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## Book review: getting emotional after sex: tendencies in queer studies

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## Review Essay

### Getting Emotional After Sex: Tendencies in Queer Studies

Sarah Cefai

Browne, Kath and Nash, Catherine (eds), *Queer Methods and Methodologies: Intersecting Queer Theories and Social Science Research*, Ashgate, Farnham and Burlington, 2010. ISBN: 978-0-7546-7843-4, 316 pp., £65.00.

Halley, Janet and Parker, Andrew (eds), *After Sex? On Writing Since Queer Theory*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2011. ISBN: 978-0- 8223-4909-9, 336 pp., US\$24.95.

Heckert, Jamie and Cleminson, Richard (eds), *Anarchism & Sexuality: Ethics, Relationships and Power*, Routledge, Oxon and New York, 2011. ISBN: 978-0415-65818-8, 238 pp., US\$42.99.

#### Queer anti-queer

*After Sex?*, *Queer Methods and Methodologies* and *Anarchism & Sexuality* are anthologies on queer theory, method and politics. Each book leads with one topic, but engages all three, resulting in queer studies projects that defy thinking queer singularly. These books reflect new directions in research as well as a reflexive attitude towards the institutionalisation of queer in the academy. Such reflexivity pools the critical and not so critical energies of myriad projects, asking: What can 'queer' do, now that queer appears only with a genealogy that is necessarily, at least in part, orthodox in its concepts and citations?

*After Sex? On Writing Since Queer Theory* (2011) is a retrospective on queer theory edited by Janet Halley and Andrew Parker and written by some of queer theory's more influential voices. The book consists of responses to the editors' leading question: 'What has queer theory become now that it has a past?'; quickly supplemented by the more intriguing: 'Does "sexuality" comprise its inside? If so, then does queer theory have an outside?' (*AS?*: 1). The book's tenor is decided by examining the relationship between a political discourse, 'queer', and its primary concept, 'sex', through the 'personal' (2). Authors engage with their own apprehensions of the still unravelling event of queer thinking in the academy, duly giving space to the ongoing suspension of queer's institutionalisation in ways not analogous to those of postcolonial or gender studies. Reflecting this, *AS?* coheres around the genealogical quality of authorial voices and the critical worlds they live in, rather than any definitive agenda or even shared problematic.

From the other side of the Atlantic, *Anarchism & Sexuality: Ethics, Relationships and Power* (2011), edited by British based sociologist Jamie Heckert and historian

Richard Cleminson, asks the most direct questions, but (perhaps consequently) packs the least punch. The book's desire to bring about and document radical change in social and cultural life risks the reader's disappointment. The Introduction presumes familiarity with sexuality studies, opting instead to introduce anarchism. The revolutionary demand for change is a call to action on which chapters and poems—ranging from social commentary (Kolárová) to academic (Davis)—do not equally deliver. The editors annotate the aims of their book as follows: 1) 'to make fresh anarchist perspectives available to contemporary debates around sexuality'; 2) 'to make a queer and feminist intervention within the most recent waves of anarchist scholarship'; and, 3) 'to make a queerly anarchist contribution to social justice literature, policy and practice' (*A&S*: 1).

Whereas *A&S* marries academia and activism as an inchoate hybridity that is an opportunity, *Queer Methods & Methodologies* takes this as an ethical and epistemological problematic invited by the use of queer theory in social science, and *AS?* takes as read that this relationship—activist and academic—has always been the condition of queer thought (e.g. see Berlant 1994). The hybrid form of academia and activism in *A&S* is an exciting proposal for a political sensibility, but the intellectual space remains undecided with chapters quite isolated from one another in a fragmentary conversation that does not bear out the editors' intentions to reflect on the conferencing and research networks through which, the reader is told, the book emerged. I found it difficult to grasp the central object of the project from the outset as I do not follow the editors' premise that 'authoritarian divisions between the personal and political, between desires categorised as heterosexual or homosexual, between activism and scholarship' (Heckert and Cleminson: 1) are entrenched as such. The relation between this opening taxonomy and existent relations of power deserves more lengthy explanation. Particularly tricky for a newcomer is the idea of anarchy as an umbrella term for feminist, postcolonial, race, queer, indigenous and Marxist analysis. *A&S* might, then, have fared better as a niche publication that did not aim to persuade those working on sexuality to the ways of anarchism, but rather created conversation among authors of a nascent field. A more consistent genealogy of 'anarchism' throughout the book might have allowed for a more convincing engagement between central terms such as power, intimacy, and activism.

