pathologise now as precocity, but could equally signal a growing awareness of the uneven dynamics of a social science labour market. Psychology's appeal lay not least in my recognition that, as a discipline, it paved the way to jobs with titles protected by an increasingly protective and powerful professional body, jobs that commanded prestige and much higher wages: the upwardly mobile peasant was making the most of his opportunities! It didn't seem like too much of a sell-out to shift my ideals of helping (Parker (2000, p. 12) argues that 'psychology increasingly seduces people into psychology through therapeutic discourse.') from what seemed like the gutter cleaning grime of social work to the more lofty therapeutic ambitions of the 'psy-professions' (Parker, 2007; Prilleltensky, 1994; Rose, 1999). The prestige and higher earning power of clinical psychology appeared preferable to social work; more fitting for a peasant with a faltering, if growing desire to make the most of the opportunities offered, aligning with the neo-liberal hegemonic positioning

occasioned by the marriage of psychology (Parker, 2007) and a soon-to-be hyper capitalism of the west.

Unlike the other sub-disciplines on offer from this generalist first year of social science, psychology's selling technique won out. Few places on the psychology degree were available; only the very best applicants would even be considered; recruitment to the degree would actually be a process of necessarily harsh selection; the academic challenges for those successful in being selected were not for the faint-hearted; the discipline was harsh and testing; the programme was only for those who could tough it out in ways that the other applied and social science options would not test. But, for those who succeeded in this quest, the rewards would be great. I was sold, hook line and sinker. The aspirant zeal with which I entered modernism through higher education was tumescent with the challenges presented through these marketing ploys.¹³

* Psychology's allure continued to unfold in a raft of unexpected ways. As a field, it operated as a blank canvas, a virgin territory; it was, for me, yet another way of running away, of creating a disciplinary fracture with previous academic studies – psychology was not at all represented in the formal second-level curriculum in the Irish Republic. This new field was like no other with which I was already familiar, this was no bucolic countryside stifled by the expectations of previous knowledge.

* Psychology offered a reprieve from the seminary and offered the promissory of rationality against the metaphysical speculations of the didactic theism in which I had so far become (Johnson, 2013, p. 131). Psychology promised a different kind of smoke-and-mirrors magic – a magic x-ray for the

¹³ I entered university in 1984, and the Psychology department of the University of Ulster at Jordanstown in 1985. This was prior to the mass expansion of Higher Education and of Psychology as an academic discipline in the UK. 15 students out of 120 studying social sciences that year admitted to the Psychology programme.

personality and neuro-cognitive structures of being and mind; a peep-hole into the new western front of knowledge. Kvale (2003, p. 581) suggests that 'Theology as a truth guarantee was replaced by the new sciences, and psychology took over religion's task of providing guidelines for human life' with the transformation of truth-seeking invested in an Enlightenment Protestant project of psychology through the salving introspection that shaped an actualising and radicalised individualism. Now, instead of the salvation of my soul, I had the self and the psyche to integrate and realise.

* Psychology offered the promise of belonging in the face of my desperate attempts to forget, to leave behind all that had gone before. It offered the possibility of becoming part of a culture, becoming part of a 'tribe' within the wider academy (Becher, 1994). I was offered an entry point to a new culture, one that had a particular kind of power – student parties were much more fun at the mention of psychology as my major! – and one that would link me across institutions nationally and internationally. Psychology didn't just offer the mastery of new knowledge, and the legitimacy of claiming expertise in such knowledge, it offered a sense of belonging to a whole heritage of knowing whilst simultaneously offering to further refine the edges of knowing. This was an opportunity to re-bed and bend myself back into a community, an embedding to refresh the uncauterized tears and ruptures that felt like my running away from the past and its tissue ties: here was an opportunity to suture myself back into a community of choice, to be an interacting part of a wider social and cultural arena. I could belong, no longer a hermetically sealed individual failing to make sense of the connections already available around them.

* The discipline demanded of my undergraduate psychology training was an exacting master. It soon became clear that anything less than absolute devotion and absolute fidelity would not suffice. The success of my subjection into the all-consuming acrobatics of its techniques is astounding in retrospect: the fabrications of the abstracted individual that it

studied; the precision butchery of even this abstracted individual into smaller atomised components – attitudes, behaviours, motivations, reaction times, sensations, personality traits; the statistical techniques that made this individual (and its ‘othered’, abnormal opposite) calculable and calibratable; the abstracted operationalisation of lived concepts into measurable variables; the finer nuances of error, bias and artefact in experimental design. All these and more took hold and exercised what felt like the very essence of my being. Its (il)logics occupied all of those plasticized head spaces for thought that I had forged in making sense of the cacophonous nonsense required of a non-normatively sexualized younger life. And anyway, there was little time for body now in psychology’s self-enslavement to the Cartesian dictum *cogito ergo sum*. I became pure mind, merely brain, a super-charged cognitive processor. The compulsions to excel produced a certain quality of uncanny wariness in my obsessive supplication to its subjecting demands. Those pathologising lenses, haunting and hunting the addictions, tics and obsessions of all those outliers daring to stray too far from the norm, threatened to turn their gaze towards this seemingly obsessive and fetishistic paraphilia for psychology’s techniques that pervaded my engagements with its discipline. The more sadistic its silent command for disciplined mastery, the more I seemed willing to surrender in supplication to its colonizing appeal.

* In tracing the development of psychology in England across the twentieth century, Rose (1985, p. 5) argues that after WWII the discipline became ‘a science of the individual’ with a distinct aim of ‘differentiation and quantification’. Celebrating my entry into what felt like a community, into distributed networks of belonging through my enculturation into the discipline, was in ironic tension with psychology’s very own focus in directing my attentions to the exclusive study of the individual and its location on a gradable scale of aggregated individuals (Danziger, 1994). In my special location of becoming an acolyte of this new science of the individual, I also became one of the many; a target for its knowledge, a collection of attributes and traits that were subject to knowability. As such, the non-normative

sexual life that came with me into psychology (see note 2 above) was under threat of closer examination.

* Psychology's construction of, and rigid focus on, the individual (Kvale, 2003; Parker, 2007; Prilleltensky, 1994) and its increasingly atomising focus of study on characteristics of that individual, robbed those very real living people – on whose part it claimed to work – of the importance of the wider social and cultural dynamics in which they were located. Parker (2007) argues that psychology's rise to dominance from the late nineteenth century is linked to its subservience to capitalism. Danziger (1994) argues that modern psychology's development was strongly linked to its own self-interest in how it could sell its services to the market (see also: Teo, 2005, p. 12). The discipline's construction of society as simply the aggregated sum of individuals occluded an analysis of the cultural, symbolic and political aspects of such an aggregation of individuals (Prilleltensky, 1994). This individualising impulse of the discipline aligned perfectly with the dramatic rise of a neo-liberal and hyper-capitalist zeitgeist that pervaded the wider Western cultural milieu of the late 1980's in which I became disciplined in its nexus. These economic dynamics, silenced in the purported value-neutrality of the discipline, played to the comforting aspirations of a peasant finally landed in the apprenticeship halls of the academy. I could become respectable if my motivations and orientations were of the right calibre.

* Another of the foundationalist claims of psychology lay in its determinist and materialist bent. According to this ontological position, the characteristics of a universalised human are invested in the innate traits of personality, themselves driven by the brain: 'Thus all behaviours are "biologically determined" in the sense that all events are caused, and behavioural events are caused by brain states, which are "biological" (Bailey, 2003, p. 52). In terms of sexuality, this shaped a confused and confusing series of metaphors in an attempt to predict and explain (normal) sexual behaviour; a significant feature of this trope of explanation invariably

focussed on the 'abnormal' of sexuality. There was the 'lordosis' of castrated male rats which could be seduced into sexually submissive positions through administering female hormones. These rats, the non-human models of human biology and cognition (Danziger, 1994), were clearly not properly male and were therefore invaluable in 'explaining' male homosexual behaviour. There was the feminine side of the lateralized brain that concatenated left-handedness with male homosexuality. This left-handedness, the untrustworthiness, the uncanny 'sinistrality' attaching to the homosexual (Bailey, 2003, p. 64), was always a bit queer in its connotative ability to signal abnormality – especially when associated with the doubly queer of the homosexual. Monozygotic and dizygotic twins were brought into the fray to lend support in the clearly sought out location of homosexuality in the realm of genetic heritability, the endless and circular debate over the predominance of nature or nurture. Somewhat later, there were LeVay and others' attempts to find a homosexual brain: neuroanatomical differences between homosexual and heterosexual male brains were compared with (mostly) heterosexual female brains from the 1990's onwards and found to be more similar than those of heterosexual men. These attempts seemed to me to be yet further attempts to locate the cause of homosexuality in the biology of the human, essentialising (homo)sexuality as yet another fixed and natural trait of the abstracted individual who was the object of psychological knowledge (see especially Wilson & Rahman, 2005). This work may have been done for perfectly sympathetic reasons in the context of what Robinson (2006) refers to as *the Queer Wars* in which homosexuality was constructed as beyond the 'choice' of individuals and therefore part of the natural range of human sexuality. As such, it ought not be 'cured' and should be accepted and tolerated. However, this construction of an essentialised (homo)sexuality concomitantly means that the hetero/homo binary stays intact and acts to exclude alternative versions of sexuality that might be invested with and intersected by a wider set of politics relating to gender, class, race, nation and/or (dis)ability.

* Rose (1985, pp. 3–4) argues that ‘the conditions which made possible the formation of the modern psychological enterprise in England were established in all those fields where psychological expertise could be deployed in relation to problems of the abnormal functioning of individuals.’ Marecek & Hare-Mustin (2009) explore the ways in which the continuation of psychology perpetuates a ‘diffusion of deficit’ (Gergen, 1990) in the areas of mental health as well as around intimate life. Psychological knowledge of the individual, and knowledge of the sexual in particular, was (and continues to be) largely constituted through the poles of normality/abnormality. The academic psychology of my undergraduate subjugation to its discipline didn’t often explicitly address the homosexual, but its figuration was there in the background, in the allusions to ‘normal’ development, behaviour and cognition. It loomed as the unspoken, the uncanny Other against which normality, acceptability and respectability, were constructed. The homosexual, already conceived as a ‘type’ through bio-medical purity movements (Mort, 2000) and sexological work (Weeks, 2007), was reinforced in psychology and festered in what seemed like the histories of its own neurotic working out the aetiology of this deviant and abnormal animal. This ‘type’ – like the connections traced between discredited notions of the ‘degenerate’ and the psychopath across a century of psychology (Jalava, 2006) – lingers in the liberal humanist constructions of the ‘gay’ male in contemporary psychology’s LGBT+ concatenations. And in all this, the spectre of an abnormal childhood sexuality sat and sits uncomfortably and at odds.

* The ‘norm of normality’, modelled as it was around the rabid insistence of a Gaussian normal distribution, conjures a stricter adherence to a stable and coherent middle ground than other models of statistical effect. This Gaussian distribution is less tolerant of outliers (O’Boyle Jr. & Aguinis, 2012) and those cases that might (through resistance, through preference, through political choice?) lie at the extremes. This normal distribution was required to make our statistical tests work – it seemed that less attention was paid to whether, and how accurately, the statistical modelling necessarily

reflected the concept in human behavioural terms. What mattered was that our hypotheses could be tested. And when the data didn't conform to this Gaussian curve, when it was positively or negatively skewed – indicating further variance from means – then it was assumed that there was error in the data, or an unexplained artifact of this particular sampling exercise, rather than in the theoretical assumptions framing that data. Outliers could be eliminated or managed through particular mathematical functions so that they would conform to a normal distribution. So, although data were sacrosanct in the lumpen empiricism attaching to the psychology into which I was inculcated (and that remains the abiding approach (Parker, 2007)), it was perfectly legitimate to manipulate and exclude data to make it fit the apriori assumptions accorded the concept under investigation. The assumptions attaching to the normal distribution reflected the apriori and postpriori theoretical assumptions that framed the empirical work demanded of psychology's empiricist bent. The 'normal' also signified what is considered 'natural' in samples of cases (often individuals or elements of their being) and therefore of populations. Here was another example of contradictory knowledge claims in which it made sense not to ask too many, or certainly questions that were too penetrating. I was astounded that, as university students, we were exhorted to think laterally and critically, to question and critique. But there was a limit to one's questions, to the remit of critique (Parker, 2007): questions that queried the technocratic procedures of disciplinary practice were welcomed, they introduced disturbance that was easily re-assimilated; questions framed from outside the realm that legitimated psychology in its own terms were considered bad form, beyond the pale. I thought I'd left such constraint on questioning behind – don't question your elders, don't question the priest, don't question your teacher – in the cacophony of discordant voices from a previous time pressing sense from nonsense. Perhaps psychology was teaching me that knowing and knowledge was intrinsically conservative, circulating endlessly but with different language games cloaking its targets. Perhaps, in this, I was also provoked into recognising that chronarchical time, with a linear past, present

and future, and as calibrated in the grand narrative of learning progress, was itself somewhat queer, ebbing and flowing, endlessly repeating.

* Kvale (2003, p. 586) argues that 'Throughout the 20th century the subject matter of modern psychology moved from an internal consciousness to external behavioural responses and back again to internal cognitive process in a mind.' The department in which I studied was largely stuck in the Behaviourist zeitgeist of the mid-20th century with only the slightest nod to the late 20th century Cognitivist turn in psychology. This department, wedded as it was to stimulus → response associations of classic Behaviourism, reduced human action to "contingencies of reinforcement' [fabricating] a world of behaving organisms, behaving as if they had no thoughts about what was happening to them, and the thinking that does occur is treated as an epiphenomenon of the behaviour' (Parker, 2007, p. 43). Indeed, at times, this approach could dispense with humans all together relying instead on the eponymous white lab rat as a substitute model (cockroaches, pigeons, monkeys and other animals were other options (Parker, 2007, p. 81)) on which the abstracted, 'natural', ahistorical, learning essences of the human, excavated of their free will and agentic thought, might be studied.

I wish they'd not handle me quite so much. Oh, they've let me down. I was convinced that I was going to get dropped again and have to suffer all that screaming as I scrambled for cover along that very slippery floor. I'm back in that very strange place again where they keep putting me day in and day out: lots of hallways and doors and dead-ends. There's cheese at the end. I've had it before – although the quality's not always up to much. They'll be timing me and I'm not sure if I should be going fast or slow really – not a clue from the great gloved one! But I feel tired today. Can I really be bothered performing for them as well as I did yesterday? I suppose the quicker I get on

with it, the quicker they'll put me back in the cage. Oh, there's not that smell of wee and fear today. And so far, at least, it looks like they've not got the electric shock grids going on. Why are they so intrigued with how I and the other rats remember where the cheese is?

It's that bell again. That's dinner, I'm sure. He'll stroll in here with food, as if it didn't matter. As if he didn't know that we know how dependent we are on his bringing food. I'm so hungry. Oh, even thinking about it makes my mouth water. I'm sure that's the same bell.

The unthinking rats and salivating dogs of Behaviourist lore implicated me as one hungrily desirous of mastering the techniques and (il)logic of psychology's discourses. Was I really studying this subject? Was I simultaneously an object of its study? Was there any thinking to be done at all? Surely all that I amounted to was an automaton responding to the stimuli of my disciplinary masters. But if that was the case, then was their/my thought capable of creativity and innovation? Could they work beyond the confines of the other great fathers whose work we were re-creating in our laboratories?

More specifically in terms of my project here, in what ways did behaviourism's evacuation of thought or meaning shape my understanding of embodied sexuality: of behaviour, of desire, of orientation? Was I merely a slave to my own autonomic nature, a mindless salivating subject to all those previously programmed stimulus → response associations in sexual terms? In what ways did my fellow-rat's scramblings in the maze get transmuted onto my abnormally developed childhood? Did this mean that I could be re-oriented, re-aligned, cured? Or what pathological configurations did this

tradition conjure along the abnormal arcs that lay my early experiences of sex? Surely I should know that a homosexual is my most obvious fate. Perhaps I needed to be on guard against the more likely outcome of becoming a freak or criminal? Certainly, I should not attempt to embrace these previous associations, attribute them with the productivity of their political potential to disrupt and question, to queer and query what is fabricated as normal.

* The transition into psychology occasioned no major ruptures in the ways in which it afforded understandings of the world. Parker (2007, p. 74) points out that 'psychological descriptions unfortunately chime all too well with commonsensical views of who is 'mad' and who is 'bad''. Sexuality, I would argue, was treated in a similar way – that the discipline could hardly have been seen as taking a radical stance in opposition to what Probyn (1995) refers to as the 'folk beliefs' of a wider heteronormative culture. Indeed, in many ways psychology could be accused of having 'colluded in the configuration of such folk beliefs' (Probyn, 1995, p. 448). Psychology treated (homo)sexuality with the kind of 'abiding anti-erotic prejudice' that Robinson (2006, p. 149) argues is characteristic of wider US culture. Sex/uality and sex/gender were most often treated as an independent variable in testing for differences across a range of psychological traits (Bendl, Fleischmann, & Walenta, 2008). As such, they were constructed as natural and innate divisions in the abstracted and universal human. Relatedly, sex/uality and sex/gender were constructed as mutually exclusive categories – a reification of the binaried oppositions of wider 'folk beliefs'. However, psychology's representation of these ideas was all the more pernicious as they were presented with the avowedly neutral force accorded 'scientific objectivity' and 'fact'. In doing so, they produced normative descriptions of (homo)sexuality that 'slip into naturalised prescriptions' (Burman, 1994, p. 4), ratifying an abnormal (homo)sexuality as the stable and stabilising other of heterosexuality.

* What were the lines between the private and the public, between the personal and the professional that I started to draw during this time of becoming psychologised, and that were facilitated by Psychology's obdurate adherence to a Cartesian split between mind and body? In what ways was I, and continue to be, colonized by psychological discourses in configuring my sexuality? Wilton (2000, p. 240) argues that in terms of sexuality as a feature of the individual, 'all available words seem both inadequate and pregnant with excess implication. Words such as personality, persona, ego, mind, self, will or identity are firmly located within a psychological paradigm which is itself complicit in the Cartesian problematic.' In what ways does the hegemonic psychologisation of (homo)sexuality occlude alternative imaginings that might allow a re-scripting of the sexual, a re/con/ceptualisation that pays homage to the richness of sexuality?

* In what ways did mastery of psychology allow me to think of myself as 'outside of' those who were the putative targets of psychology's study? In what ways do the tensions of placing myself a subject to expertise in psychology reinforce the already dissembling fractures required in presenting abnormality to a world that could most easily entertain normality without going into some sort of hyper/super drive of intervention, remediality, reorientation or cure? How did these fractures, in becoming a subject to and of psychology, model the separations between a sense of self and body nursed through the chasm of un/acceptable early sexuality? How did a growing expertise of the individual help me to forget that that individual – itself an invention – was also an invention that applied to myself and that it most usually was seen in abstraction from the sensual body that I dragged along with me across and through Psychology's abnormalities and psychopathologies?

* Who were/are the subjects and objects of psychology; the 'inside' and 'outside'? Which individuals become the imagined subjects of a psychologising production of knowledge; which the objects of that

knowledge? As a student-apprentice, I was fashioning myself in the fashionable discourses of psychology, the knower of the subject and the knower of subjects as objects. I wonder how I cut a knowing lay between these confusions of subject and object, of knower and known? Or whether these confusions acted as device, a technique of inculcation into the pervasive and colonizing discourses of psychology? It strikes me too, when remembering more specifically of learning about (the homo)sexual/ity of/in psychology, that there was a mysticism of what was known, what was knowable, what refused knowledge, what was best left outside of knowing, what was too embarrassing to even attempt to know. Like Royle's Freud who is uncannily lost in accounting for the uncanny because he 'is subject to the subject, at least half under its hypnotic sway' (2003, p. 13), my engagements with the (homo)sexual in psychology produced an irresistible temptation, an allure full of the enticements marked by the liberal revulsions permeating an American-led discipline recovering from its newly tolerant decision to remove homosexuality from the DSM III just over a decade previously. Mastery fought with its irreconcilably desirous other, 'surrender' (Maclure, 2003, p. 120), in my furtive and embarrassed glances towards the homosexual in psychology text and lore. The homosexual, in its package of homosexuality, peeked from the weighty introductory tomes that established the territory of psychology. It competed with some of the more legitimating frames for approaching sexuality within its terrain: the endless search for sex differences, 'normal sexual development', moral development, transsexualism and other exotic paraphilias of the erotic. This positioning of the (homo)sexual, simultaneously a stalwart of abnormality and an ephemeral production for display in shoring up (hetero)sexuality, the eternal supplement to/of normal sexuality (Derrida, cited in Maclure, 2003, p. 123), produced an uncanny distance in my desire to explore it more fully from a legitimate subject position. And there was all that objectivity and value neutrality in the performance of a detached researcher and, of course, being subjective was the worst of all sins (Parker 2007 see especially Ch. 2). There was the balancing act of keeping myself out of it and failing, trying to put myself in

and failing doubly. These practices of boundary maintenance were (and remain) a Sisyphean labour as 'the 'outside' is always already in the 'inside' (Maclure, 2003, p. 113). I remember my engagements with the phantom (homo)sexual of psychology as 'an experience of something duplicitous, diplopic, being double. It calls for diplomacy, the regulation of a strange economy, an art of negotiation which presupposes a kind of double talk, double reading, double writing' (Royle, 2003, p. 16). The doubling, the doublet-ing cloak of becoming fluent in psychological discourse without explicit recourse to (my homo)sexuality, mirrored some of the many dissembling enactments of presenting abnormality in the mainstream prior to entering psychology. This subject then, increasingly recognising itself as sexually perverse, insisted on the phantom homosexual as an obvious trope in which to house those earlier sexual interactions that railed against normalising impulses. Mastery and surrender then flicker backwards and forwards across the tensioned divides of achieving expertise on the inside and residing as a copy of one of those abnormals furnishing such expertise.

* Stretched across what still seems to me an irresolvable tension in the very foundation of psychology, what Kluckholm and Murray posit as 'Everyman (sic) is in certain respects (a) like all other men, (b) like some other men, (c) like no other man' (1948;35, cited in Doherty, Shemberg, Anderson, & Tweney, 2012), I felt like I had not moved far from the fabulously mind-bending and queer metaphysics of my formative Catholic doctrine: three persons in one God, transubstantiation of body and blood, the ascension of Mary the Mother of God into Heaven *virgo intacta*. How could we be the same, completely unique, and at the same time different too? And how was this tension conflated in the largely parametric statistical manoeuvrings applied in the pursuit of nomothetic causal laws? Where did the 'unexplained variance' in data sets go to? And how did it get explained away as 'error' in the sample (Doherty et al., 2012)? How did these techniques hide the kind of difference that might be possible and that I was anxious to 'discover', to see evidence for in the sexual and sexualised ghosts

that populated those samples across the seemingly endless psychological studies? The (homo)sexual, it seemed, might have erased itself in 'error'.

* Lamiell (2013), in his historical accounting for how statistical techniques began to have so much authority in an emerging twentieth century psychology, highlights the ways in which studies concerned with attributes of individuals (e.g. personality, attitudes) can only generate knowledge about those attributes and NOT about the individuals who happen to be carriers of that attribute under study. Lamiell laments the fact that 'The knowledge yielded [from such studies] is thus not knowledge of individuals, but instead knowledge of *attributes*. Unfortunately, this distinction would soon become obscured.' (p.66). Lamiell points to the fact that '... knowledge of individual differences variables is quite literally knowledge of no one' (Lamiell, 2013, p. 70). This 'butchering' of whole humans reminds me of the kinds of critique offered about porn – about the ways in which women are represented metonymically by parts of the body in this genre. Was/is psychology a kind of knowledge porn, particularly reminiscent of the close-up fetishisation of gonzo porn where excitement is elicited in the close-up, tight-framed scopophilia attuned to the minutia of the sexual act; a porn which objectifies particular parts of the (sexed) individual and treats these as independent of the body of which they are a part? Perhaps this allowed me to forget that I was human, with a gendered and sexed body rather than a series of loosely (if at all) connected micro elements: traits, desires, behaviours, orientations, potential psychopathologies.

* Psychology's fictions or at least its attempts to 'clean up' and study 'ideal', unreal or at best not real life in its 'abstracted' experimental mode in terms of sexuality through neuro-imaging (Dussauge, 2013) produced a strange and uncanny knowing of this abnormally (homo)sexual subject. Dussauge (2013, p. 139) characterises the ways in which psychology's reductionist methodology in studying sexuality becomes an issue when the 'few well-chosen, meaningfully and carefully idealized, tightly

scripted, sexual acts' in the laboratory are subsequently meant to signify the messy 'outside-scanner sexuality' in the 'real world'. 'When neutrally framed, sexuality is idealized: as pure (ageless), perfectly oriented along the homo/hetero-axis, bodiless, distilled to an essence independent of its subjects and feelers.' (Dussauge, 2013, p. 144).

* My postgraduate education focussed on the applied, sub-discipline of industrial/organisational psychology which grew out of a range of management movements and devoted itself to controlling and regulating the intellectual labour of employees through the dissection and manipulation of the employee for the ends of industrial hygiene and efficiency (Jacques, 1996; McKinlay & Starkey, 1998). Psychology figures strongly in extracting surplus value from the employee (Parker, 2007), especially through its practices and techniques by which the employee is accounted for (Miller & O'Leary, 1987) and held to account (Townley, 1994) to the exigencies of capital. Explicit ideas of sexuality were largely absent from these psychological accounts of effectively managing the employee. Indeed, sexual identity and orientation were, certainly to begin with, hardly voiced and later only as part of the 'mosaic of diversity' (Kandola & Fullerton, 1994) that allowed a more liberal but efficient management of the full range of human resource (Bendl et al., 2008). Although there have been subsequent attempts to 'queer that a little, to fuck it up' (Parker, 2002, p. 147)¹⁴, I had to wait several years after my masters to witness a tentative but emerging focus on gender and sex/uality in the sub-discipline. However, the ways in which the practices and techniques of accounting and accountability might be applied in 'understanding' human sexuality were certainly not lost on me. Townley's (1994) ideas about the individual as object and subject of Human Resources Management discourses were particularly informative when combined with

¹⁴ I really like Martin Parker's 'justification' for using this otherwise verboten phrase in academic management speak in a footnote in his paper: 'I use this word a lot here because it is bellicose, erotically intimate and ironic. It also has some usefully messy connotations – in terms of fucking things up'.

Fuss' (1991) and Sedgwick's (1994) accounting for the in/out dynamics of the closet.

* In all of this work, it appeared to me that there was something neurotic in attempting to establish the aetiology of the homosexual, a reification of the pathology that inhered in this cultural figure even when the bible of clinical psychology replaced the mental health diagnosis of homosexuality in the early 1970's. Unlike some of its more radical disciplines in the social sciences and the humanities, I detected little attempt to shift its stance from questioning, 'as had been traditional from the late nineteenth century, what are the *causes* of homosexuality, but rather, why are we so concerned with seeing homosexuality as a condition that has causes?' (Weeks, 2012, p. 530). Although psychosocial and social constructionist perspectives were brought to play in these early encounters with psychology, these latter seemed like mere addenda, a fulfilment of an expectation to balance an argument rather than as a set of serious alternative and plausible explanations of the phenomena under study. I remember learning the ABC (Antecedent, Behaviour, Consequence) primer of Behaviourist psychology, and recognised the scientific parsimony in this and many of its other pillars. This parsimony, lending psychology the air of the natural sciences, was a powerful call to control and prediction, a call to a causal truth in which an anteriority might explain the present haunted in the threat of the homosexual. And I remember how the shadowy figure of the fixed homosexual loomed as a twisted subjectivity into which any sort of perverse sexuality beyond the ironically invisible 'normal' script of coupled heterosexuality might be located.

* Freud, the figure who probably had most to say about homosexuality, was perhaps the most silenced in all of the discourses flogged in under- and postgraduate encounters with psychology. Freud's narcissistic homosexual, stalled in his intra-psychic development and steered by his innate drives, was yet another pathological figure who was too involved in the anteriority of his traumas with paternal figures to realise the folly of his own

ways and succumb to the rightness of heterosexuality. Freud's ideas, reductionist as they potentially are, were side-lined because they could not be subjected to the necessary logic demanded of a scientific psychology. In being side-lined thus, they became the uncanny absence of the (homo)sexual in the disciplinary and disciplined psychology in which I attempted to make sense of a history of non-normative sexual practices and desires.

* Mainstream psychology, even when it attempted a liberal tolerant approach, most often furnished me with stories of trauma and negativity: life would be full of depression and suicide ideation; I'd hate my body and live a lonely life full of self-hatred; an outcast, burnished by the stigma(ta) of disease (HIV was another unspoken and uncanny spectre playing out in the background at this time period) (Russell & Bohan, 2006). These are the stories that incarcerate the self-identifying homosexual, or indeed sexual difference of any kind. In what ways, through psychology, was I incarcerated in the belief of cure and treatment for ills that were those of society rather than of those individuals who failed to conform or veered too far from its many imagined norms? The homosexual lurked.

Prilleltensky (1994, p. 13) argues that the discipline of psychology is particularly conservative in its relation to the socio-political dimensions of its effect, and warrants the claim of maintaining the ideological status quo in favour of those in power. Even in its changing forms he suggests that 'Although the *phenotypical* manifestations of conforming messages in psychology change with the times and with the particular school of thought, the *genotype* remains largely the same ... that different psychological paradigms have been constituted by, and constitutive of, the prevalent ideology.' (p.13). Similarly, Parker (2000, p. 12) argues forcefully that, regardless of its postmodern twists, psychology is still in thrall to the modernist conditions in which it was produced:

The old paradigms are still in place, the cultural and economic societal conditions that made psychology possible

*still reign, realism is still used by psychology when it suits it
and disregarded when it offers an account which conflicts
with it.*

It was only in 1998 that the British Psychological Society formally inaugurated a Lesbian and Gay Psychology Section. This inauguration followed the rejection of three previous proposals which were declined on the basis that they were 'too narrow' and 'too political'. Those campaigning to set up the section had been exposed to abuse by the professional body's own members (Kitzinger, 1999, p. 50), and the vote itself received the highest 'anti' vote of any BPS ballot (Kitzinger, 1999; Peel, 2012). The Section was more recently re-named and re-focussed around Psychology of Sexualities (Peel, 2012). This retrospectively garnered splice of Psychology's history, viewed from the comfort of some distance away from the profession/discipline, helps make sense of the pervasive feeling of heteronormativity that I felt when part of its milieu, and adds anecdotal support for Peels' (2012, p. 2) contemporary assertion that 'mainstream psychology, by and large, remains resolutely heteronormative, if not out and out heterosexual'.

More recently, a great deal of the literature in psychology that I encounter is that which is concerned, in a positive and liberal bent, with the experiences of lesbian, gay (and less often), bisexual and trans identifying people. However, there seems little in this literature that challenges the assumptions that people whose sexual attraction, desire and/or practices are oriented in non-heterosexual ways are already pre-figured.

Similarly, psychology's interest in the self-governing individual focuses attention on sexuality in a newly liberal psychology in very particular ways: homophobia and the homophobic replace homosexuality and the homosexual as the locus of attention without challenging the ontological bases of its own knowing, without questioning the socio-cultural frameworks through which psychology lends itself in perpetuating a heteronormative society (Monk,

2011). As Carrera et al (2012, p. 1001) argue, 'Transphobia and homophobia are usually construed as individual responses of fear, hatred, and disgust, but they are supported by more subtle, underlying heteronormative social processes.' Psychology absents itself from the contexts in which these phenomena are labelled as anything other than the recurring characteristics of the individual in a homophobic society (Chirrey, 2011, p. 294).

Homophobia and the homophobic become the new targets for 'explanation', the new pathologisable subject position vested with the taint of 'arrested development' that was once a central plank in explaining the aetiology of homosexuality itself. Interestingly this pro-gay interest in homophobia (See Bryant, 2008) concomitantly opens up new possibilities for the salvific power of the psy professional in remediating the effects of such homophobia. These shifts mark a mere turning around of identifying who is 'sick' and in need of intervention, without necessarily disturbing the heteronormative status quo of a hetero-patriarchal sexuality politics (Monk, 2011, p. 64).

Attaching to this increasing use of homophobia was the version of internalized homophobia (Russell & Bohan, 2006) with which to internalise and further blame the victims of heteronormativity for their own oppression. – great!! Lesbians and gay men thus were accorded an 'impaired identity' with 'psychological distortions and reactions' and 'negative evaluation of the self' with a 'litany of indicators' that completely misses the reactions to a politically 'homonegative' heteronormative social world. Instead, psychology was persistent in locating internalized homophobia as 'individual pathology, an indicator of maladjustment and an important target for therapeutic work'. Internalized homophobia then 'becomes a new pathway to pathologising LGBT identity' (Russell & Bohan, 2006, pp. 345–6).

A statement in (hope of) remove:

Sex and sexuality, unlike the more accepted constructionist versions of gender, remained either in the biological or in the psycho-biological. In fact the resistant strands of examining gender further concretised the biological, immanent and essentialised notions of sex that troubled psychology's fumbblings in sexuality. The homosexual haunted the edges of psychology and was reflected back in the homilies of the casual social encounter. And psychology's silence on that figure of abjection, the ghostly opposite to psychology's spectral normal, inhabited the spaces of worried rumination in the in-between of disciplined head and a social body in which I wandered, when not otherwise occupied in sharpening the expertise of my increasing subjugation in/to its technocratic rigours of 'why' and rational cause. The homosexual goose-stomped across the graves of these ruminations.

It has taken me years to deal with the aftermath of my (academic) discipline of origin. Indeed, from the writing here, I see still the many ways in which I continue to revel in revealing its architectures in the everyday and academic understandings of the sexual. These are constructions with which I continue to wrestle (more fondly now than before!).

[In/Assert] Subject to and being

There was a time when fortune had been less remiss, he thought, whilst checking off the ever-shrinking list of papers for delivery. Shelves burdened with slow-moving cheap plastic told the fall of his family's star. The fortunes of his forefathers –touched and all as they were by the guile of the gombeen – smirked at what remained. In its time the shop was a veritable emporium of the gee-gaw and warranted the family's place in the town's coterie of grandees. Unlike many border towns, this one had largely spared itself from the kind of us-and-them mentality that made the business of pleasure still possible. Even after the Civil War, there had been enough cross-border trade to subsidise the several Protestant churches – even an Orange Hall – and gave a welcome to the toffs from across the border who retired to the holiday homes they'd already set up when their sense of entitlement wasn't even in question. And that, in its turn, had drawn a horde of lesser pleasure seekers; those hoi polloi whose desire to be more than themselves for a whole fortnight in the summer had built Deco into the concrete bathing boxes and the pier on which they strolled and conjured much better times of an evening.

This bucket and spade brigade and their need for cheap souvenirs kept the till full in the summer – or at least full enough to cow the local farmers into the kind of deference that local customers should have. Tom knew all too well that the shop hung on the trade of these dung clotted regulars, it was them who kept it going in the winter lull. But, as his father always said, goodwill is only good when it's not counted on by them that makes it. Better to keep them on the back heel, not exactly tugging the forelock, but at least reminded of who was who and what was their place.

Nowadays, there wasn't really a living to be made in newspapers and sherbet dips. Wasn't Margaret herself forever on the net, buying the kinds of things that had made the family a fortune once upon a time. And what couldn't be

bought from Amazon and E-bay these days? In his darker moments he couldn't but glee at the possibility that he'd failed her in some way. Her trips to the hairdressers were few and far between now. He didn't even know that she could use hair curlers herself until he'd gone home one Saturday afternoon and seen her with a home dye kit and half a head in rollers like some alien. And, now that he thought about it, didn't she always have some excuse for not going on holidays with the golfing girls. Times changed despite his insistence on not paying attention. At some level, he knew that no amount of additional work or extra loans would make things better. But there was comfort to be had in the outward denial.

And his own brood? Well! They scoffed at everything he held dear and knew for true. The boys had little interest in the shop, and gave even less attention to the arcade that had never really taken off. He'd invested most of what was left of the family money, just before foreign holidays and home entertainment systems reached this backwater. Paul and Colm filled their heads with making it in music or in trying to live the wastrel lifestyle that they thought went with it. He couldn't understand that neither of them made anything of the opportunities on offer to them. They'd had every advantage and had turned their noses up, or pissed them away. Not a decent qualification between them and they seemed more than happy to do casual jobs for pin money. The girls weren't much better right enough, but were great at spending anything that was put in front of them. Except maybe Saoirse, the youngest. She was the brightest of the bunch and seemed keen to learn and develop the businesses. She had great ideas too and he could see that she'd be the best bet if there was any hope of getting things back on track. He loved when she spent all her time working with him in the holidays. But it didn't feel quite right. Shouldn't girls have other priorities? Leisure time, and the knack of looking good. Wouldn't they need that in catching the right man?

Still, there was no point in letting on. There were appearances to keep, standards to hold. If you started doubting, the whole thing might just crumble. Best to keep going.

Now, did I put in a Donegal Democrat for the McSorley's? Was, that somebody up at the counter? Ah yes. Reading the papers, but I'm dammed sure he'll not actually buy one.

Tom recognised him as one of a whole brood of culchies. They all came with the smell of the country, like a shadow. Regulars, they were. But not needing any sort of special attention. And, hadn't this one always had the look of strangeness about him? Hadn't he always had airs about him? Ideas above his station, I'd say. What was it that was his name now?

* * *

Unlike the shop of my memory, the place spoke more of tack than of treasure. Despite the attempts to modernise, the shop had an air of decay about it. It was a relic from a past, not yet aware of its own passing. And Tom looked at home here.

I glanced at the headlines while Tom futered absent-mindedly somewhere at the back. The headlines threatened, gnawing at the uneasy composure that I'd struggled to effect since arriving here. Ireland's news was too close to that from across the channel. Or maybe I was just too attuned now to what passed for news in England.

I'd need cigarettes for the walk.

Tom's attempt at service almost registered. Was it the half-heartedness, the lack of practice or the novelty that he was even trying? Schoolboy poetry surfaced:

*What need you, being come to sense,
But fumble in a greasy till
And add the halfpence to the pence
And prayer to shivering prayer, until
You have dried the marrow from the bone;
For men were born to pray and save;
Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,
It's with O'Leary in the grave.*

Yeats' cynicism had always felt right in Farren's. Now, it also reminded me of myriad dissatisfactions from an earlier life.

The wind whipping up Main Street fought with the tiredness of the place. Like most peripheral small towns, it had been licked by the Celtic tiger, but the signs of the good times now hung like an aging and ill-fitted Sunday-best suit.

Turning the corner onto Quay Street reminded me of hanging out, trying desperately to belong. The chip shop, the library, the doctor's surgery and the anxiety that I'd never really fit, assailed a younger me as I headed towards the sea. Montgomery Terrace, where I'd toked on my first spliff with the big boys, opened the view across the saltwater loch.

When had I first learned that this watery expanse was best kept at a slight remove? A local folklore, filled with stories of drownings and famine-relieving sustenance, had painted this sea as gluttonous and profligate, devouring the bodies and thoughts of those too irreverent to recognise its unsated appetite

for emptiness. And yet this water also held the fascination of one determined to run from the tyrannously leaden soil that dried my skin at its touch and trapped me in the clod of its loam. This waterway was my escape to the leisured urban life in which I found myself most commonly these days.

Turning my back on the pastel painted terraces of the town, once the Georgian sea-side play-ground of a planted Northern Protestantry, I pass the dowdy trim of the municipal Green and head for the scabrous solitude of the headland. The windswept ruggedness unspools the whorl of thoughts that ferries me back here.

Why do I always return to this landscape when my soul or heart or head needed the balm of heal? How does the familiarity of this formative geography offer a deeper succour than that to which I had been so eager to escape? The very same anonymity that I'd craved when growing up in this provincial claustrophobia was clearly not what I needed when I sought comfort and the space to centre myself again.

* * *

He'd just been there at first; a friend of some friends. He became a regular sight on our clubbing forays, playing just the right kind of attentive. With a fitting quip and an open intensity for chill-out gabfest, he made the ideal foil for the wit and wisdom that recreational drugs allowed me to imagine as a right. And then he became a fixture in more sober diversions too. Increasingly part of my social landscape, I noticed him more and more, a link in the networks of sexual liaison that iced the hedonism once longed for and now made life full.

At first, we were casual about and in our encounters in these fleshly pits of excess. But quite quickly, we seemed more drawn by each other's wiles. There was a connection in the bustle of bodies that penetrated the haze of

my popper-fuelled ecstasy. I think it surprised us both. This connection, a draw that we both felt happy to oblige, became an indulgence that fairly quickly fixed us as a double act that most seemed willing to accommodate.

