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‘Sometimes I fear that the whole world is queer’  
What bisexual theories, identities and representations  
can still offer queer studies

JOSEPH ANTHONY RONAN

Thesis submitted for the qualification of  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN SEXUAL DISSIDENCE IN  
LITERATURE AND CULTURE



UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

December 2014

STATEMENT

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been, and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree. However, the thesis incorporates to the extent indicated below, material already submitted as part of required coursework for

MA Sexual Dissidence in Literature and Culture

which was awarded by

University of Sussex, 2011.

Joseph Ronan,

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December 2014

Parts of pages 32, 33, 38 and 42 of this thesis are adapted from 5 paragraphs in the MA Term Paper: *'A Label is No Liberation at All': Queer Fixity and the Process of Bisexuality*, submitted 2010.

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEXJOSEPH RONAN DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN  
SEXUAL DISSIDENCE IN LITERATURE AND CULTURE‘SOMETIMES I FEAR THAT THE WHOLE WORLD IS QUEER’:  
WHAT BISEXUAL THEORIES, IDENTITIES AND REPRESENTATIONS CAN STILL OFFER QUEER  
STUDIESSUMMARY

This thesis examines the marginalization of bisexuality in contemporary British culture and in queer theory, and addresses a division in bisexual theory between identity-based and epistemological approaches. It proposes in response a bisexual reading, here termed ‘*re/depositioning*’. This interdisciplinary approach gives particular focus to the interrogation of bisexual textuality, rather than (only) to bisexuality as a subject of representation.

Part I examines ways in which bisexuality is erased and relationships between bisexuality, queer theory and narrative. It then posits a bisexual critical practice as counter to the end-oriented progress narratives of fixed identity and capitalist production, and to the reduction of queer theory to a fixed oppositional stance. Part I also responds to the ‘temporal turn’ in queer theory – particularly in the work of Lee Edelman, Jose Esteban Muñoz and Elizabeth Freeman – which critiques ‘straight time’. The thesis advances a bisexual temporality distinct from the conflicting utopian and anti-utopian queer approaches to futurity.

Part II of the thesis *re/depositions* a number of contemporary literary and cultural representations of male bisexuality. A chapter on the staging in *The Buddha of Suburbia* of adolescent sexuality and pop music repurposes damaging bisexual stereotypes; the denigration of bisexuality as ‘adolescent’ gives way, in this analysis, to a productive ‘textual immaturity’. The subsequent chapter reads Morrissey’s cultural performance as an embodied critique of heteronormativity which negotiates incompatibilities between radical theory and lived identity. A chapter on Alan Hollinghurst’s *The Stranger’s Child* reads that novel as a ‘bisexual camp’ text whose narrative structure and unnamed bisexualities critique the rewriting of bisexuality as gay, queer, or immature.

A final chapter presents the thesis’s conclusions: that critical re-engagement with bisexuality strengthens the arguments of queer theory and offers possibilities for living that resist the reductive imperatives of straight time and heteronormative identity narratives whilst remaining liveable within them.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In its first year this research was aided by a Sussex School of English bursary, and for the past two has been funded by an AHRC doctoral award and Sussex match-funding. I would like to extend thanks to both the AHRC and the School of English for this generous support, and to the interview panel of Norman Vance, Lindsey Smith and Doug Haynes for seeing promise in this research.

Many thanks to my secondary supervisor Vicky Lebeau who, along with Ruth Charnock and Tom Wright in our annual review meetings, provided provoking feedback on draft chapters which have helped me to clarify my thinking in a number of areas.

I would like to thank Rachel O'Connell and all in the Centre for the Study of Sexual Dissidence, past and present, for providing a research community of which I am proud to be a part. The queer dialogues I have been part of over the last few years have been enriching and always welcoming. I hope for continued association with the centre and its valuable community.

The teaching I received during my undergraduate and MA study at the University of Sussex has been formative and life-changing. A Masters term paper written for William Spurlin contained the kernels of this present work and his passionate encouragement and support was instrumental in its continuation. Particular thanks must go to Alan Sinfield, who opened my eyes.

I would not have embarked on this PhD were it not for the efforts of Bill McEvoy, who over the last eight years as tutor, colleague and friend has always encouraged me and pushed me when I needed pushing; my thanks to him for his great generosity.

Thanks also to Jo and Mike Ronan, for their significant financial support and personal encouragement without which I could never have considered postgraduate study. They have been a vital safety net, ready and willing to offer help and yet knowing when not to ask 'how it's all going'.

Thanks are also due to Ellie Williams for innumerable discussions about my work and the university over many years – and in particular for her deft manoeuvring between scholarly critiques, moral support, and bringing me down a peg or two. In recent months Dominic Walker has provided a much needed extra pair of eyes over sections of this work; his attentive comments and feedback are hugely appreciated.

Bryin Lindoe, Daniel McEvoy, Teeny Brady, Tom Runciman and Rachel Wemyss have all had to live with this thesis at various points over the last three years and have put up with it (and me), without complaint. My thanks to them all, and also to all those with whom I have shared a workspace for whom I have undoubtedly been too regular a distraction.

Tom Houlton, Zac Rowlinson, Mike Rowland and Dominic Walker: you have kept me going.

My sincerest thanks are reserved for Vincent Quinn, my doctoral supervisor, whose support has been invaluable. My brief words here cannot do justice to his understanding, encouragement and humour over the last three years, which have enabled me to submit this work in a form of which I am proud. I am so grateful for his availability and willingness always to give time to work (presented so often in a state of disarray), as well as for the extent and quality of his questions and advice. I am a far better writer and thinker for his input and I cannot thank him enough. His ongoing faith in this project allowed me to keep mine.

# INTRODUCTION

*Sometimes I fear that the whole world is queer*



This thesis began with a sense that bisexual theory had reached something of an impasse; that a range of crucial and exciting questions around bisexuality had not been able to move far beyond a seemingly irresolvable tension between identity-based and epistemological approaches which are ‘ultimately [. . .] at odds with each other’; that ‘the reification of bisexuality as an identity is incompatible with the allegedly transformative potential of bisexuality as an epistemological force’ (Storr 1999, 167). An earlier beginning: this thesis began with a sense of bisexuality as an absence in queer theory, and a recognition of ‘queer theory’s (deliberate or unwitting) attempts to relegate it to the outside’ (Gurevich, Bailey, and Bower 2009, 45). Gammon and Isgro state that within queer theory, ‘attending to the topic of bisexuality is uneven at best and more often simply absent’ (2006, 161). The thesis responds by proposing and performing a bisexual reading practice, *re/depositioning*, which can productively accommodate what Clare Hemmings identifies as ‘contradictory bisexual meanings’ (2002, 15). This is both developed through, and performed in, readings of contemporary literary and cultural representations of British male bisexuality.

Bisexuality is still an ill-understood and much maligned identity compared to monosexualities. Miguel Obradors-Campos suggests that bisexuality

together with those terms that either derive from it or have a meaning related to it (such as pansexuality or omnisexuality) tend to create confusion, doubts and mistrust about what they really label and entail, whereas *homosexuality* and *heterosexuality* seldom cause the same commotion in the mainstream public. (2011, 208)<sup>1</sup>

For Nichi Hodgson, writing recently in *The Guardian* on Tom Daley’s ambiguous coming out, this is symptomatic of the fact that

bi-visibility in the media is a joke. Declaring yourself bisexual translates as meaning that you are one of just several things: attention-seeking and performative, promiscuous, or gay in denial to appease fans. What’s more, when it comes to bi-visibility, the mainstream LGBT media and community are just as guilty of reductionism. (2013)

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<sup>1</sup> Emphasis his. Hereafter, unless otherwise stated, all emphases in quotations are as they appear in the source.

The lack of visibility, along with a distrust of bisexuals engendered by the preponderance of these damaging stereotypes, works to ensure that bisexuality remains ill-defined and marginalized as an identity in contemporary British culture.

Scholarship on bisexuality frequently focuses on the difficulty of firmly defining it and then claims this uncertainty as the source of bisexual theory's critical potential. David Halperin, for instance, suggests that 'this unresolved definitional uncertainty points to a larger uncertainty about what sexuality is and how it should be understood [and] bisexual theory therefore has the potential to remind us of aporias in the contemporary conception of sexuality' (2009, 451). Clare Hemmings has similarly posited such uncertainty 'as a starting point for [. . .] enquiries into sexual subjectivity, power relations, and a "politics of location"' (Storr 1999, 193). Where bisexuality *is* defined there is, Halperin notes, 'considerable disagreement among bisexuals and bisexual theorists themselves' (2009, 451), whom therefore produce contradictory meanings. Indeed, Vicki Bertram observes that bisexuality 'has been treated as both radically conservative and profoundly subversive' (2000, 161). For Halperin

the reason there has been so much argument over the meaning of *bisexuality* is that the word signifies different things to different people. Even more important, it keeps getting used in different ways, or to refer to different things [. . .] – at times without an explicit awareness of the slippages or confusions among different definitions of it. (2009, 452)

As such, bisexuality comes to 'unconsciously' carry a range of different meanings, 'even,' as Hemmings observes, 'where the writer explicitly states otherwise' (1997, 32 n.10).

The primary split that different trends in bisexual theorising have produced has been between an identity-based movement concerned to analyse and redress marginalization of bisexual individuals and an epistemological approach which sees the meanings and knowledges bisexuality produces as endowed with transformative potential to disrupt sexuality and gender binaries. The site of tension between these two apparently contradictory

approaches – bisexuality as a lived experience and bisexuality as a radical epistemology – is where this thesis makes its claims.

The present work is therefore situated in, and advances, contemporary bisexual theory. This also means, however, that it has an uneasy relationship with queer theory. As April Callis notes, bisexuality and queer theory are ‘two fields that should have much to contribute to each other’ (2009, 219), and yet ‘queer theorists have been curiously silent on the subject of bisexual identity’ (217). Gurevich, Bailey and Bower likewise suggest that bisexuality appears ‘an obvious ally to queer theory and politics. Yet queer theory has variously sidestepped, marginalized and even arguably erased bisexuality’ (2009, 236). For Hemmings this is due to some ‘queer theorists’ refusal to recognize bisexuality as a valid and enduring sexual identity and bisexuals themselves as authentic subjects’ (2002, 4).

Callis attributes a continuing absence and erasure, in part, to the texts forming the foundation of the ‘queer canon’. She notes that

authors such as Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Diana Fuss and Eve Sedgwick, all bypassed bisexuality as a topic of enquiry even while writing against binary, biological models of gender and sexuality. Works written within the last 15 years [to 2009, although I would say as true today], often in response to or building off of these early works, have for the most part continued to ignore the numerous questions posed by bisexuality. (2009, 213)

Not all queer theory ignores, elides or writes over bisexuality but direct engagement with it within queer texts is the exception rather than the norm. This project follows from Gurevich, Bailey and Bower when they draw attention to the ‘theoretical (not to mention psychic) machinations required to keep bisexuality outside the queer parade’ and take these as incitement ‘to consider what function bisexuality serves discursively, epistemologically and politically’, in the face of a queer studies which has marginalised it (2009, 237).

Queer thus stands accused. But as Steven Angelides suggests, ‘while queer has not fared very well so far in theorizing bisexuality, this is certainly no reason to abandon it’ (2001, 189). Callis persuasively argues that ‘the lack of discussion around bisexuality within works of queer theory has ultimately weakened the arguments queer theorists are trying to make’

(2009, 214). A second aim of this project then is to redress the marginalisation and erasure of bisexuality identified above in order not just to advance bisexual theory specifically, but to strengthen queer theory more broadly at a time in which its efficacy and institutionalisation are once again under question. David Halperin describes contemporary scholarship as ‘an age in which *queer* has [. . .] subsided into a mere synonym of gay’ (2009, 454), and scholars have long warned against queer becoming definitionally fixed as a directly oppositional anti-normative discourse (Jakobsen 1998). I propose bisexual engagement to avoid such cementation. I do not present bisexuality in opposition to queer theory but rather advance a bisexually inflected queer practice in place of what can often be an implicit – but exclusionary – lesbian or gay approach.

The primary aims of such a move are therefore twofold: firstly to address and redress the elision of bisexuality within both queer theory and mainstream culture in order to facilitate the advancement of both a bisexual (identity) politics and a radical queer epistemology; secondly to bisexually inflect queer theory as a means to resist what Robyn Wiegman identifies as ‘the nearly canonical equation between queer enquiry and anti-normativity that anchors queer studies’ contemporary self-definition’ as an ever more institutionalized field (2014, my transcription). As Alexander and Anderlini-D’Onofrio make clear, ‘a queer theory that misses bisexuality’s querying of normative sexualities is a queer theory that is itself too mastered by the very normative and normalizing binaries it seeks to unsettle’ (2011, 7). This thesis therefore stages a bisexual intervention in queer studies in order to resist such mastery and strengthen queer arguments.

Hemmings suggests that what ‘characterises the British contribution to bisexual theorizing is an interdisciplinary approach drawing more heavily on critical and cultural theory than on [the] empirical sociological approaches’ which have been more usual in the United States (2002, 19). It is in this British tradition of bi theory that the present work is located, as well as in queer theory and contemporary English literary and cultural studies more broadly. Jo

Eadie, has posited lived bisexuality as a 'hybrid' identity (1999, 133–136); a 'patchwork', comprised of elements of, among others, both homosexual and heterosexual cultures (Eadie in *Bi Academic Intervention* 1997, 204). This thesis's approach therefore will be similarly interdisciplinary and 'patchwork' in its methodology in an attempt to find a critical language to better reflect a bisexuality primarily encountered through uncertainty and contradiction.

Bisexuality is inherently interdisciplinary. Merl Storr sets out as follows the three broad responses to the question 'What is bisexuality?' which have been (and are) used in different disciplinary contexts:

One response has been that bisexuality consists in maleness and femaleness, in a biological or anatomical sense [. . . another] has been that bisexuality consists in masculinity and femininity, in the psychological sense [. . . and the] third response is that bisexuality consists in heterosexuality and homosexuality. (1999, 3)

She also suggests that there has been 'definitive shift' from the second to the third of these definitions (3). We might assume that a contemporary popular understanding of bisexuality as an in-between sexuality is the result of such an uncomplicated shift to the third of these responses but the narrative of bisexuality is not as chronologically definitive as this suggests. While colloquially and within the Humanities bisexuality may well be used primarily to denote a sexual orientation this is not definitively the case elsewhere.

Storr acknowledges that the shift applies 'outside of medical and psychiatric circles' but not necessarily within them (3). Indeed, as Shiri Eisner notes, all of these definitions '(including the medical ones) are still used in some form' (2013, 20). Biologically speaking 'bisexual' is defined as being hermaphroditic ("Bisexual, Adj. and N." 2014), and in articles such as 'Morphological, biological and molecular characteristics of bisexual and parthenogenetic *Haemaphysalis longicornis*' (Chen et al. 2012), 'bisexual' populations are those which have two sexes in order to reproduce, as opposed to unisexual populations which reproduce asexually. These different, and supposedly chronologically 'earlier' definitions clearly still then exist as current terms within certain fields.

Notwithstanding the above, my focus in this project will be on bisexuality as it pertains to romantic and/or sexual desire for more than one gender rather than as the coexistence of more than one sexual or gendered identity or experience. Nevertheless it is important to draw attention to the fact that the status of bisexuality in contemporary culture does retain, to varying degrees, associations of several of its different meanings. Even in those perspectives which seemingly put aside 'earlier' definitions those meanings and their implications bleed through.<sup>2</sup> There is no single narrative to chart the history of bisexuality as a term – its meanings were and remain plural. Hetero/homo, male/female and masculine/feminine definitions still inform contemporary bisexuality both as historical meanings and as current ones. As Eisner observes, bisexuality is 'therefore a carrier of multiple meanings' (2013, 21).

While this thesis is intentionally interdisciplinary it is nevertheless cautiously so. Joe Moran remarks that interdisciplinary approaches can of course 'challenge ossified, outmoded systems of thought and produce new, innovative theories and methodologies which open up the existing disciplines to new perspectives' (2010, 165). And further, that this is aligned with the project of queer theory which

begins by working in the margins of the existing disciplines, looking for ways of thinking that they have ignored or devalued [. . . and] once these new ways of thinking have been consolidated, we can see that they infiltrate more established areas of knowledge and alter our understanding of them. (99)

However, such movements will then 'tend to acquire the institutional and intellectual characteristics of disciplines as they become recognised and accepted' (100), which certainly could be said to be the (counterproductive) case for much queer enquiry by 2014. Robyn Wiegman notes that

as queer studies becomes institutionalized its habit is to claim [. . . anti-normativity] as its political position and there's a huge difference between setting up something as your object of study and converting it into the political position that guarantees that all the rest of your object of studies [sic] will know what their politics are. (2014, my transcription)

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<sup>2</sup> In, for example, the centrality of androgyny and gender performance in certain kinds of popular bisexual representation, exemplified perhaps by the David Bowie of the 1970s.

Such processes of institutional solidification can lead to a re-disciplined theory that 'is often forbiddingly difficult and complex, which means that it can seem to non-initiates as jargon laden and exclusive as any discipline' (Moran 2010, 100). That could *certainly* be said to be the case for much contemporary queer theory (and, rather unfortunately, perhaps particularly for some of its biggest names).

Even if this re-disciplining can be avoided queer interdisciplinarity is not an unquestionably good response to institutional restriction. In fact, interdisciplinarity can equally be a tool against critical thought. 'The danger', suggests Moran, 'is that interdisciplinary work, without some clear justification or rationale, will simply produce a vague, bland eclecticism' (2010, 170), which works in favour of, rather than critically against the marketization of education since 'modern market imperatives encourage the creation of a fuzzy, ill-disciplined smorgasbord of knowledge' (172). Indeed, Moran argues that the

model of interdisciplinarity that has found favour with university managers could be said to echo this modern, neo-liberal idea that unregulated markets are fundamentally egalitarian and democratic, helping to sweep away outmoded hierarchies and inefficient bureaucracy. This interdisciplinary model certainly fits the rhetoric of modern business. (169)

Moran develops this argument in part following from Thomas Docherty's suggestion that interdisciplinarity is central to the marketization of research. Docherty explains that

the rhetoric of interdisciplinarity goes back to talk in the 1970s about "breaking down barriers". Back then, we were apparently constrained by our disciplines, hampered by the boundaries between philosophy and literature, sociology and biology, engineering and architecture. Just as the 1960s let it all hang out, so we let our disciplines overflow into each other like anarchic lava lamps.

In a banal sense, this equated with an idea of research and socio-political freedom. Research would no longer be constrained by punitively exclusivist disciplinary regimes. The fact that I specialised in the study of texts should not preclude - indeed would enhance - my analysis of the Falklands War, say. Such a view, despite itself, was complicit with a marketisation approach that suggests research is about the production of new, commodifiable ideas, and endless novelty: fresh configurations of the lava. (Docherty 2009)

In the present context – a thesis introduction in which I must clearly lay out what is 'new' about my research (what the final produced result of more than three years of work is, what 'original contribution to knowledge' this intervention makes) in order to pass the examination

– Docherty’s equating of the production of ‘new, commodifiable ideas’ with a market approach to research is provoking. This thesis *is* interdisciplinary and it *does* have something new to propose so in some ways it is complicit in a progressional marketized narrative. Equally however, it is concerned to critique the production of such ‘endlessly novel’ research and the recuperable and commodifiable nature of disciplinary transgression.

Moran agrees with Docherty ‘that the desire to break down academic boundaries is not necessarily liberatory in itself’ (Moran 2010, 169), just as Hemmings argues that ‘continually shifting boundaries do not necessarily denote new territories or new discourses. Transgression of the status quo can, in fact, *consolidate* the dominant discourse rather than undermining it’ (1999, 195). Elsewhere, Hemmings and Grace dispiritedly identify ‘the queer emphasis on *transgression* for its own sake’ (1999, 391), and queer theory’s ‘fear of being ordinary’ (392). Likewise, Jonathan Dollimore has criticised attempts within both queer and bi theory to try to pass off as inherently transgressive and politically radical any particular sexual identity or practice (Dollimore 2000, 20). Nevertheless, while neither bisexuality nor interdisciplinarity are *inherently* radical or transgressive, as a multiply defined and somewhat ‘patchwork’ identity (or more properly a *network* of identities and theories), bisexuality does invite a similarly-minded methodology.

Eisner claims that the methodology in her *Bi: Notes for a bisexual revolution* is itself somewhat ‘bisexual’. She argues that

bisexuality as an idea is something that society finds threatening to its normal order. This has nothing to do with bisexual individuals. I certainly do not mean to suggest that being bisexual is subversive or radical in and of itself (if only it were). [. . .] I also do not mean to set a whole new standard for bisexual behavior that might alienate large portions of the bisexual community. And I do not mean to imply that the stereotypes are correct as far as the personal behavior of bisexual people goes. What I do mean to do is to examine why society places bisexuality on the side of anxiety, threat, and subversion. And how can we use these very things to disrupt social order and create social change?

In so doing, what I am attempting to do is step away from the binary discourse of Yes verses No, True verses False, or Good verses Bad, and open a third, radical choice of transgression, subversion and multiplicity. Such a move, in my opinion, is also *bisexual in character*, marking a resistance to binaries, a collapse of boundaries, and a subversion of order. (2013, 43, my emphasis)



I embrace the notion of the 'bisexual character' of Eisner's argument, and apply similar thinking throughout this project. I term this bisexual form of writing, *bitextuality* and in this thesis identify it as a feature both of cultural texts and my analyses of them. My employment of the term bitextuality is informed by the work of Lorraine Janzen Kooistra and of Robert Samuels, but departs from their usages in several key ways.

Kooistra develops her theory of bitextuality in reference to illustrated books of the *fin-de-Siècle* to account for the 'image/text/reader dialogue [which] is an integral part of the cultural discourses in which it is both produced and received' (1995, 247), and to interrogate how 'meaning is actively produced in the intercourse between picture and word' (11). For her, bitextual studies would therefore 'incorporate the strategies of both visual and verbal interpretation in order to understand how the dialogue between picture and word produces meaning within a network of cultural discourses' (5). She argues that image and text are traditionally positioned relationally in ways which 'are clearly gender-inscribed, and therefore culturally specific and open to resistance and critique'. She explains that 'by casting the text in the traditional "male" role of mastery, authority and activity, and the image in the traditional "female" role of submission, reflection and ornamentation, illustration studies entrench these sexual positions'(10). She therefore proposes in response a bitextuality which

plays with the multiple meanings of its analogue, bisexuality, in order to foreground the sexually coded nature of image/text relations. [. . .] The two texts of illustrated books function rhetorically as two sexes, however, bisexuality can also indicate both the hermaphroditic condition of having two sexes in one person, and the erotic condition of being attracted to both sexes. Bitextual theory incorporates all three meanings of bisexuality. (11)

The meaning that is produced through such texts is likewise ambiguous.

Bitextual construction of meaning into wholeness involves a struggle toward consummation which never results in a seamless oneness, but is always the process of a negotiated relation between the forces that make the picture and word cohere and the forces that drive them apart. (13)

Bitextuality as I use it here overlaps with Kooistra's formulation in its focus on multiplicities of meaning, the failure to cohere into a 'oneness', and in sexually coded natures of textual

relation. But where Kooistra's project specifically concerns image/text relations in the illustrated book, I expand the term to stand for other intertextual relations between text, image, identity and performance, and to interrogate the temporal and narrative forms of contemporary bisexual identity.

In Robert Samuels' psychoanalytic readings of Hitchcock, 'bi-textuality' describes a 'polyvalent foundation of sexuality and textuality [. . .] derived directly from Freud's early theory that the unconscious is inherently bi-sexual' (1998, 135). Thus, 'just as Freud posited a fundamental ground of bisexuality for every subject, we can affirm a form of universal bi-textuality that is repressed through different modes of representation yet returns in unconscious aspects of textuality (dreams, word-play, jokes and symbolism)' (1). I am cautious of ways in which the Freudian reading of inherent bisexuality can lead to a universalized maturation narrative which only invalidates adult bisexuality, and I do not want to make the claim in this project for a repressed bi-textuality present in *all* textuality as such. I appreciate Samuels' suggestion that 'the combination of [. . .] opposing modes of discourse creates a bi-textual form of sexuality and representation' (26), and that 'bisexuality and bi-textuality serve to undermine all of our stable illusions of identity and our ability to control language as well as the general field of representation' (5). However, where Samuels identifies the 'bi-textual function' of artefacts such as bottles of wine in Hitchcock's *Notorious*, which 'serve as both Symbolic phallic signifiers and as potentially open vaginal containers' (67), this thesis's version of bitextuality will be more concerned with the forms of narrative temporality, plurality, immaturity and uncertainty which enact the experiences and concerns of contemporary bisexual identities and theory.

I am also indebted to J. Halberstam's work, in *The Queer Art of Failure*, on 'Low theory' which is used to

look for a way out of the usual traps and impasses of binary formulations. Low theory tries to locate all the in-between spaces that save us from being snared by the hooks of hegemony [. . .]. But it also makes its peace with the possibility that alternatives dwell in the murky waters of a counterintuitive, often impossibly dark and negative

realms of critique and refusal. And so the book [*The Queer Art of Failure*] darts back and forth between high and low culture, high and low theory, popular culture and esoteric knowledge, in order to push through the divisions between life and art, practice and theory, thinking and doing, and into a more chaotic realm of knowing and unknowing. (2011, 2)

At times there will be similar darting in this thesis as I move between the high and the low, the personal, the individual, the abstract – seeking bisexuality, bisexually. This is ‘serious’ and ‘rigorous’ work with sustained close readings and theoretical analysis, but, as Halberstam suggests

being taken seriously means missing out on the chance to be frivolous, promiscuous, and irrelevant. The desire to be taken seriously is precisely what compels people to follow the tried and true paths of knowledge production [. . .]. Indeed terms like *serious* and *rigorous* tend to be code words, in academia as well as in other contexts, for disciplinary correctness. (2011, 6)

This thesis then, like the stereotypical bisexual, is immature and promiscuous with respect to (inter)disciplinarity and to (inter)textual analysis in its proposal and performance of a bisexual reading practice. Hemmings suggests that a ‘bisexual perspective is a way of looking, rather than a thing to be looked for. In this context the bisexual I/eye does not see itself reflected back in the object of its gaze, but foregrounds bisexuality in its various forms and functions, whatever the final form of the object’ (Hemmings 1997, 14). I term my approach to this critical foregrounding, *re/depositioning*.

### ***re/depositioning***

The term itself is hybrid: a conglomeration of various meanings and connotations, some overt, some obscure, some fully intentional, some partially intended, some happy accidents, combining to embody the project of the thesis; a dissident reading which not only reads against the grain of dominant discourse but also dissents from queer fixity. This is developed in a way which reflects the contradictory, uncertain, hybrid nature of many characterizations of bisexuality. Ann Kaloski presents a bisexual reading in comparison (but not necessarily opposition) to a lesbian reading which aims for ‘lesbian coherence’: ‘a bisexual reading, unlike

a lesbian reading, can *never* be a complete reading, and it/she will experience the ambivalences produced by the (lesbian) attempt at a wholesome text' (1997, 98). I therefore present no final definition of precisely what kind of reading *re/depositioning* is. Instead, over the course of this thesis I offer a collection of approaches which I hold in communication with each other under the one term.

*Re/depositioning* is many things; here are some of them:

- ❖ It is 'repositioning': in the sense of both moving to another position and of putting back in place. It is an adjustment, a shift, a relocation – situating the text and/or reader in a critical elsewhere to engender new perspectives. At the same time it replaces, restores elided bisexualities.
- ❖ It is 'de-positioning': dislodging text and/or reader into a (physical or political) non-position; refusing discrete and settled identities – including oppositional anti-normative ones – it unfixes identic positionality.
- ❖ It is a (re-)deposition: an act of dethronement and its repetition; a reiterative laying aside of old hierarchies; an ongoing, time-looped rebellion.

It is also a *rede* positioning. The OED carries the following eight definitions for 'rede' as a noun:

1. Counsel or advice given by one person to another. Also: a piece of advice
2. The act of taking counsel together, or of assembling for this purpose; a council.

*Re/depositioning* is relational. It is a proposal given from one to the other, but that one is plural; an assembly of ones, to an Other. This is in line with Kaloski's argument that 'a reading which speaks to a bisexual sense of self is one that tolerates not-knowing, flux, postponement and transition, and is aware of, but continually attempts to mediate between, multiple subject

positions and the multiple relationships between them' (1997, 104 n.29). *Re/depositioning* looks for bisexuality not as a fixed subject position, but as a network of relations.

3. The faculty of deliberation; judgement, reason; pondering, consideration. Also: an act of deliberation or consideration.
4. Decision, resolve taken by one or more persons; a plan, design, or scheme.

Rede is the capacity to deliberate and consider. At the same time it is the act of doing so. At the same time again it is the result of the act – the decision in which the deliberation results. Positioning the rede then means orienting judgement and reason. Existing across the past, the present and the future, the *re/deposition* is simultaneously the resolve, the relational pondering and deliberation that led to that resolve, and the potential for deliberation in the first place.

5. A scheme, plan, or method for attaining some end; a principle or course of action; mode of procedure.
6. That which is advisable, advantageous, or profitable; aid, succour; remedy; reward. Also: a remedy, a solution.
7. Fate, lot; an occurrence, event.

*Re/depositioning* is a method, an approach, which, offers itself in part as solution to the dual problems of bi erasure and queer fixity. It is a plan, a scheme, an approach – carefully considered and under control; simultaneously it is fate – an event beyond our control. It invokes a teleological destiny, a future made past, and repositions it, depositions it.

- 8.a. A statement, an utterance; speech, discourse.
- b. Narrative; a story, tale; a saying, proverb.
- c. Interpretation. ("Rede, n.1" 2014)

*Re/depositioning* is both the narrative and its interpretation – revealing that each was always already the other. It is the single utterance, the discrete moment, and it is the whole discourse, extended over time – simultaneously a single point and a whole history and future of points.

As a verb, rede not only means to conduct the kinds of deliberation, advice or council described above, but also to: guide or direct; clear a way or a space for; vacate; clear or clean out; remove from a place; make ready or prepare; delineate or fix exactly (a border or boundary); arrange; settle, decide, put an end to a quarrel ("Rede, v.1" 2014; "Rede, v.2"

2014). The contradictions inherent in *re/depositioning* are to be embraced: between removing bisexuality from a place whilst also delineating or fixing its borders; preparing bisexuality for its next stage whilst also putting an end to it; clearing out a space for bisexuality whilst clearing out bisexuality itself of meaning; warning against its positioning whilst decreeing that very position. These incorporated and constituent definitions all bring to bear on its usage here and thus engender the final indeterminacy of the term as a whole.

- ❖ Rede is also a homophone for 'read' (in the present tense), and so *re/deposition* is also a read-position, or reading position.
- ❖ A further homophone: reed positioning. When playing an instrument such as the clarinet or saxophone, slight alterations in the position of the reed affect the tone of the sound produced. Playing with different reed positions can significantly alter the tone and thus overall effect of a composition.<sup>3</sup>

The word rede is largely obsolete but retaining historical variation of language and meaning is crucial for an analysis of bisexuality which itself carries multiple meanings. Reemploying an archaic term is a fitting part of the development of this thesis's critical language. In this, *re/depositioning* shares similarities with methods Elizabeth Freeman identifies in the work of the artists she analyses in *Time Binds*. She suggests that they 'see any sign as an amalgam of the incommensurate: of dominant uses in the present, of obsolete meanings sensible only as a kind of radiation from the past, of new potential, and, more simply, of different points in time as meanings accrue and are shed' (2010, xvii). The instability of this new term, *re/depositioning* – in its reliance on both italic and roman type; the presence of the solidus; its appropriation of

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<sup>3</sup> It is for this reason that my suggested pronunciation of the term would be akin to 'reed-position' rather than 'ree-dee-position', although the fact that the spelling of the word invites the latter only serves to further unfix it.

an obsolete word; its acknowledgement of (and demand for) many permutations of connoted meaning – stands in reference to the instability of the bisexualities against which I employ it.

## ONE

In **Chapter One. The End of Bisexuality** I chart ways in which bisexuality is rewritten as other identity positions – straight, gay, queer – in personal life narratives and in queer theory. I explore debates surrounding the efficacy of queer discourse and the dangers of it becoming fixed as an oppositional, anti-normative, anti-identity position and propose bisexual (re)engagement to counter this. In doing so I refute the claim that bisexuality necessarily reinforces a rigid gender binary and instead advance a reading of bisexuality as a radically non-disclosed identity. The coinage *radical non-disclosure* describes a practice whereby sufficient acknowledgement of (in this instance, normative gender and sexuality) power systems is made to achieve a viable liveable life within them but without disclosing the subject's position in relation to them. It is a form of acknowledgement which, in not revealing its own relative position, refuses to be fully defined in the terms of that which it acknowledges. I argue that reading bisexuality in this way offers an opportunity for a politically viable and liveable life within heteronormative social structures, whilst exposing said structures as constructed, reductive and repressive and making space outwith them. In this way, radically non-disclosed bisexuality productively acts as 'double agent' (Hemmings 2002, 32).

In addition, Chapter One explores the cultural illegibility of bisexuality as an identity position and alternative narratives that are written over it. I argue that the common positioning of bisexuality as a transitory identity, a phase en route to a fixed monosexual identity, is a product of a broader social investment in teleological narratives of maturation and progress. In this I follow from Judith Roof who proposes

narrative and sexuality as organising epistemes and as expressions of a figuratively heterosexual reproductive ideology in twentieth-century Western culture. Interwound with one another, narrative and sexuality operate within the reproductive and/or

productive, metaphorically heterosexual ideology that also underwrites the naturalized understanding of the shape and meaning of life. (1996, xxvii)

Roof argues that this capitalist 'heteroideology' subtends narrative as such and further that it is rooted in a need for a re/productive narrative 'end'. I argue that, given its distinct relations to narrative temporality as an unriveted, transitory identity, bisexuality can be an appropriate site for the rethinking of end-oriented narrativity and therefore for thinking the new shapes of life we might open up. This thesis therefore posits bitextuality as an alternative narrative mode which intervenes in, and interferes with, what I term here a *heterocapitalist fiction of progress*.

## TWO

Hemmings notes that in publications such as the *Journal of Bisexuality*, what 'is markedly absent is any critical account of the terms through which bisexuality is being reproduced' (2002, 20). Taking this as a prompt, and given this project's investment in a critical interdisciplinarity, in **Chapter Two. Bisexuality in a Different Light** I reconsider some common terms through their use in a different disciplinary language: quantum physics. 'Indeterminacy' and 'uncertainty' are words with which bisexuality is often charged in order to either invalidate it as an adult identity or, conversely, to posit its radical transformative potential. Chapter Two therefore reads bisexuality through Werner Heisenberg's quantum mechanical elaboration of Indeterminacy and the Uncertainty principal, and Niels Bohr's associated concept of Complementarity. As a response to 'wave-particle duality' whereby photons, the quanta of light, can be seen to exhibit behaviours of both discrete particles and continuous, flowing waves, Complementarity provides a framework which accommodates both; this therefore offers a model through which the mutually exclusive bisexual epistemologies, and politically viable bisexual identities can be rethought.

Gayle Salamon observes 'what we might think of as the temporal turn in queer studies, with the important work of Edelman, Halberstam, Muñoz and Freeman' who have elaborated 'straight time' or 'heterotemporality' (Crosby et al. 2012). Chapter Two responds to the



debates which such texts have engendered – between utopianism and negativity and around straight time, progress and failure – by exploring the temporalities of bisexuality. Identifying a productive metaphorical relation between sexuality and light, I explore the queer temporal behaviour of light at the quantum level alongside *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* and the Pet Shop Boys. I propose ways of thinking bisexual temporality which can begin to re-work the heteronarrative as both a quality of cultural texts and a mode of self-narrativization.

### THREE

Eisner outlines many of the stereotypical constructions of bisexuality (as, for example non-existent, going through a phase, promiscuous, or actually gay or straight), and common bisexual refusals of them ('No, we're not!') as part of her project to distil a 'coherent radical, rather than liberal, bisexual politics' (2013, 7). She rightly observes that the

outright denial of the stereotypes creates a mirror image of the bisexual imagined therein. While the bisexual person imagined by the stereotypes was threatening, dangerous, infectious, and unstable, this bisexual is reassuring, harmless, stable, and safe [. . .]. In fact, this entire rebuttal comprises a reassurance for bisexuality's – and bisexuals' – safety to society, answering each and every call for normativity with enthusiastic consent, thereby reinforcing it. (42)

She argues that 'these stereotypes should not be taken literally at all, but rather read as metaphors about the subversive potential of bisexuality' (43). Following Eisner, in **Chapter Three. Textual Immaturity: *The Buddha(s) of Suburbia***, I take one of these stereotypical accusations aimed at invalidating bisexuality – as 'immature', 'adolescent' – and repurpose it as *textual immaturity*, a critical bitextual mode of reading and writing. I consider contemporary cultural constructions of the 'adolescent' as an in-between figure situated in an unsettled and ambiguous temporal position between past and future and analyse that figure's relation to heterotemporal progress narratives and to power and authority. Informed by representations, histories and theories of 1970s British punk and the role these have played in recent queer theory, Chapter Three reads the multiple versions of Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*

as an unsettled text engaged in a textually immature unfixing of history and which troubles a high/low culture binary.

Chapter Three is also an exercise in the immature textuality it describes. Taking cues from the formal unsettledness of *The Buddha of Suburbia*, the cut-up methods of David Bowie's songwriting for it, and the performed rebelliousness of punk, it is structured by gaps, cuts, jumps and juxtapositions as well as by more traditional progressional arguments and analyses. This enables the chapter to better reflect not only the specific texts it engages with but also bisexual temporalities and 'patchwork' identity so as to open up new narrative possibilities. As in any textual analysis there are routes left untrod, connections made but not pursued; the argument of Chapter Three proceeds by leaving possibilities open, rather than by closing them down into a linear narrative. There are numerous threads followed through the intersecting texts – adolescence, punk rock, queer futurity, adaptation, bilingualism, pop literature – placed beside each other rather than tied together into a final coherence.

In following these particular threads in relation to *The Buddha of Suburbia* I shift the focus from the more usual postcolonial lenses through which the text is viewed (with the protagonist Karim's ethnicity and cultural hybridity foremost), in order to explore new routes through it. This is not to reject or ignore the important postcolonial analyses of racial identity that have been made of and by the text but rather to approach it by means of a less well-trod approach, and to resist the imperatives of 'academic maturity' to approach particular texts in particular ways.<sup>4</sup>

#### FOUR

Building on the concepts of textual immaturity and radical nondisclosure, **Chapter Four. 'That's How People Grow Up': Morrissey as Cultural Text** argues that Morrissey (perceived here

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<sup>4</sup> I appreciate that as a white man writing about *The Buddha of Suburbia* in this way I may find myself open to criticism, but I contend that Chapter Three shows the value of its particular approach, without ignoring racial and cultural concerns.

engaged in an ongoing, embodied social critique) points to ways in which bisexual indeterminacy might be made viable as a lived identity. Following Mark Simpson's positing of him as an 'insider-outsider' (2003, 187), this chapter reads Morrissey's self-construction as an embodied social text which interferes in dominant cultural codes and unsettles binary relations. Through close readings of his *Autobiography* (2013), alongside a number of recent songs, images and performances, I argue that with an ironic narcissism Morrissey performs an exaggerated insider-outsider status and actively critiques the construction of the Western canon even as he stakes a claim to be a part of it. I analyse the relationships between bisexuality, marginality and power that his cultural/textual body produces and suggest that by determinedly occupying a radically non-disclosed subject position both within and outwith heterocapitalist power structures, Morrissey gestures toward ways in which bitextuality may be able to be enacted in and on an individual body.

## FIVE

**Chapter Five. A Cock and Balls Story: Bisexual Camp in *The Stranger's Child*** reads Alan Hollinghurst's 2011 novel as a bitextual narrative in which the cultural illegibility of contemporary bisexuality is played out and played with through an exemplar of what I identify as *bisexual camp*: an ironic bitextual response to bi erasure in gay and queer narratives. The novel, when considered in relation to Hollinghurst's literary 'brand' (which leads a knowing reader to expect a certain kind of gay, sexually explicit, literary engagement) both illustrates and provokes the rewriting of bisexuality as really gay, as queer or as an immature point en route to heterosexuality. Further, I propose that in its characters' repeated misunderstandings and in the failure of the narrative to resolve, this bi-text presents us with ways in which bi-temporalities can respond to and interfere with heteronarrativity.

## CONCLUSIONS

The chapters outlined above are discrete and there is something of a cumulative build up as new concepts are introduced; nevertheless the hope is that they relate to each other laterally rather than in a linear progression leading to some final end. Angus Gordon notes that ‘any argument based on close readings will inevitably be shaped by the specific characteristics of the individual texts chosen’ (2005, 316). While this is certainly true in the present case, and concepts are developed in relation to specific texts, the thesis aims to be bitextual in nature – functioning as a network of influences, connections and allusions, rather than (or as well as) a cumulative progressional narrative. Although the chapters are discrete, their edges are nevertheless blurred and the different layers of texts in the thesis are enmeshed as one finally inseparable whole.

For instance, whilst bisexual camp is theorised in relation to *The Stranger’s Child*, a different version of this thesis may have put the camp focus on Morrissey and spent more time with Hollinghurst’s relationship to canon building. That bi camp appears alongside Hollinghurst does not suggest that Morrissey does not exhibit bi camp, nor does the appearance of textual immaturity alongside *The Buddha of Suburbia* suggest that textual immaturity could not have developed (albeit differently) alongside Hollinghurst. The intention is that these other versions of the thesis in some ways haunt the present one. To that end the **Conclusions** offer some glimpses at alternative pasts in which this thesis developed in different ways, by shifting the focus on texts as they have appeared thus far and emphasizing alternative connections and lines of influence beneath their surfaces. In doing this I *re/deposition* the thesis in order to reframe it, point to other routes out of or back into the work contained here, and to leave the ground over which it has worked finally unsettled.

Michael du Plessis claims that ‘relations between bisexual bodies and theories of bisexuality become even more vexed when we realize that bisexuality is very often only apprehended as something “in theory,” that is, as a speculation or hypothesis which does not,

in fact, exist “in reality” (wherever *that* may be)’ (1996, 24). It is important therefore, that whilst this is a theoretical project it is one in which is minded to the ways in which its theories translate into social and political action and to internal narratives of lives, desires and self-identifications. At one level then this project is about me developing new ways of thinking myself and of situating myself relationally. I make no suggestion that my choices of texts and my responses to them are anything but firmly tied into my experiences as an economically-stable, white, gay, cisgendered man. In these respects I am exactly who queer theory is often accused of being by and for, to the exclusion of all others. But Hemmings also observes that ‘most of the work on bisexuality is undertaken by self-identified bisexuals’ (Bi Academic Intervention 1997, 199), and that bisexuality ‘is rarely examined as a potentially enlightening analytical tool or starting point for knowledge, nor as a particular subject position that might merit further inquiry by anyone not calling herself bisexual’ (Hemmings 2002, 1). As a non bi-identified and yet allied scholar, I hope to go some way towards redressing that gap.

The ways in which male and female bisexualities are represented in contemporary British literature and popular culture are very different – David Bowie and Madonna are not synonymous. Eisner identifies a primary difference in the response to male and female bisexuality thus: ‘for bisexual women the presumption is that we’re really straight, while bisexual men are often presumed to be really gay’ (2013, 39). My project here is to explore ways in which male bisexuality is rewritten as ‘gay’ as a function of a heteronarrative which invalidates bisexual desire, or as ‘queer’ as a function of counter-productive anti-normativity. I therefore focus on a limited archive of male bisexual literary and popular representations.

# PART I

Bisexual Reading

# CHAPTER ONE

The End of Bisexuality

### **Illegible Back-door Queers**

Outlining the emergence of ‘contradictory bisexual meanings’, Clare Hemmings traces

a shift from bisexual theorizing that adopts an identity-based approach to one that emphasises bisexuality’s challenge to existing structures of sexuality and gender. This split (between epistemology and identity) remains unresolved and reflects bisexuality’s structural position as middle ground within contemporary thought. (2002, 15)

Note the spatio-temporal slippage here – a shift becomes a split. The former suggests a once-unified identity-based approach of a community of bi theorists, some of whom have since moved (and we might infer ‘progressed’) to an epistemological approach. This implicitly situates the identity-based approach in the past, compared to a more currently favoured bisexual epistemology. However, as Hemmings formulates it here, although bisexual writing may have shifted from one thing (identity), to another (epistemology), nevertheless in arriving at the latter, it has not relinquished the former. This results in a ‘split’ present in which the two versions, older and newer, co-exist in unresolved contradiction. ‘Shifting’ from one approach (or location) to another results not in a transposition but in a division, since the ‘past’ approach is as much present as the ‘present’ approach: the present of bi theory in two places at once. The unresolved present (2002, in the current example, but I would argue as true of 2014), of bisexual theory is therefore constituted through an apparent progression into the future which nevertheless keeps its past present.

The shifting uncertainty through which bisexual theory shifts uncertainly (and shiftily), is between two mutually exclusive approaches. On the one hand, bisexuality as a radical postmodern epistemology must remain a fluid, unfixed (but perhaps therefore unliveable) critical (dis)location, with a concern to disrupt the hetero/homo binary. On the other, in the face of social elision and illegibility in any form other than an immature, hypersexualized, body, bisexuality needs a visible, relatable, politically viable identity. Responding to Hemmings and Jo Eadie, Jonathan Dollimore ‘cannot help but feel that the more theoretically sophisticated [their] celebration of difference becomes, the more experientially unconvincing



it also becomes' (1996, 527). The difficulty in negotiating tensions between a radical bisexual theory and a liveable bisexual identity/politics has contributed to the sidelining of bisexual discourse more generally.

Eadie has stated that bisexuality 'simply cannot exist as a category in discourses which name all male-male and female-female sex "homosexual" and all male-female sex "heterosexual"' (1999, 124). In such discourses (in which we should include the contemporary UK mainstream), a bisexual person would at times be read gay and at times straight. They could only be read as bi if there were evidence of their having male and female partners simultaneously or in quick succession (Cossman 2007, 181). Thus bisexuality where it is evident at all becomes hypersexualized (Eisner 2013, 45). Heterosexuals and homosexuals however, to a degree not nearly so possible for bisexuals, can be read as hetero or homo without necessarily needing to be read as sexual. This invisibility, or rather visibility only in limited sexualized contexts, only perpetuates the stereotype of the greedy, promiscuous bisexual. Bi activist Robyn Ochs questions this, asking

what kind of behavior would I – as a bisexual – have to engage in for other people to see me as bisexual? I could walk into the room with a man and a woman, one on each arm, engaging in public displays of affection with each in a way that makes it obvious that we're sexual partners. Or I could be known to have multiple partners, including at least one man and one woman. Or I could leave someone for someone else of a different sex than the partner I have left. (Interestingly, in this scenario many people still might not read me as bisexual. Rather, they might interpret me as having finally 'finished coming out' or decide that I have 'gone straight'.)

