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“TROLL”: DISSERTATION ON SEXUAL IDENTITY COMPRISING THREE COMPONENTS

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A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Arts, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts.

Johannesburg, 2006

ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores identity as its central theme. There are three components to the dissertation. The first is the academic essay which explores identity through the perspective of queer theory and proposes a three-dimensional conception of an "identity cloud". The second component is the creative essay which consists of ten chapters towards a final novella entitled "troll". The creative component's central theme is the lead protagonist's struggle in assimilating the identities of "gay" and "addict" after receiving a liver transplant. The third and final component is an essay detailing the manner in which the creative and academic created and informed one another.

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted for any other degree or examination in any other university.

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BRETT LOTRIET

_____ day of _____, 2006

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dr Michael Titlestad for supervising and guiding the process and construction of the dissertation.

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no fixed identity. a queer perspective

academic essay: component one

Introduction

This essay is an interrogation of sexual identity as seen through the theoretical kaleidoscope of queer theory, and serves to provide an academic elaboration on the themes explored in the creative component "troll". While the academic and creative components have been involved in a process of mutual production and feedback, they have also interestingly diverged fundamentally from one another. The aim of the dissertation's three components is to create a deep-rooted understanding that all perspectives are inherently filtered through ideological glasses, and while we can never 'remove' these, we can at least become conscious citizens aware of the constructs with which we view the world.

This essay should be read first as it provides the theoretical framework with which to achieve this understanding of identity. I have attempted to focus both the academic and creative components on creating an ideological wedge between identity and the 'facts' of our existence. In this way I hope to remind the reader that if we can *see* differently, our conscious awareness can provide the vital step towards tolerance and open-mindedness in all spheres – political, social and spiritual.

The argument

> An illusion is not something that does not exist, but something that is not what it seems.
> Susan Blackmore, *A Way out of Illusion* [2003:__][1]

> I want us never, in the process, to lose sight of the fact that our debates about the body's biology are always simultaneously moral, ethical, and political debates about the social and political equality and the possibility for change. Nothing less is at stake.
> Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body* [2000:255]

[1] Internet Site. Blackmore, S. *A Way out of Illusion*, downloaded on 28/03/2006 from http://www.susanblackmore.co.uk/Conferences/Oxford03.htm presenting her paper *A Way out Of Illusion* at Enactive Consciousness, Seventh Annual Conference of the Consciousness and Experiential Psychology section of the British Psychological Society, Oxford June 28-9 2003. Works cited will be given full reference in the bibliography. In these footnotes they will be referred to by the author's name (with book or website title added if he/she is the author of more than one publication cited in this essay).

Let me start with a fundamental question. How do you know who you are? It seems somewhat ludicrous as questions go, but it points us to the critical nature of understanding the labels by which we name *who* we are. It is a question that leads us to statements about a unique, essential 'self' that each of us believes to exist. Of course the very word 'essential' is problematic. What is essentially me? My race, my class, who I sleep with or marry, or what I eat? Each of these has a label by which we compose the composite picture called our identity. Each of us can list reams of words, like "white", "father", "vegetarian" or "lawyer" that compose the things that make up *who we are*. These words inflect and moderate the currency by which we transact in society, and the currency itself defines the access to power that we enjoy. I wish to focus this debate on the identity politics of sex and sexuality. Firstly, I must emphasise the gravitas of the debates into which we enter. This realm, this delicate nexus where our bodies, our actions and our feelings intersect, and where thought, desire and physiology collide with culture and society, is the transaction site that governs so many of the interactions between our inner and outer world. And this conception of *who we are* (sexually speaking), whether by choice, by categorisation from within or without, whether accepted or denied, is a site where the personal becomes political, and that is for many a fight for their very lives for, as Fausto-Sterling puts it, "nothing less is at stake"[2].