We largely withdrew to the confines of the private and exercised the shock of finding abundance in just two. I'm not sure what John found in me. I didn't need to know, any more than what it felt to be world enough for someone else. I was fat with the joy of pleasure, given and received with equal delight. I fed on his unremitting wonder at the world, and the simple complexity that he wove in living it. He talked and laughed, shouted and shouldered as much as he offered blissful silence: quiet time to listen and to actively not be. His offer, an open invitation to share and be shared, loosed the guards that drilled against some previously imagined incursion.

Our original commitment to unruly, public sex was refracted, momentarily, into the infinite bounty of the bruising brush with one and only one. We flexed our coupling until he folded in as crux and core of me. He became the muscle that, not having prior knowledge of its existence, turns out to be essential for the newly realised twist and turn of the everyday. His body was a present for mutual exploration; our sex a palimpsest on which we found our separate paths, and scribed new routes together. Our bodily pleasures picked up pains and joys previously discarded, for whys too risky to tell. But, scrutinized anew in the unfettered bliss of our encounter, their intensity fluoresced in stellar hues toward infinite possibility. He reflected back my own desire for sex as productive force; a prospect of relations forged in fecundity rather than in the mould of colonizing constraint.

* * *

A glint of light draws my eye to the heft of the sunbeams streaming from between the clouds, just this side of the horizon. Their rays dance on the choppy grey water like the tongue of a practiced lover, and chuck their light

towards the sheltered sandy cove that had once been a favoured haunt with my aunt.

She'd responded casually to my excitement when I'd first seen sunbeams and was already half-sure of their magic. Like many times thereafter, I allowed my head to fill with her wisdom that cherished more than chided. "They're stairways for angels". "They're always there. It's only on special days that we can actually see them". "They remind us that we're never alone". I'd taken her talk with my bucket and spade and built a life in the gradual awareness that her explanation was more totem than truth. But such totems were the fabric that made life fantastic, the fabrications that made time endurable. When the chores were done, the women in my life worked the hearth with their stories of the supernatural and the real. Their traded tales told Banshee wails, themselves foretelling folks about to pass. These stories were filled with the spectral sights of devils, and fairies, and the wraiths of those already gone but not yet settled. These stories wove such nonsense into the stuff of life. They conjured a loam in which later truths were seeded.

And the gossip of the real was no less spellbinding. Dissecting the intrigues of the clachan and the townland beyond, an abundant talk praised the foibles of the young whilst petting the fallibilities of those already respected too long. Bound in promised oaths of silence, this half-secret talk, was stored till the next time of telling when furrowed again for its riches. This endless round, of delve and divulge, was the tilth that nurtured imagination.

The stories told here nourished and nurtured, whilst the chat of the men, masquerading as detached fascination for technical detail or joshing riposte, had the edge of hunt and hurt. Manly banter, postured and posed as hide-hardening fact, fed for its wit on the rivalled defeat of the other. Its soundtrack was that of constant daring do, and pulsed with the lethal beat of backwards and forwards shunt. It was a rhythm that I could never quite master; a mysterious metre that left me askew. And when the denuding

glare of its spotlight found me stilted, or worse still, struck dumb, I withdrew to the safety of difference that I claimed, and was gifted, on the back of copybook and creed.

An early recognition for bookish proficiency spared me much of the tedium of my brothers' chores and already set me aslant from their straight anxious strides toward a laboured manhood. As the youngest boy, my chores were handed down from brothers keen for promotion to outdoor work that marked them as men in waiting. And with younger sisters not quite old enough for domestic duty, my everyday tasks kept me closer to the fireside than the farmyard.

Not that I was completely immune from the seasonal peaks in the annual round of farm work. This back-breaking work still registers in my body like the chronic ache of young love – a resonance of soma wholly resistant to the passing of time. The unbroken, bended back of potato picking; the skin-piercing lance of corn stalks at harvest; the pitch of the peat sucked wet from the sodden clench of the bog. Such are the bucolic displeasures of the peasant.

* * *

Seagulls, routed from their scavenge at the pier, squawked noisily over the headland in front of me and pulled me from my reverie of what seemed like a distant past. Their caterwaul reminds me of my arrival into the anonymity of the city with its long-imagined promise of freedom and secular pleasure. I'd long since relinquished the fantasy of sanctuary in the seminary, and leaned instead on my bookishness for educational escape. The impulse to find home for my unsettled difference led me, like all roads in this regenerated city, to the newly-liberated ghetto of gay street. And I celebrated my coming with queer abandon.

Here, for a brief period of carnivalesque gluttony, I found a self; happy in communion with the taint of difference.

* * *

I take the path to the top of the headland and light a cigarette as an antidote to the breathlessness of the climb. Scanning the coastline, up past Glack and Ballybrack to the gleaming spire of St Colum's at Shroove, I feel a familiarity that never fails to tug. With my back to the wind, I look through the windswept eddies of smoke at the roil of waves scouring the gully below and momentarily trace their force to the open sea beyond Magilligan point. The path on the lower level of the promontory has long-since crumbled but the granite on which it was laid resists the insistence of the tide. The rocks, hirsute with seaweed, sit languid, resolute. All is change. All stays the same.

I watch as, below, further ahead, a group of walkers unfold into a single line to let a lone figure pass. My heart quickens. For a moment I am, again, a mere appendage to someone else's phallus, languishing in my own gift of accommodating penetration. I feel the push and pulse of anality that fucks me in gender. There is an automaticity in how the resultant twitch is offered in the familiarity of the plaid fleece, the swoosh of golden hair and the manly swagger. Where am I? What is this disorientation? What would Gill be doing here?

* * *

Perhaps in the rapture of our early sexual excess I'd just assumed that the ground on which John played was the same as mine. In our queer ghetto, hard-won from the closet, I was sure that he also cocked a snook at the lines setting out the who and what of entanglement. I was reassured by his sneer at the clamour for acceptability that belied the misrule of that rebellious sex in

which we'd first met, and was warmed by his disdain for the creep of respectability that centred the standing in our new-found village of the gay.

He'd balked, like me, at the supposed allure of the straight-acting gay, and wondered aloud at the tendency for many of these men to snub any intimation of the queen. He played along with my frustrated realisation that, even in this space of excess, faggots really could despise fags. This opprobrium was most obvious in the dismissal of those queens who flounced and frilled their way on the scene, or in derogating those Sparkle-d ladies, done up to the nines as if for bingo on the estate. It railed in the argot that told on their fear of the feminine: limp lettuce, fish, twat, bitch, pussy and gash. They slurred these metonymic deprecations with the force and venom that had smeared their own failures to pass the rigid tests of masculinity. The festered wound, tagged in the malignant call of pansy and ponce, swivelled back in hate at that which was once used to mark and besmirch their own falling from the norm.

John was such a promising prospect at the start. For a while, at least, we suspended the certainty that our temporary monogamy, replete and all as it was, could ever hold against the impulse to queer the norm and normal. Both knew that our decision to sleep with men, more than just an in-born fascination with the phallus, was nurtured in the liberatory claim for the unrespectable, the tease and test of the libertine. Or, so I thought.

* * *

I noticed it first when the extravagances of our early sex settled into well-rehearsed scenes of pleasure sought and supplied. There was an increasing tendency to re-inscribe the previously improvised, to retrace the well-trammelled scripts of our first encounters. It was as if the rapture in those earlier entanglements came from particular technique, from an approved pattern of performance, rather than from the anarchy of invention.

And then, just the slightest hesitation. A second's second thought to check what was possible and how. Transported in the heady euphoria of wanton sex we failed to give it attention until we could no longer ignore its interruption.

Attempts to articulate these hairline fractures, growing into chasms of settled sexless contentment, stumbled on a language compressed in the binary of us-and-them, in the requirement to name our sex as either his or hers.

Frustrated by our inability to translate the fluency of our earlier sex into our current groove, yet unwilling to give up on what we'd glimpsed with each other, we opted for a lazy compromise and allowed another convention to take shape. We invited others in to reform and rejuvenate.

The new arrangement was regulated by a strict code of conduct, and open negotiation was its key. When possible, we'd engage as a couple but, individually, we could take as many partners as was warranted in not making any of them casual. Partners who featured over time, or with a particular level of intensity, would be marked for how they signalled something of import in understanding our own sexual relation. In all cases we would harness the non-monogamy for its value in reminding us of our commitments to each other. But it also felt like an experiment in building a network of sexual commitments, a family of choice free from the strictures of sibling sex.

John and I seemed, once again, to become an A-team who always loves to see a plan come together.

And then Gill became a semi-permanent feature of my sexual landscape. She was the point no negotiation could resolve.

Chapter 4: Bidd(able)y Masculine

This chapter outlines some of the biographical backdrop against which I become. In particular, the chapter speaks to Ireland and Irishness in some greater detail than is outlined in chapter two which queries the (im)possibilities for adopting a 'gay' identity in Belfast – a (non Irish) city that is, itself, replete with (non sexual) borders that require very particular kinds of crossings and passings. This chapter then, speaks to and for those broader geographical¹⁵ contexts in which ideas of national and gender identity were formed. In exploring ideas of Irishness and masculinity the chapter continues to disrupt and scatter the glossed understanding of 'gay' that is serviced in and by the formula stories of 'coming out' and of 'the closet'. These contexts present possibilities for conjuring identity in ways that question the applicability of the 'coming-out-into-gay' story as the most likely in configuring a queer orientation in and to the world.

Memorialising¹⁶ Ireland:

Ireland is one of the earliest colonies to have asserted its independence from the British Empire in the early twentieth century. This national independence was, by all accounts, achieved at great cost: lives lived, lost, and ruined in an endless play of strategic warfare, guerrilla tactic and counter reprisal. There had been almost continual agitation against British rule along the long stretch of colonial occupation in Ireland, with a number of failed armed uprisings

¹⁵ As in most instances in this work, I use geography to signify something more than mere physical location – although that is invariably significant too. I use geography to conjure the socio-cultural aspects of location and thinking about those locations as a way of '*Mapping the Subject*' (See Pile & Thrift, 1995)

¹⁶ To memorialise is, of course, to commemorate or to preserve the memory of something. However, the word is also inflected with the idea that acts of remembrance are also constitutive of those entities which are remembered, that it is in remembering that myths are (re)created. I am also reminded here that the word pertains to 'memo' and memorandum which are conduits for messages in business or diplomacy.

most notably in 1798 and in 1916. This latter, known in Ireland as the 'Easter Rising' and during which a formal proclamation of independence was made, would prove talismanic in finally securing independence in 1922. It is widely acknowledged that it was not the events of the 1916 uprising per se, but the reaction of the British government against the leaders of the uprising that secured a more widespread acceptance of a call to independence on the part of the Irish populace. The leaders were captured and summarily executed in Kilmainham Gaol. Their deaths came to emblematised the injustice of British colonial rule, garnered wide-spread support for a nationalist cause, and acted as the touchstone for a more formally recognised War of Independence that was fought between 1919 and 21.

But the War of Independence did not finally settle the issue of Ireland's independence from its colonial master. Instead, the move towards setting up an independent state became a long-running and painful wrenching of the tissue and sinews that had characterised the contested, shifty and shifting Anglo-Irish settlement established across the previous eight centuries. Indeed, the cause of independence continued to have effect as series of effects both in the Republic of Ireland and in contemporary Northern Ireland.

In renting a newly established Irish Free State¹⁷ in the early 1920's from its colonial masters, a mass of puss-filled excrescences was the messy political legacy. Partitioning six of the thirty two counties of the island of Ireland into a Statelet which accommodated many of the descendants of a Planted Protestant minority (Bardon, 2012) and remained in union with Britain was established through the 1920 Government of Ireland Act. This Act was consolidated in the formal Anglo-Irish Treaty of independence formally agreed in 1922 (Duibhir, 2011). The partitioning of Ireland in this way created a

¹⁷ Independence in 1921 for part of the island of Ireland, the 'Irish Free State', constituted it as a dominion of the British commonwealth with the British monarch as its titular head. It was only in 1948 that Irish legislation prescribes 'Republic' and in 1949 that the UK concedes to this through the Ireland Act (1949).

keenly disputed geographical and political border that defied the long-held aims of a fractured but myth-creating Irish Republican movement for a whole-island independent state. There were bodies and lives and cultural heritages imbricated in this partitioning too. The descendants of Ascendancy Protestants, and those formerly non-conformist Presbyterians who had previously been Planted as part of the colonisation of Ireland were left as a religious/cultural minority in the twenty six county Republic. On the other side of the border there was a Unionist Protestant majority who felt threatened and isolated in the face of a Catholic majority Republic and who translated the worst excesses of their fears on terrorising the Catholic minority within the six counties (Brown, 2004; Kiberd, 1996). Many of those identifying as part of the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland continued to share, with their southern allies, a vehement desire to achieve a whole-island republic. Commenting on the more recent conflict in Northern Ireland and the ways in which the psyche of the country is scarred by and through the border that followed the events of the early twentieth century, John Hulme (leader of the SDLP in Northern Ireland) argued that "It was not the land of Ireland that was divided, it was the people of Ireland. The line on the map was geographical, but the real border was in the minds and hearts of the people" (Hulme, 1996: 15 quoted in Gilligan, 2007, p. 613).

The ethno-political divides, based on deeply ingrained historical and sectarian loyalties, fresh and virulently felt at the time, continue to haunt the island until the present day. They are part of the mix that is most obviously manifest in what became referred to, rather anodyne, as the 'Troubles' and which raged and was at its height for almost exactly my whole formative life in Ireland (Brown, 2004; Gilligan, 2007). These 'Troubles', the troubled and troubling war between Ireland and England/Britain was, in terms of death and destruction of lives and property, felt most prominently when it spilled outside of the six counties border into either England/Britain or into the Republic of Ireland. These latter incidents caused a much greater level of outrage than was evidenced when the violence was confined within the borders of Northern

Ireland and could be explained away as the internecine tribalism of the uncivilized.

Growing up just twenty miles across the border in the Irish Republic during the zenith of the 'Troubles', the on-going conflict and violence occasioned a highly contradictory set of reactions which, I suspect, were felt more keenly by those who lived in the immediate shadow of this border. An entrenched (if romanticized?) republicanism entangled with outright rage on behalf of Northern Catholics who suffered the worst excesses of a staunchly Protestant/Unionist Statelet, backed by British militarism. This rage and indignation was heightened by the construction of the war as mere internecine tribalism – a construction reinforcing the longstanding trope of the uncivilised savagery of the Irish which had characterized England/Britain's view of its lesser neighbours over previous centuries (see for example: Bardon, 2012; Curtis, 1984). An early and increasing awareness of the social injustices meted out to Northern Catholics did battle with a profound revulsion for the source and effect of the violence that was perpetrated in the name of their oppression. More profoundly yet, was the guilt at having the luxury of such high-minded reactions just twenty miles from the thick of it; of being able to wish it all away and ignore it until the next violent incident recycled the same overwhelming wash of emotion. This was a luxury not afforded those living with the day-to-day realities of this war.

The Treaty partitioning Northern Ireland from the (then) Free State, was seen by many as a contentious capitulation to the former colonial master. Indeed, most Irish republican accounts of the treaty negotiations are cast through the aggression and trickery of the British against their unsuspecting former colonial minions. The Treaty, an outcome of these negotiations, led directly to a bitterly fought civil war during 1922-23 between those in favour of the Treaty and those who wanted to continue fighting for a (whole-island) Republic (Brown, 2004; Duibhir, 2011). As in most civil wars, lines were drawn in the most unlikely places, with family and community loyalties split in

previously unthinkable ways. Dorney (2010) argues that, although in terms of deaths and scale of operation this conflict was dwarfed in comparison to most similar contemporary civil wars, the conflict has had a disproportional effect across subsequent generations.

The very smallness and intimate nature of the conflict made it all the more painful for those who lived through it. ... it was a civil war in the truest sense, fought not only between Irishmen (sic) ... but within the Irish Catholic, nationalist community. The killed and their killers sometimes knew each other, having been comrades in the Republican movement before the split over the Treaty. (Dorney, 2010, p. 1)

The civil war and its effects were, until very recently, largely left unspoken in analysing formal histories of Ireland and in thinking through ideas of Nation and nationality (Ferriter, 2012a) – despite the importance of these events in forming an historical backdrop to the continuing conflicts in Northern Ireland. It is argued that the divisions that are rooted in the Irish Civil War period, in which the internecine battles amongst and between different shades of Irish republicanism were fought, shaped the dynamics of future generations in Ireland. Foster (2001) argues that this aspect of Irish national history is certainly downplayed in comparison to the role accorded England/Britain in shaping a sense of Irishness. Presumably it is easier to create myths of nation through story tropes that index heroic liberation from a dastardly evil colonial master than it is to lionise a State still suffering the fractures effected by a messy civil war.

The brief recounting of that history through which the independent Irish Republic was established seems like it has floated endlessly as part of my being. It was an amorphous and opaque body of knowledge that seemed omnipresent but nebulous and inchoate in terms of the detail. As children we were reminded to remember without really being encouraged to find and fill in the detail. The whole story, or rather the network of story and song-lyric fragments that recurrently gave birth to the nation, functioned as shibboleth

and was the ground in which a shared sense of belonging might be established. And more than any other, one story element functioned as the apogee in generating in-group solidarity: England/Britain as the age-old foe was the ultimate villain in such stories. Without belittling the hardships that are claimed in articulating the oppressions of British rule in Ireland, there is perhaps at least a sliver of truth in the idea that 'the modern Irish, contrary to popular impression, have little sense of history. What they have is a sense of grievance, which they choose to dignify by christening it history' (Lee, 1989, p. xiv). And, the weight of this (mythologised) history was played out in the quotidian of everyday life. The whispered curls of 'sideways talkers' (Heaney, 2009: see Casualty, part III) half-enunciated talk, unsettled first and were then dismissed as idle gossip. Slanted accusations, insinuations of treachery, the slur of turncoat – such half-articulated allegations flitted and fixed around my head like the uncanny brush of a non-existent cobweb.

This tenebrous history was yet another way of knowing that, founded in the spectres and half-forgotten but phantasmagorical plays of loyalty and misplaced zeal, circumvented any easy logic of question and answer. It gave birth to knowledge manufactured in and from the imagined splices and splinters of a past worn in the everyday present. Its shadows, full of guile and guilt, formed yet another seam of knowledge veiled through the opacity of its own history, willingly told in some side-ways ways, cloaked in secrecy in others. And it was in the midst of such un/knowing that a sense of Irishness is meant to form from the half-detailed plots of failed revolution, and the inevitably doomed male heroism who gave their life willingly in the name of Ireland and a sense of Irishness.

In Mountjoy jail one Monday morning

High upon the gallows tree,

Kevin Barry gave his young life

*For the cause of liberty. ...*¹⁸

*I bear no hate against living thing
But I love my country above my King
Now Father, bless me and let me go
To die, if God has ordained it so.*¹⁹

Imagined Irishness

My sense of Irishness has been shaped through the greasy translucent lens of allusion and innuendo, of half-told stories and song lyrics, of histories made acute in the chronic vagueness of their endless retelling. These histories of Ireland, played out in the everyday socio-cultural turbulence of 1970's Ireland (Ferriter, 2012a) and were forcefully underscored by the death and destruction of the continuing (inter)national war being waged across the border just twenty miles from where I grew up. Gilligan (2007) argues that the conflicting discourses of national identity that played out during the 70's and 80's around the conflict were integral in the formation of national identity as a 'category of practice' (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000) both in establishing a sense of self and in reinforcing the seemingly immutable political rhetoric that pervaded my milieu at this time and in this location. Growing up, it became increasingly clear that there were histories to bear in being Irish, and that that national identity competed in contextualising any sort of sexual identity that might be shaping up. Following Brubaker & Cooper (2000, p. 5) I suggest that what is important is to '... seek to explain the processes and mechanisms through which what has been called the "political fiction" of the

¹⁸ A fragment of the lyric from Kevin Barry, a rebel song based on the death of a 20 year old who died in 1920 following a skirmish with British troops. See

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kevin_Barry_%28song%29#cite_note-1

¹⁹ Lyric fragment from 'The Croppy boy' a rebel song based on events from the 1798 uprising in Ireland. 'Croppy' refers to the close-cropped hair cuts of the Irish rebels involved in the uprising.

"nation" ... can crystallize, at certain moments, as a powerful, compelling reality' for those who labour with it.

Ailbhe Smyth argues that

... in this place, this island, this entity [Ireland], the only identity (or sense of identity) allowed pride of place in public discourse is national identity: all other senses must be contained with that conflation, or denied. However much we argue about the meaning of Irish national identity, we rarely question its right to be the dominant meaning (1996; quoted in Sinha, 1998).

Smyth's assertion about Irish national identity reflects what Lloyd signals, in more general terms, as 'the primacy of national identification' (cited in McGovern, 2009, p. 256) in making sense of our relation to the world. The argument here is that through a narrative of national belonging, 'one gains a national belonging, a membership in the socios' (van Houtum, 2012, p. 56).

Exploring the lay of Irishness for my particular purposes in this writing is not to present some sort of monolithic idea of Irish identity which Connolly (2003) frames in the tensions between difference on the one hand, and universality on the other. Stuart Hall argues that although national identities seem and are represented as if they are unitary, they are in fact 'cross-cut by deep internal divisions and differences, and 'unified' only through the exercise of different forms of cultural power' (Hall, 1996). McGrellis (2010) contends that the kinds of racialised bigotry toward inward migrants evident in a post-Good Friday agreement Northern Ireland, evidences a level of racism that 'always existed but was masked by sectarianism' (2010, p. 763). Likewise Goldstone (1998, p. 31) argues that the rise of racism evidenced in a contemporary post-Celtic Tiger Republic of Ireland is merely an extension of 'old 'racisms' like anti-traveller feeling and anti-Semitism [which] have preceded what we see today.' Perhaps the intolerance and bigotry shown towards recent immigrants is a direct result of the cultural basis on which Irishness and the

Irish state were founded; that foundational claims to Irishness were based on erroneous ideals of cultural homogeneity.

Nor is the aim of this exploration to make claims for Irishness as being 'essential' or fixed. Like all claims to identity, national identity has, most recently in the social sciences, been seen as contested, fragmented and constantly produced and performed in 'banal' ways (Billig, 1995) that make it appear 'natural' (Hall, 1996). However, as Scully (2010) points out, national identity is not necessarily something that the individual can escape from – it has its lure in the process of making sense of the world. Like Sinha (1998), the object in this current writing is not to attempt to characterise definitively the nature of Irishness, but rather to identify some overarching characteristics, and point to the centrality that that has in shading dimensions of identity, particularly in relation to gender and sexuality. In doing so I take as central Billig's (1995, p. 61) argument that, rather than asking 'What is a national identity?', one should instead ask 'what does it mean to claim to have a national identity?'

Given this latter, I wonder what if anything is particular or special about Irish national identity in distinguishing it from that of other Western developed nations? Lee (1989) makes a cogent argument for the distinctiveness of Ireland's recent history as a context for the exceptionalism of Irish identity. Certainly, in a European context, Ireland has been characterised as atypical in its economic and political development into modernity, and

... the slow development of 'modern' Irish society was attributed largely to the survival of an exceptional form of traditionalism, considered as both embedded in Irish cultural norms and promulgated by conservative (catholic) clerics and an inward-looking nation-state (Connolly, 2003, p. 175; see also Lee, 1989).

However, O'Kelly (2004, pp. 19–20), like many Irish commentators who are seen as belonging to the revisionist school of the same history, reminds us

that 'the idea of being Irish is artificial'. Perhaps a more generous reading of this artifice is to inflect it with the idea that 'the postcolonial condition is always marked by discontinuity and a sense of living along the fault lines of a fractured tradition' (Hayes, 2005, p. 57). Perhaps it is precisely the artifice of fracture that makes it so foolhardy to even attempt to get a grip on Irishness.

Gray (1998, p. 67) suggests that there are 'two competing hegemonic discourses of Irishness.' The first of these is a '(post)colonial' discourse – one that constructs Irishness in reaction to English/Britishness, of 'de-anglicisation' (Gillespie, 1998, p. 11). This discourse, steeped in the dynamics of colonisation, decolonisation and the cultural legacies of these processes, was framed in and by the nation-making activities of the newly formed Irish Free State. O'Kelly (2004, p. 509) argues that this reactionary construction of Irish identity is heavily invested with earlier 'unashamedly romantic' ideals from the nineteenth century Celtic Revival (Ferriter, 2012b) movement which glorified the imagined purity of those living in the remote rural West of Ireland. This Revivalist idea(l) was centred around romanticized visions of a bucolic peasant, happy and contented in their traditional rural idyll, at the furthest remove from the corrupting taint of their English colonisers. This ideal of Irishness, constructed through the vector of opposition and freedom from the taint of the coloniser, harnessed the range of long-standing grievances held towards the former colonial master (O'Kelly, 2004, p. 510) as well as the stereotypes fostered by the English/British about the differences between the Saxon and Celt. Mathew Arnold, for example, portrayed the "Saxon" as energetic, worldly, phlegmatic and successful: the 'Celt' as poetic, spiritual, mercurial and melancholy' (cited in Longley, 2005, p. 124). Irishness was set 'at odds with the English. They were essentially foreign to each other' (O'Kelly, 2004). This dynamic of opposition was further harnessed in constructing a sense of national identity in and for the new Irish Free State – as everything that is not English. Sinha (1998, p. 21) argues that it is through this defensive reaction to and within its history of British colonial oppression that traditional notions of Irishness gets its particular

quality of fixity and narrow rigidity. Foster (2001) argues that this traditional construction of Irish national identity has a 'distinctly make-believe feel to it, [and is based on] simplistic and fusty versions of the Story of Ireland'. In a similar but much more heavily critical vein, Pelan shows how the work of Edna O'Brien constructs a very different version of Irishness – one 'that is not so much romantic and sentimentalized as brutal and unforgiving.' (2012, p. 7).

The second discourse of Irishness, according to Gray (Gray, 1998), is one that positions Irishness in the context of social and cultural upheaval in the 1960's and 70's (Ferriter, 2012a) and, in particular, through Ireland's entry into the European Union in 1973. Gray argues that the integrationist zeitgeist occasioned by entry into Europe signalled Irishness taking on a more progressive and liberal hue (Brown, 2004; see also: O'Kelly, 2004; Pelan, 2012). This 'modern' Irish identity, metropolitan and outward-focussed, is seen as positioning itself against the state sanctioned traditional version of national identity based on parochial rurality and insularity. Integration into a modernising Europe was seen by many as a potential threat to those cultural claims to Irishness on which the state was founded: closer ties with Europe represented a threat to the traditional idea of Irishness.

However, I wonder whether the two forms of Irish identity outlined by Gray above are so distinct. In retrospect, I think that, like O'Kelly (2004), entry into the European Common Market in 1973 might actually have perpetuated an anti-English/British basis for Irish identity rather than promoting a radically new set of cultural politics within which a sense of national identity was constructed. In this vein Corcoran and Share (2008, p. 4) argue that 'while the meaning of [national] identity may have lost some of its solidity in modern [Irish] society, older collective identifications and solidarities persist, often in new forms.'

It is in the tensions and contradictions of these constructions of 'traditional' and 'modern' Ireland that I adopted an early and gradual awareness of Irishness. It is difficult now to conjure clearly what it was like back then in the shadowy mists of time and place past. And when I do, I wonder how these memories, this present-future knowing of the past, are informed as much by the stories that narrate a nation (Bhabha, 1990; Foster, 2001) as they are necessarily by the memories of my having lived it. Bhabha (1990, p. 1) argues that

Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye. Such an image ... is a particular ambivalence that haunts the idea of the nation, the language of those who write of it and the lives of those who live it.

Despite the vagaries of memory, and even in recognising the caveat that such reminiscence might be self-serving, I want to assert (certainly for my story here!) the idea that I had some clarity, from a fairly early age, about which of the two versions of Irish identity that I wanted to adopt – and the lure of the modern prevailed. This lean towards the modern facilitated a rejection of the traditional construction of Irishness – jingoistic, and cloying with a sickly sweet whiff of sentimentality that supposedly connoted comfort and home, the known and knowable. This traditional construction also conjured everything from which I was increasingly desirous of distancing myself: a stultifyingly rigid and narrow notion of Irishness; a seemingly stubborn and conservative gaze towards the past; a subservience towards religion and religiosity; a lack of economic opportunity; an ostensibly hidden racialisation of life, and a particular and peculiar gender dynamic that petrified the possibilities for, and construction of, Irish masculinity.

From a distance: Irishness in Enemy territory

Writing about my Irishness – having been absent from Ireland for the last twenty-odd years – is somewhat like trying to feel my body through its own

reflection in a mirror. It speaks to the psychic distance that Dermot Healy, in his autobiographical novel *The Bend for Home*, describes as a consequence of his family eating and talking to each other exclusively through the large mirror in the dining room: 'this distance between my mind and my body has always remained and is insurmountable.' (1996, p. 74).

Healy's reference to distance between self and body, between the embodied and psycho-emotional self, resonates with the 'doubleness and ambivalence' by which Harte (2007, p. 5) characterises Irish biographical writing more generally. Perhaps, then, it is through these distances of time, geography and psychic (dis)comfort that I can, at last, attend to my Irishness and explore its ambivalent character. Ironically, it may be my separation from Ireland, through the emigration experience, that affords me 'a form of critical distance which will allow [me] to perform some form of critique of essentialist formulation of Irishness.' (O'Brien, 2000, p. online).

On the other hand, I am also aware of Kiberd's warning that 'exile is the nursery of nationality' (1996, p. k). Living in England, as an Irish emigrant, makes even more complex those alignments to Irishness that nag and negate all that I thought settled. As MacÉinrí (2005, p. 36) argues, 'Postcolonial nationalism is a strange phenomenon. Brought up to despise everything British ... we were also imbued with a sneaking suspicion that British was somehow better' – even when British-ness was meant to represent all that to which I ought to be in opposition. Kiberd (1996, p. k) suggests that 'the effects of cultural dependency remained palpable long after the formal withdrawal of the British military: it was less easy to decolonize the mind than the territory'.

Pile and Thrift (1995, p. 43) capture some of the complexity of accounting for a postcolonial identity when they characterise the ways through which the coloniser/colonised are mutually imbricated in contradictory webs of meaning making. They ask that attention be given to the ways in which the coloniser

marks the sameness/difference between itself and the colonised, and how the colonised is failed doubly in such marking:

... separation fails both where the colonised identify with (supposed) civilisation which masters them and where the colonised define themselves as opposite to the coloniser, while the description of the colonised repeatedly stumbles over the fences of representation that the colonisers and colonised place between each other, in order that they should both know their place.

As an economic migrant into England I have availed of the opportunities in acquiring a comfortable socio-economic position that would not have been possible had I stayed in Ireland. Manchester is home; it is where I live with my partner, it is where my work is, it is the base from which I have a network of friends. And yet this economic settlement is in constant altercation with the sense of England and Englishness with which I was imbued when growing up: England was the aggressor, a brutish colonial master who had robbed and pillaged blessed Ireland across the mists of time. Writing about growing up in 1950's Ireland, MacÉinrí (2005, p. 34) reflects on his enduring memory 'of an unconfident state and people, for whom progress, modernity, Britishness, sex, scandal, atheism and immorality were rolled up in one. It was out there, waiting to corrupt us, but we would remain proud, isolated, unsullied and different.' Englishness was louche and libertine, Protestant and dissolute; in effect, all that I should not or want to be.

And yet, I am also aware that living here is not, in any way, an accident: I was aware from a very early age of my desire to leave Ireland. This desire to leave was a keenly felt and oftentimes clandestine one that was invariably related to sex and sexuality. I remember the excitement and delight in reading titillating sleaze in the weekly tabloid newspaper – ironically bought in the church car park every Sunday directly after mass. The back pages of the Sunday World secreted advertisements for services considered too unsavoury for the main body of the paper, and reinforced a sense of the

sexual conservatism that was promulgated in the society more generally. The line drawings, illustrating advertisements for wet-look thongs from Kiniki underwear, hinted at a bulging sexual freedom that could only be acquired elsewhere. My furtive scramblings in the rear of the newspaper were a preamble to the furtive and prurient delectation of the splashes of sexual scandal and deviance displayed in the main body of the paper. For the most part, these scandalous shenanigans, seemed only to take place in the freedom of an anonymous and potentially decadent British metropolitan life – a million miles from the rural backwater in which I was trapped. The most alluring of these scandals were metonymically signified in the sordid stories of rent boys in London's Kings Cross. How I wanted to have the freedom of those boys; I could only imagine the pleasures and power of these urchins immersed in the usury of sexual exploitation. My imaginings focussed mainly on aspects of escape and decadent freedoms, refusing the brutal material realities of these lives to dampen my increasing ardour. Even before movement, I was part of that rural exodus towards the imagined city described by Weston (1995). However, there was little in these imaginings about belonging to a gay/lesbian community; it was much more the anonymity and sexual licence that the built-up city conjured in this frustrated country dweller's mind.

Now that I have left and cast off the confines of Ireland and of traditional notions of Irishness, this exiled home in England seems also the place in which I feel most compelled to call myself Irish. My assertions of Irishness whilst living in England are so much in contrast to the resistance that I felt for that same sense of national identity when I lived in – and constantly wanted to run away from – Ireland. Perhaps there is something in what Elizabeth Bowen, through one of her characters in *The House in Paris*, rather disparagingly suggests 'Where would the Irish be without someone to be Irish at?' (Cited in Hayes 2005, p.59).

However, I feel that there is something more to mine here.

It seems that there are temptations to lay claim to being Irish at the very moment that it is most under threat: there is the double edged relation in claiming Irishness that plays queerly with the paths of escape and position of opposition that I effected in getting away from it in the first place. Assignations with (and of) Irishness threaten to exoticize through perpetuating the centuries-old stereotype of the 'thick Paddy' (Curtis, 1984). This stereotype of the Irish Catholic as 'lazy, dirty, improvident, irresolute, feckless, made menacing only by their numbers and by their doltish allegiance to a sinister and subversive religion' was used in justifying the supposedly innate superiority of Ulster Protestants (Lee, 1989, p. 4) and in rationalising British colonial plantation in the first place (Bardon, 2012), looms at every point that I claim or am assigned Irishness here. Of course, my emigration into England is very different to the shiploads of unskilled Irish labourers who did so before me. But I am reminded that Manchester is yet another English city where my forebears would have encountered signs that stipulated 'no dogs, no blacks, no Irish' when seeking a place to call home. Although not nearly as rabid, Hickman (2005, p. 94) asserts that the wave of Irish immigrants in the 1980's and 90's would still have experienced what she calls 'the dying embers of anti-Catholicism' in England/Britain – and especially that directed to the Irish.' On the other hand, I am wholly aware to the ways in which making claims to Irishness whilst being resident in England, protects me from the threat of assimilation figuring me as "just the same as us" (Hickman, 2005). Perhaps it is precisely as a result of this cultural antipathy that I find myself playing at Irishness in my role as the Irish migrant in England even when I question my own commitment to that very form of identity.

This desire to attach myself to Irishness when in England feels more akin to some of the dynamics outlined by Scully (2010) and others who explore second generation Irish identifications in England – particularly for those who mix fairly exclusively in Irish community contexts. I suspect here something

of the need to account for myself as an outsider with a very different (and sometimes problematic) cache of cultural capital. Perhaps it is the need to mark myself as a foreigner, estranged and estranging myself from some of the banal nuances of Englishness that themselves seem so completely alien to me (Fox, 2004; Hayes, 2005). There is a resonance here with Probyn's (1995, p. 439) use of "I grew up in Wales" as '... a short form to explain the quirks of my accent and in a theoretical mode to try to indicate some of the backward-and-forwardness, the *va et vient*, the straying of any identity.' Perhaps it is to explain/justify (to myself as much as to anybody else) why, at times, I feel unconnected, an interloper dislocated from the fixities that I often witness around me. Perhaps it is in recognising the fallow aridity that casts me a half-formed hybrid – fabricated across the seething, fecund suppositions of Irishness, on the one hand, and the arrogance of Englishness that affords it its polite veneer of civility and manners, on the other – that I should lay a pathologising claim. However, like Probyn, I am aware that such explanatory pronouncements 'stations one, places one in relation to something that can take on the weight of origin: that's where you're from, that's why I'm like that, that explains it, etc.' (p. 439).

I suspect that there is also something phonic at play here: it is not just the accent that gives me away and for which I have to provide some sort of explanation or blush and play coy when, once again, I'm told how "the Irish accent so does it for me". Like Palmer (2005) there is something, in addition, in my treatment of that language that I supposedly share with my English interlocutors. Even though this was the language of my education and my first language of use, I have what Palmer (2005, p. 47) characterises as part of the Irish national psyche; an ambivalent relationship with it as the medium of my being:

Always dazzled by words (and all my most fluent words were English), I felt, nonetheless, at a remove from English. Its words had an oddly hand-me-down feel and they didn't always fit.

In terms of speech, Palmer (2005, p. 59) argues that the sense of remove from English as a medium of being and becoming echoes hollowly like a phantom mimicry:

*Our always latent sense of estrangement from English is
activated when vowels and turns of phrase that sit at the
core of our being suddenly sound strange even to ourselves.
... Delivered into the echo-chamber of Received
Pronunciation, our ordinary speech turns into performance
and we into actors.*

Perhaps, in this (dis)location to language, there is also the ring of the subaltern's mimicry here (Bhabha, cited in: Maclure et al. 2012) which perpetuates the fictionality of my felt relation to Irishness – especially as it is constantly re-produced anew in my adopted milieu.

Whatever the reason for claiming Irishness in this (now) English home, I continue to claim and be assigned a national identity that was, in the first place, a construction that I resisted heavily. And these un-straight-forward assignments with national identity slide (in) me queerly. In each move toward and from Irishness there is a queasiness that feels for root at exactly the same time that I revel in the exhilaration of floating free, of flying weightlessly towards a freedom in which all is nothing and everything is just as it ought to be. This queasiness has the feel of a joyously sickening (re)move hinting at and haunting the very fabricating performances that (dis)locate me thus. This is the liberating bind in the double fold of my Irishness as an exile in England, of yet another Irishman seeking freedom from Ireland in exile in England. And this double fold is yet another form of troubling and troubled knowing – although this hail to Irishness is much more opaque and convoluted than the supposed ease with which the identity of 'gay' might fit me. What these dynamics of sliding around (with) national identity do, are to place me out-of-sorts; flailing in recurring movements and moments of (dis)location, celebrating the freedoms from fixities occasioned in

crossing, passing and resisting. These dynamics lead me to question whether it is Irishness, rather than any and all of the same-sex genital manoeuvrings that I experience and imagine, that queers (for me) as it casts its carcass intemperately across a non-linear conception of geography and time in my trajectories across national borders. This constant ebb and eddy of Irishness, its travel and travail in servicing me here from there, constantly constitutes itself into a further wave, upsetting and unsettling all that which was thought to be settled in the easy relation to the realm of gay.

Irish (queer) sexuality:

I became formed in what I might now call a queer family or at least what I might refer to as Quare (Giffney, 2007; Johnson, 2001) familial dynamics, although it might be argued that the very symbolic of the Irish family always and only operates in the realm of the Queer (Conrad, 2004). This queer-ness does not just reside in the early sex that I explore more fully in the next chapter, but in the ways in which the reverberations of these sexual encounters intersected with a range of other socio-cultural contexts through which I became to understand the world. These contexts and their intersections are manifold but, for the remainder of this chapter, I will focus specifically on an exploration of ideas of gender (most specifically masculinity), sexuality and sexual identity and in how they intersect with the unsettled impress of national identity.

The Free State, and subsequent Republic, of Ireland was heavily influenced by the Catholic Church (Dorney, 2010) and the socio-sexual order was based strictly on 'the private family and heterosexual marriage whose sole purpose was procreation, rather than pleasure.' (Ferguson, 2002, p. 120). In recounting some of the repressive legislation shaping sex- and sexuality-related issues in the Republic of Ireland since 1960, Girvin (2008, p. 85) asserts that 'the period from 1979 to 1991 is one where conservatism rather than liberalism was successful in Irish politics', and these politics included

those of sexuality. This period is one set against a backdrop of relatively staunch conservative marriage between Catholic church and state, the latter hefting the weight of a relatively newly formed state in constructing an idea(l) of purity in terms of Irish sexual identity (Conrad, 2004). This period coincided with my teenage years and provided a backdrop to my explorations of an already emergent gender/sex-ed identity.