Somewhere in between, with editors and contributors writing primarily from the US, UK, but also Sweden, Canada and New Zealand, *Queer Methods and Methodologies: Intersecting Queer Theories and Social Science Research* (2010) is altogether different. The editors' Introduction takes as its audience a reader unfamiliar with queer studies and introduces them to chapters that connect through a series of problematics produced at the intersection between queer theory and research methodology in the social sciences. To explain the book's origins, geographers of sexuality Kath Browne and Catherine J. Nash cite the omission of 'method' and 'methodology' from discussion on the integration of queer theorising in social research. They observe: 'Many scholars who use queer theorisations can use undefined notions of what they mean by "queer research" and rarely undertake a sustained consideration of how queer approaches might sit with (particularly social scientific) methodological choices' (*QMAM*: 1). This is a welcome interdisciplinary reflection on and call for deeper engagement with methodology as integral to queer knowledge and answerable to queer theoretical paradigms.

All three editorial frames converge on the need to mark out a threshold of queer's academic institutionalisation by identifying 'queer' forms or instantiations not to be confused with their own. The queer anti-queer is that which queer is not, cannot and should not be; that which threatens the very potential of what queer studies *could* (and *should*) become; that which must be specified in order 'to counter the ways "queer" often means merely...' (Berlant 1995: 301, and in her example, "cool gay man from the city"). Halley and Parker specify their anti-queer as follows:

Queer has become the victim of its own popularity, proliferating to the point of uselessness as a neologism for the transgression of any norm (queering history, queering the sonnet). Used in this sense, the term becomes confusing, since it always connotes a homosexuality that may not be at stake when the term is used so broadly. (Marcus 2002: 196, in *AS*: 7)

Transgression for the sake of transgression is an all too familiar queer anti-queer, often associated with misdirected readings of Judith Butler (Butler 1993). A further and related problem is the failure to insulate queer scholarship from acquiescing to norms. As others have noted, queer theory's promised revolution in 'new ways of living and "doing" identity and *being* in the (Western) world' was 'immediately usurped by the overarching individualistic culture of North American capitalism' (Blumenthal 2012: 1). The 'failure' of queer theory to guarantee a critical vantage point is bound up in its success as an academic term in that queer's acquiescing to norms of intimacy and economic exchange in capitalist culture operates within as much as beyond academia.

*QM&M* and *A&S*, on the other hand, specify their anti-queer as abstraction to the point of inconsequence. The anti-queer for these publications is that which is so far removed from people's everyday it bears no relevance on the material conditions of living:

With this initial focus on discourse analysis and cultural critique, some scholars argue that queer approaches, while interesting theoretically, are largely detached from the blood, bricks and mortar of everyday life. Queer theorising arguably does not lead to effective changes around the material inequalities of everyday life (although this could be questioned by the cultural materialist strand of (still textual) queer theory). (Browne and Nash *QM&M*: 6)

No doubt *AS?* is one such 'still textual', here implicated in Browne and Nash's distinction between theory / materiality that in my reading is underscored by a concept of class (on the undecided relation between queer and 'material inequality' see in particular Berlant 1994). The abstraction of queer is a similarly salient point of reference for Heckert and Cleminson:

In doing so, *Anarchism and Sexuality* bridges a supposed gap between theory and activism, between ideas and real life struggle. By drawing inspiration from the rise of the global movement of movements, and the corresponding waves of anarchist activism and scholarship, this book provides much-needed sources of inspiration for putting anarchist ethics into practice, focusing on issues such as race, class and gender equality ... (*A&S*: 2)

*A&S* claims its politics through apprehending real life in the activist resistance to capitalist organisation.