Sex, as one of our most basic drives, can be seen as a vital support lattice that is fundamental in holding the social matrix in place. Arguably, there would be no nuclear family, no tribe, and no nation if we removed sex from our complex social structures. It's easy to forget that what we do in the bedroom (and of course, whom we do it with) is one of the most invisible but pervasive means by which we situate ourselves within the matrix itself. While sex, gender and sexuality have become recognised as highly charged nodes of power within society, it is in the labelling of these identities that we acknowledge the means by which our social and personal interactions are managed. These labels therefore tell us if *who we are* is permissible or a transgression of the current social mores and codes. This essay seeks to evaluate queer theory as a critical, postmodern ethic capable of revealing the process of identity formation, not to merely

[2] Fausto-Sterling, 255.

devalue it, but to understand the means by which we value per se. We need to compose a different picture of sexual identity (and therefore all identity), as an illusion as described by Blackmore above, not as something that doesn't exist, but as something which is "not as it seems"[3]. For it is not sufficient to merely deconstruct identity, and in revealing its 'constructed-ness' pronounce it meaningless, or to seek an 'Answer' in some Ultimate Theory[4]. Rather, we need to grant ourselves freedom from the tyranny that identity politics imposes upon all of us, even those privileged positions in the mainstream, by analysing identity's production as a fabrication. I do not want to imply that by unveiling the manufacturing of an identity we reveal some empirical 'truth', but rather, as I will discuss, that all forms of production of identity are at best temporary, transitional positions we might occupy.

Postmodernism, and the fight against making things fit

In the rarefied gulf-stream of academia, postmodernism is pulling apart our ways of knowing, our constructed systems of thought and analyses. Our beliefs and philosophies have been, to a large degree, constructed on the assumption that there are implicit and explicit underlying and over-arching truths out there. We seek these ultimate unifying 'truths' for they promise to remain constant, stable, and immutable in all places, at all times. These meta-narratives create a reductionist methodology, a categorical approach. We want things to fit, in their simplest terms, and the facts are either right or wrong. When it comes to the meta-narratives of our bodies, our identities, our sexualities, there remains a deep desire to do away with variety and multiplicity, contradiction, transgression and 'failure' to fit a category. So what happens when a large, hairy man is femme? Or a biological man *feels* like a woman? As Wilchins states in *Queer Theory, Gender Theory*, "the application of symbol and meaning can be painful when it's applied

[3] Blackmore, S. Internet site *A Way Out of Illusion* downloaded on 28/03/2006 from http://www.susanblackmore.co.uk/Conferences/Oxford03.htm.

[4] The concept of an Ultimate Theory is the scientific "philosopher's stone" of equations which currently revolves around the search for a theory that can cope with both the findings of quantum mechanics, as well as the larger forces whose behaviour Einstein outlined in his general and special relativity. Many scientists believe that M theory, which is a unified version of string theory, might provide the answer. The paradigm of such a universal 'key' has spilled into the humanities as well.

to people's bodies…This *fascism of meaning* is a kind of crime – an assault of meaning that forces people to live as gendered impossibilities.[5]" [2004:38]

Why then do we enforce the binaries of man/woman, straight/gay, etc? The real debate is about power. "Power" here, I use in Foucault's sense as a discourse of knowledge that is the tactical and economic relationship between people, institutions and groups[6]. Barry Allen states in *Critical Essays on Foucault* that: "the value of [this] knowledge is no more than its currency, has no more to do with 'things in themselves' than money with the value of its paper or metal"[7], but what is relevant is not that the 'things in themselves' are merely mutually agreed signifiers, but the degree of power imbued in the construct.

Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* has the lines "What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet"[8], implying a thing is what it is, not what we name it. But the naming of it, the *identifying* process, is like giving a price tag to goods. By naming we give or take value, and the process is literally the price tag of identity. The issue is not to prevent this process (arguably impossible), but to become aware of its consistent and omnipresent operation so that we can re-value that which is named. For, while this essay will aim to deconstruct identity into a cascading constellation of biological and social effects, the point, if we are to follow Fausto-Sterling's "possibility for change", must be to *empower* those people who fall outside of the mainstream's current. These constructs of power are like a sword of Damocles and our debates must constructively blunt that deadly blade (an image that is relevant considering Foucault's quote that knowledge is "made for cutting"[9]).