If you think about it, these examples mirror the most common stereotypes of bisexuality. And that is no coincidence. These are the few moments when bisexuals become visible, and because of this, many people equate bisexuals with promiscuity, cheating, destabilizing relationships, untrustworthiness, horniness and hypersexuality. Bisexuals who are not currently engaging in one of these behaviors are seen as ('well-behaved') straight, lesbian or gay people. (2011, 172)

The pervasive inability to perceive the non-sexual bisexual essentially renders bisexual monogamy, celibacy or other non-promiscuous behaviour illegible.

In mainstream British culture bisexuality is perhaps defined, discussed and understood (to the degree that it is ever defined, discussed or understood) just in terms of sex-object choice to greater degree than are other identities. While sex-object choice is ostensibly the

primary defining factor in being gay, lesbian or straight there are sufficient further distinguishing features of each identity to name them in non-sexual contexts. In popular imagination a gay man does not need to be in a relationship, nor be sexually active to present as gay. As problematic, reductive and inaccurate as they may be there are nevertheless culturally recognisable homosexual 'brands' to a greater extent than there are bisexual ones, and these are pervasive enough to allow people or behaviours to be read as homo- without the need for them being overtly sexual.

For example, despite the prevalence of androgyny as a feature of male bi representation, socially the presentation of any gender non-conformity is as much cause for someone being read homosexual as their perceived sex-object choice. Richard Johnson notes, for instance, that 'the accusation of being gay carries more than the charge of [. . .] homosexuality itself – it also signifies any way of being a young man that is insufficiently masculine or laddish, or too close to the adjacent boundary of the feminine' (1997, 13). A feminine boy, even one with a girlfriend, is far more likely to be cast as *really* gay than bi. In other words, there is more to being read as 'gay' (or lesbian or straight) than simply with whom one sleeps. The same cannot be said as confidently of bisexuality.

Hartmut Friedrichs observes that 'most of the effort in the bisexual movement is still concentrated on "teaching bisexuality to beginners" [. . .] explaining the most basic facts, dispersing the most primitive prejudices' (2011, 365). Moreover, Eadie has suggested 'that throughout the bisexual community there are fears about not being bisexual "enough" [. . . and] this persistent insecurity is generated by the absence of any normative identities which might provide the security of being bisexual in "the right way"' (1999, 123–4). If it is not clear – even to bisexuals – what or who bisexuality or a bisexual person *is* other than sexually, then how can one recognise it outside sexual contexts?

Kenji Yoshino proposes this social erasure of bisexuality as the result of an 'epistemic contract of bisexual erasure' (2000). Arguing that 'the two dominant sexual orientation groups

[. . .] have shared investments in' the erasure of bisexuality (3), Yoshino suggests that it 'is as if self-identified straights and self-identified gays have concluded that whatever their other disagreements, they will agree that bisexuals do not exist', and, in order to protect their own stabilities, continually render bisexuality invisible, leaving it illegible as a valid cultural position (18). Yoshino identifies three primary

investments that both self-identified straights and self-identified gays have in bisexual erasure. These are: 1. an interest in stabilizing sexual orientation; 2. an interest in retaining sex as a dominant metric of differentiation; and 3. an interest in defending norms of monogamy. (3)

Thus, while bisexuality itself may not be inherently transgressive or radical, in Yoshino's account the imperatives of monosexuality exist because bisexuality is seen as threatening to it and must therefore be erased.

Evidence of erasure whereby bisexuality is recast as gay abounds but we may think of just a few recent examples. In the significant press coverage and debates surrounding the UK government's introduction of the *Marriage (Same-Sex Couples) Act 2013*, the legislation was much more usually referred to as the 'gay marriage' bill, and the benefits to 'gay couples' or 'gay and lesbian couples' formed much of the discussion.<sup>5</sup> That a bisexual marrying someone of the same sex is seen to be entering a 'gay marriage', and one marrying a person of the opposite sex a 'straight marriage' (or just a 'marriage', since the dominant group need no qualifier), only serves to reinforce the notion that bisexuality is transitory and/or promiscuous; there is no culturally legible way to 'settle down' bisexually or to legitimize bisexual relationships whilst retaining their bisexuality.

We might also think of British diver Tom Daley's coming out. In a video posted to his YouTube channel in December 2013 responding to rumours about his sexuality, Daley said that he had 'dated' and 'still liked girls' but that he was currently in a relationship with a man and 'couldn't be happier' (*Tom Daley: Something I Want to Say...* 2013). Daley didn't use the word

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<sup>5</sup> A Nexis search of UK national newspaper headlines in the 1 year period to 08.07.2014 returned 314 results containing the phrase "same sex marriage", compared to 915 containing the phrase "gay marriage" and just 9 for each of "equal marriage" and for "marriage equality".

'gay' in his video; nevertheless, much of the news reporting of the issue described him as gay, or as in a gay relationship (Hodgson 2013).<sup>6</sup> He didn't use the word 'bisexual' either, but given that he had openly discussed being attracted to both girls and 'guys', if the press were going to put a label in his mouth, one could be forgiven for assuming that it might have been bisexual. Daley (presumably deliberately) did not label himself as gay, as bisexual, or indeed as anything other than 'happy'. I am not claiming Daley as a specifically bisexual icon, and he may go on to identify with one or the other, both or neither of these labels in time. What is clear though is that the mainstream press who *did* label him, actively cast him as gay as opposed to bisexual, despite the latter fitting more closely with his self-descriptions of his romantic activities. In examples such as these we see the evidence for the claim that bisexuality has 'become the target of a politics of delegitimization. The desires and the existence of bisexuals are erased from view and subsequently reconfigured to fit within our comfortable—and comfortably narrow—homo–heterosexual binary' (Erickson-Schroth and Mitchell 2009, 298).

As well as being rendered culturally invisible, Friedrichs observes that bisexuality and bisexuals are elided in queer discourse through either a narrowing or a widening of the latter's terms of reference: '*Queer* in the most narrow sense is only another word for lesbian and gay. *Queer* in the widest sense means the whole spectre [sic? spectrum?] of sexual and gender emancipation movements'. Thus bisexuality is written out of queer either because queer really comes to mean homosexual, or else it is expanded as a generic umbrella-term under which bisexuality loses any specificity. This can lead to bisexuals' 'fear [of] losing their identity as a movement if and when they appear to the outside as part of a greater amalgam like the queer movement' (2011, 366).

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<sup>6</sup> A Nexis search of UK national newspaper headlines in the 1 year period to 09.07.2014 returned 44 results containing both "Daley" and "gay" compared to just 4 containing both "Daley" and "bisexual". Of those 4 only 2 refer to Daley as coming out as bisexual. In 1 the bisexuality referred to is Lady Gaga's and the other, from PinkNews of all places, claims (inaccurately) that Daley is 'definitely gay – not bisexual' (Roberts 2014).

Moreover, on some occasions bisexuality is not considered 'queer' enough to be included as a full member of a queer constituency. In 'Critically Queer', a 1993 discussion of the meanings and motivations of queer (which, in fairness does suggest that these will change), Judith Butler uses the occasion of raising its contingency and unfixed nature to exclude bisexuality from it. Here she claims that it is necessary to let queer

take on meanings that cannot now be anticipated by a younger generation whose political vocabulary may well carry a very different set of perspectives. Indeed, the term "queer" itself has been precisely the discursive rallying point for younger lesbians and gay men and, in yet other contexts, for lesbian interventions and, in yet other contexts, for bisexuals and straights for whom the term expresses an affiliation with anti-homophobic politics. (1993, 21)

For Butler here, bisexuals use the term to express an *affiliation* with anti-homophobic politics, rather than as natural practisers of that politics. Bisexuals, like straights, are but *allies* to those lesbian and gays who fight homophobia *as sufferers* of homophobia's oppressions.

Homophobia becomes written as something experienced only by lesbians and gays, which bisexuals can fight as principled supporters, but not as victims.<sup>7</sup> Bisexuals in this reading may share an affinity with 'queer', but not as constituents of the politics the term denotes, only as its supporters.

In addition, some versions of queer theory can reject bisexuality as being less 'advanced' than queer, if not directly counter to its project. Erikson-Schroth and Mitchell note that contemporary bisexuality's 'emergence as an identity was colored by a belief in an inherent difference between men and women' and from this history comes the ammunition with which some queers can attack bisexuality (2009, 302). April Callis observes 'a feeling from some queer theorists that "queer" has moved beyond bisexuality, as *bisexuality* is a term situated within a sexual/gendered binary by its very name,' and she proposes that 'perhaps bisexuality in general is not seen as sophisticated enough for queer theory' (2009, 220). By

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<sup>7</sup> This also excludes all those who are not LGBTQ identified but who are nonetheless very real victims of homophobia because their attackers *perceive* them to be.

pointing to the 'bi' in its name it can be claimed that bisexuality is regressive inasmuch as it refers to and supports the binary gender structure which queer seeks to dismantle.

The insistence that bisexuality inevitably reinforces and consolidates binary oppositions offers easy grounds for its dismissal as a site for critical enquiry (Hemmings 2002, 6). Thus, for all the bi theorists who argue that bisexuality can dismantle 'the entire apparatus which maintains the heterosexual/homosexual dyad' (Eadie 1999, 122), 'disrupt and displace monosexual models of identity' (Hall and Pramaggiore 1996, 7), and who identify the 'radical, transformative potential of its indeterminacy' (Ault 1999, 185), or argue that the existence of bisexuality renders the existence of heterosexuality and homosexuality 'improvable' (Yoshino 2000), all a so-minded queer theorist need do is point to the reification of binary gender ostensibly enacted by the term in order to delegitimize it, and call it retrograde for maintaining an essentialized sexual difference. This has led Eadie to wonder whether bisexuality can catch up 'with the deconstructive and ironic suspicion with which our queer comrades regard their sexuality? Will we always be the late guests at this particular sexual-political-theoretical feast? (1997, 155).

There have been several tactics of bisexual response to this. One has been to claim that desiring both sides of a binary deconstructs that binary as binary or presents an alternative kind of binarism to that of normative straight or gay identities. Miguel Obradors-Campos, for instance, notes that

certainly there are [. . .] some bisexuals who endorse gender binarism and understand genders as having essentialized, opposite and complementary categories. However, against the "black OR white" tendency of monosexuals [. . .] who endorse gender binarism, for those bisexuals who endorse gender binarism the question is rather in terms of "black AND white." (2011, 208)

Another response has been to draw attention to queer's potential oppositional nature and/or homocentricity. Hemmings has noted, for instance, how

queer theorists' refusal to recognise bisexuality as a valid and enduring sexual identity, and bisexuals themselves as authentic subjects, is redefined by "bisexual advocates" as a deliberate foreclosure of non-oppositional sexuality and held up as evidence of lesbian and gay conservatism and self-interest. (2002, 4)

If it defines itself through an anti-normative stance then queer can solidify around an 'anti-' position and become as fixed as the fixity it resists by defining itself through and around such resistance.

Janet Jakobsen has warned that 'opposition to the norm [. . .] can present the problem of being definitionally determined by what we would resist' (1998, 522), hence the construction of a new queer/non-queer binary and the gradual concretisation of queer as a distinct theoretical and identic position. Likewise Sue Wilkinson suggests that 'it is not possible to deliberately "transgress", to break a rule or overstep a boundary without clear knowledge of those rules and boundaries, the existence of which is thereby reinforced' (1996, 297). Therefore, in actively seeking to disrupt binaries some versions of queer can install a queer/non-queer dualism which reinforces normative constructions and in effect presents all opposite-sex desire as its 'other'.

More recently, James Penney's attack on the field –which he describes as making 'the scandalous claim that queer discourse has run its course' (2014, 1) – argues that

even the most sophisticated queer theorists rely on an implicit distinction between what is queer and what is normative. [. . .] Even the distinction queer tries to make between itself and its more fixed generational predecessors [such as lesbian and gay studies] requires the most fundamental gesture of identity construction, namely the differentiation of an 'other'. After all, it's much easier to define yourself by saying what you aren't than by identifying essential qualities that don't depend on a contrast with something else. In short, queer wants to subvert identity and have it too. (10-11)

A queer discourse which has succumb to this (anti)normativization and come to be set up in opposition to the 'non-queer' can reject too readily all instances of opposite-sex desire as that which it is defined against – even that opposite-sex desire which occurs in a bisexual body. Thus the specificities of bisexual identities are lost, subsumed by an anti-normative stance that operates, although not necessarily intentionally, to oppose any opposite-sex desire.

Butler draws attention to problems arising through such a fixed anti-normative queer discourse definitionally opposed to any and all identity categories by highlighting some of queer's other, founding motives.

I would suggest that more important than any presupposition about the plasticity of identity or indeed its retrograde status is queer theory's claim to be opposed to the unwanted legislation of identity. After all, queer theory and activism acquired political salience by insisting that antihomophobic activism can be engaged in by anyone, regardless of sexual orientation, and that identity markers are not prerequisites for political participation. [. . .] Queer theory opposes those who would regulate identities or establish epistemological claims of priority for those who make claims to certain kinds of identities [. . .] not only to expand the community base of antihomophobic activism, but, rather, to insist that sexuality is not easily summarized or unified through categorization. (2004, 7)

In this formulation, queer opposes the regulation, fixing and hierarchization of identity rather than it opposes identity as such. I argue that 'bisexual' as an identity – undefined and yet claimable, and with no clear oppositional agenda – may be a position from which the queer project that Butler puts forward here can be advanced, with lesser risk of having to oppose all gender and identity claims, seemingly just for the sake of it.

This is not to suggest bisexuality as a necessarily 'better' site than queer for critical engagement. Morris and Storr rightly express concern at a 'tendency to celebrate bisexuality as sexually or politically radical in and of itself' (1997, 2). Hemmings likewise warns against 'reactive bisexual claims to be more transgressive, perverse, gender bending, or multicultural than other queers' (2002, 5), and insists that 'presumptions of de facto bisexual transgression have as foreclosing an effect on the range of bisexual knowledges and ontological possibilities as do presumptions of de facto bisexual consolidation' (6). However, I do argue that due to the processes of elision which it faces theoretically and culturally, which render bisexuality illegible, what is produced is *queer by the back door*.

Obradors-Campos suggests that 'by not establishing a rigid and fixated idea of bisexuality, the mainstream culture [. . .] offers room for freedom, possibilities, and development for bisexual people no other sexual orientation is allowed or entitled to, at least to the same degree' (2011, 208). I suggest that we see the same process happening in theory. In dismissing and eliding bisexuality, in not allowing it to become clarified or decided, the ossifying oppositional queer has inadvertently created the very unfixed, non-identical position that it intends for itself but which, with the coming of institutional and disciplinary stability it



may no longer achieve. Thus, as Gammon and Isgro point out, ‘while bisexuality in and of itself may not necessarily transcend binary oppositions, it does offer a lens through which to observe and explore them within queer theory’ (2006, 174). By being neither fully normative, nor anti-normative, bisexuality can function as both dominant culture’s and queer’s insider-outsider. This bisexuality can occupy sites which anti-normative queer cannot, and thus it can launch critiques which anti-normative queer cannot. It is for this reason that I argue for the need to read bisexuality back into queer studies. The indefinable bisexuality which has been left in the wake of queer may yet prevent us having to hold a wake *for* queer.

One of the definitions Shiri Eisner uses to define bisexuality is an ‘attraction to people of genders similar to and different from one’s own’, a definition which she suggests

invokes the topic of gender, but without limiting its options – pertaining to two categories, but leaving their contents open. As an inherent effect this definition gently questions people about their own gender identities and how their own gender is related to their desires toward others. (2013, 25)

It is also instructive to consider this in relation to the history of definitions of bisexuality and particularly in response to the question Garber raises ‘of whether “bisexuality” has reference to the subject or the object’ (1995, 160). Taking bisexuality firstly to mean the instance within one person (physically or psychically), of both male/female or masculine/feminine characteristics, then the term as an identifier describes the desiring subject but gives no indication whatsoever of the identity of the object of desire. The opposite is true when taking the term in the second instance to mean one who is attracted to persons of both (or all) sexes and/or genders. It then becomes a term which describes the object of desire but tells nothing of the identity of the desiring subject. This makes bisexuality, as Obradors-Campos (2011, 208), suggested, more open than and distinct from identities such as: lesbian or gay (which establish the femaleness or maleness of both subject and object); homosexual (which establishes that subject and object are the same gender); or of queer (which although not revealing any such sex or gender identity of, or relationship between, the subject or object, can nevertheless establish a political position vis-à-vis normative sexuality and gender constructions).

Following Eisner and Garber here, and in answer to accusations that bisexuality reifies sexuality and gender binaries, I read bisexuality as radically non-disclosed. While it may nominally acknowledge the existence of binaries (male/female, hetero/homo, masculine/feminine), as societal constructs this bisexuality does not disclose its own position in relation to what remain contentless categories. With bisexuality considered thus, the categories are invoked but emptied of meaning. Radically non-disclosed bisexuality invokes binaries, but does not make it clear *which ones*. Remaining permanently unclear as to which specific binary or binaries it may be alluding to at any given moment, or whether its referent is subject or object or both (or neither), I posit it points to binary constructions as extant social norms, but gives no clear statement on them.

This bisexuality, although never fully legible (and notwithstanding the identity-based work on increasing bi visibility which still needs to be done), just has cultural purchase enough to begin to access the mainstream in ways in which more recent associated identity claims such as 'pansexual' are not, but yet remains undetermined enough to remain in transit, finally unintelligible. For the individual, as Butler notes,

there are advantages to remaining less than intelligible, if intelligibility is understood as that which is produced as a consequence of recognition according to prevailing social norms. Indeed, if my options are loathsome, if I have no desire to be recognized within a certain set of norms, then it follows that my sense of survival depends upon escaping the clutch of those norms by which recognition is conferred. (2004, 3)

With no such recognition however, the practical necessity of surviving day to day in the societies structured by those norms is impeded, a tension which is particularly prescient with bisexuality. Butler describes the paradoxical position one finds oneself in when trying to escape strictures of normativity, whilst at the same time requiring some of those very norms to survive.

I may feel that without some recognizability I cannot live. But I may also feel that the terms by which I am recognized make life unlivable. This is the juncture from which critique emerges, where critique is understood as an interrogation of the terms by which life is constrained in order to open up the possibility of different modes of living; in other words, not to celebrate difference as such but to establish more inclusive conditions for sheltering and maintaining life that resists models of assimilation.

(2004, 4)

Bisexual critique then needs to attend to both an identity-based approach which can work for bisexual representation and recognition and also a more radically queer approach to bisexuality as an unfixed and unfixable location. Radical non-disclosure advances this work.

As Butler observes, 'identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes, whether as the normalizing categories of oppressive structures or as the rallying points for a liberatory contestation of that very oppression' (1991, 13). These 'rallying points' are important in terms of political and legal gain, and for the equal treatment of individual bisexuals but are problematic and limiting conceptually. Thus Butler would not identify as lesbian but as she goes on to explain this 'is not to say that I will not appear at political occasions under the sign of lesbian, but that I would like to have it permanently unclear what precisely that sign signifies' (14). I have argued that queer, if it exists as an anti-position can become fixed but that a radically non-disclosed bisexuality can remain 'permanently unclear'. Where queer is an anti-position, bisexuality can be a non-position in the manner of Butler's proposed lesbianism – sufficiently recognisable to be claimed as an identic rallying point but sufficiently unclear to never reveal exactly where it is rallying from.

This might be illustrated as a journey in which it is never revealed what or whom is travelling from where to where; a journey in which the only known details are, for instance, that at certain times the process will involve travelling 'North', at certain times 'South', and occasionally 'North East'. This journey uses the recognisable structures of the compass points in part of its self-definition, but by not revealing the point from which it starts, nor ever stopping to allow for an end point, it is a journey which is impossible to plot despite it being ostensibly informed through the dominant structuring power of fixed, directional compass points. Consider then the social constructions of Male, Female, Masculine, Feminine, Heterosexual, Homosexual, as cardinal points on a broad social compass. Radically non-

disclosed bisexuality alludes to these points, but not in any finally locatable or decidable way, thus emptying them of meaning, and remaining itself unplotable.

### **Bisexuality and Narrative**

Peter Brooks observes that

for all the widely publicised nonnarrative or antinarrative forms of thought that are supposed to characterise our times, from Complementarity and Uncertainty in physics, to the synchronic analyses of structuralism, we remain more determined by narrative than we might wish to believe. (1992, 204)

Judith Roof similarly suggests that it is impossible to divorce oneself from its structures: ‘we cannot escape narrative, even imperfect narratives, since narrative is the inevitable register through which we define, reason, analyse, criticise, and comprehend’ (1996, xiv). For Roof, interrogating this is of particular import in sexuality studies since narrative and sexuality are implicate. Indeed, she contends ‘that it is impossible to think about narrative without engaging ideologies of sexuality’ (24). She observes that the ‘concepts of narrative and sexuality evolved together within the frame of developing capitalism’ (33), and argues that they are ‘interwound with one another [. . .] within the reproductive and/or productive, metaphorically heterosexual ideology that also underwrites the naturalised understanding of the shape and meaning of life’ (xxvii).

J. Halberstam also thinks ‘about ways of being and knowing that stand outside of conventional understandings of success [. . . which] in a heteronormative, capitalist society equates too easily to specific forms of reproductive maturity combined with wealth accumulation’ (2011, 2). Similarly, for Elizabeth Freeman, a narrative of successive productive moments (such marriage, wealth accumulation, reproduction etc) underpins not just the conventional understanding of success but of the very liveability of a (sanctioned) ‘life’. She remarks that

in the eyes of the state, this sequence of socioeconomically “productive” moments is what it means to have a life at all. And in zones not fully reducible to the state – in, say, psychiatry, medicine, and law – having a life entails the ability to narrate it not only in

these state-sanctioned terms but also in a novelistic framework: as event centred, goal-oriented, intentional, and cumulating in epiphanies or major transformations. (2010, 5)

But equally, it is not simply that the successful, sanctioned hetero-reproductive life must be given as narrative, but that it is constitutive *of* narrative. In Roof's terms, the 'heteroideology' subtends narrative as such – and narrative is therefore always already a 'heteronarrative'.

Roof further argues that the heteronarrative also creates and polices sexual 'perversions' as detours on the route to heterosexual reproduction and the end of the narrative. Since 'perversity belongs to narrative as the instance of its potential dissolution' (xxiv), any narrative *about* 'perversion', about dissident sexualities, remains a heteronarrative reproducing the heteroideology which casts such behaviours as perverse in the first place. In a similar vein, Lee Edelman discusses 'the problem with story, as such;' that

however attenuated, qualified, ironized, interrupted, or deconstructed it may be, a story implies a direction; it signals, as story, a movement that leads toward some payoff or profit, some comprehension or closure, however open-ended. This leading *toward* necessarily entails a correlative "*leading from*"[. . .] Even in those moments when we imagine ourselves immersed in its permanent middle, the story, so conceived at least, moves through time toward its putative end, where it seems to define the field within which it produces its sense of sense. Absent that framework of expectation, it isn't a story at all, just metonymic associations attached to a given nucleus.

But even such an elaboration would return us to the conventions of story: the refusal of story will always enact the story of its refusal. This orientation toward a future, toward something always yet to come, conceived as bestowing a value on life by way of the future anterior, by way of the life one *will have lived*, conceived, moreover, as justifying this refusal to live it *while one could*: this is what I call optimism, a condition so wide in its reach that it shapes our experience into narratives touched with the gloss we might think of as finish, in more than one sense of that term. (Berlant and Edelman 2014, 3)

Here, narrative as agent of reproductive futurism becomes inescapable since any refusal of it is refusal through the conventions which it itself installs. If one cannot refuse the story, or the narrative, without always being returned to narrative, *through* narrative and if narrative is always already heteronarrative since it is constituted through an aim towards heterosexual reproductive sexuality and capitalist production then any queer resistance to heteronormative, capitalist social structures is itself returned as (hetero)narrative.

Roof, following Freud, claims the 'end' 'as that moment of illusory completion that [. . .] defines the story in the first place' (1996, xxxiii), and she notes 'our sense that a narrative must produce something and/or go somewhere'(xxxi). She explains that 'reflecting finally a belief that meaning can be had at all, the fact of an end appears to give us a sense of mastery over what we can identify as a complete unit' (8). Completeness, presented as that which is required for a liveable life, comes only with the end, which is the goal (and thus cause) of all such narratives. If our lives are structured by and understood through narrative, then they must produce something, go somewhere. This produces a fiction of progress to which immature, inauthentic bisexuality is perceived to be antithetical. It is in the construction and maintenance of what I perceive of as a system of *final salary identities* that bisexuality is thus invalidated and elided. The concept of a narrative progression tending toward ever greater authenticity of self has the effect of invalidating, by infantilising, previous experience. A person's 'authentic' identity becomes defined by who they are 'now' (and even more particularly at the moment of death, the final identic position to which the pension of their legacy will be attached) as opposed to who they have been or could be.

This thesis proposes a bisexual engagement with narrative and time in order to complicate such heterocapitalist narrative imperatives, whilst retaining a viable identity. Bisexuality is well positioned as a site for such work due to the complex ways in which bisexual stories manifest in culture. Marjorie Garber proposes that 'bisexuality is related to *narrative* as transvestism or hermaphroditism is to *image*'. Noting a common reference in bi writing to Tiresias, she suggests that

it makes sense that the naming of Tiresias should mark the place of a *story* rather than a *body*. It is not any one state or stage of life but the whole life, the whole life "story" as we like to call it, that is sexualised and eroticised. By its very nature bisexuality implies the acknowledgement of plural desires and change over time. (1995, 160)

Bisexuality's potential to 'change' is then always related to stories, to narrative. As an identity thus marked by change there is a temporal dimension to bisexuality distinct from supposedly static (or 'arrived') monosexualities. The concepts of linear time and progression that

heteroideologically underpinned narrative creates and relies upon are then themselves marked by, in that they are reflected in and thus carry the trace of, bisexuality, whose constructions while undeniably part of the heteronarrative, also provide room to rethink it.

As a transitory point on the trajectory of a narrative of personal (sexual and identity) development bisexuality is 'just a phase', typical of adolescence, out of which one properly matures. After Freud, bisexuality is cast as an innate human sexuality from which hetero- or homosexualities develop through 'natural' psychological and social processes. As Phoebe Davidson points out however, this has significant implications for the temporality of bisexuality, arguing that

the concept of different relationships/fantasies with people of different sexes over time, becomes difficult to comprehend if theories of sexuality are based on a linear strategy. It is precisely the way that both Freud and Klein use Oedipus as a standard route to a resolved adult sexuality, usually heterosexuality, which causes a conceptual problem. Sexuality is perceived as a maturation process: a bisexuality could be perceived at the beginning, in infancy, but it certainly has no place at the end of this process, in adulthood. (1997, 64–65)

This narrative of sexual maturation bolsters a perception of bisexuality as 'immature', and places the (correct) negotiation of it as part of growing up straight or gay. The maturation narrative is normalised through heteronormative institutions such as schools and marriage which, as Garber describes, install 'the idea that it is "normal" to reach a settled sexual identity, and that that "identity" is either heterosexual or homosexual. The claim that bisexuality is "immature" is closely related to this assumption that maturity means choosing between those ostensibly polar alternatives' (1995, 343). We see then that bisexuality, in personal life-narratives, becomes written over by fixed and 'proper' monosexual identities, which invalidate earlier bisexual desire.

Moreover, the repudiation and/or rewriting of bisexuality becomes constitutive of homo-monosexualities by operating as a fundamental moment in the coming-out narrative so engrained in the actualisation of a contemporary gay identity. Angus Gordon suggests that

‘coming out is not simply an isolated moment in the development of a gay or lesbian identity; it is also, crucially, a narrative genre’ (2005, 321). Esther Saxey further argues that

this narrative gives context and meaning to sex acts through a narrative framework. This is a breakthrough for lesbian and gay identity: same-sex acts are saved from their cultural isolation, and embedded as elements in a story of personal development, seeking identity and establishing community. (2006)

But the narrative framework which creates meaning for gays and lesbians is still based upon a heteroideology and therefore coming-out stories ‘reiterate a version of the heteronarrative by making the recognition of identity the victorious product of a struggle with self’ (Roof 1996, xxxv). Gordon shows that

at the heart of coming-out narratives is a teleological movement: the construction of “closetedness” or being “in the closet” leads inexorably to the narrative pay-off called “coming-out”. What this means is that everything to do with the closeted state is retrospectively given meaning by reference to this one climactic event. (2005, 323–4)

And further, he reveals that the construction of homosexual identities through such a narrative

involves the absolute progression from untruth to truth. Obviously this means that the coming-out narrative implicitly relies upon essentialist accounts of homosexuality; it is structured by the postulate that a gay or lesbian identity claim is first and foremost an outward acknowledgement of a prior inner truth. (322)

Therefore, he suggests that ‘even those for whom essentialism does not “fit” with experience are obliged by the genre’s very ubiquity to submit to its structural essentialism to some degree’ (322 n.18).

Moreover, Saxey’s analysis reveals that ‘the archetypal [coming-out] story uses the exclusion of any bisexual potential as one of its key dramatic and moral incidents’ (2008, 10), an exclusion which ‘becomes the climax of an ethical battle between enforced, inauthentic heterosexuality and redemptive gay honesty’ (130). She explains that ‘this strategy means that the key cultural story we have for understanding same-sex sexual desire has made foundational to its plot the expulsion of opposite-sex sexual desire. It has excluded the possibility of a character with self-aware, ongoing desire for both sexes’ (2006). The coming out story is therefore ‘a mixed blessing for those who have both same-sex and opposite-sex



sexual desires' who are then 'usually cast as self-deceiving or cowardly characters' (Saxey 2006).

Gordon claims that 'from the perspective of the "out" adult gay or lesbian subject [. . .] virtually every aspect of his or her adolescent life can be understood in terms of its relation to the eventual realization of homosexual identity – a realization that is both epistemological and narratological' (1999, 1). The writing-back of an 'authentic' gay identity writes over bisexuality so as to erase it from culture in any form other than as the inauthentic desire which must be repudiated. Cast as a point in youth from which one must properly mature into either a hetero- or homo- monosexuality, and as the site of a battle from which the proper subject must emerge the authentic gay victor, any instance of bisexuality beyond this moment can become characterised as arrested development and later-claimed monosexual identities are therefore used to retroactively invalidate earlier bisexual experience.

Of course, there are many gay people who did 'go through a phase' either of bisexuality, or of claimed, but false, bisexuality. In fear of social opprobrium on coming out as gay, some individuals may deliberately use bisexuality as a transitory identity as an attempt to make things easier for either family or themselves. This is often referred to colloquially with derogatory terms such as (the admittedly humorous), 'bi now, gay later'; Nicholas Guittar's recent study of this behaviour however, calls it 'the queer apologetic' (2013). In Guittar's terms this is

essentially a form of identity compromise whereby individuals locate and disclose an intermediate identity situated somewhere between 1. their personal attractions solely for members of the same sex and 2. society's expectation that they be attracted only to members of the other sex. (170)

Guittar suggests that the prevalence of the queer apologetic – in which a deliberately claimed but knowingly false bisexuality eventually gives way to an authentic gayness – is a significant contributor to the social invisibility of bisexuality and further compounds the stereotypes of bisexuality as immature or inauthentic within lesbian and gay communities as well as mainstream culture. He argues that

the use of bisexuality as a transitional identity causes many people in the LGBTQ community, particularly those who engaged in a queer apologetic themselves, to fail to recognize bisexuality as an identity end point. This sort of fracturing within the LGBTQ community may, in turn, limit the level of empathy and support received by those with a bisexual identity. (187)

This personal narrative which uses bisexuality as a compromise position in a progression to the end point of authentic gayness, further reduces bi visibility and marks any bisexuality that is visible as inauthentic and haunted by the spectre of its inevitable future gayness.

Certain bisexual perspectives however, can work against final salary identity schemes.

Hemmings has suggested that

a bisexual perspective can afford to focus on – is in fact dependent upon – those very rifts which other identities may gain more from avoiding. So, for instance, in personal accounts or narratives of sexual identity generally we tend to find retrospective rewriting of past experiences to make sense of one's whole life as leading to, and as proof of, what one is now. Of course, bisexual 'coming-out' narratives repeat that retrospective gesture, insisting that the bisexual subject has always been bisexual, and that previous identities – such as lesbian, straight or gay – were mistaken. But that's not true for everyone. Some of us previously identified quite happily as lesbian, for example, and don't believe that that needs to be rewritten as repression of a 'true' bisexual self. If we are interested in theorizing bisexuality in ways that acknowledge how that identity is always – and [. . .] *primarily* – “patched up” from different places [. . .] we need to be critical of bisexual stories that mimic the temporal narratives of other identities. (Bi Academic Intervention 1997, 209)

Hemmings points here towards an alternative bi narrative which can accept change without invalidating that which it changed from; which can accept 'authentic' bisexual moments alongside 'authentic' straight, lesbian or gay moments – a network of different but equally authentic selves existing in rejection of standard heterotemporal final salary identity narratives.

The heterotemporal development of final salary identities is consistent with what Ursula Heise, observes as a

general culture of time that has become wary of hypostatizing long-term historical patterns and developments. The focus on the present, the moment now at hand [. . . links] firmly to contemporary media and consumer culture with its relentless emphasis on the present as the only time phase available for gratification, planification, and control. (2005, 374–5)

I see this 'cultural fixation on the now' (375) which consumer capitalism so encourages, meshing with a broader heteroideological narrative teleology in which our 'progress' necessarily invalidates our past. Roof observes that

on the surface, our comfort in the end is produced by a cause/effect logic where the end promises an ultimate result. Our very idea of an end is dependent upon a concept of chronological, linear, unidirectional time that positions the end as the cumulative locus of completed knowledge. (1996, 7)

Throughout the course of a life then, knowledge and meaning are cumulatively attained so that we supposedly become closer to our 'true selves' as we grow up and grow out of immature diversions such as bisexuality. According to Roof 'breaking up the heteronarrative' would therefore 'mean not just never ending, but never perceiving an end as a possibility, as something missing, sacrificed or displaced'(182).

I propose that bisexuality can offer useful tools to reconsider identity and subjectivity against final salary identity schemes which, in conjunction with a heterocapitalist ideological structuring of narrative, raises the present moment above those of the past, which is in a constant (and sometimes conscious) process of being rewritten to the exclusion of a bisexuality thence rendered culturally illegible. It is my claim in this thesis that by thinking narrative bisexually, by seeking out bitextuality, heteronarrative imperatives can be complicated and new queer ontologies made available. Roof states that

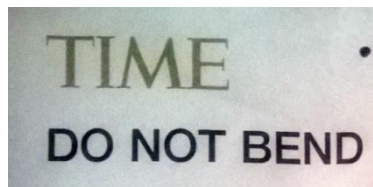
to combat heteroideology would mean thinking outside the system altogether, changing conceptions of time, cause and effect, and knowledge. To effect such change will take more than narrative or a consciousness thereof. [. . .] By defining what we seem to take for granted, we might find away to begin to think in a radically different way [. . .]. This radicality has to do with seeing what has always been there: the patterns in narrative that have never counted because they did not lead to closure or production. It has to do with never assuming that effect necessarily precedes cause, with understanding that time can move two ways, and that meaning lies not in the lure of knowledge but in the repetitions, accruals, alternations, and nonsense of maybe never getting there. Or in knowing there is no there to get. (1996, 187)

In the present work, this radicality has to do with *re/depositioning* bisexuality. In the following chapter, I propose a bisexual temporality in order to work towards a more radical bitextuality which refuses to insist on heterocapitalist reproductive resolution.

# CHAPTER TWO

Bisexuality in a Different Light

Recently I received a communication from the publishers of a well-known magazine. Whilst their solicitation for my subscription was of no great interest to me I was nevertheless struck by the outside of the envelope: top centre, the name of the magazine in its brand font; directly beneath this, an instruction to postal workers to take care of the contents. The combination of these two things became a crucial message. First thing in the morning, literally forced into my home, this was an urgent imperative; a command, a warning, a plea. It struck a chord. In what follows I attempt to ignore this imperative, disobey the command, turn deaf ears to the plea; in short, to misbehave. And the message?



The magazine's publishers must be deeply invested in maintaining what Jose Muñoz identifies as 'an autonaturalizing temporality that we might call *straight time* [. . . in which] the only futurity promised is that of the reproductive majoritarian heterosexuality; the spectacle of the state refurbishing its ranks through overt and subsidized acts of reproduction' (2009, 22).

Elizabeth Freeman discusses something similar in terms of *chrononormativity*, 'a mode of implantation, a technique by which institutional forces come to seem like somatic facts.

Schedules, calendars, time zones and even wristwatches inculcate [. . .] forms of temporal experience that seem natural to those whom they privilege' (Freeman 2010, 3). Straight time, chrononormativity, or heterotemporality, all describe the ways in which, as Freeman suggests,

the state and other institutions, including representational apparatuses, link properly temporalized bodies to narratives of movement and change. These are teleological schemes of events or strategies for living such as marriage, accumulation of health and wealth for the future, reproduction, childbearing, and death and its attendant rituals.

(4)

It is fitting then that the imperative to maintain straight time, came in the form of a branded solicitation for my money.

### The Present Problem

The present is where bisexuality is not. Lachlan MacDowell notes a ‘tendency to banish bisexuality to a pre-subjective past or a utopian future’, and suggests therefore that ‘for many theorists of sexuality, bisexuals don’t exist in the here and now’ (2013, 220). Already socially invisible, bisexuality is further evacuated from the present, thrown back into the past or flung far in the future. The popularly invoked ‘classical’ bisexuality of the ancient Greeks, like the originary bisexuality of the Freudian developmental narrative, imbues the foundational Western civilization with a definitional bisexuality. The future bisexuality of science fiction tends to present it as a utopian beyond-sexuality from a more enlightened time in which sex and gender cease to have meaning as cultural organisers.<sup>8</sup> Both moves function as othering fantasies: two somewhat conflicting figurations which are held simultaneously in order to remove bisexuality from the present, to place it anywhere but temporally here; as the foundation of Western culture or as it’s polymorphous future, but nevertheless resolutely other to the now.<sup>9</sup> The bisexual then is the perfect figure for a temporal epistemology akin to that implied by Elizabeth Grosz’s suggestion that ‘the more clearly we understand our temporal location as beings who straddle the past and the future without the security of a stable and abiding present, the more mobile our possibilities are, and the more transformation becomes conceivable’ (2004, 10).

The centrality of time to human experience has of course formed a central debate in centuries of philosophy. As Craig Bourne puts it: ‘Time plays a central role in our lives and our world-view; it is fundamental to the idea of what it is to be the very beings that we are; it is indispensable to the way we structure experiences; it is central to our understanding of the world’ (2009, 1). Further, no matter how radical our temporal philosophy we are still

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<sup>8</sup> A recent example of this would be Captain Jack Harkness, omnisexual rogue time agent from the BBC’s Doctor Who and spin-off Torchwood series. Amy Chinn finds that ‘although placing a well-loved bisexual character at the heart of the show was an important step forward in promoting queer visibility [. . .] locating it in a character from the 51st century suggested that a fluid approach to sexual object choice may be a feature of the strange future, but not of the normal present’ (2012, 76).

<sup>9</sup> This point is also central to Angelides’ argument (see in particular 2001, 17–19).

apparently subject to a certain certainty that time will continue to progress with a futural orientation. Brian Richardson calls this ‘the inescapable law of human perception: every consciousness experiences time in a unidirectional linear sequence moving from the present to the future’ (2006, 604). However, Ursula Heise reminds us that ‘the human experience of time depends on cultural contexts that are themselves subject to change’ (2005, 362). As such, if by way of these contexts any view of time installs itself as natural and prediscursive, then that view demands queer critique, for as Muñoz observes, ‘heteronormativity speaks not just to a bias related to sexual object choice but to that dominant and overarching temporal and spatial organization of the world’, variously called straight time, chrononormativity or heterotemporality (Muñoz 2009, 154).

Work such as Muñoz’s in elucidating straight time has not been without criticism.

Historian Valerie Traub warns against too straightforward a ‘teleoskepticism’ and too easy a linking of normative heterosexuality with linear time since

neither straight identity nor heterosexual desire is the same as linear time. Not every diachronic or chronological treatment of temporality needs to be normativizing, nor is every linear arc sexually “straight.” A scholar’s adherence to chronological time does not necessarily imply a relation to sexuality or normativity. Nor does a scholar’s segmentation of time into periods. [. . .] To periodize is not to advocate a particular method, and the identity that periodicity imposes need not be inevitably problematic – as long as it is understood to be contingent, manufactured, invested. (2013, 128).

This last qualifier is of vital importance. Traub’s concerns here strike similarly to Judith Butler’s reminder that queer must aim to resist the *policing* of identity rather all identity per se. Again, it is the work of this current project to offer, through bisexuality, an approach to time which does not, in a rush towards radicalism, reject all chronology or experience of time moving forward, just as this bisexuality does not reject all different-sex desire or identic positioning.

As Chung-Hao Ku suggests, ‘the point is to resist normative timelines in accordance with hetero-or homosexual identity, not to turn down any resemblance to straight or gay life choices (Ku 2010, 323). In short, I will not, in the words of Mitchum Huehls, ‘throw the baby of temporal experience out with the bathwater of teleological thought’ (2009, 6).

Nevertheless, Judith Roof has argued that rethinking the heteronarrative requires a fundamental rethinking of time because time and narrative are always entwined. Another argument suggests that 'human time is a product of narrative's temporal dynamics' (Matz 2011, 274). Jesse Matz claims that 'time does not come naturally to us. It is not natural to cognition, but instead defers to representational constructions, for practical time locates itself in the narrative forms that supplement failed efforts to tune to a natural environment' (278). Matz therefore moves to 'consider human time a matter of active, deliberate performance, not just a hermeneutical given but an achievement of collaborative human action or perhaps even an individual accomplishment' (278), and thence to ask:

Can we transfer the temporal understanding embedded in narrative forms to conscious action, and, in turn, to critical thinking about time crisis? Could such critical thinking amount to a temporal practice, a way to respond to "time today", and explicit motive for narrative engagement? (281).

I follow Matz here in seeing the critical engagement with narrative temporality as a route to a temporal practice which can respond to 'time today'. More specifically, drawing on recent work on queer time, I *re/deposition* the heterotemporality which characterizes the contemporary moment and which facilitates heterocapitalist final salary identity structures, and propose a bi-temporal practice through which we may negotiate and resist it.

The temporal turn in queer theory, of which Muñoz and Freeman have been key players, along with Lee Edelman, J. Halberstam and Heather Love, among others, has offered a number of rethinkings of time in response and resistance to heterotemporalities. The most significant of these can be broadly categorised into two strains, the anti-social and the utopian, which I will briefly rehearse here before developing in this chapter a radically non-disclosed bi-temporal contribution to queer temporality, narrative and the problem of the present.

For Edelman, 'the queer comes to figure the bar to every realization of futurity, the resistance, internal to the social, to every social structure or form' (2004, 4), and names 'the side outside the consensus by which all politics confirms the value of reproductive futurism' (3). Thence he famously calls for us to 'fuck the social order and the Child in whose name we're



collectively terrorized [. . .], fuck the whole network of Symbolic relations and the future that serves as it's prop' (29). He approaches queer negativity 'as society's constitutive antagonism, which sustains itself only on the promise of resolution in futurity's time to come, much as capitalism is able to sustain itself only by finding and exploiting new markets' (Edelman in Caserio et al. 2006, 822). It follows then, suggests Huehls, if 'the widespread equation of children and futurity only perpetuates a suffocating heteronormativity, then the political work of queerness belongs to the present' (2009, 3). But any political work based only in the present similarly runs the risk of doing heterocapitalism's work for it. As Huehls notes, 'the technology-driven globalization machine of capital and commerce [likewise] erases both the past and the future, collapsing them into the present to accelerate the instantaneous exchange of information' (6), and we have seen that it is the progressive present – the 'cultural fixation on the now' (Heise 1997) – which underpins the heteronarrative.

Edelman has also been criticised for the exclusionary nature of his queer figure. Kara Keeling notes that

much of the valuable debate about *No Future* has involved a critique of the figure on which Edelman's analysis hinges for having the characteristics and privileges that accrue to middle- and upper-class white gay men. Calling for no future, it has been argued, might inform a (non)politics only for those for whom the future is given, even if undesirably so. (2009, 568)

One such criticism has come from Halberstam who draws attention to 'the excessively small archive that represents queer negativity' in Edelman's work, and his rejection of material political concerns which Halberstam finds he 'tends to cast [. . .] as crude and pedestrian, as already a part of the conjuring of futurity that his project must foreclose (in Caserio et al. 2006, 824). This is part of what leads Muñoz to identify the anti-social thesis more generally as 'gay white man's last stand' (in Caserio et al. 2006, 825).

Nevertheless, as Heather Love observes, 'although many queer critics take exception to the idea of a linear, triumphalist view of history, we are in practice deeply committed to the notion of progress; despite our reservations, we just cannot stop dreaming of a better life for

queer people' (2007, 3). For Muñoz the 'future is queerness's domain' (2009, 1), since the 'present is not enough. It is impoverished and toxic for queers and other people who do not feel the privilege of majoritarian belonging' (27). Responding directly to Edelman, he states: 'as strongly as I reject reproductive futurity, I nonetheless refuse to give up on concepts such as politics, hope and a future that is not kid stuff' (92). His queerness is therefore 'a work shaped by its idealist trajectory; indeed it is the work of not settling for the present, of asking and looking beyond the here and now. [. . .] The purpose of such temporal manoeuvres is to wrest ourselves from the present's stultifying hold' (28). However, this work, Robert Caserio suggests, still 'does not fully escape Edelman's force' (Caserio et al. 2006, 820) and Robin James finds Muñoz's recourse to 'ecstatic time' less than satisfying. James argues that

for Muñoz, ecstasy—literally ek-stasis, excessive, ornamental, nonfunctional pleasure that transgresses the limitations of straight time and commodity capitalism— is both a critique of and alternative to Edelmanian negativity. Instead of the negation or rejection of the future, ecstasy is [. . . liberation] from the linear progressive rationality of "straight" capitalist time [. . . However,] this druggy, irregular temporality is, in neoliberalism, decidedly not queer – it is the very measure of healthy deregulated economy (of capital, of desire) in which rigidly controlled background conditions generate increasingly eccentric foreground events. [. . .] Not even time is liberated because in neoliberalism, labor power is *supposed* to be offbeat and irregular. (2013, 519)

Here, just as Edelman's rejection of the future leads to an investment in the present which can succumb to capitalism's 'now', so too can Muñoz's ecstatic utopian futurity, in its attempt to disrupt progressive time, become co-opted by a neoliberal capitalism which itself 'requires subjects to be infinitely flexible and adaptable' (R. James 2013, 521).