These discussions about what is queer or anti-queer are not simply a matter of policing the meaning of a word and its worlds. The need for distinction around queer's meaning continues to be symptomatic of the different epistemologies brought into contact in a field of knowledge that is liminally institutionalised. More difficult to comprehend than multiplicities in meaning are the fragmentary responses to the massive questions posed by the editors. Given the degree and complexity of tension between these books and the variety of scholarship within each one—over fifty authored contributions in total—this article does not synopsise content nor attempt claims on the status of queer studies (see, in the US, Berlant and Warner 1995; Butler 1997b; Eng, Halberstam and Muñoz 2005; Halperlin 2003; Marcus 2005; Povinelli and Chauncey 1999). This article instead picks up on three tendencies in queer studies that these books together agitate: 1) the representation of queer scholarly embodiment and subjectivity engaged by the different disciplinary intentions of the books; 2) the ironic development of queer identity that is based on anti-identitarian principles, and; 3) the uneven representation of the methodological production of queer subjects and objects of knowledge.

### **Calming the trembling body**

Queer scholarship 'has given us, among other things, a language to think about the relative closeness and distance between bodies' (Cobb *AS?*: 218). Closeness and distance between bodies is that about which the academic subject of queer studies speaks *and* that which animates the embodied subjectivity of the queer scholar.

Unlike other subjects whose capacity to craft knowledge is afforded by their academic institutionalisation, the subject of queer studies is located: 1) in terms of identity, 2) their identification with a critical—intellectual and political—project *about* identity, and 3) in terms of an embodied relationality between identity (1) and critical identification (2). The context of subjective embodiment is one in which the queer subject is constantly renewed.

Conceptualising gender as a field of representation has been central to feminism since the writing of Simone de Beauvoir and is part of feminism's generational renewal. Not all women are feminists, yet, as standpoint feminist theorists have demonstrated, women are the potential subjects of certain types of gendered knowledge. The case of lesbian studies is different because the 'disjunction between ontology and politics' is not linguistically marked through the circulation of 'a separate word for each position' (like *women* and *feminism*) (Villarejo 2003: 6). The case of queer is different again. Like lesbian, queer connotes the sexual specificity of being and knowledge, but at the same time refuses to tell what that specificity is: queer refuses the sexual specificity of lesbian (and gay) and yet is specifically sexual and sexually specific. It is 'the homosexuality ... at stake' (Marcus 2002: 196) and 'a certain unsettling in relation to heteronormativity' (Freccero *AS?*: 17) that specifies queer ontology and politics.

The queer scholar is not necessarily lesbian or gay, but takes up a critical subjectivity that situates sexual identity in relation to a homosexuality that is at stake and a system of heteronormativity that is threatened. A queer perspective would have the author's subjectivity expressive of a sexuality:

The private life of an individual, his sexual preference, and his work are interrelated not because his work translates his sexual life, but because the work includes the whole life as well as the text. The work is more than the work: the subject who is writing is part of the work. (Foucault [1963] 2004: 186)

There is a critical and conceptual elasticity around the terms of self-identification and identification with queer: 'subjectivity relates only obliquely or metonymically, if at all, to totalizable bodies and agencies' (Freccero *AS?*: 23). Queer theory is the ongoing critical interrogation of this oblique relation, even in 'queerly deconstructed identitarian and identificatory logics' (23). The queer scholar's identification with a critical project about identity is lived, but the ontological commitment placed on the subject of queer knowledge is not determined by, or rather, does not determine, a position in and on gender identity. Queer is a politics of identity that embodies its subject through complex discursive and affective mechanisms that generate an eschewed identity that is non-linear, non-singular and becoming, irrevocably not-yet. This suspension of the representation of identity as a point of arrival differentiates the production of queer epistemology from lesbian and gay studies, and feminism, which always names its subject as gendered, even where such naming is contested and incomplete. The fact that this very statement is based on a contradiction—queer is named as queer—points to the problem I wish to open up around queer's valorised possibility as a term whose meaning is perpetually open. This valorising takes place only in relation to the fixity of other terms.