This is a debate about power in a very real sense, in that women are oppressed in most cultures, gay men are reviled and persecuted by many factions and intersex bodies are often surgically robbed of the right to even exist through the early procedures conducted

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[5] Wilchins 38. Italics Wilchins'.
[6] Peterson, R. Internet site *Michel Foucault. Power/ Knowledge*, downloaded on 12/04/2006 from http://www.colostate.edu/Depts/Speech/rccs/theory54.htm.
[7] Quoted in Peterson, R from Allen, B. 74.
[8] Martin, G. quoting Shakespeare. Internet site *The Phrase Finder*, downloaded on 15/03/2006 from http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/305250.html.
[9] Foucault, M. *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History*, 88.

on babies with mixed or ambiguous sex organs. Wilchins, in her essay *Queerer Bodies*, writes, "Knowledge marches to the beat of power. Specific kinds of knowledge *about* bodies enable us to exercise specific kinds of power *over* them.[10]" [2002:37]. It follows that if we have different knowledge, if we can *know* in a different way, then we can shift the power relations, and that in my estimation, is a worthwhile enterprise.

Ricki Wilchins is adamant, and I agree, that there is an almost neurotic pursuit of singular, absolute, universal "Truths" (with a capital "T")[11]. Perhaps in the fight for our rights, we must realise how ironic the term becomes – being 'right' means you have access to real, powerful political and social 'rights'; being 'wrong', means you are disempowered, marginalised. Is this why we seek to show that being gay is as 'right' as being straight? I certainly believe that our constant turning to biology to find static, final, 'right' answers to questions of gender and sexuality are inscribed in the fact that we believe that the 'facts' of our flesh are inscribed (somewhere, we have only to find the place) in either our genes, hormones, hypothalamus, or any constellation of the fluids and flesh that we call our biology. And it's a winner takes all position that is deeply flawed, as Wilchins continues in *Queerer Bodies*:

> But where gender and meaning are concerned, there are lots of little truths. The way you understand your hips, your chest, your hair. How you feel when your lover holds you, gets on top, makes you come. The rush when you dress up, dress down, put on silk or leather. These are immensely small and private experiences. They are among the most intimate experiences of ourselves in the world. And they are precisely what is lost when we propound and pursue singular and monolithic Truths about bodies, gender, and desire. [2002:39]

Queer theory is about re-framing the questions and the search itself. We cannot simply find new binaries to oppose the argument, that process only reinforces it, invisibly consolidates the binary as a given. We need to 'queer' the terms themselves and expand the possible scope for ways in which we engage in the debate. For if queer is to function usefully, it can not merely be in opposition to the centre. It has to hold contradictory

[10] Nestle, Howell and Wilchins, ed. *Genderqueer*, 37. Italics Wilchins'.
[11] Her position is outlined in the collection of essays, Nestle, J. Howell, C. & Wilchins, R. *Genderqueer: Voices from beyond the sexual binary*. Los Angeles: Alyson Books.

statements, ways of being, bodies of knowledge as being right. I would argue that queer can not merely be that which will oppose our mainstream beliefs but, in fact, allows us to hold both the margins *and* elements of the mainstream simultaneously. The debate is eloquently framed in a quote from *Genderqueer* that Wilchins uses,

> "Let's assume you are right…"
> "No, let's not assume I am right. Let's assume there are lots of different 'rights' out there and this is just one of them." [2002:38]

Multiple rights might even be more difficult to comprehend than multiple orgasms, but the binary of right/wrong is as embedded as male/female. And if we are to pull the debate from strictly theoretical discourse into the real world – and critical here is to note that we return to biology so consistently to anchor our theory in the *real* world – then I wish to start with a brief foray into science, and what we can learn about how we look at the means by which we debate. There is a schism between our common sense (and there is little either common, or sensible about it) and current scientific and theoretical 'truths' which gives motion to many political endeavours. It is precisely this crack I wish to pry open further. For as nature consistently serves up more seemingly incomprehensible 'truths', we are left with the task of trying to make sense of that which simply does not bend to our rule or rationality. This is the space in which "queer" can be most successfully deployed. And, while I understand that an axiom of the Heisenberg Principle[12] is that the mere intrusion of the experimenter into the experiment changes the nature of the findings, as we have already intruded into our own experiment we must simply be aware that our 'findings' will move as fluidly as we do.