For her part, Freeman had previously located queerness in the future, but presently looks to the past, thus:

I thought the point of queer was to be always ahead of actually existing social possibilities. On this model, it seemed that truly queer queers would dissolve forms, disintegrate identities, level taxonomies, scorn the social, and even repudiate politics altogether [. . .]. Now I think the point may be to trail behind actually existing social possibilities: to be interested in the tail end of things, willing to be bathed in the fading light of whatever has been declared useless. (2010, xiii)

Offering readings of the work of several performance artists, Freeman therefore attempts to put ‘the past into meaningful and transformative relation with the present (2010, xvi). This look to the past chimes with Heather Love’s project of ‘turning backward’, since queers, ‘even when they provoke fears about the future [. . .] somehow also recall the past (Love 2007, 6). Love suggests that while

accounts of queer life as backward are ideological [. . .], backwardness has the status of a lived reality in gay and lesbian life. Not only do many queers [. . .] feel backward, but backwardness has been taken up as a key feature of queer culture. Camp, for instance, with its tender concern for outmoded elements of popular culture and its refusal to get over childhood pleasures and traumas, is a backward art. Over the last century, queers have embraced backwardness in many forms: in celebrations of perversion, in defiant refusals to grow up, in explorations of haunting and memory, and in stubborn attachments to lost objects. (7)

Such queer orientation backward however, at least for any transformative queer project comes up against a ‘central paradox of any transformative criticism’ – namely that

its dreams for the future are founded on a history of suffering, stigma, and violence [. . .]. Insofar as the losses of the past motivate us and give meaning to our current experience, we are bound to memorialize them (“We will never forget”). But we are equally bound to overcome the past, to escape its legacy (“We will never go back”). For groups constituted by historical injury, the challenge is to engage with the past without being destroyed by it. (1)

Observing the same paradox, Huehls suggests that ‘this double motion, back to the past and forward into the future, presents unique complications to one’s sense of time in the present’ (2009, 7). He continues to suggest that ‘pulled in two directions, the present runs the risk of being evacuated, leaving an individual with no stable footing from which to launch political struggle in the first place’ (8). It is my contention that these complications are ones which bisexuality is well-placed to negotiate by virtue of the fact that culturally it is subject to a strikingly similar systemic evacuation from the present.

Ku proposes a bisexual temporality that rejects ‘the logic of sexual linearity, transition and renouncement’ (341), which he identifies in straight and gay temporal narratives.

A teleological, heterosexual take on time, for instance, would see life as a timeline for schooling, marriage, childbearing, retirement and other goals in accordance to the subject’s straight identity. By contrast, a gay man would see his “coming out” moment as a watershed in his personal life. (322)

By contrast

bisexual temporalities embrace what would be dismissed as contradictions or exceptions in linear, transitional, monosexual takes on individual sexual histories, making room for sexual partiality and multiplicity. Whereas narratives of “coming out” [...] and “temporary deviance” [...] espouse an authentic gay or straight identity, bisexual temporalities do not erase a gay-identified man’s heterosexual histories or a straight-identified man’s homosexual encounters. (309-10)

This is a very useful elucidation of three specific temporalities as this thesis considers them.

However, I do want to push Ku’s bisexual temporality a little further here. Bi-temporality as I propose it is, in essence, a *re/depositioning* of time; a non-linear and non-hierarchical temporal experience, which nevertheless remains conscious of the generally forward-flowing affective experience of time. As we shall see by examining bisexuality through ideas gleaned from quantum mechanics, while we may be subject to the forward march of time, our versions of it can be malleable.

### **Indeterminacy/Uncertainty**

Angelides argues that historically, bisexuality ‘has represented the very uncertainty of the hetero/homosexual division itself’ (2001, 207); Brian Loftus speaks of ‘the bisexually perverse potential of indeterminacy’ (1996, 228).<sup>10</sup> In the spirit of the undisciplined bisexual and as a reminder that bisexuality itself still means very differently in other fields, I want to come at these terms from a different angle, through a sideways step into physics. By considering how indeterminacy, uncertainty and associated terms are used in other disciplinary languages their metaphorical attachment to bisexuality can be extended in particularly enabling ways.

Jim Al-Khalili explains that indeterminacy ‘states that we can never know at the same time, and with total precision, everything about a quantum system’, and that the ‘best known example of indeterminacy is given by the uncertainty relation, first discovered by Werner Heisenberg (2012, 55). P.J Corfield notes that the

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<sup>10</sup> (See also Garber 1995, 240; McCormack, Anderson, and Adams 2014).

“uncertainty principle”, which indicated the probabilistic nature of measuring the simultaneous position and momentum of subatomic particles, appeared also to shake confidence in a settled cosmos. The unfolding framework for history, and indeed for historical causation through time, thus began to seem much more wobbly and uncertain than had previously been imagined. (2007, 10)

Although perhaps not understood in precise detail by the general population this has nevertheless entered public consciousness outside physics departments and contributed to postmodern conceptions of time more generally. Gabriele Griffin (following Duden 2002), suggests that

people in the everyday are often unaware of how language, specifically the use of scientific terms in the everyday, conditions their thinking about themselves and others. [. . .] The normalization or domestication of scientific language generates meanings in the everyday that bear no relation to the scientific meaning of the terms in question. (Griffin 2009, 651)

It is worth then considering some terms which have a life both within and outwith the sciences more closely.

Implicit in the above paragraphs is one of the first difficulties one encounters when attempting to discuss indeterminacy – that is, rather fittingly for my purposes, is the uncertainty of the language used. Hilgevoord and Uffink explain that

the notion of uncertainty occurs in several different meanings [. . .]. It may refer to a lack of knowledge of a quantity by an observer, or to the experimental inaccuracy with which a quantity is measured, or to some ambiguity in the definition of a quantity, or to a statistical spread in an ensemble of similarly prepared systems. Also, several different names are used for such uncertainties: inaccuracy, spread, imprecision, indefiniteness, indeterminateness, indeterminacy, latitude, etc. [. . . and] even Heisenberg and Bohr did not decide on a single terminology for quantum mechanical uncertainties. (2014, 2)

In very simple terms Heisenberg’s uncertainty principal for position and momentum states that ‘the more precisely the position [. . .] of a particle is given, the less precisely can one say what its momentum [. . .] is’ and vice versa (Hilgevoord and Uffink 2014, 1). Essentially, through the process of observing one characteristic, one precludes the possibility of accurately observing the other.

It should already be obvious that there are analogies here to the kinds of bisexuality discussed thus far. We might compare it with Jonathan Dollimore’s aforementioned thoughts

on bisexuality and theory: 'the more theoretically sophisticated [. . . it] becomes, the more experientially unconvincing it also becomes' (1996, 527). Or Amber Ault's observation that 'the move to define and defend the bisexual subject paradoxically seems the move most likely to undermine the radical, transformative potential of its indeterminacy' (1999, 185). Thus the more precisely the position of a bisexual identity is given, the less radical is its theoretical transformative potential and vice versa. We see a similar uncertainty relation in Marjorie Garber's questioning 'of whether "bisexuality" has reference to the subject or the object' (1995, 160). If bisexuality refers to the instance within one person (physically or psychically), of both male/female or masculine/feminine characteristics, then the term describes the desiring subject but gives no indication whatsoever of the identity of the object of desire. If it means one who is attracted to persons of both (or all) sexes and/or genders then it describes the object of desire but reveals nothing of the identity of the desiring subject. Thus one can either know the desiring subject, or the object of desire, but one cannot precisely know both simultaneously.

### **Light**

If bisexuality is not a serious, grown-up identity we might feel there is a certain 'lightness' to it: so consider the words 'spectrum' and 'rainbow'.

Alfred Kinsey (1948) popularised the idea of human sexuality on a spectrum in which he divided sexual behaviour into seven sub-sections: a continuum with broadly demarcated (and somewhat arbitrary) middle sectors between two end points. In the Kinsey scale these end points are hetero- and homosexual; varying degrees of the intermediary space is commonly considered bisexual.<sup>11</sup> This notion contains and constrains bisexuality within the

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<sup>11</sup> The Kinsey scale runs from 0 to 6, with 0 representing exclusive heterosexuality and 6 exclusive homosexuality. People variously categorise bisexuality as anything from only the section midway along (of value 3 on the scale – equally hetero- and homosexual), up to all of the values 1-5 inclusive (mostly heterosexual to mostly homosexual).

two bounds of homo- and hetero- sexual. But what if we were to consider the 'spectrum' of human sexuality as more closely analogous to the spectrum of light than we usually allow?

On the visible light spectrum different wavelengths determine the 'colour' we see. In popular understanding, and as any British school-child can probably recite, this is broadly sectioned into seven colours; from Red through Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue and Indigo, to Violet: seven sub-sections in a continuum with broadly demarcated (and somewhat arbitrary) middle sectors. Together they form the rainbow – which since Gilbert Barker first designed a rainbow flag for the San Francisco Freedom Day Parade in 1978, has become perhaps the most widely recognised symbol of LGBT pride movements worldwide (Fox 2007, 509 n.4).<sup>12</sup>

The rainbow flag symbolizes diversity within LGBT communities; the rainbow of visible light is only one small part of the electro-magnetic spectrum. Immediately to the one side of visible light, by wavelength, there is infrared and to the other ultraviolet. Beyond those we encounter microwave radiation and radio waves in the one direction (with longer wavelengths), and x-ray and gamma radiation in the other (shorter wavelengths). All are part of the one continuum and the 'diverse' rainbow is just that small part of it we can see. Where the light spectrum is divided into colours, in the spectrum of sexuality, desires are grouped into sexual identities (straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, bi-curious etc.). This begs the question: can we imagine Kinsey's scale extending out into other forms of sexuality that are not part of the 'visible' spectrum? How might we conceptualise and experience the infra-heterosexual or the ultra- homosexual?<sup>13</sup>

### **Complementarity**

Looking at light at the quantum level one encounters wave-particle duality. Hilgevoord and Uffink summarize the problem, thus:

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<sup>12</sup> I should note that the standard LGBT rainbow flag now has only 6 stripes, with purple in place of the indigo and violet of the traditional rainbow demarcations.

<sup>13</sup> Or, indeed, X-gay radiation.

Experimental evidence on the behaviour of both light and matter seemed to demand a wave picture in some cases, and a particle picture in others. Yet these pictures are mutually exclusive. Whereas a particle is always localized, the very definition of the notions of wavelength and frequency requires an extension in space and in time. (2014, 12)

Already we can see how we might relate this to relationships between epistemological and identity-based bisexualities. A solution to this problem, Complementarity, was proposed by Niels Bohr, 'the true father of quantum mechanics' (Al-Khalili 2012, 35), who 'may be seen as one of the greatest revolutionaries in [the twentieth] century's intellectual history' (Plotnitsky 1994, 146). Al-Khalili suggests that 'Bohr the philosopher is almost as famous as Bohr the scientist' (2012, 34), and Heisenberg himself described Bohr (presumably disparagingly) as, 'primarily a philosopher, not a physicist' (Plotnitsky 1994, 99), due to his emphasis on wider conceptual implications of his work. Plotnitsky explains that

Bohr offers many brilliant and precise formulations together with a general framework that extends well beyond the domain of quantum physics. [. . .] The meaning, or rather framework, of Complementarity as conceived by Bohr is as broad as it is revolutionary in its implications, both in the field of physics itself and in more general conceptual and metaphoric terms. Complementarity can be extended into theoretical aspects of the humanities and social sciences. (1994, 73)

As Al-Khalili puts it, the Principal of Complementarity 'states that both seemingly conflicting aspects are necessary for a complete description of a quantum particle' (2012, 56). He likens this to the Rubin vase in which 'it is difficult to see both aspects of the image at the same time; if it is two faces, there is no vase; if it is a solid vase, there are no faces' (56). Nevertheless both faces and vases are necessary for a complete description of the image.

Bohr's solution to the co-incidence of mutual exclusions had striking implications both scientifically and philosophically. Hilgevoord and Uffink explain that

the choice was essentially between a description in terms of continuously evolving waves, or else one of particles undergoing discontinuous quantum jumps. By contrast, Bohr insisted that elements from both views *were equally valid and equally needed for* an exhaustive description of the data. His way out of the contradiction was to renounce the idea that the pictures refer, in a literal one-to-one correspondence, to physical reality. Instead, the applicability of these pictures was to become dependent on the experimental context. (2014, 12 emphasis mine)



Thus, Complementarity provides a framework whereby the problem of wave-particle duality can be accommodated by disconnecting the (equally necessary) wave and particle views from the physical reality they attempt to describe. Plotnitsky explains that quantum conditions

according to Bohr, disallow the concept of undisturbed reality, which could then be disturbed or distorted by observation. Some disturbances and distortions of certain “previous” configurations can, of course take place under certain conditions. But they must be seen as superimposed upon *structural* distortions, prohibiting one from speaking of an undisturbed reality or matter existing ‘by itself’, independently of interpretation. (114)

Bohr’s radical step was to develop a framework which retained mutual exclusivity whilst acknowledging that both descriptions are required for a complete description. This is only possible if neither picture is a complete description of a pre-existing independent reality. One must separate the concept of a complete physical reality from the models one uses to comprehend it.

This is in part due to inevitable interaction occurring between the observer and the system under observation. Bohr claimed that

any observation of atomic phenomena will involve an interaction with the agency of observation not to be neglected. Accordingly, an independent reality in the ordinary physical sense can neither be ascribed to the phenomena nor to the agencies of observation. [. . .] This situation has far-reaching consequences. (in Howard 2004, 671)

In a significant way then the quantum is already queer. When Judith Butler refutes the notion that a body can exist before culture, and establishes the queer maxim that sex ‘was always already gender’ (2006, 9), she treads similar ground to Bohr’s earlier claim that we cannot conceive a complete and undisturbed reality which is then disturbed by observation. Butler’s proposition of the supposed pre-discursive nature of sex being constructed by the very discourses of gender it is supposed to pre-exist overlap with Bohr’s Complementarity. Both the quantum and the queer suggest that there can be no *independent* reality prior to interpretation, no *meaningful* existence that pre-exists the ascription of meaning.

### Bi-Temporality

Let us consider a significant bisexual cultural text, which, as Bi Academic Intervention observe, ‘appears to have been formative for many bisexuals’: Richard O’Brien’s *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1997, 6). The stage musical *The Rocky Horror Show* was first performed in 1973 and the film version *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* was released in 1975. The film has become a cult favourite (indeed, as Jeffrey Weinsock observes, almost the *definition* of a cult film (2008, 2)), with a ‘unique status in American and British culture’ (3).<sup>14</sup> *Rocky Horror*, in a genre-blending, gender-bending, glam sci-fi/horror pastiche, depicts the encounter that straight-laced Brad and Janet have with Dr. Frank-N-Furter, a Sweet Transvestite from the planet Transsexual in the galaxy of Transylvania. In its representations of queer and bi-sexualities and its patchwork of genres and allusions *Rocky Horror* well reflects the convergence of bisexuality and intertextuality in narratives of desire.

The intertextuality, cult nature and queerness of *Rocky Horror* have been well documented.<sup>15</sup> I want to use it instead to illustrate a relationship between bisexuality and time, (also demonstrated through its nostalgic queering of 1950s science-fiction B-movies). ‘Time Warp’ – probably the most famous musical number from the production with cultural purchase well beyond the cult following– provides ways to think bisexual temporalities more broadly.

In the opening section of the song, the character Riff Raff (played by O’Brien in the film), sings:

It's astounding  
Time is fleeting  
Madness takes its toll  
[. . .]  
I've got to keep control.  
I remember doing the Time Warp,

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<sup>14</sup> For *Rocky Horror*’s cult fandom and participatory screenings, see (Weinstock 2007, 32–51; Chemers 2008).

<sup>15</sup> For the history of the different versions (Weinstock 2007, 12–31). For further analyses of *Rocky Horror* and queerness see, for instance (Lamm 2008).

Drinking those moments when  
 The blackness would hit me,  
 And the void would be calling.  
 Let's do the Time Warp again.  
 (Sharman 2004)

One might regain control over life and time by doing the Time Warp – again. This solution from a past to be recollected and repeated will save the present and time itself will be imbibed.

What kind of intoxication, we might wonder, comes from being drunk on time?

Aside from a dance routine, what *is* the remembered and re-enacted Time Warp? OED carries two definitions; for the moment I will take just the first of these – the second will become important later.<sup>16</sup> For now, the time warp, is

1. Chiefly *Science Fiction*. An imaginary or hypothetical distortion of space-time whereby people or objects at one point in time can be moved to another, or within which time moves at a different speed. (“Time Warp, N. and Adj.” 2014)

A later part of the lyric:

Riff Raff: With a bit of a mind-flip  
 Magenta: You’re into the time-slip

A time-slip being: ‘the bringing together of different points in time, as a result of which events at one period may be perceived or experienced at another’ (“Time-Slip, N.” 2014). This moment in a key text in the popular bisexual archive points to a radical lived experience in which we can move through time and bring different points together. I therefore suggest that the mind-flip required to warp straight time is the flip to a bisexual epistemology. Having warped time by flipping our minds, we are into the time-slip – a site of being in which we are able to experience moments from different points in time. Here, on equal terms, are our pasts, presents and futures. This is not to rewrite or reimagine our past but to re-experience past moments *as present* and thus (re)reconstitute the ‘real’ present through which we experience them.

Huehls claims that ‘politics can only succeed when treated as a function of time, but [. . .] no single panel of time – future, present, or past – sufficiently grounds politics’ (2009, 1).

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<sup>16</sup> And I see you shiver with antici

To *re/deposition* is to do the sexual and textual Time Warp and advance a politics grounded by all three. Citing Homi Bhabha's concept of 'an "ambivalent temporality" caused by an irreducible tension between the smooth time of forward progress and the contingently fractured time of any given present moment', Huehls outlines the political implications of such a duality, thus:

If we experience time exclusively as a forward flow into the future, then we can unproblematically locate political change and action in the future; and if we experience time exclusively as an isolated present moment, then we can most assuredly strategise a course of political action without worrying about the demands of the past or the contingencies of the future. But if we experience time as both motion and fracture, then the temporal ground of politics, and of subjectivity itself, becomes both contradictory and compromised. (2009, 2)

What is needed therefore, Huehls suggests, are 'new temporal experiences that explode the dichotomy between flow and fracture, duration and instant' (3). Using the framework offered by Complementarity (in which both flowing wave and localized particle pictures – vase and faces, flow and fracture – are equally valid and equally necessary to describe the complete state) I respond with bi-temporality.

The quantum can now give us further insights into time and (bi)narratives through *retrocausation*. This is illustrated by the 'two-slit', or 'double-slit' experiment (and John Wheeler's 'delayed choice' variation thereupon), explained by Matthias Egg, as follows:

The double-slit experiment is probably the best known illustration of the basic mystery of quantum mechanics. If quantum particles [e.g. photons] are sent through a double slit, a characteristic interference pattern appears on the screen behind the two slits. However, this pattern disappears as soon as one tries to detect through which of the two slits each [photon] passed. It thus seems that the [photons] either behave as waves (where "wave behavior" means passing through both slits and producing an interference pattern) or as particles (where "particle behavior" means passing only through one slit and displaying no interference), depending on the kind of experiment we choose to perform. [. . .] This is already puzzling enough, but further puzzlement is added by the insight that the decision [as to which kind of experiment] to perform [. . .] can be taken after the [photon] has passed through the double slit. [. . .] If we think of the [photon] as travelling from the source to the double slit and then to the screen where it is detected, a natural question to ask is whether the [photon] behaved as a wave or as a particle at the time it travelled through the double slit. [. . .] Now if the type of experiment [. . .] is fixed in advance, this determines the behavior of the [photon], and a unique story about its wave- or particle-like nature can be told for each type of experimental setup. However, in the delayed-choice case, the experiment-type is not yet fixed at the time the [photon] is at the double slit, so it

seems that there is simply no fact of the matter as to whether the [photon] passes through both slits (as waves do) or through only one slit (as particles do). It is thus clearly impossible to tell a simple realistic story about what happens at the double slit in a delayed-choice experiment, if by “realistic” we mean that the story should attribute a definite, observer-independent behavior to the [photon]. (2013, 1126)<sup>17</sup>

The decision as to which observation to make occurs after the photon must already have ‘chosen’ one slit or both slits. The experiment then seems to suggest as Wheeler explains, that ‘one decides whether the photon “shall have come by one route, or by both routes” after it has “*already done* its travel.” . . . In this sense, we have a strange inversion of the normal order of time’ (in Plotnitsky 1994, 104). Thus a decision made by an observer (already implicate in the quantum system by the fact of observing) after the event appears to retroactively affect the prior trajectory of the photon.

For Al-Khalili ‘nothing brings home so ruthlessly and beautifully the mystery of quantum mechanics as the experiment with the double slit’ (2012, xi), and it is easy to see why when it seems to flatly contradict our usual conception and experience of time. Nevertheless, as Shoup and Sheehan suggest, ‘if quantum phenomena appear to us as “weird”, and violate “common sense”, then we should take this as an indication that our underlying assumptions are faulty – that our common sense could benefit from some re-examination and revision’ (2011, 255–6). It is our common sense which has the wrong of it, for as J.B.S Haldane has suggested, ‘the Universe is not only queerer than we suppose, but queerer than we *can* suppose’ (1971, 286).

What might any of this suggest for bisexuality? Take a newly self-identified gay man who retells his personal narrative to recast any earlier experience of opposite-sex desire as a product of immaturity, confusion, social pressure or mistake. Rather than a rewriting of the story he tells himself might this not (also) be a rewriting of the past as *actually lived*? By identifying monosexually could he in fact be said to alter the very nature of his past desires

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<sup>17</sup> I have used Egg here for the clarity and comparative simplicity of his explanation. The particular versions of the experiments he describes here are conducted with electrons, rather than photons. For ease I have replaced the ‘electrons’ with ‘photons’ since the effects are sufficiently similar for the purposes of this thesis (see also Al-Khalili 2012, 11).

rather than just what he thinks about them? In an analogous experimental context his (bisexual) desire was behaving as a wave, flowing, extended in time, going through both male and female 'slits' at the same time, until the nature of the experiment was changed. When nobody (him, his society) was observing the behaviour of his desire at the two 'slits', it came through both. Now the experiment is set up to determine which way it has come the 'interference' pattern of wave-sexuality disappears. The past trajectory of desire is retroactively changed so that now it can be seen to have come by only one (monosexual) route.

Ostensibly this model only allows for two possible objects of desire – Man, or Woman. However, the two slits in the experiment represent a 'choice' offered to these desires not by any 'naturally' occurring universe but by those performing the observations. Similarly, it's not the photons that install the slits, but those who construct the experimental apparatus. Thus the options of Man and Woman represent only those which have been offered by those who have devised the context into which desire is emitted. This draws attention to the pre-existing structures through which we (must) force our desires in order to constitute sexuality and sexual identity and, crucially to highlight *the potential to change those structures*. If the ways we conceive sexuality and desire depend upon what questions we ask and what 'apparatus' we are using then changing those questions and the contexts in which we ask them would offer alternative possibilities. Likewise, if the trajectory of desire can be retroactively affected by training certain lenses, seeking to observe certain behaviours, then what happens if we change the lens?

In a world which demands that we observe sexuality through monosexual lenses, bisexuality becomes not just re-narrativized but re-experienced as monosexuality. The now-gay man in my example *genuinely experiences* his past bisexuality as pretence, falter, mistake, or as a deliberate queer apologetic, despite it being genuinely bisexual desire *at the time*. Thus

the whole process of monosexual identification becomes a delayed-choice experimental exercise in determining the course taken *after we have already taken it*.

Dollimore suggests that 'identity, we know, is formed socially - not so much by the immediate present as its relation to the past. So too is desire; to an extent that we can never exactly know, desire is constituted by the history of our identifications' (1996, 530). But what if, as I have suggested here, the 'history of our identifications' which constitutes desire in the present is itself retroactively constituted by that present desire, and further, that the history of our desire is likewise constituted by our identifications in the immediate present? To attempt to predict (or police) the future trajectory of desire by assigning it a (hetero- or homo)sexuality requires looking at its past, but in so doing one changes that past and what it means or could mean. Attempting to determine the trajectory of desire (that is, taking up a final salary identity), affects the very trajectory under observation, not only in the present, but also potentially in the past. As Shoup argues, given retrocausation 'the traditional idea of cause and effect should be retired, and replaced with a more general notion of bi-directional influence'(2006, 187). This of course has implications far beyond the scientific context.

I make the claim for radically non-disclosed bisexuality as both epistemology and identity which acknowledges the existence of normative constructions of male, female, heterosexual, homosexual, but which never fully discloses its location in relation to them. Thus the 'bi' references a binary nature of sex and/or gender not to perpetuate it but rather to repeatedly draw attention to the constructedness of the observational contexts through which it is formulated. Just like the photons in the experiments described, bisexual desire highlights the constructed contexts in which it occurs by operating through them (as it must) but never being observable completely in such contexts' 'classical', heteronormative terms. It does not reject nor resist normative constructs in the way that an oppositional queer might, rather it refuses to be completely defined by them. If it references male and female it is only in so much

as noting that those are two options that heteronormativity offers it, rather than validating their existence itself.

A bisexuality so conceived thus implies that if the experiment were set up differently the behaviours and outcomes of desire would also be different. Remaining within the terms of the (normative) experimental context it can claim an identity; being never being fully describable by those terms it can trouble the constructs which established them in the first place. Rather than adopting a queer anti-position, actively resisting the normative contexts in which it exists (and thus reifying them), a *re/depositioned* bisexuality exposes the constructedness of those contexts, eludes complete description within heteronormativity and alludes to infinite potentialities for desire unpinned from strictly linear temporal narratives.

I do not suggest that living bi-temporally necessarily enables us to escape from the forward march of lived time. However, it does enable us to re-consider, and to an extent re-experience, the dilated present of postmodern heterocapitalism as a point through which to reencounter moments across the temporal manifold. Living bi-temporally (both having and eating Schrodinger's cake, as it were) does not deny the presence of the present, nor the affective relationship to time which we primarily experience unidirectionally, but it does offer us a way to be present in which we do not succumb to the tyranny of final salary identities but have our pasts and our futures recast through a contingent now.

To further illustrate the bi-temporal Time Warp I want to turn to the Pet Shop Boys' 'Memory of the Future' (2012). In part a love song, this track demonstrates a relation to temporality which maintains a past, a present and a future and speaks from a stable location, but yet evacuates that location of meaning. This is established in the opening lines: 'You seem to be / inevitable to me / like a memory of the future / I was and will be near you'. Here the object of desire unsettles straight time. Two conventional ways in which romantic love is supposed to affect experienced time – which might be thought of as 'I feel like I've known you all my life', and 'I feel like this will last forever' – are conflated here, with the object of desire



cast as inevitable, a fixed point in time extending into both past and future. But where, temporally, is the speaker in relation to this inevitable other? He remembers that he ‘was’ near them, and he remembers a future in which he ‘will’ be near them, but at the moment of utterance in which this bi-directional remembering occurs there is no preposition to indicate their current proximity. Whilst not making explicit the object’s absence there is at the very least an implied distance between them in the speaker’s present.

The next lines give some indication of the affective experience of the bi-directional memory: ‘Over and over again / I keep tasting that sweet Madeleine / looking back at my life now and then / asking: if not later then when? [. . .] It’s taken me all of my life to find you’. We have the referencing here of Proust’s ‘almost too-familiar, involuntary memory trigger’ (Green 2008, 683), which initially appears to position this in a now-conventional way of thinking about the past. But the backwards-looking here also includes a look backward to ‘now’ and, given the ‘memory of the future’ that this moment has brought about, the ‘then’ is open enough to signify both a ‘then’ of the past and a ‘then’ of the future.

‘If not later then when’ recalls the signature maxim of Rabbi Hillel the Elder, which asks us to consider identity construction as both individual and communitarian concern. This is commonly translated as: ‘If I am not for myself, who is for me? And if I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?’. Alan Goldberg suggests that this maxim ‘is instructive for two reasons. First, it highlights the dynamic tension between the individual and the social; second, it specifies three characteristics essential for psychological well-being: self-awareness, relationship, and action’ (1992, 108). Refiguring the temporality of action, the lyric’s version of this – which leaves us hunted by an empty ‘now’ even as it creates a future-space – casts this ‘memory of the future’ as a meditation on these essential characteristics of selfhood and relationality.

Noting that ‘*prendre le thé*, the French equivalent of “to have tea,” also [colloquially] means “to have homosex”’ (Hayes 1995, 1004 n.1), Jarrod Hayes posits the ‘possibility that

taking tea is a code for homosex [that] infects [. . .] the entire system of Proustian memory' (993). He suggests therefore that 'the madeleine [episode] cannot be spared this possibility' (1000), and that 'when the narrator [. . .] takes tea, the past is resurrected; he regains a lost paradise – Sodom – that returns to disturb the heterosexuality of the present' (1004). But from the mouth of Neil Tennant, a now-openly gay performer with no further need to code his homosexuality, this passage figures a bisexual narrative in another way: Madeleine also functions as a woman's name. We therefore have the gay Tennant's newly bi-temporal location being brought about by the 're-tasting' of an early different-sex encounter: the gay man reconsidering his gayness in the face of the re-experience of an earlier bisexuality – from before this was reimagined in later life through the coming out narrative and recast as immature or as a queer apologetic.

The line 'At last the right conclusion / or at least a sweet illusion' recalls the heteroideological end-orientation. But here the 'right conclusion' is not only potentially illusory (and even if it is its effect is considered the same) but is also the 'conclusion' which itself does away with any meaningful sense of conclusion by bringing about a bi-temporal experience in which the 'whole life' can be experienced but which nevertheless still has a 'future'. One can 'look back' at one's whole life from a point presumably beyond it and yet maintain a futural 'later'. From such a position the concepts of past, present and future lose their reductive and constraining total hold on experience, but yet remain affective possibilities. The past the present and the future are experienced at once, the distinct moments in time folded into contact with each other. This leaves the 'present' moment from which the speaker speaks as unfixed, unsettled – but nevertheless liveable. This is a location from which a voice can pronounce and yet which remains finally undetermined. The nature of the present is unclear, straddling the past and the future as an uncertain between- and beyond-temporality.

We can describe the moment of the song here as having a radically non-disclosed relationship to the temporal manifold of straight time; things such as the past, the present and

the future are not rejected outright or denied – they are acknowledged and still have meaning as particular ways of cataloguing experience – but the speaker gives no finally decidable location in relation to them. This bi-temporality does not refuse all linearity or all moments of past, present and future identification, but it occupies a time-warped position in complex relation to each. Let us visualise this with a lemniscate:



The standard representation for infinity (the unending, without limit), the lemniscate is a fitting figure for bi-temporality. We see a central, middle point at the join of the loops, the bi-temporal moment which looks back into the past and forward into the future, repeatedly, unendingly. We see that each present moment has a large loop of pastness and a large loop of futurity crossing and condensed in the middle-place keeping them connected and in commune. This is a mid-point between two binary opposites but which holds those opposites as in-fact the same. The mid-point is a defined and locatable present but one which is simultaneously connected to the past and to the future; a representation of a liveable present which yet is bound not only to the present, nor oriented only to either the past or the future. We might then think of radically non-disclosed, time-warped bi-temporality as, *8isexuality*.

Marcy Jane Knopf suggests that

temporality becomes an important issue in reading bisexuality, especially since most readers distinguish the sexual orientation of characters in novels based upon the desires or relationships at the end of the text –rather than looking at the fluctuations and variations of desire throughout the novel. (1996, 157)

Bisexuality as it is represented in texts can thus face the same erasure at the hands of final salary identities as it does in culture. In Part II of this thesis I consider representations of bisexuality in novels, television and pop music and performance and identify the bitextuality of these narratives, of which bi-temporality is a key aspect. In the *re/depositionings* of texts which follow I use *8isexuality*, to follow Matz's suggestion that we consider

the possibility that narrative texts are phenomenological instruments through which to transform temporal realities, pragmatic opportunities that make time more truly an open question. And a public one: to say that narrative forms constitute a public practice of time is to say that these forms often invite application to an array of potential shared endeavours rather than only to reflect subjective realities or ideal ontologies. (2011, 275–6)

How might the following bi-texts show us ways not only of entering an individual time-slip through which to (re)encounter identity, but of a public (political) practice – the Time Warp as a group routine?

## PART II

Bitextuality

## CHAPTER THREE

Textual Immaturity: *The Buddha(s) of Suburbia*

(feat. Pet Shop Boys)

Bisexuality has a relationship with immaturity it just can't seem to shake off. As Phoebe Davidson observes, bisexuality is often 'seen as an immature phenomenon rather than an adult sexual category' and thus 'as a hallmark of emotional immaturity' (1997, 70). Marjorie Garber goes further than this, responding to the accusation that bisexuality is 'just a phase, thus:

It's what many parents say and hope when their children tell them they're gay, lesbian or bisexual. But bisexuals are also accused of going through a "phase" by many gays and lesbians, who consider that there are really only two poles, straight and gay. Once they grow up, the idea seems to be, they will know which one they are. Until that time they are waffling, floundering, vacillating, faking, posturing, or being misled by dangerous acquaintances. Bisexuality thus gets defined as intrinsically immature, as, in a way, the very sign of immaturity, and bisexuals are urged by many gays, as well as many straights, to put away childish things. (1995, 352)

Finding themselves placed so often in the realm of the adolescent can be hugely reductive and disabling for bi adults. Nevertheless considering bisexuality and immaturity alongside each other as a hermeneutic practice can be fruitful. In this chapter I do not put away childish things. Instead I take the reading of bisexuality as 'the very sign of immaturity' as a point from which to both approach texts 'immaturely' and to read for their immaturities. I therefore propose *textual immaturity* to explore textual relationships between bisexuality and adolescence which unsettle boundaries, authority and temporality.<sup>18</sup>

Something or someone mature is 'proper, fitting, [and/or] appropriate (in time)' ("Mature, Adj. and N." 2014). Textual immaturity will name the opposite; the improper, the ill-fitting. It names texts which operate in time inappropriately; they are between times, they are in the wrong time, they are out of time, they are untimely. They may be timeless in both the sense of being of all times and of being without time. They may mobilise strange chronologies.

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<sup>18</sup> While 'immaturity' could also refer to younger childhood I am interested in adolescence particularly as an in-between stage, and as where the apparent emergence of sexual desire is central. I read childish immaturity and adolescent immaturity as quite distinct; adolescent immaturity is devoid of the attendant purity and innocence of the immaturity of the child (for analyses of the queer child see in particular Edelman 2004; Stockton 2009). I read in adolescent 'immaturity' the implicit suggestion that one, unlike the child, should probably know better.

For the immature text, as for the teenager, everything is ‘*so out of order*’ as they fuck with the fabric of time, and do the Time Warp again, and again, and...

Maturity is also that which ‘has attained an advanced and settled state’ (“Mature, Adj. and N.” 2014). Textual immaturity therefore names texts which, like the bisexual figure, have not and will not ‘settle’. Annabelle Cone suggests that Hanif Kureishi

navigates freely between the written genre and the filmed genre, from screenplay to film to or novel to television [. . .]. His writing, especially in novel or short story form has a visual quality that transcends the separation between the written word and the filmed frame. In fact, Kureishi’s narratives tend to float seamlessly in a postmodern, postcolonial aesthetic, mixing a linguistic and visual cocktail. (2004, 261)

Bruce Carson similarly finds Kureishi ‘a contemporary *auteur* with the “postmodern” ability to range across a range of “high” and “popular” cultural forms’ (2000, 114). Given its multiple forms which fold back into each other and the myriad intertextual resonances these forms create, *The Buddha(s) of Suburbia* is an exemplary text in this regard: unsettled (and unsettling), a bitextual entity in several different manifestations which inform each other bi-temporally.<sup>19</sup> The text exists first as a novel by Hanif Kureishi published in 1990 and set in 1970s London and suburbs. Kureishi and Roger Michel then adapted this for BBC television in 1993. David Bowie (who is referenced directly several times throughout the original text) provided the theme tune and incidental music for the series, which then formed the basis of a studio album of the same name (1993).

Already this makes *The Buddha of Suburbia* an unsettled text since the name refers at once to: a novel; a television adaptation; a nickname for a character in both; a Bowie album based on the soundtrack to the TV adaptation; and a song (appearing twice) on that album. The difficulty I have in clearly differentiating in my writing between the novel, the television series, the character(s), the album and the song(s) (and as distinct from a unified cultural text comprising them all), without over-relying on (cumbersome) parentheses or footnotes is

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<sup>19</sup> I have part-pluralised the title here to convey this. Serving as collective noun *The Buddha(s) of Suburbia* denotes the whole family of Buddha variations whereas *The Buddha of Suburbia* or ‘The Buddha of Suburbia’ refer to one of the individual works and the Buddha of suburbia to the character.



testament to the unsettledness of the text(s) as a (cultural) whole.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, the characters of Karim Amir and Charlie Hero put in cameo appearances in other novels by Kureishi – *The Black Album* (1995), and *Something To Tell You* (2008) – further unfixing the textual boundaries of *The Buddha(s) of Suburbia*.<sup>21</sup>

More than analysing bisexuality and immaturity *in* these texts I read for the immaturity *of* them. Reading against the fiction of progress I emphasise a non-hierarchical approach to maturity and immaturity which rejects an equation of immaturity with inferiority. I also intentionally practice textual immaturity in the ways I write and structure this chapter. In a manner designed to reflect the unsettled texts that make up *The Buddha(s) of Suburbia* – with their web of intertexts and the adolescent immaturity of its bitextuality– in my analyses here I am undisciplined; I get distracted; I dart from place to place and text to text; I paste the walls with pictures of the pop stars I fancy; I become obsessive about idiosyncratic things, then just as suddenly disinterested in them; I am overly earnest and unbearably trivial and just too-clever-by-half, alone in my room yelling at you not to come in.



Adolescence is by definition an in-between stage.<sup>22</sup> As such, it overlaps significantly with the bisexuality with which it is so often linked; in particular, I argue that the temporality of adolescence is also a bi-temporality. Patrick Heaven describes adolescence as a distinct ‘time of transition’ and notes that it ‘is as though adolescents do not clearly fit into any life stage.

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<sup>20</sup> See note 19 above.

<sup>21</sup> Whilst these other appearances are interesting in the way in which they extend the universe of the text full engagement with them is beyond the scope of this present project.

<sup>22</sup> In using the term ‘adolescence’ I follow Angus Gordon’s usage, in which it ‘is not intended to refer to any ontological or transhistorical reality. Rather, it refers to a discursive field that in the twentieth century has been the dominant mode of knowledge of a certain cohort of subjects, loosely defined by age’ (1999, 3).

That is what makes the adolescent years so different' (2001, xiii). Similarly, Don Randall suggests that

the adolescent is inscribed between times, already manifesting some of the power and purpose associated with the adult but still prey – indeed, all the more acutely – to childhood's uncertainties and susceptibilities. (2000, 11)

For Randall adolescents are 'creatures of the *limen*, figures set upon the thresholds that stand between opposing identities and worlds' (16). Similarly, for Pamela Thurschwell adolescence 'is caught between the past of childhood and the future of adulthood – a strange and uncanny temporal state that partakes of both backward-looking and forward looking desire' (2013, 147–8). Each being understood within the strictures of the fiction of progress as liminal, uncertain, forward- and backward-looking, in-between times neither adolescence nor bisexuality have validity in their own right, but only as routes into monosexual adult maturity.

Reading Hall (1904), Thurschwell suggests that

the modern adolescent is created by holding together two opposing temporal schemes. On the one hand, there is adolescence as passing phase, a few brief moments in time on the trajectory from childhood to adulthood. On the other hand, at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, the "adolescent" is being redefined as a "case", a locus for concerns about the potential criminality, waywardness, or deviance that accompanies the insecure cultural space between childhood and adulthood (before the child takes that apparently logical next step into economic productivity and sexual reproduction). (2013, 148)

And Gordon reminds us that "'adolescence", the idea that a particular period of life is fundamentally structured by transitionality and indeterminacy, is of course just as much a narrative construction 'as the closet'" (2005, 321), and that the 'striking [. . .] deployment of temporality' within the discourse of adolescence is

"narrativistic" because it is analogous to the discourse of fictional narrative. [. . .] The meaning of adolescence is always understood to become apparent only in hindsight; it is structured throughout by a foreshadowed denouement, which is the subject's arrival at adulthood. [. . .] However, this denouement must never occur too soon; the narrative must be allowed to run its course. (1999, 3)

Gordon also warns against

the theoretical tendency to treat adolescence as the utopian site of a free-floating "liminal" exploration of myriad nonbinding identifications and desires [which] must be resisted [. . .]. This tendency implicitly relies on a presentist phenomenology that treats

adolescent experience as something empirically available “in its own right.” But since discourses of adolescence figure sexual orientation diachronically—as an immanent futurity, that which the subject will acquire—the present of adolescence is ubiquitously structured by an adumbrated future. Just as the generically constrained denouement of fictional narrative structures the reading of its dilatory “middle,” the perpetually foreshadowed fixity of adult sexual identity informs the purported liminality of adolescent sexuality at every point of its discursive articulation. (6)

He therefore urges against

treating the uncertain status of sexual identity in adolescence as a utopian paradigm of sexuality in general. It would be easy to argue that rather than reading adolescence through the reifying lens of an achieved gay or lesbian identity, we ought to read gay or lesbian identity through the deconstructive lens of an adolescent same-sex desire understood as transitional and contingent. To do this, however, would risk playing into the hands of a heteronormative discourse intent upon representing adolescent same-sex desire precisely as transitional and contingent, in order that it might not be seen as an obstacle to the eventual achievement of a heterosexual identity. It is for this reason, and in a spirit of rhetorical stubbornness, that I've referred [. . .] to 'gay and lesbian adolescence', despite the fact that such a term is surely not quite appropriate when we are talking about desires whose status as 'gay' or 'lesbian' is still speculative. (2005, 331)

But the potentially speculative nature of adolescent sexuality is not the only reason referring to ‘lesbian and gay adolescence’ is not quite appropriate; bisexuality is missing from Gordon’s analysis. I understand his reluctance to embrace adolescent same-sex desire as transitory lest that reify a maturation narrative in which only normative heterosexuality is reasserted. But if the lens of ‘transitional and contingent’ adolescent same-sex desire is that of bisexuality, then irrespective of how the adult subject comes to identify, adolescent desires (of all kinds) are not invalidated.



David Bowie, for many the ‘embodiment of bisexual chic’ (Gammon and Isgro 2006, 162), ‘emerges as an important reference point in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, and indeed features as a key figures in many of the music-novels set in the 1970s’ (Smyth 2008).<sup>23</sup> Bowie is a good fit

<sup>23</sup> I assume that the pluralisation of ‘figures’ here is an editorial oversight. However, given Bowie’s multiple cultural presentations and this project’s investment in identic plurality I have kept it, *sans* ‘sic’.

for the *The Buddha(s) of Suburbia*'s interrogations of identity and formal unfixity, and his own working methods and generic infidelity are important here, as he explains:

I only knew certain things: that I was uncomfortable as a blues singer, that I was not comfortable as a soul singer, and that time after time, it struck me that I was uncomfortable being in any genre. I didn't feel a natural "anything". And then, when I suddenly started taking bit of things and putting them together in a new way, mixing all the colors, mixing some blues with folk with artistic ideas in books about Japan, I realized I was a guy who did collages. I was a collagist! I was good at hybridization, at juxtaposing things that shouldn't, and often didn't make sense. I was always interested in the guys that didn't fit into the mainstream. (in Chirazi 2000)

Moreover, Bowie's performance of bisexuality is not only 'chic' but can be seen to enact the problem of the evacuated present; as in Dick Hebdige's analysis in which 'Bowie's meta-message was escape – from class, from sex, from personality, from obvious commitment – into a fantasy past (Isherwood's Berlin peopled by a ghostly cast of doomed bohemians) or a science-fiction future' (1991, 61).

Bowie is directly mentioned three times in the novel – each in connection with protagonist Karim's initial love interest, Charlie Kay who becomes punk legend, Charlie Hero. In the first of these Bowie is cited as a major influence.

Charlie [. . .] stood out from the rest of the mob with his silver hair and stacked shoes. He looked less winsome and poetic now; his face was harder, with short hair, the cheekbones more pronounced. It was Bowie's influence, I knew. Bowie, then called David Jones, had attended our school several years before, and there, in a group photograph in the dining hall, was his face. Boys were often to be found on their knees before this icon, praying to be made into pop stars and for release from a lifetime as a motor-mechanic, or a clerk in an insurance firm, or a junior architect. But apart from Charlie, none of us had high expectations. (Kureishi 1999, 68)

Charlie is not the only Bowie-casualty in this text however; there is Kureishi himself, for whom bisexuality and Bowie played a similar, and similarly implicate, role. Asked about Karim's bisexuality, Kureishi has suggested that

it was really to show that, I suppose, one emerges out of childhood bisexual. But when you're a kid, you feel so erotically attached to both men and women, boys and girls around you. And you're sexuality is so undifferentiated then, you know. [. . .] Bisexuality is always something I've taken for granted, actually. It's only later that, as it were, I got differentiated out and knew what it was that I really wanted. Bowie and pop were a big influence. Bowie went to the same school as I did, ten years before. And you know, dressing up and being girlish was part of English pop. And you can see it with the Rolling Stones. As Mick Jagger said, you know, every Englishman can't wait

to get into a dress [. . .] So it did seem to me that being a girl was part of being a boy in some way. And I was rather surprised when it was called bisexuality. [. . .] I thought it was just the ambiguity that somehow we all inhabited. (MacCabe 1999, 48)

In this fittingly muddled elaboration, Kureishi describes a universal bisexual orientation out of which a bi-sexual subject is differentiated in adulthood, into what he ‘really’ (and implicitly had *always* ‘really’) wanted. And yet this universal bisexuality and bi-sexuality is also recognised not only as erroneously universal, but also contingent and influenced in a ‘big’ way by ‘Bowie and pop’. This bisexuality is an immature erotic attachment to *and* identification with men and women but which is directly influenceable by pop music. Kureishi slips between differing meanings of bisexuality here as both a universal psychological ambiguity and a pop performance.

Karim’s bisexuality in the novel is similarly understood and elaborated through popular music.