For Ferguson, like many who write about Irish sexuality, '(Hetero)sexuality was in itself regarded as fixed and treated as fate, and homosexuality was illegal.' (2002, p. 121). This construction is, in its way, not so remarkable given that 'compulsory heterosexuality' is the hegemonic trope that structures sexuality in most western society. So, like Ferriter (2012b) I wonder if sexuality really does have national characteristics? Inglis (2007, p. 4) suggests that one of the central things that makes the Irish Irish is 'a strange taboo about the body, sex and being physically affectionate' and that the absence of sensuous physicality forms the basis of the Irish 'obsession' with sex. In this way, Inglis might be accused of positioning Irish sexuality as similar to that form of sexuality that we 'moderns' are taught was the dominant form of sexuality in Victorian Britain: a sexuality that is repressed to the extent that it leaks and erupts in unruly ways. No matter how tempting this characterisation is, I am mindful here about how this characterisation merely re-inscribes Ireland and the Irish as a pre-modern version of (post)modern Britain and the British. And, for my purposes here, this move echoes too closely the lineaments that shape all and any moves that trope in ideas of progress: from naïveté to knowingness: from child to adult; from rural to urban, and from pre-modern to (post)modern. Ferriter underscores these potentially postcolonial moves in citing Siobhan Kilfeather's argument that representations of Irish sexuality were polarised 'between versions of the authentic Ireland as a realm of purity and versions which insist that the true Irish character is ribald and promiscuous' (cited in Ferriter, 2012b, p. k). Similarly, Ferriter is keen to dispel the idea that Irish sexuality has only come to blossom in the very late twentieth century. He suggests

that any 'narrative of Irish sexual history that moves seamlessly from repression to liberation is incomplete and simplistic' (2012b, p. k).

What, instead, I offer here in exploring Irish sexuality is to outline what I think are some of the intersections that it has with gender (with an emphasis on masculinity) in this particular national context. Ferriter (2012b, p. k) suggests that 'the history of Irish masculinity has yet to be written.' The exploration claims that there are some particularities of gender in Ireland rather than to suggest that the dynamics through which gender and sexuality intersect are in any way particular to that national context.

And so, it is with the skirt and mince of (straight-boy)²⁰ masculinity that I explore the structures of gendered idea(l)s and my relations to them as I become 'gay'.

In the turf-cutting landscape of my rural Irish formative past, there is a verb that queers my now location in the urban, and the academic, present. It is one of a number of words that have needed translation, indeed an absolute ruptured re-signification, in my journey from one place to another; from one form of being into another. To "cope" is, in my contemporary relation, an activity that rights the fractures which might signify wrongs. To cope is to deal effectively with and put right all that threatens to disrupt or disintegrate the fiction of psychological coherency. However, in the uneven terrain of winning those over-laboured turf – the crusted and dried peat that warmed

²⁰ I am reminded here of how (homo)sex/uality figures in the construction of (hetero)sex/uality more generally (see chapter one). Simultaneously, I wish to signify that my musings here focus on gender/masculinity rather than on sexual orientation, that the period from which this section is written is one from which I claim a masculinity undifferentiated by sexual orientation and that, following Butler (1990) and my own observations through life, I suggest that expressions of and claims to gender identity are stabilized in performances that are often marked as 'natural'. However, it is often only those performances of the homosexual that are marked as 'unnatural' in terms of masculinity.

the winters of my early years – to “cope” was something else entirely. To “cope” most often referred to the toppling over of the vehicle used in transporting the turf from the peat bank from which they were cut to the roadside from which they could then be ferried home. This idea of “cope” could also be applied to a person, one who might stumble or fall, or find themselves at an odd angle to the world. I keep the ambiguities of this term in mind when thinking through the following ...

Un/Re-membering Irish gendered masculinity:

My exile from Ireland to the anonymity of the British city did not follow the best known path of outward Irish migration (Leonard, 2009; McGrellis, 2010) whereby the immigrant into Britain invests themselves with the social capital available through the diasporic networks already existing in many of the major urban centres in Britain. I was in no way looking to re-insert myself into the claustrophobic surveillance from which I felt I was running. Another significant feature of my exile into the British city that differed from that of so many of my forebears was that my life in Britain was to be one of education.

‘Books are “strange tools,” Hoggart asserted, to many in the working class, and the child who wields them may seem just as strange’ (Borkowski, 2004, p. 103). I recognise some of the symbolic values of books and bookishness in the narratives of becoming that I forge and fabricate here.

An interest in things bookish signified and manufactured difference in the Irish Catholic, rural poverty in which I formatively became. There was a deeply-felt but unspoken tradition in which books shaped a path to a very particular vocation – mainly in paving a route to the seminary. Indeed, it was the seminary that would, most realistically, furnish the sole route to higher education for someone from my economically deprived background. And as the youngest son, there was a tangible, if largely unspoken, hope that I might cede to the cultural tradition of offering one child to the church. Quietly

inhabiting the promissory of a future priestly vocation provided a justification of some kind against the performed ardours of a hetero-patriarchal gendered economy: a seminarian of the future could be excused from the rigoured monotony of boy/man. The projected promise of priestly frock allowed a certain play between the either/or of the masculine and feminine.

Playing with the performance of a potential future priest, or at least as someone who might be “of the cloth” is certainly not to say that I was completely immune from the vicissitudes of a traditional Irish and hetero-patriarchal gendered economy. In presenting myself thus, I felt the many unflattering parallels made with those confirmed bachelors who littered the parish²¹. Many of these same unmarried men were younger sons who had once flirted with ‘the collar’ but who subsequently were dependant on older brothers’ inheritance. They were also feted as men who “kept a fine house and could put a hand to any woman’s work as well as the next”. These confirmed bachelors loomed as abject signs of the non-frocked priestly vocation taken too far in the harsh talk and hardening realm of an everyday secular masculinity. The softened hand of their pious and seemingly asexual masculinity, floated rather too close to the realm of the feminine, and was an unctuous smear that queered the rigorous binary of male and female. To don the collar of a priestly vocation was a tolerated exception to masculinity²², but

²¹ Tom Inglis (2007) explores how famine in 1840s and land reform in 1880s and ‘90s meant that families were reluctant to further split small farms and, thus, set a pattern for late marriage or not getting married at all and remaining celibate. Inglis emphasises the starkness of this situation in suggesting that for many, it was a choice of ‘sexually shutting up or shipping out’ (cited in Ferriter, 2012b). Patrick Kavanagh’s long poem *The Great Hunger* captures the experience of late farm inheritance and late marriage or singledom (Kavanagh, 2005, *Collected Poems*)

²² It would require a whole other dissertation to explore the priest’s relation to masculinity; another to (dis)locate this figure in its uneasy relation with sexual innocence through his celibacy – even when they were charged, in the Irish context, with sexual education and control. A central part of that imagined thesis would index the current trend to sensationalise the sexual shenanigans of Catholic clergy – in spite of the fact that these cases account for a

merely flirting towards it without fully inhabiting it was too far beyond the pale of what was acceptable in terms of manliness. These “holier-than-thou’s” performed a role similar to that of the managerial employees in Collinson & Collinson’s (1990) now classic study of shop-floor masculinity: their exclusion from what counted as masculine served to perpetuate a clear idea(l) of what it was to be a man and how masculinity ought to be performed.

In this cultural milieu then, education had a strange and tensioned relation to masculinity. Indeed, O’Connor (2000) argues that education in Ireland has traditionally been feminised not least because of the tendency to educate women as property was much more likely to be passed down the male line. Such gender ideals were further reinforced in the doxy and practices of the schools in which I first encountered learning: woodwork and metalwork for boys, home economics, secretarial skills and a raft of more intellectual pursuits, supposedly, more fitting for girls. And outside school, I had brothers and male models galore who were not only indifferent to the possibility of education, they positively scorned it. Education was for sissies, and those boys with an interest in books were prone to accusations of otherness – the transgressing other ‘who is teased in his working-class family for putting on airs ... the “smart one” who thinks he is not “one of us”’ (Berube, 1996, p. 146).

Smiler (2004, p. 16) points out that ‘gender affects individuals across a broad cross-section of their lives by prescribing certain behaviours and proscribing others, from personality attributes through attitudes, and from vocational choices through leisure activities.’ There is a growing acceptance for the idea that gender is performed and enacted ‘within the moment-by-moment,

relatively small proportion of those cases of sexual abuse brought before the law. In terms of this latter, and given the occupation of the majority of child sexual abusers in Ireland, Ferriter (2012b) suggests that rather than ‘sexual abuse by priests’, a more apposite but less likely term to catch newspaper headlines would be ‘sexual abuse by farmer’.

shifting requirements of men's everyday lives' (Johnston and Morrison, 2007, p. 662); it is accomplished in the 'everyday, interactional activity that reinforces itself via our activities and relationships' (Coston and Kimmel, 2012, p. 98).

Ferguson (2002, p. 120) characterizes traditional Irish masculinity as 'essentially rural' while Ni Laoire (2005) asserts that this predominantly rural construction was also built around a gendered division of labour and land-ownership (cited in Johnston and Morrison, 2007, p. 663). Fitting with these arguments, my own experience was that gender was constructed in and through the laboured practice of chores of a large family living on a small subsistence farm. I remember my own chore-d labour as that of husbandry and preparation, centred across the liminal doorway of inside and outside, the public and private. Getting the staple of potatoes ready for the stove, ensuring a steady supply of turf from the stack in the haggard and sterilizing the equipment that kept the milk fresh in the absence of a fridge were some of the regular duties handed down from older brothers. As the youngest of four sons and having no younger brother to bequeath them to, these chores became ossified as my labour outwith the usual promotions into proper farming male. These chores positioned me much more closely to the realm of the feminine. Although somewhat perturbed by this positioning, I was also pleased that it protected me from the rigours of dirtier farmyard work. And I invested these feminised chores with the over-thought discipline of a masculinised mastery. I railed against the perception that this practice of precision perpetuated a seemingly natural feminine deftness for neatness and detail but celebrated how these purportedly feminine characteristics indulged me closer to the hearth and a mother supplicated in the trap of an endless litany of inventing provision.

At her knee, I learned to gut and stuff a chicken with its giblets and its own crumbed blood; to work the cast of an iron frying pan patinaed by age and the ministrations of my mother's mother before her. I understood the subtle

distinctions of hairy or hard-clod turf²³ that fired scones at a higher temperature than was necessary for the slow caramelisation of meringue. I learned the beat of creaming butter for cakes, laboured with love and wolfed in the unthinking rush of tea-time hunger. I came to know the point at which sugar jammed those blackberries cajoled from the hedgerows on my day off school when looking out for her in her widow-hood. I witnessed the deft skill of waxing aged and worn linoleum anew, and the art of setting tables for the peace of everyone's need. And, all this learning, the skills and practices at/of the knee of my mother, was wrapped in the whisper of local scandal and familial secrets, matters of past truths not yet known, the unkempt secrets of other people's dirty laundry. These flashing gems of knowledge, rich in their power to disrupt the accepted hierarchies of the locale, were a powerful balm against the oft-times brutal aridity of men's banter. It was to the warmth of this heart and hearth that I would claim a stake in forming a gendered self, even in the mutual recognition of the harsh realities that accompanied the joyful cons of the idolized, the blissful cruciations of idealization - the womanly ways of glorified traditional Irish maternity.

In writing this tableau-vivant of tender affection, in fabricating this composite scene of my relation to femininity through my mother, I am only too aware of how it fits too closely with (and potentially fixes too firmly) a Freudian gaze that diagnoses the male homosexual as someone stuck in a pathological and developmentally stunting relationship with an overly-strong mother. As a dynamic taking place at the level of the unconscious, I acknowledge how

²³ 'turf' is the colloquial name given to peat which was, until recently, the primary form of solid fuel of the rural subsistent farming household. 'Hairy' turf were those with a loose, less-calcified structure and burned at a lower heat; clods were the broken bits of more coal-like turf that came from the lower depths of the turf 'bink' and burned at a higher temperature. These latter were often prized for their heat-giving properties but were more difficult to handle ... Oh, another set of knowledge/language that has little use in the modern, urban ... more knowing that has 'been disqualified, rendered nonsensical or nonconceptual' (Halberstam, 2011, p. 11) .

impossible it is to deny its (il)logic. However, I ask that such a reading is, if not resisted outright then is at least, held with the kind of scepticism that befits the polysemy of a text as complex as (homo)sex/uality, or, more importantly, ask that, like Sedgwick (2004, p. 144), we question how 'Mothers ... and women are reduced in the light of its urgency to a null set'.

Johnson and Morrison (2007, p. 663) argue that 'The parochial nature of Irish society also gave rise to more informal mechanisms of surveillance through the powerful social stigma associated with the transgression of norms.'

Likewise, I am reminded of Conrad's (2004, p. 14) argument in terms of this public/private dichotomy that 'Those who step outside the ideal are pilloried in the public sphere or confined to silence in the private sphere'. This queer boy's labour distorted the gendered roles of a rural household, polluting the divide between the traditionally masculine world of the public/outside and the feminine private/inside. In those doings I found myself somewhat undone across a strict gender dichotomy of male and female, masculinity and femininity. Like Gamson (2003, p. 248) '... it didn't take long for me to figure out that anything 'girlish' – anything that implied that a boy could be like a girl in his demeanor, activities, and worst of all in who he might want to marry – was unacceptable, even punishable, in me or any other boy, ...'. "Nothing but an aul' biddy" was a constant threat/entreaty that assailed my stumbling ventures towards masculinity.

And yet, in spite of the threat of surveillance and regulation that policed the strict division of gender in this social milieu – one that asserted 'that femininity in a person with a penis can represent nothing but deficit and disorder' (Sedgwick, 2004, p. 144) – I found myself repudiating the forms of masculinity that I encountered most often. In part, this was about the ways that my chored labour harboured me in the warmth of a feminine and feminised heart and hearth. But, it also marked an increasing unease in developing an awareness of masculinity's relation to femininity. Vasques del Aguila (2012) refers to the concept of 'masculine capital' which is 'learned and

acquired through repeated mechanisms and techniques to police masculine behaviours' (note 2, p. 222). O'Conner (2000, p. 82), drawing on Connell's work in exploring the 'patriarchal dividend' of masculinity, highlights some of the many ways that Irish society is pervasively structured along gender divisions, with masculinity being constructed as the polar opposite of femininity. In the early years of establishing an independent nation 'Church and state combined deliberately to construct masculinity and femininity to assert the difference between the Irish and the former British colonizers.' (Ferguson, 2002, p. 122). The dominant ideal of the imaginary of Irish subjecthood in the newly established Free State was invested heavily in masculinity and inherited a sense of 'entitlement' to exert control over women. O'Connor argues that 'In Ireland, the social subordination of women was, until recently, seen as 'natural', 'inevitable', 'what women want' and that men perpetuated a patriarchal system even when they 'see themselves as unwitting beneficiaries rather than oppressors' (O'Connor, 2000, p. 83).

A masculine homosociality that resides in and perpetuates this patriarchal ideal has never fully endeared itself to me despite my increasing investment in it as a way of procuring sexual tricks. Homosocial encounters were replete with the wretched slight of a banter that only worked in its ability to challenge and denigrate, to succeed in piling to the top. This kind of hegemonic masculinity seemed like some sort of eternal and lonely cock-fight; an endless performance of bravado peppered with the satisfactions available in turning bouts of monotonous and back-breaking manual work into a contest. And there was the endless talk of furrowing fields and females, things to plough and plunder. These everyday performances of masculinity never did feel quite right.

Ging's (2012) analysis of the representation of Irish masculinity in film resonates with the political struggle that characterises my early relation with masculinity. She argues that rather than the heroes that populate other national cinema, representations of Irish masculinity were, until relatively

recently, more likely to conform to a pathological form: 'violent, tyrannical, emotionally damaged, depressed, suicidal, alcoholic, socially marginalised or otherwise excluded from the dividends of male cinematic heroism.' (p.1). Perhaps my formation of gender identity was, again, one of reactivity; of reaction against a host of material and cinematic formations of masculinity that left me cold.

Heteronormativity and masculinity:

A great deal of gender analysis relies on the dynamics that operate and are perpetuated in the push and pull between masculinity and femininity. In a heteronormative landscape, masculinity and masculinities can only take shape in their binaried relation to femininity and femininities. This is none more so than in a post-colonial Irish context in which Hanafin (1998, p. 413) argues that 'The symbolic construction of [colonized] Ireland as female led to a commitment on the part of the postcolonial elite to a privileging of masculinity.' The privileging of masculinity was also one that set heterosexuality as the hegemonic ideal. This male hetero-patriarchal ideal mirrored a wider nationalist project, rooted in a mythologised and imaginary past, in promoting a postcolonial nation state as one free, at last, from the corrupting influences of its colonial master and by which patriarchy and homophobia became 'the official discourse of the postcolonial Irish state.' (Hanafin, 1998, p. 413; See also Conrad, 2004; Lacey 2008).

As I have outlined above, the chored labour of my early life and my relation to bookishness located me askew in terms of masculinity/femininity. However, there was another set of influences that hailed my early play with bookishness and reinforced my alignment with femininity. A raft of aunts who had emigrated to England, Canada and the US in the 1950's, were inspirational influences on my life and mirrored my own aspirations in figuring a future away from Ireland. These were emigrants who had used their

pathways of emigration to return with education and training that afforded them airs and graces, and the kinds of money that meant they no longer lived in penury. It was in and around their being that my gendered becomings were most strongly located: in the waft of 'Lily of the Valley', and the moisturised sheen of a softened face framed by the severity of a deftly depilated eyebrow metonymically exercising a kind of control that few men could. These women, as well as those bringing nurture and care into my life, were the windows through which I was able to see out into the world, the ballast which anchored me on my own aspirational emigration trail. It is not that femininity was performed in a more "authentic" way than was masculinity. Rather, it was the way in which these performances of femininity fit in the world and contrasted so sharply with the constantly contesting performances of masculinity. In these women, femininity seemed like a performance perfected with knowing ease, peppered occasionally with a liberal sprinkling of unpredictability. These performances wove a spiked joy that pushed and played with the gender boundaried stages on which they were played. They occasioned a look, a test of what was already accepted as their domain and used this to resettle into a more comfortable position. But only for now, for a then that might not be again. This was uncertainty played for what it could invent, and in which it might become²⁴.

These were performed subjectivities that created and played in planes of invented celebration!

²⁴ Having written this position, I am subsequently reminded by Kent (2004) of the value that Sedgwick places on gossip as a means of constituting the social world – it is in the circuits of such 'knowing' that I validate my own writing!: 'I take the precious, devalued arts of gossip, immemorially associated in European thought with servants, with effeminate and gay men, with all women, to have to do not even so much with the transmission of necessary news as with the refinement of necessary skills for making, testing, and using unrationalized and provisional hypotheses about what kinds of people there are to be found in one's world' (Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990): cited in Kent, 2004, p. 183)

And given these public performances of being, contrasting so forcefully with what felt like narrow and clumsily rigid public scripts of masculinity, why then would I not bend and veer towards the feminine? Is it any wonder then that I might choose to think of myself in 'gender inappropriate fashion' (Barriteau, cited in Gosine, 2007, p. 352)?

In positioning myself thus, awkwardly along and at odds with or beyond the male/female continuum, I wonder at how my artless gender identifications might differently carry my relation with (homo)sexuality and with the unease with which I have come to relate to 'gay' in particular. In a related vein, I am interested in how the warp of such gendered identifications might carry the pump and flow of unease that burdens the increasingly narrow codification of a politically docile, homonormative 'gay'. In this exploration, I am comforted by the ideas that

Biology, medicine, and anthropology provide ample evidence that beyond the rigid model of social desirability, beyond the linearity assumed by the rigid congruence of genital (penis-vagina) and gender (masculine-feminine) duality and by a hegemonically heterosexual orientation, there exists a broad diversity of [sexual] identities (Carrera et al., 2012, p. 1000).

This (dis)location with a set of queerly gendered relations has a long history in framing a set of pathologising ideas constructing the 'de-masculinized' homosexual, the effeminate 'not-man' pansy that signifies all that is abhorred for and by masculinity (Coston and Kimmel, 2012). However, I would argue that it is precisely this genderqueer (Wilchins, Howell, & Nestle, 2002) relation that has the potential both to disturb any easy settlement of the homosexual in a wider patriarchal order, and to open up to scrutiny the very unease that I have with a figuration of the modern homosexual in the form of the docile and respectable gay man – the homonorm (Duggan, 2004).

Although I have resisted the idea when working to identify as gay, I feel an increasingly strong affinity with a pre-Stonewall construction of homosexuality

that embraced the concatenation of gay with gender inversion, a view that plays to and celebrates the effeminacy of 'gay' as it challenges hegemonic masculinity. This, perhaps especially, when that figuration of the homosexual has been vaunted in a broader heteronormative culture as presenting a 'predatory and effeminate danger to the nation and its manhood' (Houlbrook and Waters, 2006, p.145). This is not a call in support of the biologically deterministic theories of homosexuality that have garnered a great deal of attention in late twentieth century psychological literature and that locate homosexuality in the endocrinology of the male/female foetal brain (Bailey, 2003). Rather, this affinity is located in a more socio-political theatre in which the effeminacy of homosexuality is conjured as an enactment, a performance, one that embraces its codification as a repudiated identity whilst simultaneously harnessing the power inhering in that abjected position as a means to disrupt a sex/gender status quo. I would argue that the effeminate (of homosexuality) has the potential to disturb the dominant patriarchal order either through the Minstrelization of camp and/or a Militant Chauvinism of genderqueer (Goffman, referred to in: Coston & Kimmel, 2012) in managing a stigmatized identity. What these disturbances of the idea(l) of male and female as 'universal constants' (Wilton, 2000) allows is a resistant play with/in what Wilton calls the 'master discourse of gender and the erotic – heteropolarity' (p.238).

Late twentieth century LG(BT) political agency has solidified the idea that the homosexual is a distinct figure, a type of individual, a personage:

'First registered in sexology, science, medicine, and psychiatry and taken up by the state during World War II, homosexuality was redefined from gender inversion, congenital condition, or a prohibitive act that anyone could commit to a psychological and pathological condition that adhered to anyone who engaged in same-sex practice, and that condition, moreover, was a defining feature of the self. In these ways, the dominant classification system was shifting from gender inversion to sex of object choice' (

Valocchi, 2012, p. 462: See also, Cook, Mills, Trumbach, & Cocks, 2007; Weeks, 2007, 2008, 2012).

In this way the homosexual became a reality, and that reality existed in and emanated from the inner core of the homosexual rather than it being a product of wider discourse traditions – including those of gender and genderqueer disruption. This construction of the homosexual as an identifiable category of person, not only legitimises those seeking to refute their exclusion from citizenship enfranchisement on the basis of their non-heterosexual sexual relations. It also reifies and solidifies the institution of heterosexuality through a hetero-patriarchal gender economy; it acts to reinforce the hetero-homo binary in accounting for the range of sexual identity and sexual orientation and, simultaneously, discounts the diversity of gender-affective locations that are possible beyond the male/female, masculine/feminine binaries.

Through these discursive formations, those same-sex sexual acts and behaviours that were both experienced in a variety of ways and which signified a range of affective relations with the dominant gender/sexed economy, were reduced to a focus solely on the object choice of that sexual behaviour. Late twentieth century histories of homosexuality 'assume that gender sameness is the natural expression of homosexual desire and that all other genders and gender expressions are somehow non-normative, performative, and in need of explanation' (Valocchi, 2012, p. 463). This construction of same-sex sexual acts consolidate 'object choice as the relevant and overriding characteristic of "gay" community and reinscrib[es] the hetero-homo binary as the most important dimension of sexual subjectivity' (Valocchi, 2012, pp. 465–6).

Chauncey (1995) argues in his book about pre-World War II New York that:

'Men were not gay or straight. They were "fairies," "husbands," "jockers," "wolves," "trade," and "queers".'

These were not different labels for the same group imposed from the outside but internal gendered demarcations of desire, consciousness, practice, and association, defined partly in terms of class, ethnicity, and immigrant status.'
(Cited in Valocchi, 2012, p. 461).

In this accounting of pre-war New York, Chauncey registers the variety of same-sex desire and identity as it intersects with a range of other social and cultural locations, and in particular the performativity of gender. In this landscape, male same-sex practice is not solely based on sexual object choice but on an intersection of that sexual desire and practice with race, class and a gender sensibility.

In a similar vein, Valocchi (2012, p. 453) argues against the dominant account of modern male homosexuality in which the primacy of object choice as its defining feature is asserted, and the role of a genderqueered affectivity in constructing a sense of homosexual/gay identity is side-lined: 'No longer does gender style, role, or identification structure erotic life and sub-cultural associations.'. It is argued here that the object choice narrative, a narrative that reinforces the hetero/homo binary, was one that was pushed by middle-class same-sex attracted men in their bid for building an identity-based community of 'gays' as part of the rather more fraught nomenclature of LGBT+ solidarity. In retrospect, and with the benefit of the liberalised economy that such politicking produced, there is an increasing drive to (re)examine what was lost in this strategy of communitarian glossing. Valocchi argues that this strategy 'ignored the continued power of diverse gender identifications as an organizer of same-sex experience for men'. (2012, p. 457). It has been argued that, in adopting a rights-based political strategy of gay sameness, this strategy has actively erased the '... "spaces" or "distances" between the dominant identity construction and the non-normative forms of desire and subjectivity' which include the gendered dynamics that structure particular classed and raced same-sex sexual attraction.

These ruminations, on my formative relation to (Irish) masculinity, queered in their relation to feminised labour and education and in the early homo-sexed and homo-social encounters with other males, fosters a disruptive and potentially unruly (dis)location with the very notions of a gendered economy in which male same-sex behaviours are located; they insinuate a genderqueer sensibility that queries the dichotomised categorical gender binary, as well as the continua between the poles, that characterise much of the constrained thinking about sex/gender in a western tradition. In this sensibility I inhabit neither of the male/female categories. Likewise, I refuse some calibration in a 'middle-ground' between these poles. Instead, searching for an alternative relation with gender that seeks a subjectivity exceeding the constraint of 'he' and 'she', 'him' and 'her', that is fluidly in flux and productive, I wish at least to locate my non-heterosexual masculinity as effeminist (Dansky, Knoebel & Pitchford, 1977; Stoltenberg, 1989 cited in Coston and Kimmel, 2012) with a political lean towards an alignment of feminism and against hegemonic masculine ideals of both mainstream heteronormative and homonormative culture.

And like Valocchi, I reject the idea that my sexual identity structured thus around a queered relation with the traditional hetero-patriarchal gender economy is in anyway 'pre-modern' or a 'variation on an emergent homosexual subjectivity' (Valocchi, 2012, p. 460). Instead, I see it as a disruption of the dominantly storied homosexual/gay that hunts and haunts the liberal assimilationist politic of LGBT+ rights-based discourses that work to excavate (homo)sexual practices of their ability to challenge and productively re-construct a socio-political landscape in which sexual identity, touted as a minoritising and single-issue politic in the fight for social justice, is then tolerantly taken back to the private realms of the (homosexual) boys.

Perhaps it is time to return to the ambiguities referred to earlier in this text, the ambiguity that lies in “cope”, between the vernacular of the past which continues to haunt the dominant vernacular of the present ...

(In)Conclusions:

Gendered identity, framed in and through the scripts of the everyday, does not happen in isolation from sex and sexual identity. As well as gender being an expression at the individual level, it is also institutionalised at the social level, ‘an organized social structure that creates and maintains particular societal and cultural ideologies ... [and] dictates how one is rewarded or punished by how one ‘does’ gender’ (Slesaransky-Poe & Garcia, 2009, p. 204). Gender identity is also framed by and produced within what Adrienne Rich (1980) calls ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ which ‘is a mandate; society demands heterosexuality; our informal and formal policies and laws all reflect this’ (Coston and Kimmel, 2012, p. 105). At this point it is important to remember that for me sexual identity was forged in the illicit practices of sexing boys. I was and continue to be only too aware that ‘Homo-intimacy and homo-eroticism are consequently discouraged, and indeed forbidden, precisely because they disrupt the gender and sexual script which dictates that a man must desire women in order to be a ‘proper’ man’ (Nynäs and Yip, 2012, p. 6). As Jeffers asserts ‘Having been socialized into a heterosexual society, we expect lucid gender distinctions because that is the norm’ (2004, p. 16). (Homo)sexuality, constantly arraigned in and by the panoply of heteronormativity that colonises the culture in which I live(d), is stretched along the hegemonic binary of gendered opposition. How might this stretch welcome an intersect with sexuality when the latter is about notions of the ‘orientation’ that bruise and confuse the heteronormative insistence of a ‘natural’ male/female binary? How then might an identity that has learnt to and chooses to orient itself to same-sex objects, when that orientation is bound within a gendered heteronormative economy, fail to engage ‘properly’

with the man/woman, male/female, masculine/feminine identifications laid out for it within such a gendered economy?

[In/Assert] Early sex fiction

Much, much later. When the relationship had finished with my first real long-term girlfriend, and I returned to the bosom of family to lick my wounds; when I couldn't sleep and prowled the living room, alive with an existential angst heightened by that tumult of feeling that harked at the hyper-reality of having felt love with a woman and the vividness of loss at its ending. My mother got out of her bed as she always did, to see what was wrong when things were astir in the house at night.

"Do you miss him? I mean, do you still miss him? Even after all this time?"

"I still wake up, in the night, in the mornings, and reach out for him. It takes forever to realise that he's no longer there."

In that moment, I understand the intensity of their sex from nearly twenty years before, when I was only a wean and neither of us knew that he'd die and leave us alone. In that moment, I caught again a glimpse of the domesticated sexual tension that was all around when I was young. In that moment, I understood them – one dead, the other left alone in grief – as sexual beings; not parents, but older versions of this becoming adult self who felt the pain of loss as if it were his own invention. I suppose the string of brothers and sisters should have been a clue.

* * *

"You're far too young to be at that now! You're a big boy now. It's your work you need to be doing."

* * *

My body does some funny things these days. There's that feeling now that I get when I sometimes have a pee. It's warm and friendly. Like stretching my body many days after a whole day of gathering potatoes. Except that there's no stretching needed. It happens just by standing there in the byre and letting go. Should I be feeling this? Should this be happening? Isn't it only girls that feel it like this? I'll ask one of them when we're doing it soon.

* * *

"That stripe over there was fought over between my own grandfather and the king of the fairies. It was wile battle and my grandfather only won the right to the water by the skin of his teeth."

* * *

"Offer up your prayers now to our Lord and the Blessed Virgin Mary"

If I stare and pray then I will be good.

"Our Father who art in Heaven ..." *The Lord's Prayer: a different ending for us and them. Why? Are they not the same? "For Thine is the power ..."?* *No! That's not right.*

Aren't they beautiful? St Joseph with the child and Francis with his animals. Why do they get to wear long cloaks, like dresses? Do they have trousers underneath?

"The Blessed Virgin, ... Mother most pure, Mother most chaste, Mother inviolate, Mother undefiled ... Virgin most powerful, Virgin of virgins ... Gate of Heaven, Cause of our joy, Tower of Ivory, House of Gold, Singular vessel of devotion ..."

She doesn't look like Mammy or any of our girls. More fine, too delicate. Are they not like her?

"O my God, I am heartily sorry ... "

He gave up his life for us. He died on the cross so that our sins could be forgiven. Doesn't he look holy? And gorgeous too. He's very white. Look at his muscles all stretched out on that cross. Doesn't he have big muscles too, and really long legs? Look at the agony on his face. But he also looks like he's kinda enjoying it. Is that this 'ecstasy' they keep telling me about? And He was human like us, flesh and bones, and skin and ...

"They played lots for his undergarment..." Why has he still got that cloth around him? Would his body be like mine? Could I see underneath if I was able to get closer?

"... heartily sorry for having offended Thee ..."

"When you get a stiffie, if you rub it, it squirts out this white stuff. You're not old enough for it to happen yet. Do you want to see it?"

What joyful mastery of one's world!

"Oh, she was a right one her, a right consequence and well up with her dirty heels. Nobody was good enough for her. She thought that there was no man who could hold a candle to her.

"It was just across the brae there. They held dances in McGettigan's barn in the summer. And McFeeley asked her to dance. Now everybody knew that he was a bit simple but, sure, there was no harm in him.

"Oh, the look she took at him! Says she: "I'd rather dance with the divil himself"

"Now people weren't happy way how she'd talked to McFeeley, but left her on her own to get on with it.

"And, not five minutes after, didn't she see some tall dark boy come in through the front door. Dressed to the nines, a collar and tie 'n' the finest blue suit the cut and colour of which she'd not seen on anyone before, and not a stoor of the byre about him. Here, in this handsome stranger didn't she see herself and her rightful place. Like everybody else, she wondered who on earth he could be, for he clearly wasn't from around here. Still, sure he might have been home from beyont visiting his people.

"She couldn't believe her luck when he headed straight for her, and she danced the feet of herself all night thinking she was the belle of the ball. It was only at the end of the night that she happened to glance down at the floor and, instead of the fine black polished shoes, she saw the cloven hoof peeking out of the bottom of the suit trousers.

"Now, the people from around about still tell the hullabaloo that rose with her screaming. Somebody else must've seen what was going on, for they sent as far as Derry for the Bishop. 'N' when he arrived, the first thing he did was to draw a big circle in the street in front of the barn with his staff, and into it he ordered the bucko in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Just at that, the circle went up in flames, there was a wile win blowing like the worst storm of winter, 'n' it in the middle of summer. And, worse than the sound of the wind, the people were deafened by the soun of wailing and weeping. The Bishop said it was all the souls in purgatory, keening for all the sins that they didn't repent.

"People had to look away from the circle, and way the win that was in it, it took six of the strongest men to houl her back from going into the circle way him.

"And now, for all her wants, didn't she end up on her own to be a aul' woman way nuthin' and nobody about her.

* * *

"Sure many's the hare was just an aul' one that took to run for the night.

"There's a boy from Mosseyglen. Farren's the name. He was out poaching very early one morning and didn't he get a good shot at a hare. But when he went to the spot that it should have been, damned a sight of it. Now he saw blood and a trail heading back in the direction of the far glen. Thinking that the animal would be in pain and wouldn't get far he thought he'd track it back and maybe get it further on down the road.

"But de'il a sight there was of the hare.

"So he followed the blood all the way back to the far glen and it led right up to the back gable of Maggie Farley's. A strange aul' one by all accounts. She always kept herself to herself, and many's a one had felt her eye. Now, he also hears somebody talking away to themselves, and he takes a gleek around the corner of the gable wall. And what d'ye think, but that she's standing bathing her bloodied foot outside the front door in a bucket. And just out of the back of her skirt couldn't he see a wee tuft of a tail.

"I'll tell ye now, he wasn't long haring out of it, and not once did he ever speak to her about it. For he was feared of what she might put on him.

* * *

"It's the sin of Sodom, one of the four sins crying to heaven for vengeance."

"Bless me father for I have sinned ..."

"Is there anything else my son?"

Can I tell him?? ... Can you imagine this beautiful young priest with an interest in me? Surely he knows the similarities in us underneath these robes, this surplice and soutane?

* * *

"We have wee Jim for geography."

"He's a holy terror when he's riled. Even out Paddy, who was a real swot, got a feel for the back of his hand one day he was in bad form."

...

"... The frequency and pattern of hawthorn trees in the middle of otherwise arable fields can be seen as evidence for their effectiveness of these as scratching posts for cattle in combating the infestations of lice, particularly in the summer months. These trees are there because of their hardy nature, able to withstand extremes of climate and the loss of bark from the constant rubbing by cattle – and nothing to do with them as the dwelling places of fairies, as is forwarded by a folkloric tradition."

* * *

"Mary had a baby. She remained a virgin. Mary intercedes for our sins – the many, the mortal and the venial."

"Hail Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy, hail, our life, our sweetness and our hope. To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve: to thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this vale of tears. Turn then, most

gracious Advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us, and after this our exile,
show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus, O merciful, O loving, O
sweet Virgin Mary!"

* * *

"Move over."

"But it's cold over here. I can't get warmed up at all. You're all toastie"

I make my move. He makes his.

There's a dance that will play out now. Breathing and monitoring breathing;
signs of sleep and being awake; subtle and not so subtle shifts of hands and
legs; intimations and encouragements; hesitations and false starts. I'm
younger but I know what I want this to be, where I want this to go.

No matter where I move, it's always with other boys. The beds are damp and
the rooms are dark. But there's a kind of light in the attention, of having
some sort of control on my world through this body that never stops garbling
at me. I feel connected and noticed and whole. I can even feel a bit special;
there are other stories that I can make sense through. There are princess
stories that float in my head: he kissed her from sleep, he saved her from a
life of kitchen drudgery where she was mostly ignored, his attentions brought
happiness ever after.

The warm wet of course gets cold. When it's over, I can get to sleep and
dream and fantasise even more.

There was sometimes pain, but nothing like the pain of not knowing, of
feeling little sense between me, my body and the many worlds out there.

We've been moved into the thatched cottage so that aul' Eilish can move into our room. We're the closest to family that's she's got, and somebody's gotta look after her. Even if she's not a witch, she's certainly half cracked: far too fond of them cats locked up in that filthy little craw of a house.

Is this what they meant in Fairytales about living happily ever after? The whole of the rest of life could be lived, housed in this little house. Is it in living this play of house, content with somebody to love and hold and have, that I'll find it? Now, I know how those princes finally do bring a blissful silence to their sleeping quarry.

"Sex before marriage is a sin against God. It is to venerate him in conceiving children that we enter the holy sacred state of marriage."

"Ah, we had a right time last night, I'll tell ya. Didn't I give her the right twirl? Oh, a right good seeing to."

"Peadar's taking that young heifer that's driving on a rope up to Norris' to get her serviced. They've a new Sharley bull. Will ye go up with him?"

The sun baked the apprehension from the walk on the way there.

What is going on? That's a lot of sniffing and snorting. Is she being serviced now? Is she in service? Has she been served yet?

Whoa! That bull has a big one!

But some parts don't look that different to what goes on at night in the many beds that I sleep and wake in.

"Do we have to walk all the way back ourselves? But it's a really long way!"

What was she thinking about when she had that bull on her back?

"Aul' Tom O'Donnell's father, it was. 'N' him just a young strapping lad full of ideas about improving the place. They weren't short of a bob, 'n' didn't the father set him up with his own place. Oh, Tom's mother, Mary, was a great catch too. A fine pair, the two of them. Sure didn't they think they were the bees' knees, with a wee one in the cot and another one on the way?

"Now, as I say, Tom's father was a great worker, and wile for making the best of the farm. And bedad, doesn't he decide that that little hawthorn tree in the middle of his lower field needs to come out 'cause it makes ploughing a scunner. No matter that the cows are always around it, taking shilter when the weather's bad.

"Off he goes one morning and gets to work digging it out. When Mary arrives with the dinner that forenoon she's impressed with the progress he's made. But she tells him that the wean in the cot hasn't settled since he left this morning.

"And it's the same story when she comes over with the tea in the afternoon. She says that she's half out of her mind wi worry for the wean, 'n' nothing she does seems to settle it. Tom's father is worried by this stage too for he

hasn't seen Mary in this state ever before. But he's anxious to get on with the work that he's doing and get as much done before the day's out of it.

"It's when he's getting back to the house that he gets the measure of what's been going on at home when he's been out all day. He hears the wean crying long before he gets home, and Mary's on the front flag in a wile state, saying she doesn't know what she's gonna do. And off he hares to the upper room to see the wean.

"As he goes into the room he can feel that there's something not quite right, and he's sure that he sees somebody, a little person, walking from the head of the cot at the far end down to the gloom beside the fireplace. But he doesn't pay that much heed, wanting to see the wee one first and the racket she's making.

"Now, when he first looks into the cot, the wean looks fine and has whist it's crying at this point. There doesn't seem to be a hate wrong way it. He thinks he'll take out the wean to show Mary that there's nuthing the matter. But as he pulls back the blankets he sees the wean is stuck way the very same thorns that his hands were scraped way all day working at the tree in the field. The wean is covered way bleeding scratches and is actually very poorly. 'N' immediately he knows what he's done, that it's the little people he's upset in digging up the tree that they live under.

"From that day 'til now, the hawthorn stands in the exact same spot. The O'Donnell's had nuthin' but good luck way them from then out: their cows were fine strong bastes 'n' were feriver stanning around that wee tree scratching and shilterin' themselves.

* * *

"D'you know where babies come from?"

"We have to roll her over. Can both of you boys stand on the plank? That's how we'll get the twist out of her womb.

"Now, when I get this rope attached to the hind leg, pull like you're pulling a 2lb bag of sugar. Gently now."

I've not had an adult talk to me like this, like I was part of something important.

I so prefer him to the AI man. Is the AI man a vet too? Is putting the calf there the same as taking it away from the cow?

And I've never seen such hairless skin on a grown-up man. A bit like Jesus on the cross – except that this one's golden. But he's also white? His tan matches his accent. From the West Coast of America. And nothin' like the way my aunts and uncles in New York sound. Oh, he's from a whole different life – well away from here.