The unbelievable 'truth' about science

> In some important ways, the Buddhist view of the universe resembles the view developed by 20th-century physics. Except for the mental categories we impose upon experience, we find nothing in experience that is immutable. There is no constant but our own

[12] For more detail on the Heisenberg Principle, see Mykel Board's Internet site *You're Wrong. An Irregular Column*, downloaded on 29 May 2006 from http://www.killcreek.com/devolution/mykel/123.html.

misconceptions and our own doomed instinct to deny change. Gerald Grow *Buddhism: A Brief introduction for Westerners* [1996: __] [13]

In 1927 Heisenberg formulated his Uncertainty Principle proving one can never know an electron's position and velocity simultaneously[14]. Four years later, in 1931, mathematician Kurt Godel proved his famous Incompleteness Theorem setting the limitations by which mathematics is constrained[15]. Towards the end of the 20th century even stranger theories were postulated with the formulation of the curled up extra-dimensions in string theory. Each of these breakthroughs created a picture of modern scientific thought as having crossed the boundaries of the bizarre and broken notions of common sense. We live in a world where particles can pop into and out of existence, where matter exists in *probability clouds*[16]. What does this have to do with queer theory? If science's most fundamental building blocks are unstable, if we can conclusively say that the very fabric of our world obeys laws beyond the scope of all traditional thinking, then why can we not transpose this de-limiting approach to society's conception of the human self? If particles can come into and out of existence, why does our need for classification not allow the same flexibility? If a man sleeps with a man at age forty, did he suddenly become gay? Does all previous categorisation of perhaps a monogamously heterosexual life suddenly dissolve, or should it be ignored? Can a person be both gay and straight, and simply occupy different positions at different times? And why is it natural for us to assume that, once a 'position' is adopted, the identity is fixed and unchangeable? In fact, there is often active resistance (from both mainstream *and* margins) against moving between identity categories or against those who occupy the

[13] Internet Site *Buddhism, A Brief Introduction for Westerners*, downloaded on 4 May 2006 from http://www.longleaf.net/ggrow/Buddhism.html.

[14] Discovered by German physicist Werner Heisenberg, "quantum mechanics shows that at a microscopic level *you cannot possibly know both of these features* [position and velocity] *with total precision.* Moreover, the more precisely you know one, the less precisely you know the other. And although we have described this for electrons, the ideas directly apply to all constituents of nature", states Brian Greene in *The Elegant Universe* [1999:114].

[15] "The theorem states that within any formal system of axioms, such as present-day mathematics, questions will always persist that can neither be proved nor disproved on the basis of the axioms that define the system… Gödel's theorem set fundamental limits on mathematics. It came as a great shock to the scientific community, since it overthrew the widespread belief that mathematics was a coherent and complete system based on a single logical foundation", states Stephen Hawking in *The Universe in a Nutshell* [2001:39].

[16] For more detailed description see Internet Site, *The Universe. At Home in the Cosmos*. http://newton.nap.edu/html/oneuniverse/linked_matter_72-73.html.

more blurred boundaries between them. Why can we not have *probability clouds* of identity where one might be found, but found in a constantly blurred positioning that allows fluidity? Why has mainstream culture not acquired more 'labels' or identities that allow for greater freedom and contradiction?

Of course the theories I mention shook the foundation of scientific thought because they seemed so *unscientific*. So what would happen if we used the concept of an Uncertainty Principle to affect our understanding of society? Would it too be shaken to its core? Science is still standing, if a little less certainly, and by our very nature we adapt socially and culturally, so just how big a ripple would be created by saying that we can never pin-point any identity? Mainstream culture embraces stereotyping and broad brushstrokes; it seems to encourage a structured, blinkered way of seeing facts and 'truth'. Surely, our first step is to simply eject the current paradigm in which we even view the concept of identity? But how?

Science, we must remember, is a powerful political tool and a dangerous one. And as a large portion of this essay is devoted to examining scientific studies, it is necessary to give a bird's eye view on how to treat the knowledge itself. In this regard, I turn to the 'epistemological anarchist' Paul Feyerabend and his *Against Method* and *Farewell to Reason.* His fundamental mistrust of things scientific is worth considering, as he states:

> the separation of science and non-science is not only artificial but also detrimental to the advancement of knowledge. If we want to understand nature, if we want to master our physical surroundings, then we must use *all ideas,* all methods, and not just a small selection of them. The assertion, however, that there is no knowledge outside science – *extra scientiam nulla salus* – is nothing but another and most convenient fairy-tale [17] [2006:__]

Feyerabend argued in *Against Method* [1975] that science was a threat to democracy, and that society needed in fact to be defended against scientific 'experts'[18]. I wish to frame