It was unusual, I knew, the way I wanted to sleep with boys as well as well as girls. I liked strong bodies and the backs of boys’ necks. I liked being handled by men, their fists pulling me; and I liked objects – the ends of brushes, pens, fingers – up my arse. But I liked cunts and breasts, all of women’s softness, long smooth legs and the way women dressed. I felt it would be heart-breaking to have to choose one or the other, like having to decide between the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. I never liked to think much about the whole thing in case I turned out to be a pervert and needed to have treatment, hormones, or electric shocks through my brain. When I did think about it I considered myself lucky that I could go to parties and go home with anyone from either sex – not that I went to many parties, none at all really, but if I did, I could, you know, trade either way. (Kureishi 1999, 55)

This bisexuality is marked not just by any pop music, but significantly by the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. As John McMillian observes, those bands ‘represent two sides of one of the twentieth century’s greatest aesthetic debates’ (2013, 4), and ‘teens on both sides of the Atlantic defined themselves by whether they preferred the Beatles or the Stones’ (2). Indeed, as he points out, ‘to this day when people want to get to know each other better, they often ask: “Beatles or Stones?” A preference for one group over the other is thought to reveal something substantial about one’s personality, judgement, or temperament’ (4). Karim understands this as a choice which he is supposed to make, and which supposedly makes a

definitive identic statement, but it is a choice he would find heartbreaking to make; his one heart which loves both, split down the middle by the necessity to choose. Hemmings has suggested that ‘bisexuals are constituted by their sense of being made up from their experiences in other places, which are radically incompatible, but between which we cannot choose’ (Bi Academic Intervention 1997, 208); we see this in Karim’s Beatles/Stones sexuality. Of course, just as with the sexual orientations he describes, the apparently meaningful divide between the two bands is a false one, for ‘when rational criticism prevails, *both* groups are lauded’ (McMillian 2013, 5).

The autobiographical fact of Bowie’s schooling and references to real bands such as these also mark the *The Buddha(s) of Suburbia*’s bi-temporal engagement with history. In ‘real life’, Bowie *did* go to the school, *did* become an icon, but Charlie Hero did not. This is a past that is almost the past we remember, but not quite (as any narrative must be). This is indicated very subtly early on in the text when Karim refers to one of his ‘favourite records, Dylan’s “Positively Fourth Street”’ (Kureishi 1999, 6). This album is in reality, entitled ‘Positively 4<sup>th</sup> Street’. 4<sup>th</sup>/Fourth –two different ways of saying the same thing; a tiny difference with significant implications (and which is only noticeable visually, not aurally). Firstly, this may simply be an error or oversight on Kureishi’s part; secondly it could be an error made by Karim which reflects his inattention or indifference to detail; thirdly this is a small signal of an alternate historical reality through which the narrative unfolds. The difference between Fourth and 4<sup>th</sup> signals, almost silently (or rather, *only* silently, since when spoken the difference disappears), the parallel universes in which the novel operates and the qualities of written versus spoken text.



In the introduction to a collection of essays by bilingual writers, Isabelle De Courtivron asks: 'Being Bilingual. What does it mean? Living in two languages, between two languages, or in the overlap of two languages?' (2003, 1). Noting that 'metaphors of duality and dislocation and betrayal abound' in bilingual autobiography, she describes bilingualism and bilinguals in the same terms we have heard for bisexuality: 'hybridity'; 'in-betweenness' (1); 'patchwork'; 'uncertainty' (3); 'continuum' (4); and as a double agent (2). Similarly, Doris Sommer argues that 'talking with two is a double bind. Bilinguals are not [. . .] pairs of monolinguals stuck at the neck, but overlooked, imperfectly doubled systems in which the supplements as well as the missing pieces destabilize both languages' (2003, 8). Furthermore, as with bisexuality, the disjuncture between theory and lived experience is central to the issues facing bilinguals.

Despite the fashionable postmodern emphasis on displacement and dislocation; despite the celebration of diversity and "more-than-oneness"; despite the intellectual persuasion that trying to find wholeness in our lives is a somewhat obsolete ideal, the anxiety about fragmentation and the search for existential coherence remain primordial human responses. (De Courtivron 2003, 2)

I do not want to collapse bisexuality and bilingualism into each other here, nor erode the specificities in the experiences of bisexuals and bilinguals (or indeed of bisexual bilinguals, or bilingual bisexuals). Nevertheless we might say that bisexuals must learn to speak two languages, 'heterosexual' and 'homosexual' to operate effectively within these two spheres, and that bisexual theory is similarly an attempt at bilingualism, of identity and epistemology.<sup>24</sup>

In *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Karim, much to the disappointment of theatre director Shadwell, only speaks English, as the following scene illustrates:

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<sup>24</sup> Rubén Gallo's examination of bilingual letters from a young Freud lead him to the following conclusion, in which bisexuality, bilingualism and adolescence are implicate:

Freud loved girls in Spanish and boys in German. Like his command of the language of Cervantes, his affection for girls was clumsy, rigid, and academic. His passion for boys, in contrast, was expressed fluently and naturally in the language of Goethe and German Romanticism. Freud explored his attraction to both genders in two languages that sometimes came together in an unusual *patois*: a bilingual bisexuality – a linguistic-affective ambiguity that makes his letters to Eduard Silberstein a treasure trove of symptoms of what William T. McGrath has called "adolescent Sturm und Drang." (2010, 169)

Instead of talking to me about the job he said some words in Punjab or Urdu and looked as if he wanted to get into a big conversation [. . .] To tell the truth, when he spoke it sounded like he was gargling.

'Well?' he said. He rattled off some more words. 'You don't understand?'

'No, not really.'

What could I say? I couldn't win. I knew he'd hate me for it.

'Your own language!'

'Yeah, well, I get a bit. The dirty words. I know when I'm being called a camel's rectum.'

'Of course. But your father speaks, doesn't he? He must do.'

Of course he speaks, I felt like saying. He speaks out of his mouth, unlike you, you fucking cunt bastard shithead. (Kureishi 1999, 140)

Not only can Karim not understand the language here, he cannot even *identify* it. Karim recounts that attendees at a family party 'weren't speaking English, so I didn't know exactly what was said' (81). Again this is defined not in terms of a specific language he doesn't speak but in terms of it *not* being the only language Karim *does* speak. We might see in Karim's mono-lingualism Berthold Schoene's suggestion that

Hanif Kureishi belongs to a new generation of ethno-English writers who – unlike Salman Rushdie, for example – identify themselves not as displaced postcolonial subjects 'in translation', but primarily as English, or British. Kureishi was born and bred in England. He does not write *back to* the imperial centre, but *from* it. (1998, 111)

But while Karim does not learn the language of his father's side of the family, he does find the need for translation, and attempts a form of bilingualism, in his attempts to ingratiate himself with fellow actor Eleanor (with whom he has his 'first real love affair' (Kureishi 1999, 227)), and her wealthy friends.

What infuriated me – and made me loathe both them and myself – was their confidence and knowledge. The easy talk of art, theatre, architecture, travel; the languages, the vocabulary, knowing the way round a whole culture – it was invaluable and irreplaceable capital.

At my school they taught you a bit of French, but anyone who attempted to pronounce a word correctly was laughed down. [. . .] We were proud of never learning anything except the names of footballers, the personnel of rock groups and the lyrics of 'I am the Walrus'. What idiots we were! How misinformed! Why didn't we understand that we were happily condemning ourselves to being nothing better than motor-mechanics? Why couldn't we see that? For Eleanor's crowd hard words and sophisticated ideas were in the air they breathed from birth, and this language was the currency that bought you the best of what the world could offer. But for us it could only ever be a second language, consciously acquired. (177-178)



But Eleanor is also bilingual; she speaks to Karim not only in an exclusionary language of class, but a liberatory one of sex. She was ‘the first person to illustrate the magic qualities of language during sex. Her whispers stole my breath away: she required a fucking, a stuffing, a sucking, a slapping, in this, that or the other way. Sex was different each time’ (188). Whilst these versions of English are, to Karim, a foreign language of sorts, one is marginalising and the other revelatory. Under Eleanor’s tutelage he too becomes bilingual – fluent not in the hard words of the ruling class whom, he later comes to see, ‘weren’t worth hating’ (225), but in the fucking and stuffing of a newly linguistic sexual possibility.



As both boys enter Charlie’s attic room, the scene of the novel’s first moment of queer sex, Charlie instructs Karim: “Please remove your watch”, he said. “In my domain time isn’t a factor” (Kureishi 1999, 14). Karim obeys, leaving his watch at the foot of the stairs as they proceed to smoke marijuana and listen to prog rock. After some Pink Floyd and a joint Karim had

an extraordinary revelation. I could see my life clearly for the first time: the future and what I wanted to do. I wanted to live always this intensely: mysticism, alcohol, sexual promise, clever people and drugs. I hadn’t come upon it all like this before, and now I wanted nothing else. The door to the future had opened: I could see which way to go. (14)

The suspension of straight time (the wristwatch being one of Elizabeth Freeman’s markers of chrononormativity (2010, 3)), along with a healthy dose of drugs and rock and roll, opens up for the first time a perception of the future for Karim. But the future that he sees and desires is an eternal extension of this particular (and particularly ‘immature’) present. He wants always to live in a moment like this intense moment, outwith heterotemporality.

Before returning upstairs, Karim goes into the garden and sees his father having sex with Charlie’s mother, Eva.

I knew it was Daddio because he was crying out across the Beckenham gardens, with little concern for the neighbours, 'Oh God, oh my God, oh my God.' Was I conceived like this, I wondered, in the suburban night air, to the wailing of Christian curses from the mouth of a renegade Muslim masquerading as a Buddhist?' (16)

Witnessing his father's affair, Karim's first thoughts are to himself, his conception, and thus his self-conception. On returning to the attic, Karim masturbates Charlie.

I had squeezed many penises before, at school. We stroked and rubbed and pinched each other all the time. It broke up the monotony of learning. But I had never kissed a man.

'Where are you Charlie?'

I tried to kiss him. He avoided my lips by turning his head to one side. But when he came in my hand it was, I swear, one of the preeminent moments of my earlyish life. (17)

Of course, heterotemporality accommodates as standard a brief foray into this immature queer moment in adolescence – particularly when there is no kissing. But the fiction of progress demands that this moment is left behind, relegated to a memory of a misspent youth. As Garber noted, people are allowed youthful bisexual 'mistakes', so long as they are narrativized as such (1995, 343).

Recollecting this moment much later, Karim reads a similar conflictedness into Charlie's behaviour: 'I looked at Charlie, recalling the night in Beckenham I tried to kiss him and he turned his face away. How he wanted me – he let me touch him – but refused to acknowledge it, as if he could remove himself from the act while remaining there' (Kureishi 1999, 253). However, the trajectory is complicated here. On entering the queer domain of Charlie's room, Karim had divested himself of the symbol of authorised (and authorial) time, and gives himself over to an adolescent temporality. Immediately following Charlie's ejaculation, Karim continues:

I was licking my fingers and thinking of where to buy a pink shirt when I heard a sound that was not the Pink Floyd. I turned and saw across the attic Dad's flaming eyes, nose, neck and his famous chest hoiking itself up through the square hole in the floor. [. . .] We all climbed backwards down the ladder. Dad, being the first, trod on my watch at the bottom, trampling it to pieces and cutting his foot. (Kureishi, 17)

After the climax of the queer moment Karim is not able to re-enter the authoritarian temporality marked by the watch. Annabelle Cone suggests that the novel presents us with 'the moral confusion of 1970's London where adults are behaving like children' (2004, 263). Haroon, fresh from the breaking of his marriage vows, crushes the watch underfoot, thereby trampling over the marker of the straight time which heretofore constrained his immaturity. And with whom has Haroon committed adultery? With Eva; a woman, in Karim's eyes

whose face was constantly in motion, and this was the source of her beauty. Her face registered the slightest feeling, concealing little. Sometimes she became childlike and you could see her at eight, or seventeen or twenty-five. The different ages of her life seemed to exist simultaneously, as if she could move from age to age according to how she felt. There was no cold maturity about her, thank Christ. (86)

Eva exhibits a bi-temporality, her face presenting the bisexual time-slip – and it is she who has released (or regressed) Haroon. Cone suggests that 'marriages in *Kureishi* [. . .] are always a failure, or at least something to avoid. Is this failure of marriage associated with the failure of all institutions due to the end of the Empire and the crisis in Patriarchal authority?' (2004, 263). In this instance perhaps so, as the smashing of straight time coincides with the breakdown of marriage, one of its key markers.

The heterotemporality symbolized by the watch is then suspended by the bisexual moment with Charlie, and broken by Haroon. Adult immaturity and adolescent bisexuality have seen straight time trampled to pieces and Karim has 'glimpsed a world of excitement and possibility which I wanted to hold in my mind and expand as a template for the future' (19). Note that this futural template is not teleological, not goal oriented, but is the expanding of possibility. Bi-temporality is not contained within the queer adolescent attic bedroom, but extended beyond, resisting the reinstatement of straight time and provoking the imagination of an expanding queer present as template for an intense futurity.



Linda Hutcheon suggests that 'although adaptations are also aesthetic objects in their own right, it is only as inherently double-or multilaminated works that they can be theorized as adaptations' (2006, 6). The temporality of adaptation is non-linear in as much as the 'adaptation and the adapted work merge in the audience's understanding of their complex interrelations' (117). However, the result is not purely additive as if each subsequent adaptation carries the cumulative (personal or cultural) memory of those preceding; adaptations also have their own way of warping time. In the case of film adaptations of books, Hutcheon asks

What if we have never read the novels upon which they are based? Do the novels then effectively become the derivative and belated works, the ones we then experience second and secondarily? For unknowing audiences, adaptations have a way of upending sacrosanct elements like priority and originality. (122)

Because of this, 'multiple versions of a story in fact exist laterally, not vertically: adaptations are derived from, ripped off from, but are not derivative or second-rate' (169). We see here how the different versions of a text extend themselves sideways into each other, rather than linearly from first to last – often they are *so out of order*.

Adaptations, recognised as such, are therefore not only shaped by responses to the 'original' text but also have the ability to speak back to earlier versions and alter them, retroactively. Sanders notes 'the recognized ability of adaptation to respond or write back to an informing original from a new or revised political and cultural position, and by the capacity [. . .] to highlight troubling gaps, absences, and silences within the canonical texts to which they refer' (2006, 98). For Bruce Carson, *The Buddha of Suburbia's* 'generic hybridity and its setting in the recent past of the 1970s make it an ideal vehicle for adaptation as a quality TV drama' but he suggests that 'the majority of critical readings have privileged the novel and overlooked the importance of the television drama serial in shaping the audience's cultural memory of the text' (2000, 113). Instead, he argues, that since 'only a minority of the [TV] audience [of 'reputedly 5 million'] would have read the book by 1993, the television version

would have undoubtedly played a dominant role in shaping the audience memory and of course encouraging many more people to read the novel' (118).

We should take heed of Sanders' suggestion therefore that 'we need, perhaps to think less in terms of lines of influence and more in terms of webs or networks of allusion and (mutual) influence' (2006, 152). There forms a web of influence on a lateral temporal plain as opposed to a hierarchical, linear line of influence from 'original' through each successive adaptation. Hutcheon argues that 'adaptations disrupt elements like priority and authority (e.g., if we experience the adapted text after the adaptation)' (2006, 174). The process of adapting a text therefore unfixes not only the generic and formal bounds of the text but their temporal ones.



Textual immaturity names texts which are 'improper'. On the writing of the novel, Kureishi, already a successful screenwriter, describes the provocation given him by Salman Rushdie.

"We take you seriously as a writer, Hanif", he said, "but you only write screen plays." And I remember being really hurt by this, and provoked by it. And I thought, well, I'll write a novel then, and then I'll be a proper writer; that somehow that's what being a proper writer was. (in MacCabe 1999, 42)

The novel form itself is here seen to be the 'mature' form of writing; one only matures as proper writer when one writes novels. Novels are long, serious and important; screenplays are frivolous. Despite Kureishi's initial aim towards propriety however, when the novel, replete with pop cultural references and teenage bisexuality, was released in 1990 there was, he says, 'some condescension; it wasn't thought to be a proper literary novel' (in O'Connell 2008). In many respects this was precisely what Kureishi has since indicated he intended.

Pop was so weird and rebellious and strange and individual. And it was just completely liberating [. . .] And so I obviously was always fascinated by pop, but also by writing about pop [. . .] particularly American writing. People like Tom Wolfe and Hunter Thompson, Kerouac and so on. And who seem to me to be introducing subjects into

writing, into literature, that hadn't been there before. I mean, for us, when I was growing up, literature was very grand, you know. It was a bit of a cheek to think you could be a writer. (in MacCabe 1999, 47)

Kureishi positions himself in part as a response to an American tradition which while in the 'proper' form of the novel is improper and cheeky in its content. The same is true of *The Buddha of Suburbia* in which 'the music of the 1970s is incorporated as part of a wider discourse focused on the experience of British adolescents during a period of significant socio-political change' (Smyth 2008, 186). The proper mature form is infiltrated by improper, immature, bisexual pop content.

As a practice that is often involved in repeating and reinforcing the status of canonical texts, Sanders suggests that 'adaptation could be defined as inherently conservative', and yet in its ability to speak back to or recast these originary texts 'adaptation can also be oppositional, even subversive' (2006, 9), thus creating a situation whereby adaptation can be seen to be 'requiring and perpetuating a canon, even as it reformulates it' (8). Carson observes that

whilst a great deal has been written about the novel's articulation of issues of hybridity and identity, less exploration has been made of it as a literary historical adaptation for television. This is unsurprising given the critical and cultural prestige that still accrues to English literature. (2000, 114)

It is a very satisfying inversion of the narrative of cultural maturity invoked here that *Buddha* starts life as a novel and, being *so out of order* then 'regresses', first into screenplay and, finally, into that most immature of forms, pop music. Written as a direct attempt to both be more 'properly' literary, and also to imbue the literary with pop, the text is subsequently adapted into the very forms it was written not to be. In *The Buddha(s) of Suburbia* therefore, we may not have a series of adaptations of a *canonical* text as such, but we do have a network of texts which are concerned with their own status in a cultural hierarchy, and which sit astride a high/low cultural divide.



The Pet Shop Boys work in, around and between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture, as the title of their compilation album, *PopArt* (2003), attests. Their music, lyrics and live performances weave ‘highbrow’ and political references and allusions and musical innovations, with ironic nods, jokes, puns and classic pop and disco. Tennant, in 1989, explains that one ‘of the things the Pet Shop Boys are always trying to do is always to be mass market without watering down anything we’ve ever done, without “selling out” or whatever’ (in Maus 2001, 381). They manage to be ‘pop’ and popular but also highbrow. The two-disc *PopArt* collection announces these dual natures whilst simultaneously blurring their boundaries, its title situating them in reference to Pop Art, a movement in which, as Roland Barthes describes, ‘images from mass culture, regarded as vulgar, unworthy of an aesthetic consecration, return virtually unaltered as materials of the artist’s activity (1997, 370).

But the title does more than allude to a particular artistic movement. Disc one is labelled ‘Pop’, and disc two, ‘Art’ suggesting a division between the duo’s purely pop numbers and their more thoughtful, experimental work. However, as Adam Sweeting remarks, this ‘division appears to be purely arbitrary. Glib, even’ (2003). The ostensibly self-evident binary between pop and art begins to break down when one attempts to divide the Pet Shop Boys’ oeuvre into those discrete categories, and the arbitrariness of the final running order exposes the arbitrariness of those categories themselves. I align this boundary-blurring with textually immature moments of impropriety – of behaving and thinking uncanonically, improperly, teasing the boundaries of hierarchical cultural categorization.

*PopArt* also draws attention to many other dualities with which the two performers play. Fred E. Maus suggests that

the particular roles of the duo already establish a preoccupation with binaries, setting Tennant (verbal, vocal, articulate, non-dancing) against Lowe (musical, non-singing, inarticulate, dancing). Perhaps the most pervasive Pet Shop Boys effect comes from

the mysterious combination of Tennant's over-articulate but evasive lyrics with Lowe's musical and embodied presence; their songs are, in part, about the incompleteness of each role and the gap between them. (2001, 386)

Maus also notes 'Tennant's double-voicedness: he describes situations and feelings that are basic to much twentieth-century gay life, but leaves out any fully determinate specification of sexuality' (384). Maus finds that the ambivalence throughout their work is

continuous with the discretion that homophobia enforces; but in becoming a generalised quality of Tennant's writing, the expressive ambivalence spreads beyond the specific issues of closeted gay sexuality. Unlike the gay meanings hidden in double-voicedness, these representations of ambivalence are easily accessible to straight audiences (though so much unexplained evasion may strike straight listeners as a peculiar trait). Still, there is continuity between the issues of sexually motivated double-voicedness and deniability and the Pet Shop Boys' other ambiguities and ambivalences. And further, their combination of sensuous, opulent sound and evasive or withdrawn expression can itself be heard as a gay-coded configuration, whatever the specific content of the lyrics. (385)

He therefore suggests that 'issues of ambivalence in Pet Shop Boy's songs are neither reducible to gay coding nor fully separable from it' (386). I want to further this point by proposing a bitextual reading in place of a gay one. The playing with binaries that Maus identifies through their work extends to sexual identity itself, given Neil's (now) open gayness and Chris's undisclosed orientation. I suggest that it is therefore more appropriate to consider them bisexually (and bitextually), rather than as 'gay' – recognising in their gay/silent dynamic that male bisexuality tends to be more closely associated with gay than straight communities. That is, gay/undisclosed is perhaps a more accurate reflection of contemporary male bisexual representation than gay/straight would be, given that bisexuals may find themselves in LGB spaces, but rarely in 'SB' ones. This thesis therefore considers the Pet Shop Boys as a single bitextual creative entity.<sup>25</sup>




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<sup>25</sup> See also Chapter Four's discussion of Gilbert & George, pp.134-136.



Dealing with what Charlie has released in the attic requires more than Karim licking his fingers. The immediate aftermath – a period of silence – performs apparently opposing functions between the novel and the television series. There will of course be material differences in a presentation of ‘silence’ between any novel and television programme. Gerry Smyth observes that

although stories are occasionally read aloud for an audience, and although the audio book is a viable commercial prospect in the early twenty-first century, the fact remains that the novel is first and foremost a legible form – one that is usually consumed alone and in silence. Moreover, the novel does not produce any remarkable sound of itself, other than perhaps a rustle of pages as it is being read or a dull thud as it is set aside or replaced on a shelf. (2008, 3)

With the advent of the e-reader of course, even the rustle of pages may be silenced.<sup>26</sup> And so, as Smyth argues

music in the novel is always intended by the author, or understood by the reader, to stand for something beyond itself, and this, for the very simple reason that in a medium restricted to written language, music cannot stand for itself. Every music-novel, that is to say, realises a necessary silence – the silence of a sonic medium when transferred into a non-sonic medium. (190)

Therefore, ‘every music-novel is obliged to enact its own silence vis-à-vis the musical discourse it looks to represent’ (191). Given this, when considering the transition of a novel such as *The Buddha of Suburbia*, so marked by its music, into the altogether noisier form of the television series, the silences become even more marked.

In the novel, in what becomes known as ‘the Great Sulk’ (Kureishi 1999, 20), for ‘a week after that evening [at Eva’s house], Dad sulked and didn’t speak, though sometimes he pointed, as at salt and pepper’ (19). This ‘time of Dad’s silence’ (20), lasts for long enough, and is complete enough, that when Eva telephones and Haroon goes to answer it, Karim ‘couldn’t believe he was going to speak in his own house’. When he does it is ‘as if unaccustomed to using his voice’. The only other moment in which Haroon’s period of silence is broken is ‘the queer sound [Karim] heard coming from his room’. This ‘queer’ sound is of Haroon practicing his act for upcoming appearances as the Buddha of suburbia – a rehearsal which involves

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<sup>26</sup> Although they do at least still thud if you set them aside forcefully enough.

'hissing his s's and exaggerating his Indian accent. He's spent years trying to be more of an Englishman, to be less risibly conspicuous, and now he was putting it back in spadeloads' (21). As, Schoene explains, 'forced 20 years previously to mimic stereotypical Englishness in order to make a living in Britain, [. . . Haroon] now prospers on what he can retrieve of his Indian past, conflating it with Eva and her friends' spurious conception of Indianness'. In Schoene's reading, 'Kureishi deconstructs common conceptions concerning the authenticity of individual and group identities, demonstrating that no clear differentiating line can be drawn between being and acting' (1998, 116). This deconstruction of authentic identity through the elaborate reconstruction of a (false) authenticity is marked in the novel, by 'queer' sounds, punctuating an immature, petulant silence.

Conversely, in the TV adaptation there is no explicit indication that this a specific 'time of silence'. Instead, Episode 1 depicts a series of brief scenes depict 'Family Life'.<sup>27</sup> As in the novel, Karim overhears his father practicing his act, but in this case we actually hear him speaking (running lines about lives wasted in the office) rather than 'queer sounds'. This appears as part of a sequence of glimpses of family dinner, Karim in his room, his mother drawing in the living room and Karim at school. As in the novel we see the family dine with Haroon in silence and react awkwardly to the phone ringing. The effect of all of these moments is altered however, since they do not occur within a specific period of deliberate, active silence. This process of adaptation therefore simultaneously increases and decreases the extent and potency of silence at this point in the narrative.

On the one hand, with no direct reference to or clear representation of 'the Great Sulk' as an active, stubborn silence then Haroon's (silent) statement is itself silenced. In a twist on adaptations giving a voice to previously silent characters, Haroon is robbed of his *intentional* silence and is thus robbed of his 'voice'. The silencing of his silence removes the powerful (if petulant) statement he uses it to make in the novel. Instead, his active temporary silence is

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<sup>27</sup> As titled by the BBC DVD Chapter headings (Michell 2007).

exchanged for a passive, habitual one. Haroon still does not speak during these scenes, but rather than being part of a deliberate ploy it is a way of life. A specifically awkward dinner in the novel becomes a generically awkward one in the series as a specific *act* of silence is replaced by a pervasive *state* of silence.

And so across the versions the general and the specific, the discrete and the extended, operate in an indeterminate relationship with each other – particle and wave, specific point and extension in time. In the transition from the past tense of the novel to the present tense of the television series this specific period of past time looked at with hindsight is expanded into a perpetual present; Haroon's queer sounds are no longer a startling intervention in a bounded moment, but part of a family life montage, transformed from a specific punctuation in an active past silence to a standard oscillation in a passive, pervasively present silence. *Re/depositioned* together, these bitextual interrogations of queerness and identic authenticity oscillate in (bilingual) conversation.



James and James suggest that maturity 'describes the extent to which a child appears to behave or think more as an adult does' (2012, 2). In general then immaturity means not thinking as an adult does. I pose *adolescent* immaturity as a knowing and sometimes deliberate form of this; not contained or controllable within the rigid structures of 'grown-up' thinking it is *so out of order*. Discussing their relation to adult figures such as parents, teachers and the police, Heaven refers to teenagers' 'orientation to authority' (1994). It is pleasing that he chooses a word with such attendant connotations of dissident sexualities as 'orientation', binding the ways we respond to authority and the ways we desire, our orientation to power and our orientation to sex-objects as part of the same mechanism. Adolescence becomes the site of a simultaneous awakening of and experimentation with both sexuality and critical

thought; textual immaturity therefore recognises an always implicate sexual and critical orientation – a queerness.

Heaven notes that ‘younger children are much more likely than adolescents to be accepting of parental and other authorities. Adolescents, capable of abstract reasoning, are more likely to question authority’ (1994, 194). But while adolescent orientation to authority may primarily be an orientation towards questioning it, to rebelling, we must also consider the unpredictability or capriciousness of such teenage rebellion. There are moments of outright rejection of authority, even if that rejection is damaging to the immature subject themselves. But equally there are moments of apparent acceptance or even welcoming of authority, of doing what you are told. Sometimes it seems just for the sake of it to reject outright even aspects which might appear beneficial; sometimes it seems to go along with normative convention surprisingly easily. Sometimes it takes a principled stance, sometimes it seems only self serving, sometimes completely uninterested. In other words, like bisexuality as a sexual orientation, adolescent orientation to authority is radically non-disclosed, unfixed and unpredictable.

More than anything though, as ‘a locus for concerns about [. . .] waywardness’ (Thurschwell 2013, 148), the adolescent *demands to be dealt with*. Whilst authority can sometimes find the adolescent reasonably easy to deal with – their ‘loitering’ can be successfully criminalized through acts such as ASBOs for instance – they still require a response of some kind – they are difficult to ignore. Might we not, in an analysis of this adolescent orientation to authority, elaborate something like a critical petulance? Kureishi suggests that part of writing’s responsibility ‘is its irresponsibility, you know. It is asking questions of authority. And not being, I don’t know, respectful to ideologies’ (in MacCabe 1999, 53). Textual immaturity holds the adolescent unfixed orientation to authority together with the adolescent’s bisexual orientation and the adolescence *of* the bisexual orientation, to name a radically non-disclosed locatedness of an attention-seeking bitextual response to power,

which, like rebellious teenage subcultures, similarly always demands a response, always must be dealt with, even if that response is then to reject, marginalize or invalidate it.



‘Punk itself at this point needs little introduction’, claim Brown, Deer and Nyong’o (2013, 1).

They find that

almost four decades after its flamboyant self-declaration and its equally performative self-annihilation, punk continues to hold meaning in popular imagination and critical consciousness. The term resonates in both historical as well as affective registers; it oscillates between specifically located worldly practices and free-floating transhistorical associations. (2)

Although punk has many forms it is the British punk of the nineteen-seventies which is of particular interest to this project and, as Smyth suggests, ‘one of the principal forms through which that punk moment of the 1970s continues to survive is the contemporary novel’ (2008, 189). Brown, Deer and Nyong’o suggest that seventies punk ‘was a space squatted by misfits, outsiders, miscreants, the strange and estranged’ (2013, 2), and

was sometimes nihilistic and angry, sometimes absurd, sometimes gimmicky and puerile. Sometimes it simpered and preened for the cameras, at the same time as it growled at the media to leave it alone. It was almost always self-conscious, foreshadowing the spirit of continuous self-invention that characterizes contemporary capitalism. (3-4)

But to succumb ‘to the temptation to write punk off as juvenile’, they argue, ‘produces severe political myopia’ (4). I agree; but equally what about writing it as juvenile without writing it *off* as such? If we reject the final salary identity schemes which cast the juvenile as inferior in the first place, then the immaturity of cultural movements such as punk need not be the grounds for their foreclosure where (textual) immaturity and adolescence are understood as radically non-disclosed vis-à-vis maturity, not progressional points en route to it.

Tavia Nyong’o has proposed theorizing ‘the intersection of punk and queer as an encounter between concepts both lacking in fixed identitarian referent’, and asks ‘what might

be the gain, for academic theory, and perhaps also for activism, in building upon this commonality? Can we, as scholars, contribute to the cultivation of a punk spirit of anticapitalist subculture, art and politics?' (2005, 20). It is not just in the shared lack of fixed referents in which the two are implicate, however; Drew Daniel proposes 'punk performance as both a catalyst for, and a solvent of, queer identity' (2013, 14). But there is also much to be learned from a conversation between queer and punk temporalities, and it is this conversation I stage here.

J. Halberstam finds in particular that the Sex Pistols' 'God Save the Queen' 'echoes through recent queer antisocial aesthetic production', despite its omission from Lee Edelman's *No Future*. In this song, it is claimed, the band 'used the refrain "No future" to reject a formulaic union of nation, monarchy and fantasy.' For Halberstam

the Sex Pistols made the phrase "No future" into a rallying call for Britain's dispossessed [. . .] they turned the National Anthem into a snarling rejection of the tradition of the monarchy, the national investment in its continuation, and the stakes that the whole event betrayed in futurity itself, where futurity signifies the nation, the divisions of class and race upon which the notion of national belonging depends, and the activity of celebrating the ideological system which gives meaning to the nation and takes meaning away from the poor, the unemployed, the promiscuous, the non-citizen, the racialised immigrant, the queer. (2011, 107)

And, when they 'spat in the face of English provincialism and called themselves "the flowers in the dustbin," when they associated themselves with the trash and debris of polite society, they launched their poison into the human' (108). Unsurprisingly, Edelman rejects this assessment.

Affirming [. . .] as a positive good, "punk pugilism" and its gestural repertoire, Halberstam strikes the pose of negativity while evacuating its force. [. . .] Though originally called "No Future," "God Save the Queen" does not, in fact, dissent from reproductive futurism. It conventionally calls for England to awake from the "dream" that *allows* for "no future" while implying that the disenfranchised, those "flowers in the dustbin" for whom the song speaks, hold the seeds of potential renewal. "*We're the future*," it tells us, against its refrain, "*No future for you*." Ironically, given Halberstam's dismissal of style, its punk negativity thus succeeds on the level of style alone. Taken as political statement, it's little more than Oedipal kitsch. For violence, shock, assassination, and rage aren't negative or radical in themselves; most often they perform the fundamentalist faith that always inspires the Futurch. (in Caserio et al. 2006, 822)

Both Halberstam and Edelman take the Pistols' identification as 'the flowers in the dustbin' as their identification with the disenfranchised, with society's 'trash'. But this phrase reveals more about the complex temporality at play here than either allow, and points to a way past their disagreement about punk futurity.

Who, we may ask, put the flowers in the dustbin? And *when*? I want to suggest some scenarios in answer, although of course there could be more:

1. The hippy grows up, gets a job, and discards the flowers in their hair.
2. The flowers are a rejected courting ritual, binned by their intended recipient uninterested in the advance.
3. The flowers are a rejected apology or peace offering, binned by someone not ready to move past a conflict.
4. The flowers are wilting, binned and replaced with a fresh bouquet.
5. The wedding over, the clean up begins.
6. The funeral over, the clean up begins.
7. Flowers sprout and grow out of the piled rubbish; beauty out of trash.

In each of the first six scenarios the flowers are binned, but the temporality of their rejection differs. In scenarios two and three flowers are refused in the *before* – never given an opportunity to be appreciated. In scenario four the flowers are discarded in the *after* – they are dead or dying, thrown out to rot. In scenarios five and six the flowers, used to decorate milestone heteronarrative moments, are discarded after a 'use'. Though still 'beautiful' they are surplus to requirements, having served a specific purpose. Are the Sex Petals rejected before, during or after? Are they the dying? Have they marked a specific moment and are now surplus? Were they refused outright, before they ever made it to a vase? Are they, as in scenario seven, growing organically out of the trash and debris of polite society; life finding a way, beauty out of decay? Or perhaps, as in the most obvious scenario one, they are the rejection of that most flowery of subcultures – hippies. Note that in this reading the punks therefore are not those *who* dispose of the hippy ideology, but *are* that disposal. They do not come *after* hippies, they are the embodiment of the *rejection of* the hippies, or of the hippy's

own moving on; the immature remnant of a movement that failed to change the world, a sign 'of undetonated energy from past revolutions' (Freeman 2010, xvi).

Whether flowers (of the cut and bought variety) are used to woo, to apologise, to decorate or commemorate, they are nevertheless always *unnecessary*, and sometimes frivolous. Yet, whilst they may be an excess, their absence would be felt – these aesthetic adornments have become so much a part of cultural identity of those normative moments that for a great many people, something such as a wedding with no flowers is essentially unthinkable. In most of the scenarios offered above, whilst unnecessary the flowers then have an important function within restrictive regimes of romantic love and normative life courses. When picked wild and worn by hippies this flowering attempts to be part of nature whilst damaging and accessorizing it. When cut and sold commercially it commodifies nature and brings it indoors under strictly controlled conditions. But these flowers, all eventually rejectamenta, are intended to *achieve* some result – whether that be conflict resolution, romantic coupling and/or aesthetic pleasure.

If punks are the flowers in the dustbin they are the rejection (and product) of all this – of a heterocapitalist policing of relationships, kinship, death and nature. But they are a bi-temporal rejection, ambiguously and multiply binned both whilst fresh and wilted, before, during and after their 'use', or growing freshly from what society leaves behind it. Muñoz suggests that 'through punk as a genre (or, more nearly, *antigenre*) [. . . people] found a way to, in a sense, "pause" a temporal moment, allowing people hailed by a mode of negation associated with the outsider's trajectory, the space to find an otherwise elusive mode of being-with' (2013, 97). Rather than as a temporal "pause" however, I read the degenerately flowering punk as *8isexual*; a time-warped experience across many times, rather than a held moment in one.

Moreover, punk is provocatively anachronistic in the contemporary moment. Nyong'o wonders whether 'in commending punk to the attention of queer theorists, my terms of pop



reference are out of date. Hip-hop surely, or rave culture, or the Internet, would all provide more relevant and timely sources' (2005, 21). Likewise, in Brown, Deer and Nyong'o the writers suggest that 'young twenty-first-century radicals immersed in the anarchist and DIY ethos of movements like Occupy may roll their eyes skeptically at historical punk' (2013, 1). Thus, whilst trashy punk flowers may have grown from a kernel of failed revolution, to invoke punk now that its moment is similarly past, is also to look backwards. But, as Nyong'o suggests, 'in an urbanized and overdeveloped culture that wants to live nowhere but at the cutting edge, a defiantly backward glance might just prove revivifying' (2005, 21). Indeed, Brown, Deer and Nyong'o propose that

if punk can never quite give up the ghost, perhaps that's because we are still trawling through the political and economic wreckage that prompted its emergence in the first place. [. . .] If punk has an afterlife, it is because we are still sorting through the shards of history that cling to its edifice – and its ruins. (2013, 1)

Beyond (or rather within) the subcultural movement, punk on an individual level – in the figure of the 'aging-punk' for example – can also point to ways in which immaturity can be enacted outside its temporal bounds within certain stages of the life course. Joanna Davis suggests that as a subculture

punk is understood initially in terms that are clearly marked and recognizable. It's three chords and bratty lyrics; it's the Mohawk and the safety pins; it's anarchy and rebellion; and ultimately it's rock 'n' roll incarnate: loud angry and hedonistic. The distinctions between 'us' and 'them' are considered obvious. 'They' are clean-cut, demure, suburban, grown-up, professional and corporate. 'We' are young, angry, amateur, DIY and in your face. In this distinction, the binary opposition seems evident and appropriate. But the emergence of adulthood starts to disrupt these binary oppositions, and complicates punk notions of us and them. [. . .] some "old timers" reconceive of punk in terms that allow for more compatibilities between punk scene participation and the realities of growing older. These terms draw attention to the constructedness of the binary opposition between us and them, and thus demonstrate the fluidity of punk as an idea. When conceived of in ideological terms, punk becomes more than one kind of music, or mere youthful rebellion; it becomes portable and adaptable – an approach to life rather than simply a phase of it. (2012, 105)

Punk thus conceived 'can *fit* something besides youth, and narrow definitions of clean, obvious distinctions between youth and adulthood. As such, it helps us [. . .] to understand how that transition to adulthood *is* a culturally constructed social phenomenon; does not have clear,

obvious steps and trajectories' (118) Moreover, Davis notes, 'we still have to function and get by in the real world' and so, 'on some levels one must at least acknowledge (which may be a form of accommodation) the ways in which one is constrained by structure'. But punk, framed so as to maintain its immaturity whilst exceeding its youth, 'is a way of acting against, of maintaining a resistant definition in the face of, structural forces' (118). Unbound from the teenage years, an ongoing punk immaturity can then call into question the process by which it is cast as immature in the first place, and point to the complex negotiations between complicity and resistance present in any radically non-disclosed identity such as bisexuality.



In *The Buddha(s) of Suburbia*, maturation, punk and a complex futurity are structural. Susan Brook suggests that 'the narrative of escape from the suburb to the city is written into the novel's *Bildungsroman* structure' (2005, 216); Dominic Head similarly observes that, ostensibly at least, the 'book is so structured as to stage a flight from suburbia' and a 'progression' to 'the metropolitan centre' upon which the 'personal development of [. . . Karim] is predicated' (2000, 82). For Brook though, while it 'is true that, to some extent, the novel does rely on a familiar distinction between the urban and suburban, for which the inner city represents a world of escape and sexual possibility in contrast to the stultifying suburbs' (2005, 215), nevertheless 'over the course of the novel, this distinction is often contradicted, modified or rendered unstable,' and

more broadly, the differences between the inner city and the suburb are increasingly unclear: the sexual excitement Karim seeks is available in the suburb as well as the city, just as he encounters "suburban" racism and snobbery in the inner city milieu of the theatre. The suburb, more specifically Beckenham, emerges as a space of in-betweenness. (216)

She further notes that 'although structured around an apparent journey of one-way mobility, from the suburbs to the city, the novel returns to the suburbs on numerous occasions,

including in the novel's final chapter (220), and that therefore, 'suburbia forms a point of return as well of departure for the novel, disrupting a simple linear structure' (221). For Head, this means that 'the model of progression or rejection implied in the overall structure is subtly undermined.' In Head's reading this is taken to imply a 'need for suburban roots to be recognised' (2000, 82). I want to read this differently, by emphasising the temporal dimension a little further.

Toward the end of Episode 2, in an added scene marking the move from the suburbs to the city, Eva announces: 'We're off – to the future, to London' (Michell 2007). London, the only escape from suburbia, is a spatialized future of possibility, the only solution to the problem of the present. Given that London is, in Eva's suggestion, explicitly conceived of as 'the future', then not only are Karim's subsequent returns to Beckenham returns to the suburb but also returns to the past/present. This complicates the *Bildungsroman* in as much as the future into which the protagonist matures is an unfixed future allowing for return to the spatialized past, bi-temporally.

After Eva's announcement is the following exchange:

Ted: What? But I thought I was doing all this for  
*you*?  
Haroon: My very good friend Ted, everything is  
change. Metamorphosis, right?  
Ted: Right... metaphormosis...  
Haroon: Come on [*raises glass*], metamorphosis!  
All: [*raising glasses*] Metamorphosis!

Ted: What? But I thought I was doing all this for  
*you*?  
Haroon: My very good friend Ted, everything is  
change. Metamorphosis, right?  
Ted: Right... metaformosis...  
Haroon: Come on [*raises glass*], metamorphosis!  
All: [*raising glasses*] Metamorphosis!

It is ambiguous from the delivery of the line in John McEnery's performance as Ted, whether his mispronunciation is portrayed as an intentional or unintentional slip. Is he making a wry joke here, is he stumbling over his words or is he ignorant of the word itself? All are possible and I would urge that the plurality be embraced. In this moment the word metamorphosis is metamorphosed but with no finally decidable cause or purpose.

But there are distinct ways in which this (mis)pronunciation can be heard and thus interpreted by a viewer. If we hear 'metaphor-mosis' then it functions more clearly as a joke by

Ted at Haroon's expense, poking fun at this Buddha of suburbia's cryptic mysticism (or mystic crypticism). It also underlines the move from suburb to future/city as metaphorical as well as literal. Alternatively, if we hear it as I (probably foolishly) first interpreted it (and will stubbornly stick to), 'meta-form-osis' draws attention to the process of adaptation and of critical reflection on representational mode. From definitions of the prefix meta- as either denoting transformation or of theoretical disciplinary self-reflection ("Meta-, Prefix" 2014), *metaformosis* then is understood as the condition both of self-reflecting on form and of change(s) in form; a bi-temporal loop in which self-reflection leads to formal transformation leading to self-reflection leading to formal transformation leading to...

Deriving 'metaformosis' from this exchange may seem teasing and far-fetched – to a degree it is. But the very possibility of this ambiguity speaks directly to the process of adaptation from page to screen. On the silent printed page this same ambiguity would be impossible; the word cannot easily be written in two ways simultaneously short of writing in columns – and even then one would need to decide where to place them, left to right.<sup>28</sup> Any process of cross-media adaptation must necessitate both reflection on, and changes to, form on the part of the adapters but here I argue these processes are built-in to the narratives. Remember that the novel only exists as a novel in the first place due to the provocation from Rushdie that Kureishi *only* wrote screenplays. Thus, even before the screenplay for the television series existed the novel always already carried the spectre of the screenplay it was actively determining *not to be*. *Re/depositioned* together both the moment in the television series and its necessary absence from the printed text expose the limitations of language in the capabilities and restrictions of different media to use language in distinct ways.




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<sup>28</sup> And in any-case, who would do such a thing?

Muñoz discusses the crossovers and spaces between punk and queer cultures in response to the work and artist statements of Kevin McCarty. McCarty describes a period in his youth in which

in a retail space, in the rear of a strip mall the Chameleon Club opened. One entered what would be the sales floor and made their way back, through a single doorway to the storeroom, which had been converted, into a punk rock club [. . .]. To the right of the stage was a doorway that led to 1470's, the largest gay bar in Dayton [Ohio]. When you paid admission to the Chameleon Club you could buy drinks at 1470's. The punks would pass back and forth, but no one from 1470's came to the Chameleon Club [. . .] Neither place was mine. I observed both from the outside. My utopia existed at the doorway on the threshold – neither space at one time and in both simultaneously. (in Muñoz 2009, 105)

For Muñoz

this statement resonates alongside my own autobiography. I was certainly crossing what was for me a metaphorical threshold between the punk world and gay life. Punk made my own suburban quotidian existence radical and experimental – so experimental that I could imagine and eventually act on queer desires. Punk rock style may look apocalyptic, yet its temporality is nonetheless futuristic, letting young punks imagine a time and a place where their desires are not toxic. McCarty talks about a space between these two zones, between the queer 1470 and the punk Chameleon Club. In part, he is narrating a stage of in-between-ness, a spatiality that is aligned with a temporality that is on the threshold between identifications, lifeworlds, and potentialities. (105)

Muñoz's alters the temporality of McCarty's statement here. McCarty describes an image of utopia from his past which existed in the both/neither between-space of punk and gay. In Muñoz's retelling this both/neither space becomes a 'stage of in-between-ness' en route to a queer utopia, rather than the utopia itself. McCarty's utopia existed 'at the doorway on the threshold' between the two locales; for Muñoz this resonates with his own '*crossing* [. . .] a metaphorical threshold' (my emphases). Where the threshold itself is McCarty's utopian space, for Muñoz the same is a temporary space to be crossed. By aligning McCarty's threshold space with a threshold temporality Muñoz disallows the permanence of that space. The threshold goes from being a fixed, albeit ephemeral spatial location to occupy, and becomes a transitory location through which to pass; we move from a *space* of in-between-ness to a *stage* of in-between-ness.

Muñoz recognises punk as his transitory route into queerness, but in so doing forecloses the more enabling possibilities I read in McCarty's account. For Muñoz, punk allows new kinds of desire to be imagined. The young punks with 'toxic' desires then cross the threshold and reconfigure, or re-recognise those desires as queerness; the futurity of punk is therefore oriented toward the queerness it enabled him to realise. But in McCarty's account, the punks cross between both spaces, the queers do not – they queers stay resolutely in 1470's, the 'gay' (not queer) bar. If, as *stage* of in-between-ness, this represents for Muñoz a future-oriented punk that enables the imagination of, and crossing into queer desire and spaces, then it is only toward a fixed queer which stays in its gay spaces that such a future points; it is neither the both/no space at the threshold that forms McCarty's utopia, nor the free passing from one space to the other that the punks perform. In contrast, McCarty's punks can be seen not just as pointing to a queer future, but also as rejecting the fixity of the 'gay bar' which comes to be the site of that future. Punk then becomes a transitory site which enables the future, but which never commits to it, retaining and returning to its pastness, its punkness, as it crosses bi-temporally out of and back into that space.<sup>29</sup>



Charlie functions as a jarring carrier of the unsettled, the untimely, and foregrounds the narratives' relations with the 'real' past, unfixing the historical 1970s and the future that, for him, its London represents. According to Smyth, Charlie 'embodies the moment of pre-punk British popular music which [. . .] was a volatile, confused period in terms of value and taste', until 'the shift in focus from suburb to city [which] coincides with the advent of punk' (2008,

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<sup>29</sup> In practice, there are presumably other reasons why 'no one from 1470's came to the Chameleon Club', whilst the punks passed 'back and forth'. Perhaps the punk atmosphere was felt by the queers to be threatening, perhaps they didn't like the music, or perhaps the gays just preferred to stay by the bar. It is also possible of course, if the punks are seen as a largely straight crowd, that this also represents a hetero-privilege in which all spaces are assumed to be open to them, but not to queers. But then perhaps, in practice, a queer rejection of boundaries and a privileged disregard for them can look remarkably similar.