Now, does he look a bit like he might be in ecstasy too?

"Well, the man puts his thing inside the woman like this. Then he jiggles it around a lot, like this."

He's moving faster now and I can feel the sweat and mixing with the spit and there's a kind of tingly feeling; I'm going to know this secret now ...

"And then the baby grows inside of the woman."

Will I have a baby? What if it arrives when I'm going for a number two? Could I flush it down the toilet before it cries, before anybody would know?

Chapter 5: The queer child

This chapter follows the slide of time into an imagined past. It goes backward (in time) in the search for a queer child. It, of course, tropes on the (continued) modernist, post-Freudian necessity for finding an originary in the past to explain the trauma of 'coping' in the present, the lure of survival into any and all futures. These are the workings of a God who is an 'I' in a culture that replaces individual therapy for religion and politics.

In slinking along with this trope I recognise that I too might be read as catharticizing the (homo)sexuality that I have already confessed, that is already out into 'gay', and from which I look for some (rel)ease in order to reconfigure it, relocate its otherness as a political force beyond the tolerant acceptance of heteronormativity and the placid respectability of homonormativity.

However, I would like you, as reader, to hold out on the lure and temptations of this well-worn narrative structure (in any case, consider it here fair warning that there is no final dénouement, no *joissance* available in either me, in or through this fragment of my body (of work) that I have asked you to work alongside me in its making).

The search for the queer child in this chapter, is NOT a search for the 'proto-gay, the pre-homosexual, the doomed-to-be-queer, the pre-gay neophyte, the undercover child, and the sexual minority youth' (Bond Stockton, 2004, p. 284) that validates the homosexual in an otherwise precarious heteronormative socio-political context. Equally, this work is by NO MEANS a manifesto in support of those associational movements that campaign for the legitimacy of paedophilic sexual expression and exploitation. Instead, this search is a further attempt to (re)locate the queerness that is most usually placed in/on/for the sexually non-normative adult as a presence along in the

becoming that is as much about child and childhood as it is about the formulaic recognition of (sexual) orientation in the 'sexually mature' adult/youth. The argument here is that queerness resides in, and is the 'norm' from which, all childhood is asked to become normal²⁵. In my case, I suggest that there is a refusal to become that 'normal', that there were fascinations in the being of child that I would not put aside in order to order my becoming (adult). If this refusal tropes too closely with the unconsciousness of Freud's (or with late twentieth century's reading of Freud (cite)) ideas of an arrested and stunted psychological development for the homosexual, then so be it! At any rate, I am too aware that the child-of-before-adulthood is a mere imaginary peon to the (in)securities of the adult (Kelleher, 2004; Mohr, 2004). It seems that, whether we like it or not, Queers 'trail children behind them or alongside them, as if they are wedded, one to another, in unforeseen ways' (Bond Stockton, 2004, p. 302). In this awareness I am wont, not so much to "love the inner child", but to emulsify and regurgitate that very child at each and every turn.

Disciplining the (already postmodern) peasant:

I am fond of locating my genesis in the 18th century, or at least in a pre-industrial, subsistence-level agrarian rural landscape. It seems a somewhat fanciful idea, but is one that was catapulted into my own recognition when visiting the Museum of Folklore in Budapest which had been recommended as a good place to go given the quality of the displays and the lack of tourists who went there. One of the exhibits, on permanent display, was an attempt to represent the development of the country/region's economic development across the millennia. Contained within that part of the exhibit demonstrating 15th -18th century subsistent peasant agrarian (non?)development were a range of farming implements, many of which I recognised as those that had

²⁵ See Kelleher's (2004) discussion about the aftereffects of early Psychoanalytic theory's attempts to deal with the *perverse child* and the *manifest pervert*.

blighted my own formative existence. The sense of my own history reflected in this exhibit provided a lens for seeing anew some of the ways in which my childhood echoed a life unrecognisable to many of my British contemporaries: no television until I was eight, and then never for children's programmes scheduled during chore time; few books bar those required for a school curriculum that was neither valued in my family nor seemed in any way resonant with the post-colonial Planter region in which I lived. This shock of recognition spoke to a sense of dislocation from my own history. The citation of my peasant past to the leisured and middle-class tourist in that far-flung European city museum warped the trajectories by which progress and development are most usually constructed in western modernist narrative. Like Warner (2004, p. 215) 'recognising myself in these [exhibits] takes effort, as though the memories themselves are in a language I don't understand, or as though I had briefly passed out'. Past and present irrupted in a messy unfolding of time: unruly swathes of fabric bolting through the black holes of forgotten pasts patched over by the desires for a neatly ironed future. Queerly. Timed. That instant, refusing the straightness of a line, the forced creases of a respectable, a common, a knowable growth and development, collapsed the fiction of time braced rigidly across modernist conceptions of fixed chronarchy, anchored in an anteriority as the progenitor of present and future.

This moment of temporal collapse, of a past queered in the then future present of this writing, speaks to another set of architectures that stretch my imaginings of a queered sexuality beyond the bounds of the fully formed homosexual, the docilely respectable gay man.

It is difficult to describe what the recognition of my former life outside of the modern world in which I now live might mean, both for myself and in any attempt to represent myself to others in a contemporary (post) modern British context. Subsistence agrarian peasant seems to signify adequately, but it is difficult for that term to accurately capture how utterly foreign and

suspect such a genesis constructs so many aspects of the world into which I (be)come a modern, an academic and a homosexual. The shadows populating the spaces between the formative and the current configurations turn and twist from the lights meant to illuminate them. In that, they remain elusive, beyond reach, seemingly independent of the stories in which I find and make for myself, and yet threateningly full of promise in articulating a sense of self that speaks to the potential queerness that I carry into any future. These elusive shadows are the queer uncanny that haunt my attempts to discipline and know, to press myself into the shapes determined as acceptable, tolerated, respectable and which then feed the unease with which I adopt the narrative of the a fully formed gay.

This section represents something of my journey through early formal education. In chronological time, it prefigures those explorations of my disciplined and nomadic journeys into and through the Higher Education academy but speaks to some of the same dynamics that are experienced in/through the latter. Along the way it speaks to the fissured excesses that most obviously attach to socio-economic class and sexuality, excesses that leak beyond the formalised logic of a modernist and rational logic and that haunts and queers any easy acceptance of a sexuality encapsulated by the dominant contemporary configuration of the homosexual – the 'gay man'.

Becoming Schooled

Home and school were worlds apart, raging in silent battle with each other. They were territories between which I stretched and traversed finding pathways that transgressed the boundaries of each and, in doing so, forged identities that fractured any notion of an integrated whole. As a boy, it was clear to me that education was prized and feted. But there were romanticised twists in this relation that hinted at something not so straightforward – that in gaining education, the masculinity of boyhood might be threatened. And subsequently I have become only too aware that, as a currency of academic

knowledge, that threat might itself become the target of knowing and knowledge: that the knower might itself become an object to the knowable thus losing itself in the clash of its knowing traditions. And many of these twists continue to haunt my rather extended relation with the academy.

The economics of school attendance cannot be underestimated. School was yet another way in which you were a drain on resources. School books and PE kit, educational trips, materials for metalwork and woodwork and home economics, fees for applying for exams and university applications, and even the suggestion of extra-curricular activity would reverberate around an already strained budget. Better to stay off school than to have to admit that you're too poor to take part. These concerns continue to haunt the educational experiences of low income children in contemporary Ireland (Daly and Leonard, 2002) and elsewhere, and represent some of the lack of progress that gives lie to those 'up-the-mountain' stories of progress (Rorty, cited in: Kitzinger, 1988), those bulwarks of a modernist sensibility.

The brute economics of attending school are reflective of a wider set of social and cultural barriers that children of the working class and the rural poor also have to navigate when encountering a largely middle-class institution. In terms of the latter group, the dedicated labour and discipline demanded in school competed with that of the farm. As in many agrarian societies, school attendance was constantly in tension with the need for children to supplement agricultural labour in seasonal peaks. Even when we attended school, there was a further demand to attend to the daily discipline of our farmyard/household chores. Homework might be fitted around farmyard husbandry, and eked out in a house crowded with siblings and with only one room with any form of heating (Lynch and O'Riordan, 1998). These chores were not insubstantial in and of themselves, but they also seemed to symbolise beyond their intrinsic labour value; as well as signifying from an early age the need to earn your keep, they also spoke to a dogma of being aware of, and not trying to go beyond, your station in life. I hated the

drudgery, this sometimes back-breaking labour that signified fixity and entrapment. And yet there was pride in its accomplishment, satisfaction to be had in its completion, a discipline to be excavated in its practice.

This native culture in which the discipline of homework had little space signalled the chasm between school and home life, and was borne out of a larger set of misunderstandings between those institutions of these early years that had me rooted and/or routed. My parents were afraid of school, intimidated by teachers and the whole institution of education. (Perhaps they knew that their views as parents were not welcome and actively ignored by the system (Daly, 2009)). Their fear is emblemized in an episode in which an older brother, beaten so badly for a relatively minor incursion to the dogmatic respect demanded of a sadistic teacher – the boy had laughed during a carol concert rehearsal – that his hands are swollen to the point that his usual farmyard chores are not manageable. Both parents are outraged that day and rail against the injurious brutality of the teacher's liberty. They are, I think now, reliving many of the injustices meted out in their own experience. By morning, consoled by the fact that the swelling had abated, they resolve that perhaps the teacher had had reason for his intervention after all. This resolution had the feel of a lie to it and encapsulated some of the many ambivalences that characterised our continued relation to school.

Neither parent had had an opportunity to attend secondary, let alone third-level education. Compulsory and free secondary education was only introduced into the Republic in 1967 (Gray and O'Carroll, 2012), the year that I was born. They were full of stories of the monotony and poor instruction of their own education and of the senseless brutality of many of their teachers. These are stories shared by many of their contemporaries who went to school in the decades immediately following the establishment of the Irish Free State when 'schools became central to the ongoing project of melding Catholic and nationalist identity' (Gray and O'Carroll, 2012, p. 701). As children of families who had (forcibly) lost Gaelic generations before through colonisation, their

Irish language medium education – an unsuccessful state-led initiative following independence from Britain when the Irish language was positioned as a minority but first language (Ó Laoire, 2012; O’Riagáin, 1997) – alienated them from their own experience but romanticised their views of an ideal education. They were alive to the rhetoric of education as a resource for upward social mobility – even when successive educational policies fail to combat the class-based inequalities in the Irish school system – but were much less versed in how that might be exercised and what the implications of that were for those clambering up the greasy pole of aspiration.

We are, of course the children of our parents. But, in leaving home for the institutionalisation of school, there is a growing awareness of one’s own separation from the fold. In that, there was an embodied materiality in disciplining the body for and in school: the endless sitting still on bottoms numbed by docile inactivity, on unbending rows of wooden benches, in view of the authorising gaze, when fidgeting signalled intemperate indiscipline and gave warning of punishing humiliations, often corporeal in their effect. Bladder and bowel, in rhythm to the demands of a large family’s use of a single bathroom, were now required to concede to the chronarchy of break-time and the seemingly arbitrary wiles of a teacher’s permission to leave their class: leaky mishaps shout out the failings of mastery while concentrated withholdings silently whisper the unspoken dangers and pleasures of controlling the body anew. And other sets of discipline make the body anew: violence training the encounter of body with surround, fractures the knowingness of worlds both home and schooled, queers and is queered in the ‘intensely regimented interaction between the physical enclosure of the classroom space, the educational discourses within which it is embedded and in turn perpetuates, and the policing of regulated and normative behaviours’ (Jones, 2013, p. 606). Is it little wonder that working-class children (and working-class boys in particular), valued at home for their activity, resist the normalising stillness of the classroom and begin their careers of disruption and disaffection outwith the development norms of the ‘proper child’ (Maclure

et al. 2012)? Although troubled in the contradictory modes demanded of these worlds, I was fascinated with the strictures of both home and school and the freedoms that these occasioned in my head and were enacted in the darker spaces of an illicit sexual life. These fascinations nurtured a host of mimicked performances of the 'good child': 'In order to be (seen to be) good, children need therefore to 'pass' as the sort of proper child that is fabricated in the texture of classroom interaction and educational discourse.' (Maclure et al. 2012, p.465).

At a somewhat less materially embodied but no less significant level, the literacy of school clashed with a wider cultural literacy that was valued at home. The putative individualism of school achievement (although almost always marked favourably and unfavourably against older siblings and with the 'type' to which one belonged) clashed with 'The rigorous control of self, ... in terms of expression, ambition, and indulgence' which Inglis (2011, p. 65) argues was predominant for Irish identity for all prior to the current generation of Irish children. And this aspect of self was not the only cultural capital that required re-negotiation when entering and being in school. Life outside of school was steeped in a sociality and morality that centred around an oral story-telling culture based on folklore and local legend. The existence of 'little people', wraiths and a host of shape-shifting beings, was tracked in a landscape of raths and fairy thorn trees and the eeriness of an eternally fallow and fern-strewn rocky "field of crying", the putative graveyard of ancient Chieftains slain in the cause of land rights. The codes for deciphering this vernacular, rapidly disappearing, were further obfuscated by the invocation 'to value literacy over orality as a superior cultural mode, to eschew the allegorical obscurity of folk tales for the formal rigour and sophistication of rationalism, logic and analysis' (Harte, 2000, p. 159). Tsalach (2012, pp. 72–3) argues that in contrast to and in order to emphasise the rational, modern and scientific – what she refers to as 'the cultural center' in a modernist zeitgeist – 'folkloristic beliefs, religious rituals, and myths are

constructed as its opposition, and as indicators, if not the cause, of backwardness and ignorance.'

School, in all of its permutations, right up to my continuing engagements with the 'adult' academy, was set in contradistinction to such belief sets. I suspect that in this respect I am, almost a generation later in time from Seamus Deane's boy in *Reading in the Dark* (1997), 'situated at a crucial conjunction of social and historical change, as the oral folk culture of his native community is about to be finally and irrevocably overlaid by the dominant state-sponsored culture of literacy' (Harte, 2000, p. 157). Despite this cultural dominance, traces of this lore remain, resisting its erasure, haunting the rational (lack of?) imagination that clings to a narrow scientific notion of knowledge. And it is in the uncanny of these hauntings that fractures continue to queer the claims of knowing that locate myself in the academy. It is in the continued investment of such fractures, the inability to erase the traces of a 'before in the present' that seed and breed unsettlement with/in the smooth stories of modernity – and especially those attaching to (homo)sexuality. Perhaps it is especially in relation to sexuality with its potentialities for the transcendent and other-worldly bliss, and its ties to particular gendered economies, that (re)fold the literacies of those lores, almost once forgotten, into a search for something much more fulsome in the narratives available to the contemporary homosexual. Perhaps it is from between and within these two cultures of literacy that the Irish sensibility of dislocating word and meaning (Palmer, 2005) intersects most fruitfully in remembering and re-storying this homosexual, of queering that abject figuration to more politically productive effect?

The teacher/parental mis-recognitions of the respective cultures of home and school, and my own fascinations with the unsettling transitions between the two, rendered me a boundary object between two competing worlds, an arbiter of the clash seemingly misunderstood in each domain (Maclure et al. 2012). The translation to-and-fro composed a space of reconciliation, of

pleasing each in their respective adult roles, requiring the responsibility of an adult in the exercise and demeanour of a child. This space, formed in the contorted labour of a boundary object²⁶, was also one invested with the freedom of recognising the lie of the supposedly real – recognitions of difference with my multiple relations to those realities. It allowed yet another appreciation, not fully coherent at the time, that the translations from one culture to another were pregnant with the potential for invention. In this (dis)location of boundary object, I belonged to and was regulated by neither, its very freedoms challenged both, further queering my relation to the world.

Becoming classy

Learning the cultural fractures between school and home were intensified in my becoming in a HE environment. Like Borkowski (2004), who describes his upwardly mobile journey from working class roots through Higher Education as that of the 'gift-less working class academic', I could not really lay claim to the 'narratives of "gifted" ascent', the stories of bookish savant, that provide a dominant trope for both working class exit into Higher Education and early homosexual escape from the heteronormative. I had lingered at secondary school, repeating exams on several occasions so that I could earn both a place at University and a maintenance grant that would afford my going there. These delays, perhaps the gap year of the peasant, gave pause for further reflection and hitched themselves to a wagon already wanton and wilfully ambivalent in its desires to be gone.

²⁶ Akkerman & Bakker (2011) review the educational literature on *boundary crossing* (the transitions of people across cultural boundaries in educational contexts) and *boundary objects* (those artifacts that cross such boundaries). I use boundary object here to denote the ways in which the child crossing boundaries is also an artifact (or is that a British artefact?) of the spaces between which the child crosses. I am interested in how this perversion of the distinction adds to the idea that people are themselves artifacts, fabrications of the 'cultures' that they are inhabit. See also Akkerman & Van Eijck (2011).

Like many who are the first of their immediate family to go to University, there was a dramatic culture shock in entering this hallowed institution. There was little that preceded my entry there. My three older brothers had left school at the earliest opportunity, for apprenticeships in semi-skilled labour or farm inheritance. My oldest sister followed the well-worn caring path of a host of Irish aunts into a nursing apprenticeship. I know how I might feel like an imposter and a fraud in the academy. I knew that I carried the weight of upward mobility – a representative of the family, a proof that we were capable but stifled by the lack of opportunity. But even this weight was not enough to quell the excitement of being there. University represented an escape route, a coming out from the closet of peasantry into which I was born. It promised a rebirth away from the ties of the formative, and a materialization of the kinds of running away that rehearsed my exit from a conservative peasant penury. Here were further rituals of passing to effect and this trickster was immediately in love with the chameleon spaces provided by a university apprenticeship.

The cultural clashes characterising my earlier schooling, although now fuel for games for which I have warrant to play, and through which I might forge and exercise an expression of difference, are still deeply felt. The discourse registers and conventions that continued to signal class and the value of the formal over the informal also mapped a wider and putative transition from the pre-modern into the modern. These registers were not just those of vocabulary or technical grammars, of narrative structure and location. These were clashes of axiology and ontology. They fashioned a whole system in their colonising claims to know; of what could be known, of what was of value to know and how one could know it. These sites of knowledge clash, (in)cite themselves through claims to establishing the ultimate arbiters of truth over those unrecognised knowledges that can be disqualified (Halberstam, 2011); these clashes invariably cite the sovereign and omnipotent seer. And, in all of these dynamics of knowing and learning to know what should be known, as one masters one becomes subject to such knowing. However, as Maclure

(2003) suggests, there is hope for resistance to imperative of mastery; mastery and supplication are interdependent features of the same fold.

Becoming academic traced some of the deeply-felt filaments of the 'dispossessed' subject – one that *avows* the differentiated social bonds by which it is constituted and to which it is obligated' (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013, p. ix). Berube (1996, p. 151) adds, in the context of his own Canadian higher education experience vis-à-vis the working rural poor background in which he grew up, that the language of university conflicts with a 'native language' that he 'had learned at home, a language that spoke through action and held a deep mistrust of educated talk that doesn't come through when times get tough'. I think here of my experiences on the building sites around London during the summer holidays from university: how ostensibly rabid the homophobia and racism of the banter that passed for chat; how crass in comparison to the rational speech and spaces for speech making that I longed for and found in a largely middle-class academy. But land me in trouble, fix me with a problem and I know to whom I would go for succour and support, which world would offer me the most protection (Kadi, 1996). Memories nurse me still in some of the delightfully clashing confluences of those registers, between the folkloric fairy tree in the middle of a field and the modernist scratching post for cattle that interrupts the life-cycle of a particular parasitic mite; between the literacies of the folkloric and the formal. I retain much of the sensibility that nurtured and shaped me in my peasantry. And I am wholly resistant to the idea that I have to leave behind all that I gained from these formative years. I recognise the inversions required to be re-born and relocate into a dominant middle-class discourse that gifts all vices, ills and lacks in those who people the world from which I have come (Munt, 2000, 2008). It is, I think, the perverted readiness in these tales that are both alluring and simultaneously repulsive: easy to reject the formative before and glorify the arrival in the new, difficult to resolve the self-identifying tensions that this twisted logic occasions.

My (continued) dis/location in the academy enfolds something of my relation to that Irish peasant identity from which I came: an identity that was well aware of the colonialist ideology that '... equated civility with the imposition of English norms and values.' (Nally, 2010, p. x) and that was concatenated closely with the logic and rationality of a scientific academic discourse. Where else but the academy would the aspirations borne out of poverty and a colonised psyche be more at home and fitting in their attempts to ape the very apogee of arrival? Of course, in Fanon's terms (Fanon, 2008 [1952]) I would not be able to see this with any sort of distance, instead only measuring myself by how well I fitted in. But I was imbued with a naïve and inflated arrogance, fuelled by the kinds of resilience developed by an actively sexual minor in the face of a censorious sexual culture, by the nerve of one feeling the passing transgressions between worlds, that I could deal with and succeed in anything. And beyond this ego-fuelled explanation I offer the idea that the differences and distances between such worlds work like 'a pair of epistemic binoculars from which certain layers of reality become visible, while they remain less accessible and relevant to members of other identity groups (Alcoff, 2006: cited in Tsalach, 2012, p. 75)

Berube's 'class escape stories' offer the cut of a double-edged sword. For these narratives are also those of cutting off and estrangement (Borkowski, 2004) which invariably 'reveal unresolved conflicts about what you have lost and gained ... [and] the anguish of leaving a home you can't return to while not belonging where you've ended up' (Berube, 1996, p. 140). These stories of class transition, of unsettling resettlement, of abject migration, of joy and exhilaration at escape tinged with loss and longing, of being marked in the academy by the very class status from which one has escaped, reinforce the possibility that personal narratives should not be made as wholly integrated and integrative (McAdams et al., 2006). These stories of my own class transition through Higher Education, reinforce the contradictory (w)holes that haunt the narratives of those in the academy who are not from backgrounds of traditional university students/staff (Archer, Hollingworth, & Halsall, 2007;

Christie, Tett, Cree, Hounsell, & McCune, 2008; Evans, 2009; Hardin, 2008; Munt, 2000; Ramsay, Jones, & Barker, 2006). These stories represent another version of the queer flight into the in-between of either/or whilst simultaneously resisting a settled hybridity of both/and. They speak instead to the queer of a simultaneous many and none, the excess available in an uneasy hyperconsciousness of being always already elsewhere.

Specifically in terms of class transition, Soliday (1994, p. 515) explores Richard Hoggart's portrayal of "the scholarship boy" who epitomises class transition with the possibility of neither realising 'a singular, deracinated self or the integrated self of two worlds'. This dis/location leaves him with an identity that inhabits neither of the worlds and precludes his living 'intimately or authoritatively in either'. This outcome, resonating as it does with the allure of comforting trauma, seems wholly too pessimistic. It conjures for me the paucity and emaciation conjured for a pathologised in-betweenness: that all possibility in this slashed space, between the either/or and both/and, simultaneously reifies and perpetuates each; it refuses the myriad possibilities for more radical alternatives wrought neither in choosing either nor in the piecemeal twist of hybridising from both. In recognising the diametrical polarities of each, my being agitates more restfully towards an unimaginable and inarticulate(able) space of liminal otherness. This space, which eschews the cloying sensibility of a middle- or third way, imagines itself with/in the laconic float, the flapping push-pull lap of warring boths; it invents itself other from the hybridizing shred of their battled quests. It is with/in this space that the assimilated comforts of/for the ossifying certainties of either/both threaten and are (only sometimes) let go. I can breathe then; I can write and be more comfortedly other. The queerness in refusing settlement thus, speaks from the fecundity of arraigned constraint. It erupts and then eddies in the rills of disaffected otherness that bless those (un)becoming future pasts that fertilise and fetishize my now. They flow and find levels that I glance at, and glow from the possibilities nurtured in my passings, happy that I am

there in their sight, knowing that there is little to regret in the joy of whatever now.

Recollecting sex

'... the sexuality of early childhood involves more than the curiosity about where babies come from ... Especially pervasive and far more intense is the curiosity about the structures that are the sources not just of far-off potential babies, but of the pleasurable feelings the child is immediately aware of, ... Although this is a root question for children, it especially confounds parents and even many physicians, who can not, because they will not, believe that a child should "know" officially about the sexual pleasure that the smallest one already "knows" it has in actuality been experiencing. So begins the sad game of silent denial by the parents, and of equally silent knowing by the child, which continues throughout childhood and adolescence, and separates the child from both parents and society. But worse, it serves also to separate the child from itself. Imagine, if you can, something you experience often and intensely as real and present being accorded no recognition of existence whatsoever by the world around you. Or imagine this real and intense experiencing of yourself being subjected over and over to severe, totally bewildering disapproval and punishment. What kind of silently tormenting existential hell is this to which we consign our children from their earliest memories?' (Calderone, 1979, p. 6)

I grew up, male, in the sweaty, sweetly illicit joy of same-sex sexual activity. The sex was witnessed by the dust motes of last year's hard-won and barely-stretched, left-over hay romping in the beams of an oft lazy and torpid summer sun. Energetic frolics masqueraded as games of touch and feel, and often ascended into body plays that adults already owned, and knew that we ought not be familiar with. These frenetic grapplings of slip and slap supplemented those even more clandestine night-time encounters that made the days of those languorous school holidays worthwhile. Darkened spaces of warm affectionate attention only took on an air of veniality when they were reflected again in the light of day, when their absence was felt as a presence

in the knowledge that early sex, and especially sex with other males, was prohibited, taboo.

But the detail of these encounters is not the main focus of this story. This is not the tale, even if it seems like the most compulsively told on early sex: the pull to 'striptease culture' in a milieu besotted by the impulse to therapeutic confession; the compulsion to 'tell, tell, tell' (McNair, 2002) that pervades so many contemporary discourses of sexuality. Nor does this story fit with the zeitgeist of a therapeutic culture in which those ills of the past must need be resolved in the present. Instead, I would like to focus on how the absence/presence of early sexual knowledge, the rift between what I was supposed to know and that to which I had embodied access but few technologies of speaking, generated a peculiar and particular kind of awareness that harboured a flotilla of awakenings about knowledge and its relations with the tides of truth and lies, with seeing and saying, with silence and revelation, with knowing what one ought (not) know, and how to know it.

The concealment of such encounters were (and continue to be?) negotiated within the landscape of sexual innocence and purity imposed on a socially accepted but mainly western concept of childhood: '... the domain of childhood cannot include sexuality; and in equal turn any young person who expresses sexuality is de facto outside the domain of childhood' (Egan & Hawkes, 2010, p. 2). Likewise, Bond Stockton (2007, p. 304) argues that in legal terms 'The child is defined as a kind of immunity or legal innocence, a body more in need of protections than of freedoms, a creature who cannot by law consent to its sexual pleasure, or divorce its parents, or design its education.' Robinson (2005, p. 68) argues that the dominant way in which childhood sexuality is constructed is via a discourse which 'represents children as being asexual, innocent and immature and is the most pervasive and influential discourse around children and sexuality'. An alternative construction of childhood sexuality is that of the immature and rampant

sexual being who does not know how to control their own sexuality and who should therefore be under constant adult surveillance in an attempt to civilise and constrain its 'natural' and unwanted urges (see also Angelides, 2004; Laqueur, 2003). In this way the 'normal' child is produced from the polymorphously perverse child of 'un/natural' Freudian impulses (Kelleher, 2004). In this latter construction, expressions of childhood sexuality, often seen as a threat to adult power and control and in need of discipline, are invariably constructed as a kind of pollution/corruption in need of civilising and as the (d)evil sibling of the natural purity contemporaneously imputed onto (almost!) all children.

Extending her discussions on childhood sexuality, Robinson (2005) further notes that not all expressions of sexuality by children in early years education institutions are seen as problematic. She points out that there are continual and pervasive displays of particular sexualities that largely go unchallenged in a system that seems, at first glance, neurotic about policing all such expressions. She provides evidence from her ethnographic field research in these education settings that, in spite of a dominant discourse of innocence and protection for younger children, early years workers were more than tolerant of children engaging in particular sexualized expressions. Indeed, she argues, these expressions were actively encouraged in such settings and were '... inherent in everyday practices, policies and pedagogies operating in early childhood settings. Mock weddings, girlfriends and boyfriends, kiss and chase, mothers and fathers, are integral to the narratives of young children's experiences of schooling.' (Robinson, 2005, pp. 71–2). Robinson's empirical observations are particularly significant given the dominant construction of children as 'too young', 'innocent' and in need of protection from all things sexual. In effect she argues that children are actively facilitated in behaving in particular sexual ways from a very early point in their processes of socialization. However, as she points out, these highly sexualized behaviours are so intimately interwoven in a heteronormative frame (compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1980)) that they often go invisible and unnoticed.

Similarly, Carrera et al (2012, p. 1008) point out how this unseen sexualisation of children in schools is part of a wider hidden gender-normative curriculum 'where students are explicitly taught how to be sex/gender normative and consistent.'

These constructions of, and enforcements for, the (a)sexual child have consequences for all children, but especially for those children who are (already? ever? always?) engaged in sexual activity, and those (queer) children who are expected to bear the weight of later, dissident adult sexualities (Probyn, 1995). In the work presented here, I am not referring to those cases, much lauded in our contemporary press, the victims of predatory paedophiles – although one might speculate about how the *perverted child* and the *manifest pervert* are inextricably linked in contemporary culture (Kincaid, 2004; Mohr, 2004). Rather, I wish to conjure a child for whom sex is a central feature of their becoming, without invoking any of the sensationalist tropes that pre-figure such a child as the 'victim' of abuse or as in need of corrective and controlling therapeutic intervention (Angelides, 2004). In doing so, I recognise the contemporary hegemonic (in)sensibilities that attach to such a query. As Rubin suggests, while reflecting on some of the issues extolled in relation to child/minor sex/uality sketched in her earlier paper *Rethinking Sex* (1993), 'why should even an exploration of such issues need to be done so gingerly, and feel so dangerous? That it does is an indication of something deeply wrong.' (2010, p. 39). In light of the *wrongness* that Rubin indexes, it seems to (and for) me vital to explore the possibilities of and for childhood sexuality. This compulsion is, of course, bred in my own experiences but is also nurtured in the theoretical hesitations in exploring the topic, and against the idea that 'to trivialise child sexuality as premature, as play, and as imitative of adult reality is socially irresponsible.' (Angelides, 2004, p. 158). As I argue above, sexuality can be seen as the pivoting diviner of the child/adult binary. I would argue that childhood sexuality, read exclusively through the lens of adult sexuality, has implications for how childhood sexuality is then regulated and erased. I suggest instead

that it requires a focus of its own, independent of its imagined originary status of adult sexuality. I hold with Angelides' view that (2004, p. 164)

The more we mystify and pathologise children's relation to sexuality, evacuate childhood of the stain of sexuality, and reify simplistic notions of child powerlessness, the more we disempower children and foster their uninformed curiosity, desire, risk taking, and psychological maladjustment to emerging erotic orientations.

Equally, that 'it is impossible to predict, on the basis of childhood or adolescent sexual desires and behaviours (sic), which path a child will take' and that we should engage with the very real possibility that 'childhood [sexuality] ... is not superseded by adulthood but remains an ever-structuring force in the production of adult subjectivity and sexuality' (Angelides, 2004, p. 164).

What follows below is not that project. Rather it is an opening, a way of beginning to prove²⁷ childhood sexuality in the enforced silences that speak to its (un)relation to (a queered) adult ('gay') sex/uality.

Engaging in early sexual encounters²⁸ engendered an awareness that, as a non-adult, I wasn't supposed to be partaking of this heady brew. Even if

²⁷ I am interested here in the ambiguities of 'prove' especially between its relation to *truth*, *validity*, *corroborate*, *evidence* and a host of other words/concepts that attach to science/knowledge, and that which denotes the process in bread-making when dough is left to rest in still, dark heat so that it becomes aerated and rises. It is in this latter sense that I invoke the word here.

²⁸ I resist the imperative to chronarchicise these sexual encounters. Refusing to pin down the age at which the sex takes place, and the age of those with whom it happened, is meant as an oppositional (if potentially ineffective (Ohi, 2004, p. 84)) strategy, for highlighting the ways in which 'child' and 'youth' are elasticized in those discourses which perpetuate the mythos of the asexuality and innocence of 'childhood' (Berlant, 2004). It is also intended as a 'way in which the excesses and over determinations of juvenile sexual desire escape the limited diagnosis and blind projections of more "knowing" adults' (Bruhm & Hurley, 2004, p. xxxi). And for good measure I hold up Angelides' (2004, p. 164) argument that 'Queer

vaguely, I was only too aware of what might happen if these sexual shenanigans were to be named and inevitably shamed²⁹. And, if I didn't know it then, I certainly became aware later that telling these encounters would leave me pinned in the interstitial fracture of the abuser/abused binary of most childhood sexual activity. Alternatively, I could prostrate myself, endlessly fluctuating, on the slightly less claustrophobic continuum between victim/survivor and victim/perpetrator. Neither of these are spaces that I could or can bring myself to occupy. Instead, I cho(o)se to languish in the vital power that such closeted activities afford, striking hard bargains in an economy of keeping secret such joy.

Here was knowledge that went against the 'hegemonic norms of concealment' that juxtaposes secrecy to truth telling: 'A secret is produced by withholding or denying the truth – the greater the withholding, the more pernicious the secret.' (Hardon and Posel, 2012, p. S1). However, I wonder whether and how I agree with Hardon and Posel's construction of the withheld secret as pernicious. Certainly there was a twist, a torsioned warp, attendant on withholding such counter-normed knowledge. However, concealment also afforded a frisson of power in knowing; it created the opportunity to cleave from the fabric of the normal and invest in a host of alternative fetishised realities. Or rather, the concealment occasioned a realisation that alternative realities, already possible, were there for the taking, ripe for fetishisation and further fabrication. As Kent (2004, p. 186) would have it 'for many gay, lesbian and queer-identified people in the twentieth century (and perhaps earlier centuries), the dramas of secrecy versus revelation, private versus public, were themselves highly eroticized, and perhaps also constitutive of

theory offers an important corrective to the culturally prevailing linear and sequential model of age stratification and sexual development. In its psychoanalytic form, queer theory has inherited from Freud the idea that sexuality involves not a chronological unfolding of distinct stages of sexual development but an interminable interplay between these stages'.

²⁹ Is it possible that I might not have to analyse and articulate the (largely unspoken but weightily felt) censure on childhood sex? Is it enough to say that I knew?

such identities'. Was this where the possibility of a closeted (homo)sexuality was born? Not in the genes or brains or in the periled twists of civilizing innate perversity, but in the joys of holding in and holding on? (Oh anal Freud. You have me again!).

The boundaries between telling and withholding are 'fluid, shaped in part by personal choice and in part by the structural factors that enable and constrain these choices. ... in some situations it is not the knowledge of the secret that is at stake but the right to tell' (Hardon and Posel, 2012, p. S4). In this dynamic of (gradual) realisation, I also came to know an economy vested in that knowledge considered impure, and thus secret: secrets themselves were things to disclose on a strictly need-to-know basis, they could be bartered and banked, saved as futures not yet happened. And, secrecy had the power to craft and be crafty: there was art and artifice in brokering this economy. Secrets shared with some whilst remaining untold to others provided a kind of shared power in knowing; an economy of secrecy on which unspoken bargains were/are made – even when the basis of this knowing was/is quite so precarious. I have become only too aware that secrets kept hidden could instantiate a truth that, if told, would not stand the tests entailed in telling.

McGovern (2009, p. 262) argues that 'Western society prefers to view children as asexual and proto-heterosexual' – there is little space, it seems for the knowing child, and even less for the knowing (homo)sexual child. The sexually knowing child 'is a figure rich in paradox, at once familiar and strange, naïve and knowing, transparent and inscrutable, docile and dangerous, innocent and guilty' (Hanson, 2004, pp. 134–5). The sexually knowing child, then, is an oxymoronic assemblage of contradictory othernesses. It harbours and inhabits those oppositions that configure good and evil – although, in relation to child/hood, that binary is precarious and unstable given that its poles are in 'such intimate communication with each other' (Hanson, 2004, p. 133). Given our insistence on the purity and innocence of the western child, then the sexually knowing child is one who

(knowingly) tells lies about their own innocence, who is deceitful and conniving about their own pleasure in a world in which that (particular) pleasure is voided. The sexually knowing child is anything but Go(o)d and, in the Manichean theocracy of the Anglo-American milieu, must take their position as the ultimate (d)evil child³⁰. With its potential to pervert through its inverting the 'natural' axes of child/adult autonomy and dominance, the (d)evil child is an unruly contagion in need of suppression and regulation. Its excess threatens the very systems of rationality and knowing that supposedly curtail and contain it. The sexually knowing child is definitely queer!

Certainly, through the myriad orientations in attempting to make sense of the sexual encounters that populated the landscape of my formative becoming, I developed a necessary precocity in shifting and reshaping the meanings that were possible for and from them. These sense-making negotiations were made yet more complex in the absence of either a language or a space in which they could be articulated. Perhaps these negotiations too were enriched by the silence that blanketed the fulminating pleasures of the 'innocent' body to which they applied. In many ways, making sense of these silent and silenced eruptions required something similar to the kind of imaginative scrabbings by which Delaney (2008, p. 13) characterises Colm Tóibín's refusal of certainty in his semi-autobiographical writing: 'Occlusions, omissions and erasures: aphasia, the limits of what can be said, and the withholding of speech.' These were the (non?)sense tools by which I mined, stutteringly, for an understanding of my illicit pleasures. In this respect, Havers' conjuring on the nature of *Queer Research; or, how to practise invention to the brink of intelligibility* (1997) are of interest in retrospectively linking this period of body and head excavation to a wider project of Queer research. Havers suggests that it is in engaging with those states of being beyond the limits of what is easily said, or those which refuse the already available and accepted subjectivizations, that is what makes research Queer:

³⁰ See Hanson's (2004) reading of *The Exorcist*.

'... It is in, and by means of these stammerings, syncopations, caesuras, hesitations and parapraxes that the very possibility for any thinking lies.' (1997, p. k). These were the tools with which I negotiate(d) an understanding within the silences framing such powerful and embodied pleasures. These are the still-stumblings that lie and rise before you here, and by which I 'cope'; glancing askew at the world.

So, the encounters that were prominent in my forming subjectivity were ones about how to reconcile a very full and pleasurable secret world of sex/uality with a world in which that pleasure was at risk in its acknowledgment. The knowing of the sexual rendered me a particularly problematic position in the Ireland of my youth: as McGovern (2009, p. 247; quoting Eilis Ni Duibhne) suggests in relation to the female child, 'Nobody in Ireland likes a child who knows anything.' I would argue, that this also, and most certainly, applies to any child who knows the plays of power available in the sexual – even more potent if that knowledge is of a queer variety. In this latter I include both pre-adult sexuality, and sexuality that is oriented away from that which loosely accords heterosexuality in its sexing. Whilst having this knowledge, I had to camouflage my knowing to make it look like the innocence demanded of children, or risk the sanctions of being placed outside that hegemonic imaginary of the purity of childhood. I argue that, engaging in these encounters whilst simultaneously understanding the sanctions that rendered them unspoken and largely unspeakable was instrumental in facilitating different kinds of knowing – knowing about knowing, a meta-knowing. Pointing out the silences of these encounters is not a plea for more spaces of telling. Rather it is a plea for reframing the reactions to, and sense-making within, that are available to any such telling, it is a plea for a conceptual space in which possible alternative sense-making narratives might be possible. In this economy of concealment and (not)telling, I became adroit in passing - long before the closet colonized the sited double of silence; I had a full apprenticeship in how duplicity, a sinful evasion of the truth, could be cloaked in the respectability of the accepted. I also became more than

acquainted with the marriage of pleasures attendant on engaging behaviours considered illicit whilst simultaneously performing and appearing within a script normed out of sight.