[17] Internet site *Against Method. Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge*, downloaded on 08/05/2006 from http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/feyerabe.htm.
[18] Internet site *A Brief Chronology of Feyerabend's Life and Work* , downloaded on 12/05/2006 from http://www.seop.leeds.ac.uk/entries/feyerabend/. See the entries 2.13 – 2.15 for full description of his approach.

the essay with this ethos in mind, for if quantum mechanics has already bridged the impasse that mutually exclusive opposites must be theoretically held[19] - must, in fact, be embraced if we wish to further explore our world - then these rationalities that defy any common sense view of how the universe works are the fertile ground from which the likes of queer theory can find nourishment. However, if we can find no scientific methodology or 'proof' that brings us to a politics that is more inclusive, to a belief system that does not always privilege the centre, then we must also not be afraid to disregard science and to start to look elsewhere for our answers. We must break the often invisible meta-narrative that we are a culture that seeks only the 'empirical truth' under the guiding light of science and the pursuit of knowledge. We must accept that *not* all knowledge or science is in fact progress, or fall into the ideological trap that the value of something is defined only by its social usefulness or need (which would by implication be defined as the mainstream's consensus of an identity or position's need or usefulness to that society or group). And so, we turn to the term which seems capable of handling such a messy blurring of boundaries.

We turn to an ideology called queer. But what exactly does it mean ?

Queer etymology

"Queer" is at once both verb, noun and adjective and the 'queer object' is much like our electron, at times we can position it temporally, chronologically locate it but, as we locate it, its meaning shifts. Like an electron it has no desire to be held; it seems nature does not wish to be confined or allow her constituent elements to be cornered.

While Eve Kosofky Sedgwick has been titled the "the Queen Mother of Queer Theory" [20] with her publication of *The Epistemology of the Closet*, it is Teresa de Lauretis who gave queer its 'nic'[21] in February 1990 (although she abandoned it just three years later on the

[19] Previously science conceived matter as either existing or not, while current thinking proposes that elementary particles can come into and out of existence. The contradiction is that either the particle is there or it isn't, but if this is subject to change then *either* possibility might be valid at different points in time.
[20] Turner, W. 128.
[21] 'nic' is the internet shortening of the word nickname, used to label people, thoughts or ideas.

grounds it had been appropriated by the very mainstream it had sought to oppose, and stated that queer theory has "very quickly become a conceptually vacuous creature of the publishing industry.[22]"). Growing out of gay and lesbian studies, queer theory is a more mutable concept that encapsulates the ever growing constituency of the sexual margins (we now have pride marches for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered[23]). Of course, the lumping of groups into a political pot for sheer strength in numbers has been an effective evolutionary strategy politically as it operates to straddle more disparate groups and, therefore, marginalise fewer identities. And when it comes down to politics, it's about numbers, about groundswell. As the nature of virtually any identity grouping is connoted more by its exclusions than its inclusions (one is either Black or Jewish or gay or transgender, or not), queer's lack of implicit "essentialism" means it has no empirical identity[24], and therefore should be less exclusionary in its politics. As Jagose states in *Queer Theory*[25]:

> queer may be thought of as activating an identity politics so attuned to the constraining effects of naming, of delineating a foundational category which precedes an underwrites political intervention, that it may better be understood as promoting a non-identity – or even anti-identity – politics… For queer is, in part a response to perceived limitations to the liberationist and identity-conscious politics of the gay and lesbian feminist movements. The rhetoric of both has been structured predominantly around self-recognition, community and shared identity; inevitably, if inadvertently, both movements have also resulted in exclusions, delegitimation, and a false sense of universality…Acknowledging the inevitable violence of identity politics and having no stake in its own hegemony, queer is less an identity than a *critique* of identity. [1996:3]

And therein lies queer's greatest gift – it is a "*critique* of identity". The word queer actively 'outs' itself as naming the unnameable, labelling that which often changes its descriptors. It brings to the surface the process of identity formation as much as it lists those who could fall within its blurred and amorphous boundaries. As Jagose continues,

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[22] Jagose, A, 2. Quoting from De Lauretis, T. (1994) *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and the Perverse Desire*.
[23] Referred to as GLBT from hereon.
[24] Other than that of sexuality, but I believe this too will shift to incorporate a broader reach of ideologies and practices that operate in the margins; such as recovery identities formed in Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous. I will deal with this specifically in the later section when looking at 'addict' as a non-essentialist identity.
[25] Internet site *Queer Theory*, downloaded on 08/03/2005 from http://www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/AHR/archive/Issue-Dec-1996/jagose.html. Italics Jagose's.