183). Smyth posits Kureishi as ‘perhaps the first British novelist to attempt to describe the milieu from which punk music emerged, as well as the impact that it had upon a generation of young British men’ (182-3), and suggests that *The Buddha of Suburbia* therefore ‘initiated many of the themes and tropes that were to feature in subsequent novelistic representations of the punk era’ (184). In Charlie then, we have not only a representation of different stages of a particular historical social transition which has yet to ‘give up the ghost’, but also the kernel of subsequent representations of that history; a looking back and a pointing forward.

Newly in London – already the supposed future-space – Karim and Charlie stumble further into ‘the fucking future’ (Kureishi 1999, 131), in the back room of the Nashville pub.

The band shambled on, young kids in clothes similar to the audience. The fans suddenly started to bounce up and down. As they pumped into the air and threw themselves sideways they screamed and spat at the band until the singer, a skinny little kid with carrot hair, dripped with saliva. He seemed to expect this, and merely abused the audience back, spitting at them, skidding over on to his arse once, and drinking and slouching about the stage as if he were in his living room. His purpose was not to be charismatic; he would be himself in whatever mundane way it took. The little kid wanted to be an anti-star, and I couldn’t take my eyes off him. [. . .] When the shambolic group finally started up, the music was thrashed out [. . .] This was no peace and love [. . .] Not a squeeze of anything ‘progressive’ or ‘experimental’ came from these pallid, vicious little council estate kids with hedgehog hair, howling about anarchy and hatred. No song lasted more than three minutes, and after each the carrot-haired kid cursed us to death. (130)

This description of the carrot-haired singer strongly invites association with John Lydon, aka Johnny Rotten, lead singer with the Sex Pistols. Despite Karim’s claim that ‘it would be artificial’ to follow them – ‘We don’t hate the way they do. We’ve got no reason to’ (132) – Charlie is inspired by the punk encounter, and from this moment inserts himself, however artificially, into its (future) history.

Charlie changes his own band’s name from Mustn’t Grumble to The Condemned, adopts the stage name Charlie Hero and they become, ‘one of the hottest New Wave or punk bands around’ (153). As Smyth observes, ‘he transforms himself from a sensitive, middle-class artist to a crass, working-class punk overnight’ (2008, 184), and Isaias Acosta suggests that in this way he ‘has prostituted punk, since there is nothing under his punky appearance, not even

punk's original rage' (1994, 58). Schoene describes how Charlie 'appropriates working-class youth culture, just as his mother appropriates Indianness, and for the same reason, which is to become culturally visible at any cost, if necessary even by metamorphosing into somebody else'. For Schoene these and Haroon's identity metamorphoses function in the novel to undercut cultural identity.

As Charlie tries on the in-vogue persona of deprived and angry youth, Haroon likewise moves from stereotype to stereotype. Both of them peddle preconceived identity packages to their audiences, relying for their success entirely on the booming market for the tribal, ethnic and exotic. By juxtaposing syntheticity (punk) with ethnicity (Indianness) in this manner, Kureishi demolishes the notion of any originary cultural authenticity. (1998, 116)

Charlie's self-interested class and cultural appropriation, whilst politically suspect, nevertheless gestures towards a textually immature rupturing of a maturation narrative in which the proper product of adolescence is an *authentic* final salary identity.

Smyth suggests that 'Charlie Hero would appear to be a thinly disguised depiction of the British "punk" Billy Idol who [. . .] was a member of the so-called "Bromley Contingent". This was the name given to a group of fans of the Sex Pistols who, like the characters Karim and Charlie, hailed from that part of Greater London' (2008, 220 n.9).<sup>30</sup> But the name 'Hero' not only references Idol, but also re-links Charlie with Bowie, whose hit "Heroes" was released contemporaneously in 1977. Bowie acts as a chameleonic constant through British music culture from the pre-punk period to the present day, and so reinvoking him here extends Charlie's temporal relations beyond the specific moment of punk transition.

The Condemned come to occupy in this 1970s universe a similar cultural position that the Sex Pistols did in ours. Karim explains how Charlie

was continually being chased by national newspapers, magazines and semioticians for quotes about the new nihilism, the new hopelessness and the new music which expressed it. Hero was to explain the despair of the young to the baffled but

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<sup>30</sup> However, this claim is complicated by the fact that Charlie is inserted into music history *alongside* Idol, since Karim 'listened to the new music, to the Clash, Generation X, the Condemned, the Adverts, the Pretenders and the Only Ones' (206). The character is certainly riffing on figure such as Idol, but he is not a direct historical replacement for him, given that Generation X were the band Idol fronted. Although this could of course just be an attempt to avoid a libel case.



interested, which he did by spitting at journalists or just punching them. He had a smart head, Charlie; he learned that his success, like that of the other bands, was guaranteed by his ability to insult the media. (Kureishi 1999, 153)

That is not to say that they *are* the Sex Pistols, but that this is an alternate past in which it is the Condemned and not the Pistols who rise to that iconicity. There is no explicit reference made to the Sex Pistols as a band whereas other contemporary punk real-life bands and musicians are named. Thus, if we accept the invitation to read the band that Karim and Charlie saw *as* the Sex Pistols, then Charlie was directly inspired by them to embark on the activity which sidelines them in the novel's version of history. Directly following that initial encounter with carrot-haired punk

four kids from the Nashville, two girls and two boys, were piling into a car. They whooped and abused passers-by and fired water pistols. The next thing I saw was Charlie sprinting through the traffic towards them. [. . .] Seconds later he'd leaped into car with the kids, his bare torso on someone's lap on the front seat. [. . .] Charlie was away to new adventures. (132)

The Sex Pistols are markedly absent; in their place, water pistols. We might then read The Condemned, formed by class-tourist Charlie as a watered-down version of the Sex Pistols, devoid of underlying rage. But the replacement of Sex with water here also marks the fluidity of the bisexual middle. In this version of history the punks fire upon an unsuspecting public not from phallic sex pistols, but from childish water pistols as Charlie thrusts himself in-between two boys and two girls on his way to new adventures, literally occupying a ground between a gender binary, the awkward fifth that makes their number odd, queer.

Towards the end of the novel, Karim stays with the now-famous Charlie in New York for a period, 'with Mick Jagger, John Lennon and Johnny Rotten living round the corner' (249). Rotten becomes a named presence in the novel, but only explicitly so post-pistols. The carrot kid alludes to him and inspires Charlie, who then seems to write over him with the Condemned, leaving the real life Pistols haunting the narrative. The naming of Rotten later in the novel in New York, then highlights his own prior absence in the intervening period in London which Charlie has been filling. Note also that when Rotten is named it is in a list of

three whose other members are a representative of the Rolling Stones and the Beatles –the cultural binary division which, for Karim, the choice between is as hard to make as conceding a monosexuality. Charlie’s re-versioning of punk history then in part reshapes it as a bisexual alternative to the heartbreaking imperatives of monosexism.

Hero operates multiply as a successor to, a version of and a contemporary with the real-life Sex Pistols. This is marked again in a tiny textual moment. Karim states: ‘nothing would have prevented me from seeing precisely what it was that had turned my schoolfriend into what the *Daily Express* called “a phenomena”’ (152). Similarly, in Episode 3 of the television series, Eva clutches the paper, declaring ‘they’re calling my son a phenomena’, before bursting into tears (Michell 2007). The mismatch of the singular and the plural subtly figures Hero’s position in the narrative. He is the character most marked by his intertexts and so functions at multiple levels, embodying the (re)writings of history which occur. The singular Charlie Hero is more than one phenomenon; not least he is both the phenomenon of the Condemned and of the Sex Pistols. Therefore, he can be Charlie “Heroes”, for ever and ever, and steal time (just for one day).

Whilst positing the contemporary music-novel as a principal survival form for seventies punk, Smyth notes that they nevertheless present ‘for the most part an extremely partial vision of what punk was and what it represented’ (2008, 189). Likewise, Halberstam suggests that the ‘history of punk has been all too often told as one of hetero white male fury, but this hides another history that links gender and sexuality to empire and racial politics’ (2013, 128). These other histories are so important, Halberstam says

because without them, punk becomes a rebellion without a cause, a boys’ club of heroic art- school dropouts, and another master narrative within which white guys play all the parts — the masters and the slaves, the business- men and the slackers, the insiders and the outsiders. (129)

Halberstam is therefore concerned to remind us of

the other side of punk — a no place populated by different kinds of renegades: new immigrants, queers, women, and social misfits who are not well captured by the

various histories of punk, the neatly organized genealogies that lead back to Malcolm McLaren, the Sex Pistols, the Clash, and other punk boys. (124)

Whilst white, middle-class Charlie Hero affecting a working-class punk style seems representative of that former, reductive history, I suggest that his bitextual recasting of the Sex Pistols (given the racial contexts of the rest of the novel) unfixes the neat organization of the standard punk history. Given the centrality of the Pistols in historical accounts of mid-seventies London punk, Hero's bi-temporal overwriting and sidelining of them exposes that history as narrative and therefore as open to being rewritten.



'It's all about Change. It's a Metamorphosis.' The line is from the Pet Shop Boys song

'Metamorphosis' from the 1996 album *Bilingual*.<sup>31</sup> Maus notes that

beginning in 1994, Tennant has publicly acknowledged that he is gay. A few album cuts, from around that time and later, have seemed to include undeniably gay subject matter, but not many: 'Can You Forgive Her?' and 'Metamorphosis' are the most direct (though some listeners still seem able to miss the point). (2001, 389)

Metamorphosis's 'undeniably gay subject matter' is in many respects a standard gay coming out narrative. It opens with Tennant claiming to be 'living proof that man can change' and goes on to describe a youth of suppressing desire, of trying to be 'a family man but [that] nature had some alternative plans'. Backing vocals by Sylvia Mason-James explain that 'you grow up and experience this a total metamorphosis'. So far, so gay.

Toward the end of the song however, this is shifted: 'It may not last but here am I once a caterpillar now a butterfly It can seem strange but when you reminisce It's all about change It's a metamorphosis'. Given that the apparent subject matter is the transformational change instigated by finally coming out into an authentic gay identity the apparent transience of the

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<sup>31</sup> I reproduce lyrics here as they appear in the sleeve notes of the 2009 CD remaster: blocks of text with no punctuation between sentences or clauses, simple successions of run-on lines. I capitalise where words are capitalised in this text. (Pet Shop Boys 2009).

transformation is provoking. The caterpillar transforming into the beautiful butterfly is a not uncommon trope of coming out narratives but here the maturation from larvae to adult form is reversible and 'may not last'. Coming out into a secure gay identity is here represented through a maturation narrative with a reversible trajectory. The 'total metamorphosis' which is experienced when 'you grow up' may be *total* – metaphorically as total as the vast physical changes undertaken by Lepidoptera larvae in the cocoon – but this *totality* of change does not extend to its *permanence*. The total change is simply *one possible change* of many which may occur throughout that life.

Tennant also observes that 'when you reminisce It's all about change'. The centrality of change is contingent on the process of reminiscing; it is only when one looks back that 'it', life, is 'all about change'. The suggestion here is that it is *only* through the process of reminiscing, of thinking back, of subjecting our pasts to narrative, that metamorphosis becomes central to existence. It is narrativization in the present moment of the self's past which establishes the fiction of progress in the first place. The song presents a certain gay narrative but simultaneously unfixes that gayness by establishing it only as the product of the coming out narrative itself and as therefore ultimately open to change through subsequent retelling.



Writing the Sex Pistols out of history, incompletely, Charlie Hero appears as something of a palimpsest, in which the former's cultural legacy re-emerges from underneath the figure of the latter. Sarah Dillon has drawn attention to

both the queerness of the palimpsest and the palimpsestuousness of queer, not just as both these terms are applicable to descriptions of identity, but also as they can be extended [. . .] to queer traditional understandings of history, identity, temporality, metaphor, reading, writing, sexuality and textuality. (2007, 126)

Dillon ends her study *The Palimpsest: Literature, Criticism, Theory* at the point of 'identifying the queerness and queering power of palimpsestuousness' (126), but she does so directly at the expense of bisexuality. She notes the palimpsest as a concept used figuratively 'in areas of research which insist upon the interdisciplinary nature of their work' (1) and then expands on Genette's term 'palimpsestuous' to theorize a reading practice which she later couples with queer.

The official adjective from "palimpsest" is "palimpsestic", meaning: "that is, or that makes, a palimpsest". In contrast, "palimpsestuous" does not name something as, or as making, a palimpsest, but describes the type of relationality reified in the palimpsest. Where "palimpsestic" refers to the process of layering that produces a palimpsest, "palimpsestuous" describes the structure one is presented with as a result of that process and the subsequent reappearance of the underlying script. (4)

Palimpsestuous reading then

seeks to trace the interwoven relations between the layers that constitute the fabric of the text. [. . . It] does not reduce the text to a single layer but takes all of a text's layers into account [. . . so that] no layer of the text represents the essential or definitive version of a work' (48).

A crucial feature of the palimpsest, as Dillon figures it, is the unrelatedness of the layered texts other than their coexistence on the same surface.<sup>32</sup> She is thus careful to point out that the palimpsest is not synonymous with an intertextuality primarily concerned with identifying the sources of references and illusions within texts.

She does however propose it as a more appropriate term for Kristeva's original proposal of an intertextuality which 'describes the nature of all textuality, comprised as it is of diverse utterances or discourses'. It is Dillon's suggestion that palimpsestuousness, 'while retaining the emphasis on the textual, [. . .] distances itself – by the very unrelatedness of the texts that constitute it – from the confusion with source study from which the term 'intertextuality' can now no longer be disentangled' (85). That intertextuality has different meanings neither fully separable, nor resolvable into unity, seems to promise more than Dillon

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<sup>32</sup> And this is distinct from de Quincey's concept of the 'palimpsest of the mind' in which he rejects the 'incoherence' of the layered texts found in the palaeographic artefacts (see Dillon 2007, 23–44; De Quincey 1850, 209–220).

allows it here, choosing instead to write over Kristeva's intertextuality with palimpsestuousness, ignoring the palimpsestuousness of intertextuality. In doing so she cements 'source study' as an unwelcome factor entangled with a truer version of intertextuality, rather than as one of the layered meanings of a shifting, palimpsestuous signifier.

It is clearly useful to attempt to discern between different uses of the term. Ott and Water's observe that in media studies it has

been used to describe both an interpretive practice unconsciously exercised by audiences living in a postmodern landscape and a textual strategy consciously incorporated by media producers that invites audiences to make specific lateral associations between texts. Intertextuality has come to describe both the general practice of decoding and a specific strategy of encoding. (2000, 430)

They, like Dillon, object to this dual usage for the reason that since 'these two conceptions involve very different rhetorical processes, their conflation undermines the explanatory force of intertextuality as a theoretical tool' (430). Unlike Dillon however, they do not propose a new term, nor even suggest that one is needed to combat this potentially confusing and counterproductive conflation of meanings. Nor does their conclusion present the interpretive practice and the textual strategy as different theoretical tools but rather as different applications of one. They conclude that intertextuality (note, not intertextualities) 'is a valuable theoretical tool – provided that media scholars are precise about how they are using it' (442). Thus, while bemoaning the unthinking conflation of different meanings they do not bemoan the existence of those meanings, as Dillon seems to.

By foregrounding the palimpsestuous rather than the palimpsestic Dillon does draw out a far more visceral intermingling of texts than that connoted by intertextuality. The result of the palimpsestic process is a textual entity formed of the layering of several independent texts but from which the composite parts, including the most recent, cannot be extracted, cannot be found complete and unaffected (or uninfected) by the others. Once formed, it cannot be unformed (the critical potential of this element of palimpsestuousness makes

Dillon's rejection of intertextuality on the basis of its different meanings being too 'entangled' all the more strange). Intertextuality however, while denoting relations between texts does not necessarily call into question their status as discrete texts on their own.

But Dillon's introduction of queerness is more troubling in that she deploys it at the direct expense of bisexuality. Performing a 'queer reading' of H.D's 'Secret Name', Dillon aims to offer

a critical re-evaluation of the 'bisexuality' explored in H.D's texts by refiguring it in terms of palimpsestuous queerness. The advantage of this figuration is that it emphasises, in a way that the term bisexuality does not, the troubling interpenetration, transversing, 'movement', 'eddy' (all words Eve Sedgwick uses to define the term 'queer'), within queerness of homosexual and heterosexual desire. (2007, 123)

The favouring of queer over bisexuality for such reasons is not uncommon, but what makes this particular example so problematic is that Dillon seems to wilfully neglect to give bisexuality the same degree of consideration with regards its potential palimpsestuousness that she gives other terms in her project. This is particularly strange given that she first introduces bisexuality by citing scholars who primarily use the term in its sense of masculinity/femininity. Dillon then goes on to draw attention to

another duality in the term bisexuality, referring as it does to gender on the one hand, and to sexual desire on the other: bisexuality means having both sexes in the same individual *and* the state or condition of being sexually attracted to individuals of both sexes. In the first instance, bisexuality becomes an indicator of (gender) identity, even if that identity is a dual one; in the second it becomes an indicator of desire, a far more shifting ground for (sexual) identity and one which does indeed make "bisexuality the mark of the difficulty or uncertainty of sexual identity, rather than the foundation of an alternative identity." (119, quoting Buck 1991, 87–88)

She then establishes that her primary interests, distinct from Buck, are in the second of these meanings, 'bisexual desire – and to consider how the text exposes the palimpsestuousness of the queer subject who is continually crossed by both heterosexual and homosexual desire' (119).

From this point Dillon speaks of queerness, not of bisexuality. What is so striking is that at no point does she consider bisexuality itself through the terms of the palimpsest; she

discusses the entanglement of different meanings within the term 'bisexuality' without wondering whether this might be palimpsestuous, and then selects queer as a better term because of queer's inherent palimpsestuousness. Dillon states that the palimpsest is 'not simply a layered structure which contains a hidden text to be revealed. Rather, it is a queer structure in which are intertwined multiple and varying inscriptions' (2005, 257); a description which would serve as well with bisexuality if she would let it. Dillon's is a queer palimpsestuousness founded an erasure of bisexuality. In a palimpsestuous move of my own then, I propose the 'resurrection' of the textual bisexuality in this palimpsest. This in turn can inform this project's broader concern to redress the cultural and theoretical erasure of bisexuality as we see the erased bisexual text re-emerge from beneath gay identities and queer theories; a palimpsestuous result in which neither are fully separable into discrete entities, but viscerally implicate. In this way we may think of *re/depositioning* as a bisexual palimpsestuous reading.



Unsettling the state and status of *The Buddha(s) of Suburbia* further, Bowie's album is not in fact the soundtrack to the television series. In the sleeve notes to the 2007 re-release he explains that

although this collection of music bears little resemblance to the motif driven small pieces that became the actual transmitted soundtrack for the BBC play of Buddha, director Roger Mitchell's [sic] request that I supply some stuff for Hanif Kureishi's fabulous play got me on a real roll. Weeks later however, left to my own devices, these same pieces just took on a life of their own in the studio, with lots of narrative provocation from Hanif's play and dozens of personal 70's memories providing textural backdrop in my imagination that laid the groundwork for a truly exciting work situation. I took the play motifs and discarded them completely except that is for the theme song. [. . .] My personal memory stock for this album was made up from and almighty plethora of influences and reminiscences from the 1970's.  
(Bowie 2007)



This is evident on in the title track/theme song which both opens and closes the album in two slightly different versions and which, as Denis Flannery observes, ‘replicates the David Bowie of the late 1960s and the very early 1970s whose work is so important to Kureishi’s novel’ (2014, 158). Dave Thompson describes this as ‘one of the most invigoratingly self-referential songs Bowie has ever written’ and suggests that the artist

dug deep into the back catalog for key lines, chords and movements, but did so with a knowing wink, as if daring the listener to name each one before the song’s lyric pinpointed them. And the songs contained the peculiar nostalgia that the novel itself so magically invoked. (2006, 110)

This playful nostalgia and winking, ironic reworking of the past, stem from and encapsulate the other versions of *The Buddha of Suburbia* and their bitextuality.

The line in this song from which I take my thesis title – ‘Sometimes I fear that the whole world is queer; sometimes but always in vain’ – playful but forlorn and occurring within an established context of bisexuality (Bowie, Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia*), encapsulates the troubled relationship between queer and bisexual theories/identities from which this thesis emerges. The ambivalence felt here towards ‘queer’ and its prolificacy, the simultaneous desire for and fear of it, resonates with the contradictions and Complementarities of bitextuality. This is a bisexuality which fears for its own future in the face of a subsuming queer but which simultaneously wishes for the advancement of a queer project. Bisexual theories and identities can become enveloped into what may be variously thought a more fashionable, radical or inclusive queer. What bisexuality has to lose from the whole world being queer is its specificity and potentially its political freedom; as I have suggested, becoming tied up in queer anti-normativity can be as restrictive as the strictures of normativity they resist. Bisexuality may rightly fear the whole world being queer if queer does not allow space for opposite-sex desires. Yet at the same time, how delicious a queer world would be.

Having been inspired by the *Buddha* texts Bowie self-consciously revisited his own 1970s in content, form and working methods. One of the most prominent of these methods

lyrically is, in Bowie's words, the 'cut-up style [. . . which] springs from the Brion Gyson/William Burroughs school of Fucking with the Fabric of Time' (2007). Bowie claimed when making *Buddha* that the narrative form is 'almost redundant' but that 'having said that, I am completely guilty of loading in great dollops of pastiche and quasi-narrative into this present work at every opportunity' (in Pegg 2011, 384). Here there is a simultaneous rejection and reworking of the (hetero)narrative form, in an active attempt to revisit an earlier period and fuck with the fabric of time. We might see Bowie's role in the *Buddha* soundtrack as creating something of a predestination paradox. Of the TV soundtrack Kenneth Kaleta claims that Bowie, as 'a figure of the seventies was the ideal choice for the program. His music defined that period, and he was still a mega superstar during the TV program's production. As the composer of its music, he defined the seventies depicted in the program too' (1998, 107). This 'meta-musical' involvement, as Kaleta terms it, sees the 1990s David Bowie creating the incidental soundtrack to a fictional 1970s which he had helped to inspire in the first instance; this fictional 1970s in turn inspires his own new creative output in the 1990s, creating a temporal loop, a paradox in which Bowie becomes his own bitextual grandfather.

Though, as Pegg describes, Bowie has named *The Buddha of Suburbia* 'as his personal favourite of all his studio projects' (2011, 385), and though the tracks on the album with the exception of the title track were *not* written for, or used in the television series (but rather inspired by the music Bowie *had* written for broadcast), the album was distributed as a soundtrack and as such received very little in the way of publicity or critical reviews. It therefore remains relatively unknown compared to Bowie's other studio albums. This has led Pegg to describe it as 'one of the choicest treasures awaiting discovery among Bowie's less familiar work [. . .] showcasing [. . . him] at his most bravely experimental' (385). It may seem typical of Bowie that this album which fucks with time and narrative also fucks with its own status; being not quite a soundtrack and not quite a studio album it is something of a fence sitter.

This version of *The Buddha of Suburbia* works with the novel and the television series to create discrete but interwoven worlds in which the experience of bisexuality immaturely warps straight time and unsettles formal fixity. The walls between the textual universes break down as the intertextual resonances between both these other versions of itself – and also of the countless other pasts, alternate realities and imagined presents which they create – bleed (like a craze) through. *The Buddha of Suburbia* is therefore no one thing at all but is in fact manifest in diverse forms which interrelate and write back into each other in a web of mutual influence, disrupting linear chronology and allowing for the reframing of temporal and textual experience as critically immature.



*Out of no particular order*, textual immaturity describes an approach to texts whose language, form and content bring into focus a critique of literariness, of high and low culture; which ask what can be considered literary and how the normalising functions of institutions work through language. Textual immaturity rejects the notion that maturity is in any way better or more valid, or that there is a natural linear progression towards it. It plays the adolescent to 'proper' literature's adult. It rejects the fiction of progress and upholds no hierarchical relationship (in either direction) between youth and age, past and future (other than thinking that it knows best). Rather like adolescents then, textual immaturity may be playful, may be irreverent, may be idealistic and cynical in equal measure. Such texts may be skilled and accomplished but they are decidedly not proper. They are not fitting; whether by resisting easy generic categorization, or by being too big, or too small, or square when the hole is round, they are texts that do not fit. They are those that, like the adolescent of the adult, are consciously aware of their relationship with 'mature' texts. They play with the cultural pressure to mature and rebel, even as they crave a future. They reject canonical rules almost for the sake of it but are embroiled in envisioning their own futures within them. They want to grow up, but *not like that*. They play the part of the 'enfant terrible'. They are unruly.

# CHAPTER FOUR

‘That’s How People Grow Up’

Morrissey as Cultural Text

This chapter focuses on the writer and pop performer Morrissey – ‘one of the most controversial, complex and iconic figures within popular culture’ (Devereux, Dillane, and Power 2011, 15) – as a sexually and textually dissident thorn in the side of mainstream British culture. As an outsider ‘whose songs give voice to the voiceless’ (Devereux, Dillane, and Power 2011, 16), but whose self-importance and contrarian statements render him impossible to unproblematically champion, Morrissey, this chapter argues, claims an indeterminate and radically non-disclosed site from which to launch a bitextual critique. I read his *Autobiography* (2013), alongside recent solo recordings, to analyse his complex negotiations between high and low culture, adolescence and maturity, linear time and his orientation to authority. In *re/depositioning* Morrissey thus, I claim that he points to ways in which radical bisexual epistemology may be realised as a viable identic practice.

In presenting this argument I make no claim as to the intentions or psychological state of the individual Steven Patrick Morrissey but of the cultural phenomenon that is ‘Morrissey’. For Gavin Hopps this is one of the difficulties in writing about him, since ‘Morrissey’ is not just the individual but ‘is a spectral entity or mythic personality which paradoxically exceeds its creator’ (2009, 12). Michael Bracewell similarly contends that Morrissey’s is ‘one of the only people in pop who has managed to turn themselves into a virtual mythological archetype’ (in Flintoff and Kelehar 2002).<sup>33</sup> This myth is meticulously maintained, as Len Brown observes: ‘there are no coincidences in the world of Morrissey. Nothing is accidental; everything is planned to perfection, from beautifully-crafted pop masterpieces and iconic photo opportunities to manufactured media controversies’ (2011, 9). This crafting extends beyond styling and performance to ‘the careful, deliberate construction of a deeply coded, textually rich self, where every gesture, sound, and image is almost painfully self-conscious’ (Devereux, Dillane, and Power 2011, 16).

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<sup>33</sup> In this and subsequent references to this documentary, all quotations are my own transcriptions.

This is captured by Sparks in their 2008 track, 'Lighten Up, Morrissey', which responds to the character that he creates in culture and the intensity with which some fans respond to it. The speaker is attempting to woo a girl whose obsession with Morrissey is such that his figure overshadows any of the speaker's advances and represents an ideal he cannot be.

She won't have sex with me, no, she won't have sex  
 'Less it's done with a pseudonym  
 She won't do sport with me, no, she won't do sport  
 Says it's way, way too masculine, look at him  
 So lighten up, Morrissey  
 [. . .]  
 I got comparisons coming out my ears  
 and she never can hit the pause.  
 If only Morrissey weren't so Morrissey-esque  
 She might overlook all my flaws. (Sparks 2008)

This is what is different between Morrissey's persona other artists'; it is not that he is Morrissey – it is that he is *so* Morrissey. And what's more, he even appears to believe it. In *Fun Home*, Alison Bechdel wonders whether 'affectation can be so thoroughgoing, so authentic in its details, that it stops being pretense... and becomes, for all practical purposes, real' (2006, 60). I suggest that we see this in Morrissey, who is so relentlessly, unforgivably *Morrissey*.

Clearly no Smiths fan, Dave Thompson posits Morrissey as having 'shrugged away the adolescent trappings of that band' in his solo career (2006, 71). But far from shrugging away adolescent trappings, I argue that Morrissey has wholeheartedly embraced them. Indeed his public identity is formed from them; he is a cultural figure defined by *not* growing up. In many ways Morrissey serves here as a counter to Bowie, the chameleon, by refusing to change – becoming instead only more and more 'Morrissey-esque' as the years go on. 'I don't change', Morrissey says, 'what people think about me changes' (in Flintoff and Kelehar 2002). In 'All You Need Is Me', Morrissey sings: 'And then you offer your one and only / joke and ask me what will I be / when I grow up to be a man / me? nothing ....' (Morrissey 2009b). This question is a joke not only in as much as in his queerness Morrissey does not fit a standard model of hetero-masculinity and thus will not grow up to be a 'man' as such (as in 'I'm Not a Man', in which he suggests that 'if these are the terms you'd use / to describe' masculinity, then 'I'm

not a man / I'm something much bigger / and better than a man'(Morrissey 2014)), but also because to 'grow up' into adulthood is itself antithetical to the Morrissey project. Morrissey has grown up adolescent.

Central to this critical immaturity is a sexual ambiguity: once openly celibate; always playing with coded and overt gay references in lyric and personal comment; refusing to be drawn on identity labels; writing desirously of both men and women; toying with and subverting gender in word and performance. In *Autobiography*, Morrissey typically does not claim any sexual identity label although he does refer to relationships with both men and women; equally typically some reviews claimed that he was therefore coming out as gay (see Dillane, Power, and Devereux 2014, [1]). In response to these claims Morrissey made the following statement through the unofficial fan website, true-to-you.net, which nevertheless serves as his formal mouthpiece (see Giles 2013, 120): 'Unfortunately, I am not homosexual. In technical fact I am humasexual. I am attracted to humans. But, of course ... not many' (Dillane, Power, and Devereux 2014, [1]).

Garber claims that 'all great stars are bisexual in the performative sense', since they must be able to elicit (and capitalize upon) desire from men and women (1995, 140). Eadie though rejects her reading in which 'the entire audience is attracted to a star because, in the world of her simple Freudianism, we are all bisexual already [and that] what we require is only a star whom we believe would be responsive' (1997, 158 n.9). In the identification as 'humasexual' we see a humorous rejection of conventional identity categories and a simultaneous widening and narrowing of the field of desire – widened to extend potentially to all humans (thus meeting Garber's criterion for the 'bisexuality' of star quality), and yet dramatically narrowed to only those very few that *Morrissey* might fancy (thus simultaneously minimising any likelihood of his responsiveness).

## Erot(et)ics

Morrissey writes in *Autobiography* of an early memory of watching *Top of the Pops* ('a rare flash of glamour in our oh so very pale lives'), and of seeing T. Rex for the first time.

Facts blur with hallucination as T. Rex edge in from somewhere interplanetary, giving an elbow-thrust to Pickettywitch and the galvanizing Tom Jones. T. Rex are a question I had been saving up for a long time, and the singer is of pleasantly soft speaking voice, and my little radio crackles with interference regardless of where the station happens to be. (2013, 46)

Hailing from somewhere interplanetary, just as Bowie explicitly framed himself as alien, T. Rex are unearthly outsiders. Conversely, we might think of Morrissey as an archetypal unglamorous *earthly* outsider; rather than arriving from space, Morrissey was already here in the dirt. Where glam's outsiders are the beautiful aliens not let in, Morrissey's are the lepers, pushed out. Note too the striking positioning of T Rex as 'a question'. It is perhaps not uncommon to describe someone as the *answer* to your question (or your prayers), or to be *asking* a question, but more striking to hear the group described *as* the question itself. What might be gained from thinking Morrissey similarly as a question – perhaps even one we have been saving up for a long time?

Before this, it is worth taking a moment to examine how Morrissey presents questioning in some other moments in *Autobiography*. Here, he describes Vincent Morgan, his headmaster at St. Mary's Secondary Modern School:

I am struck by his game of persuasion, trying to convince me that whatever I say to him by way of reply has no value. I am dented by his technique of always making the cross-examined feel 'less', as I am also pierced by his bullying trick of speaking only in intimidating questions: '*and what's that all about then?*', '*and who told you that you could do that?*', '*and who do you think you are exactly?*' – and irrespective of how you explained yourself he would always come back with a question-reply so that he maintains ground as the inquisitor, keeping you answerable, yet failing to account for your actions. The words are a trick to make the victim passive. (2013, 57)

The act of questioning is seen as a deliberate form of oppression, a linguistic trick to exert dominance and instil passivity by those in positions of authority. The question asked of the 'victim' forces said victim to be answerable to it; the repetition of this question forces the victim to be repeatedly answerable and yet always failing to account for themselves. This



chapter therefore reads Morrissey as another kind of (repeated) question which radically refigures the (miserable) passivity imposed by Vincent Morgan. J. Halberstam suggests that

in a liberal realm where the pursuit of happiness [. . .] is both desirable and mandatory and where certain formulations of self (as active, voluntaristic, choosing, propulsive) dominate the political sphere, radical passivity may signal another kind of refusal: the refusal quite simply to be. (2011, 140)

Morrissey certainly does not show us how to be happy, but might his – to use Johnny Marr’s nickname for him – ‘*misery mozzery*’ (Morrissey 2013, 173), illustrate his years of refusal to ‘be’ at all? Or rather, to ‘be’ within those normative, Vincent-Morganist, terms. As Halberstam suggests, perhaps happiness is not what we should be seeking.

C.E.M Struyker Boudier suggests that ‘like ordering, requesting, promising, thanking, etc., asking a question may be considered a form of doing, a doing with words’(1988, 27). This performative can be violent – as in the weaponized question used against Morrissey during (what he describes as) a ‘campaign against’ him by *NME* magazine.

Branded a racist by the *NME* (who apply just enough question-marks alongside their allegations to protect themselves from any specific accusation in a court of law), the finger-pointing goes unanswered from me, but my refusal to feed the *NME* story causes a bushfire of speculation that forms part of my biography forevermore. (2013, 255)

Here, the question becomes the protection behind which those who wish to misrepresent him hide, and Morrissey’s refusal to answer this question, refusal to account for himself in the way Vincent Morgan had also demanded, becomes a response of its own.

Jinjun Wang posits questions as ‘a possible means for dominant participants to exert power over subordinate individuals, whether in casual conversation or in institutional dialogue’ (2006, 529). Wang argues that the ‘inborn features of questions make them inherently bound up with power in that questions possess the ability to dominate and control’ (531). This is not only in the sense that the question elicits an answer and instigates a controlled ‘turn-based’ discourse, but also that ‘questions restrict, constrain and ratify the topic of a response’ (533). As Douglas Walton states, ‘if an answerer gives a direct answer to a question, then he becomes committed to the presupposition(s) of the question’ (1988, 219).

But refusing outright to answer also becomes a positive act of non-participation, an anti-position therefore defined by the question. Thus the question, 'is Morrissey racist?' demands that the answer (or failure to answer) be given and understood through the terms of mainstream racism discourse, just as '*who do you think you are exactly?*' demands a response in the repressive terms of a structural system which asserts that this question is answerable through fixed identity categories.

Of course, there is another relationship between the question and authority: as critique and as resistance. There is an important ambivalence to the presentation of the question as it pertains to authority in this text, since to be able to critically question power is of tantamount importance to resist it. This, it must be said, is what Morrissey spends much of *Autobiography* doing. We might think in particular of the forty-eight pages he spends bitterly detailing court cases.<sup>34</sup> Morrissey has particular ire at the behaviour of Judge John Weeks and of the court process in general, and asks:

So why did John Weeks use words so violent and apparently preferential in his final judgement? Why did Weeks not simply admonish Joyce for failing to sort his own personal business out all those years ago when the time was right? Why was the failure of Joyce to organize his own personal life deemed to be the responsibility of Morrissey and Marr in 1996 – even though the judge also said that he had no doubt that Joyce had always been equal to Morrissey and Marr? If, as the judge insisted, Joyce had always been equal to Morrissey and Marr, why would that same judge also deem Morrissey and Marr accountable for the supervision of Joyce? How could this ever be the case if all three were of equal partnership liabilities? And if indeed they were, why did the judge not take Joyce, as an 'equal partner', to task for any alleged business failings made by Morrissey and Marr? If all three were 'equal', how could there ever be a point when that equality separates? (2013, 316)

Performing a cross(-)examination of his own, Morrissey becomes John Weeks's Vincent Morgan. Taking Weeks and Joyce to task in this sustained interrogatory fashion serves as his cold revenge, exposing the pair as corrupt, devious and stupid; his position of authorial power making them passive. But this is not Morrissey 'winning' – the rant also reanimates Morrissey's enforced passivity in the past moment it describes – these were all questions that he was not

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<sup>34</sup> Namely the case brought against Morrissey and Johnny Marr by The Smiths drummer Mike Joyce in 1996 to settle a financial dispute and Morrissey's subsequent (unsuccessful) appeals against the verdict which had found in Joyce's favour.

able to ask at the time, and which, for all his ranting, there is no need for Weeks or Joyce to answer to now. This is a petulant settling of scores which simultaneously presents Morrissey as passive victim and relentless spiteful antagonist.<sup>35</sup>

If we are to *re/deposition* Morrissey as a question, then which kind of question, with what kind of relation to power, would he be? Not 'to which of my questions is Morrissey the answer', but 'for what questions is Morrissey's body the site for?' What is it that his figure asks or demands of power, of culture, of the individual? If T. Rex, edging in from outside, give 'an elbow-thrust to Pickettywitch and the galvanizing Tom Jones', then who or what might 'Morrissey(?)' give one to?<sup>36</sup> What might such a question dislodge? And with what does Morrissey(?) 'interfere'? In the two slit experiment it is the wave behaviour, not particle behaviour which produces the interference pattern; unfixed, flowing Morrissey(?) therefore causes a cultural interference pattern. The interference caused by T. Rex crackles 'regardless of where the station happens to be'. I posit the (cultural, political, personal) interference caused by Morrissey(?) as similarly indiscriminate; there is nowhere on the spectrum (of radio waves, of sexuality) that escapes its crackling. There is no 'station' that one can settle on, no stable identity or political position that can be occupied that escapes the crackle of interference from the question ever ringing (and singing) in our collective ear.

Importantly though, T. Rex are a question which *Morrissey* has been saving up. In suitably narcissistic form Morrissey lays claim to T. Rex as *his* question – incorporates the T. Rex text retroactively as a question that *he* has been waiting to ask. T. Rex are robbed of their agency as Morrissey – for whom *everything* is about Morrissey – colonises the new ground they have broken. This is not an isolated act of appropriation on Morrissey's part; such moves are fundamental to his cultural performance. His song-writing quotes, references and alludes to a wide range of works and individuals (Oscar Wilde and *A Taste of Honey* being among the

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<sup>35</sup> Unusually for Morrissey, at the end of this forty-eight page barrage, he gives someone else the last word on the matter: 'at the same time Michael Stipe is interviewed in *Q* magazine where he describes John Weeks as "a fuckhead"' (350).

<sup>36</sup> Henceforward, Morrissey as an embodied question will be suffixed thus: Morrissey(?)

most common); indeed, Hopps argues that he is ‘undoubtedly the most literary singer in the history of British popular music’ (Hopps 2009, xi).<sup>37</sup> Mark Simpson suggests that these intertexts give some idea of the ‘real’ Morrissey; that we must only listen to his lyrics and follow his trail of intertextual breadcrumbs to understand the man (2003, 5). Pierpaolo Martino though sees Morrissey’s textuality as serving a critical social function, since

Morrissey is [. . .] foremost a “living text”, that is a space in which different signs, different voices and discourses speak to each other. [. . . He] stands as a “multimodal text” [. . .] in which the visual, the musical and the literary meet to articulate a complex critique of the cultural and political establishment. (2011, 234)

Here, Morrissey as both ‘text’ and ‘space’ becomes a site from which political action can be mounted, the site of critique – the embodied question, edging in from the side.

Lee Brooks observes that from

the very earliest Smith’s recordings and throughout his entire solo career Morrissey has, like a *bricoleur*, delved into a toolbox of cultural references that is at once limitless yet apparently limited by an overwhelming connection to a particularly individual remembrance of the past. (2011, 267)

This is reflected throughout *Autobiography* as Morrissey gives readings of actors, singers, bands, poets and novelists which all come to sound like readings of himself. Here he describes reading the poetry of A E Housman when young:

I ask myself if there is an irresponsible aspect in relaying thoughts of pain as inspiration, and I wonder whether Housman actually infected the sensitivities further, and pulled them back into additional darkness. Surely it is true that everything in the imagination seems worse than it actually is – especially when one is alone and horizontal (in bed, as in the coffin). Housman was always alone – thinking himself to death, with no matronly wife to signal to the watching world that Alfred Edward was now quite alright – for isn’t this at least partly the aim of scoring a partner: to trumpet the mental all-clear to a world where how things *seem* is far more important than how things *are*? Now snugly in eternity, Housman still occupies my mind. His best moments were in Art, and not in the cut and thrust of human relationships. Yet he said more about human relationships than those who managed to feast on them. You see, you can’t have it both ways. (2013, 96)

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<sup>37</sup> Morrissey’s literary references include Maya Angelou, Jane Austen, Jean Cocteau, Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Jean Genet, Goethe, Sylvia Plath and Elizabeth Smart, among many others. (Goddard 2012).

This passage, in which I suggest we are invited to replace 'Housman' with 'Morrissey' and 'Alfred Edward' with 'Steven Patrick', is one of many examples in which Morrissey describes the life and work of another artist so as to self-consciously construct 'Morrissey' as he does so.

This is simultaneously generous and selfish. It shows a clear appreciation of and debt to others and establishes a tradition in which he follows; at the same time it appropriates them entirely so that their relevance can only be as constitutive of 'Morrissey'; the tradition in which he follows instead become his precursors – his John the Baptist, preparing the way. At the risk of doing exactly what Morrissey wants, we might think of this in terms of Wilde's own great terminally-adolescent narcissist.

Yet one had ancestors in literature as well as in one's own race, nearer perhaps in type and temperament, many of them, and certainly with an influence of which one was more absolutely conscious. There were times when it appeared to Dorian Gray that the whole of history was merely the record of his own life, not as he had lived it in act and circumstance, but as his imagination had created it for him, as it had been in his brain and in his passions. He felt that he had known them all, those strange terrible figures that had passed across the stage of the world and made sin so marvellous and evil so full of subtlety. It seemed to him that in some mysterious way their lives had been his own. (Wilde 1992, 113)

Observing that the vast majority of all his solo releases feature images of Morrissey, compared to The Smiths covers which featured images of various of his heroes, Brooks posits it as indicative of the development of 'Morrissey as a constructed, almost fictional, character' (2011, 262) – that is 'Morrissey' becomes the very texts which constitute the *bricolage* that is 'Morrissey'. Given the shift in iconography, he makes the compelling argument that

there is a sense in which this cover art is an admission that Morrissey's need to pay homage to the heroes of his past has been diluted by the fact that the images that these sleeves portray are now such a composite of these references that by displaying them he has himself become the tribute. (2011, 262)

Due to its careful curation during The Smiths, Morrissey's image is so imbued with intertextual references that they are now always already present in that image. What 'Morrissey' means is already so constituted from the fragments of his idols that his image fundamentally refers to them. For Brooks, Morrissey's

hero-worship of shadows from the remembered past has moved beyond the directness of The Smiths era into an increasing projection of a self that has become so saturated with popular cultural idolatry that its very existence acts in place of the earlier imagery of cover stars and verbatim quotations. [. . .] In short, the ethos of “talent borrows, genius steals” has not just shaped Morrissey’s music but also constructed the very nature of Morrissey himself. (2011, 268)

Morrissey becomes constituted through endless iterations of Morrissey to the point that he becomes his own intertexts – Butlerian repetitions which construct the very thing they supposedly repeat.

Morrissey, the living text, the flesh made word, is not the first to embody his art this way. It is worth placing him not only as part of literary and popular music traditions, but also as following from a tradition of bodily performance art developing through the 1960s. Simon Donger explains that

the new art body had a different relationship with words and concepts. The debates provoked by the work of art no longer issued from a body through its discourse and its objects, but in reverse order, where the discourse of the concept became embedded in the body, corporeal. The body is then the unfixed canvas where issues are rehearsed, sometimes even cutting deep into the skin. (2010, xiv)

We might think of visual artists Gilbert & George who have ‘long enjoyed a unique position in contemporary art [since . . .] defining themselves in 1969 as a single entity of “living sculpture”’ in which their two living bodies are presented as the artwork (Duncan 2008, 171). They explain how they came to this form, thus:

Gilbert: We realised we didn’t need the objects anymore. It was just us.  
George: And in our little studio in Wilkes Street in Spitalfields we played that old record *Underneath the Arches*. We did some moving to it, and we thought it would be a very good sculpture to present. And in a way that was the first real G & G piece. Because it wasn’t a collaboration. We were on the table as a sculpture, a two-man sculpture. (in Rosenblum 2004, 15)

Their status as living sculptures is not confined to those times when their bodies are explicitly exhibited in a gallery but extends to their entire lives (as far as an outside eye can tell). Michael Duncan observes that a ‘distinctive performative element animates all of their art, interviews and public appearances, fuelled by their well-mannered and well-groomed, deadpan public persona (2008, 171). Gilbert & George describe waking each day into their art, since

Being living Sculptures  
 is our  
 life-blood  
 our destiny  
 our romance  
 our disaster and  
 our light and life.  
 As day breaks over us  
 We rise into our vacuum.  
 The cold morning light  
 filters dustily through  
 the window. We step into  
 the responsibility suits  
 of our Art.  
 (in Violette and Obrist 1997, 35)

The two men are one creative entity, 'their first-person singular "I" is always the first-person plural "we"; [. . .] their lives are always those of an inseparable duet' (Rosenblum 2004, 9).

I suggest that through their public, queer relationship and the singular art that plural 'they' are, Gilbert & George embody what Berlant and Edelman refer to as "an encounter," specifically, an encounter with the estrangement and intimacy of being in relation' (2014, viii). Berlant and Edelman argue that dialogue itself 'has some of the risk and excitement we confront in the intimate encounter. Not for nothing does the OED list "communication" and "conversation" as the primary meanings of *intercourse*' (ix). Always appearing in public together, Gilbert & George 'dress alike (their ties might be of similar pattern but different colour); they seem to speak out of one mouth, despite the difference of accents' (Rosenblum 2004, 9), and, in so doing, question the boundaries of the individual self in an enterprise that Duncan describes as 'queer in all ways' (2008, 171). Gilbert & George, two queer mouths as one, dialogue as monologue as art, exhibit an intimate encounter like the one Berlant and Edelman describe, which forces us to face 'the psychic and social incoherences and divisions, conscious and unconscious alike, that trouble any totality or fixity of identity' (vi-vii).