In retrospect, I wonder how much I was engaged in what Haddon and Posel (2012, p. S10) refer to as a tactical non-telling which reflects the cultural specificities of those contexts in which, that which is worthy of secrecy occurs. I was busy harnessing the insights that these encounters provided, in making richer sense of the normed and normalizing architectures of becoming a civilized adult. I felt somewhat like Henry James' *Maisie* who knew that 'It was in the nature of things to be none of a child's business, ... but she learned on the other hand soon to recognize how at last, sometimes, patient little silences and intelligent little looks could be rewarded by delightful little glimpses' (cited in Ohi, 2004, p. 95). The potential hullabaloo attaching to these encounters – if told – only served to heighten the jeopardy of their happening, and to a pitch that felt untenable for (more than fleeting) consideration. Consequently, the secrets and silences surrounding these encounters occasioned a concomitant freeing of my imagination for constructing a host of resistant positions against a mainstream, into which I was encouraged to feel anchored and fixed, but from which I could pleasurably remove myself when required. In psycho-therapeutic terms the feelings of disconnection and inchoateness that I allude to here would, most likely, be diagnosed as disordered, dissociative – an identity that fails to maintain/retain its coherency. But such a diagnosis rests on idea(l)s of psycho-emotional integration and coherency, and in a model of 'depth psychology' that construes any fragmentation as wound and trauma (Bruhm & Hurley, 2004, p. xxvi). Rubin (1993) argues that such psychology is 'the last resort of those who refuse to acknowledge that sexual dissidents are as conscious and free as any other group of sexual actors' and that 'these sexual dissidents include children who, presumably, can find in their sexual expression a consciousness and freedom' (Bruhm & Hurley, 2004, p. xxvi).

I argue here that it is the 'consciousness and freedom' (Bruhm & Hurley, 2004, p. xxvi) attaching to my early sexual experiences and its disavowal, rather than the sexual experience per se, that occasioned anything that might, subsequently, be construed as psychological trauma. I argue that it is in the disavowal and evacuation of the erotic, the construction of 'eroticization as de-eroticization' that is the psychological violence perpetrated most often against, and in the name of, childhood sexuality (Ohi, 2004, p. 91).

Certainly, these encounters queered my (knowing) relation to the world. They sought me out in the interstices of truth and lies, of public and private, of secrecy and revelation. They did NOT invite me to be 'normal' ...

Ohi (2004, p. 105) asks 'to what extent it is possible to make the queer child legible – that is, to attend to the child's illegibility or its exorbitance – without duplicating a reification that enacts the ideological voiding/comprehension of the child in erotic innocence'. I suggest that there are other stories that make the queer child legible in alternative ways.

Early sexualized engagements invited an incessantly urgent requirement to make sense of a body that effects its sexual potential in its interactions with a world increasingly obsessed with discourses of sexuality – regardless of whether these discourses conjure and take the shape of exploration, of experimentation, of exploitation, as the progenitor of sin and damnation, or as the legitimate pathway to pleasure and ultimate knowledge of being. These encounters obligated a sense-making that was probably earlier in the development cycle than is catered for in the uneasily accepted staged developmental models of sexual knowing. The encounters also required a sense-making that were not easily rendered in the 'age-appropriate' discourses in which, I suspect, a great deal of such encounters may learn to reside for the many. Such 'premature' engagements required sense-making in a lacunae of story frames that require endless and radical alternatives for shelving such knowing – knowing that arose from and resided in body, in gut,

in the many other bodily locations where knowing was not supposed to be, and especially along the multiple lines of that very same barrier, the skin, that met the touch of the other and simultaneously marked the sovereign boundary of that entity which I was supposed to know belonged only to me, the self, the being, the individual. This kind of unruly knowing, constantly refusing to be marshalled by the knowledge organ of the head, consistently resisting the imperatives of the knowledge of what I understood around and for me – that this was not allowed, that this was beyond what was good for me, that this was verboten - opened spaces for (mis)recognising those other knowings that bent and twisted civilisation into the norm. This illicit knowing force(d/s) me to give grace to those transcendent psycho-emotional planes that were available in such prohibited pleasure, and were already always testing and resisting the boundaries of what was claimed as known and knowable. Sitting in the melee of wretched delight and blissful vexations that these encounters occasioned, whilst being perfectly aware of their social and cultural abjection, ruptured the seemingly seamless coherency that I deduced from those living around me. Making sense with/in and of these pleased knowings, rent the very flesh of the wider storied world around me, and invited a flood of other possible story-ings, a re-corpulence of those textual tissues whose job it was to (re)connect the gashes of understanding occasioned by what was there but was unspeakable. In such a way I stored the adipose tissue of not being normal, and consequently storied another kind of fat, a psycho-emotional corpulence that fleshed the spaces haunted by the absent/presence of a corporeal and lived reality that was marked only by its deafening silence. This space of (dis)location occasioned a que(e)rying lens towards the very weave of the fabric that storied the wider cultural milieu. It became a space from which I might question the what and how of stories that purported to tell the realities through which my wider becomings were formed.

Making sense of the verboten, within the limits of the stunted and stultifying discourse set for childhood sexuality, plasticised the parameters for

negotiating the many other everyday experiences intersecting with this untellable and tale-able inhabitation as a truly rampant child. In many ways the plasticisation of these intersections were just as productive as they were necessary in making sense of early embodied sexuality. Certainly, they occasioned a productivity both in negotiating the orientation of that sexual activity for which that rampancy became a potentially defining feature, and in negotiating the orientations of those other social dynamics that became marked in understanding my life in some wider socio-cultural frames like nationality, gender and, in turn, sexual orientation.

[In/Assert] Flights of Fancy

Intemperate, indisciplined orientations toward (un)knowing

Attempting Struggle ...

Endlessly forgetful/able. Yet another choice? How each, yawns the barbed possibility of weighty 'truth'.

Not knowing? How possibly interesting ...

And stories to begin! They all start the same way ... a beginning ... a positioning ... a s(h)elf of living ... a being ... ME.

So, once upon a time

Or ... when I felt ...

N-emptiness

Moth...

I am a moth(man) fluttering and flitting towards, but always outside, the bulb of light that is the blaze of science and knowledge, the promissory shine of rationality and being. I'm not sure where I come from, or what the repetitious fluttery flittings of my becoming might mean in my endless lure to the brightness that seems forever beyond me. Certainly I live in and feast from closets. I wear holes in those text/ile/s³¹ that might otherwise have been whole. I am a contagion that only (camp/hor) balls will deter, a corruption of all that might otherwise be folded straight in the dark tidiness of

³¹ Is textile the feeling of a text? The feel of the tissue of lies that fabricate its whole?

out-of-sight neatness. I am a moth that disappears in the day, comes out at night, and is the uncanny, the dull dead brother of my beautiful non-sibling butterfly.

Teasing knowledge:

- How do you know whether anything that I've said (written) is a complete fiction? What fictions masquerade as truths? What truths, fictions? On what basis do you (or indeed my examiners, or even I!) assess whether I'm talking a whole heap of imaginary crap?
- Do you know any of the writers that I refer to in my work? Are they the arbiters of what counts as truth? Do you trust that I will have exerted a certain (academic) ethic in constructing this work? Does what I tell you have the 'ring' of truth about it? If the latter, then are you, my audience, the connoisseurs of that ring, the arbiters of the truth, of this work?
- The questions raised here introduce a whole host of existential doubt on the veracity of much academic endeavour when, I would argue, we are confronted with ideas that sit outside the realm of our 'expertise' and/or experience. What makes you and I believe? Are we simply dupes, or can we rely on method as the teller of what stands and falls as truth?
- I wonder how much this existential doubt is, or indeed **should** be, engaged in when encountering that which is not or unknown from our own experience. Am I resorting to a good old-fashioned empiricism here?
- I suppose in some ways it mirrors the feeling that I have, at times, in imagining what it might be like to live as a heterosexual man – regardless of how many of those entities I talk with. I suppose that the same applies to all those other features of my life, or those other dimensions of identity that I do not take as structuring my life-world: having children; being poor; having skin that is anything other than a Celtic blue/corn-beef colour; having parents; taking up arms or

protesting against what I see as the excesses of a corrupt and unjust social world. But even those that I do – earning a middle-class wage, spending two weeks in Milan to work on this PhD chapter; that I'm talking in front of a bunch of peers about this today or that I am working with these ideas as part of my PhD. These also seem unreal. Certainly, they require a great imaginary leap from earlier versions of myself in order to conjure them as anything approaching reality.

- Much about my world seems unreal, imagined, imaginary. Or it requires such leaps of the imagination from my own standpoint, that the idea that I don't really know the Other regardless of the amount of reading that I do, seems so totally obvious.

To tease is to untangle - more orderly, a more intentional version of snag. It (gently) pulls into separate strands, from which other text/ile/s might be spun. And yet it also pokes and jokes, provokes and mocks. It is also a love that flaunts, a look that taunts in its coyness, a flirtation that confuses and confers power on those who are to blame and those who ought to be excused³². Its homonymous shock tears and ruptures all that might be grounded in text/language, in the symbolic games that we play in becoming and being. It is the metonymic particular of all language game that put another 'o' in God and appeals for all of us not to be bad. It is the ragging laugh that separates the chaff³³ from that which will grow straight and strong³⁴.

³² There are legal defences for rape that bestow a tragic power on women who dress or act in ways unbecoming to their status, or on men whose homosexuality causes such panic that the only recourse was bashing and (sometimes) rape.

³³ In 'Google define' I note that "he hopes to separate scientifically supported claims from pseudoscientific chaff" is an exemplary sentence. And, here, chaff is synonymous with such worthless things as dross, leavings, trash and a whole host of words that denote the super-abundance in naming the 'other' to that which is the main. Indeed there is such abundance that some of these synonyms are distinguishable from their formal familiars under categories of '*informal*', and '*rare*'. And this abundance contrasts spectacularly with the starkness of

I guess I make this appeal about the incessant deferral that makes language, as an allegory for the unreality of any 'myself' and 'I' that might be written here. It is also to register the abhorrence for much that has been written in the social sciences that claims to represent me. Likewise, I am hinting, through the tease of artifice, that the imaginary is just as good a basis on which to articulate a 'me' than is already, and immediately, available in this cultural moment. For this male who has chosen to engage with same-sex desires and practices, and as one who has succumbed to the taxonomic lure of settling in, and for, the penetrable cultural-knowingness of 'gay'.

Presenting self, representing knowledge:

... there is something about density ... of being thick (is this Bond Stockton's sideways in fat? Or) in the head – of slowness, outside of the groove of normal development³⁵. But dense is also that which denotes writing/speech

Google's definition for wheat – the reproductively germed centre to chaff's already dead edges.

³⁴ And can I not even write 'fictions' without the footnoting excesses more common in academic writing where I'd have to tell you of my researching credentials, to persuade you that I wasn't pulling the wool over, that I wasn't out to fabricate, that you could go yourselves and (definitely?) read the same texts as I have already done. Presumably there is here a guarantee that you will read them in the same way as me, or that you will be able to see how I made the reading that I did. For surely, since getting rid of authorial voice, there is not one reading that will reassure you that I am anything but corrupt in my reading and then representation of that reading.

³⁵ ...there is something ... in the ellipsis that veils that which precedes it, the anterior (or is that posterior?) of that which becomes marked and visible. It suggests, and indeed claims, that there is an on-going mono-, dia-, polylogue; a conversation that is queer in its out-of-sightness but is the progenitor of the visible. The ellipsis speaks also to that aspect of oral storytelling that is part of the Gaelic tradition 'to introduce sequences of action, just as passages in the native language were often introduced by phrases ... after a digression on the part of the speaker. There is a crossing in this ellipsis, a passing into the moment of visibility that allows me, its author, the freedom to write what surfaces for a moment from

as impenetrable, the hardened gloss of difficulty that greases itself from the potential grasp of the penetrator. Dense demotes text from the realm of reasonable (read understandable, knowable, (re)citable) to the arid barren loftiness of erudite esotericism, the hard, the onanistic edging of an eternal wanker rather than the producer of endless similarity, the reproducer of those who would, once again, long for and repudiate all that is hard. "Don't make us try to understand it." I am not ready (yet? ever?) to leave the repetitive comforts of the known. Don't make me try to understand anything that I do not already understand. Don't ask me to consider the polysemous infarction that strokes the blockages of hardness, the deflecting recoil that echoes a recall to return to all that which is impenetrably dense, to the anarchism of tropes and slopes, of slips and trips along and through which I have not come before. Denseness is not light. But it *is* rich. And richness is not for the faint- (although possibly for the feigned-) hearted. And certainly not for the poor, or the poor that ought to be con/as/re/signed the emaciating comforts of the normal.

Writing stories...

"Stories should be entertaining, they need to make me laugh. To do just fictional interviews would be dull."

How do you get me to write? No! How?

Given that they are sexual stories – do they have to be outrageous in their declarations? I've the feeling that they will be stories of living.

the endlessly circuitous round of internal dialogue that, itself, refuses the tease of order and linearity, refuses to make sense of the queerness of any becoming in the past, present or future.

"Will they be stories of being (as outlined here), or will they be stories of fractured selves' reminisces/musings about why they are gay?"

'Just for a moment, I think that it is more heroic not to be.' Anne Enright (2008), *the Gathering*, London, Vintage.

Stories as data: these are my experiments - my practicals in Psychology's terms – the Results or the Appendices of my report; the workings out, the display of my internal and fractured interviews/conversations. So I need to work with data, and I need to have that data legitimated in the academy before I can discuss and review literature, before I can describe and justify my method, before I can discuss and synthesise, before I can conclude and recommend more (of the same?). And all these caveats work to delay and sabotage my efforts to create an academic voice. I allow them to keep that voice at a distance.

Last night I finished writing the first of a series of literary fictions planned for my PhD. I want to remember the joyous sense of achievement that (re)grounded my view of past, present and future. And I don't think it was just the relief at having finished. It also bled from a sense of having created, through whittling and crafting, a story with my own words. I felt clear and energised for all those other writing jobs that I've sacrificed for completing this piece. I believe that the crowning achievement in doing so was that it looked like a polished piece of writing, structured and drafted through many iterations into a story that, although highly flawed, is a product of my own work. I have fought with my need to make purple the prose that I hail in capturing my ideas. One of the earlier reviewers described it as 'very descriptive' – a damning rebuke in the academic discourse of student feedback – and as containing too many adjectives. One of the drafting iterations set out specifically to tone down this aspect of my writing. I really don't think that I was successful: at best the prose went from purple to a deep lavender! How, I ask myself, could I refuse the vibrant dyes that colour

my quixotic vision of literary fiction – steeped as they are in the plunge of the canon forced in English language classes at secondary school where the heroes were etched in Victorian and earlier excesses, where it seemed that the great Irish writers to which I was meant to lay claim felt compelled to show their wordiness to spite the infantilising rhetoric of our colonial masters?

Transcending ...

I'm thinking here about how my male partner expresses concern when I, as a male, sit down on the loo to take a pee, especially when I'm wearing a dressing gown with little undergarment! It's interesting how both of us, differently, engage with a practice that is so closely tied up with the 'private' nature of the sex/gendered body. I'm thinking about how it keeps the toilet bowl clean for longer – less of those splashed drips – without having to do yet more gendered domestic labour; or of the play of my body on the porcelain of my toileting, and contrasted this with all that porn-inspired cottaging narrative that requires a more vertiginous 'pointing Percy at the porcelain'! I'm also thinking about how I like the feeling of being womanly in pissing this way – there's a frisson to this mode of bladder release which works against the gender binary that makes the pissing at least more enjoyable for me. My partner points out how this practice marks me as womanly – although it's voiced in inverted ways about how it marks me as 'not a real man'. Men (seemingly) don't do this! I wonder how this seemingly innocuous practice speaks more than the Trans in/for me. I'm impressed with how the practiced reactions of my partner marks both the sexed and gendered nature of bodies and how they are meant to 'work' in particular gendered ways. I wonder here about a (fictional) male(?) counsellor/psychologist who finds himself sitting on the loo to pee, in the presence of his Trans patients/clients?? I'm also interested here about the ways in which in the workplace, toilets and toileting stretch the constraint and disciplining of gender/sexed bodies. What I suspect holds these things together is something about the (institutionally conservative) structures that speak for and shape any and all understanding of bodies/identities.

Remembering to be

I hear it all in the new,
In my head now that's wondrous
And new and now.

Breathing beauty from the sonnet
That's new and now in
The here and there, and then and now.

Carrying all that's new and now,
In the here that once was there and might be then
But is also me and be, and here and now.

Filamented, traced and woven here,
Not true or there but carried here
Like new, remembered now that's me.

Of beauty set in gritty soil,
That I won't remember to forget
When now is then, and all again is me.

And tough as bodies all of mine,
Remembered now as then, was me.
And all, fresh new. As then, is now.

Seminar-ing...

In earnestness my/our language foils and fails to impress, repress, express ...
stop!

What use of useless language?

Of words lain together where they ought nought.

To play at what they ought say.

To adore for pleasure?

Such onanistic travails.

Any less useful or (re)productive than management by flabby text that are used by some as toned and healthy; that are derided by others as not making the poetic mark whilst at the same time are used as a means to spike and spite, to spark to new, to spook the hegemony guessed at from an imagined authorial intent.

And who can judge against other flabby texts?

Who's to say?

Not me.

Not these.

Not all of us, surely.

And still the silences wrought by the language of language, deafening to this very voiced ear. The other, me/other not yet gotten to, tired out by making the mechanisms so abundantly clear. And still, through thrust and parry of the representational problematic, the silence of the sex.

The dysfunctions erected for the now are caught listing in the halcyon lacunae sexed in ex's; in x's and y's; in the birds and the bees; in the nudge and wink of bodies there and here.

And now, like then, the muse disappears. I'm left in earnest. Once again.

Chapter 6: Telling stories/ Finding a Doctored voice.

'What medley of history and horror, science and poetry, is hereby made manifest?'

(Taussig, 2008, p. 7)

This dissertation, and indeed the project on which the dissertation is one outcome, was conceived through three 'disorganising' principles and a series of 'snags' which I outline at the start of this work. It is towards the bent of these principles and the ambiguities that I signalled for the snagging and snagged focus of the dissertation that this final chapter orients itself. It does so in a compulsion to conclude, to round off, to pull itself together. It does so in the vacuity of having another kind of end. It does so in the knowledge that there is no finality, only a continuation in the anaphora 'It does so ...'

An (m)other anchor:

Stories afford and make a life, don't they? And stories have a beginning middle and end; they are structured by and rooted in the experiences which they attempt to represent. Of course, we know that life, and the stories that purport to tell it, is not really as simple as that. Instead, we know that things are much more troubled and troubling. In citing the multiplicity of life and those stories that attempt tell it, I am immediately brought to the knee of my mother, a weaver of endless talk that rarely, if ever, felt itself restrained by conventions of structure. Arcs and sworls of seemingly unrelated tellings, tales of travail filtered through the lens of halcyon memory, linked and loved over days and weeks, were knitted loosely from the months and years before and after my being was conceived by her. Tales of sleabhac³⁶ and fairy

³⁶ Sleabhac – an edible seaweed that grows on the shoreline and was harvested by the poor to supplement their diet. It's taken several hours of research to find this word on the internet

soup³⁷, the imaginary food of the starving that then sold the lacks of poverty in the now: "Oh, and didn't it taste good", "Sure weren't we happy in them days"; endless talk of the talk of others: "Says she to me ...", "And now that's not what he told me ..."; tales of family intrigue, dirtied and laundered in the patina of this endless web of talk: "Now, don't tell another living soul", "Oh, I could write a book about him". In this unbroken lineage of herstory, I/she am an angel, bathed in the sonorous cacophony that whispers the depth and surety of our being, bathed in the light marked only by the darkened silence of sleep.

In remembering, shame burning red on my cheek, I am simultaneously transported to a cocky and strident insistence that her talk (later constructed as dribble) be checked and chalked against the formal rules into which I was being inculcated in school: a modernist formula of daily-news writing in class, the requirement for clarity and precision, in getting the right answer, and more latterly, in the causal disciplinary discourses of Psychology in which variables and their correlations must be described and teased for their finest truths.

and convince myself that it is 'real'; this, a word that littered my mother's lore and filled my head with a rhythm of language without ever really knowing (or really needing to know) what it referred to. It is a prime example of how vocabulary (but also stories) from my early life needs translation, that even I need translation of and for myself between the chasm of the then and now.

³⁷ Fairy soup conjures a set of vague but pervasive stories about boiling stones in water to make people believe they might eat – clearly a cultural reminder of famine and hunger. Sometimes the fairies, the little people, or the raiths of ancestors past were involved in these stories, replacing the stones with meat. This latter depended on how deserving were the characters in the story. But there was also a much less fantastical version of this story, a story much closer in time, which relayed my grandmother's cunning in boiling water with salt and pepper to feed her children. This latter story was often used as a way of persuading us how lucky we were when we complained about the quality or quantity of the food put in front of us.

And now I'm here. With unruly stories that refuse shape, with a lack of transferrable mastery learned in the rigours of psychological cause and effect, in the hypothesized and statisticized proofs of that peculiar practice, ironically called experimentation. Here I am with stories that float and shift, often before I get the chance to pin and pen them down. No amount of cool reflection gives me the distance to write them up without the license of frivolity that Maclure (2003) brings to me from Derrida. Instead it seems, in writing them through and down, I am left with the frustrations of an embodied memory, and an imagination that bothers both synapse and sex – neither of which answers to the call for rational, linear telling.

My mother's stories were at least, I suppose, enactments of presence; about the balm of being with, and sharing. I see in her whorl of talk the fragmented anti-narrative that Kiberd (1996) argues is the major trope of Samuel Beckett's work. Kiberd argues that such fragmentation in Beckett is a modernist instantiation of a deeper cultural psyche whose literary history has been rendered incoherent through colonisation but is retained, to some degree, through reliance on a regulated orality. Kiberd suggests that this trope 'becomes clear in the broken songs and stories which fill out Beckett's world: ... they are never told to a conclusion' (Kiberd, 1996, p. k).

My former, dismissive reaction to my mother's 'ramblings', the dribble of her nurture, was something, no doubt, to do with my own arrogant and aspirant trajectory toward a modernist orientation for linear (and straight?) stories with beginning, middle and end; stories with morals and straight-forward messages of proof and truth. However, now, in trying to tell my own stories, stories that touch and tell, that beg for (my own) presence, then that which I once dismissed as dribble comes back to haunt and heal. I am that (m)other who fails to tell linear stories but is, instead, immersed in the here and now of ... talking? ... of speaking ...? so that I confirm that I speak – but, for this current work, I must do so in writing.

It is not just in remembering my mother, and the way that she gifted me with an oblique orientation to linear story-telling, that this dissertation rests. There is a whole panoply of memory, a veritable 'erotics of memory' (N. A. Miller, 2002) to which this work turns in re/con/figuring same-sex genital erotics away from 'gay' and through a praxis of que(e)rying. The current work adheres to Castiglia and Reed's (2011, p. k) call for 'strategic remembering', recognising it as 'an act of resistance ... a process at once disruptive and inventive'. They claim that 'Like utopias, memories craft a world that stands as a counter-reality to the lacking or painful present, creating narratives of "the past" so as to challenge the inevitability of dominant constructions of "reality"'. They see the potentiality of 'a use of pastness to articulate social yearnings that contest the disciplines of the present' (Castiglia & Reed, 2011, p. k).

Although characterising Ireland's transition to modernity, with its concomitant bending towards capitalist unequal concentrations of wealth, Lloyd's ideas of using some elements of the past as a critical lever in (re)imagining the future is resonant with Castiglia and Reed's (2011, p. k), arguing that memory and remembering are ethical and potentially radical acts: 'the past and its possibilities are not the goal of the present but they are the sign of unclosed and unworked possibilities of life in common, whose recalcitrant living on demands that we do justice still to the alternatives they represent' (Lloyd, 2008, p. 8).

The remembering in this current work is a corruption of Castiglia and Reed's project in which they resist the fashionability of much Queer Theory in preference for a return to the politics of 'gay'. The corruption of my work in this dissertation is to harness the gerund in/of queer – queering – in re-casting the life of memory so as to reappraise the fabrication and flimsiness of late twentieth and early twenty-first century constructions of 'gay', and my own rush towards its acceptability and putative respectability. Perhaps this is what this whole project is about – finding a way to walk between the

tightropes of Queer Theory and a queer practice in the everyday: being able to be settled in the in-betweenness of past and present, emigrant and immigrant, of non-normative sexualities and genders ...

The current memory work harks at Chris Waters' (2008) celebration of what is termed 'new British queer history', especially through the work of Matt Houlbrook's history of homosexuality in early twentieth century London. Houlbrook repudiates the use of 'gay' (and even 'homosexual') in referring to "all erotic and affective interactions between men and all men who engaged in such interactions" in Britain prior to the 1960's' (Waters, 2008, p. 140). Houlbrook insists that all such homo-erotic and homo-affective activity should be denoted by the term 'queer' so as to avoid imposing a post-Wolfenden frame onto activities and identifications that preceded their true emergence. The current work echoes this ethos in as much as it suggests that the nomenclature of gay, effective as a rallying cry for 'the world we have won' (Weeks, 2007) and as a signifier of the important continuities between the present and the past (Weeks, 2012), fails to index the exponential diversity of experience and identification that labours under its sign. That is to say that, through this work, I offer the argument that this term sacrifices much of the rich and unruly fractures that site classed, gendered, national and childhood (sexual) identity formations as subordinate to those attempts that direct the political productivity of homoerotic and homo-affective relations in the cause of rights-based sexual franchise under the single issue banner – orientation towards a sexual object choice. As well as losing the rich diversity of sexual (and other) labour inherent in these fractured and fracturing identity positions, the arraignment of homoerotic and homo-intimate relations under the banner of 'gay', fails to disrupt those very structures that simplify and reify such identity positions into hierarchies of top and bottom, into cartographies of centre and periphery: of male/female, upper/lower classes, of coloniser/colonised, of hetero/homo, of straight/gay. There is, of course, an inevitability by which particular elements of these binaries are assigned

negative value, and the dominant one of the pair becomes that which is occluded from a social science gaze.

So, the current work is deeply invested in a range of 'memory stories' that chart my engagements with the world. These are stories of 'coming out' but are not necessarily of, or especially exclusive in their concern with, the closet. Nor do they hanker after the kinds of 'abjection' that often pertain to that darkened space of pre-enlightened (homo)sexuality – the inky murk from which 'gay' offers salvific redemption. Instead these 'memory stories' recast the fragmented trajectories of becoming away from the master narrative of 'gay' and look backwards toward the ways by which they offer a different set of masquerades for the becoming of me that continues to afford a play in thinking and being the queer-ed man that I (resist) represent(ing) in this work.

'Memory Stories' – disrupting 'gay':

There is clearly a compulsion on my part to tell some of the story fragments of an earlier and formative me. As such, I am not immune from the cultural zeitgeist that demands a place for a sense of order in/for auto/biographies of the ordinary. However, in writing the story fragments in this work, I was constantly alive to the possibility of queering the stories that I thought had worth in telling, or that I felt a compulsion to tell. In this, the telling was guided as much by art and artifice as it was by those claims that ignore the rhetoricity of storying an authentic 'I' in auto/biographical and auto/ethnographic genres of story telling (Evans, 1998).

One of the (dis)organizing principles that propelled this project was in mapping my own sense of (a sexual)self in relation to some of the spaces, places and dominant discourses that pervade Euro-American cultural frames for telling male same-sex genital relations. More specifically, I wanted to

disrupt 'gay' as the dominant site in accounting for such (homo)sexual relations by providing a more nuanced exploration of the in these geographical contexts. I have done this through an exploration of my own relation to a myriad of identity (im)positions and (dis)locations in the everyday that are not always easily aligned under the sign of 'gay': it is from these points and processes of finding myself out-of-time, out-of-place, out-of-kilter that I wish to (dis)place the formula story attaching to 'gay'.

The dominant trope in the story of 'gay' is one of emancipation from the 'stress and struggle' (Cohler & Hammack, 2006), of closeted passings into the dull glare of accepted (hetero)normativity – with a particular, if barely noticeable bent towards a same-sex object choice! In such stories the mantle of early trauma is wielded into the healing balm of a present, fully resolved, or at least primed to a point when the journey to completion can be imagined and willed into existence: in this story, 'coming out' into 'gay' is 'the missing puzzle piece which, clicked into place, finally brought the whole picture into focus' (Weir, 1996, p. 29). Disrupting the story of gay is not, by any stretch new. Mark Simpson's edited collection *Anti-Gay* (1996) brings together a number of cultural critics who equally repudiate the banal emaciations of mainstream 'gay' identity and subculture (see also Sinfield, 1998). The collection, diverse in its authors and targets for repudiation, aims to 'offer the beginnings of a new dialectic, a new conversation with the world, one that is rather more interesting than the current one ... [borne through] the merciless operation of critical faculties where gay demands they be suspended, censored or diverted into "fighting homophobia"' (M. Simpson, 1996, p. xix). The collection pivots on the idea, much vaunted in Queer Theory and Activism that preceded and followed it, that '... identity does not inhere in specific persons – the lesbian, the gay man, the bisexual, the straight – but that these terms only name provisional sites which are intersected by a range of practices, desires, attitudes and politics which never come together in the same way every time' (Eadie, 1996, p. 75).

The current work takes up the mantle of Simpson's project, and responds to Kent's (2004) call for richer storying of non-normative sexual subjectivity. In this work, the stories offer a very different reading for that experience which is, more usually, seen as abject, the unacceptable in the formation of non-heterosexual identities in relation to their present and future. Here, stories of a formative life are (re)constructed as offering a realm of opportunity, a set of openings raw in their possibility rather than constructing them as the wounds of hurt which is how they are more readily imagined in dominant cultural narratives and then imputed onto the struggles of the proto-gay in need of protection and therapeutic cossetting (and concomitant policing?). The stories here attempt to fracture this dominant trope, and examine instead the ways in which biographical stories might be made to work differently in (re)fabricating a later identity that subsequently adopts the formulaic story of 'gay'. These stories work to highlight the range of queerness that characterise relations of becoming in/to the world and resists the idea that the fabulous and fabricated identity position of 'gay' 'explain[s] my entire life' (Weir, 1996, p. 26). The work, then, is an attempt to query and queer the present, in its relation to the past, so that I might re-examine how the trajectories that combine in/for non-normative male sexuality might cast off the long-standing charge that 'self-identified gay men are especially resistant to thinking about issues of class and race, and they steadfastly deny their sexism' (Weir, 1996, p. 29).

In this, I have attempted to re-script the past as (at least) a set of narratives with the potential to (re)form becoming, queerly, so that 'they move, or can be made to move us, into other modalities of becoming.' (Probyn, 1995, p. 480). In the words of Freccero's (2011, p. 24) impassioned plea for re-thinking non-normative sexuality in its intersections with the social, the work attempts to '... imagine other ways to be, to live, and to fashion worlds.'

There is something then in this project that recognizes how those stories, already available to and for (homo)sexuality, have the ability to form, and

conform to, configurations of the (homo)sexual that map its (dis)location away from settlement and from the norm in more politically productive alliance with other forms of (dis)location. In attempting to (re)map 'gay' I identify a series of dislocations that, more usually, align with aspects of identity (class, nation, gender, race, (dis)ability, childhood sexuality) often theorized separately from sexual identity (for example, see Fraser, 1999). It is in exploring the particularities of these sites of (dis)location – of geography, of embodied and discursive sense-making in the everyday – that the work attempts to resist the settled formulation for male same-sex genital relations that are most usually conjured for and through 'gay'. The work takes seriously Fraser's (1999, p. 125) suggestion 'not only to explore in detail the specific processes, both spatial and temporal, which are productive of subjectivities ... but to take that interrogation seriously, especially as it constitutes, to cite Butler again, 'a self-critical dimension within activism'.

Through autoethnographic reflection, my work acknowledges the contemporary and formative geographical, cultural and academic contexts within which I (re/un)make sense of a biography of same-sex erotics. In great part this is to ground my subjective negotiations with the localised hetero-gender complex that an early being, the ghosts of early life, engaged with in its becoming in the present.

Working the dissatisfactions and unease with which I consider myself part of the contemporary gay scene in Manchester acted as a starting point. I am aware how these dissatisfactions might be dismissed as the middle-aged ranting of someone who worked hard at achieving the status of gay and was now no longer obviously included in that youth-obsessed milieu (Schwaiger, 2006; P. Simpson, 2012, 2013). However, I think there is more to it than that! In imposing a structure (for reflecting) on the current work, this starting point triggered a series of backward glances which attempt to (re)examine the unease that I profess for 'gay' and find it within the heady rush towards 'gay' that promised to make my life complete (Weir, 1996).

The first backward movement in this work is toward Belfast, where I studied psychology as an undergraduate. I reflect here on the queerness of Belfast as a city-space, on how the situatedness of being was much more about ethno-political identity than it was, necessarily, about (homo)sexuality. Displacing narratives of (homo)sexuality with one which privileges ethno-political identity in negotiating that space and place is emblematised by border crossings and the 'double-talk' necessary in being safe in that milieu. The double talk of ethno-political identity in Belfast is mirrored in the haunting absence of any talk about early, non-normative sexual practice. These reflections que(e)ry the socio-discursive compulsion of homosexuality as the dominant, or only, assignation in claiming such practice.

Belfast is the geographical context of my early encounters with psychology which begin to shape and discipline a very particular subjective sense-making, especially in its uncanny hailing of the (homo)sexual. The form of this chapter marks most clearly the inchoate sensibility that I felt in writing autoethnographically, in attempting to snag and unpick trajectories of becoming that slide ineluctably toward the story of gay. The chapter effects, most clearly, the fragmentary nature of narrative that Kiberd (1996 above) indexes as the condition of the postcolonial. It is clear that psychology still troubles. It troubles in its contradictory and conservative approach to knowing (homo)sexuality. It troubles in its seemingly reluctant but equally voracious desire to know, and render knowable, (homo)sexuality³⁸. Ideographically, it troubles in my failed attempts to find a straightened bent from which to coolly appraise its penetrations in my own becoming. I feel

³⁸ I am reminded here of Eadie's (1996) use of appetite and indigestion as metaphors for exploring the uneasy relation of lesbian and gay culture with bisexuality: 'Appetite is, by definition, not sure of what it wants' (p.82) but is driven towards consumption regardless of its (in)ability to digest that what it consumes. I wonder how these metaphors might be useful in exploring psychology's relation to (homo)sexuality.

left holding onto the raptures and ruptures of psychology's (homo)sexuality: knowing and not, known and not, knotted in its/my unknowing.

Belfast also acts as a location from which I examine, autoethnographically, my relation with Irishness and with gender. Exploring my relation to national identity, my Irishness, is one of the most surprising aspects of the current project. In starting out, I had not given it that much thought. But, in the process of writing, it took on an elephant-in-the-room character, and wrought its way to telling. I suspect that its compulsion to be told was fuelled, in part, by the seemingly innocuous observation that my word processor underscored Irishness in red whilst Englishness seemed wholly acceptable. I wondered at the queer lexicality of Irishness, its need for remediation. And, in this wondering, I pressed ahead in gingerly (dis)locating my relation to this axis of identity. In the frustrations of trying to sight Ireland, its (relation to its own) convoluted and contradictory histories from my own displacement as an exile now living in England, I took heart from Howe's (2006, p. k) argument that 'Wrestling with the problem of the national also involves thinking about the bases for different kinds of collectivity – physical bodies, forms of feeling, or the dictates of reason.'

I was further heartened by Liam Harte's (2007) converse thesis that all Irish autobiographical writing is, in essence, writing about the nation and national identity – a nation always under threat of erasure from political tumult and violence. Harte shows how the indeterminacies associated with Ireland as a national construct are redolent of and creatively productive in reminding us about the parallel indeterminacies of the narrating self. He suggests that a recurring trope of Irish autobiographical writing is '... the vacillating self, poised between definition and dispersal, enunciation and erasure, affirmation and dissolution', and that the genre is replete with writers who take 'a paradoxical delight in doubleness and ambivalence, even as they strive for self-completion, suggesting that the Irish autobiographical self is most itself in the very process of becoming.' (p5). In retrospect then, I am glad that this

writing about Ireland and Irishness takes such a centre stage in my attempts to write about 'gay' subjectivity and how that subjectivity is queered by and through a queer(y)ing of Irish/ness in the contexts of British urban homonormativity.

Valocchi's (2012, p. 469) idea about the role of 'transnational processes of immigration and urbanization' in furnishing a broader and more textually rich set of stories of sexual subjectivity is resonant for me here. I wonder about how early sex and national identity as an immigrant in England require me to look elsewhere in thinking about the queerness of my identity – a queerness that lies in a range of atonal cacophonous voices that speak to and for a subjectivity out of sorts and dislocated from the normative ideologies of (national and) sexual identity in the present. I am wholly cognisant of the tensions in telling, in any way that sutures past and present together in a coherent gloss that threatens to smooth the ambivalences of adhering to a national identity either when I lived physically in Ireland or in my most recent past as resident in England. Both are counterpoints to the fiction of a jingoistic national identity; both force awareness that true, authentic Irishness – the variety only really associated with those who are resident in the Republic – is always and forever beyond any past, present or future that I can imagine. The nostalgia to return, implicitly invoked by my professed dislocation from Englishness, is a fantasy recognised both now and for the future – there is no going back:

Going back different, going back to people indifferent to your difference, the past indifferent to your present, your presence superfluous to the past, being haunted by places past ... this is much pain here. (Probyn, 1995, p. 454).

The chapter in which Irishness is addressed is also the space in which I story my oblique relation to gender. These stories, and the questions about

masculine identity to which they give rise, focus largely on the labour that works masculinity in a subsistence agricultural economy, and on the forms of oral narrative through which masculinity is endlessly performed. These stories, I hope, resist what Evans (1998, p. k) characterizes in the genre of auto/biography as the 'project of masculinity, which emphasizes autonomy and the completed self, [and] does not fit easily with subjective or reflective accounts of the origin of the person, or even the unknowability of the person.'

I am not interested in resolving my relation to gender/masculinity. In this work I hold masculinity just as much at arm's length as I do nationality and 'gay' and que(e)ry some of their intersections in (con)forming straightened positions of being. In this way, the work harnesses the potential of remembering, in unseating masculinity from the safety of its putative naturalness. Instead, I am interested in how these tellings intersect with and disrupt the significations of 'man', 'male' and 'masculinity'; in what ways do these ideas and ideals intersect through a becoming towards all and none of these? What are the locations of femininity in this? In what ways do the experiences of economics, and national identity play across the strings of this gendered trajectory? And, as significantly, how do they play out in the formation of the homosexual? Is it possible that the abjections available in the normalising tendencies of dominant narratives of gender and nation propel me in/to a reactionary celebration of the margins; an inversion of that which is signified as the abject, into an escape, a place of sanctuary from which to gloat at the fucked-up shenanigans that fuck up and at the norm?

The final autoethnographic chapter (dis)locates what I name as the queer child. In this chapter I re-play and re-furrow some narratives that construct the child as largely malleable along the smooth(ed) trajectories of psycho-social development into civility. In the first instance, I tilt my plough to the lea of school/ing and (re)explore its conditions in cultivating its (un)civilized crop. My ruminations seat me in a class-room, disciplining a body of sense-making that must know its own demise. In and through school/ing I learn

that the folkloric must learn to bottom itself to the topping rise of formal logics and literacies; it is where I learn how one set of learning can be 'disqualified, rendered nonsensical or non-conceptual or "insufficiently elaborated"' in Foucault's terms (cited in Halberstam, 2011, p. 11). School is also the site to and from which I learn the contradictory crossings in and out of acceptability and respectability. It is in the queer tilth of boundary subject/object, between school and home, that I claim to grow a weedy curiosity that, itself, queers my relation in subsequent knowing. Further, I see in the dynamics of schooling traces of class dynamics that were rife in rural Ireland. Ferriter (2010, p. k) argues that such class distinctions 'underlie the huge gulf between the rhetoric of aspiration that coloured so many of the expressions of the supposed advantages of Ireland as an unsullied classless rural idyll, and the reality of a society that failed hopelessly to live up to such rhetoric.'

In this cluster of socio-cultural dynamics, po(i)sed in the elaborated disciplines of school and set in opposition to the material and cultural realities of a peasant home, lay another set of dislocations and ruptures that reverberate their lessons in other future pasts. It is through these particular fractures of becoming that I want to be able to claim, like Berubé, 'to accept and constructively use the distances and dislocation, my double vision and two-mindedness, and my homosexual desires up, down, and across class lines.' (Berube, 1996, p. 154). It is, I argue, as much in the dynamics of class and the civilizing projections of school that the queerness of (homo)sexuality resides.

The second move in this final autoethnographic chapter conjures a sexual child (dis)placed within a set of discourses that preclude its being. Again, in re-examining this biographical history, I venture an argument that wrests a generative power from the ruptures and fractures that inhere in the secrecies and (not) telling that (dis)locate the sexual child. When I look back to the cacophony of silences that shrouded these early sexual pleasures and (p)lay

them alongside the ridiculously, rampantly, beautifully undisciplined and disorderly conflicts and tensions in which those pleasures took place (of gender, of nation, of class, or pre-modernity), I recognise the dynamic of childhood as one that is ripe for a (re)inscription of adult sexuality. This recognition is not, however, meant to claim childhood (sexuality) as the originary root from which all subsequent (sexual) growth/development occurs. Instead, like Probyn, I recognise the memories, by which childhood is civilized, as yet another layer in the sweet dessert that is made (in)coherent in writing biographical trajectories; in the current work they add up more to Eton mess than they are placed in the neatness of a mille-feuille. These childhood memories do not have 'the status ground: they are there and they are not there, they are beginnings that are constantly wiped out, forcing me to begin again and again' (Probyn, 1995, p. 445).