queer has a "conceptually unique potential as a necessarily unfixed site of engagement and contestation" (1996:3). So, queer should be big enough to hold pretty much everyone in the sexual margins (although I will return to the political ramifications of this mass inclusion later), but the term is also not gender specific. Queer has been able to remove gender as the most significant marker of sexual identity and expression, and thus it is more fluid, and less essentialist that the gay and lesbian studies from which it grew. In his book *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* David Halperin states:

> Unlike gay identity, which, though deliberately proclaimed in an act of affirmation, is nonetheless rooted in the positive fact of homosexual object-choice, queer identity need not be grounded in any positive truth or in any stable reality. As the very word implies, "queer" does not name some natural kind or refer to some determinate object; it acquires its meaning from its oppositional relation to the norm. Queer is by definition *whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. *There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers*. It is an identity without an essence. "Queer", then, demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative – a positionality that is not restricted to lesbians and gay men but is in fact available to anyone who is or feels marginalized because of his or her sexual practices [26] [1995: 62]

The word can manage all transgressions, to comfortably subsume the behaviour, the practices and the identities under a single banner and, in Halperin's reading, it is explicitly subversive. It could even conceivably eject the elements of (the entire?) gay[27] canon as too 'mainstream' as we enter pockets of social epochs where gay has become assimilated by the pull of the mainstream's current. As Halperin continues, "'Queer', in any case, does not designate a class of already objectified mythologies or perversions; rather, it describes a horizon of possibility whose precise extent and heterogeneous scope cannot in principle be delimited in advance" [1995:62]. While I embrace the fluidity of Halperin's reading of queer, his statement that queer's positionality is "whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant" raises some difficult questions. For

[26] Italics Halperin's.

[27] I use the word "gay" here because it is beyond question that the white gay male has become far more palatable in the mass media's conception of what being gay actually means. Television series have moved away from gay characters as the comic relief and support act, and given us the likes of *Will and Grace* and *Queer as Folk*, but it is questionable whether the stereotyping of promiscuity, a penchant for interior design and high disposable income on vapid lifestyles really captures what it means to be gay. Recently we have also seen *The L Word* but it is important to note that in screen time, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender identities are virtually unrecognised outside of smaller art house films, which is why I don't refer to a GLBT 'canon' in this instance being assimilated in the manner that gay arguably has.

if we follow Halperin's logic, then surely all sexual positionalities that 'oppose' the norm are necessary included in queer, including paedophilia, necrophilia, bestiality, etc. This logic shows the empirical flaw in any binary debate, for it automatically lumps together opposites that do not necessarily have any cohesion or common ground. In other words, the proverb "the enemy of my enemy is my friend"[28] is not necessarily true. For what would this achieve, if we assume that queer stems from a founding principle to politically empower the margin? Do these groups belong together?

As Suzanna Danuta Walters states in *From Here to Queer: Radical Feminism, Postmodernism, and the Lesbian Menace*[29], "this reduces queer politics to a banal (and potentially dangerous) politics of opposition, potentially affiliating groups, identities and practices that are explicitly and implicitly in opposition to each other" [2005:8] and, as she continues, "this emphasis on the delight in the inconsistency for its own sake seems to me foolhardy at best" [2005:9]. Personally, I can see the political suicide of conflating the groups, but I am also hesitant to once again draw the boundaries of what is permissible and what is not.[30] While I understand the principle and processes by which the age limits are manufactured, and by no means wish to undermine their efficacy in policing the charged term of 'abuse', I wish to highlight the constructed nature of the debate itself. We must be aware of the systems that we are bound by and be willing to extend the same understanding to *any* identity no matter its construction in biology or society; *not to* is sheer hypocrisy. Of course, key here is that queer is not politically representative in the way that the GLBT groups are, and in truth I believe queer *never* will be, precisely because it is not involved in the process of labelling as the other political identities are (no matter how tenuous the gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender categories themselves bleed and blur, but I will tackle this issue directly later in the

[28] Arab proverb quoted from internet site *Wikipedia: Enemy* downloaded on 12/03/2006 from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enemy .