Gilbert & George manage this, in part, through a careful curation of themselves as both insiders and outsiders, neither fully accepting nor rejecting the dominant social order. Their 2014 exhibition 'Scapegoating Pictures' was accompanied by the following statement

from the artists, printed along the wall: 'We want our Art to bring out the Bigot from inside the Liberal and conversely to bring out the Liberal from inside the Bigot'.<sup>38</sup> David Dibosa asks:

How does one make sense of two openly gay men whose intimacy remains permissible within the public domain despite the fact that they publicly exhibited their naked arses as well as presenting the public with lurid images of abject bodily secretions, such as blood, urine, semen and excrement? How is it that Gilbert & George came to be described as "controversial" rather than "obscene"? [. . .] Gilbert & George have developed a visual strategy through which they accrue a degree of conventionality while, at the same time, undermining the very conventionality that they have secured. [. . .] Registers of instability and excess, through which non-normative subjects have negotiated the public domain emerge from a range of strategies emerging from the *lived practices* of those navigating non-normative subjectivities. The work of Gilbert & George, albeit hypervisible and highly professionalized, can be compared with such lived out approaches. (2009, 255–6)

Their campily conservative appearance, an ironic old-fashionedness as queens-about-town, and the thoroughly ordered and disciplined nature of their precise daily routine, frames their work which is otherwise visceral, destabilizing, abject. Dibosa suggests that their 'account of orderliness *within* the public domain constantly gestured to another space outside of it where order broke down' (2009, 258). And yet, I do not read Gilbert & George's work as presenting the *struggle* to maintain order in the face of the chaos outwith, nor of the oppressive triumph of order *over* this chaos. Rather, the embodiment of a queer encounter shows that order and the breaking down thereof are always implicate.

We might also think of French artist ORLAN, and particularly her series of 9 surgical performance works, *The Reincarnation of Saint ORLAN*, in which she underwent public cosmetic surgery under local anaesthetic whilst reciting texts. The artist explains that 'each surgical performance was built on a text, philosophical, psychoanalytical or literary [. . .]. I read the texts for as long as possible during the surgery, even when my face was being operated on' (ORLAN 2010, 42). In these performances ORLAN is given the features of women from the (male) canon of Western art – including the brow of the Mona Lisa and the chin of Botticelli's Venus (Jeffries 2009) – whilst remaining 'a fully conscious, active participant [. . .who] contributes to and performs in the surgical event, responding to her environment, controlling

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<sup>38</sup> White Cube Gallery, Bermondsey, London: 18 July – 28 September 2014.



certain activities and performing her own position as subject and object in the operating theatre' (Bouchard 2010, 63). According to Bernard Ceysson, in this work 'ORLAN does not seek to lose identity but to affirm herself as absolute art, to be the supreme artist that crystallizes the masterpieces of artifice in the "natural"' (2010, 30). ORLAN then, quite literally 'becomes art' by way of a feminist appropriation of the image of woman that has been produced by a male artistic tradition, coupled with modern concerns surrounding cosmetic surgery.

Gilbert & George as 'human sculptors' and ORLAN as 'absolute art' become their work, much as Morrissey becomes his text. I am not suggesting that he is a literal constructed, hybrid text in the visceral way that ORLAN is a constructed hybrid art body, nor is he two (queer) bodies made one creative entity. It is nevertheless worthwhile to contextualise him within this tradition of embodied art, alongside the more obvious musical and literary histories. Thence his song-writing, performances, autobiography, public statements and controversies can be understood not only as the construction of a public persona, but as the actualization of a bisexual (inter)text.

### **Insider-Outsider**

I posit Morrissey's interfering answer to Vincent Morgan's controlling question – *and who do you think you are exactly?* – as a radically non-disclosed one. Radical non-disclosure acknowledges the existence of gender and sexuality binaries and institutional power structures as repressive constructs but refuses to disclose a final position in relation to them. Will Self's positing of Morrissey as 'eccentric' shares a similarity with this formulation: 'He's fully embraced his destiny as an eccentric. "I am what I am", he says. "But you aren't allowed to know what I am". And that's a very, very eccentric position' (in Flintoff and Kelehar 2002). 'I am what I am' – totemic anthem of gay pride – is stripped of the fixity of 'gay' and the positivity and liberalism of 'pride' and becomes instead an undisclosed location which

nevertheless is no less viable a position. This 'I am' still makes a claim for liveable identity but refuses to disclose in what name it makes it other than in the name of 'Morrissey'. In Self's reading, Morrissey claims an identity – Morrissey – but refuses to disclose what that identity is. Might we then read Morrissey akin to Judith Butler's permanently unclear lesbian (1991, 14)?

If identity is fixed only so far as it is fixed as 'Morrissey' what might we glean from the name? Morrissey claims that he

had originally decided to use only my surname because I couldn't think of anyone else in music that had done so – although, of course, many had been known by just one name, but it hadn't been their surname. Only classical composers were known by just their surnames, and this suited my mudlark temperament quite nicely. (2013, 173)

On the one hand there is a pomposity and self-importance to the move, claiming a place in the Classical canon; on the other it is the act of a mudlark, a scavenger. The name keeps a foot in both camps. Martino suggests that without the easily-genderable first name 'Steven', it also achieves this vis-à-vis gender: 'the very choice of calling himself just Morrissey expressed a borderline from which to address outsiders of both sexes' (2011, 231). And yet, while the name might not identify gender, using only the surname also reinscribes a system of patriarchal lineage where the most important of an individual's names is their family name, their father's. Again, we can see a simultaneous supporting and subverting of heteronormative naming conventions.

Reflecting on hearing fans chanting this single name, Morrissey also recalls that it was the way his teachers had referred to him.

*Morrissey?* Wasn't that the sneeringly caustic way by which those crude St Mary's schoolteachers had called to me – each bark full of shitheel slander?

*Yes, it was.*

Torn down, put down and shot down, it survives the skinned-alive ethics of the working-class secondary modern and becomes a word loved instead. (2013, 405–6)

His naming then is also a queer act of reappropriation, turning the term used to subordinate him into a rallying cry, an icon. So if 'I am what I am', and what I am is 'Morrissey', we can start to discern that: I am scavenging in the mud like all the great Classical composers, both at the

bottom and the top of the cultural divide; that I present ambiguously with regards gender; that I am determinedly, unwaveringly Morrissey, but that what 'Morrissey' is remains ambiguous.

This act of radical non-disclosure simultaneously exerts the right to exist as subject and withholds the necessary identic detail required to definitively locate one as such. Thus the position from which one makes a claim to political viability takes the form not of a fixed identity but of an eccentric embodied critique – not as an answer, but as question which demands another question – 'who is that?'. In a version of the child's immature quest for understanding/interrogatory game of meeting every answer with 'why?', Morrissey responds to every question with a petulant 'Morrissey(?)'. *Who do you think you are exactly? Morrissey(?). And what's all that about then? Morrissey(?)*. Irrespective of how you explain yourself he will always come back with a question-reply, keeping you answerable, and indeed questionable.

For Simpson the naming is an act through which Morrissey distances himself from the world.

The name, like the artist, like the unmistakable if somewhat dated hairdo, stands apart. Aloof in an age of ghastly accessibility. Aristocratic in an age of dumb democracy. Inimitable. Indigestible. *Irredeemable*.

Instead of being famous for being famous, Morrissey has the breathtaking petulance to be famous for being Morrissey. (2003, 10)

Yet Morrissey does not *only* stand apart, he also participates in dominant culture as Hopps explains in a reading of Morrissey's response, during an interview with Jools Holland, to a 'knock knock' joke. The exchange ran as follows:

*Holland: Knock, Knock!*

*Morrissey: I'm not joining in.*

*Holland: Oh go on, please!*

*Morrissey: [to laughing audience] You can join in. [laughter] No, Jools, I refuse to open the door.*

*Holland: That's very good, that's very clever. You don't even know who it is!*

*Morrissey: I'm not curious.*

For Hopps this is a very revealing exchange which exhibits Morrissey's relations between refusal and participation, resistance and complicity.

It reveals, for instance, that he's witty and slippery and remains in character even when he's offstage. It also suggests that central to this "character" is a not-joining-in or refusal to make friends with everyday experience – a being "bad on purpose", one is tempted to say. Perhaps most interestingly of all, though, what it reveals is that his not-joining-in is a double gesture which subverts and paradoxically *takes part in* the game. That is to say, in making a joke *of* the joke – which lays bare but nonetheless relies upon its conventions – his refusal itself is a sort of "knock, knock" joke and a continuation of its tradition. (2009, 2)

For Hopps it is precisely this paradoxical subversive/participatory nature which affords

Morrissey his transformative potential.

It is this participation from a position of nonbelonging that allows him to ironize or "deconstruct" his own gestures in the very moment of their performance – and makes him a bone in the throat of popular music. Such nonbelonging, however, also plays a vital role in his ability to speak for and extend our sympathies towards the outcast, the marginalized, the "unlovable" and the other. (10)

Morrissey, in occupying the decentred position of nonbelonging is able to act as champion for those marginalised outsiders he comes to represent whilst simultaneously deconstructing the parts of his (carefully managed) self-performance which cause him to occupy said non-position in the first place.

In one of his most Morrissey-esque (and textually immature) moves of late

*Autobiography* was published as a Penguin Classic. Brendan O'Neil, writing in *The Telegraph*, argues that this move has ruined Penguin's reputation and as a result devalued all 'Classics'.

To package as a classic a book that no one except Morrissey and a handful of his fawning acolytes has read is instantly to reduce the worth of all classics. Plato, Julian of Norwich, Darwin – they must all be spinning in their graves right now. In essence, Penguin is sneering at the public. A classic is a book that is judged by posterity to be an outstanding work. How does that happen? Through people reading the book, discussing it, embracing it, recognising its artistic beauty and universal import. There is a democratic element to the idea of the classic; certainly the elevation of a work to classic status involves intellectual, public engagement, the subjection of the work to readers and audiences over a long period of time. For a couple of men in suits at Penguin's head office to decree, behind closed doors, that Morrissey's autobiography is a classic is an act of both extreme haughtiness and dumbed-down relativism – it is arrogant to believe a classic can be christened before being devoured and discussed by humanity, and it is ignorant, too, a relativistic denigration of those classics whose worth we as a species have already agreed upon. (2013)

Well, quite, Brendan; but isn't that rather the point? By declaring the work a Classic before it has been published, before it rightly *could* be a Classic, the status of 'Classics', and the

question of ‘who gets to decide’ is overtly being critiqued, as is causal linearity; fuck posterity, this is a classic *now*! It is petulant, yes; it is arrogant, yes: but it is also *exactly what Morrissey would do*, and is funny, divisive and provokingly bi-temporal.

How democratic does O’Neil believe the appointment to Classic status generally is? Perhaps the Classic status of Plato was decided by more than ‘a couple of men in suits’, but it certainly wasn’t decided by ‘humanity’, or us ‘as a species.’ O’Neil may well include himself in the same species as those who have policed the canon over the centuries; I am not convinced that Morrissey would, or at least not willingly. Perhaps O’Neil missed the following passage in *Autobiography* which, whilst describing unhappy schooldays, Morrissey considers whether there are specific commonalities between himself and authority figures:

The abyss in which I live hasn’t the wit to save itself from savage ignorance, and I now feel assured that I am not in the company of my own species (or, at least, I *hope* I am not, for if I am, then I am *they*). Dear God, let time pass quickly, and let this end. Let me be older and let this mediocrity pass as a dream – one in which the utmost was done to bury me alive. (2013, 84)

By demanding that *Autobiography* be published on the Classics imprint Morrissey is not only, as Hopps observes, ‘putting the effect before the cause’ (BBC 2013), but is drawing into question the processes by which one would usually be canonised.<sup>39</sup> When can something be considered a Classic and who gets to make that decision? O’Neil’s answer is ‘over time, by the people;’ Morrissey’s is ‘fuck time, fuck you’. One suspects, however, that O’Neil would not actually be particularly happy with the ‘democratic’ results if the whole of humanity over time really were to vote for Classics. Morrissey may even beat Julian of Norwich in some constituencies.

For some this publishing act displays a profound arrogance on the part of Penguin and Morrissey for making the decision without letting ‘the people’ come to it through years of discussion; in a sense this is true. But it also brings into sharp relief the ‘extreme haughtiness’ of the small elite who have not only traditionally been able to make these decisions but whose

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<sup>39</sup> And indeed, Morrissey had been talking about publishing his *Autobiography* as a Penguin Classic for years before it was written.

privilege in so doing is so normalised that they believe they *should*. One wonders how many members of the 'humanity' O'Neil describes as historically coming to some sort of organic, democratic consensus on classic texts were women, or poor, or non-white, or queer, or from the global south or from any one of countless other groups marginalised by traditional Anglo-American power structures. What about those who not only cannot engage in the debate about what constitutes the Western canon, but do not even get to read it? What about those from so many parts of the world for whom the Classics as determined by Penguin do not form part of their 'canon' of texts, in whatever form that canon may take?

Morrissey(?) deciding his work is a classic before anybody else has read it, and thus excluding anybody else from the debate and the decision, becomes a performative critique of the process of canon-forming which is supposedly by and for 'us as a species' but through which so many are always already excluded. His body comes to stand for all the bodies who are excluded and marginalised from these discussions and from these texts; his arrogance and narcissism deftly, and hilariously, only reflecting that of those whose privilege usually grants them as a collective the role that Morrissey(?) has claimed for himself – to decide what has 'universal import'.

However, this move, while critiquing the formation of the (Penguin) Classics nevertheless results in becoming one of them – and as a white man supposedly 'giving voice to the voiceless' at that. This is not a rejection of Classic texts, but a claim to their status – a claim that, whilst destabilizing through its inversion of usual process, still upholds the notion of Classics. In this way Morrissey both rejects and is part of the system and performs this duality knowingly, participating from a position of non-belonging. The paradoxical relationship between subversion and participation is central to my reading of Morrissey(?)'s radically non-disclosed bitextuality. Woronzoff similarly suggests that

Morrissey does not deconstruct popular culture to such an extent that it is unrecognizable from its original entity. What Morrissey does that is so unique is that he acknowledges the dominant codes but parlays an alternative means of decoding them. (2011, 273)

Reading Morrissey 'in contrast with other individuals who firmly situated themselves within dominant or oppositional discourses' (275), Woronzoff argues that his 'lyrics do not deny that the gender categories of male and female exist but rather they are unstable, capable of flexibility and changing' (277).

Morrissey as radically non-disclosed bi-text comes to figure this possibility as an abstract myth but also as a 'real-life' example. Woronzoff explains that

when members of the dominant popular industry, such as Morrissey, actively espouse and live narratives that counter dominant ideologies, they prove themselves to be more than cultural allegories. Rather, their negotiated and even oppositional codes create a new discursive rhetoric, one which demonstrates to individuals the possibility to live outside the narrow confines outlined by dominant political and cultural codes. (282)

In such a way we can see Morrissey as bridging the gulf between the epistemological and identity-based approaches of bisexual theory in one bitextual body. Angelides suggests that 'an analysis of bisexuality as undecidable, as both inside and outside, heterosexual and homosexual (yet at the same time none of these), is one crucial way' of 'deconstructing the hetero/homosexual structure' of dominant monosexuality (2001, 177). Suitably, Morrissey is as Simpson describes, 'a man who lives between borders, an insider-outsider' (2003, 187).

### **'I can have both'**

In their working paper *I am a 'Humosexual' [sic] and I need to be loved: A Queer Reading of Morrissey*, Dillane, Power and Devereux (2014), offer a reading of Morrissey's 1997 B Side, 'I can have both'.<sup>40</sup> Although not one of his most well known tracks, Morrissey has claimed it as 'one of [his] favourite songs' (in Dillane, Power, and Devereux 2014, [13]). Dillane, Power and Devereux read the song's voice as that of 'a young person in the early stages of exploring bisexuality and coming to terms with this'. They offer some fascinating analysis of the musical structure of the song and suggest ways in which the chords 'can be easily mapped onto a

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<sup>40</sup> As they explain, the song 'was originally intended for inclusion on the album "Maladjusted" but was replaced [. . . then] reinstated on the re-issued extended version [. . .] in 2009' (2014, [13]).

male/female, straight/gay binary [. . . but that] the manner in which they are used interchangeably from the outset [. . .], allows for them to be viewed as rendering [. . . an] either/or and “both” idea’ (2014, [21]). However, I suggest that they misread some key textual moments in the lyric of the song, leading to some flawed conclusions regarding the song’s bisexuality. The lyric is as follows:

Staring in the window of the shop that never opens  
 Planning my selection from all the treats inside  
 Should I take as I desire - oh shall I, oh shall I?  
 Or should I hang around to be enticed inside?

I'm trying to explain to myself  
 I can have both  
 I'm trying to explain to the voice inside  
 I can have both  
 I can have both  
 There's nobody around to say no  
 Who've brainwashed the small shy boy inside  
 He doesn't know he can have both

Smiling through the window to the one who never serves you  
 I've not been feeling myself tonight  
 Should I take as I feel like it - well shall I, oh shall I?  
 Or should I wait and hope to be dragged inside?  
 Oh...

[Chorus]

I can have both  
 There's no need to choose  
 Because  
 I can have both  
 There's no need to choose  
 [Repeat to fade]  
 (Morrissey 2009a)

Central to their reading is the idea that the

key metaphor deployed by Morrissey is [. . .] the sweet shop. It is a place of desire and absolute indulgence and the protagonist looks through its window in a state of longing. It becomes obvious that this is really the storefront for beautiful bodies and desirable things [. . .] There is so much there that is bad for you, but oh so good, too. This ambivalence around the sweetshop works perfectly as a metaphor for sexual choices and predilections. (Dillane, Power, and Devereux 2014, [16])

Whilst a sweetshop metaphor may work well for ‘sexual predilections’ it is important to note that it is never directly stated in the song that the shop *is* a sweetshop. It is a shop that ‘never



opens' with numerous 'treats inside;' there is nothing to suggest that sweets are the particular kind of treat on offer. Of all the things Morrissey might consider a 'treat' sweets do not strike me as likely to be particularly high on the list. Records perhaps?

For a paper that is otherwise keen to point out the ambiguities central to Morrissey and his lyrics this seems remarkably certain that the shop is selling sweets – even if only metaphorically. The certainty that the treats are sweets leads them to another assumption. Since the sweetshop 'looms large in childhood fantasies' ([17]), and 'given the continued influence of this childhood experience, we might imagine he is no more than a young adult' ([18]). The lyrics make reference to the 'small shy boy inside', but no direct statement is made as to the age of the person on the outside. If the small shy boy inside is taken to be inside the speaker, in the sense of an 'inner child', then if anything it suggests that they have *greater* distance from this childhood. The idea of an 'inner child' only really makes sense if the 'outer' person is clearly not a child.

I do agree with Dillane, Power and Devereux's reading of the 'voice inside' as representing 'some institutional process he has undergone as a child, telling him, no, he can't have it both ways' (2014, [17]). It shows the internalisation of the structures by which sexuality and desire are bounded and policed; so successful are the institutions of heteronormativity that the voice attempting to restrict the speaker's desire now comes from within. At this point the bi-temporal time-slip becomes apparent as we see the simultaneous presence of a self at various stages of being. Different moments in the life course are all occupying the same internal space and communicating with each other: the small shy boy who was victim to the institutional process; the policing voice that this boy develops into; and the present 'I', distinct from but indebted to those earlier selves.

These selves have different knowledges – the present speaker knows what the boy inside does not – yet later knowledges do not obliterate past selves. The boy (without this knowledge), occupies the same space as the older man (who has it), who must now try to

explain. In this bisexual subjectivity different moments of the life course each have purchase on the present moment; each version of the self has a claim to the present. This is not one unified self who matures seamlessly from one into the next, learning and growing, but rather a succession of distinct selves who try to convince each other of the validity of their own argument. Thus, whilst the particular opinions of the boy and the voice are presented as the result of a normative socialisation which the present self tries to undo, the boy himself is not rejected outright as an immature, lesser self. Rather, he has as much claim and access to influence the present as the present 'I'. The past selves must be reasoned with, not rejected.

This bitextual temporal structure is also reflected in Morrissey's use, throughout *Autobiography*, of the present tense. The life narrative, told from the present, nevertheless appears as an ongoing sequence of (past) present moments. Hopps observes that this ongoing moment has been central to Morrissey's songwriting throughout his career. Here, he explains how the preponderance of deictic words which point to the present ('now', 'here', 'this' etc.), in Morrissey's song writing, construct the moment of the song, presenting

the moment of experience as coterminous with the act of description – he is presented, that is, as describing events *as they go on* [. . . which] dramatizes rather than merely describes the experience, and the emotional disclosure is presented as something going on before us. In other words, the song doesn't report an expose that takes place elsewhere – it is the space in which the exposure occurs. (2009, 126)

The songs become the sites for the exposures they describe, just as Morrissey(?) becomes the site of the questions those songs ask, by presenting the coexistence of the subject during different present moments.

Of course, the 'inside' in which we find 'the small shy boy' may not be a psychic interiority at all. He may be the inside the shop itself. Perhaps the small shy boy is the same 'one who never serves you'. Thus the speaker tries to explain both to himself and an Other that they can *both* have both. The attempt to explain is then not only an internal negotiation with different selves, but also a recognition that the institutional process works more widely. The speaker is not the only one who didn't know he could have both. The speaker realises that

he can now, with enough persuading of the voice inside, have both. The boy in the shop does not yet know this and this is why he never serves us. The shop is where all the treats are kept – and kept from the speaker – by the small shy gatekeeper who does not open the shop or serve to outsiders like Morrissey. What is recognised in this reading is that the gatekeepers, the border police of desire, are victims of the same systems. I do not favour one of these readings of the small shy boy over the other; there's no need to choose...

Dillane, Power and Devereux read the implied bisexuality in the song as a foretelling of Morrissey's later claim to 'humasexuality'

for, of course, there is not 'both' in the sweet shop. A sweet shop is full of all kinds of sweets but in the end with all the variation they are still all sweets. This song then, speaks to the very early stages of exploring one's sexual identity and contemplating behaviours outside what is deemed permissible by society. [. . .] While the song therefore is not a radical humasexual message promoting sexual engagement across a spectrum of experiences, in the manner in which it reinforces the initial binary children or young adults face – straight or gay – there is no doubt that the listener is left wondering if one can indeed be both and, 'have' both and be bi-sexual. (2014, [18])

I am sympathetic to this reading but I suggest that they have misread the referent of 'both'. It does not refer to the treats but the different options for getting them – that he can both take as he desires and 'hang around to be enticed inside'; take as he feels like and 'wait and hope to be dragged inside'. It is the method for gaining access which is the binary of which he can have both options, not the variety of treats therein. Thus this 'both' is not as straightforward as a claim for bisexuality. Instead it refers to the more obviously mutually exclusive options of both taking and waiting – a figurative (and, if we were to decide that the shop is a bakery instead of a sweet shop, then literal) having your cake and eating it. Hopps suggests that 'the singer seems to take pleasure in remaining in the limbo of temptation' (2009, 154 n.59). Here he is both inside and outside at once, doing as he pleases and simultaneously waiting to be approached. Again, Morrissey(?) is both taking part and refusing to take part at the same time.

We can read this more directly sexually as well, in terms of penetration and the speaker's preferred forms of intercourse. Should he 'take' (receive) as he'd like, or should he wait to be invited 'inside' as the penetrative partner? Note, in the options available here, the

inversion of the top/bottom = active/passive relationship of (reductive) conventional wisdom. If he is the receptive partner then he 'takes' as he desires; if penetrative then he waits around, passively, to be enticed inside. But, no strict top or bottom he; our versatile speaker can have both.

### ***Ringleader of the Tormentors***

Morrissey's album *Ringleader of the Tormentors* (Morrissey 2006) features on its cover a monochrome image of the singer, in white-tie, playing a violin. Martino suggests that an image of such 'a serene Morrissey playing violin – "suggests a state of mind verging on the harmonious"', and links this with lines the song 'You Have Killed Me' which appear to speak directly about a sexual relationship that Morrissey is having – apparently (and startlingly) successfully (2011, 238; quoting Beaumont 2006). For Martino this image represents an emotional serenity and harmony that has come to Morrissey now that he has apparently found love. Hawkins however, reads this image as follows:

Poised in the heat of the moment, Morrissey is depicted as the maestro in full flight, dressed in black tie [sic] and looking ever so earnest. Instantly this comes across as an impudent allusion to the world-renowned classical label Deutsche Grammophon, with the cover appropriating a near identical logo and design. More than a touch of parody is invested in the monochrome photo, conceitedly positioning Morrissey as virtuoso instrumentalist within a genre he could not be less a part of – the trained orchestral musician *par excellence*. (2011, 310)

In this reading, the image becomes another example of Morrissey's ironic playing with his position in a cultural hierarchy which looks down on pop music, whilst simultaneously functioning as a self-aggrandising move.

In answer to a fan's question regarding the inspiration for the image Morrissey describes a scene in the film *Humoresque* (Negulesco 1946), 'in which Oscar Levant holds up a copy of a magazine with John Garfield on the front playing the violin, as he does throughout the film. I thought the Garfield picture was so touching, so I tried to copy it' ("Questions Answered" 2007). In the film (an adaptation of the novel by Fanny Hurst) a talented violinist

struggles to find success because he lacks the contacts that would open doors for him in the elite world of classical music. One suspects that had this been a Smiths album the cover image would have been the film still. Here the referenced image is once again incorporated into/appropriated by Morrissey's own.

To these readings I would add the pop-cultural trope of comically expressing melodrama and mock-sympathy through the playing of 'Hearts and Flowers' on the violin. This has led to idioms such as 'spare me the Hearts and Flowers', and 'playing the world's saddest song on the world's smallest violin', and the image of the sad violin appearing in countless films, television programmes and cartoons. For Morrissey – popularly perceived as an exasperating melodramatic miserabilist – to use this image on the album cover is to openly acknowledge this reputation and parody it by appearing exactly as everybody thinks he does, maudlin and self-important. How many people must have mimed the sad violin when a Smiths or Morrissey track is played? There is a delightful cheekiness in this appropriation of the images with which he is mocked.

Further, and especially given this album's close association with Rome, the image also recalls the legend of Nero playing the fiddle while Rome burned.<sup>41</sup> Whilst not historically accurate the story of the emperor playing the violin and ignoring the plight of his people whilst the city was devastated by fire has sunk into popular imagination. The recalling of it here once again presents Morrissey as aloof, separate, a self-absorbed narcissist who either does not notice or does not care that devastation is being wreaked on everyone around him, so involved is he in his own (sad) violin playing. Invoking this story though, also inevitably involves invoking its falsehood. Whilst 'Nero fiddled whilst Rome burned' is widely known, it is also widely known to be apocryphal. Thus, not only does this image embrace (and aid) the popular construction of the self-absorbed 'Morrissey', it also acknowledges it *as* construction. Just as it

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<sup>41</sup> The recording took place in Rome where Morrissey was living at the time, and the songs 'You Have Killed Me' and 'Dear God, Please Help Me' directly reference the city and specific locations or people within it. The cover image features, in tiny letters, the legend, 'Registrato e Mescolato a Roma Estate'.

is perfectly possible to know that Nero as a figure in popular imagination fiddled while Rome burned yet simultaneously know that that is historically untrue, this image asks us to hold Morrissey(?) as cultural text simultaneously with the constructedness of that text. This is Nero writing his own urban legend.

Combining these readings of the one image this album's cover then presents a Morrissey who has: finally found harmony through love; impudently elevated himself into the classical canon; been marginalized from that same elite world; embraced his reputation as a melodramatic miserabilist; set himself apart and become entirely self-absorbed; and all the while flagging this up as a cultural myth. This is a Morrissey well aware of how he is read by both fans and detractors and is active in both building on and ironizing those representations simultaneously. The image, I therefore suggest, situates the album as a meditation on Morrissey's status as Morrissey(?). We might therefore also consider this image in connection another idiomatic violin: Morrissey, arch-manipulator plays us all like one.

### **'You Have Killed Me'**

Much of *Ringleader of the Tormentors*, observes Alexis Petridis 'is given over to fretting about the effect that admitting sexual satisfaction – or, apparently more disastrous still, love - might have on Morrissey's image' (2006). The third track, 'You Have Killed Me', in particular appears to perform an identity crisis brought on by such sexual or romantic serenity. Take this section:

I entered nothing and nothing entered me  
'Til you came with the key  
And you did your best but

As I live and breathe  
You have killed me  
You have killed me  
Yes I walk around somehow  
But you have killed me  
You have killed me

Piazza Cavour, what's my life for?  
(Morrissey 2006)

What is Morrissey's life for if he has a love requited? What could it mean to be Morrissey(?) anymore? The 'Morrissey' who must remain forever romantically and sexually alone, entering nothing and with nothing entering him, is now dead, following the orgasmic arrival of the addressee with the key. As he cries out later in the song: 'Who am I that I come to be here?'

This reading is complicated however, by a recontextualization which took place during a 2013 concert at the somewhat unusual venue of Hollywood High School – a smaller, more intimate venue than one might expect for Morrissey, with a capacity of just 1,800 people. This was filmed (with direction by James Russell) and released as *25Live* to mark twenty-five years of Morrissey's solo career (Russell 2013). The concert therefore spans his career with songs representing each stage of Morrissey's work from The Smiths through his solo albums. Already the framing of this within a legacy concert positions each song performed as an aspect in the cumulative construction of 'Morrissey'. 'You Have Killed Me' in particular though is given an additional set of associations by the venue, the preamble with which Morrissey introduces the song and the alterations to the lyrics he makes during the performance.

Hopps observes that often, in live performance, Morrissey

delights in travesty his own lyrics, with bizarre noises, acts of phonetic violence, and outright alterations, which fundamentally destabilize not only a song's meaning (for what status do such alterations have? – is it parody? is it whimsy? Is it a revelation?) but also meaningfulness *as such*, since they suggest a playing with signifiers without commitment to meaning. Indeed, what we can see in Morrissey's habit of altering his lyrics in live performances is a perpetual usurpation of textual authority and something of a return to the radical instability of oral literature, which is reconstituted with each performance and has no definitive 'original' text. (2009, 25–26)

In the *25Live* version of 'You Have Killed Me' the performance goes beyond the altering of some lyrics to a specific piece of framing which functions to readdress the song, shifting the killer-object 'you' from presumed lover to institutional education. The aptness of a school as site for the legacy gig is referenced in Morrissey's preamble to 'You Have Killed Me' in which he frames the song in the context of institutional oppression rather than (or as well as) an identity lost to love.

Preamble is not quite the right word here: what is particularly striking about the discussion of the school is that it appears not so much between songs, but explicitly *as part of* 'You Have Killed Me'. The previous song over, the band launch into the recognisable opening notes of 'You Have Killed Me'. However, they abruptly stop playing and the notes sustain whilst Morrissey snarls his way through the following short speech, towards the end of which the band start up the song again.

[*False intro*]

You know - Do you know that you never, ever, ever, escape from school? No matter how old you are it stays with you forever and crushes and crushes and crushes, crushes you down. Well it did me anyway.

[*Begin Intro proper*]

I'm still alive! Only just! I'm still alive! (Russell 2013 my transcription)

In this performance 'You Have Killed Me' responds to experiences in the state education system. What has killed Morrissey here is the bullying of the Vincent Morgans rather than the serenity and harmony of love. In a concert which looks back on Morrissey's entire career to date, he returns to a school and inserts into a song about his figurative death lines about how he was repeatedly crushed by, and cannot escape his own school days.

In this new framing narrative 'You Have Killed Me' becomes both an acknowledgement of how much damage has been caused by his schooling, and also a resistant and determined cry that shows its limitations – 'I'm still alive!' In the previous reading of the song Morrissey can 'walk around somehow' in spite of being killed – in this framing he can do so because he is 'still alive', albeit 'only just'. Note the changes in tense here too: the damage imparted by the school system is not something that is restricted to a past moment in childhood. Even though schooldays may be long behind him, he has not escaped from its crushing power – 'no matter how old you are' it *still* crushes and crushes. The process of crushing which institutional education represents is an ongoing pressure for Morrissey here; an ongoing present where the past returns not as memory but as continual effect. He is not still living with the effects of having *been* crushed as a child, but rather he is still *being* crushed by the same crushers who were crushing then. In the next breath though, Morrissey speaks from a bisexual



moment beyond the re-present past – ‘well it did me anyway’ – because now, in this moment on stage Morrissey is still alive.

While the lines ‘I entered nothing, and nothing entered me / Till you came with the key’ make a clear sexual allusion, in this performance Morrissey removes some of the ambiguity by altering them on their second iteration to ‘I entered no one and nobody entered me’. Given the wider framing of oppressive schooling methods which one lives through again and again over a lifetime and cannot escape, making these lines more explicitly sexual invites a more disturbing reading of child sexual abuse. Read alongside allusions to that effect made in *Autobiography*, this becomes all the more plausible.

Each day is Kafka-esque in its nightmare, and the school offers nothing at all except a lifelong awareness of hate as a general truth. [. . .] Mr Kijowski [is a] physical education instructor ostensibly [. . .]. Young and unmarried, he is obsessed with homosexuality – that it should be traced and uncovered, named and shamed [. . .] and yet the most obvious homosexual behaviour reveals itself in Mr Kijowski himself, as each PE lesson closes and the obligatory communal showering is enforced [. . . and he] pushes his way through this cramped room of naked boys. Mr Sweeney is also a physical education teacher, and unmarried, but is less obsessively homosexualist, although it is commonly noted how he stands and stares and stands and stares at showering boys when neither standing nor staring is necessary. One day during five-a-side, I [. . .] crash down on my right hand. This stirs a blip of compassion from Mr Sweeney, who then takes me to his private office, whereupon he proceeds to massage my wrist with anti-inflammatory cream. At 14 I understand the meaning of the unnecessarily slow and sensual strokes, with eyes fixed to mine, and I look away, and the moment passes. Shortly thereafter, drying myself off after a shower, Mr Sweeney leans into my mid-region to ask ‘*What’s that scar down your stomach, Steven?*’ – but his eyes are lower, and these are the moments that cause you to check certain words in dictionaries, and for the first time you are forced to consider yourself to be the prize, or the quarry. (2013, 59–60)

This is not the place to debate whether or not Steven Morrissey was sexually assaulted by his teachers as a child. What this passage does show is that whatever the truth of events may have been, for Morrissey as he curates himself here, the experience of institutional authority was not just oppressive and crushing, but overtly sexualised.

In this reading Morrissey entered nothing/no one and nothing/nobody entered him until the Vincent Morgans ‘came with the key’. But while these ‘enterings’ signify physical acts of sexual abuse they also function figuratively as the construction of Morrissey(?). The oppressive structures of state-controlled socialisation are the key which open Morrissey(?) up

to the world. That he is 'entered' by such forces suggests the internalisation of heteronormative power structures that we saw also in 'I can have both'. The sexualised state does not oppress bodies from the outside (although it does that too), but rather opens and enters them and installs itself within. But conversely it is this which also allows Morrissey(?) to enter others – in word, in song, as social function. Not only does sexualised authority come with the key to open him up so as to install itself within him, it also becomes the key to understanding him subsequently as a social function constituted by but apart from and resistant to this authority.

Hence, a slightly rosier version of his killing becomes apparent. 'And you did your best but [. . .] you have killed me': Morrissey's death is not the result of his abusive and sexualized schooling relentlessly crushing him down in order to appropriately socialize him – rather it is a result of the *failure* of this normative socialization. He has not been successfully shaped into the good subject, living the one true free life. And since, as we have seen, there are only certain kinds of lives which can register as a (narratable) 'life', anyone who finds themselves outside those narrow bounds, is, by nature, 'killed'. What we see in this reading then is acknowledgment of the role that dominant discourses play in constructing desire, even as those desires may fall outside, and actively resist, the very boundaries within which they were constructed.

### **'At Last I Am Born'**

Morrissey is dead; long live Morrissey. Concluding *Ringleader of the Tormentors* is 'At Last I Am Born'. If, on one level at least, 'You Have Killed Me' wonders what role Morrissey can possibly play now he has actually found love, 'At Last I Am Born' – described by Nicholas Greco as 'a triumphant end to an album dominated by notions of death and *lamentations* toward God' (2011, 72) – seems to accept the new arrangement and put the old Morrissey behind it. For Martino this song 'is a sort of confession about the suffered achievement of a state of physical

and emotional serenity' (2011, 238), now that Morrissey is in a relationship and living the one, true free life.

Hopps notes that 'over the years Morrissey has repeatedly insisted that in some fundamental sense his life has never quite come into being (he speaks, for example, of being a ghost, of a "half-life," of being "scarcely born," of "not actually living" and of a life "not even begun")' (2009, 11). In-between 'You Have Killed Me' and 'At Last I Am Born', Morrissey is once again a spectre. Hopps argues that the spectral is central to an understanding of Morrissey since 'the radical indeterminacy of his lyrics is mirrored by the elusive spectrality of his persona, which informs and further destabilizes the lyrics, which in turn unsettle even as they constitute his persona' (290). Pamela Thurschwell argues that there are clear 'connections between the liminal status of ghosts and adolescents', since

if ghosts exist uneasily between the worlds of the living and the dead, then adolescents exist uneasily between childhood and maturity. For both adolescents and ghosts, we might argue, "time is out of joint." Growing up, of course, always means growing up toward death.

However, not only is time layered and complicated for ghosts and adolescents, but space is also awkwardly arranged, for where do ghosts and adolescents "properly" belong? (2013, 149)

Such ghostly/adolescent unsettled, disjointed time is evident in 'At Last I Am Born' through another instance of the self-centred, self-mythologizing time-slip, which is later used to great effect in the publishing of *Autobiography*.

The second and third lines of the song – 'historians note / I am finally born' – are at once both an observation and command. 'Historians note' sees Morrissey speaking directly to/about the historians of the future who will come to mark this moment as his birth. At the same time however he is speaking to/about historians of the present who use their position to write and rewrite the past. In this bi-temporal moment the present is being written from the future (by command from the present), and the past being written from that same present. This is a bold claim to the historical significance of the birth of Morrissey, in the moment of its occurrence, just as *Autobiography* is a Classic at its moment of publication. Nevertheless there

is also a bitterness here: while Morrissey has been alive and culturally significant for a long time, it is only *now* that historians note that he is born; he only comes into the kind of being that is recognised by the gatekeepers of history as a 'life' now that he can reject what it is that he has been up to this point – now that love has killed him. If this is news to the historians however, there is another constituency, the vulgarians, for whom Morrissey being born is common knowledge: 'vulgarians know / I am finally born'. The unrefined and ill-mannered are already well aware of his coming.

The song mockingly recalls and rejects the 'old' Morrissey who 'once was a mess / of guilt because of the flesh', and who

once used to chase  
affection withdrawn  
but now I just sit back and yawn  
because I am born, born, born  
[ . . . ]  
I once thought that time  
accentuates despair  
but now I don't actually care  
because I am born, born, born  
(2006)

The image of Morrissey sitting back and yawning, not caring about affection, sex and despair is delightfully incongruous. As such, it is both triumphant but also scarcely believable. The mocking primarily takes the form of the finally-born Morrissey parodying, in the spoken section which occurs twice in the song, the voice of the old one. Marked out in the printed text with quotation marks, and on the recording spoken in a quiet, tired, manner quite distinct from the direct and confident delivery of the sung verses (which are accompanied by a military march), this repeated section calls out the 'old' Morrissey for being repetitive and boring.

"Look at me now  
from difficult child  
to spectral hand  
to Claude Brasseur  
blah, blah, blah, blah..."  
(2006)

This is neither the first time nor last time Morrissey has used such techniques of course.<sup>42</sup>

Hopps draws attention to Morrissey's habit of using such 'etceterizing gestures' – in the present case 'blah, blah, blah, blah' – in order to interrupt himself and to announce the abandonment of the previous utterance (2009, 157). In relation to a different song, but which stands as well here, Hopps argues that

what we see in Morrissey's persona in his later solo career is a strange persistence of what he 'was' alongside his divergence from it. And each of these aspects of his later persona is capable of placing quotation marks around the other. In this way, Morrissey is able, without visible sign, to be more than he 'is,' to do more than he's doing, and say more than he's saying. (2009, 52)

In this instance the technique creates a significant tension between the killed and the born Morrisseys. Given the quotation marks and the different delivery style it would seem that this section contains lines that are being attributed to the old Morrissey, which the newly-born one now mocks and rejects. And yet, the etceterizing blah, blah, blah, blah appears *within* the (printed and musical) quotation, suggesting that, in fact, the *old* Morrissey was bored of himself.

On the one hand, this reads as a straightforward parody: new-Moz takes on what he perceives as the character of old-Moz, delivering a repetitive, attention-seeking, enigmatic, self-consciously poetic and allusive line and then draws attention to the failings of this by performing it monotone, in a tired deadpan voice and (not) concluding it with a series of 'blahs'. Where this breaks down however, is that the self-parody is so successful that the repetitive, attention-seeking, enigmatic, self-consciously poetic and allusive line which draws attention to itself then demands the attention it seeks. The parody of enigma produces enigma; setting it apart from the rest of the performance achieves just that – it is set apart from the rest of the performance. While ostensibly this is so it can be laughed at, in practice it simultaneously functions to elevate it – particularly to any listener (or Morrissey himself earlier

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<sup>42</sup> We might consider, for example, The Smiths', 'Stop Me If You Think You've Heard This One Before' from 1987, or 2009's solo track, 'You Were Good In Your Time'.

in the album on 'You Have Killed Me') who may be cautious about what the post-Morrissey Morrissey might be like (or what he might be *for*).

And so, more than any other part of the lyric which is comparatively straightforward and direct, it is the section of self-parody, flagged up as tired and boring, that most elicits an 'ooh, I wonder what he *means!*?' What does boring old Morrissey *mean* that he has gone from screaming child to spectral hand (at Belshazzar's feast, writing on the wall?), to French actor Claude Brasseur? What connections might these seemingly incongruous allusions have, and how do they relate to the apparent suggestion that they have been the trajectory of Morrissey's life or career prior to this new birth? And so here Morrissey, as so often, gets the best of both worlds: his parody of his own intertextuality, of deepness and vacuousness, is a joke at his own expense, and yet it still works as the kind of enigmatic and allusive Morrissey-esque line it mocks.

The new life is always haunted by the previous one it rejects. And what is it exactly that he is being born into? The 'one, true, free life' does not, after all, sound very much like something Morrissey would sign-up to; it sounds suspiciously like a heterocapitalist progress narrative of authentic identity. The relationship here between 'the one true free life' and the character of the birth is unsettled, due in large part to the ambiguity surrounding the word directly preceding the phrase. The printed lyrics have it as 'living' –however, as stated, Morrissey regularly changes words, or else delivers them in a twisted, tortured pronunciation so as to unfix its meaning. This word is variously decipherable as either 'living' or 'leaving'. Woronzoff interprets it as the latter and suggests that in 'leaving' this life Morrissey provides a new narrative, since

the free life that is constructed from dominant discourses is not free at all. But the moment one realizes that a life cannot neatly fit into a binary, then this is the moment of rebirth. This type of narrative, one which questions, plays with, throws away and recycles dominant structures, creates a powerful influence on those who accept it as a new alternative to what is commonly considered the truth. (2011, 274)

Once again Morrissey is our insider-outsider, our spectral adolescent, both living this life and leaving it; haunted by his own persona which in turn constructs the conditions of its own haunting.

The act and art of being 'born' has its own spectres of course, its own haunting. However, rather than the haunting by inevitable death that must in some sense accompany any birth, in this instance I refer to linguistic hauntings – intertextual traces carried by the word 'born'. In the written text and title the word given is 'born', but given that these are primarily words to be heard rather than read, there are several homophones which are worth bearing in mind.

As well as the moment of birth, this song also marks the point at which Morrissey is finally borne, endured: someone, at last, can finally bear Morrissey, and can love him. In doing so though, in ensuring that he is borne, the same person kills him, albeit in a way that leads to him being (re)born. Bourne or bourn also means, as noun, a boundary a limit, and as verb, to set limits to, to bound. This then is also the moment at which Morrissey(?) has become restricted, limited, by finding and accepting normative romantic love. By entering into a relationship with another, Morrissey(?) has become fixed, bounded, limited, tied into normative discourse which demands that we find relations as a couple, following the 'one, true, free' narrative of normative romance, and living happily ever after. Further, the noun bourn/e can also refer to 'limit or terminus of a race, journey, or course; the ultimate point aimed at, or to which anything tends; destination, goal' ("Bourne | Bourn, n.2" 2014).

Morrissey here, at the moment of birth has reached the end of the journey. In finding love Morrissey is over – he has been killed, reached the ultimate end. But this narrative is a cyclical one in which the end causes the start.

However, this also gives us the reading of Morrissey *as* ultimate end: Morrissey(?), figure of a liveable, textually immature bisexuality, as the point to which we must aim; a journey narrative in which one always tends to a destination that, by its nature, deconstructs

itself as such. This is not a cyclical narrative in which the end becomes the beginning, thus still reifying the heteronarrative end, but rather a journey in which each point continually constitutes itself, whilst deconstructing its locatedness. *Ringleader of the Tormentors*, and these two songs from it in particular, therefore demonstrate both an acceptance that Morrissey(?) as cultural entity must cease to function if the questions which constitute him are answered whilst simultaneously pulling apart the assumptions which lead to these questions in the first place.



## CHAPTER FIVE

A Cock and Balls Story

Bisexual Camp in *The Stranger's Child*

### Gay Reading

Alan Hollinghurst has suggested that there is 'a lot in *The Stranger's Child* which is rather liminal, [. . .] there's quite a lot of bisexuality' (Moss 2011). Despite this however, the words bisexual or bisexuality appear exactly never in the 576 pages. A number of the characters display what we might reasonably consider bisexual behaviour but bisexuality in this novel is unnamed, perhaps unnameable. Rewritten as gay, queer or an immature, transitional identity, the text's unnameable bisexuality speaks to a contemporary moment in which bisexuality remains culturally illegible, subsumed under different narratives. Far from an unfortunate act of bi erasure however, I read the novel's approach as a critique of the personal and cultural narrative processes which lead to such erasure in the first place.

I claim no knowledge of any particular intentions Hollinghurst may have in this novel, nor attempt to ascertain them. But the fact that he explicitly names bisexuality when discussing the text, but (presumably deliberately) does not use the term within it invites further exploration. Hence, I *re/deposition* *The Stranger's Child* as a response to the mainstreaming of a gay identity complicit in bisexual erasure. In so doing I propose the lens of 'bisexual camp' and, drawing on the paratextual elements surrounding the novel – the reviews, the interviews and the 'Alan Hollinghurst' of popular imagination (which work to situate this novel in precisely the gay context which, I would argue, it undermines) – I argue for the novel as a bitextual camp response to the erasure and cultural illegibility of contemporary bisexuality.