Ohi (2004, p. 101) argues that Henry James' novel *What Maisie Knew* 'makes explicit the ways in which the child, as pure, impermeable blankness or as nothing but the facticity of its violation, allows us to imagine a self-sufficient subjectivity (especially our own) not rent by the vicissitudes of language, representation or desire.' I recognize in Ohi's characterization of James' novel the desire for alternative orientations in and through a symbolic system which currently offers an impossible choice – one that configures me knowing as a sexual child whilst insisting on the impossibility of being a sexual child. Is it in the double-bind of this impossibility that I am, and made, queer? If it is, then it also queers my relation to the wider world, to all those other structures that I outline and layer here.

Berube warns that 'the class hardship narrative only reinforces class hierarchies in the telling. Even as it makes visible and validates the lives of working-class people, and evokes sympathy from middle-class listeners, it reduces us to either victims or heroes. Our lives become satisfying dramas of suffering that end in inspiring victory or poignant tragedy.' (Berube, 1996, p. 154). I wonder how these tensions, of representing a class-ed positioning for

someone from a national context in which class does not operate like it does in Britain, applies to all those other elements of this life that tries to tell themselves in this project: the early sexualised child who refuses the taint and tincture of survivor, the Irish migrant who 'does well' but retains enough of the Gaelic gloom to hark at peasant; the boy/man who is related to masculinity only in its obliquity, the homosexual who achieves but resists the lure of the homonorm?

I am reminded here of Michael Warner's injunction against coherence in storying the self, of NOT having stories 'of discarded personalities, no vestigial selves, no visible ruptures with ourself, no gulf of self-forgetfulness, nothing that requires explanation, no alien version of yourself that requires humor (sic) and accommodation. What kind of life is that?' (2004, p. 216)

It is, in fact, the messy (in)coherence of the matrix of storied biographical (dis)locations presented in this work, that allows me to sit with and (dis)locate my adult sexuality from the neat homonormativity that inheres in 'gay'. It allows me to relocate the unease of 'gay' into the turbulent uncertainties of queer – the queer here intentionally has a small 'q'; it is aligned with the gerund and with the mundane, it invests in the constancy of quotidian becoming and eschews the dead rest of being. And it is in this relocation that I recognise how those theoretical positions most reviled by foundationalist accounts of subjectivity – postmodernism, poststructuralism, posthumanisms – come to me like a breath of fresh air, a soothing balm from the rabid search for some imagined coherency that is peddled for the homosexual in the therapeutically inclined, modernist insistent, psy disciplines. It is from within the topsy-turvy comfort of these 'post' theoretical positions that I fail to make sense of the (neo) foundationalist critiques that these 'posts' are anything but material, always only at the level of text. This network of (post) theoretical positions provide, at least for me, the very breath in my body; they are the materiality of every pump and fold of memory that I carry and orient towards this writing. They are the vitality

that allows me to encounter again, everyday, the beauty and joy and pain and inequality of the world around me, to stitch and fabricate a way in a world so full of precarious tolerance. These theoretical positions also allow me to know (or more likely guess) that my (homo)sexuality is nothing to do with an orientation, nothing innate, or not even something to choose. It is more likely based in a praxis of question and que(e)r/y that trouble the positions adopted in the darkening light of the claim to know. The 'queer' that I invoke here is nothing about queer as homosexual or non-heterosexual; it is not really located in an 'orientation' or vector, in the choice of a particular gendered love object. Instead it lies to the heart of how one might (fail to) make sense of the multiple, conflicted layers of meaning that are available in the embodied and unruly pleasures of a/sexual practice; in the cultural folds that insist on fixing sense, that try to bundle voices of non-sense into some sort of linear, or Euclidean plane of sense. I realise that my homosexuality, and the unease with its presentation as 'gay' lies only in the certain commitment to the political and psychological uncertainty of (un)becomingness.

Working in and out through those contradictions attaching to the absent/present nexus of early sexuality, tells on the allure of the 'coming out' in telling the (homo)sexual as 'gay'. The 'coming out' story is one that is readily available; a dominant story that offers the allure of an integrated self and, for me, can be viewed as a lazy way of adopting an identity narrative; adopting the line of least resistance within the dominant narratives that exist already in culture seemingly obsessed with the hetero/homo binary. However, it is precisely the potential ease of adopting it that shapes, to a large extent, the unease with which I continue to inhabit its mantle – especially given the particular and narrow entailments attaching to it within a dominant homonormative frame (Duggan, 2004; Giffney, 2007). The work presented here is meant as a means of re-thinking gay and its productivities along the many axes by which (homo)sexuality intersects. I begin to leave the project with the strong hope that I do not fall into the trap outlined so

many years ago by Lisa Power who, in arguing against the rigid classification of sexual practice/desire into categories of sexual identity, flags the very real possibility 'that in their perfectly reasonable desire to transgress, their devotion to deviancy, they have mistaken homosexuality for a powerful State against which they must rail' (1996, p. 64)

Que(e)r(y)ing Gay through fiction:

Given the nature and status of autoethnographic writing, it strikes me that there is a significant level of doubt and uncertainty in the voice of the author of the autoethnographic texts that I produce in this work. This doubt and uncertainty is, to some degree, in the nature of all texts when examined under the deconstructive and poststructuralist lens informed by Derrida and others with an interest in text and representation. Maclure (2003, p. 128), for example, argues that 'Texts are always incomplete and fragmentary because they are part of the unceasing fabrication of the world, which involves both making and unmaking. Bits are unravelling at the very instant that new connections are being knotted together.' However, I think that the doubt and uncertainty applies especially to autoethnographic texts. Here, the doubt and uncertainty resides in the uneasy relation between author and narrator, a relation that is – even for the author of these stories – indefinite and unknown.

The autoethnographic stories that make up the dissertation are themselves fiction. It is not that I set out intentionally to deceive. Rather, they are, by the very nature of attempting to tell a self, a project in fiction. As Mary Evans (1998, p. k) would have it, biographical stories are always partial, fragmented, plagued by the vagaries of memory, and subject to the conventions and tropes of narrative fiction in their retelling. There is something about stories that make them a pale representation of a life:

The story of a life is less than the actual life, because the story told is selective, partial, contextually constructed and because the life is not yet over. But the story of a life is also more than the life, the contours and meanings allegorically extending to others, others seeing themselves, knowing themselves through another's life story, revisioning their own, arriving where they started and knowing 'the place for the first time'. (Richardson, 1997; 6).

Richardson (1998, p. 43), quoting from her then novelist husband and writing collaborator, argues that 'As Picasso (1965) wrote, "We all know that art is not truth. Art is a lie that makes us realize the truth. The artist must know the manner whereby to convince others of the truthfulness of his lies"'

The uncertainty, the certitude of indeterminacy in the texture and textuality of autoethnographic story, is resonant for me in Bersani's (1995) arguments about the precarious position of the homosexual in the wider cultural imaginary – the 'failed subject'. Bersani's argument, like that of most Queer Theory, recognises the precarity of the (homo)sexual, and (homo)sexuality more generally, in the dominant hetero/homo frame. It is a position from which the (homo)sexual continues, contradictorily, to hang itself in the laurels of transgression, in which it is marked as a violation of taboo. It is a position that, simultaneously, requires and compels (homo)sexuality to find a form of normativity to facilitate its easy congress in the form of a tolerant acceptance, of respectability. This balancing act in/to 'gay' is that of the funambulist given an unevenly weighted pole and the unsettling reassurance of loose ties for their safety net. Taussig (2008, p. 13) argues that 'We need also to bear in mind that to transgress is not only to lift a taboo temporarily but to feel its weight, charged with the conflictual and exciting currents societies muster when taboos are put to the test. Then the whole world looks different, as does the language attempting to describe this state.' Charged with its full weight, with the impress of (constant, continuing) transgression, I only want to imagine (homo)sexuality through its own indeterminacy, an indeterminacy that sees 'the strength, not the weakness, of homosexuality, for the fiction of

an inviolable and unified subject has been an important source of human violence.’ (Bersani, 2009, p. 43)

In this work then, the doubt and uncertainty of the (homo)sexual is doubled in the blend of autoethnographic and creative fiction modes of writing that lay beside each other to reproduce the whole body of the work. The aim in my writing such stories, and especially in blending creative fiction with autoethnographic forms of writing, was as much to unsettle the more usual focus of these stories as it was to disturb the neatness and resolution that much telling of this kind usually inheres (Bleakley, 2000). In doing so, the work attempts to add a further dynamic to the narrowed and hegemonic stories that dominate the contemporary field of male same-sex sexual orientation – especially the ‘coming out’ story and that of ‘the closet’ in the formation of a (homo)normed ‘gay’ subjectivity (Benozzo, 2013; Chirrey, 2011; Crawley & Broad, 2004; Gray, 2009; Hegna, 2007; Herman, 2005; Jolly, 2001).

Ketelle (2004, p. 453), following Wittgenstein, argues that ‘Fictionalizing real world experience affords an opportunity to attend to everyday experience in a new way, to revisit particulars that may have escaped notice the first time around’. In many respects this argument, for the use of fiction, is aligned with the role of memory work in imagining different futures (Castiglia & Reed, 2011; Lloyd, 2008). However, I wonder at how Kettelle’s idea of the everyday ‘hiding’ particular truths of the world – especially when we consider that the dominant stories told in the everyday are told from within particular ideological frames of reference, of conventionalized narrative structures, of what is tellable, what is sayable. In this way, contra-Ketelle, I argue that one might fictionalize experience in order to ‘go beyond’ the everyday (narrative) experience of our world. Like Duggan (1993, p. 811) I am interested in the impulse

*... to retell our culture’s dominant stories with an eye to
reorganizing its distribution of cultural and material resources.*

*With these new stories we re-present and re-make the world
from the interaction of our own points of view and those of
others in an ongoing process of re-vision.*

Likewise, Sloan (2009, p. 229) asserts that 'Stories therefore may at once misrepresent the literal truth and also assume a truth of their own that lends them the status of reality ...'. In appraising Dermot Healy's *Bend for Home*, Sloan (2009) posits how 'promiscuously fact and fabrication coexist' in telling the supposed fact of a life already lived. And again, he is at pains to show how Healy '...reaffirms how the distinction between fact and fiction, between truth and lies is blurred; and more radically, it contests the very notion that they are separable and knowable as discrete categories' (Sloan, 2009, p. 230). Quoting directly from Healy's novel *The Bend for Home*, Sloan points to Healy's warning about how the quotidian of life gets overlooked in attempting to tell tales solely on the basis of memory: 'what images are locked away that only imagination can release? Beyond those wild sexual arousals are other plainer moments, disguised as clichés, hiding from the language of elation. They are the mundane everyday that memory does not espouse' (Healy, p.101)

Commenting on a similar narrative of Irish boyhood, Sloan argues that Ciaran Carson, a contemporary Northern Irish writer, 'shows that it is not the nature of a story to be fixed and immutable or merely an act of repetition; a story is dynamic, improvisatory, and assimilates or is affected by any number of random associations or connections affecting both the narrator and the audience. In this way it invites unexpected links and subverts boundaries of thought, space, and time.' (Sloan, 2009, p. 235). Likewise, Royle argues that 'the power and strangeness of fiction, poetry and drama [lies] in their capacity to disturb our well-established beliefs or presuppositions about the relations between truth and imagination, work and play, literature and real life' (2013, p. online). In a similar vein to St Pierre and Pillow's (2000, pp. 1–2) treatise on the poststructuralist feminist writers that contribute to their

book *Working the Ruin*, the aim of this writing was to tell stories 'that neither produce or desire another clear, consensual, and whole narrative. Rather they encourage a lusty, rigorous, enabling confusion that deterritorializes ontological reckonings, epistemological conditions and justifications, and methodological striations.' And, in this latter, I am minded to remember Halberstam's (2011, p. 10) idea that, in the search for knowledge that is productive in and for the world, 'we may, ultimately, want more undisciplined knowledge, more questions and fewer answers.'

This idea of fiction, as a voice of the self whilst also representing a voice of something extra-self, is not unrelated to what Palmer (2005) explores as the necessary condition of English-speaking Irish who retain traces of knowledge about the Irish language. Palmer suggests that: 'To know, as the Irish do, that alongside the absolute clarity and cut-and-driedness of 'Yes' and 'No' there is no Irish word for either yes or no is to inhabit an uncertain space. ... [in this uncertainty] there is far more room for irony, scepticism and a doubleness of vision than in the black-and-white world of yes and no.' (p.60).³⁹

Ketelle (2004, p. 452) quotes Barone's (1997, p.224) argument that '...artistic texts must invest in ambiguity. Good stories, as art, do not conclude, but suggest, eschewing direct summary statements for delicate hints about theme and thesis'. She continues by arguing that, in fictionalized narratives, 'the "theme and thesis" act as a starting point for the writer to explore and navigate, or re-navigate unresolved experiences from (work) life.' Barone's idea here resonates with what I want to achieve in this work in using creative fiction – to forgo some kind of 'truth' about either the characters that I

³⁹ I am mindful here that my reading of urban 'gay' (homo)sexuality is one that stresses (life)style and the repetitious riff of lines learned from elsewhere. Invariably I find myself lost in this cultural script. Instead I am constantly looking to and for (homo)sexuality in an erotics of orality; in the unruly, edgy and inventive scat of improvised barb and the balm of previously unimagined chat.

construct in my fictional narratives, or indeed about the 'character' of those subjectivities that are the subject/object of my autoethnographic research.

Ketelle's argument for using fictional narrative, as a means by which one can know more or better in the social sciences, is one that I took seriously in orienting myself to and in this project. However, in terms of (homo)sexuality – and especially in its form of 'gay' – I was constantly thinking about how narrative fiction in social research can, like Harold (2003) suggests, lead us to more 'unknowing', to less closure in what might be claimed as known.

Rather than thinking about one form of writing as better than the other, impressing yet another hierarchy of top and bottom, I am left with the realisation from this work that one operates in merely different ways than the other. This is certainly the case depending on the 'content' and the object of the gaze for which one is intent on writing. For example, see the analysis of writing both fictionally and autoethnographically about early child sexual encounters above versus writing those aspects of the dissertation that are about Irishness. In the former, because of the cultural sanctions on even conceptualising child sexuality I felt constrained in the fictional mode of writing in how I might represent this aspect of life and living. However, in writing autoethnographically about the same topic, there is the possibility to rely on a realist tradition that trades in its ability to speak of an abject past; one that trades on the contemporary (and seemingly hegemonic) acceptability of a narrative of trauma and abuse. Even in writing fictionally about this aspect of my biography, I felt constrained and retained a similar trope of narrative convention. In writing about Irishness, the opposite held true: I felt a great deal freer in writing creatively (and fictionally) about Irishness than I did in writing autoethnographically about this same aspect of my biography. It seemed to me that I was either more steeped in, or more aware of the extensive genre of writing about Irishness through fiction than I was a theoretical literature about this same topic. At the same time, attempts to write autoethnographically about Irishness were constantly sabotaged with

a dread that I would get it wrong, with my inability to voice the fractured and fragmented knowledge of Irish history and culture. It was as if Ireland and Irishness were characters that solely resided in fiction.

In comparing the two approaches, and in focussing most especially on the supposed foundationalist realism of much autoethnographic writing, I am reminded of Probyn's injunction to be aware of what she claims is a well-worn theoretical truism 'that the past is made up; fictions of the past, the past as fiction.' (p.440). My attempts at telling childhood and later formative lives in order to excavate these slivers of made-up recollections in the form of autoethnography and then to contrast these with more clearly marked instances of fiction is precisely 'not to recount them as links in a chronological chain that links the present to a fixed past. [but rather] It is to tell them with the fervor of the possible, not the implacability of truth-telling.' (Probyn, 1995, p. 458) In my use of fiction I am attempting what Probyn exhorts us to do in disturbing the more usual trope of lesbian and gay narrations that go 'from the present to the past in order to justify the present ... [as it] merely reproduces the present as an effect of the past, of past causes.' (p.450).

Concomitantly, the two forms of work, of writing, of representation, are doubles of each other. Each feeds the other with an 'out clause', an *outré*, through which all fixity fails to solidify and take hold. As Mahon would have it in reading Seamus Deane's semi-autobiographical novel *Reading in the Dark*, 'Where truth and fiction are inseparable, where imagination and reality blur, the obsessive reconstruction of incomplete stories is all that remains' (2007, p. 117). In this, the dissertation parallels the form of Deane's novel, and provides for both he and I 'to strategically occupy this reiterative space of incomplete narratives, where the tyranny of one true version of events taking precedence over all others is constantly precluded.' (Mahon, 2007, p. 117). Mahon argues that Deane's novel celebrates the constant deferral of 'truth' with stories, layered, competing in an endless celebration of occlusion from the truth, thus producing a site in which 'a non-hierarchical framework or

system of incomplete narratives can flourish because no story has the ability to cancel out any other'. He argues that this characteristic of the novel is the one that adds to our understanding of the political situation in Northern Ireland where 'no narrative or narrative identity can ascend to the status of the "last word" – all are incomplete; all are affected in advance by an echo that constantly opens them not only to imagination, articulation, and repetition, but also to each other' (Mahon, 2007, p. 118). This kind of endless cyclicity, of competing story, of a mutual and interdependent reliance for truth across the borders of fact and fiction, is something that I associate with my own project of queer-ing here and then. On reflection, I find it in the (in)ability or (lack of) need to find fuller representation, fuller lines of reading in found and created stories to mark the splendiddness, the fabulousness, the queerness of (any)sexuality – and this is especially the case in its (dis)locations with class, gender, ethnicity, childhood, (dis)ability... In doing so, I desire to mark the polymorphous vitality of sex, its resistance to subordination – but only in its own recognition at the margins of the norm.

'Ultimately, it is only by risking a crossing, a violation, that one learns to live with ghosts' (Mahon, 2007, p. 118). Similarly, I would argue that this dissertation is, in no way, an attempt to open up the 'truth' of the (homo)sexual to further modernist scrutiny. Instead, this dissertation is one in which the profusions of mimicry, within both the creative fictions and the autoethnographic writing practices, bleed and irrupt into those instances where a supposedly 'authentic' research object/subject confesses itself. There is no 'real' here: all is an attempt to represent a set of 'selves assumed and discarded in a spirit of mimicry and emulation' (Maclure, 2003, p. Note 10: p. 209). As Ursula Le Guin (2012) would have it, in decrying the violence forced onto writing by those wishing to classify it by 'genre':

I leave it entirely up to you, O Reader, to decide which ... is the Real and which is the Unreal. I believe the science of deciding such questions is called Ontology, but I never learned it. I am strictly an amateur. I don't know anything about reality, but I know what I like.

Desires in Doctoring:

This thesis may well be (nothing more than) a representation of a journey into doctoring myself. However, and clearly, it is also a form of self-medication, an attempt to cure myself in and of the colonizing (un/dis)ease of modernizing and modernist aspirations into education, the purported freedoms expressed for 'gay', and towards a better understanding of the contexts and histories within and from which my present and future are inextricably linked. As an attempt to decolonise, it is an attempt to break from the cycle of subjection to domination that has rendered me relatively silent (more likely, unwritten) in the past. This is a cycle that starts with imaginings for possible new orientations, which are blissfully dissipated in even stronger feelings of (dis)location. These feelings of (dis)location invariably undermine the impulse and (im)possibility of finding a beginning, they languish in the well-worn comfort of stop, the (un)ease of not doing. This unproductive cycle of un/knowning is yet another fold in the miasma of the largely unscripted 'I' that peeks and pokes from the pages of this document, the one that hides behind its pages? This cycle has, until now, trapped me in what I thought was the nothing and nowhere-place of the in-between, the anti-space of being. Instead, I see that it is in remembering and acknowledging the in-betweennesses of much of my becoming that I recognise its vital pulse, the hear-beat of my (un)becoming. It is from these spaces of negation and supposed failure that I root and shoot an alternative way of re/ac/counting of and for myself.

For most of the writing of this dissertation, as well as trying to judge what might make a good story, I sat wondering what I could write. Of course there were tensions in resisting revelation – of 'coming out' all over again, and of claiming authority on the basis of experience. This latter was, not least, a dynamic of resistance to coming out confession. But it was also one of judging what was legitimate? What was acceptable? Ever nervous, I

persisted in asking: Do I have anything to say? Does what I say have resonance for anyone else? Am I just some bizarre oddity all to myself? I fought with and was often frustrated by the fraught thought that I was merely doing that which Tóibín accuses/celebrates in Tennessee Williams's work: 'He had, as he said, a way of reducing or indeed elevating everything to the personal.' (Tóibín, 2012, p. k) At other times, it was as if in writing about the concerns raised here, I was committing the worst kind of crime – a murder perhaps in search of a body on/in which to perpetrate it? Perhaps, in articulating these concerns I am indeed raising some of the conflicts that inhere between the paper and the bed sheet. Perhaps that is one of the many complications in attempting to write about (homo)sex/uality? And this might be particularly apposite for someone resigned in their formative years to the invisibility of their body whilst being hailed for their head.

In thinking more about sex/uality, embodied erotics, and their relation to queer, I remain concerned with my hesitancies in scribing a more visceral and embodied piece of work. In those terms then, the thesis is not at all queer in the ways in which I first envisaged it (In seeking a supervisor, I claimed that they would have to deal with my 'getting my cock out on the page'. That hasn't really happened!). Binnie argues that 'to speak of sex acts can sometimes appear clumsy or awkward, embarrassing, painful or smutty.' (2009, p. 170). Perhaps there is something here about a squeamishness on my part, an over subjectivization as a respectable academic in the social sciences who, according to McKee, is disciplined to avoid writing 'titwank' (McKee, 2009), investing instead in a series of circumlocutions for sex. However, it is also possible that, in writing this work, I recognize the claim that minority sex/ualities are much more likely to be explicated – and therefore exploited – in social sciences than are the 'unsexy' sexualities of mainstream, normative heterosexuality (Naste, 1998; Phillips, 2006 both cited in: Binnie, 2009, p. 172). Furthermore, Bleakley argues that attempts to write the erotic within the conventions of personal-confessional narratives are most likely doomed to failure, to return merely as an obscenity, given that the

genre form has roots in puritan ideas of cleansing and purging and is subject to commoditization in contemporary capitalist culture. He suggests that 'there is nothing less erotic than exteriorizing one's innards in gushing confessional mode, for then there is nothing hidden, concealed, mysterious, secret – elements essential to eroticism in word and deed' (2000, p. 20). Leaning on a number of women writers (e.g. bell hooks, Jane Gallop and Joanna Frueh) who suggest that, given the conventionalized erotophobia of traditional educational contexts, Bleakley (2000, p. 21) suggests that there are ways to engage in writing practices that embrace a "critical erotics", a way of doing criticism that does not deny eros or life-force and vitality ... [that] includes, indeed welcomes, bouts of indeterminacy, shifting identities, lyricism, humour, pun and play, elliptical practices, and the fires of urgency and immediacy.'. This, I suggest, is part of my compromised move in representing the erotic in this work. Rather than risking further fetishisation, by representing non-normative sexual practice in writing practice from within the academy, I invest that erotics in the caesura of occlusion (the bracket, the ellipsis, the slash), in the rupture of disciplinary conventions for marking and making work academic. It is here that this work's eros lies; in the erotics of memory, in the erotics of writing against the grain.

Of course my hesitations might just signal a fear of holding my head above the parapet. Am I just uncertain? Throughout, I've wrestled with and for forms of writing that resonate with some elusive voice that might, epiphanously, find me comfortably. The auto-ethnographic and reflexive forms adopted throughout the dissertation feel lacking in rigour and validity. I'm still tempted to attend to the lack of citations that are (not) included there, as if the quantity were the ultimate measure of its worth. And this, despite the annoyance of my supervisor at my insistence for needing to read more, and my awareness of a growing collection of academic voices who make a well-argued case for this form of writing as a means of writing 'beyond the normal'. In terms of validity, I am reminded of Denzin's (1997) argument, about how questions of validity, reliability and objectivity – the

markers of quality in positivist-inspired studies attempting to generalize for 'the normal' population – 'renders absent difference, contestation and more marginal formations within populations' (cited in Gray, 2003, p. 188). As an antidote, Denzin insists on academic work that requires alternative forms of politically-informed evaluation. Can the current work, presented in a social science milieu, make such claims through its exploration of the productivity of writing creative fictions in order to queer! There are, it seems, some many dislocations yet for my undisciplined indiscipline.

There is additionally something hesitant in my writing here that (barely/overly? I am always lost in excesses) recognises its own post-coloniality; an acknowledgement in the writing of the fracture and fragmentation that hound my interstitial placing betwixt and between a (forgotten) language of the past, and an imagined articulacy of a future for and of the learned – an endlessly deferred future in which I imagine a mastery of my being through the mastery of a narrative structure that is anything but loose and scattered. Kiberd (2010, p. 4) argues that people who have been subject to colonialism rely on narrative tropes that have been forgotten because they were forbidden by the colonizer. He suggests that 'these narratives are often broken, fragmented or occluded in codes which become mysterious even to those who are their bearers'. I read Seamus Heaney only when he is already dead, and hear, for the first time in written English, the tone of 'buckrake'⁴⁰ (Heaney, 2009, p. k; See: The Toome Road). In this aural reading I realise the poetic rhythm of the bog in my own autoethnographic writing and the chasm between that and 'the professional theory-speak that a young (sic) academic has to master nowadays.' (O'Driscoll, 2009, p. k). And yet, even in many of those stories that I hold out as fictions, I recognise my seeming inability to break free from the kind of

⁴⁰ An L-shaped farm-yard implement with a number of tines that, hooked onto the back of a tractor, is used for lifting and carrying large objects – most often hay and other fodders for cattle.

academic language, the reportage of psychology and the complexities of Cultural Studies, especially when I attempt to write my relation to a sex that balks at the norm and normal. It is in the chasm and contradictions of these competing vernaculars that I can also mourn the passing of those chored and laboured pasts that are 'disqualified, rendered nonsensical or non-conceptual' (Halberstam, 2011, p. 11) in the accomplishment of (this) academic writing. Perhaps like Heaney, in his best known poem *Digging*, I will have to relinquish the outlines of laboured becomings from which I was supposed to trace a being, and be content instead to mine, and become, in writing. Is this, then, my new labour?: 'But I've no spade to follow men like them./Between my finger and my thumb/ The squat pen rests,/ I'll dig with it' (Heaney, 2009, p. k).

In reflecting on my hesitancies, I am also minded to think that I am writing in the English language. Even though this was the language of my education and my first language of use, I have what Palmer (2005, p. 47) characterises as part of the Irish national psyche, an ambivalent relationship with the language: 'Always dazzled by words (and all my most fluent words were English), I felt, nonetheless, at a remove from English. Its words had an oddly hand-me-down feel and they didn't always fit.' Palmer outlines some of the many ways in which the English language was used as a tool of colonisation with the effect of rendering much of the placenames in the Irish landscape 'mesmeric but meaningless' which makes you 'learn that English alone cannot fully explain your world; and you are left haunted by the sense of a missing language.' (p.49). In terms of speech, Palmer argues that the sense of remove from English as a medium of being and becoming echoes hollowly like a phantom mimicry: 'Our always latent sense of estrangement from English is activated when vowels and turns of phrase that sit at the core of our being suddenly sound strange even to ourselves. ... Delivered into the echo-chamber of Received Pronunciation, our ordinary speech turns into performance and we into actors' (p.59). Palmer makes the point that 'Paradoxically, the English ascribe eloquence to the Irish – while the Irish are

haunted by a sense of inarticulacy. (The two often amount to the same thing: the English equation of reticence with rationality relegates eloquence to the margins, to the *banlieue* of art – and blarney.)' (Palmer, 2005, p. 55)

I wonder also whether, in my hesitations with writing praxis, am I merely practicing the feel of resistance to that audited academic culture that insists that I write despite my not yet feeling that I have a voice – or that this voice is so ordinary, so derivative that it has nothing much of interest to say? In thinking about this work as academic performance, as an inscription to doctoring, I reflect on the myriad processes of 'passing' to which I am subject in order that I become and stay an invitee, a hyper-conscious performer bending in all directions in order to avoid the accusation of trespass or sham: this doctoring scribe, itself an actor of the pass. And these passings are not unrelated to those other requirements for passing, those that hang on and in the closet of the homosexual and that are shaped in the narrow possibilities of an increasing toleration of LG(BT) struggle and academic writing.

Undergraduate psychology once disciplined me in writing. More specifically, it taught me the practice of 'reporting', of 'writing up', a form of writing that invariably signalled the end-point in a cycle of knowledge claimed from the prosaic fabulations of 'practical' and 'experiment'. This kind of writing practice reflects the natural science tradition that psychology aped. It rested in a practice of writing with certainty, about what was always already known, always in the past tense, always a reporting of what had already happened, and holding strongly to the idea (pretence?) that there was little that was being made up in that 'writing up'. It held the writing process as a process of merely and mimetically representing what was already known. This disciplined process of 'writing up' is shocked with and by a creative research process that is effected in 'writing through', where writing is both the craft and tool hefted in the praxis of producing knowledge, where the linear locations of knowing and not knowing are corrupted in the very process of its own becoming. In this contrast of approaches to writing I find myself, first,

wandering aimlessly in the illegitimacy of the (homo)sexual in such writing (practice). How could I, then, write of a past that I knew would not be acceptable? In what ways might this 'writing up' already foreground a present and/or future in which this past might act as an excremental blot? And, in any case, which past might I write up, in an inscription of/as the (homo)sexual in psychology: the fictive past adopted to conceal, or the concealing past adopted to pass?

In the contrast of writing up and writing through, I also see the contrast of being and becoming for the (homo)sexual 'gay'. The model of writing practice, inculcated in psychology, ignored the fallacies of mimetic representation of the real; it erased the rhetorically constitutive role of writing in constituting and constructing the objects and subjects in/of its gaze. As Barthes would have it, psychology clung neurotically to the idea of its 'reporting' as "degree-zero" writing – that is, writing that appears to be free of rhetoric and bias, and impervious to dissenting interpretations.' (Cited in Maclure 2003, p.81). The hypothetico-deductive techniques of psychology, characterized in 'writing up', demand an apriori existence. They find and found their conservative legitimacy on concepts and positions that they already know. Despite the rhetoric, there is only slender (or highly suspicious) visibilities afforded those findings that fail to conform to the originary hypotheses. This conservative technological zeal reifies the being, and makes suspicious all that make their claim to being in the (eternal) slip and slide of becoming.

Academically, I learned to write in psychology. But, living at a slant to the certainties of its being, at unease with its mastery and in supplication to the blissful terror of (homo)sexual becoming, I could never properly orient myself to its knowing and known practices. And here I am again, learning to write. Perhaps my hesitations are, of course, to do with the doubts and uncertainties of any apprenticeship, that labour of the alternatively-sighted who has only the astigmatism of past sightings to guide their way into

unknown territory. And yet, as I finish this chapter and glance back at the products of this work – at a further remove from the doubts and frustrations of production – I hesitantly recognize the form and function of my own (new?) writing practice here.

This recognition is borne on the aspiration that the work of this thesis might be read (queerly) as having value, or making a mark. I pose the following as a set of criteria by which the work might be judged as having aligned itself with the wanton and wanting disorganising principles set out in the epilogue. These criteria are those that I set for this text and may or may not align with those adopted by its other reader/producers when (and if) they ever get to this point. The potential misalignment between my (author/reader) and your (reader/producer) evaluation of this text is, of course, the risk taken by and the privilege afforded to any writer. It also speaks to the polysemous nature of all text for which the author is not a guarantor of its reception.

In seeking legitimacy for this work I invoke a series of verbs with a string of questions as their practicing entrails. For this reader at least, the answers to these questions are resoundingly in the affirmative:

- v)** To reorient: Does the text successfully que(e)ry that which is claimed for non-normative (homo)sexuality – especially in its variant explanations of (homo)sexual orientation? Are there possibilities from/within this text in re-evaluating what is known about non-normative sexuality?
- w)** To learn: Are there possibilities in this text to learn new things or to re-appraise those (sexual/ity) things for which existing knowledge makes claims? Do these re-appraisals plead for a more careful thinking about the intersectionality of sexual orientation with a range of other identity markers?:

- a. Does the urbanity of 'gay' take on a new, or aslant hue in its contrasting city-dwelling places of Manchester's Gay Village and Belfast's sectarian-riven urban spaces for being and becoming?
- b. Might rural Irish/ness (still that que(e)rying red line!), its (post)colonial histories and socio-economic statuses claim a seat in re-thinking British urban 'gay' subjectivity?
- c. Do questions of gender (and especially a questioning of masculinity) require further and constant scrutiny in conceptualising and practicing sexual (re)orientation(s) in the everyday?
- d. Are there questions to be asked about the dominant cultural construction of the asexual child, beyond the moral panics and sensationalisations most commonly collocated with children/childhood and sexuality?

Might these questions, and others raised within this text, be productive in disrupting the insistence of exclusive and fixed gay/straight orientations within heteronormative and homonormative millieux?

- x)** To cohere: Are there coherencies within and across the inchoatenesses and incoherencies of a text that takes risks in its form and content?
- y)** To evoke: Does the text provoke and/or evoke? Are there moments of emotional congress with (points in/from/across) this text? Does it provoke thought and feeling across its snags?
- z)** To (dis)orient: Does the text disorient the reader in its (un)knowing, in its (un)becoming, in its (il)logic and non-linearity? Does it invite a wonder at and/or a wander from what its putative points might seem to be? Does it invite a reappraisal of what counts as knowing and not? Does it recalibrate the impulse to conform and confirm what is acceptable and respectable: as Social Science text; as Social Science epistemology; as the tolerated (homo)sexual of heteronormativity; as the respectable 'gay' of homonormativity?

The claims for success made for and in this work attach, of course, to the recognition of becoming legitimate (doctored?) through it. I am also happy and confident that the work has value in its attempts to interrogate non-normative sexuality, to disrupt more traditional representational forms adopted in Social Science knowledge production, and to break (with) a cycle of writing silence in the academy.

And yet, there remains the temptation to mark this work as a failure, a failure of tradition and disciplinarity, a failure on my part to have been disciplined properly into and through the social sciences, and in particular in relation with psychology. In doing so, whilst also celebrating the counter- and trans-disciplinarity of the work, there is an alignment in this failure – the potential abjection that inheres in being outside of disciplinarity – with that which is often accorded same-sex genital relations (Bersani, 2009). In this case it is not about failure to know absolutely, but a failure to conform and, in so doing, confirm the possibility of knowing and knowability. Rather, it is a failure to recognise the injunction that one should know – even the self – in a particular sort of way, or indeed a failure to recognise the knowability of the self. In this I think both this project and the project of (the category of) the homosexual – like that of autoethnography and creative fiction – sit alongside each other, harking parodically at their own thrusts and counterthrusts of (un)knowing. Haywood Rolling and Brogden (2009, p. 1146) exhort me to:

Take the risk to find a personal style, make your acts of research to your own casts, and then take the risk of contributing your ways of doing to the constitution of a community of like-minded doing. New ways of doing produce new habits of doing, which in turn produce transitions in our disciplinary states of mind and being.

This gets at what I want to attempt, methodologically, in this dissertation. In that way, this dissertation is an attempt at what Maclure (2003, p. 172) refers to as 'new textual practices that disturb the usual conventions of research writing and baffle the boundaries between literature and science, self and other, data and analysis, fact and fiction, mastery and surrender.'

Epilogue: Can I finish now?

Throughout this work there is an implicit recognition that 'gay' rests on the foundation of a formative and essentialised identity which, when recognized and claimed, is subsequently the fuel for a set of socio-cultural politics. The dominance of the 'identity leads to politics' formula is one that is played out in the configuration of the closet and 'coming out' narratives where 'there is a familiar tension between a view that identity is something that is always present (but has been repressed) and that which has never been socially permitted (but remains to be created or achieved).' (Petersen, 2003, p. 61). The current work is clearly insistent in reappraising the dominance of what Crawley and Broad (2004) critique as the formulaic nature of the classic bildung attaching to the coming out journey of male, non-heterosexual identity into 'gay'. Certainly, like Berubé I wish to eschew the coming out narratives of abjection that invoke the victim and hero as the only tropes in, I would argue, satisfying a heteronormative frame in helping to rescue the troubled homosexual into the grey light of normality. As such it is also wary of how 'gay' can be a basis on which a politics of social justice might be built. In doing so, I wish to remember some of the many other scaffolding jibs on which the planks of identity might also – or indeed more firmly – be laid. Perhaps I imagine this telling to adopt what Leonard refers to as 'alternative stories' (2006), Ní Laoire calls 'counter narratives' (2007) filled with queer possibility (Bryson & MacIntosh, 2010, p. 107) – i.e. narratives that work against the dominant stories accepted by and for the community to which the teller might be seen to belong. Through this work, I am interested in seeing how such story fragments might represent a different approach to thinking 'gay' and, as such, have a different productivity for (and of) that community to which I might be said to belong. Plummer (1994, p. 85) points out that stories do not exist in isolation; that 'stories need communities to be heard, but communities themselves are also built through story tellings'. I am also aware of Leonard's (2006, p. 1129) warning that 'the stories that are more

likely to survive are the ones that the community wants to hear.' At (al)most (all) points in writing here, I wonder at how useful the stories that I (un)cover in this work might be in reshaping the political productivity of a homonormative 'gay' male community, one that is settled in its respectability, the precariousness of its tolerant and tolerated acceptability. However, as Leonard continues: '... communities themselves are not static but are likely to change and as they change this may pave the way for more dissenting stories to emerge. Indeed it is possible that dissenting stories themselves may encourage community change.' (p.1129)

There is something in the narrative form of the thesis – a telling backwards as a means of moving forward – that deserves a final mention as it relates to how stories might be of use in the future. Like Love (2009) I think I am desirous of looking and feeling backwards, not as a means to get stuck in the past but rather, as a means of reimagining a future that incorporates the past. This backward-looking-forward practice is one that (I discover) works against the practice of imagining a future that does not yet exist, a utopian futuricity that one might imagine but that abrogates responsibility for bearing any of the weight of that past from which it is, itself, born/e and imagined. This compulsion towards memory, and away from a putatively free-floating utopianism, in imagining a different future, is resonant with Castiglia and Reed who argue that 'Unlike utopias, which cast their visions into a perpetually receding future, prone to dismissal on the grounds of implausibility, memories insist that what once was might be again' (2011, p. k).

The dissertation is equally propelled by a query about the productivity of writing creative fiction as part of social science discourses. This query rests in wider epistemological and ontological uncertainties about social science and in the learning that is available, to this social scientist at least, in existing narrative fiction. In responding to these queries the current work orients its focus towards male same-sex sexuality and, more specifically, towards the

knowability of 'gay'. As such, the work operates as a project in which I ask if writing creative fiction can queer 'gay'. Instead, it ends in 'showing' how queer-ing might fictionalise that very 'gay'. It does so, through the creative fictions included here, by setting that 'gay', through which I have come to understand my own same-sex genital relations, at a remove from a settled and settling 'I' to which I might make a claim. There is a distance and obliquity afforded in the process of writing these creative fictions – in the conception and execution of the stories – that provides licence to explore the uneases with 'gay' that I signal throughout the work and that I live in the everyday. This licence, in turn, has afforded a very different kind of autoethnographic work for this project than if I had been writing it as 'straight' autoethnography. It does so, by hailing into memory a range of other (dis)locations through which this 'I', or the 'I's' of 'me', is formed. It is a re-invocation to and of those (dis)locations and their potential to queer, not just the (homo)sexual me, but the register of becomings that haunt the many rather than the fetishized few. I harness queer in the thesis as a means of disrupting and unsettling the seemingly unstoppable march of the male 'gay' individual into the homogenizing glare of the indistinguishable Humanist Enlightenment subject. I am reminded of Foucault's call to re-examine the very nature of philosophical knowledge making when he asks: 'What is philosophy today, if it does not consist *not* in legitimating what one already knows but in undertaking to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently?' (Quoted in: Halperin 1995, p.77).