[29] The essay appears in the anthology, Morland, I and Willox, A. *Queer Theory: Readers in Cultural Criticism*.

[30] For example, the age of consent in Canada for homosexuals is fourteen, while in South Africa is nineteen [figures obtained from internet site *Age of Consent* downloaded on 28/05/2006 from http://www.ilga.info/Information/Legal_survey/Summary%20information/age_of_consent.htm], these are decided on moral grounds that become legally ratified and no tether with actual practice. Is a fifteen year old 'molested' then by on older man here, but consenting there? And the nine year old, do we all agree that a line there is crossed?

essay). If the queer object obeys Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, then its inability to be located means it cannot provide a stable political platform for either the (a) kind of politics it embraces or (b) its fluid constituents. Queer becomes an ethic, or ethos, a term that can be used to uncover the illusion of our own identities. If we try to hold it, contain it to a specific group or standpoint, then we spell its imminent demise.

To return to the point of whether I am incorporating *all* the margins and not just GLBT into the definition of queer? I would argue yes. Queer is not, as Halperin points out, *only* that which opposes the norm. It is not just a positionality, or at least not one that we must see as occupying a linear, two-dimensional space in relation to the norm. Here again we must borrow from science to see how we are looking at the definition itself. If we are inadvertently seeing queer as a point at some remove from the centre (two points on an *x* axis), then it follows that the more queer something is, the less it belongs to the mainstream and vice versa. It looks not unlike Kinsey's model for his 6-grades of sexuality – but this is characteristic of the binaries that we wish to debunk; the diagram clearly indicates how this becomes an either/or situation along one axis.



Figure 1.1 One-dimensional conception of identity. The two black dots represent different positions along the 1-d axis. This conception implies that the more one moves towards one identity, the 'further' removed from the other one has to become.

Queer occupies a three dimensional space[31] (incorporate a *y* and *z* axis into the picture so we can rotate the points, and expand the points to become a sphere in the same way an electron occupies a *probability cloud*), and it makes the positioning less specific and,

[31] The point of departure for this visualisation comes from psychobiologist Richard Whalen's work where he outlined an orthogonal model vs. the standard linear one between masculinity and femininity in rats. In other words, rats could be both highly masculine *and* highly feminine as the positions occupied are on separate axes. Whalen's work is outlined in Fausto-Sterling, 195-230.

therefore, less rigid. In other words, the probability cloud allows the identity labels to become wider in their scope and, from certain trajectories, even overlap.

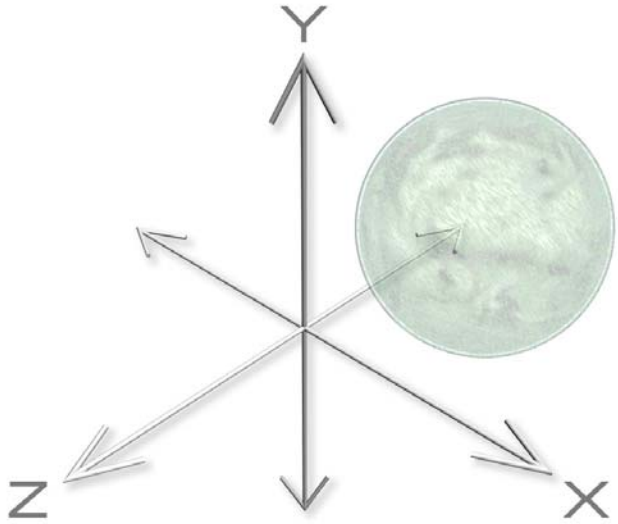


Figure 1.2 Three-dimensional conception of queer identity. The space could be filled with overlapping spheres for each 'identity cloud'.

I believe the term queer is a title that by definition applies the same laws equally to all, not just those laws that suit our current moral code, and that it can comfortably hold the positions Walters fears to incorporate because it does not necessarily apply agreement between them, only that they too occupy a space on a 3-dimensional axis that can still fall within the parameters of queer's 'equation' – Walters' fear is based on a linear binary[32], and queer is malleable enough to hold different views.