*The Stranger's Child* is divided into five sections; each of these takes place over a relatively short period of time – a weekend, a summer, for example – but with significant gaps in time. Hollinghurst explains that he 'loved the idea of leaving the characters at one point and then joining them 10, 15 years later without any real explanation; making the reader work out what's happened to them' (O'Keeffe 2011). The five sections ('Two Acres'; Revel; 'Steady, boys, steady!'; Something of a Poet; The Old Companions), take place in the following years,

respectively: 1913; 1926; 1967; 1979-80; 2008. In the first section George Sawle comes home from Cambridge for the holidays, bringing his aristocratic friend and secret lover, Cecil Valance to stay for the weekend. As Emma Brockes describes, Cecil is 'a narcissist, a charming nymphomaniac' (2011), and also something of a poet in the Rupert Brooke mould; George's impressionable 16 year old sister Daphne becomes infatuated with him. At the end of the weekend Cecil writes, in Daphne's autograph book, a poem about the house, *Two Acres*, which is also ostensibly a love poem to her.<sup>43</sup> The subsequent sections of the novel deal with the repercussions of this weekend, and with Cecil's literary reputation through the years as *Two Acres* enters the national consciousness and, later, as discarded – apparently more explicit – verses written to George, not Daphne, re-surface. After the first section Cecil is absent from the novel following his offstage death in WWI but he remains a presence throughout. As Elsa Cavalié describes, 'although the poet is only "physically" present in the first section [. . .] Cecil is the core of the novel, for his personality, love affairs and literary production are endlessly discussed and reappraised' (2012).

As each section jumps forward in time the characters try and fail to piece together various 'truths' about the past, a process which for many of them involves writing about Cecil. Georges Letissier suggests that here 'Hollinghurst toys with the idea that there may remain outrageous secrets concealed in the past, possibly holding their own measure of truth [. . . but which] are destined to stay forever beyond the grasp of history' (2013, 9), and by the end of the novel no character has successfully got to the bottom of any final truth. George, who becomes an historian, publishes a heavily redacted and 'de-gayed' collection of Cecil's letters. Daphne goes on to marry three times – first to Cecil's younger brother Dudley with whom she has children (although we later learn that one of these children may secretly be Cecil's) – and publishes a memoir of her relationship with Cecil. Paul Bryant, introduced as a closeted, young, gay man in 1967, goes on to write a scandalous biography of Cecil which outs him (and many

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<sup>43</sup> 'Two Acres' is the name of the house whereas *Two Acres* (without the inverted commas) is the poem.

others) as gay. Nigel Dupont, whom we meet as a schoolboy in 1967, has, by the concluding section in 2008, become a prestigious academic at Sussex University who began his publishing career with an edited edition of Cecil's work (including the previously lost 'queer' verses).

These brief examples, which I shall return to more closely below, demonstrate the novel's concern with literary histories and legacies and with the literal writing and rewriting of lives. It is primarily in this conceit of having numerous characters writing their own versions of Cecil's and their own pasts that we see the emergence throughout the text of what Theo Tait describes as

a sort of ironic meditation on the evolution of literary memory. It shows how the poem and the original incident behind it are mythologised, and the myth is made official. Later comes the revisionist version [. . .]. The myths are partially corrected, but new myths replace some of the old ones, and new fashions unbalance the historical record just as the old ones did. (2011)

As we shall see this re/writing of literary memory is also held alongside the mechanisms and failings of personal memory, such that the novel explores concurrently the various processes of constructing personal, literary and national identities, of personal and 'official' histories, through uncertain and flawed narrative developments.

Daniel Mendelsohn suggests that Hollinghurst, in previous books and in this one, displays 'a penchant for playing secret gay histories against "history" with a capital H' (2011). Many reviewers have likewise read characters' attempts to write and understand their pasts, as well as the novel's task more broadly, as an excavation of hidden gay histories. Such readings erase the vast amounts of bisexual behaviour in evidence throughout the book. This erasure presents a version of the text in which *The Stranger's Child* is 'a moving social history of gay life in Britain over the last century [which] in different hands [. . .] might be called "Gay Men and the Women Who Marry Them"' (Brookes 2011), or is a book whose 'ideological underpinning [. . . is] the way homosexuality and homosexual lives have been forced to remain secret throughout history' (Mukherjee 2011). The insistence that the novel charts 'a secret history of homosexuality' (Mukherjee 2011), is coupled with a reading like that of Sam Leith's

that ‘more or less every male character in the book is presented as either openly, or covertly, or thwartedly homosexual’ (2011). I assume that some of the characters Leith has in mind here include the bisexual Revel Ralph, the implicitly-bisexual Dudley Valence and Cecil himself – their bisexualities repurposed as thwarted homosexualities.

For Emily Stokes, *The Stranger’s Child* is ‘about the way in which the true gay story behind a poem [. . .] is elided over time’ (2011). James Wood similarly asserts that ‘the real subject of Paul’s biography, as is the real subject of Hollinghurst’s novel, is the hidden homosexuality of [Cecil,] this now idealized literary representative’ (2011). I suggest that readings such as these mistake the activities of the characters within the text for the activity of the text itself. Paul Bryant, in his writing of gay biographies, is certainly concerned with uncovering some hidden ‘Gay Truth’, but that is not to say that this process is the same one that the text as a whole enacts. Indeed, the text shows Paul’s efforts to be flawed. As Brookes rightly observes, ‘it would be too slight a conceit if, in the modern-day section of the novel, the big scholarly reveal was that Cecil had slept with men’ (2011), yet this is nevertheless what the Gay Truth reading results in suggesting. I argue instead that this text is precisely *not* about revealing any Gay Truth but in fact shows how the very idea of a Gay Truth is constructed and written over bisexuality at the latter’s expense. It is not the true gay story which is elided, but rather it is the imposition of the True Gay Story which elides bisexuality, since the True Gay Story is still just a story.

I suggest that the assumption of a Gay Truth is bound up with a popular understanding of Hollinghurst as a ‘Gay Writer’ (who as Letissier observes, ‘has become something of an institution’ (2013, 3)), and therefore with a reading of *The Stranger’s Child* as a ‘Gay Novel’ – perhaps in the genre in which Tait suggests Hollinghurst usually writes: ‘gay sex pastoral’ (2011). Moss describes how in their interview

one question [Hollinghurst] refuses to engage with is whether he is still pigeonholed as a gay writer. That was the canard that followed him on his promotional tour for *The Line of Beauty*, when interviewers asked whether his gayness defined him as a writer and every news piece was headlined, “Gay writer wins Booker”. “I have a feeling it’s

changed,” he says. “I spent 20 years politely answering the question, ‘How do you feel when people categorise you as a gay writer?’ and I’m not going to do it this time round. It’s no longer relevant.” (Moss 2011)

It is no longer relevant in part because of huge social changes in the UK over the last decades which have led to gay representation becoming more mainstream and also, connectedly, because as Hollinghurst claims he is ‘not writing such completely gay [novels] anymore’ (O’Keeffe 2011), and ‘feel[s] that gay writing is already dissolving into the main body of writing’ (Mcgrath 2011). This is a Hollinghurst acutely aware of the way in which he is popularly represented, of his ‘reputation as an explicitly gay writer’ (Anthony 2011), and of his own engagement with that reputation through both his writing and his public appearances.

Mendelsohn wonders whether ‘like many of us gay men over the past generation, with its galvanizing traumas and its great successes, too – Hollinghurst the writer can no longer quite decide who he stands with: the “queer” outsiders or the establishment’ (2011).<sup>44</sup> I contend that *The Stranger’s Child* bitextually rejects this choice; Hollinghurst can have both. I argue that *The Stranger’s Child* functions decidedly not as a ‘re-gaying of 20<sup>th</sup>-century history’ (Leith 2011), but as a response to the cultural positioning of Hollinghurst as a Gay Writing institution. The novel’s bisexualities stage a critique of their inevitable interpretation within the terms of the Gay Novel. Hollinghurst claims that ‘there is a particular kind of gay reader who would like me to keep writing the same book over and over again, which I’ve never had any interest in doing’ (Baron 2012); it is my contention that *The Stranger’s Child* operates as a response and rebuke to this Gay Reader.

While Hollinghurst here is probably referring particularly to male homosexual identified individuals I want to extend idea of the ‘gay reader’ here slightly. I therefore capitalise the term to refer not to individual readers – who may or may not be male, or gay – but to a particular reading position which approaches the text with a set of assumptions about Alan Hollinghurst as a ‘Gay Writer’, and therefore about the text as a ‘Gay Novel’ which will

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<sup>44</sup> It is telling that it is as ‘us gay men’ that Mendelsohn wonders this.

feature explicit Gay sex.<sup>45</sup> It is such a reading position, evident in the reviews quoted above, which understands the novel as a search for a Gay Truth. To anyone approaching the text thus, *The Stranger's Child* is frustrating, with a narrative structure which fails to resolve or finally cohere and which refuses to provide what it sets the Gay Reader up to want – particularly in the way sex is presented. This has led to suggestions that 'it has rather less bite than its predecessors' (Tait 2011), and that Hollinghurst has 'relinquished some of the outrage' evident in his earlier novels (Letissier 2013, 9).<sup>46</sup>

### **Irony Quivers**

Letissier notes 'the potentialities of "camp" as a countercultural impulse within Alan Hollinghurst's aesthetic' (2013, 3–4), and I do want to propose *The Stranger's Child's* response to the Gay Reader as a camp one. In this instance however, I argue that the aesthetic is of a particularly bisexual version of camp, in which the relationships between mainstream and gay cultures that are played with in 'standard' camp practices, are replaced by a teasing and teasing out of the relationship between gay and bi cultures. By 'camp' I mean that which, albeit in many different forms and to different extents, is traditionally understood to have specific historical (and named) connections to (primarily male) homosexuality (see Cleto 1999, 5). This is not to say that that bisexuals don't do camp, or have not been part of this history, but rather that camp is primarily understood in the cultural mainstream through its relation to homosexuality rather than to bisexuality (and this may well be often because that bisexuality has been rewritten as gay). Bisexual camp is a version of camp in which the primary relation is between gay and bisexual, as opposed to the more usual straight and gay. Bisexual camp may thus be considered both as a subset of camp and as something of an inversion of it.

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<sup>45</sup> It is nevertheless likely that a majority of Gay Readers may be gay readers.

<sup>46</sup> It is worth noting at this point that I say all this as a reader who first encountered this text very much from the position of the Gay Reader and who felt those frustrations keenly as I was repeatedly denied the Gay (Sex) Novel I wanted. It was this deep frustration which prompted the reencounter with the novel in this chapter.

I propose that, in a mutually constitutive *re/depositioning*, bisexual camp gives us a productive way of reading the functioning of bisexuality and narrative in *The Stranger's Child*, but equally that a reading of *The Stranger's Child* offers us these new, bisexual ways of thinking camp.<sup>47</sup> In essence, if camp, as 'a survival mechanism, a form of queer resistance in a world where the systems surrounding gender and sexuality are rigidly policed' (Wolf 2013, 286), can be understood as a gay response to, and method for both coping with and critiquing, the straight culture which oppresses it, then bi-camp is an equivalent bisexual response to a now mainstreamed gay culture which likewise marginalizes bisexuality and strictly polices a monosexual system.

I do not propose a fixed practice or set of practices for what finally constitutes bisexual camp, nor what definitive properties might make certain texts, acts or entities available for inclusion or exclusion from a list of bi-camp objects. As Andy Medhurst so memorably observes: 'trying to define Camp is like attempting to sit in the corner of a circular room. It can't be done, which only adds to the quixotic appeal of the attempt' (1991, 154). That said, 'most of us know it when we see, hear, feel or do it' (1997, 276). For Medhurst

the problem with camp is that it is primarily an experiential rather than an analytical discourse. Camp is a set of attitudes, a gallery of snapshots, an inventory of postures, a *modus Vivendi*, a shop-full of frocks, an arch of eyebrows, a great big pink butterfly that just won't be pinned down. Camp is primarily an adjective, occasionally a verb, but never anything as prosaic, as earth-bound, as a noun. (1991, 155)

Fabio Cleto further observes that

camp hasn't lost its relentless power to frustrate all efforts to pinpoint it down to stability, and all the 'old' questions remain to some extent unsettled: about how camp might be defined and historicised, about its relation – be it ontological or happenstantial – to homosexuality (is it an exclusively gay cultural mode of representation, or what? if so, how subversive is it and how much does it comply, or has it historically complied, with the compulsory heterosexual, and both gyno- and homophobic, dominant structures of interpellation?), where and in what forms it can be traced, and about its relation to postmodern epistemology and theories of textuality and subjectivity. (1999, 2–3)

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<sup>47</sup> I use the terms 'bisexual camp' and 'bi-camp' interchangeably.



I make no attempt to present a full set of answers to these questions, nor to provide a complete definition or history of British camp. Camp is deeply ambivalent and in-between, both radical and conservative, subversive and regressive, but that is what makes a bi engagement with it so necessary. The aspects I discuss here are not the extent of camp, nor are they always camp; nevertheless they provide points of entry into the bitextuality of *The Stranger's Child*, and offer ways of conceptualising and contextualising the text's responses to the Gay Reader and to bisexual erasure more broadly.

Cavalié notes that 'the mode of the novel is irony' (2012), and the degree to which the whole text is ironically imbued is a key contributing factor to understanding its bitextuality. Hollinghurst explains, thus: 'I think I must do a lot of it unconsciously. [. . .] It's not something I deliberately work at, but I do enjoy creating a tone of voice which has all sorts of quivers of irony in it – that's how I want to write' (Baron 2012). The language with which Hollinghurst here describes his pleasure in the creation of his own ironic voice with its unconscious quivering seems already to gesture towards a relationship between writing and desire, irony and sexuality.<sup>48</sup> We might therefore carry this through to briefly consider irony as it pertains more particularly to bisexuality and therefore to bi-camp.

Bi Academic Intervention suggest that

irony is a particular – though by no means exclusive – bisexual approach to representation. Postmodernism's founding tenet, that we are in a media-rich culture so saturated with images that all we can do to make them anew is recycle and ironize them, has a particular resonance for bisexuals. There is still a poverty of images of bisexuality, and the recycling which generates contemporary bisexual imaginaries is often a quotation from other imaginaries – lesbian, gay, straight, swinging. Nevertheless, bisexuals currently have an unfashionable investment in the authenticity of their emotions which places us on a secluded spot on a map of contemporary sexualities [. . .] Bisexuals have still not achieved that level of saturation and stability which allows us to surrender to ironic play, nor reached a level of power where ironic representation can be risked. On the other hand, in developing this 'authentic' sense of self, bisexuals do seem to have been adept at utilizing irony in particular ways. (1997, 10)

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<sup>48</sup> When Hollinghurst uses it in *The Stranger's Child*, the word 'quivers' invariably connotes uncertain sexuality – my favourite example being: 'She had a quiver of sexual energy about her, unexpectedly tucked under her crushed velvet hat' (536).

I find it striking here that the irony of bisexuality is taken to be the irony of postmodernism, rather than the irony of camp, or of both. Medhurst compares postmodernism and camp as follows:

Postmodern aesthetics can easily be confused with camp, but while camp grows from a specific cultural identity, postmodern discourses peddle the arrogant fiction that specific cultural identities have ceased to exist. Camp has been conceptualized from the historical, palpable, raw material of gay men's cultural experiences – without those experiences there is no camp, only things that resemble it or try to borrow its name. (1997, 290)

I do not want to disagree too much with Medhurst's point here about the origins of camp through gay male cultural experience other than to point out that presumably many of the gay men referred to here were bisexual. Bisexual cultural experiences though are often characterised by such 'borrowing', from gay, from straight (Bi Academic Intervention 1997, 204). The bi-camp that I read in *The Stranger's Child* is rooted in contemporary bisexual cultural experiences of erasure, invisibility and hypersexualization.

Bi Academic Intervention go on to chart particular bisexual utilizations of irony as an

'ironic authenticity': an acting out of the self which is conscious of its own status as performance – but no less real for all that. Such an identity is 'on the edge' of authenticity and of artificiality. It's an identity which inhabits discourses (heterosexuality, homosexuality) where it is not recognized. An identity which says one thing and means another (to those in the know). Bisexual identities are, in short, formed through an ironic imaginary. [. . .] The bisexual imaginary is both iconic (setting up an image) and ironic (destabilizing that image), without having to choose between the two. (1997, 11)

Well, colour me a queen but that sounds pretty camp to me. In a manner similar to that in which homosexual communities have used camp to both survive and ironize a dominant straight culture which persecutes them, I read this ironic authenticity as a bi-camp equivalent, responding not only to heterosexuality but also homosexuality (and so therefore also to gay camp), whose spaces – which together are, after all, essentially *all* spaces – exclude or fail to recognise bi.

### What Are You Insinuating?

One of the key historical functions of camp, at least in its relation to queer communities has been as a coding practice, a dual language which communicates queerness to those in the know, whilst remaining hidden (or at least plausibly deniable), to mainstream culture. But where once same-sex desire needed to be concealed and would operate through codes and secret dual languages, the world in which *The Line of Beauty* (2004) wins the Booker prize is a very different one. *The Stranger's Child* might be seen as a post-Hollingshurst text, following the mainstreaming of explicit gay content. The characters are continually re-writing bisexuality as gayness or queerness (which again, really comes to mean gayness), at the same time as readers are doing *exactly the same thing*. And so the bisexuality here operates as gayness once did as a code, as a dual language, under the surface. Here though this is not limited to certain code words, actions or descriptions but rather that the text's entire language and narrative structure comes to stand for it.

Greg Graham-Smith points to the opening passages of the novel to argue that same-sex desire is built into the text itself. In his reading of the novel's opening

having had her imagination stirred by reading poetry and feverishly staging her first longed-for encounter with Cecil, Daphne becomes a stand-in for Hollingshurst himself as author as she fictionalizes a fatal reason for Cecil's delayed arrival. The fact that she is unable to envisage a definite cause for the delay is significant. The exact news remains concealed, in keeping with the open secret that will eventually come to infuse the rest of the novel: it emerges later that the real reason for Cecil and George's lateness is their deliberate postponement of their arrival at "Two Acres" to enjoy some time on their own as lovers. (2012, 8)

He couples the indeterminacy of Daphne's imagined fatal scenario, with connotations of concealment derived from Cecil's surname, Valance (which he defines as 'a decorative heading to conceal the top of curtains and fixtures', although a bed-skirt might be a more common usage) to suggest that 'Gayness, the concealed reality has already been insinuated into the folds of the text'(8). I welcome the suggestion that the same-sex desire is 'insinuated into the folds of the text'; however, I reject the idea that what is insinuated into this text is 'Gayness' rather than bisexuality. The passage in question reads as follows:

But he must have missed his train, or at least his connection: she saw him pacing the long platform at Harrow and Wealdstone, and rather regretting he'd come. Five minutes later, as the sunset sky turned pink above the rockery, it began to seem possible that something worse had happened. With sudden grave excitement she pictured the arrival of a telegram, and the news being passed around; imagined weeping pretty wildly; then saw herself describing the occasion to someone, many years later, though still without quite deciding what the news had been. (Hollinghurst 2011, 3)

Here, in a microcosm of the narrative as a whole we see the absence of Cecil in the present as the catalyst for a writing of the past which is then projected into the future; and all of this is performed 'without quite deciding' what that past had been.<sup>49</sup> Rather than the truth being concealed I want to suggest that what we have here is the truth being absent, unknown, so Daphne writes her own, filling in the narrative gaps.

This possible truth however, is finally undecidable, not because Cecil is concealing gayness but because of the unintelligibility of bisexuality. When proposing that through Daphne's imagined scenario gayness is insinuated into the folds of the text, Graham-Smith claims that this is 'without, at this point, either Daphne or the reader knowing about it' (2012, 8). I can accept that this 'gayness' is not known about by Daphne, but can the same be said for a reader? For the Gay Reader there is a degree of expectation of gay content. I suggest that this extends to a reasonable assumption of a sexual relationship between George and Cecil from the moment the two male names are mentioned in proximity. In this case it is in the novel's second sentence: 'It wasn't easy: she was thinking all the while about George coming back with Cecil, and she kept sliding down, in small half-willing surrenders, till she was in a heap, with the book held tiringly above her face' (Hollinghurst 2011, 3).

Certainly my own assumption on first reading the novel was that George and Cecil would turn out to be lovers of some kind, and that their delayed arrival would probably be caused by something of a sexual nature. The fact that this turns out to be the case is not then a reveal so much as a confirmation. I approach the text expecting gay, I am quickly presented

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<sup>49</sup> Graham-Smith reads it as a 'fatal' event, but it doesn't necessarily have to be fatal, and, even if it was, it could just as easily be George who has died.

with the names of two males who are somewhere together and are late, I assume they are fucking and I am then shown to have assumed correctly. What I am wrong about though is the gayness. Because I presume a gay subject I write gay over what is, as we shall see, in fact bisexual. So, while I agree that desire is insinuated into the text, it is a certain reader (of which I was one) who make that desire a gay one. Thus the bisexuality that *is* insinuated into the folds of the text is done so against the gayness which is presumed to have been.

This opening sets up the complicated relations between gay and bisexual desires which structure the narrative. Cecil and George's same-sex desires are presented to us through Daphne and her own desire for an imagined Cecil. Thus, the presumed gay desire between George and Cecil is presented through the heterosexual desire of Daphne for Cecil. The Gay Reader may assume that the George/Cecil desire is the 'true' one here, and that Daphne's desire for Cecil is unrequited. It turns out of course that this is not the case – Cecil does have several sexual encounters with her. The 'reveal' then is not that Cecil and George are having sex – we assume they will be – the reveal is that Daphne's desire is *also* required. This is not then a narrative concerned with a concealed gayness so much as it is about that gayness being written over bisexuality, in part because of the inability for bisexuality to be legible in the context of the Gay Novel.

This is demonstrated in Daphne's indecision as to the past she creates to explain the absence of Cecil (and we may want to remember here the frequent bisexuality-as-indecision stereotype (Eisner 2013, 44)). Graham-Smith posits the significance of Daphne's being 'unable to envisage a definite cause for the delay' being concealed gayness. I argue instead that this gayness (not necessarily concealed from the reader), is not envisaged by Daphne because of her own desire for Cecil. By this I mean that since she knows her own heterosexual desire for Cecil (which will be reciprocated), homosexual desire becomes impossible to envisage because the two are incompatible. This is also what leads to the Gay Reader invalidating Daphne's

desire since the assumption, from the start, must be that she will be refused. Both her desire for Cecil and George's cannot coexist simply because bisexuality is culturally unintelligible.

This is reflected in Graham-Smith's analysis of the text which seems incapable of conceiving bisexuality at all. Desire in the novel is posited as either homosexual (which he reads primarily through George and Cecil) or 'putatively heterosexual' (through Cecil and Daphne) (2012, 7). The putativity of this heterosexuality is reminiscent of attempts to rewrite bisexuality as *really* gay. Not only are only gay or straight identities allowed, but when one character, Cecil, displays both of them, one must be diminished, invalidated. The desire and relationship between Cecil and Daphne, the putatively heterosexual one, is then subordinated to the *real* desire, which is homosexual.

Graham-Smith reads the misunderstandings surrounding the poem's intended recipient as the failure of heterosexual desire compared with 'gayness [which is] the concealed reality' of the text (2012, 8). As he reads it

the poem, ostensibly written to the young Daphne, George's sister, is actually a covert "love-letter" to George but, as it is written in Daphne's autograph book and deliberately left by Cecil upon his departure for Daphne to find, is taken up, mistakenly, within the circuit of heterosexual exchange [. . .]. Daphne is foregrounded as Cecil's Other [. . .] but her inevitable failure as the cause of desire is doubled in that she is actually a transvestic stand-in, an improvised George. (10)

While it is certainly true that at least one version of the poem is intended for George rather than for Daphne I find the way in which she is diminished here troubling; in this reading Daphne becomes not only an improvised George but an impoverished one. This reading must also actively ignore those parts of the text where it is made clear that Cecil does have interest for Daphne. By the time the poem has been written Cecil has already kissed Daphne (albeit when drunk and in a fashion that takes advantage of her), and they go on to have a further sexual relationship. Why Cecil should pursue Daphne as a stand in for George when he could very well be having George instead (and is, at the same time), is not made clear in Graham-Smith's argument. Why is it that Cecil's relationship with Daphne can only be seen as the lesser stand-in for the one with George despite it being made abundantly clear throughout that he is,

while not directly named as such, bisexual? Indeed, he ‘would fuck anyone’ (Hollinghurst 2011, 456).<sup>50</sup>

This bisexuality is something which Cecil discusses with George quite openly. Here they are discussing Veronica, the parlour-maid at ‘Two Acres’:

‘She’s an attractive young girl,’ said Cecil, in his most reasonable tone.  
 ‘Is she?’  
 ‘Well, to me.’ Cecil gave him a bland smile. ‘But then I don’t share your fastidious horror at the mere idea of a cunt.’  
 ‘No, indeed,’ said George drily, though a blush quickly followed. (72)

Whilst George does not, Cecil finds women attractive and, gentleman that he is, has no problem with their cunts. Graham-Smith, in a reflection of this, performs some remarkable mental gymnastics to avoid reading Cecil as bisexual. For him, Cecil

is a subject who ultimately eludes both men and women: his encrypted gayness and assumed heterosexuality mean that his text-as-body is utilizable for either hetero- or homosexual inscription. In the end, both “versions” are correct, as Cecil ultimately escapes legible sexual signification. His ambiguous body remains absent in the sense of being ultimately unreadable in terms of the hegemonic cultural script. (2012, 10)

It is difficult to tell here whether he is trying incredibly hard to avoid saying ‘bisexual’ or whether the concept is so alien as to be unimaginable; at any rate it certainly does not figure in his idea of *legible* sexual signification. Where I see a novel about the cultural illegibility of bisexuality, Graham-Smith seemingly cannot even read this illegibility *as* bisexual. This reading of gayness requires the erasure of bisexualities that the text makes apparent. I propose instead that it is bisexuality, not gayness that has ‘been insinuated into the folds of the text’, it is bisexuality, not gayness which is signified by ‘the moment suspended in the interstices of an ineffable in-between’(Graham-Smith 2012, 11)

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<sup>50</sup> To be clear I am not proposing Cecil as an example of a ‘positive’ representation of a bisexual necessarily, but his is bisexuality nonetheless.

### A Gentleman's Excessive Cigar

According to Jonathan Dollimore, camp

negotiates some of the lived contradictions of subordination, simultaneously refashioning as a weapon of attack an oppressive identity inherited *as* subordination, and hollowing out dominant formations responsible for that identity in the first instance. So it is misleading to say that camp is the gay sensibility; camp is an invasion of other sensibilities, and works via parody, pastiche, and exaggeration. (Dollimore 1999)

From here, I argue for a reading of *The Stranger's Child* which posits its (non)representation of sex as a parodic exaggeration of the cultural invisibility through which contemporary bisexuality is subordinated, which therefore stages a bi-camp critique of bisexual erasure.

Tait observes a fact about the novel that 'some readers may find shocking':

Hollinghurst 'has radically cut down on the sex, which is mostly shielded by soft focus or euphemism'. He even goes so far as to describe Hollinghurst's apparent 'vows of chastity' here (2011). This 'shocking chastity,'<sup>51</sup> when coupled with the fluidity of the sexualities which are not quite on display is one of the factors which, for me, makes the novel a frustrating one but equally why it holds interest for this project. McGrath suggests that there 'is a gay tryst scene, but by Hollinghurst's standards a pretty tepid one' (2011), and this is because at precisely the moment at which the sex proper is about to occur, Hollinghurst shifts the focus elsewhere, and jumps forward until after the event.

The first incident of this is exemplary. Seventy-eight pages in we are finally with Cecil and George alone in the woods, the Gay Reader finally about to get their first sex scene.

Cecil stopped and shrugged with pleasure, slipped off his jacket and hung it on the upraised claw [of the branch] above him. Then he turned and reached out his hands impatiently.

'That was very good,' muttered Cecil, already standing up – then walking off for a few paces as he roughly straightened his clothes. [. . .] He had a way of distancing himself at once, and seemed almost to counter the bleak little minute of irrational sadness by pretending that nothing had happened. (Hollinghurst 2011, 78)

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<sup>51</sup> A wonderful image in itself. Cf. Morrissey's celibacy.



Having held back for seventy-seven pages and now transitioning from the word 'impatiently', over the blank page-space of the paragraph break and into Cecil's ridiculous post-coital summation, Hollinghurst in this passage is so teasingly toying with the Gay Reader's expectation of explicit sex. But just like Cecil here, Hollinghurst is only pretending that nothing happened. To perceive this as chastity misses what I suggest has actually happened to the sex: it hasn't been removed, it's been *dissolved*. As the structure of the narrative as a whole denies a final resolution so the sex in the text is denied its explicit climax. Instead we have an endless deferral or redirection of climax, it becoming here an extended state rather than a single moment or end point.

I argue that this results in a hypersexualization which bi-camply refuses the heteronarrative. By ostensibly cutting the explicitness the Gay Reader expects and leaving a shockingly chaste absence in its place, Hollinghurst makes the sex even more fundamental than it would otherwise have been and allows sex and desire to permeate the entire narrative. And so instead of sex being confined to explicit sex scenes the ostensible absence places the sex everywhere, or at least *anywhere*. Mendelsohn feels that 'there is something tame about this [novel. . .] By the time you reach the last of its [. . .] pages, you wonder whether a certain vital organ is missing'; for him the book comes to be defined by 'an absent penis' (2011). What Mendelsohn seems to miss is that this particular omission, and its function, is flagged up in the text itself. In the penultimate section Paul Bryant is looking at some pictures given him by a now elderly Daphne, drawn by Revel Ralph (her second husband, bisexual). In particular, Paul notices

a rapid and much more inspired-looking series of drawings, over ten or twelve pages, of a naked young man, lying, sitting, standing, in a range of ideal but natural-looking positions, everything about him wonderfully brought out, except his cock and balls which were consigned to the imagination by a swoop of the pencil, ostentatiously discreet, pretending it wasn't the point. (Hollinghurst 2011, 510)

This perfectly encapsulates Hollinghurst's move from the explicitly gay of former novels to the 'ostentatiously discreet' in this. As with these drawings, the cock and balls that are 'left out' of

*The Stranger's Child* are still very much the point and, like Revel, like Cecil, Hollinghurst is only pretending they aren't.

We also see this relationship between absence and excess mirrored through Cecil and the poem (of which we never see a full version) throughout the novel. They are absent for the vast majority of it but so define the lives, actions and relationships of the other characters that they are excessive even in their absence. Note the particularly bitextual nature of this relationship between absence and excess, both being linked to some of the delegitimizing accusations levelled at bisexuality. Bisexuality, as du Plessis notes, 'seems to lend itself to exaggeration – all or nothing; everyone is bisexual or no one is. Bisexuality carries extreme values' (1996, 19). Just as the characters' lives are entirely shaped by the absence of Cecil, the whole text becomes staggeringly, hilariously sexualized by the 'absence' of sex. *The Stranger's Child* takes the cultural illegibility of bisexuality and ironizes it, making an outrageous bi-camp excess out of apparently absent sexuality to the degree that the entire text functions as bisexual innuendo.

I am not claiming any and all innuendo to be necessarily bitextual in nature but *The Stranger's Child* does stage particular bisexual encounters which frame its camp engagement bisexually.<sup>52</sup> In the second section ('Revel'), Daphne (aged 26) and Eva Riley are in the garden at Corley Court during a party hosted by Daphne and her first husband Dudley Valance. Eva (in a striking resonance with *The Buddha of Suburbia's* Eva Kay), is a fashionable designer known for modernising houses. It has by this point been established that Daphne suspects (with good reason) infidelity on the part of her husband with Eva Riley and so dislikes and distrusts her. The conversation between the two has taken a personal turn, on the subject of their respective marriages, which Daphne finds uncomfortable. There then occurs the following remarkable scene:

They paced on, in apparent amity, whilst Eva perhaps worked out what to say. Her evening bag, like a tiny satchel slung down to the hip, nudged against her with each

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<sup>52</sup> Of course, in another sense innuendo *is* definitionally 'bi-textual'.

step, and evidence about her underclothes, which had puzzled Daphne a good deal, could obscurely be deduced in the warm pressure of Eva's side against her upper arm. She must wear no more than a camisole, no need really for any kind of brassière . . . She seemed unexpectedly vulnerable, slight and slippery in her thin stuffs.

'Can I tempt you?' said Eva, her hand dropping for a second against Daphne's hip. The nacreous curve of her cigarette case gleamed like treasure in the moonlight.

'Oh . . . ! hmm . . . well, all right . . .'

Up flashed the oily flame of her lighter. 'I like to see you smoking,' said Eva, as the tobacco crackled and glowed.

'I'm starting to like it myself,' said Daphne.

'There you are,' said Eva; and as they strolled on, their pace imposed by the darkness more than anything else, she slid her arm companionably round Daphne's waist.

'Let's try not to fall into the fishpond,' Daphne said, moving slightly apart.

'I wish you'd let me make you something lovely,' said Eva.

'What, to wear, you mean?'

'Of course.'

'Oh, you're very kind, but I wouldn't hear of it,' said Daphne. Having her redesign her house was one thing, but her person quite another. She imagined her absurdity, coming down to dinner, kitted out in one of Eva's little tunics.

'I don't know where you get your things mainly now, dear?'

Daphne laughed rather curtly through her cigarette-smoke. 'Elliston and Cavell's, for the most part.'

And Eva laughed too. 'I'm sorry,' she said, and snuggled against her again cajolingly. 'I don't think you know how enchanting you could look.' Now they had stopped, and Eva was assessing her, through the fairy medium of the moonlight, one hand on Daphne's hip, the other, with its glowing cigarette, running up her forearm to her shoulder, where the smoke slipped sideways into her eyes. She pinched the soft stuff of her dress at the waist, where Daphne had felt her eyes rest calculatingly before. In a hesitant but almost careless tone Eva said, 'I wish you'd let me make you happy.'

Daphne said, 'We simply must get back,' a tight stifling feeling, quite apart from the smoke, in her throat. 'I'm really rather cold, I'm most frightfully sorry.' She jerked herself away, dropping her cigarette on the path and stamping on it.

(2011, 214–5)

Up until this point there has been no indication that Eva's interests lie anywhere other than with Dudley but with this scene her presumed heterosexuality gives way to a bisexuality.

Crucially, when describing this scene a few moments later to Revel, Daphne declares: 'I've got to tell you about the oddest scene just now, with old Mrs Riley. I'm absolutely certain she was making love to me.' While clearly intended humorously Daphne's presentation of the scene – which after all really only included some awkward maybe-flirting and double-entendre – as Eva 'making love to' her is nevertheless indicative of the way that the shockingly absent sex permeates into the rest of the text such that the act of sex becomes an act of language (as indeed the more explicit 'carnal' sex of earlier Hollinghurst always was).

When Eva 'makes love' to Daphne it is through the language of 'warm pressure', 'slight and slippery', 'snuggled', 'slipped', 'pinched the soft stuff', 'jerked'. Once this process has begun, brought about as a reaction to the otherwise silent sex, the sex is everywhere. What might we make of: "'Let's try not to fall into the fishpond,'" Daphne said, moving slightly apart'? Once invited to look for the sex (which is what Paul spends his life doing when writing his biography of Cecil) this and indeed a majority of the lines here become, frankly, filthy. The cigarettes in this passage are another not-entirely-subtle carrier of innuendo which has been set up in the opening section of the book in a parallel scene which establishes the bisexual triangle between Daphne, Cecil and George.

This time the 16 year old Daphne has gone into the garden at 'Two Acres' later on in the evening of Cecil's arrival, looking for him and her brother in the dark. Near the hammock she hears 'a sort of moan, just ahead of her, quickly stifled and a run of recognizable giggles; and of course that further smell [. . .], the gentlemanly whiff of Cecil's cigar.' She then overhears them discussing George and Daphne's older brother Hubert and whether he is a 'womanizer' (this, unbeknownst to Daphne is George and Cecil's word for heterosexual, again establishing the following in the context of coded sexual language). George then notices her, and she responds:

'Isn't Cecil with you?' she said artfully.

'Ha . . . !' said Cecil softly, just above her, and pulled on his cigar – she looked up and saw the scarlet burn of its tip and beyond it, for three seconds, the shadowed gleam of his face. Then the tip twitched away and faded and the darkness teemed in to where his features had been, while the sharp dry odour floated wide.

'Are you both in the hammock!' She stood up straight, with a sense that she'd been tricked, or anyway overlooked, in this new game they were making up [. . .]. It would be very easy, and entertaining, to rock them, or even tip them out; though she felt at the same time a simple urge to climb in with them. She had shared the hammock with her mother, when she was smaller, and being read to; now she was mindful of the hot cigar. 'Well, I must say,' she said. The cigar tip, barely showing, dithered in the air like some dimly luminous bug and then glowed into life again, but now it was George's face that she saw in its faint devilish light. 'Oh, I thought it was Cecil's cigar,' she said simply.

George chortled in three quick huffs of smoke. And Cecil cleared his throat – somehow supportively and appreciatively. 'So it was,' said George, in his most paradoxical tone. 'I'm smoking Cecil's cigar too.'

‘Oh really . . .’ said Daphne, not knowing what tone to give the words. ‘Well, I shouldn’t let Mother find out.’

‘Oh, most young men smoke,’ said George. ‘Oh, do they?’ she said, deciding sarcasm was her best option.

[. . .]

‘Would you like a go?’ said Cecil.

[. . .]

‘In the hammock . . . ?’

‘On the cigar.’

‘Really . . .’ murmured George, a little shocked.

‘Oh, I don’t think so!’

Cecil took an exemplary pull on it. ‘I know girls aren’t meant to have them.’

[. . .]

She really didn’t want the cigar, but she was worried by the thought of missing a chance at it. It was something none of her friends had done, she was pretty sure of that.

[. . .]

Now the cigar was being passed to George again.

‘Oh, all right,’ she said.

‘Yes?’

‘I mean, yes, please.’

She leant on George and felt the whole hammock shudder, and held his arm firmly to take the item, taboo and already slightly disgusting, from between his thumb and forefinger. By now she could half-see the two boys squashed together, rather absurd, drunk of course, but also solid and established, like a long-ago memory of her parents sitting up in bed. She had the smell of the thing near her face, almost coughed before she tasted it, and then pinched her lips quickly round it, with a feeling of shame and duty and regret.

‘Oh!’ she said, thrusting it away from her and coughing harshly at the tiny inrush of smoke. The bitter smoke was horrible, but so was the unexpected feel of the thing, dry to the fingers but wet and decomposing on the lips and tongue. George took it from her with a vaguely remorseful laugh. When she’d coughed again she turned and did a more unladylike thing and spat on the grass. (2011, 33–6)

There is a delightful immaturity to this cock-cigar and Hollinghurst is clearly having a ball. On one level then the whole text operates as a campily raised eyebrow and adolescent snigger as, in Nicola Schulman’s words, ‘Cecil’s cigar smoke penetrates the modest house’ (2011).

Along with the sniggering reading of a penis-cigar however, there is also a more intricate functioning of bisexuality here, and of Cecil’s role as its textual figure. The scene operates as an establishing metaphor for the sexual relationships between these characters: Cecil having sex with them both, George resenting Cecil’s relationship with his sister and Daphne being unaware of Cecil’s with George. But the relation with Daphne occurs within a context here of assumed gayness, on the part of George and the Gay Reader. We expect to

find George and Cecil in some sort of sexual encounter in the garden; we expect that Daphne will find them and be either shocked or will not understand; we do not necessarily expect that Cecil will invite her to join in. His statement, 'I know girls aren't meant to have them' recognises the apparently gay context in which this bisexuality occurs. For George and for the Gay Reader *of course* girls aren't meant to have penis-cigars. Is this not, after all, the world the world of the Gay Novel in which only 'most young men smoke' them? But now too, Daphne, a girl, is 'mindful of the hot cigar'. No wonder George is 'shocked' when his boyfriend offers it to his little sister.

Since the invitation (repeatedly prompted by the text) to read for the sex results in the humorous proliferation of sexuality into potentially every word, *The Stranger's Child's* 'shocking chastity' becomes an outrageous excess. *The Stranger's Child* places excessive absence at its heart: bisexuality is never named, but is everywhere; sex is nowhere, thus everywhere; over-the-top Cecil is present largely as an absence. Bi-camp thus responds to the cultural invisibility of bisexuality by playing out that invisibility to an extreme.

### Untimeliness

*The Stranger's Child* is, as Hollinghurst describes, undoubtedly 'a book about time and its workings, and memory and its failings' (Moss 2011). The projects of rethinking bisexuality and rethinking time are linked through both narratives of self and narratives of representation. Thinking bi-camp then means thinking through ways in which the queer model of experienced time I have proposed through *re/depositioning* relates to what we might think of as camp temporalities. So, in the spirit of bisexual camp, and with at least one hand firmly on hip, let's do the Time Warp again by way of the second definition of that phrase.<sup>53</sup>

2. A place which has not changed with the passage of time; a situation in which things are preserved in a form which they characteristically took in the past, but which is now rarely seen or no longer relevant. ("Time Warp, N. and Adj." 2014)

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Here the bisexual time-slip leads to a landscape full of anachronism. This dovetails neatly with what Elizabeth Freeman identifies as the ‘temporally hybrid aspect of camp’, in which

the camp effect depends not only on inverting binaries such as male/female, high/low, and so on but also on resuscitating obsolete cultural signs. Camp is a mode of archiving, in that it lovingly, sadistically, even masochistically brings back dominant culture’s junk and displays the performer’s fierce attachment to it. (2010, 68)

Camp reaches back (or given a non-linear view of time, reaches around) into the past to construct a camp archive of forgotten signs in the present. Where bi-camp might diverge from here is that this archiving is not restricted to the artefacts belonging to dominant (straight) culture but extends to mainstream gay culture’s— after all, bisexuals can play with *anybody’s* junk.

Cecil, as figure of both bitextuality and of the literary past, embodies this temporal relation. Cavalié suggests that he ‘has an ambiguous presence deeply rooted in the intertextual references [. . . his] portrait conjures up’, ensuring that ‘intertextuality and the relationship between contemporary society and such “familiar” figures as the War Poets are very much at the core of the novel’ (2012). Cecil operates as both fictive origin to which all subsequent sections of the novel return, but also the figure of the ‘real’ literary past. This literary history is entwined with a ‘real’ history that is marginalized through the structural time-gaps which keep things such as the two World Wars, the General Strike and the decriminalization of homosexuality off-stage and decidedly peripheral. Keith Miller suggests that in this way the novel’s ‘action takes place at a series of points which are not so much pivotal as liminal: folds in time’ (2011). It is my suggestion that these folds in time can be read as the incursion of the bitextual into the heteronarrative.

It is through adolescent Daphne that we are first introduced to Cecil. She is in the garden waiting excitedly, impatiently, for the arrival of him and George but ‘he must have missed his train, or at least his connection’ (Hollinghurst 2011, 3). She turns toward the house

but something in the time of day held her, with its hint of mystery she had so far overlooked [. . .]. It was the long still moment when the hedges and borders turned

dusky and vague, but anything she looked at closely [. . .] seemed to give itself back to the day with a secret throb of colour. (4)

Cecil makes his first appearance in the text as an interruption in 'the long still moment' which arrests Daphne. Or rather, his voice does:

She heard a faint familiar sound, the knock of the broken gate against the post at the bottom of the garden; and then an unfamiliar voice, with an edge to it, and then George's laugh. [. . .] She couldn't really hear what they were saying, but she was disconcerted by Cecil's voice; it seemed so quickly and decisively take control of their garden and their house and the whole of the coming weekend. It was an excitable voice that seemed to say it didn't care who heard it, but in its tone there was also something mocking and superior. She looked back at the house [. . .] and thought about Monday, and the life they would pick up again very readily after Cecil had gone'. (4)

Thus Cecil's interlocution into the mundane begins before he is even physically present in the text as he makes himself heard.

What of the edge to this unfamiliar voice? Figuratively, 'edge' carries several connected meanings: 'power to 'cut' or wound'; 'Trenchant Force' ; 'Of appetite, passion, desires, enjoyment, etc.'. Cecil's voice is powerful, cutting and desirous. There is however, another slightly different current meaning for the figurative 'edge': 'keen effectiveness of language' ("Edge, N." 2014). As a poet it is hardly surprising that Cecil may be keenly effective when using language. What is interesting about reading this specifically at this point however is that at the stage at which Daphne notes this 'edge' to Cecil's voice, when she is overhearing him and George, she can only 'just make them out [. . . and] couldn't really hear what they were saying' (2011, 4).

What might it mean that Cecil's unfamiliar voice, piercing the daily vague mystery of dusk (itself a between-times), exhibits a keen effectiveness of language when that language itself is indecipherable? Cecil's use of language is so keenly effective here that it ceases to matter what the language actually *says*, as much as that it is being said. It is not what Cecil says that allows him to warp time but the way he says it; his use of words so powerful that there may as well not be any words at all. Instead, it is all in the tone which is explicitly plural; it is



both excitable and unguarded but also mocking and superior. I read this as an adolescent voice which interrupts and controls the normal time of the Sawle's estate.

Daphne reports to her mother that Cecil is 'extremely charming, you know, but he has a rather carrying voice' (2011, 10). Carrying: that is 'far-reaching, penetrating,' but also that which carries ("Carrying, Adj." 2014). What does Cecil's controlled, commanding, disconcerting voice carry with it as it penetrates? I have claimed that Hollinghurst in this text dissolves the graphic sexuality common to his work into the very fabric of the narrative. With this in mind, Cecil's voice which penetrates and which carries becomes a figure of dangerous sexuality. To be penetrated by a carrier risks infection; what is infected here is the narrative temporality of the quotidian by the disconcerting multivocal figure of bisexuality. Thus the damaging stereotype of the bisexual as carrier of disease into hetero communities (Aggleton 1996, 1), is repurposed as bitextuality infecting the heteronarrative as Cecil Valance fucks with the fabric of time.