Queer experience is located in representational gaps and overlaps between academic and sub-cultural spheres in which critique is forged (Berlant and Warner 1995). Several contributors to *A&S* are part of an anarchist practice that is culturally specific, outside of the cultural spaces provided by academia. In asking 'queer theorizing' to 'bring into relation desire and subjectivity with politics, sex, community, living, and dying,' Carla Freccero observes that 'this is what activist community and popular discourses of queer theory that circulate predominantly in non-scholarly venues more often set out to do' (*AS?*: 23). People become subjects of academic knowledge through their cultural participation in specific, often politicised, sites of sexual identity construction. Scholarly queer subjectivity is networked into academic and cultural practices shaped by the desire for a life that is not governed by heteronormativity.

Interviewing Butler, Heckert cites the following from *Bodies that Matter*: 'There must be a body trembling before the law, a body whose fear can be compelled by the law, a law that produces the trembling body prepared for its inscription' (*A&S*: 97), Butler goes on, 'a law that marks the body *first* with fear only then to mark it again with the symbolic stamp of sex' (1993: 101). This raises the question:

Is there something about anarchist(ic) practice that calms the trembling body so that you or I or anyone can act in ways unconstrained by fear of the law and the threats of violence with which it is intertwined, particularly against those bodies inscribed as subjectable to violation ...? (Heckert: 97)

Heckert's discussion with Butler foregrounds the question of 'what enables the freedom of non-compliance' (97) in which anarchism slows down or interrupts the pace of fear's intensification of the body by state power. Fear tracks potential violation, rendering the imagined autonomy of certain bodies always already violated through their subjection to fear of violation. Queer studies might be understood as a

field of knowledge that reinterprets the meaning of fear, queering fear, rendering fear's (potential) subject sexually specific and specifically sexual—fear in and among queer's other emotions, but perhaps that which is particularly amenable to a discussion of social control.

Subjects of queer studies embody the residues of structural fear and in so doing become susceptible to the paranoia of structuralism. This predicament is the subject of the final chapter of *AS?*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's (283-301) examination of Melanie Klein's 'paranoid / schizoid position' (*AS?* 291) and its stymieing of queer utopianism. Lauren Berlant describes her own 'depressive realism' as that 'in which the world's hard scenes ride the wave of the optimism inscribed in ambivalence, but without taking on optimism's conventional tones' (80). Joseph Litvak is 'secretly' loving queer theory's 'rich modern repertoire of bad vibes, the verve with which it picks up on all the clammy emotions' (46). Heather Love has 'been loving' lesbian identity 'too long' (181). And Ann Cvetkovich continues to 'depathologize negative affects' (170). Queer emotion enjoys no consensus other than the fact that emotion, after sex, is being queered. Sedgwick's analysis is the editors' pick because it fronts the watershed investment in Freud and Foucault in which these feelings and relations to feelings fester.

In hindsight, *Bodies that Matter*, like other queer texts of its time, is precursory to the rise of affect in queer theory. Queer's affective turn is consistent with Butler and Sara Ahmed's theorisations of performative embodiment or queer feminist uses of Deleuze, in Berlant, for example. *AS?* does not decide what queer scholarship 'is' as a singular discursive entity because queer theory is in excess of itself. The book's chosen frame of reference for this excess is 'after', but as a provocation I suggest it could have been 'affect'.

Affect is becoming the primary way of speaking about the closeness and distance between bodies. As queer theory advances analytic concepts beyond formative investments, intellectual genealogies become more rarefied. The diversification in affect and emotion multiplies queer ways of recognising subjectivity, power and knowledge, simultaneously institutionalising forms of recognition as ways of speaking about feeling, ways of 'doing' and 'being' queer. In these books, queer precisely takes on the 'special place' of the intimate (Berlant; Povinelli *AS?*).