This call to celebrate dislocation is not some sentimentalized and sentimentalizing redemption for an already shattered ego. Rather, it is plea for a freeing of and from that 'I' for which I am supposed to have wrought coherence. There is no coherence here. There is no final, no post-coitally resting (homo)sexual/ity here. Neither is this call one that dilutes the potency of queer in an attempt to stretch its purchase beyond (homo)sexuality, franchised into those other (dis)locations that mark the becoming of many. It is, instead, a desire to find alliance through and beyond the taint of the

(same-sex) genital, those 'privates' to which we must only nod and, most often, titter. It is a re-call to a 'majoritizing' view of sex/uality (Sedgwick, 1994), a disruption of the private/public containment of sex, an acceptance that the margins of sex/uality for some are recreated for others in discourses and bodies and territories of class and race and gender and (dis)ability and ... The work is, clearly, a way of registering the productive potency of sexuality, in its joy and pleasure, its potential for unruly bliss (Castiglia & Reed, 2011, p. 9), and in its contradictory socio-political location as the point of fissured excess between life-force and threat to civility. Phew! All is sex, still, it seems. However, the work is also a strategy in (creatively) (re)writing the creativity of that very (homo)sex. It is, I hope, a venture in that, subsequently, it might be used in re-fuelling its political power.

Like Berube (1996, p. 140) in his explorations of the intersections of class with (homo)sexuality, I will resist the 'happy-ending narrative of coming-out story' through remembering the many ways by which my (dis)locations in the world queer even my relation to (homo)sexuality .

When I look back at the cacophony of voices, the ridiculously, rampantly, beautifully undisciplined and disorderly conflicts and tensions that they set off and allowed me to sit with those 'posts' that are derided as undermining the modernist 'truths' – postmodernism, poststructuralism, posthumanisms – they come to me like a breath of fresh air. These memories however are not meant as the root from which all subsequent growth occurs. Instead, like Probyn (1995, p. 445) in her resistance of giving childhood memories 'the status ground: [instead.] they [these memories] are there and they are not there, they are beginnings that are constantly wiped out, forcing me to begin again and again.' And I can't make sense of the neo-foundationalist claims that these theoretical positions are anything but material: they live and breathe in my body; they are the materiality of every breath and memory that I carry and that allows me to encounter again everyday the beauty and joy and pain and inequality of the world around me ... and these theoretical

positions also allow me to know (or more likely guess) that my (homo)sexuality is nothing to do with an orientation, nothing innate, or not even something to choose. It is, as likely, steeped in questions and queries adopted in the darkened light of the unknown, in the certain commitments to political uncertainty of unbecomingness.

The first paragraph of the penultimate chapter finishes in hailing ends with a knell of continuation that rings in the anaphora of 'It does so...' and pulsates in a final question: Does this a PhD make? I hope that it does, so ...

*What has gone? How it ends? Begin to forget it. It will
remember itself from every sides, with all gestures, in each
our word. Today's truth, tomorrow's trend. Forget,
remember!*

James Joyce, Finnegans Wake.

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Appendix 1: Working out a method

Autoethnographic writing practices

This chapter is in two parts. Both perform a justificatory function for the approach(es) adopted in the thesis. It is significant that this chapter is near the end of the thesis – one might say, at the rear end of what I want to include. The significance of this position lies in an attempt to queer the location of a methodology chapter which, in conventional social science texts, more usually precede the revelation of data. Given that the 'data' for this project is itself queer(ied), it seems apposite that this chapter should follow rather than foreground, should reside near the backside of this body (of work) and bear the brunt of any cheek required to bear the weight of the thesis.

The first part outlines some of the features of autoethnography, guided by how these features shape and facilitate my engagements with academic research and influence this current project of writing a PhD. In particular, I focus on how the method facilitates academic writing that legitimises an 'I' in its body. I explore how writing 'I' allows me to disturb some of the uncanniness of a more distanced style of writing in which the 'I' remains overtly invisible. Having done so, I re-visit the use of the 'I' in light of the critical scholarship that I have encountered which questions the security of this 'I', and of that scholarship which questions the indulgence of the 'I' in the autoethnographic format. These latter especially disturb my own security with the practice of autoethnography. They disturb me as I conjure the ways in which those 'I' who embrace the challenge to expose and reveal their own interests in the complex of research, are then either dismissed or are exoticised as ego-fuelled outliers in the data-set to which more traditional forms of social science writing applies. They are disturbed on the basis that there is no central 'I' that I (or is that 'one') can access and/or represent.

Certainly, the 'I' that is thus adopted in such wrangled epistemological and ontological tensions is not one that I am happy to expose as yet another 'exceptional' (in the sense that it is odd, uncanny, or atypical) 'I' rather than one which might speak to some of the complexities of this particular subject-body (Inckle, 2010), or those complexities that are unknown, unknowable, but are possible for the subject-bodies that labour under the mark of those who engage with 'male same-sex genital relations'. And that is when/where/how I explore my epistemological appeal to creative fiction as a tool in queer(y)ing the representation of this (or any other) 'I' that seeks to disturb those projections of the cultural imaginary that precede and claim to speak for them! This latter is the subject of the second part of this chapter.

Perhaps it is those entrenched ideas ingrained in my formative immersion in the social sciences that compels me to shape a methodological chapter in this thesis. This is, in part, key when I think about what a thesis would look like, about what counts as research: explaining and justifying my approach. This ritualized and conventionalized practice, as translated into autoethnographic practice, allows me to make explicit a limited and contested part of my practices as 'the researcher' in order to warrant speaking for those (other) aspects of me 'the researched', and potentially, to speak, at least emblematically, for some of those others who might be similarly categorized as belonging to the target 'sample' addressed by the research: those who wish to queer the subject position of 'gay' as an 'easy' signifier of much more complex sexual subjectivities.

In practicing thus, I am reminded of Chang's characterisation of the development of autoethnography as a tradition in which many other researchers have "plowed through the wilderness to make a path" (2008, p. 10). From the lee of such furrows, I explore how the approach shapes my understanding of and has developed my relation to academic research. These explorations then provide a platform from which to speculate how autoethnography, as a practice of writing about/as research, shapes a way

into and out of my own research process and, in turn, provides a platform from which I can both present and have a partial view of my PhD.

In part, I'm wondering about both the rationale for including a chapter in the thesis, and then what kind of approach that I will adopt having decided to include it. In the first place, I am clear that autoethnography represents a particular setting down point for me in my trajectories within my academic practice and within the broader debates about social science epistemology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). For me, the approach offers a welcome relief, a sanctuary, a place of rest in the face of the farcicality of modernist ontologies, and in the face of the tightening grip of a hegemonic creep of positivist epistemologies (see for example: Denzin & Giardina, 2006), supposedly in the name of evidence-based practice and ensuring that social science research, aping bio-medical research, should be able to demonstrate its utility and return on investment (see Hammersley, 2008). The move towards autoethnographic research/writing practices also represents an impulse to take into the social sciences something that I was experiencing as legitimate in the Humanities – making social sciences human, evocative and accessible for both the producer and consumer of academic knowledge (Chang, 2008; Ellis, 2008; Richardson, 1997). So the stories that I write in this PhD, the narratives that I adopt in showing and telling me (Ellis, 2004) afford me the opportunity to "... tell you these stories not to unburden myself, by no means to confess, but to let words linger between us that might let us feel close over the inevitable distance between us." (Bonin-Rodriguez, Dolan, & Pryor, 2009, p. 19)

So then, this first section of the chapter provides a partial exploration of autoethnography as (a) method and how it has been integral to my project. The section is haunted by Carver's (2007) reflections on the discovery of Pelias's *Methodology of the Heart* (1995) – a key text Carver reflects on how Pelias' approach to performative writing facilitated her in voicing some of the many fractures that shatter and shred the supposedly pristine divide

between her personal and professional lives. She shows how academic writing is a function and feature of the complexities of having a personal life and how this personal sphere accommodates the requirements of academic work but also bleeds and leaks productively into that work which is marked as academic.

In this section then, I want to show how autoethnography, and some of the other non-traditional writing practices associated with the approach (Ellis, 2004; Richarson & Adams St. Pierre, 2008; Watson, 2008), shape my understanding of how to become a writing academic, of how they ease my understanding of how to become in an academic context; how they propel me to the point at which I can write this PhD. Simultaneously, I explore how this form of writing is a way of representing the complexities in understanding that a life in/for which (homo)sexuality might be necessarily foregrounded but is not the sole marker. I argue that this method of research/writing has allowed me to represent the contradictory multiplicities of my identity and their doubly enfolded imbrications in shaping (the story of understanding such) a life; a means of painting in baroque excess the curlicued contradictions on which so much uncertainty rests; a way of rejecting, or at least resisting, the lure of the ratiocentric and rationalizing forms of mainstream social science in representing a life that is still in process, that is continuously fighting for the hopeful generosity of space in which to grow rather than being nailed to the cross of the known.

What is Autoethnography?

Telling ...

Autoethnography is an approach to qualitative social research in which the researcher excavates aspects of their own story in an attempt to analyse the social and cultural milieu in which they are located. Carolyn Ellis, one of the

most vociferous advocates of the approach, describes it as “research, writing and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural and social.” (Ellis, 2004, p. xix). The idea of unashamedly framing the written product of the autoethnographer’s research in terms of their personal and autobiographical experiences is shared with a range of other approaches in the human and social sciences in which self-narrative takes central stage. Holman Jones (2008) points to the range of rich histories mapping the terrain of the approach’s extended formation, providing exhortations and justifications for its legitimacy, charting its varieties, and outlining its indebtedness to “research and writing practices in anthropology, sociology, psychology, literary criticism, journalism, and communication ... to say nothing of our favourite storytellers, poets, and musicians” (p.208). On the other hand, Chang (2008, p. 43) argues that autoethnography goes beyond these similar approaches in that it “transcends mere narration of self to engage in cultural analysis and interpretation.”

Not monolithic ... many types ... CAP? Denzin (2006) in responding to Anderson’s outline of analytic autoethnography cites Richardson and St Pierre (2005) who invoke the broader category of creative analytical practices or CAP to describe the heterogeneous proliferation of approaches that used in understanding the social and human world. Denzin suggests that CAP *“include autoethnography, fiction-stories, poetry, performance texts, polyvocal texts, reader’s theatre, responsive readings, aphorisms, comedy and satire, visual presentations, allegory, conversation, layered accounts, writing stories, and mixed genres. Creative nonfiction, performance writing, mysteries, memoirs, personal histories, and cultural criticism can be added to this list of narrative forms that can be used by the creative analytic ethnographer.”* (Denzin, 2006, p. 420)

that autoethnographic practices are not homogenous, that they are disparate and can include all of the practices that I want to include in the thesis; the memory work, the life segment narration, and even the chaos narrative

(Franks, 1995: cited in Herrmann, 2007).. ***Richardson and St Pierre's ideas about 'critical analytical practices' in ethnography or CAP ethnography seems a good way of signifying the heterogeneity of autoethnographic practices and traditions.***

Autoethnography emerges out of what is often referred to as 'critical ethnography' (Thomas, 2003), and, itself, arises out of a reaction to the deep concerns with what has become known in the history of Social Sciences as the 'crisis of representation' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). The concerns include those of: who represents whom; in what ways, and whether it is at all possible; in ways that are fair and politically just, to represent those 'others' who are most usually constructed as the objects/subjects of social science research (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1996)? These are, at root, issues of power in the production of social science knowledge, about the putative distance between the knower and known in the research process.

Saukko (2003, p. 5) argues that traditional methodologies were unable to accommodate "... postcolonial and feminist attacks, which argued that social science has not understood marginal groups, such as women, working-class or non-Western people, but used them to justify the scholar's political and theoretical projects, ranging from colonialism to Marxism...". "These criticisms [postcolonial and feminist] have pointed out that social research often ends up using the lived lives of other people to justify and prove some of the grand narratives of our times, ranging from colonialism to Marxism and liberal humanist feminism ..." (Saukko, 2003, p. 57).

A further concern within the practice of critically informed Social Science is that of the role of language in the construction of knowledge. Here there is due regard given to the postmodernist and poststructuralist arguments that the only access to studying the social/cultural is through language, itself the very medium of culture. This 'linguistic turn' acknowledges the problematic of language in research process and product and disrupts the idea that 'reporting' in the social sciences is 'neutral' and purely mimetic (Maclure,

2003). Research that takes these issues seriously has an explicit and political interest in the plays of power invested in the (literary) conventions of social science texts.

In recognising the impossibility of capturing the lived experiences of those most usually under the research gaze, there was an attempt for ethnographers to reflect on how they arrived at the design, process and findings of their research; a type of confessional reflexion that critically examined the location of the researcher vis-à-vis those being researched. In this way ethnography sought to make transparent the validity claims made for and from its projects. Personal, self-reflective writing in 'new ethnography' (Saukko, 2003), 'critical ethnography' (Thomas, 2003) or 'interpretive ethnography' (Goodall Jnr, 2003) was adopted as a means to reduce the distance between the object and subject of research, between the researcher and the researched, between the self of the researcher and the 'other-ness' of those being researched: all this in an attempt to be 'more true', to get a more valid, if critical, stance in representing those who are the target of the research gaze.

... and showing:

Burnier continues her reflections on why she adopted a/e as a function of not seeing 'blood and flesh' in her discipline, and how the genre attempts to blur the false dichotomy between the personal and the scholarly (2006, p. 413). ... this is about feminisms that blur the boundaries between what is personal and political ... about being 'objective' and 'neutral', about becoming native (Stanley's paper on her reflections in being with and caring for her mother).

There is an attendant lack of feeling at home in any of those disciplines that I have explored which makes a/e a useful tool to adopt (??) much in the way that Reed-Danahay argues that "the most cogent aspect to the study of autoethnography is that of the cultural displacement or situation of exile characteristic of the themes expressed by autoethnographers." (cited in

Burnier, 2006, p. 412). A turn from the closet to sexuality and to queer theory ... wanderings in Comms and my dissatisfactions with it ... ICA experience and paper ... the Amsterdam summer school and ethnographic interview with a sex worker versus my desire to (re)write my recently dead mother as a sex worker within the realms of a (putatively) monogamous marriage ... clearly a desire to queer ... Angie ... Women's studies ... illness ... the dearth of writing and a return to these ideas ...

I have been working with undergraduate students to find a way by which they might understand the nature of academic writing – how to keep from discussing the complexities involved in this term!? One of the main features, in an attempt to get them to adopt traditional models of referencing their developing knowledge within an empirical and theoretical tradition, is to get them to understand that academic writing is citational. Autoethnography is definitely citational. The other big issue they have, or rather a confusion – and I think this reflects the heterodoxy amongst colleagues – is about the role of 'I' in academic writing. In these moments I am amazed at my inability to articulate the complex and complicated colonizing processes that lead me to fear that my own desire to use 'I' in my writing is merely a fading youthful reaction to that erasure in writing that I learned as absolute in my training in psychology. At the same time I am reminded of Pelias' claim that his defense for using 'I' is that, "Only then am I given the fullest opportunity to stand by another empathically, without assumptions, without belief that my empathic response could ever be more than a partial understanding. Only then can I drop my illusions of superiority, my ethnocentrism, my arrogance." (Pelias, 2009, p. 355). Pelias is adamant that self-storying is a political and interventionist strategy in establishing the relational nature of such stories. In addition, I wonder how Pollock's (2007) ideas about the possibilities for using a performative 'I'. I wonder how these issues might be an entry point in my writing autoethnographically about writing.

Writing and reading:

Then there's reading autoethnography and what that affords for me, for readers. Chang and Muncie have things to say here. There's Hendrix' (2011) paper which provides a glimpse of a reality so outside my own sphere that it eases yet more of my curiosity about the world – much like listening to Gil Scott Heron and his poetic chanting of the dramatic injustices involved in being African American, or the ways that Sweet Honey on the Rock provides an insight). Then there is Richardson's Fields of Play in which she evocatively and critically recounts a life past and reworks her understandings from the vantage of this here and now. I'm reminded of the writer (cited in Anderson 2006) who talks about autoethnography as both window and mirror, that it gives perspective on the social world of others as well as providing a mirror from which one can also reflect (on) oneself. In the case of Richardson, it seems that her lens is located on a dolly along the dimension of time, back and forth pointing a reflexive lens at the process and product of her writing.

Herrmann (2007) provides a window on how he constructs the inner workings of his previous relationship, one that folded in the chaotic dynamic of his nomadic life. I'm frustrated and dismissive of his privileging liberal humanist and heteronormative frames in accounting for the collapse of the relationship, of his failure to foreground any kind of gender and sexuality politics in reflecting back. And even with this, I am intrigued that he furnishes me with a glimpse of the foreignness of a male reflective gaze on that most (unnatural) hidden and taken-for-granted of phenomena – heterosexual sexual relationships. I'm even thinking about how it

applies and helps me to up-end some of the dynamics of my own relationship.

I engage with Anderson's claim for analytical autoethnography but am firmly situated with Denzin (2006) in rejecting the distinction that he raises between evocative and analytical. Like Denzin, I am wary of Anderson's attempts to assimilate autoethnography into the fold of tradition. I'm also then taken with Watson (2008) who claims participant self observation as a 'critical' form of autoethnography. Now what do I like about her work and what is less to like?

Richardson and St Pierre's (2008) wonderful explorations of 'writing as a method of nomadic inquiry' reminds me of boozy nights in the pub with a colleague raised in the bosom of the Humanities who was completely (not in awe, much more disbelieving) in awe of the social science tradition of ascertaining facts and then 'writing them up'. Instead she talked about writing as process, writing is a way of helping to work things out. It took a long time for me to adopt this as a practice, and to see its effects – although I'm still not sure whether I've adopted this as a successful practice.

And then there's Moriera's work – crazy, fragmented, excessive. His writing is touched by and imbued with lashings of the unfamiliar, but is simultaneously inflected with the familiar – in particular his refusal to translate himself and his understandings of the world in any easy way. Like St Pierre who treats those women about whom she writes as provocateurs, as lines of flight who are referenced in oblique ways so as not to become "epistemological dead ends"(Sommer, 1994; 532) (Richardson & St Pierre, 2008; 490), I love the ways in which Moriera seems to refuse to write in a way '... that "runs to meet the reader" or act as a "comfort text" (Lather & Smithies, 1997) that gratifies the interpretive entitlement to

know...' (Richardson & St Pierre, 2008; 490). However, I am also cognisant that Moriera's writing (2008) reflects his refusal of the exotic subject position afforded the (post)colonial subject and is indebted to the rich vein of feminisms that resisted the 1960's onwards. I take solace from colonising tendencies of white middleclass feminisms from the mainstream of white and middle-class

Radical and liberatory credentials:

When beginning this project, I was taken with Ellis' ideas about autoethnographic research practices as liberatory and deeply involved in issues of social justice (Ellis et al., 2011; Ellis et al., 2008; 2009; 2008). Ellis & Bochner (2006) argue that the term arises from a desire to signify ethnographic writing practices that sit outside of the realist ethnographic tradition and are intentionally in reaction to traditional approaches to knowledge production which adopt an objectivist and foundationalist stance.

Chang (2008, p. 45) reminds us of the controversy surrounding autoethnography within the discipline of anthropology and in social sciences more broadly. She outlines some of the tensioned debate in placing the method along the 'objective-subjective' axis of social science method. This debate, in terms of Ethnography, is most poignantly played out in a special issue of the Journal of Contemporary Ethnography (2006; Vol 35, 4) in which Anderson (2006) calls for a curtailment in the use of 'evocative autoethnography' in favour of a more objectivist approach that he conceptualises under the rubric of 'Analytical autoethnography'. This call is firmly rejected by proponents of a more thoroughly subjectivist positioning for autoethnography precisely because it represents a challenge to the foundationalist and objectivist claims of traditional Ethnography. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) reiterate how this disciplinary debate has resonance for social science epistemology and ontology more broadly.

Although Anderson (2006) suggests that autoethnography has become a popular and faddish form of approach, it does seem to provoke a particular sense of unease that, I think, reflects some of the received wisdom attaching to established approaches in what is considered 'good' (social) science (Kitzinger, 1988). The approach continues to develop and has been legitimated through book-length applications (Adams, 2011; Khosravi, 2011; Saukko, 2008) and in having journals dedicated almost exclusively to further exploring and applying the method in a range of social/human contexts (e.g. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *Cultural Studies* ↔ *Critical Methodologies*). The approach continues to challenge, and to be positioned as a challenge to, the hegemony of those approaches that claim an 'objectivist' and foundationalist position in the social science (Defrancisco, Kuderer, & Chatham-Carpenter, 2007; Ellis & Bochner, 2006; Learmonth & Humphreys, 2011). As Ellis (2009, p. 373) suggests 'Given the number, variety, and contradictory nature of some of critiques, I have a sense that we must be doing something right and that we should continue doing what we are doing.'

Autoethnography is posited by many as a powerful way to outline some of the aspects of social life which are less likely to be explicated in a satisfactory way within traditional social science frameworks (Adams, 2011; Ronai, 1995) – see also Berger & Feucht 2011). Using Ronai as an example of deeply evocative autoethnography that tells about phenomena not usually talked about in those ways. This reminds me of both Bochner (2001 read more fully) and Lerum's (2001) calls for a more intimate and personally inflected writing in the academy autoethnography allows me to address issues that I struggled to frame in social science terms (e.g. power ...), and it allowed me to address the discomfiture of not feeling represented in those discourses that claimed to represent those experiences that I could lay claim to (see Foster, McAllister, & O'Brien, 2005)...

Ronai's work represents something much stronger and more punchier than that of Ellis – there is a sharp social justice angle, a performance of voicing

that which ought not be voiced – the messy and ugly, So, sensitive topics may, become more easily accessible through the method: Here I'm talking about a more critical version of auto-ethnography than the kinds of confessional tale outlined by Van Maanen (cited in Goodall Jnr, 2003, p. 57). "Autoethnography is often about difficult knowledge that may be difficult to hear. It also requires thoughtful telling to be heard. Sensitive stories require sensitivity – sensitivity for the writer and reader. ... I realize autoethnography may make us uncomfortable but comfort seldom promotes change or movement." (Murray, Pushor, & Renihan, 2011, p. 44)

Saukko (p85) uses Bordowitz's autoethnographic account of his first anal intercourse – an act that the latter suspects might have been the moment of transmission of his HIV⁺ status. She argues that this autoethnographic account demonstrates the dualistic purpose of such accounts as "acknowledge[ing] the need to speak of lived, subordinate and silenced experiences (being gay, living with HIV, the need for safe sex), and the need to critically analyse those social discourses, such as murderously reactionary and homophobic popular and medical tropes, which have defined those experiences for us." She argues that such accounts trouble and disturb the hegemonic and accepted understandings of such discourses "... which associate anal intercourse with sin, sickness and death." (p.85). She adds that this kind of critical autoethnographic practice, although necessarily confessional in nature, is distinct from many other critical realist positions in that "... it does not diagnose, from the outside, what drives people in their institutional and informal self-projects. It rather aims to analyze, from the inside out, the process of being (self-)diagnosed." (Saukko, 2003, p. 86 See also Goodall Jnr, 2003).

Is it one of Harte's books that suggests that the Irish, like other objects of a colonizing (in its broader sense of exoticising) gaze, are constantly aware that they have to live amongst the stories of them that precede their being in the world.

Elizabeth (2008) points to the therapeutic benefits for researchers, and the concomitant benefits to research participants of writing in expressive and personal forms.

"... personal stories become a means for interpreting the past, translating and transforming contexts, and envisioning the future." (Holman Jones, 2008, p. 211)

Criticisms of autoethnography:

Anderson (2006, p. 385) reflects a dominant critique of evocative autoethnography which, it is claimed ' ... loses its sociological promise when it devolves into self absorption.'. Watson refutes this claim by arguing that "Autoethnography, (mis)understood as the ethnographic study of oneself, is often dismissed as narcissism, a seductive indulgence in which the researcher fiddles with themselves while the Other burns. But participant self observation, as critical autoethnography, concerns more than a fascination with one's own navel. ... It examines the intersection between subjective technologies and political techniques through which identities and selves are constituted." (2008, pp. 3–4). Vryan also argues that more traditional methods would not be able to access and therefore construct a version of any individual's life as does a/e: "If anyone else sought to study my life as an impostor, no amount of interviewing or observation of me by a researcher would have been capable of producing the depth, richness, and fullness of data I was able to assemble via fully-immersive (and documented) self-observation, self-interviewing, and self-analysis." (2006, p. 407).

Pelias (2009), in debunking the claim of solipsism most usually associated with autoethnography, takes seriously the synecdotal image of 'navel gazing' that this critique embodies. In doing so, Pelias engages with a wider critique of autoethnography, one that positions it derogatorily with the postmodern

sensibility of the narrative turn, playing too closely and exclusively with discursivity thus ignoring the materiality of embodied being. Pelias rejects this idea that the 'intensified navel gazing' associated with autoethnography is performed at the cost of connection with, or concern for, the 'Other'. I really like, in his rebuttal of this critique, the lines of bodily connection that he is able to draw across his memory, his familial and erotic relations past and present. In particular, I am most impressed with the way that he uses the navel at which, as a performative writer he is accused of gazing too much, as a metaphorical bridge between himself and his always m/Other – the very genesis of his being.

I am reminded of Carrillo Rowe (2009) who talks about the embodiment involved in the formation of subjectivity, and how this is inextricably linked to the process of life writing involved in autoethnographic writing – there is something very beautiful in her description of breathing in the context of working out who we are in relation to others, a process reflected in the imaginative, evocative and performative act of writing autoethnography. There is additionally something to be said in relation to the types of subject positions who are largely attracted to and engaged with autoethnography within the academy. One of the joys is in how autoethnography seems through an invitation to those academic subject positions that belong in bodies that are marked more traditionally as marginal. Perhaps this latter is just more a function of how those embodied subject positions are required to be explicit about their markedness in the arena of autoethnography, rather than it being the case that they are more widely represented than in other academic traditions? How autoethnography inheres the body politic! However, one could read from Zingsheim's (Zingsheim, 2008) questioning the legitimacy of his white embodied privilege would indeed suggest that autoethnography is an research praxis seen, more usually as the premise of those bodies more traditionally marked by their marginality.

Carver (2007) talks about the 'reading body' which I take to signify the relation of the reader to the autoethnographic presentation with which they engage.

As if other forms of research were not themselves forms of self absorption! Listen to the kinds of justification offered by scientists for the unending devotion given over to their chosen vocation and one soon sees how this passion and self-absorption is just as much a matter of their practice as it is in autoethnography. Of course they have method to keep them 'removed', sane and 'objective' whereas autoethnographers are a messy lot with little facility for self control. Alternatively one could argue that autoethnographies are just being more honest in representing their engagements with their research settings in refusing to hide their complicity in the construction of knowledge pertaining to those settings.

Leaving a/e:

Learmonth & Humphreys (2011, p. 110) question the idea of any confessional tale as being unproblematically a reflection of some sort of truth, a true and simplistically mimetic representation of that 'self' offering the tale - regardless of the intent on which the confessional tale was told. Relying on a quote from the South African novelist, J M Coetzee, they trouble and are troubled by the seemingly transparent relation between the teller and the tale told; "J.M. Coetzee's comments about similar kinds of public confessions to ours:

the possibility we face is of a confession made via a process of relentless self-un-masking ... might yet be [concerned with] not the truth but a self-serving fiction, because the unexamined, unexaminable principle behind it may not be a desire for the truth but a desire to be a particular way (1992: 280; emphasis in original)

Indeed, Coetzee goes on to claim that such confession 'is only a special form of bragging' (1992: 283)" (Learmonth & Humphreys, 2011, p. 110)

I'm not sure what might be seen as bragging in my own use of a/e to chart either my engagements with academic disciplines – earnest, then questioning and finally savagely disenchanted with psychology; seemingly whimsical and vague with a range of alternative disciplines thereafter. However, I can see that there is an air of the braggadocio in claiming some sort of affected outsidership whilst retaining the trappings and pay-offs from an establishment academy. However, there is another possible basis on which to reject a/e as the preferred basis on which to inscribe my academic becoming, and that is related to the idea of a self-proclaiming, confessional and modernist self. I realise that adopting this as a writing strategy leaves my arguments open to being dismissed on the basis that they are the quixotic and anecdotal musings of this one very particular individual; that the emic nature of the work leaves it vulnerable to being dismissed as something which ought not be given that much credence, that it is neither representative nor a fair representation of the concerns of that community/collective from which this auto-ethnographically subject claims to speak. The a/e approach has an in-built vulnerability to be seen as speaking from the particular positionality of the individual author, rather than attempting to speak in some more universalizing way (that's a bigger claim!)

Autoethnography, as outlined by Chang (2008) and others emphasise the central importance of the self as a resource in any attempt to analyse the relationship of the self and its relation with others and with the cultural contexts of the self more broadly. Although Chang (2008) begins her outline of autoethnography as method with an examination of the two key features in Ellis & Bochner's definition above: that is she examines both the concept of self and culture. Chang discusses (and rejects) the modernist and secular view of the self that is seen as bounded, contained, unique and rationally deterministic in favour of a view of self as relational to and interactive with others (Gergen, 2009). She argues that "Autoethnography benefits greatly from the thought that self is an extension of a community rather than conceiving of it as an independent, self-sufficient being, because the possibility

of cultural self-analysis rests on an understanding that self is part of a cultural community." (Chang, 2008, p. 26)

However, in the great majority of autoethnographic writing there is often a seemingly unquestioned ontological assumption that the self exists and that it can be 'mined' and 'mapped' in the researcher's attempts to analyse the cultural milieu within which this self is located. This position is exemplified in Pelias' claim that "The search for form requires more than anything else, the maneuvering of self, sometimes putting the self forward, sometimes holding the self back, sometimes testifying, sometimes sticking to the facts, sometimes using fiction to tell the truth...As I work my way, the self is always there, demanding its negotiation." (Pelias, 2004: cited in Carver, 2007)

This positioning of the self as the primary epistemological (re)source in producing knowledge within the social sciences fails to engage with the postmodernist and poststructuralist theoretical frames that conceive of a decentred and fractured self. This conception of the self undermines the centrality and sovereignty of the self, seeing it instead as something that is endlessly produced in and reflected by culture and is therefore not sufficiently omniscient to that culture which it claims to describe.

In a related vein, 'the narrating self' (Bruner, 2004) is one which is constrained by and takes advantage of the possibility for stories to dissemble and obfuscate what actually took place and there is little to do in terms of checking the 'truthlikeness' of those narratives with the events that they purport to describe. It is widely accepted that self narratives are shaped as much by the motivations of the narrator and the socio-cultural conventions within which those narratives are told (see Weiner-Levy & Popper-Giveon, 2011). Saukko (2003, p. 78) argues that, from a poststructuralist perspective, it is clearly understood '... that the way we experience ourselves, as, for instance, 'alcoholic' is a product of subjectifying institutional, social and historical discourses, which make us perceive and live our selves and our lives

in particular ways.' Ellis & Bochner (2000, p. 744) point out that self stories, invariably subject to the limitations of memory and the mediation of language, are therefore '... always a story about the past and not the past itself.'

There is also the problematic for autoethnographic research practices emblemized in the call that personal experience, the putative ultimate arbiter of truth, can only be revealed by those who have had the experiences that allow access to whatever phenomenon is being described and then analysed. Beatty (2010, p. 432) exemplifies this problematic in discussing the ability of a reader to understand the ... Rosaldo ... thus: "Experience shapes perception, the young cannot really know what it is to be old, nor the tall the perspective of the short— and so on through all the human types, male and female, gay and straight, black and white, wise and foolish. To understand another's emotion we must have experienced something like it ourselves. But the argument is self-limiting. For if common experience is necessary for ethnographic understanding, only the reader who has had a life like Rosaldo's will be capable of accepting his point.").

And which selves might be seen as warranted to speak? This is not just a relativist problem of selecting from within the almost infinite number of cases that might forward a voice. Is the resistant voice the best one? Is the typical voice the best one? Or how does one establish the relevance of that voice with its cultural milieu? This issue is more a matter of questioning how the speaking autoethnographic voice might have something useful to say about the culture from which it is located. Again, taking a postmodernist/poststructuralist point about the ways in which such accounts, independent of their author, operate as polysemous texts I wonder if any of this is important given the authority of the reader to negotiate meaning and decide for themselves what is available from these accounts?

However, if that is the case then in what ways might my (or any) reader either understand or vouchsafe that phenomenon being described on the basis of my experience? Saukko argues that any methodology that focuses on the uniqueness of one life story is not necessarily done without an awareness of the socio-political conditions within and from which that biography emerges: "Experience is shaped by social discourses, ... and by the historical and social context, in which it is located" (Saukko, 2003, p. 7). In Saukko's terms: "Instead of seeing discourses as imposing themselves upon people from the institutional above, he [Foucault] pays closer attention to the ways in which people can 'fold' power against itself (Deleuze, 1988). According to Foucault, people may do 'a critical ontology of the self', which takes stock of the discourses that have constituted one's subjectivity and then aim to reimagine oneself differently (Foucault, 1988) This practice of a 'technology of the self' does not refer to any kind of 'freedom' from discourses but refers to a practice whereby people can become critically aware of the discourses that underpin their self via a careful and informed technique." (Saukko, 2003, p. 77)

Looking forward, my work is as much interested in Plummer's distinction of cultural stories as a topic rather than as a resource (1994). By this I mean that we can take the idea of self as a resource as an ideological position itself, treating it instead as a formulation itself as a point of analysis. What is at stake within an autoethnographic frame in this formulation of the self as a resource through, or on the basis of, which one can gain insight into the imagined shadowy recesses of the same phenomenon? Or that one is able, through rigorous and critical self reflection to make innovative pronouncements about the cultural milieu of its location. How does this formulation reinforce the taken-for-grantedness of the self as a privileged viewing gallery from which to see and understand the world. In some senses this is the ultimate Humanist (individual as sovereign arbiter of knowledge) and, indeed one might argue, Positivist (the sovereign status of empirical observation through the senses as the basis for knowledge) claim for the

method. In some ways this might render the autoethnographic method as the ultimate omniscient standpoint from which to solidify knowledge Who then is allowed to know? Is it completely democratic, or is it absolutely relativist?

Destabilizing the autoethnographic 'I':

Writing autoethnographically is clearly, an act of memory and, as Castiglia and Reed (2011, p. 23) contend, "Sitting uneasily on the borders of public and private, individual and collective, historical and ephemeral, desire and impression, memory takes up the detritus of loss and preserves it more as a strategic, pliable, and evanescent expression than as a fixed monument or accurate rendition." These authors point to the ways in which memory and memory work are quite queer, not least in how it allows for a disruption of chronological time, a disturbing of the documented annals of a heteronormatively suffused history in which non-heterosexual present and future are scored through by a (recorded) past that often excludes. In this way autoethnography acts, in the current work, as an architecture to simultaneously inscribe the fragments of a life not often represented in the annals of the social sciences more generally, but also inscribes these fragments of a life past in ways that re-positions the present and future subjectivity of that very life. Thus, it is an attempt to narrate other possibilities for that life into a future, furnished with a set of stories that move beyond the impulsive moans of before, infused instead with the potential for a future filled with plenitude and possibility. Citing Foucault, Castiglia and Reed (2011, p. 27) argue that "Looking for a way to care for selves, those engaged in memory creatively transform the present by looking to the past." And again, "That these memories often transform historical record in order to accommodate the divergent (racial, gendered) identifications of those who remember is what makes memory a viable form of social protest and reparative imagining." (Castiglia & Reed, 2011, p. 27)

'Autoethnographic forms usually feature concrete action, emotion, embodiment, self consciousness, and introspection portrayed through dialogue, scenes characterization, and plot. Thus, autoethnography claims the conventions of literary writing' (Ellis, 2004, p. xix). Concomitantly, in autoethnographic literature there is recognition that '... as soon as we begin to narrate our lives, they become fictionalized" (Bonin-Rodriguez et al., 2009, p. 17). It is in the creases and folds between the real and attempts to represent the real that this project lives and breathes; it is from the interstices of what is claimed in and for a heteronormative 'real' and the survivalist imaginary of what is, what might be, and what has to be that the project takes shape. It emerges in the interplay of fact and fiction, of biographical and imaginary memory, the lived reality of a queer life subject to the vicissitudes of heteronormative culture-scapes that require it to fabricate, to contort and distort in order for it to exist which nourishes and legitimates its being. It is, of course, a fiction. But, if it is a fiction, then like Sloan (2009, p. 230) that fiction '... acknowledges the role of language in the construction of what we take to be reality and the way language is manipulated to produce preferred versions of events ... thereby implicitly complicating or compromising the objective reliability of any autobiographical project."

Saukko's analysis – mainly in relation to the study of anorexia – of the ways in which research into the social has pathologised and victimized particular bodies and subjectivities whilst simultaneously having the potential for liberation involves a radical re-think of how we conceive of such research. For Saukko, this requires us, as producers of knowledge, to '... imagine ways of studying lived experience that mediate between honouring people's experience and critically interrogating them.' In response to her own call for such research practice, she suggests that '... we need to fetch modes of doing research that approach experience in ambivalent terms, that take experience truly seriously while acknowledging that they are always partial and compromised by social discourses' (2003, p. 93).

There is also a call from Harte (2007) to attend to the ways in which the cultural imaginary is already in production of images of those more obviously othered ... the Irish ... the homosexual.

We thus have a call for research practices that (a) insist on a place at the table for voices and stories that are often silenced by or sullied in social science research discourses whilst also (b) acknowledge the partial and contingent nature of such experiential narratives based on the queerness of memory and its susceptibility to socio-cultural conventions for narration.

In this project I adopt Queer as a sensibility that disrupts the 'real' in autoethnographic and engages much more seriously in the production and fabrication of self. 'Queer is not about me, though I am (for this article) its condition of possibility' (Parker, 2002, p. 164). Parker here queers and queries the ontological and epistemological place of the written and writing 'I' in his refusal to engage with a more normative practice of reflexivity in social science writing that instantiates the authority of the authorial 'I'. Instead he deflects the need to choose between a conception of the modernist, essential 'I' and the fragmented, post-modernist, post-individual 'I' by arguing that 'Queering the authentic self, and the non-self, are part of the deconstructionist/essentialist matrix too and 'I/we' cannot choose one without also simultaneously (but often involuntarily) choosing the other' (p164).

Vickers (2010, p. 561 quoting Rolfe, 2002; p.89) characterizes the use of fiction in the social sciences as "... 'a lie that helps us see the truth". In seeking to find a means by which I can introduce previously less visible narratives of same-sex male desiring subjectivity, I offer an argument that attempts to establish the need for social science to embrace creative fiction in order to 'Share Other Truths and Different Viewpoints' (Vickers, 2010) in asserting new and critically queer fictions so as to work towards constructing a "... gay male subjectivity ... which is not a subjectivity of risk, an object of

social hygiene, or a target of therapeutic intervention ..." (Halperin, 2007, p. 109). Instead, the project conceived here is desirous of disrupting the narratives that have been dominant in the heteronormative Social Science literatures with which I am most familiar. In addition, the project seeks to resist and undermine the homogenizing impulse of those emerging homonormative accounts of 'gay' male subjectivity that claim to speak to and for same-sex desiring subjectivities.

Fiction to the Social:

"Imagination, a licentious and vagrant faculty, unsusceptible of limitations, and impatient of restraint, has always endeavoured to baffle the logician, to perplex the confines of distinction, and burst the enclosures of regularity."
(Samuel Johnson cited in Ramsden, 2011, p. 342)

This section of the chapter sets out to explore how the use of fiction has been viewed to date in social science knowledge. The section acknowledges the dominant tradition within Social Science which not only eschew the role of fiction but locate it as fundamentally antithetical to the very project of social science 'fact'. It provides a partial survey of views on how fiction has already been used within the tradition, and attempts to envisage a role for fiction in a social science that might benefit from providing more legitimacy for the productive role of fiction as a method in social science. I am not here arguing for a displacement of social science research with fiction, rather the work like others (for example: De Cock & Land, 2005; C. Watson, 2011) argues for a more legitimate space in social sciences both in recognising the value of fiction in the creation of human, social and cultural knowledge, and in accepting that fiction as productive rather than as the scary beast that is about to run rampant, polluting and corrupting the claims made by and for social sciences.

The section offers fiction as a radical alternative to more accepted social science epistemologies and ontologies when producing (previously unknown or difficult to know) knowledge about politically sensitive queer subjectivities.

Whiteman & Phillips (2006) discuss some of the characteristic and different ways that fiction and semi-fiction are adopted by theorists in Organization Studies and, by implication, in social sciences more generally. These authors reference three main approaches by which fiction is incorporated into social science theory and research and which I adopt loosely here as a heuristic for exploring its use in Social Science more generally.