Cecil's influence over narrative temporality is evident from the way he greets Daphne when he first catches sight of her. She had been spying on him and George when 'Cecil raised his head and saw her and said, "Oh, hello!" as if they'd already met several times and enjoyed it' (2011, 5). That 'Oh, Hello!' are Cecil's first words is significant in thinking of this text in relation to bisexual camp; Charles Hawtrey's performances in numerous Carry On films imbue that phrase with a campness all of its own. The way in which this particular 'Oh, hello' is delivered, not only brings with it this intertextual history however, but also creates in an instant a parallel history for Cecil and Daphne leading up to this moment. The present of Cecil and Daphne's first meeting is turned by the edge in his voice into a moment with many precursors, a point midway through their personal narrative rather than the point of its origin. In this way, Cecil as bisexual modulator recasts the present through a rewriting of the past, establishing a parallel history which leaves George 'confused for a second' (5). Whilst I do not suggest that that these histories are created in a 'real' sense (the 'facts' of the novel remain

that this is the first time these two characters meet), this moment nevertheless represents ways in which a bitextual intervention can open out narrative possibilities of alternative pasts that directly impact on the affective experience of the present moment. Cecil and Daphne's relationship therefore occurs a context in which narrative bisexuality has created an alternative history for them which, while *false* (and confusing for George), is nevertheless *experienced*. This prefigures Daphne's, and numerous other characters' attempts and failures to accurately write their pasts; this moment of their very first meeting which acts as origin point for the novel is founded on a bitextual degrounding of linear time and stable history.

On the other side of the Sawle's Cecilian interlude lies 'Monday, and the life they would pick up again very readily after [he] had gone'. Cecil is a disconcerting between-time and after him, normal life will willingly, quickly and easily be resumed. The life that they will so readily resume is explicitly figured as narrative form. On the Sunday evening they

had given up the festive style, there was a sense of looking ahead –after the champagne and Tennyson of their earlier dinners, the table tonight seemed tactfully to prepare them for the prose of Monday morning. (2011, 87)

Cecil comes with his carrying and disconcerting voice and his hot cigar and takes control of his surroundings and of time itself through altering the narrative mode through which this time is experienced by other characters. His voice does not just read poetry but arranges the day *as poetry*; the poet does not simply write verse but rewrites the day *as verse*. This is bisexuality entering the heteronarrative and rewriting it as bi-narrative.

### **Failure & Forgetting**

Hollinghurst structures the latter sections of the book around the failures to piece together the past, the denial of success and of a clear resolution. The fourth section, 'Something of a Poet', is primarily concerned with Paul Bryant's collecting information and staging interviews for his biography of Cecil, which will go on to cause 'a fair old stink' when published (2011, 524).

Following an interviewing session with Paul a now elderly Daphne reflects on the experience:

'He was asking for memories, too young himself to know that memories were only memories of memories. It was diamond-rare to remember something fresh' (496). What was experienced in the present of the past becomes, in the present of the past's future, reduced to the memory of memory. So much is forgotten and what is left is narrativized; subsequently the same version of narrative given time and again over years so that one remembers the story rather than the event. Daphne considers the thirty years she took to write her own memoirs previously, thus:

Daphne was supposed to have a good memory, and this reputation sustained her uneasily in the face of the thousands of things she couldn't remember. People had been amazed by what she'd dredged up for her book, but much of it, as she'd nearly admitted to Paul Bryant, was – not fiction, which one really mustn't do about actual people, but a sort of poetical reconstruction [. . .]. Her first problem, in doing the book, had been to recall what anyone said; in fact she made up all the conversations, based (if one was strictly truthful) on odd words the person almost certainly had said, and within about five, or at the outside ten, years of the incident recorded. Was this just her failing? [. . .] Her experience as a memoirist, if typical, couldn't help but throw the most worrying light over half the memoirs that were written. (497)

The exploration of memory and forgetting that Hollinghurst presents here as part of Daphne's personal narrative of her life course (of both internal and published variety) is explicitly tied up with both the construction of a narrative of national history and of literary histories and reputations (including Hollinghurst's own).

Explaining the prevalence of bisexuality in the novel, Hollinghurst states that 'one of the ideas of the book is about the unknowability or uncatagorisability of human behaviour, and I was rather tempted into those ambiguous sexual areas' (Moss 2011). He explicitly links the unnamed bisexuality of the characters with the novel's broader thematic engagement with unknowability as characters' attempts to uncover truths, gay or otherwise, ultimately fail.

Mukherjee states that

readers are let in on the true nature of events in the opening section [. . .] which characters across future generations then try to piece together without ever arriving at a truth that is unclouded by speculation. These repeated future attempts at the reconstruction of the events of the pastoral provide the novel with its epistemological dynamo. (2011)

Notwithstanding Mukherjee's insistence that the 'true nature of events' is 'homosexuality', his framing of the repetition of failure as the novel's epistemology is useful. At this point I want to turn to J. Halberstam's work on failure and forgetting as integral to a queer project to think 'alternatives to the inevitable and seemingly organic models we use for marking progress and achievement' (2011, 70).

For Halberstam, 'forgetfulness becomes a rupture with the eternally self-generating present, a break with a self-authorizing [and I would add 'self-authoring'] past and an opportunity for a non-hetero-reproductive future (2011, 70). Halberstam then proposes

a notion of queer forgetting within which the forgetful subject, among other things, forgets family and tradition and lineage and biological relation and lives to create relationality anew in each moment and for each context and without a teleology and on behalf of the chaotic potential of random action. (80)

I read such a queer forgetting into the ways in which Hollinghurst troubles teleology throughout *The Stranger's Child* which, with its constant deferrals, ellipses and failures ultimately, as Graham-Smith observes, frustrates all 'attempts at finality or wholeness [. . . and thus] withholds fulfilment' (2012, 8).

The incapability of characters to recall and the incapability of the narrative to resolve are linked for Hollinghurst. He suggests that he had

just become tired of that model – which is a very common one in fiction – where a book contains a secret which, when finally revealed, makes everything make sense. And it seems to me not...you know, life's not like that. I wanted, by punching so many holes in this book, as it were, to get away from such a watertight sort of structure. I wanted to create uncertainty in the reader; the reader shares the uncertainty and ignorance of a lot of the characters themselves about what actually happened between people they knew quite well in the past. I was aware of a different sort of literary detective novel that I might have written – and that I was quite attracted to writing – with a paper chase of manuscripts and so forth. But actually, really my subject was much more to do with not so much remembering as forgetting and the way so much about the past, about our own lives, is sort of irrevocably lost to us. But I kind of play with the reader; I acknowledge it at the very end in that respect. (Hollinghurst 2012b)

He contrasts his new structural direction in *The Stranger's Child* directly with the structure of *The Swimming Pool Library* (1988) in which he says 'there is a big secret which is revealed towards the end and it makes you see everything else in light of that' (A. Meyer 2012). But in

this instance, as Angela Meyer states, as 'Cecil's biography is honed, the memories of others, and of the reader, become tainted, refocused and only sometimes clarified' (2012). In this bisexual narrative, Hollinghurst uses the fallibility of memory to 'punch holes' in the heteronarrative which even his Gay Novels have been part of. Building the narrative around bisexual uncertainty forces a structure that is no longer clearly progressional, is no longer 'watertight'.

To extend Hollinghurst's metaphor here (which, when considering the pervasiveness of 'fluidity' as a term to conceive of bisexuality is rather fitting), what the bisexual narrative gives us instead then is a 'leaky' structure. If the structure is not watertight then it is open to both seeping out and seeping in – the bisexual narrative cannot be contained, but neither is it impervious to outside influence. In this respect it speaks to my construction of bisexuality earlier in this thesis as neither part of, nor divorced from monosexuality, as a model of intertextuality in which influence is a multi-directional web of interactions. If the bisexual narrative is not watertight then certainly elements of the heteronarrative can seep in and 'dilute' it, but equally so they can seep back out again. However much the heteroideology may be pumped into the text by readers (who, for instance, insist on reading gay where the text presents bisexual) it cannot be held stably within text. In this way it allows itself to receive external forces but does not, within its structure, allow them to become fixed. Where his earlier Gay Novels, while socially radical in some respects, essentially conformed to the narrative structures demanded by the heteroideology, *The Stranger's Child* is able to disrupt the fiction of progress by using bisexual uncertainty to punch holes in the heteronarrative and to deny it its resolution.

That Cecil's voice has an 'edge' to it strikes a further resonance with my claims surrounding the bisexual text's camp refusal to finish, to arrive, when one remembers that 'edging' is a term for the sexual practice of intentionally delaying orgasm. Cecil's voice, the carrier of bitextuality, then references the refusal to climax or resolve that is present in the

broader structure of the narrative which dissolves bisex into its language. Remember too that the novel opens with the 'delayed arrival' of Cecil and George. The entire narrative becomes analogous for the plateau before orgasm on which one holds oneself or is held when edging, focussed not on the one climactic moment but on the extended experience. This approach to the (non)orgasmic structure of the narrative seems to have been felt by Hollinghurst himself: 'Normally, I do have a brief but acute sort of depression when I finish a book [. . .] but I was so desperate to get this thing off that I seem to have escaped that' (Moss 2011). Perhaps Hollinghurst escaped his usual cum-down – 'that bleak little minute of irrational sadness' as George thinks of it– after a novel by constructing one which never 'gets off' at all.

### **Discontinuous quantum jumps**

In its very early stages *The Stranger's Child* was to be a series of short stories. Hollinghurst makes a telling slip in an interview: 'I thought in a way the first two books... parts of the book [. . .] yes they do take you back into early literary periods I suppose' (Hollinghurst 2012b, my transcription). Although he swiftly corrects himself it is clear that the idea that the different sections of the novel are different books remains. I have spoken above of how bisexuality and narrative are entwined with the ways in which continuity and change manifest over a life course. I have also expressed concern about how the fiction of progress invalidates past experience. The separate books/same book leaky structure of *The Stranger's Child* figures this neatly by exposing the necessity for continuous narrative to hold pasts and presents in line. Hollinghurst states that 'one's own life doesn't naturally have a shape, one is constantly imposing a shape on it; constructing the narrative' (A. Meyer 2012). By structuring the book/books around these time jumps Hollinghurst exposes our reliance on narrative continuity by frustrating our desire to see *how* characters have arrived at certain locations. He states that he

was consciously trying in this book to, with both Paul and Daphne, have characters who we first meet in quite a state of youthful innocence, very sort of unformed

characters, to whom I think the reader will naturally respond in a sympathetic way. And then, with the passing of time [. . .] they calcify, they develop bad habits, and so it's probably harder to sustain that rather ideal feeling of them as young people. And to me part of the structural fun of the book was the scene [. . .] at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> section of the book, which is really just the history of his research, as he finally gets to interview Daphne and you've got these two characters, who I think I've sort of encouraged you to feel warmly towards, who have come head to head, as it were, and neither of them is behaving at all well, and they're trying to sort of out fox each other, and I hope the reader actually doesn't know what to think. (Hollinghurst 2012a my transcription)

What is crucial here though is that this is not a case of an at-first-sympathetic character gradually becoming less and less likable since Hollinghurst denies us that gradual development. So although it is through the 'passing of time' that these character changes occur, it is a temporal passage to which we have no access. We don't so much see them 'calcify' as see them having already calcified. The frustration and disappointment with and in these characters exposes our need to narrativize, the need we have to plot the journey from one to other to believe that they are part of the same.

This links to Craig Bourne's point about the particularities of time in distinguishing change from difference. On a panel debate, *Time's Arrow*, he proposes that the question philosophy must ask about time is 'what makes differences across time "change", in the way that differences across space are not "change"?' (Cooper et al. 2013 my transcription). What is it about our experience and perception of time that makes difference between different points in time 'change' in a way that differences between different points in space are not? He suggests that

perhaps the answer is something like, "there is something peculiar about time which distinguishes it from space". One thing might be causation, and that's the thing that brings about change. That can't be the whole answer because there are [. . .] certain changes which take place which aren't causal. Nevertheless there's, "time being a dimension where things happen there which don't happen in space" [which] is the philosophical problem to address. (Cooper et al. 2013 my transcription)

A possible answer in this context is that the peculiar feature is continuity, a connectedness between two distinct positions in time which is not shared by two distinct positions in space. Continuity, which I argue we recognise and achieve through narrative, marks the different

points in same time as sharing the same identity at some level; while the position in time is different, the object is the same entity. Difference in space does not have this peculiarity; two objects in the same temporal but different spatial locations are not the same entity, so the difference is difference and not change. There is no narrative link, no *continuity* between the different spatial locations. Or at least this is the case until we consider the quantum level again, in which it is in fact perfectly possible for one quantum to be in two locations at once. If that is possible then how might it lead us rethink continuity and narrative and therefore desire? If 'change' can occur not just over time but over space?

Halberstam also picks up this idea by linking forgetting and failure to the temporality of change and success, as follows:

To say that we might want to think about memory and forgetting differently is in fact to ask that we start seeing alternatives to the inevitable and seemingly organic models we use for marking progress and achievement; it also asks us to notice how and whether change has happened: How do we see change? How do we recognize it? Can we be aware of change without saying that change has ended everything (the death of...) or that change has meant nothing (plus ça change...)? Can we recognise the new without discarding the old? Can we hold onto multiple frameworks of time and transformation at once? (2011, 71)

We accept the Pauls and Daphnes encountered throughout the book(s) through change rather than through difference due primarily to the narrative convention that we do so. We are told that time has passed and so that time has past. While noting their difference (in characteristics, behaviour etc), we assume a continuity between the Daphnes, and a continuity between the Pauls because the differences in character are mapped onto differences in temporal location.

As James Warner notes, 'it's always alarming to run into an old acquaintance one has not seen in over a decade, and the characters in *The Stranger's Child* repeatedly inflict a similar awkwardness on the reader' (2014). While the Daphnes and Pauls are different, we accept that difference as change because these differences do not appear *at the same time*. Narrativised difference is change. However, Hollinghurst excises the in-between narratives, the lines of continuity, and fills in the gaps only through the explicitly fallible and contradictory memories



(or rather, through the forgetting) of those characters, leaving the rest up to readers to work out what must have happened in the intervening years. In this way the narrative imperative for continuity (and thus progress) is constantly frustrated.

Cavalié states that Hollinghurst ‘makes it clear that people, along with their books, cannot be trusted to provide a stable version of history’ and that what ‘the reader is ultimately presented with is a distinctly postmodernist mosaic of non-congruent portraits and texts, which simultaneously denounces the quest for an irrevocable and fictitious past while enhancing [their] fascination for it’ (2012). What Hollinghurst in essence shows us here is not that removing narrative prevents us from changing but rather that it prevents us at first from rationalising and accepting that change, recognising it *as* a comprehensive yet comprehensible change rather than as difference, distance, discreteness. On initial reading this can seem cynical, frustrating and unfulfilling. However, *re/depositioning* the text through a bitextuality, a non-hierarchical web of non-teleological sexualities and textualities, these discontinuities instead function to expose and frustrate the desire *for* continuity and the desire to be fulfilled. The text comes to embrace this frustration as the necessary failure of a life/text to finally cohere into the fixity of a final salary identity.

### **Re-Writing Cecil**

As characters write *about* Cecil they also rewrite Cecil and his bisexuality as immature, gay or queer. As such, they are shown to be agents of gay/queer and heteronormative practices which write over bisexuality. It is my contention that the text operates as a critique of these over-writing processes whilst simultaneously eliciting them from a section of its readership. As Schulman describes, the majority of *The Stranger’s Child* depicts the fact that ‘everyone in his life has to adjust, with varying degrees of resentment and pleasure, to an unexpected outcome: their connection with Cecil has suddenly become the most interesting thing about them’ (2011). Cecil, as the figure of textual bisexuality, with the power to alter the mode of

narrativised lives, operates not only as the characters' central point of interest however, but more fundamentally as a threshold— as the adolescent bisexuality out of which people, gay or straight, must mature in order to (attempt to) achieve adulthood. I argue that nevertheless, the attempts by various characters to write their way out of this Cecilian bisexuality expose what Mendelsohn identifies in the novel as an 'exploration of the way in which the stories we tell ourselves can occlude (comically or tragically) the real story – how “our” truth ends up obscuring “the” truth, whether in poetry, history or biography' (2011). Here we see the normative straight story, the gay story and the queer story all imposed on a bisexuality.

For Daphne, ostensibly the 'straight' character in the novel, he acts as a gateway. She complains to a friend about Paul's interest in Cecil and her, following the first day of their interview for his book, as follows:

“Really Cecil means nothing to me – I was potty about him for five minutes sixty years ago. The significant thing about Cecil, as far as I'm concerned,” said Daphne, half-hearing herself go on, “is that he led to Dud, and the children, and all the grown-up part of my life, which naturally he had no part in himself!” (2011, 500)

Well, naturally; how could Cecil, as figure of bisexuality, have any part in any grown-up part of a life when a life can only be read as grown-up by invalidating its bisexuality? In trying to downplay his significance however, she also owns that without him the grown-up part of her life as it is would not have been possible. Bisexuality here is what maturity must reject in order to be read as such, and yet is simultaneously that which brings about that maturity in the first place. Bisexuality is that which monosexual maturity must disavow but which, in disavowal, is made constitutive of that maturity. Note also the disjuncture between internal and external voices; Daphne only half-hears herself go on. We may assume then that this disavowal is not complete, however much she may outwardly attempt to rewrite Cecil as a fully invalidated immaturity.

Paul's attempts (pre-empting those of critics such as Graham-Smith) to re-write Cecil as gay takes a strategic and knowing form, and one guided by a personal desire, if not *need* for him to be so. In conversation with a minor character, Jake, Paul explains his project, thus:

"I'm writing a biography of Cecil Valance," said Paul firmly [. . .]

"That's right, 'Two blessed acres of English ground'."

"Among other things..."

"Didn't we have something on him recently?"

"Oh, well the *Letters* perhaps? That was a couple of years ago now..."

"That must be it. So he was gay too was he?"

"Again...among other things."

Again Jake was delighted. "They all were, weren't they?" he said

Paul felt he should be a bit more cautious: "I mean, he did have affairs with women, but I have the feeling he really preferred boys. That's one of the things I want to find out."

(2011, 420)

Whilst acknowledging (but not naming) the bisexual nature of Cecil's actual sexual practices, it is still Paul's *feeling* that he really preferred boys. There is a subtle ambiguity here to what, precisely, Paul wants 'to find out': *whether* Cecil preferred boys, or *that* Cecil preferred boys? While 'affairs' may be an accurate way to describe Cecil's relations with both men and women, the word's use here in connection with only the latter serves to reduce their legitimacy or authenticity when compared to those with men. Interesting too is that Cecil is presented as gay, 'among other things', which, whilst acknowledging potential other, simultaneous identities, nevertheless fixes gay as a defined identic position. So, while Cecil had desires for and sexual relationships with both men and women, Paul is able to delegitimize those with women and to (actively decide to) read Cecil as gay.

Later, in the final section of the book(s), some years after Paul's biography of Cecil, *England Trembles*, has been published, Jennifer Ralph (Daphne's granddaughter), gives a version of her family history which she compares to the one which was evidentially presented by Paul in his book. She goes on to describe that

according to Paul Bryant everything I've just told you is untrue. Let me see... My aunt wasn't really Dudley's daughter, but Cecil's, Dudley was gay, though he managed to father a son with my grandmother, and my father's father wasn't Revel Ralph, who really was gay, but a painter called Mark Gibbons. I may be simplifying a bit. [. . . Daphne] had been married three times as it was, and now he was claiming that two of her three children hadn't been sired by her husbands, and also, did I mention that Cecil had had an affair with her brother? Yup, that too. (524)

Cecil here is not named directly as gay in this list, whilst both Dudley (possibly bisexual) and Revel (bisexual) are, but his bisexuality, acknowledged but unnamed, *is* discussed in an

explicitly gay context, in which other bisexualities are overtly being written as gay. Hollinghurst explains that ‘the first two sections of the book were designed to be more or less conformable with the literary and linguistic conditions of the periods in which they were set’ which might explain the lack of named ‘bisexuality’ there. But by 2008 the term would not be out of place and so there must be other reasons for its exclusion here. Cecil is not named as explicitly gay, but he is presented as gay among other (gay) things.

It is decidedly odd that the Gay Reader, like Paul, imposes a Gay Truth, on Cecil when, as Marcin Sroczyński rightly notes

Paul Bryant’s quest to prove to the world that Cecil and Dudley Valance were gay receives harsh criticism in the book. The character is denounced at the end of the novel as a rather repellent figure with an ambiguous past [. . .] This seems to be Hollinghurst’s warning against too fervent a gay activism which may consist in building an artificial “gay heritage”. (2013, 82)

But where Sroczyński sees a critique of the *fervency* of gay activism, I see a critique of its *gayness*. *Re/depositioning The Stranger’s Child* reveals the bisexual perspective, showing Hollinghurst’s warning here as against not just too fervent an activism, but too gay an activism.

Paul’s work to make Cecil gay is held directly in opposition to Nigel Dupont’s work to make him ‘queer’, which once again lays claim to Cecil at the expense of his bisexuality. At the same time that Paul was researching Cecil’s life for the biography, Dupont was also preparing his first publication, an edited collection of the poems. During that section, while not encountered directly, he operates as the mysterious (to Paul)

‘Dr Nigel Dupont, of Sussex [. . .]. Paul was very unhappy about Dr Nigel Dupont, but he didn’t know what to do about him [. . .]. “Sussex” presumably meant Sussex University, not merely that Dr Dupont lived somewhere in that county. He would be an ambitious young academic, an Englishman presumably, but with an incalculable element of Gallic arrogance and appetite for theory. (399)

For Dupont, by 2008 ‘the Valance work seemed a distant prolegomenon to far more sensational achievements’(540), Cecil becoming here the preliminary discourse to Dupont’s later work, much as he functions as the preliminary discourse for the novel as a whole. This

also allows Hollinghurst to have an amusing (and not unjustified) dig at queer theory. Of those people listening to him speak at the memorial, ‘one or two, of course, would have read Dupont’s milestone works in Queer Theory, and perhaps be pleasantly surprised to find that he could talk in straightforward English when necessary’ (528). Later, Paul and Dupont speak about their respective work on Cecil, and in particular the discarded pages from *Two Acres*. These pages appear in the novel, when found in 1913, thus:

Within that ~~thronging~~ singing woodland round  
 Two blessed acres of English ground,  
 And ~~leading~~ roaming by its outmost edge  
 Beneath a darkling ~~eypress~~ ~~myrtle~~ privet hedge  
 With hazel-clusters hung above  
 We’ll walk the ~~secret long dark~~ wild path of  
                   love  
 Whose secrets none shall ever hear  
 Twixt ~~set of sun~~ late last rook and Chaunticleer.  
 And secret as – XXX (something!)  
 Hearty, lusty, true and bold,  
 Yet shy to have its honour told –

here there was a very dense crossing out, as if not only Cecil’s words but his very ideas had had to be obliterated. (52)

This discarded version is the most of the poem that is ever presented in *The Stranger’s Child*. What is fascinating here is that while these lines certainly concern a secret love – which a reader fairly assumes to be Cecil’s for George – what we see here does not quite match up to what Dupont clearly reads in it: ‘Oh, it was an unpublished part of one of the poems, which turned out to be a sort of queer manifesto, except in tetrameter couplets’ (541). Walking the wild path of love hardly seems enough on its own to constitute a ‘queer manifesto.’ While we do not see what Dupont has written on Cecil, the fact that he describes it so, and has gone on to write queer-theoretical milestones, heavily suggests that where Paul has claimed Cecil for gay, on a ‘feeling that he preferred boys’ (as has he with other characters such as Revel and Dudley who can also be more readily considered bisexual), Dupont has claimed Cecil for queer by reading ‘Two Acres’ as his manifesto.

I suggest that we do see here the obliteration of Cecil's 'very ideas', through their overwriting by Paul's 'gay' and Nigel's 'queer'. On its writing Cecil was moved to not just discard but densely cross out *something* in the poem – something he considers unnameable and that subsequent readers (must) find illegible. For Paul this is understood as gay, and for Dupont queer, each installing a nameable subject in place of the both figurative and literal illegibility and unintelligibility of Cecil's bisexuality.

In each of these cases bisexuality is the preliminary discourse for what becomes differently fixed as gay or queer, the prolegomenon to two separate writing careers – the tenacious (and somewhat outdated) biographer who outs gays and the successful but pompous queer theorist. Cecil and his bisexuality which subtends the narrative function as the starting point out of which these other identic positionings mature and the 'achievements' of the gay and the queer writers rely on the erasure or subsumption of an originary bisexuality. The maturation out of this bisexuality is key for the *success* of these careers, for the greater *achievements* which come from achieving a fixed and viable identity position and which are presented as a straightforward linear advancement towards prestige. Of course, as Halberstam makes very clear, success in these terms is an incredibly limiting kind of success.

By the end of the *The Stranger's Child*, Cecil stands in for the bisexuality that is rewritten as gay, the bisexuality that is subsumed by queer theory, and the bisexuality that is invalidated as an immature phase en route to a straight life marked heterotemporally by marriage and children. What his bisexuality is not allowed to be is the bisexuality that is named, and names itself bisexuality. This is because, despite Cecil's agency, his ability for temporal and spatial control, in the brief period he is alive, the rest of the text concerns other characters training their various monosexual lenses on him, repurposing his bisexuality and writing monosexual maturity over the top of it. Distinct from the characters' attempts however, the novel itself is, I have argued, written *through* bisexuality because the bitextual has infiltrated the narrative. I argue for a reading of *The Stranger's Child* as a bi-camp response

to the mainstreaming of gay culture, the institutionalisation of queer as an academic discipline, and the 'epistemic contract of bisexual erasure' (Yoshino 2000), between gay and straight discourses which ensure that bisexuality remains illegible. *The Stranger's Child* takes this illegibility and ~~runs~~ skips with it, making an outrageous camp excess out of its absence, and structuring its narrative through the supposed irresolvability of bisexuality as an identity.

# CONCLUSIONS

*Sometimes but always in vain*



*How to conclude whilst at the same time never perceiving end as a possibility? And if I could, how could such a conclusion not be haunted by the end it refused to perceive? How do I restate my 'original contribution to knowledge' without reinscribing the end-oriented narratives of heterocapitalism? But how do I pass the examination otherwise?*

**Re/depositioning** has endings built into its conception. In carrying the word *rede* within, it also carries the meaning of that word as a 'method for attaining some end' among its other senses. To *re/deposition* then is to re- and de-position this rede; to both re- and de-position the end-orientation. Insider-outsider, it is therefore not entirely outwith the language of heterocapitalism, but nor is it bound to the same redes of production or progress. Let us then see *re/depositioning* as the method required to attain some suitable end to this thesis, by way of unseating the method for attaining it. To that (unavoidable) end, these concluding remarks will keep open, rather than close down possibilities for this project's quantifiable effects.

Let us begin the end with a new text. 'Invisible', by the bitextual Pet Shop Boys might be subtitled 'A History of Bisexuality' so closely does it demonstrate some founding concerns of this project; I use it here to re-sketch the situation to which this thesis staged a response.

After being for so many years  
 the life and soul of the party  
 it's weird  
 I'm invisible  
 [. . .]  
 I'm here  
 but you can't see me  
 I'm invisible  
 It's queer  
 how gradually  
 I've become  
 invisible  
 [. . .]  
 Is it magic or the truth?  
 Strange psychology?  
 Or justified  
 by the end of youth?  
 (2012)

Bisexuality is erased in the present both by the advance of queer and by a normative maturation narrative. The primary contribution this project then makes to queer studies and to bisexual theory is to propose, in *re/depositioning*, a critical lens to address these questions, redress the elision of bisexuality, and accommodate both sides of a divide between lived identity and radically transformative epistemology. The thesis therefore exists, like the bisexualities it describes, in and around binary oppositions, situated Complementarily in mutually exclusive locations.

*Re/depositioning* is reading for bisexuality in texts and reading for the 'bisexuality' of texts. A task of this thesis therefore has been to identify numerous kinds of bisexual textuality – which I have called **bitextuality** – to demonstrate the bisexual inflection I argue necessary for an increasingly institutionalised and fixedly anti-normative queer theory. This thesis has thus examined, in a range of contemporary representations of male bisexuality, bisexual engagements with narrative and temporality with which we might begin to disrupt a **heterocapitalist fiction of progress** and the reproductive futurism which it demands and depends upon.

Of course, as Judith Roof has noted, 'we cannot escape narrative' (1996, xiv), and Edelman shows that any counter- or anti-narrative must always be returned through narrative (Berlant and Edelman 2014, 3). Bisexuality, as neither clearly within nor outwith the bounds of the heteronormative, is presented in this project as a suitable site for the disruption of these structures which yet remains strategically liveable within them. Arguing for a bisexual narrativity in place of a heteronarrative may seem to be simply replacing one restrictive and coercive narrative for another. It is my contention, however, that while bitextual narratives may still be narrative, (and therefore in some ways end-oriented and heterocapitalist), they are nevertheless narratives defined through a markedly different temporal structure: **bi-temporality**, or **8isexuality**.

Positioned as a response to recent queer debates around temporality and straight time and opposing utopian and anti-social approaches, this thesis has used the problematic of bisexuality's evacuation from the present to propose a bi-temporality as a way of grounding a politics simultaneously in the past, present and future. Such a lived temporality enables retrocausation and the re-legitimizing of rejected pasts and futural imaginaries whilst not ignoring the bodily experience of a forward-marching time. By paying attention to the terms through which bisexuality comes to mean – in this case 'uncertainty' and 'indeterminacy' – and along with undisciplined and promiscuous borrowing from physics, I have shown how quantum mechanical concepts reveal the queerness of time, whilst the Time Warp shows us that this was bisexual all along. Bi-temporality then gives us a lens through which to read and create narratives – be they fictional or lived narratives of our modes of relational living – with an approach to time which works to disrupt heteronarrative end-orientation.

Furthermore, I argue that rather than self-naturalizing as the heteronarrative and straight time can be seen to a bitextual narrative announces itself as such. In this respect, a bi-narrative shares similarities with Gregory Bredbeck's description of the New Queer Narrative which 'effectively blocks the ability to produce new sites of cohesion and immanence, and at the same time it exposes all aspects of narrative itself as illusory constructs devoid of immanence and productive only of false cohesions' (1995, 491). With queer facing accusations of fixity, exclusivity, and neoliberal complicity (see, for instance McCluskey 2008; R. James 2013), perhaps it is time for a 'New, New Queer Narrative' –and perhaps bitextuality is a little more gainly.

The exposure of narrative as illusory construct, whilst acknowledging and remaining understood through normative narrative imperatives (akin to standing under the banner of Judith Butler's indefinable lesbian (1991, 14)), has been understood in this thesis with the coinage **radical non-disclosure**. Radical non-disclosure counters the claim that bisexuality upholds normative gender binaries by reading it instead as an acknowledgement which does

not disclose a relative position. Thus, a bitextual approach to narrative, whilst complicit in heteronarrative imperatives for locatable identities, announces those imperatives as constructed, and whilst referencing them, is not fixable in relation to them. It can therefore disentangle politically viable identity positions from the **final salary schemes** of heterocapitalist maturation narratives.

In **Chapter Four** this is also seen in Morrissey's 'participation from a position of nonbelonging' (Hopps 2009, 10), in which I argue he turns the identitarian demands of heteronormativity's self-naturalising Vincent Morgans into a claimable site of radical critique – acknowledging the questions in such a way as to give no finally decidable answer other than as its own reiterative, radically passive bitextual interrogation – an **erot(et)ics**, perhaps. I have therefore proposed Morrissey as an example of radical non-disclosure in action – a lived life as embodied cultural critique. Whilst I make no argument that any of us should attempt to be, or to be like (or even to like) Morrissey, I do claim that his cultural performance points to ways in which, by *re/depositioning* the narratives through which we establish identities, we can respond to oppressive heteronormative structures through radically non-disclosed, textually immature subject positions. These, whilst offering enough purchase on an identity required for a viable politics, nevertheless afford enough freedom from constraining and repressive identities to embody a radical critique of heteronorms. Since we cannot viably live entirely outwith these systems of identity, *re/depositioning* Morrissey as insider-outsider gives us a (camp, playful, immature) route to a permanently unclear banner under which we make our insider-outsider demands.

This thesis has been characterised by similar such manoeuvres – trying to have its cake and eat it, perhaps – as a response to heterocapitalist progress narratives and the final salary identity schemes which they support. The political implications of this are not analysed exhaustively in this work. All of the methods proposed for countering heteronarrative are open to mainstream recuperation by nature of being at least in part within mainstream discourse.

But equally they point to ways in which we can translate insider-outsider epistemologies into material social acts and ways of living: new bitextual narratives which enable us to 'do' time and identity differently.

Strategies of **textual immaturity** are in part co-optable as evidence of a supposed postmodern infantilization of adulthood, in which politically-disengaged neoliberal 'good' subjects seek instant consumerist gratification and live the one true free life (Bernardini 2014; Kelly 2009). But immaturity as considered through the lens of a critical bisexuality cannot so easily succumb to the capitalist 'now', precisely because the now, the present, is the site from which bisexuality is always evicted. **Chapter Three's** focus on a punk subculture in particular is also instructive here, since it demonstrates the relational and political aspect of what might otherwise be an only self-serving immaturity. The figure of the aging punk is both individuated and communitarian; it is at once utopian and yet looks backward to a failed revolution, whilst remaining threshold-crossing in the present.

I maintain that there is much to be gained from working within an adolescent, insider-outsider bitextual position, rather than (or as well as) an oppositional queer position – if only because a heteronormative society must find it easier to permanently reject all of its queers than all of its teenagers. Just as bisexuality can threaten by implicating straightness and queerness within each other, what is potentially radical about the adolescent position as distinct from an queer-oppositional one is that while both may need to be 'dealt with', the adolescent must be dealt with in a way which keeps it part of society – the immature is dominant culture's past (all adults were teenagers) and also its future (teenagers will become adults). Thus an adolescent immaturity that is unfixed from its temporal, age-based bounds through an elaboration of its bisexuality can work to destabilize those power structures which require the constant production of properly maturing subjects.

**Chapter Five** presents an alternative response to the cultural invisibility of bisexuality by reading *The Stranger's Child* as a **bi-camp** text, which performs the invisibility of bisexuality

to such an absurd extent that it stages and campily critiques bisexuality's erasure. A quotation from the *Observer* on the cover of the hardback edition, announces the novel as the work of 'a great English stylist in full maturity' (Hollinghurst 2011). And yet the 'maturity' of this stylist does not prevent him from writing what is, on one level, nearly six hundred pages of textually immature sniggering at willies. Future work now needs to further elaborate bi-camp in relation to other texts in order to more fully explore as a method of production the ironic appropriation of the stereotypical qualities commonly attached to bisexuality (including irony itself).

These various bisexual readings and identifications of bitextuality point to ways not only in which to approach these specific narratives but also to think narrative differently. The unbounded, immature, bi-temporal texts here can allow us to *re/deposition* life narratives – and, by refusing to invalidate the past, look backward and forward, and accept contradiction and change. This work has therefore been minded to the ways in which critical theories of identity translate into material social concerns. The argument is that the ways of reading bisexuality and bisexually that I have put forward, can give us ways to think about, and indeed *do* time and narrative differently – bitextually and 8isexually. Nevertheless, in the scope of this project, heterocapitalism, derived from Roof, Halberstam and Freeman particularly, has been perceived somewhat in the abstract. Further work now needs to be done to interrogate the role of *re/depositioning* in our particular neoliberal economic moment.

The work of *re/depositioning* has been to begin to draw together into an approach (or network of approaches), elements of different debates: temporality; queerness; oppositionality; narrative progress and endings; adolescence; camp; self-performance; science and the arts; viable resistance; canon creation; high and low art; disciplinarity; adaptation; intertextuality; and the policing of cultural boundaries more broadly. Bisexuality and particularly bitextuality, has been the root and route of this work because of its theoretical and disciplinary unfixedness and the similarities that its numerous cultural productions share with

many of these other debates. In *re/depositioning*, bisexuality is what allows us to keep so many plates spinning.

### Bitextual Silences

Bitextuality has often been marked in this thesis by structural absences, gaps and silences: whether this is the unnamed bisexuality and narrative time jumps in *The Stranger's Child*, the silent 'Great Sulk' and its silencing in *The Buddha(s) of Suburbia*, or the same texts' recalling and silencing of real life figures such as the Sex Pistols. Equally we have seen the absence or silencing of bisexuality in queer theories, or in the necessary dismissal of bisexuality for Dillon's queering palimpsestuousness, or Gordon's retrospective closet. I have proposed a number of responses to these erasures. One is that of the **back-door queer** – the suggestion that due to its having been consistently sidelined, bisexuality might be the unfixed identity that anti-normative queer tries but must fail to be. Another response is in the elaboration of **bi-camp**, argued here through a reading of *The Stranger's Child* in which bi/sexual invisibility and absence are taken to camp extremes. But this thesis is also necessarily haunted by its own gaps and silences, some explicit, some less so.

Some of these are methodological and are discussed in the introduction; the particular focus on male bisexuality for instance, can only also draw attention to absent female bisexualities. Although sharing some of the same stereotypes, female bisexuality generally occurs differently in mainstream representation; as Eisner states men usually get written as 'really' gay whereas women are written as 'really' straight (2013, 39). It was deemed appropriate to focus on just one of either male or female bisexuality – despite the inevitable upholding of a binary division which such a move entails. Bisexuality as a critical approach, theorized here through radical non-disclosure, non-linear temporalities and textual immaturity, is extendable in the abstract to broader categories than bisexual cis male

representation. However the texts under discussion here represent specifically British, male contemporary bisexualities and intend no universalization from these.

Some of these, most notably Hollinghurst and the Pet Shop Boys, are male bisexualities/bitextualities defined in part by their relationship to a gay male community. Indeed, I write this thesis as a member of contemporary UK gay male and queer academic communities and it should therefore be seen from this perspective.<sup>54</sup> In the 1994 foreword to *Cultural Politics – Queer Reading*, Alan Sinfield explains that ‘male gayness runs through [those] discussions because it is part of [his] argument that intellectuals should work in their own subcultural constituencies’ (2005, xx). In this project I have written as a gay-identified cis male and a researcher in literary and cultural studies and queer theory in order to explore how those constituencies, my constituencies, have engaged in the erasure and/or re-writing of bisexuality and to address what has been lost or foreclosed by our having done so.

What this thesis does not cover and where further work needs to be done is in the intersections between *re/depositioning* and different (bisexual) identities and subcultures. This project lacks sufficient scope, for instance, to explore bisexual narratives and temporalities as they relate to trans representations and experience. Bisexuality and trans identities and politics have their own histories of connection and antagonism, distinct from the gay/queer/bi relationships I have charted in this project (see Eisner 2013, 49–58). Eisner remarks that ‘one of the central ways in which bisexuality is defined and imagined today’ is as ‘intrinsically transphobic’ – in particular due to its supposed inherent binarism (2013, 49). Throughout this thesis I have argued against such a reading of bisexuality as necessarily binary. Radical non-disclosure could therefore be further elaborated in reference to trans and intersex readings, particularly given the still-present senses of the word bisexual to mean either physical or psychic two-sexed or two-genderedness in some disciplines.

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<sup>54</sup> And in terms of its relation to privileged male self-importance this thesis’s cast list of Bowie, Hollinghurst, Morrissey and Edelman in particular, probably speaks for itself.



**Chapter Three's** discussion of *The Buddha(s) of Suburbia* was concerned to discuss these texts as a bitextual network of non-linear influences, writing immaturity immaturely and fucking with the fabric of time. In reading the texts in this way however, the predominant racial themes were somewhat sidelined. In part this is because that ground has been better covered to date; Kureishi, understandably, is often read through a postcolonial lens and such work has produced insights and understanding of cultural hybridity, race-relations and British-Indian experience. My focus has been different, choosing instead to follow the punk threads through the texts. The primary focus of this chapter was to advance textual immaturity. Thus particular intersections between bisexuality and race remain underexplored here. Future work should elaborate the notion of critical immaturity, alongside ongoing work in queer failure and disciplinary disobedience, and in debates around contemporary adolescence. With bisexuality operating as a nexus between adolescence, queer studies and narrative, I offer bitextuality and textual immaturity as potential sites for this.

Other of the project's gaps or silences concern those areas of focus which the discrete chapters can reawaken among themselves. **Chapter Five's** elaboration of bi-camp, in which the invisibilities and absences of bisexuality become excessively present, not only guides my readings of *The Stranger's Child*, but also quietly exposes the interrogations of camp in Morrissey and *The Buddha(s) of Suburbia*, which this thesis did not conduct. For example, Susan Brook (2005), has persuasively argued for an understanding of Kureishi's representations of suburbia as a camp space, while Stan Hawkins (2009), and Mark Simpson (2003), have explored the campness of Morrissey, with Hawkins comparing the performer's techniques with those of the Pet Shop Boys (whom this project injected into a reading of Kureishi, and whom informed its understanding of bisexual temporalities). Following **Chapter Five's** proposal of bi-camp, the campness of the Kureishi and Morrissey texts as put forward by the writers above, could now be revisited as the bi-camp that it perhaps already was.

The lessons from Charlie Hero's disruption of History can also reignite *The Stranger's Child's* pinning of its chapters to backgrounded historical events. The second of the novel's sections is set in 1926 in which Sebastian Stokes, Cecil's first biographer, comes to the Valence's estate following 'some important meeting, something about the miners' (125); seemingly the whole country was talking 'about Sebby and the Trade Unions' (137), and characters are seen 'discussing the miners' strike' over the weekend'(199). In later sections, however, this occasion is remembered as being 'on the very eve of the General Strike' (317). While this can be recognised as an attempt to use period-appropriate language and therefore situates the different time periods discretely, this *particular* shift in language also unfixes those periods and puts them into discussion with each other.

Reading from the twenty-first century UK, the phrase 'miners' strike' resonates very differently to 'general strike;' the former must invoke Thatcher's 1980s – a period so central to *The Line of Beauty* and yet strikingly absent from *The Stranger's Child* (which jumps from 1980 to 2008). This reinforces the idea of *The Stranger's Child* as a departure for Hollinghurst whilst simultaneously inviting a reading of *The Line of Beauty* as a version of the 'missing' 1980s section in the latter novel. So just as with Thatcher's imminent presence in *The Buddha of Suburbia* –the final scene of which occurs on the night of the election which installed her as Prime Minister – her marked absence in *The Stranger's Child* ensures she haunts the text nonetheless.

Kureishi's novel, which ends by indicating her election and all that came to mean, was first published in 1990, the final year of Thatcher's premiership. Reading it in the mid-2010s, after her death but from a political landscape still marked by her figure, this reference to her beginning can now be viewed in relation to the end (or rather lack-thereof) of her story. But perhaps the bitextual versions of History presented by both of these texts – as contingent, malleable, queerly forgettable and immaturely rewritable –might suggest bi-temporal routes

out of the 'stultifying present' (Muñoz 2009, 28), over which her politics still have significant grasp.

The ideas developed in this thesis can themselves be considered bitextually in both particle and wave pictures. In the former they are discrete and localised – the chapters are demarcated and the readings tied to particular texts. But each of these discrete moments can also be seen to extend in space and time, reaching back and forward and interfering in the other parts of the thesis. Like the leaky structure of *The Stranger's Child*, we read continuity into narrative gaps. Like each bi-temporal moment at the crossways of the lemniscate, the route through which the thesis therefore progresses is one of many potential routes which holds in conversation the loops of possible pasts and loops of possible futures with which it is co-extensive. It can therefore be retroactively altered, from the present moment of reading.

This is a feature of all writing; but in the construction of a PhD thesis, where the overarching narrative has both emerged from and been imposed upon many individual moments of reading and writing, and which has been through numerous iterations of ordering and restructuring, it becomes a key part of the work's temporal approach. There is work in the thesis which led my thinking directly on to ideas which now appear before it in the present structure, and haunting remnants of thinking, reading and writing which did not make this version of it – whole chapters reduced to a footnote, and conversely, footnotes growing out to become chapters. It is also haunted by the future changes and developments I may make to these researches (and in that sense of course, the pre-viva submission is intrinsically unresolved compared to a post-viva one). In the above I mean only to emphasize that the temporality of writing such work is always one in which straight time is being fucked with whilst simultaneously being delineated, structured, fixed into a necessarily progressional and cumulative artefact.

I have been keen in this project to take some of the representations of bisexuality as promiscuous, as immature, as uncertain, and repurpose these as critical approach in

*re/depositioning*. In doing so, the thesis has staged a 'return' to bisexuality from the position of the queer theory which has supposedly progressed beyond it. In part then this project, in Elizabeth Freeman's sense, looks backwards to the undetonated energies of the 'failed revolution' that is bisexual theory whilst also using the present illegibility of bisexuality as a route into a better queer future (2010, xvi). This project has also read palimpsestuously (building on Dillon 2007), and seen bisexuality as an erased and resurrected enmeshed textual layer 'underneath' queer and gay discourse.

I do not go so far as in, for instance, Marjorie Garber's (1995) reading in which bisexuality essentially comes to stand for all sexuality, nor accept bisexuality as the 'originary' sexuality. Eisner draws attention to a pervasive 'Freudian-based myth that very few people are actually monosexual (a homophobic notion that disrespects monosexualities and erases unique bisexual identity and experience)' (2013, 17) – such a notion is also 'heterophobic' of course. Bisexuality is not inherently radical, nor more or less 'natural' than other sexualities, but the way in which it has come to mean (or, often, not mean) in contemporary culture does afford it particular qualities with potential for narrative reworking that other positions may not be able to access. Thinking through bisexual stereotypes and interrogating the terms through which it has been produced, this project shows that a return to bisexuality within an increasingly institutionalised queer theory is both productive and necessary.

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# Afterword

Because there had to be



An earlier beginning: this thesis began with the confusion of a 14 year old. Although by the time I came out to anyone else it was as gay, I had come out to myself some time previously as bisexual. In later life this had become written in my personal narrative – as is often the case in many people's – as a period in which I had chosen bi because it was less threatening. I found evidence in my memories of childhood to assure myself that I was, and had always been, 'really' gay. I came to understand this as akin to 'the queer apologetic'; a deliberate and knowingly 'false' attempt to ease the transition. In later memory this was characterised by a particular triangle: a close male and a close female friend began flirting with each other and this filled me with a potent and confusing jealousy – confusing because I couldn't tell/decide whom I was more jealous of, him or her.

*Re/depositioning* is a critical lens that has developed as a response, by a gay man, to what I perceived as a lack of acknowledgment of or engagement with bisexuality within queer studies and to recent trends in the field around queer temporality. While it was never knowingly the intention, I must also acknowledge that one of the results of this project has been to assuage some bisexual guilt of my own, I was not aware I had. What this means at a very simple, personal level is that whilst I am still non-bi-identifying, given my advancement in this project of the validity of pasts even as they have been altered by the present, I now recognise in this past 'confused' self, the self that *is* bisexual, who experiences this jealousy *because he genuinely wants them both*. *Re/depositioning* my own personal narrative re-experiences, and re-accepts this moment as a validly bisexual moment, not as a 'phase' or transition but as a constantly present past, among many pasts. It also allows me to recognise the necessary repudiation of this moment in the construction of myself in this present, as gay. If nothing else, working on this thesis has shown me ways to live bi-temporally, recognising that whilst I may not currently identify as bisexual, my current liveable gay identity can be held, non-hierarchically, non-chronologically, alongside many different versions of my personal history and my potential futures.