Queer theory is not immune to neo-liberalism or hierarchies of philosophical and social scientific knowledge that are themselves powerful forces of the academy. Where queer theory adjudicates it operates normatively to subjectivate through fear (of failure, judgement, difference and therefore shame) that produces conformity. How does the adjudication of knowledge sit with the love and passion queer subjects bring to critical thinking? If, as Berlant claims, 'performing and being recognized as emotionally authentic is just as important to the modern sense of being someone as understanding one's sexual identity is' (*AS?*: 82), emotional authenticity will increasingly be a maker of queer subjection. Perhaps *AS?* assesses the paradoxical temporality of queer 'after' sex but before the law.

### **Anti-identitarian identity**

*QM&M* and *A&S* are unlike *AS?* in their implied conception of queer as a form of identity. While all three books participate in the construction of a queer scholarly

subject they hold different empiricisms, expressed in different configurations of queer in relation to identity. A number of configurations are expressed in *QM&M*. For instance, *sexual identity categories* are fluid: “‘Queer’ ... (re)defines non-normative categories of multiple sexual, gender and other marginalised identities as fluid’ (Munoz: 57); *queer thought* is fluid: ‘Fluidity and dynamism characterise queer thought’ (Jones and Adams: 204); *subjects and subjectivities* are fluid: ‘If, as queer thinking argues, subjects and subjectivities are fluid, unstable and perpetually becoming’ (Browne and Nash: 1); *identities themselves* are fluid: ‘Queer theorists seek to demonstrate that identities are unstable, fluid fictions’ (King and Corrin: 87-88); and *spaces*: ‘Queer theory and methodology has been associated with ... the fluidity of spaces and identities in the process of always “becoming”’ (Taylor: 69). Fluidity is also imagined as a relation between lived identities and available representations (‘categories’): ‘the coherence that is offered does not do justice to many queer lives which are often conflicted, contradictory and defying the coherence these categories offer’ (Rooke: 37).

This talk of fluidity exposes its authors to Biddy Martin’s earlier critique of ‘anti-foundationalist celebrations of queerness [which] rely on their own projections of fixity, constraint, or subjection onto a fixed ground, often onto feminism or the female body, in relation to which queer sexuality becomes figural, performative, playful, and fun’ (1996: 71-72). The Introduction to *QM&M* certainly negatively associates ‘fixity’: ‘do not adhere to any specific school of thought’ (4); ‘a failure to neatly box up our thinking’ (8); ‘did not enforce any particular definition’ (9); ‘cannot be reduced to’ (13); ‘escape confinement’ (16); favouring ‘the messiness of social life’ (13, 14, 15). However, these sound to me like a problematisation of the constraints of an epistemology as much as any sexual norm. The challenge of coming to terms with the effects of the phantasmatic fix/ity of objectivity in such statements could be part of remembering too how sexuality takes on the proportions of an epistemology (Sedgwick 1990).

The ‘escape from gender’ (Martin 1996: 73) finds new articulation as an escape from gay. Queer ‘announces its newness and advance over against an apparently superseded and now anachronistic feminism [lesbian and gay studies] with its emphasis on gender [lesbian and gay identity]’ (71). To claim that queer ‘has resulted in a questioning of lesbian and gay subject positions and the existence, or even possibilities, of such sexual subjectivities’ (Browne *QM&M*: 235) projects a disciplinary fixity or problematic of epistemology onto subjects of lesbian and gay identity. What remains of ‘lesbian studies’ when it is understood to proceed through a foundational attachment to identity? Fixating on the explanatory power of ‘fixity’ in this way aligns the critical aptitude of queer against the lesbian and gay constituents of its meaning.