Fiction as source:

The first approach is characterized by those who use already created fiction as stimulus material or as 'data' in the social sciences. This approach mimics the use of literary texts in the Humanities, in that fictionalized texts are treated as a source of data, either on the basis that they are (realistic) representations of the cultural milieu from which the texts are taken (see also C. Watson, 2011) or, that they reflect literary authors' knowledge of the social/cultural phenomena under investigation (Hassard & Holliday, 1998; Linstead, 2002; Rhodes & Westwood, 2007; Watson, 2011). In this sense, the authors of literary fictions are hailed as reflecting the socio-political contexts within which such texts are produced and are therefore credible sources of data about contemporary social discourses (Negash, 2004 cited in; Watson, 2011).

The literary novel has been seen as a particularly rich source of data for many in the social sciences. This is hardly surprising given Beyes' characterisation that the 'science of sociology' has been haunted by the literary since its inception and that literature, and the novel in particular, is much better at making visible social concerns before they are taken up by the social science academy: "As scholars, then, we are heirs to novelistic inventiveness" (2009,

p. 422). Literary novels, he argues, have been incorporated into management/organization scholarship in at least two movements. The first, 'emplacement' is where 'realist' literary novels are used as a means to illustrate what is already known about an empirical and/or theoretical organizational landscape. The second movement, what he calls 'displacement', is characterised as one when literary novels are used in management/organization scholarship because they offer a view of what could or might be in the (future?) empirical world. Beyes' analysis of Thomas Pynchon's *Against the Day* is similar in intent to Zhongyuan Zhang et al's (2008) use of three JG Ballard novels as a means by which 'hyper-organization work spaces are constructed, not because Ballard's novels "accurately represent the 'empirical reality' of the skyscraper, resort and technology park, ... but rather because of their ability to alert us to organizational possibilities through their tendency to exaggerate and clash with contemporary reality" (Zhongyuan Zhang et al., 2008, p. 891). In this sense then, the authors of such literary fictions, and those commenting on them, are not making claims for the correspondence truth value of the literary works. Instead, they celebrate the fantastical and fabricated nature of these works as an aid in exploring what 'might be'; in this case, how the design of hypermodern workplaces are potentially prone to engender sets of resistant and alternative lived practices that are far from those designed into the spaces in their original conception and design.

In a related way Czarniawska (2009) outlines some of the ways by which reading classic literary texts provide contemporary organizational scholars with 'novel insights' in their current understandings of organizations. She argues that organization studies itself '... can be treated as fictionalizing acts ..., that is, acts transposing the real into the fictive. They must not be imaginary and certainly not fantastic.' On the other hand, novels, 'can be all of the above; they can fictionalize the real as well as the imaginary and the fantastic. It is this margin of liberty that distinguishes the two genres and that makes novels interesting for organization theorists.' (Czarniawska, 2009, p.

358). Czarniawska is keen here to move away from some sort of correspondence theory of the relation between literary fiction and the real world. She is keen to stress that 'It is doubtful that a novel from the past depicts things "as they really were," but it is very likely that a popular novel shaped the general opinion of how they were' (2009, p. 364).

In discussing the ways in which narrative, Philipps (1995, p. 636), like Czarniawska suggests that fiction can be used as a useful pedagogical tool in the area of organizational analysis. He argues that in using fictional accounts of organizational life '... we are lying to tell the truth; we are constructing (or using pre-constructed) situations that never actually happened, but that exemplify issues that occur in actual organizations' (p.636). As well as pointing to the use of literary fiction in representing organizations in the past, Czarniawska makes similar appeals for the usefulness of such text when exploring organizations across space – in geographical locations that do not have a tradition of organization studies, like Eastern European and the former Soviet bloc countries. She argues that "The point is not that organization researchers are to become literary critics, but that they may learn to do their job better from literary critics and theorists." (Czarniawska, 2009, p. 368). Moreover, she makes the point that encouraging the necessary distance in readers of fiction might act as a model in preparing students of organizational documents to the fictive realities of those texts that are too often seen as literal.

Interestingly, Watson (2011), in her survey of the uses of literary fiction in the social sciences, suggests that social science writers refer to works of literary fiction as a way of signalling their erudition and, paradoxically given the nebulous position of fiction in factual texts, to provide validity claims for some aspect of their research. However, the use of literary texts, particularly novels, as data in social science is most often justified on the basis that they more accurately represent the inchoate, fragmentary and complex nature of social life, that the characterization of social life available in literary fiction is

legitimately 'ekphratic' and is therefore not subject to the constraints imposed on 'realist' representations more commonly expected in social science texts (Watson, 2011; see also Welsh, 2007 for a discussion of ekphrasis as a rhetorical device). Gabriel (2004) uses, as a basis for his edited book, a collection of reflections on how pre-existing myths, folkloric tales and other cultural stories can provide a novel analytic lens when applied to organizational contexts, helping to add new insights into organizational life.

This approach to the use of fiction in organizational/management studies extols the virtues of literary texts in expanding what we might know about how organizational actors understand and make sense of the organizational milieu in which they are members, and that as technique, creative approaches that are usually beyond the traditional scope of social sciences will allow researchers to know more about "the affective domain in organizational life [and will include] accessing tacit, unstated, unacknowledged and unconscious material." (Broussine, 2008, p. 4). Learmonth & Humpreys (2011) exemplify how those concerned with identity work in organizations can use existing literary fiction as a stimulus in thinking through one's identity locations within work organizations. Adopting an autoethnographic approach, these authors use *Jekyll & Hyde* – a novel about the instability of a coherent sense of self – as a point of reflection from which to explore their own identities as academics, and particularly as academic conference attendees. In doing so, they harness the view of subjectivity evoked in the novel as '... duplicitous, defective, disjunctive, split and threatening' (P.102) as a motif in exploring their own ambivalent and contingent relation to a variety of scholarly conferences, each of which require contradictory epistemological and ontological positions in terms of their academic work.

According to this view then the value of the novel, and fictive texts more generally, is in supplementing our knowledge of the social/cultural through its ability to "examine meaning rather than truth, existence as opposed to reality. Thus, the novel suggests what is possible, which reality forecloses" (Tierney,

2004: cited in Watson, 2011, p. 399). This seems like a worthwhile and worthy endeavour, seeking to disrupt the kinds of rational and rationalized stories told by and for research participants' about their social experiences in more traditional modes of social science research practice. However, an oppositional reading of this approach might suggest that these kinds of research technique in organizational studies, and in the social sciences more generally, has the potential to reflect a more totalizing regime in the capture of organizational members' deepest, most intimate and non-rational life for the service of institutional efficiencies. In making us alert to this latter possibility, Broussine (2008) is keen to stress the ethical (as well as the methodological!) challenges when treating such material as data.

Fiction as representation:

The second approach to fiction in the social sciences is what Whiteman & Phillips (2006) refer to as 'semi-fiction' and others refer to as 'ethnographic fiction' (Denzin, 2003; cited in Inckle, 2010) or 'creative non-fiction' (Banks & Banks, 1998; Caulley, 2008; see also Clough, 2002; Vickers, 2010; Watson, 2011). This approach demonstrates a great deal of variation amongst its many proponents but can be characterized, at the most general level, as one in which "empirical content is presented in a partial (or total) make-believe form for dramatic communicative effect" (Whiteman & Phillips, 2006, p. 6). In this approach, (usually qualitative) data are collected/generated adopting traditional social science epistemological frameworks and are then re-presented in forms that explicitly borrow the 'tricks' of the literary fiction writer. One of the main claims made for this approach is that, in appreciating both the instability of research papers as textual representations of social reality (Atkinson, Coffey, & Delamont, 2001, p. 9) and the fact that such texts already adopt literary conventions that unfortunately reduce them to shallow representations of the research 'subject', the fictionalization of social science data allows the researcher to knowingly adopt literary 'tricks' in presenting data so as to engage the reader more fully, to bring the 'subject' to life, and

introduce richness to our understanding of such research subjects (Caulley, 2008). Caulley's *raison d'être* for exploring and adopting creative nonfiction in traditional social science is similar to Ellis' (2004, 2008) and Richardson's (1997) claims for adopting evocative autoethnographic research practices: that much traditional social science writing is too boring and laborious to fully engage its audience.

Caulley (2008) suggests that creative non-fiction as an approach borrows heavily from what is known in the US as 'new journalism' (Bochner & Ellis, 1999; Ramsden, 2011) – a form of journalism that adopts literary conventions to enliven the social world reported upon. Caulley points out that this form of representational strategy is well established through the journal by the same name, edited and popularized by Len Gutkind (see also Athens, 2008).

Atkinson et al (2001, p. 6) in their inaugural editorial for the journal *Qualitative Research* point to the ways in which social science scholars from many disciplines are looking to the humanities as a way of "... exploring and developing their own literary and visual modes of representation." They also welcome the participation of those scholars who explore dramaturgical and performative practices in social research. Although the impulse to disrupt the realist representational strategies of social science research is most often attributed to the claim that postmodernism represents a decisive and eschatological rupture for social science research, Atkinson et al (2001) are at pains to resist this view. They argue that many earlier social science scholars were already attuned to the ways that their research "was always poised between the sciences and the cultural disciplines, reflecting literary and humane sensibilities." (Atkinson et al., 2001, p. 11)

Inckle (2010, p. 38) portrays ethnographic fiction thus: "In terms of representation, ethnographic fictions circumvent the entire, well-worn social science debates around 'truth', validity and objectivity in which disembodied 'snap shots' of individual's lives are commonly appropriated for dissection in the academic lab. Ethnographic fictions draw instead on the values of

creative practices which 'privilege evocation over cognitive contemplation' (Denzin, 2003: 119). It is 'a writing form that moves from interpretation and evaluation to praxis, empowerment and social change' (2003: 133) and, in doing so, back into the lived body."

Angrossino (cited in Inckle, 2010, p. 37) provides an exemplar of the transformative nature of this approach to using ethnographic fictions in social science research-based practice. Based on his practice-level knowledge of the residents of a home for men with intellectual disabilities, Angrossino effectively uses a (semi) fictionalising approach in persuading senior managers to introduce education on sexuality and sexual health, the omission of which had potentially dangerous outcomes for the residents of the home. Similarly, Watson (2011) provides an example from her own work in which she presents, in the form of a series of dramatic scenes, the case of a mother's experiences of engaging with medical, educational and psychiatric professionals in the process of having her son diagnosed with ADHD. Watson combines empirical data generated from the mother with fictionalised scenes and her own interpretations to satirize the ways that the professionals re-constructed the mother's whole family as a troubled and dysfunctional one. Watson makes the claim that it is in combining the fictional elements in re-presenting the mother's narrative that allows her as the researcher to highlight and poke satirical fun at the misunderstandings and original 'translations' of the family, by the educational and health professionals, into formulaic practice conventions.

Like with autoethnographic texts, there is a great deal of debate about the nature of (semi) fictionalised research and whether the texts in which it is represented require a degree of analysis to justify its being seen as legitimately social science in nature. Watson suggests that there is a conventional expectation that such (semi) fictional research texts be "swaddled within a researcherly paratext which provides authority and validates it, particularly in relation to citation" (2011, p. 403). She questions

whether this justificatory narrative, to some degree, militates against the radical bases on which the strategy is adopted in the first place.

Woo (2008) presents an interesting case which exemplifies the requirement to retain aspects of reliability and validity in traditional social science terms whilst attempting to adopt a more experimental approach in her research. Woo's aim was to explore the identity constructions of Singaporean youths in a context of (hyper) materialism. The data – initially collected, analysed and reported in conventional formal social science ways – were subsequently combined with what is described as 'informal research' and then subjected to a process of fictionalization to make a 'social-realist' film (in the genre adopted by Mike Leigh) about the phenomena of interest. Woo describes the processes by which the screen play was written for the film as iterative, informed by discussion during rehearsals with the actors who played the roles of the fictional characters, and by on-line discussion feedback received following the publication of a related previous publication. Woo was particularly keen, in the film, to represent the Singalese vernacular which she claimed had been 'tidied up' for the formal social science report but had been the lingua franca of the original participants. These confessions about the processes of 'translation' from the original data (to the formal report, and back) to the film as an alternative form of representation, are provided mainly as a way of validating the verisimilitude of the film as a faithful reflection of the data collected in the first place: "The film is, therefore, not a 'translation' in the narrow sense of being a direct analogue of the study on celluloid. ... but, rather, a *careful adaptation* with the specific aim of *ensuring that the core* of the study be communicated to a wide audience." (2008, p. 234; my emphasis). Woo invokes Churchill (2005) who advises the researcher to "shape the data ... - not to change it into *false material* but rather to bring out of the *basic material* a truth or beauty already within it." (Woo, 2008, p. 234: my emphasis).

Similarly, Ketelle (2004) advocates an approach to adopting fiction in re-presenting the data of social science research, warning that the researcher should fabricate nothing whilst taking licence at times in compressing or condensing several lived experiences into one narrative (see also Richardson, 1997). Caulley (2008) advises constraint in doing so, warning that too much compression may lead to deviating from the original data. He suggests that the researcher use triangulation methods as well as 'member checks' to ensure that what is written is recognisable by those who are represented. The latter is one of a number of strategies given by Caulley in advising the writer of creative nonfiction away from invention that might give a whiff of fabrication and following a path that keeps as close to the truth as is possible. Caulley acknowledges that there is some discussion about the degree to which fabrication might be used in creative nonfiction, but is keen to stress that whatever the particular proclivities of each individual creative nonfiction writer there should be little doubt that there is a line between what they are doing and fiction itself. Even Jermier, identified as an early and fairly radical adopter of (semi) fiction in creating alternative views of the subjective nature of his research subjects, defends his work against the claim that it is 'purely fictional' and instead describes it as being based on '*actual* field work and theoretical description.'" (1985, p.74; *my emphasis*)

I am interested in how the dichotomy (between 'false' and 'basic') set up by Churchill, invoked by Woo and reinforced by a range of other social scientists adopting the semi-fiction approach, emphasises the more general claim attendant on this approach to using fiction in the human and social sciences: that the process and outcome of creating (semi) fiction in the social sciences should not be too extreme and therefore cast beyond the mores adopted within rigorous social science research practices.

Although Athens (2008, p. 768) argues that those writers who adopt the blurred genre of creative nonfiction insist that 'no hard-and-fast lines can be really drawn between the fictional and nonfictional components of their work'

many of those recommending a semi-fiction approach in social science research are keen advocates for a fictionalising strategy that does not disturb the authenticity of the data that is originally collected. Rather, they argue that, given the difficulties inherent in attempting to represent a 'truth' (what has become known as the crisis of representation in the social sciences) the researcher can take licence with the data collected/generated and re-present it in a form that is more accessible, rich, evocative and 'true to life' than more traditional social science writing form allows (Ellis, 2008). What is never in question, according to this strain of research practice, is from where and on what basis the data are collected/generated in the first place; there is merely an attempt at disturbing the form through which the data are re-presented for the consumers of the knowledge generated. In this approach to using fiction – or semi-fiction – the reliability and validity claims for the data and made on the precepts of conventional social science research are kept intact. In effect, we still have our authenticated knowledge from the informants/participants and, through the exertions of design and/or the credibility of the researcher, these data reflect a 'real', authentic world – either 'out there' or arbitrated through the experience of research participants; the world of our research subjects, a world about which knowledge claims can be made by the social scientist for those 'Others' who are to be known.

The sanctity of social science data here is never in question, and the researcher takes pains in demonstrating that, regardless of the form adopted in the process of re-presentation, they retain far more than the mere whiff of the real 'voices' of our research 'subjects'. This approach then, seems to me to offer little that is radically different from the quintessential epistemological character of conventional social research: we might play god with the order and form of the words spoken by our research subjects, but we do not have to fundamentally question the processes by which and the contexts in which those words are produced in the first place – we retain the phlegmatic assurance that our methods work, that the original data are valid. Neither do

we necessarily have to question the ontological status of research participants' representations of themselves in the research: the fact that they are the objects of scrutiny in the first place; that the research is conceived and designed as an imaginative act by the researcher (MacLure, 2003; MacLure, 2013; Ramsden, 2011); that they perform within the conventionalized and ritualized strictures of data collection/gathering fora; that they, like the researcher, are subject to and subjected in the dominant discourses within which the research is framed (Cahnmann, 2003); that the research is then reported in conventional and conservative fora that adopt partial and particular linguistic registers (McKee, 2009); that there is no position bracketed from or outwith the discursive nexus of culture, of which social science research is a significant component (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997).

In all, the major tenet of this approach is that the artifice of literary technique ought to be adopted but not at the cost of veering too far from the 'Truth'. Part of what is problematic for me in this approach is that there is indeed a Truth that ought to be represented. I would argue that this type of positioning of (semi-) fiction in social science research is, in many ways, just as conservative as the more traditional mechanisms by which the social science researcher demonstrates their 'mastery' over the knowing/knowledge of those who are to be known.

Fiction as production:

The third and, according to Whiteman & Phillips' (2006), the most controversial approach within a social science tradition, is to adopt narrative or creative fiction as method in and of itself for exploring social phenomena.

Phillips (Phillips, 1995; citing McArthur, 1992) defines fiction, taken from the Oxford companion to the English language, as: "Fiction: A general term for something created by the human mind. It has three aspects: (1) Not a fact,

but an invention of some kind, sometimes a fabrication or a lie. (2) Not fact, but still part of reality; imaginative narrative, often part of literature. (3) A special kind of "fact": a social and cultural construct, such as a legal fiction that helps in the administration of law, temporal fictions such as the days of the week, and geographical fictions like the Equator' (McArthur 1992: 401)" (626). Park argues that that which is referred to as fiction is created on the basis of a linguistic convention which '... consists in stating that words and sentences in a linguistic product should not be taken as referring to any real things, event, fact, and situations, that is to the real world.' (1982, p. 418)

Some examples of this form of fiction in the social sciences would include Andrew Sparkes' paper about the life of a harassed academic in an increasingly intensified work environment shaped by managerialist agendas. Then there's Michael Ungar's work, and there are a number of examples offered both by Inckle and by Watson. Athens also presents a range of working chapters of a novel about living as an outsider within the American Greek community.

In an impassioned plea for how poetic form ought to be considered as rigorous social science research, Cahnmann (2003, p. 31) argues that "Just as the microscope and camera have allowed different ways for us to see what would otherwise be invisible, so too poetry and prose are different mediums that give rise to ways of saying what might not otherwise be expressed."

Whiteman and Phillips (2006) outline clearly how this form of writing/method runs against the grain of the conventions of 'knowing' and 'knowledge' in traditional social science research practice. From within the discipline of organizational studies, Rhodes & Brown (2005) argue that "... fictionality can be seen to be a characteristic of research writing in general and therefore that explicitly fictional stories can be regarded as appropriate empirical material for organizational research ...' (p.496). They raise the problematic, levelled at traditional forms of social science, that research writing is always

only a representation of the social world - never a mimetic one – and, as such, must re-adjust its claims to presenting any absolute sense of the 'truth', or indeed 'truths' of the social/cultural. Similarly, Richardson (1997: see especially Ch. 2), a muscular advocate for the immanent nature of narrative in sociology, rejects the idea that some kinds of sociological writing are objective or neutral and therefore able to provide an omniscient view of the researched. She argues persuasively that '... sociology uses rhetoric and metaphor to grant itself authority and to mask its ideology' (p.43), and more generally that 'All social science writing exists in the context of metaphors that shape the narrative.' (p34). One of Richardson's objectives in arguing against the objectivist ideological claim of social sciences is in an attempt to interrogate its conservatism and, further, to explore how experimental fictional writing can be used as a means of differently representing groups or identity positions that have conventionally been 'spoken for' or 'Othered' in more traditional social science writing forms.

There is something of an antipathy in the social sciences towards fiction; an antipathy that constructs a solid boundary separating fact from fiction. In contrasting the traditional distinctions between the work of social science and that of narrative fiction writers in a literary tradition, Phillips (1995) argues that: "... social scientists discover things, writers make things up; social scientists observe reality, writers invent alternative realities; social scientists apply scientific methods to the social world in order to test hypotheses in the interests of intersubjectivity and faithfulness to external reality, writers use illusion and deception in an effort to remain true to an internal world of subjective experience (Kreiger, 1983;176)" (1995, p. 626). This boundary is consequently most often conflated with, and in, the separations between 'reality' and 'artifice', between 'life' and 'art' and between the 'empirical' and the 'imaginary'. Nairn & Panelli (2008) suggest that in the social sciences we are most likely to construct fiction in opposition to 'the real' but demonstrates how a serendipitous experience of researching young people's experiences of life in rural New Zealand led them to recognise how their

research participants used fictional texts as a means of metaphorizing their own experiences. Further, these authors take this opportunity as a critical point in which to muse about the parallels in writing research and writing fiction, "'troubling" the artificial boundary between fictional and academic writing' (2008, p. 97).

As a trainee in the discipline of psychology in the late 1980's, I am reminded of the notoriety surrounding the figure of Cyril Burt who, although seen as a 'founding father' of the discipline – and especially an early adherent of the scientific approach to applied and educational psychology - was heralded as an object of derision and a 'traitor' to the cause of 'good' science because posthumous claims argued that his work, his ideas, were based on a series of fabrications. At one point it was claimed that two assistants in his research and publications work were mere figments of his imagination. However, the most heinous claim in my trainee narrative was that he had fabricated at least some of the data on which his conclusions on the role of genetics in IQ were based (Rushton, 2002). I remember his case being held up as an example par excellence of how not to do 'proper' social science: the heavy-weight narrative of Ethics were invoked in declaiming Burt's tactics and in extolling the sacrosanct basis of collecting, analysing and representing data in a 'pure' and 'uncontaminated' way.

It is interesting to revisit this controversy more than twenty years later and realize how sensationalist yet inconclusive the case against Burt was and continues to be, and how professional and subject specialist interests remain divided on the case (Rushton, 2002). More recently it would seem that, although the case still provokes a great deal of mixed feeling, there seems to be a tendency whilst assessing claims about Burt's integrity to moderate the significance of his 'misdemeanour' and, instead paint him as bumbling and unsystematic rather than malicious (Mackintosh, 1995).

Whatever the truth of the case – and it is unlikely to be established unequivocally now – and despite claims made that his results are validated by more contemporary cognate studies, questions about the integrity of Burt's work remain fixed on the fact that he was less than rigorous in collecting 'real' data.

I also remember, in the animal observation lab, some undergraduate peers confessing that they had invented some of the rats' journeys across the gridlines of the observation platforms between starting point and stimulus substance. Aside from the hysterical giggles that the confession evoked, I remember the much more serious invocations to silence about their transgressions of the sacrosanct, this fabricating of data. In bringing me into their fold I felt the weight of belonging to this outlawed activity. It was like partaking in a blasphemous pagan ritual in the church sacristy whilst mass was being held on the high Alter. Although the incident now seems trivial, there was something in the nature of the experience that, in recalling it, forces me to acknowledge my emerging awareness of the professional and academic boundaries that were being crossed, the disciplinary rigours that were being transgressed.

These formative lessons on how to avoid engaging with 'bad' social science knowledge were immersed within the fuller disciplinary training of how to create its opposite i.e. 'good' social science. To a large extent, this training focused on how best to generate/collect valid and reliable social science data that authentically reflects the subject under study. In doing so, there was the silent but fixed imperative that data, tainted in any way by the imagination of the researcher or research process, was beyond the professional pale. Fabricating, falsifying and, fibbing were the polar opposites of 'fact'. In social science there was no place for worshipping simultaneously at the alters of both 'fiction' and 'fact'.

Bochner and Ellis (1999) suggest that in thinking about the development of ethnography as a tradition into the 21st century, "Boundaries separating literature, sociology, philosophy, film, art, music, photography, anthropology, and performance art must blur or even dissolve." (p. 494). In this stunningly alternative and artful review of an article which the audience never actually gets to see, nor are they provided with a reference to the original article, they reject the immersion of ethnography in the kinds of polarities (heart/head, subjective/objective, art/science, story/essay, self/culture) that reflect the troubled and, for some, the boundaried relation between art and science in which social science so weightily implicates itself. They ask for an 'intermediate zone' in which genuine and divergent views might be communicated, in which the certainties of the other side might be lived with rather than used as a weapon to defeat the 'opponent'. These authors highlight the role of some social science academics in perpetuating the idea that Art and Science are diametrically opposed and that these same academics are incapable of constructing an alternative to this strictly bifurcated world view:

"I think they're victims of their own socialization as social scientists and the categorical ways in which they were educated. You know, this is science; this is art. They can't conceive of a bridge between those two worlds." (2006, p. 436). Ellis & Bochner here make this argument when discussing realist sociologists, who are insistent in seeing a divide between science and Art.

Similarly, Vickers (2010, p. 561) argues that the professional and disciplinary boundary management that maintains and underscores the opposition between the work of social scientists and that adopted by more literary creative fiction writers is, in fact, ideological rather than a reflection of the nature of the true differences between the work carried out by these knowledge workers. Phillips (1995) likewise argues that the tradition involved in constantly clarifying the distinction between these two domains might actually reflect a denial of some of the problematics that are immanent

in the seemingly 'factual' or 'mimesis' (Rhodes, 2009) work of social sciences. Phillips suggests that rather than investing energy in this kind of activity, we should embrace the productive tensions inherent in the ambiguous nature of the fiction/social science distinction. In Parker and his colleague's terms we should resist the impulse to police the disciplinary boundaries that exclude fiction from the 'factuality' of social science and instead pay attention to the degree of 'neo-disciplinarity' (1999, p. 583) that is already evident in social science.

However, it would seem that the lines that mark the separation between these realms is not as straight forward as they first appear. The idea of literary fiction being completely in opposition to the sacrosanct empirical basis of social science is a view that has been weakened considerably with what has been referred to as the narrative or linguistic 'turn' in the social sciences since the latter part of the twentieth century. Linstead (2002, p. 1) argues that 'The concepts of social science as text, social action as text, even organizations as texts, and research accounts as fictions, narratives or forms of storytelling are no longer unfamiliar. ... The textual nature of science and social science is now increasingly recognized, and used as a means of critiquing those ploys and ruses which go into creating and maintaining the power of "normal Science". Across the complete terrain of the academic disciplines of science, economics, psychology, philosophy, literary criticism, history, sociology, medicine, anthropology, and the concept of their textual nature is being used to unsettle the foundations upon which contemporary disciplinary practice rests, and by which it is comforted.' Similarly, Ramsden (2011, p. 343) points out that there are incursions across the art/science border from both sides: as well as reality figuring strongly in fiction, fiction also strongly permeates what she calls the 'story-shaped world' (citing Wicker, 1975) we take as real life. She argues further that "The new concept of the nonfiction novel arises from an attempt to find a paradigm to accommodate a new experience of reality—that of the 'empirical fiction' or 'fictuality' of the

real world—which can no longer be accommodated in the old forms of factual or fictional discourses.” (2011, p. 346).

The bases for fiction in this project:

“In the twentieth century reality underwent a series of sustained critiques, particularly in relation to ideas surrounding structuralism and its later development poststructuralism, and with this went the demise of epistemological and ontological certainty.” (Watson, 2008; 48). Watson is here referring to not only the ‘crisis of representation, but to a host of challenges in the philosophy of social science taken largely from continental philosophy and the Humanities, against the idea that ‘the truth’ can easily be established in social science with a reliance on adopting the ‘methods’ of the natural sciences (see also Ramsden, 2011). Cahnmann (2003, p. 33), in arguing the contested distinction between what is considered ‘true’ and ‘True’, suggests that ‘All researchers, whether they adjust numbers or extract quotations from a transcript, find themselves somewhere along the continuum between what is “true” and “True.” The difference may be the claims to fact or fiction that are made.’ And again, that ‘Once we realize that all claims to “scientific truth” are suspect, influenced by the culturally bound nature of the researcher’s text, we can free ourselves to write in ways that name and claim feeling, story, and relationship.’ In this way she also makes a case for legitimately and explicitly using poesis as part of the research process.

Hellerstein (1997, p. 134) writes about the overlap between psychiatry and literature and argues for the ways in which literature reinvigorates and humanizes the ‘flattened’ language more traditional in the field. Hellerstein here argues that “the psychiatrist collaborates with his patient to construct a new, less pathological, life story – in the best case, the goal of psychotherapy is to help the patient “become himself,” to create his or her own, original life story, rather than repeating some pre-programmed, neurotic tale of suffering, or society’s constructed tale of the “normal” if un-lived life. The writer, uninterested in treating the individual, may still have the deep purpose of

exposing society's pathology, or of telling tales that cure, that heal the world." (1997, p. 134). Denzin (1999, p. 513) argues for a ethnography that is explicitly intent on using the conventions of literature. Among the recommendations for adopting literary technique, he asserts that ethnography should "articulate clearly identifiable cultural and political issues, including injustices based on the structure and meanings of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. [and that] the work should express a politics of hope. It should criticise how things are and imagine how they could be different." He makes a compelling case for the use of evocative and emotionally charged writing, but he also argues for one that goes beyond the personal, the 'I' so as to make claims for and about the need for (radical) change. Denzin's is definitely a political and aesthetic bent that I want to look at and to in thinking about what social science practice might mean for me in the 21st century!

Luce-Kapler (1999) talks about her experiences of three writing groups of women and, adopting what she calls a post-structuralist action research agenda, uses these experiences to reflect on the nature of writing, and on the nature of fictionalized autobiographical writing in part. She argues that when "a writer wishes to describe her experiences, her text becomes a subjunctive reality that expresses contingent, hypothetical, or prospective events. The writing then becomes a site of possibility, a place of *as if*" (1999, p. 279 emphasis in the original). In doing so, she suggests that "Out of such imaginings, can arise fictional truths and a fictional world that recruit a reader's imagination, even if the only reader is the writer of the text. With those fictional truths, the writer and reader can explore the *as if*, sometimes discovering alternatives for their lives and seeing the multiplicity of their subjectivities in a way that offers a sense of coherence and connection even within their shifting and changing nature" (p280). Although Luce-Kapler focuses on how the '*as if*' (see also Barone, 2001) imaginings of her writing group participants can effect a critical distance from which the women were able to re-imagine themselves and their lives; it is this quality of '*as if*' that I

want to explore in this project, and that I want to suggest could be a valuable addition to the critical tradition in the social sciences. In Luce-Kapler's terms "Considering other possibilities can call into question what is assumed, considered, or sanctioned" (1999, p. 282).

Iser (1993) argues that "Literature becomes a panorama of what is possible, because it is not hedged in by either the limitations or the considerations that determine the institutionalized organizations with which human life otherwise takes its course" (cited in Holman Jones, 2008, p. 212). DeCock and Land (2005) argue that rather than trying to equalize the literary with the social science text, or in trying to make the fictive text more 'real', we should instead make the gap between 'fact' and 'fiction' explicit so as to unhinge and unsettle the 'truth claims' of the social science text: "As Iser (1993) suggested, self-revelation as fiction withdraws authenticity from whatever form it may take and it is precisely this lack of 'authenticity', its ambiguity and 'strangeness' that provides the strength of the literary text (cf. De Cock 2000)." (2005, p. 526)

'What methodological reflexivity points to is the ability for research to recognize itself as a creative practice that can delegitimize the common sense of reality and render that reality malleable rather than immutable — the goal of research is to transgress rather than report reality (Schubert 1995), to 'testify to the reality of lived experience while at the same time undermining the self-evident character of that reality' (Rhodes 2009).' (Rhodes, 2009, p. 656). "Fiction helps us to know new realities and to see other truths and viewpoints." (Vickers, 2010, p. 563). "For Barthes literature's 'unreality' is the very source of its power to affect reality. Our apparent antinomy (fiction/real; concealment/disclosure) thus conceals a deeper equivalence. Precisely by consciously entering the 'kingdom of fiction', the configuration of language in its own space, literary texts acquire the power to effect changes in the real, to restructure the world of the reader in unsettling and challenging ways, ..." (De Cock & Land, 2005, p. 525). Ketelle (2004, p. 453) following

Wittgenstein argues that "Fictionalizing real world experience affords an opportunity to attend to everyday experience in a new way, to revisit particulars that may have escaped notice the first time around." However, I wonder at how the everyday 'hides' particular truths of the world especially if we consider that those stories that are told in the everyday are told within particular ideological frames of reference and narrative structures. In this way, contra-Ketelle, I think I might argue that one needs to fictionalize experience in order to go beyond the everyday (narrative) experience of our world. In almost all ways Ketelle is making an argument for using fictional narrative as a means by which one can know more or better. I'm thinking more about how narrative fiction in social research can, like Harold (2003) suggests, lead us to more 'unknowing', to less closure in the rational known.

Rhodes (2009) disavows the kinds of reflexivity that is much advised in the qualitative tradition - the practice of 'revealing' the author and their proclivities. This disavowal is based on his take that this practice merely aims to display a "... mastery over oneself through the act of self-revelation." and that there is a "... a significant danger of enhancing rather than questioning the authorial authority that spurred the turn to reflexivity in the first place." (Rhodes, 2009, p. 666). Rhodes here questions the ego-smugness of this position and goes on to propose a space (in organization studies) in which experimental writing that "... breaks from the established ways of thinking and writing that confine becoming. ... that contests normalcy." (2009, p. 662) is given greater space in studying the social. Although he resists the impulse to define a new practice of method that inheres the kind of ethical creativity that his pursuit of poesis might suggest, he does argue that the kind of ethical responsibility that he derives from Derrida and that may apply to organization studies demands a kind of freedom from the constraints of conventional methodology: "Practically, to be responsible is to always strive towards the exercise of freedom in one's

writing rather than to rest of the methodological laurels of past convention." (Rhodes, 2009, p. 662).

He aligns his project with those forms of organizational studies that question "... old orthodoxies, by liberating new ideas and ideals, and, importantly, by providing new choices which exceeded the possibilities of what could be done in the name of knowledge. ... [that work whose project is] not that which seeks to accumulate knowledge, but that which seeks to disrupt knowledge through a radical questioning of the rigour (mortis) of theory's own substantive and methodological self-confidence." (Rhodes, 2009, p. 663). Instead he argues for "... writing in a way that asks questions rather than provides answers; that refuses the hubris of generalizations; that provokes thinking rather than provides answers; that generates possibilities rather than prescriptions; that seeks openness rather than closure; that cultivates poesis instead of pretending or pretending to extend mimesis." (Rhodes, 2009, p. 668).

"Imaginative literature can accommodate the ideas of indeterminacy, imperfection and approximation more readily than disciplines such as law or theology, where arriving at a final judgement or an affirmation of faith are critical." (Batsaki, Mukherji, & Schramm, 2011, p. 2) Inckle (2010) too is keen to stress the opportunities that ethnographic fictions present in terms of involving the reader (what Sparkes, 2003 refers to as 'active readership') in actively making meaning and sense of the explicitly partial knowledge that the social science writer offers.

Hunt and Carter (2011), in a corpus analytic approach to Sylvia Plath's *the Bell Jar*, argues that this kind of analysis can give a clearer picture of how mental health is described – in this case on the part of the fictional lead character of the novel. They suggest, like many others, that attending to the richness of description in such fictional instances has the potential to enrich

the appreciation of mental health on the part of those professionals whose role it is to treat, support and advocate for clients with mental health conditions.

Likewise, Beatty (2010) argues for literary fiction as a much more effective (?) strategy in attempting to write emotion for the ethnographer: "The case for an anthropology of emotion that depends on a reflexive or confessional stance collapses." (p. 433). There's much more to mine in Beatty's paper about the ways in which the literary author can convey emotion as it shapes the experience of those characters created, and thus illuminate for the reader, than can any ethnographer. (p437). And again: "I suggest that it is not possible to render the emotional dimension of experience convincingly without giving emotion its proper narrative due— something conventional ethnographies have rarely done. Instead, they are apt to misrepresent emotions by highlighting only one or other aspect—of language, feeling, tactics, or cultural meaning—and therefore risk turning people into caricatures, bearers of difference, social constructions." (Beatty, 2010, p. 437).. "Embedded as they are in biography, circumstantial but historical, emotions resist ethnographic formulation; their particularity defies abstraction." (Beatty, 2010, p. 438) Although Beatty is, I think, referring to a more narrative approach within ethnography, the following quote adds to his argument for the effectiveness of narrative in conveying for the reader emotion as complex phenomena that simultaneously reflect and shape action in those cultural scenarios studied by ethnographers: "A narrative approach leaves opaque what resists social analysis; it acknowledges the irreducible; it does not force an answer." (Beatty, 2010, p. 438). Beatty (Beatty, 2010, p. 439) in outlining that he has written two very different books about his ethnographic experiences – one a more traditional ethnography, the second based on his emotional struggles with the experiences of such – wonders "whether a loss of theoretical impulse and ethnographic focus isn't at the same time a gain in realism—a gain, to be more specific, in emotional realism." Beatty's critique is not one about the inability of ethnography to tell

the story of the field, rather it is, he argues, a more radical critique focussed on ethnography's inability to tell emotion, those phenomena that are of fundamental significance for those who are 'researched'. "The evocation of feelings is an exercise in imaginative recovery: a fiction but one based in fact." (Beatty, 2010, p. 440). "But the narrator, the "I," is the instrument of fiction, neither me-now nor me-then but a creation of the text, a bridge to the reader, not a real person. He is there to lend credibility, to show where the story came from, to show the limits of what could be observed." (Beatty, 2010, p. 440). "As the few exceptions indicate, only a narrative approach—because it locates emotion in practice; in the indivisible flow of action, character, and history—can reveal the dimensions of emotion hidden by other methods. There is nothing very new in this claim. Novelists have known it for centuries. But as ethnographers we have still—most of us—to learn the lesson." (Beatty, 2010, p. 440)

Inckle, quoting Smith (2002) argues that ethnographic fictions "Evoke emotions; broaden audiences; illuminate the complexity of body self relationships; include 'researcher', 'participant', and 'reader' in dialogue; helps us to think with stories; and to invite the reader-as-witness to morally breathe and share a life within the storytelling relation. ... It is a powerful means of conveying complexity and ambiguity without prompting a single, closed, convergent reading. ... The genre becomes an opportunity and space where one may relinquish the role of the declarative author persuader and attempt to write as, and be represented by, an artfully-persuasive storyteller. (Smith, 2002: 113–14)" (2010, p. 39)

Denzin (1999, p. 512) argues that "the ethnographic, the aesthetic, and the political can never be neatly separated. Ethnography like art is always political." which is in contradistinction to the view that those who wish to involve themselves in poetics and political activism should not simultaneously see themselves as social scientists. (Hammersley, 1999).

Luce-Kapler quotes Ted Hughes' (1967) argument that "All imaginative writing is to some extent the voice of what is neglected or forbidden, hence its connection with a past in a nostalgic vein and the future in a revolutionary vein" (1999, p. 285). Barone (2001, p. 26) argues that arts-based researchers select elements of their work, with no claim on the certainty that the scientific method claims to offer, "for their usefulness in recasting the contents of experience into a form with the potential for challenging (sometimes deeply held) beliefs and value."

Hammersley (1999, p. 582) talks about the "forms of antirealism that are fashionable among qualitative researchers today." This idea of antirealism suggests something very different from how I conceive of the project in which I am engaged. Certainly I want to engage in what he earlier refers to as illuminating fictions or partisan perspectives, but in no way do I think that I am engaged in either an anti- or an un-realist project. For me there is nothing more real than the need to invert those stories dominant in the cultural imaginary that more usually attach to same-sex desiring males. Indeed, I would argue that there is a moral imperative to pervert those dominant cultural stories that have hitherto (predominantly) been produced by that very same 'realist' tradition that Hammersley seems so keen to defend.

"Academics too are now taking a keen interest in stories and narratives. Long tarnished as mere hearsay, opinion, or invention, stories, with all their inaccuracies, exaggerations, omissions, and liberties, are now seen as providing vital clues not into what happened, but what people experience, or even into what they want to believe as having actually happened. Furthermore, academics are becoming increasingly aware of how stories, embedded in a kind of knowledge we now label 'narrative knowledge', frequently provide guides or recipes for action... Researchers have also become aware that storeis and narratives do not merely offer accounts of politics, but can also act as political interventions, challenging dominant discourses, subverting them, or questioning them. Stories set

agendas, express emotions, and fashion ways of thinking."
(Gabriel, 2004, pp. 2–3).

Rhodes and Brown (2005, p. 484) set out five principles that they have engaged with in their thesis about the use of fiction in social science. Although all five are worth revisiting, the last one seems most useful to me for my project in that there is a nod to the ways in which social science has a tendency to make claims for mirroring social reality - at best as how it exists at the point of data collection - and without admitting to the ways in which it is implicated in maintaining a status quo - as if that weren't part of the regime of changing knowledge in the direction of the same whilst silencing all those other possibilities for imagining a different version: "Finally, researchers might recognize explicitly that the social sciences are regimes of power with a hegemonic potency that serves to produce and reproduce social orders, not least by normalizing subjects into prescribed categories sanctioned by political authorities (Foucault, 1980)." As Richardson (1997, p. 2) would have it "We are restrained and limited by the kinds of cultural stories available to us."