The historical emergence of queer as a critique of ‘identity politics’ does not insulate the term in its theory and practice from becoming a subjectivating discourse of identity (also see Talburt and Rasmussen 2012). Several authors of *A&S* and *QM&M* regard queer in its emergent identity form—one that singularises clusters of desire that are non-singular in terms of their gendered orientations. Identification ‘with particular sexual variables’, according to Browne and Nash, ‘becomes increasingly complicated with more nuanced and non-normative understandings of gender and sexuality, particularly in relation to queer identities’ (*QM&M*: 12). By representing



sexual fluidity as an outcome of queer theory's challenge to 'the constraints of exclusionary identities such as "gay", "bi" and "hetero"' (Heckert and Cleminson *A&S*: 9), lesbian and gay identities are collapsed into heterosexuality as the placeholder of normativity even though their alternative—queer—relies on the very matter being collapsed. Heckert's observation, that 'the mainstream categories of gendered desire—hetero, homo, bi—didn't work for me anymore' (*QM&M*: 44), is a case in point. Where these (hetero, homo, bi) identities do work is the presumed scene of normativity but the desire for new (queer) identities that do work is not apprehended as a scene of normativity. Rather than leave the projected fixity of normativity unscrutinised, I suggest that the dysfunction of identity, the frustrations and contradictions cobbled together by the necessary impossibility of *being* someone ('gay'), needs to be unlearned as a sign of the failure of normativity.

Figuring the fluidity of lesbian and gay through their contingency on neighbouring terms, *intersectionality* makes possible a 'more nuanced and non-normative' account of how identities are singularly and relationally lived (e.g. Ahmed 2004, Puar 2012). An intersectional analysis reveals how 'categories of sexuality and class are experienced as unequal and far from fluid' (Taylor *QM&M*: 70). This complicates what is represented in the experience of 'erotic relationships' that cross 'borders of sexual orientation' (Heckert *QM&M*: 46) and 'queer lives' that defy 'the coherence these categories have to offer' (Rooke *QM&M*: 37). Analysing the inadequacy of the terms hetero, homo and bi is part of understanding what these terms also allow us to do, given that their inadequacies track both the tendency towards normativity *and* the critical aspiration for something else. The desire to call this inadequacy 'queer', that registers as a desire for transcendence, makes it increasingly difficult to name a homo object any other way.

Where experience is the possession of identity—e.g. 'As a lesbian investigating gay and lesbian space, I arguably possess an "experiential sameness" that entitles me to claim a shared identity' (Nash *QM&M*: 137)—the fixity of the term lesbian is imported with its explanatory power as a determinant of experience. The overdetermination of identity however can be critically challenged through positioning experience as ideologically mediated and contested *as* a political field of identity (Scott 1992). Here I am concerned by the naturalisation of a queer anti-queer (lesbian and gay) and its forms of privilege (consumer power, whiteness, the West) that while not discursively equivalent continues as a historical condition of queer identity and its academic discourse.

Queer experience is a sort of claim on sexual experience that is not determined by sexuality as a technology for normative living, that in some accounts attaches lesbian and gay to the presumption of normal where what is normal needs to be questioned: 'homosexuality can never have the invisible, tacit, society-founding rightness that heterosexuality has, it would not be possible to speak of "homonormativity" in the same sense' (Berlant and Warner 1998: 548 ff. 2). The analysis of lesbian and gay mainstreaming needs a more rigorous end point than the assertion of a 'homonormativity' which seems to deliver the punitive construction of a subject.

Queer has become a subjectivating force in the academy. If 'the very idea of sexual orientation affects people's capacities for intimacy and honesty' (Heckert *QM&M*: 44), queer reshapes the ways queer subjects think and feel. This reshaping finds its expression in the relationship between the production of queer knowledge and its

institutions. Heckert's role as a sex educator is one example (*A&S*); Browne's application of queer thinking to the question of 'creating a "sexuality question" for governmental social research for England and Wales' (*QMAM*: 231) is another. Understanding queer's institutionalisation requires a consideration of emerging relations of accountability. Persistent negation of the term 'identity' in definitions of queer blinds the reader to queer theory's own production of identitarian subjects of knowledge. Yes, such subjects boast critical reflexivity, but queer theory is the stuff of identity none the less. It is *identity*, as Foucault (1976) showed through his example of sex, that makes us who we are, that gives us experience, however fluid.

### **A matter of discipline**

The editors of *QM&M* back away from drawing conclusions regarding contributors' reflections, which reveal three distinct challenges, the first of which is how to think about 'insider' and 'outsider' positions in research. The insider position has been the subject of power-sensitive feminist discussions on methodology and is questioned further by a queer understanding of sexual identity that focuses on inconsistency and slippages in meaning. Discrepancies in meaning are often formed in the intersection of multiple identities (Rooke; Muñoz; Taylor; Gorman-Murray, Johnston and Wait; Dahl). A common theme in the discussion of insider / outsider or research / researcher relations is intimacy—particularly forms of intimacy involved in the gendering of desire—and the role that queer theory plays in creating a space for understanding and problematising how subjects become involved in the production of research (Heckert; Jackman; Dahl; Detamore; Jones and Adams).

The second challenge to emerge from *QM&M* is defining the concept of the 'field'. The field, as a temporal and spatial distinction, relates to the production of identity and governs the inside / outside of research and research relations (Rooke; Jackman; Nash; Dahl). Contributors identify the role of the 'field' as 'a spatial, temporal and sensory capsule, which is constantly revisited through notes, transcripts and memory' (Rooke: 30). Rooke, Heckert and Michael Connors Jackman are concerned by the effects of erasing, writing out and managing emotionality and desire through the displacing function of the 'field' as well as through the subjectivating displacements required by academic training and professionalism (especially Heckert). The field is not a pre-existing place but an imaginary and material 'out there' or 'elsewhere' circumscribed by the researcher not only at the level of the project, but at the level of culture, subjectivity and inter-personal relations (Dahl; Jones and Adams).

The third challenge is the specific example of ethnography in relation to queer. Ethnography is a methodology and a method—an approach to research and a technique—that raises the most complete range of questions of representation. Ethnography requires 'constant crossing between the "here" and "there", between the past, present and future' (Rooke: 30). It is the 'descriptive nature of ethnography' that 'allows for the nuanced communication of experience' (29) which dovetails neatly with queer critiques of identity (also see Boellstorff). Ethnography involves proximity to the lives of others and therefore proximity to the process of becoming the researcher / researched, to ethical decision making, as well as to issues of representation, objectivity and distance paramount to social science epistemology.

The fluidity of identity might be a prevalent theme of *QM&M* because it serves so well as a route of connection between queer theory and methodology. Like feminist

discussions, queer emphasises qualitative methods. Quantitative methods have been little explored beyond their risk of further subjugating subjects of lesbian and gay identity. This risk (it appears, of fixity,) is expressed in the view that methodologies reliant on categories to talk about sexuality on a sociological scale ‘have not allowed for the rendering of gender and sexual categories as fluid embodied identities’ (Muñoz: 56, also Browne). Several contributors discuss methodological choice as a question of wanting to capture the fluidity not only of the sexual identity of research subjects, but of researcher / researched identity in the process of research (Rooke; Heckert; King and Cronin; Gorman-Murray, Johnston and Wait; Dahl; Jones and Adams).

Many essays resist both ‘the critique of queer theory as overly concerned with textual criticism and the attachment to methodological scientificity within some schools of sociology’ (Rooke *QM&M*: 25, Taylor; Dahl; Boellstorff). The tension between abstraction and empiricism is a disciplinary matter affecting queer studies through claims to accountability and relevance. Understood ‘archaeologically’, queer theory is located within ‘the emergence of discursive formations, conceptual frameworks, and schemes of perception’ that enable as well as limit the work it is possible to do (Lucey *AS?*: 234, drawing on Foucault). In an imperialist model, authors of *AS?* hailing from Harvard, Colombia, the universities of California, Texas, New York and the like, create concepts of queer that are changed in their interpretation by readers located in different (read: less important) contexts. These anthologies, however, reveal discourses of queer theory that are embedded in the local production of knowledge. Queer concepts bear an isomorphic relation with their disciplinary, and therefore national contexts, in epistemic communities that formulate queer and anti-queer theory to suit the particular demands of research.

Jonathan Goldberg claims that queer theory’s ‘call for us not to remain with sex “in itself” ... means that queer theory never was a positivist project but was always one that dwelt in the realm of the simulacrum’ (*AS?*: 41). Or, as Berlant writes: ‘Sex is not a thing, it’s a relation’ (Berlant *AS?*: 81). This presents an immediate challenge to empiricism: ‘Can social science methodologies be “queered” or even made “queer enough”?’ (Browne and Nash *QM&M*: 2). Rather than thinking of queer as a translation from the humanities to the social sciences their important question requires engaging with the production of queer theory *in* the social sciences. To stay alive to the question of what queer can do, queer as a concept should not be assumed to more properly belongs to the humanities for this would foreclose understanding of the conceptual life of social scientific knowledges (see Law 2004).

The queer activity of ‘scrutinizing the vagaries of identity and identification’ (Freccero *AS?*: 22-23) does not disband with lesbian and gay for the more fluid ‘queer’, but challenges the very fluidity—vagary, or, more usefully, multiplicity—of lesbian and gay identities. This is distinct from the imperative to focus on fluidity in contexts of social research accountable to people’s experiences. Social scientists use concepts that resonate with their research subjects; these are their stories—neither mine nor entirely apart from mine, as Boellstorf explains and Dahl demonstrates (*QM&M*). Recovering lesbian and gay fluidity might be a more challenging and rewarding way to overcome the fixity attached to lesbian and gay in homophobic epistemology (e.g. see Dahl). ‘Experiences’ available for the critical taking in the public sphere, such as those represented in the media, seem to allow a greater space

for critique, one reflected in the differential application of ethics (typically, reading and writing requires no named ethical protocol, as if such research involves no subjects).

Given queer's realm of the simulacrum, 'new work for queer theory involves the multiplication and dissolution of disciplinary boundaries' (Goldberg *AS?*: 41). There is little evidence of this in *AS?*, which barely acknowledges the social sciences. In fact, none of these anthologies reflect the dissolution of disciplinary boundaries or a singularising of queer. In the social sciences, the 'field' under discussion tends to be the authorial field constructed by the researcher. The operation of social science knowledge as a 'field' of discursive and social relations that equally organises the researcher receives less attention. The criticism of queer's textuality always points to 'theory', as if empirical knowledges do not also function through the reproduction of highly specific kinds of text (e.g. see Ahmed 2004). Methodology is pivotal to the derivative status of representational knowledges that claim to bear more of a relation to a social world than the abstract. In the methodological approaches taken in all the anthologies, the imaginary is central to the specific contribution of queer. To imagine a world otherwise, queer demands a creative approach to representation and textuality; an academic field of knowledge and a vibrant, subcultural, diasporic queer culture write in tandem on the queer palimpsest.

The connection between queer's liminal institutionalisation (for example, there are no tenured lectureships in 'queer theory') and queer's imperialism ('couching its utopian revolutionary impulse in relation to knowledge production in the language of the transformation of everything' (Hoad *AS?*: 135)) is difficult to trace. This is in part because queer theory favours the proliferation of multiplicity in the interstices within and between academic disciplines, in the subtleties of academic practice, as well as in the (un)disciplining circulation of thinkers and texts. Despite this, and the limitations of any politics, I cannot imagine thinking about the social world without the benefit of the intellectual trajectories these projects engage. My reading of these trajectories has highlighted how locating concepts, institutions, and embodiments is part of what we do as queer's subjects. This is an ongoing and necessary process of challenging the status quo, rather than a breather from the real scholarly object or intervention. Each book presents a different institution—a different intersection of publisher, university, nation, discipline—and its public. Concepts within and across the books vary and speak to one another in various intensities of meaning. Closest, though, in both material and intangible proximity, are the affective, embodied lives of their authors. This, for me, is just as important an anthological research output.

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