But queer is not just about trying to formulate less accurate, more 'fuzzy' descriptors for identity so as to replace the rigidity of specific ones or to bunch alternatives together; its purpose is to expose the formation of identity categories. Queer is a means of living consciously, of being awake and alert to the means by which we understand and, in turn, are understood by others.

[32] Think of putting gay, bestiality, transgender or any other sexual identity group or grouping along the axis on Figure 1.1. The linear model implies some kind of relationship which is in fact non-existent

To see how intertwined science, identity and politics are, I want to take a closer look at the 'kind' of science and studies that have been instrumental in building the foundations upon which the concept of queer rests.

Who are you calling gay[33] ?

If we follow queer's roots back to gay and lesbian studies, we can see that its flexibility actually stems from the blurry boundaries between gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender. When we take a closer look at these categories, they quickly start to become far less defined; words like "gay" are used as an umbrella for disparate situations, contexts, and people. It's important to note how blurred the definitions are, because like all discourse, as Foucault is so sure to point out, it hides its own mechanisms of power and makes them invisible. Yet, often bizarrely inaccurate and un-scientific research has given us the common discourses that start to trade as fact in the currency of identity. We need to become more deeply aware of the application of 'scientific' methodology (keeping in mind Feyerabend's deep mistrust of scientific methodology per se) that has been used to define these categories.

Firstly, let us consider who decides what or who is gay. In *Born Gay* Wilson and Rahman give four possible means to define the term "gay": (1) the labels people apply to themselves; (2) their sexual behaviour; (3) their fantasies or desires; or (4) their genital and brain responses[34]. Here are four different methods for defining who may or may not be homosexual, and each is fraught with different problems. A woman might identify with feminist politics and label herself lesbian, while either sex may engage in opposite

[33] The word "gay" here again connotes the white gay male. Most scientific research has not included lesbian subjects, and only lately is there virtually any collated material on transgender and hermaphrodites. It is important to point out that, within the margin, the white male is still holding the privileged position. It would have been a much harder task, with very limited data, to ask, for example, the question: "who are you calling lesbian?" However, I would argue that each of the groups under the GLBT banner, if examined closely, is subject to the same degree of blurred category definition.

[34] Wilson, G. and Rahman, Q, 14-15. It is essential to note that: the first category does not imply that the person's behaviour matches their identity category. The second category would be the subject's factual biographical sexual behaviour, and the third category will always be completely subjective and impossible to clinically prove. For these reasons Wilson and Rahman choose the fourth category as their definition for what constitutes their definition of "gay".

sex relations because of social and familial pressures. Many people might fantasise about engaging in same sex relations but never act on it, and people's bodies react to certain stimuli in various ways, however they may self-identify. Suffice to say that, for science, both labelling and behaviour can form poor means of correlating to actual statistics. It is easy to argue (and Wilson and Rahman use this as their measure) that our body's reaction to stimulus is the most 'true' indicator, but it means that what people say or do becomes irrelevant, and sets up science as a kind of identity police. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick highlights the ethics of this kind of scientific approach in *Axiomatic*:

> To alienate conclusively, *definitionally*, from anyone on any theoretical ground the authority to describe and name their own sexual desire is a terribly consequential seizure. In this century, in which sexuality has been made expressive of the essence of both identity and knowledge, it may represent the most intimate violence possible[35]. [2005:83]

So, problem one, we don't have an agreed-upon method by which the candidates for being gay can be identified, and *telling* people who they are smacks of the era of Nazi eugenics. There is also the implicit understanding that once the identity is found, it is static – once they put you in the box, that's where you'll stay.

Study 1 : where have all the bisexuals gone?

Perhaps the most interesting study in terms of self-identification so far is by Bailey and his team from Northwestern University in Illinois, who recruited 38 self-identified gay men, 33 self-identified bisexual men, and 30 self-identified straight men from Chicago. The men were shown pornographic material (sex between men and men, or women and women only, however, so as not to confuse arousal patterns of, say, a gay man to the male actor in a straight porn movie), and tested using the penile plethysmographic test, where blood flow to the penis is measured to establish a degree of sexual arousal. As stated in *Born Gay*:

> Most interesting, however, was the finding that men who labelled themselves 'bisexual' *did not* respond to both [male and female imagery]; almost all showed the homosexual arousal pattern (although a few showed the heterosexual response). Hence, regardless of the way

[35] The essay appears in Morland, I. and Willox, A. 83. Italics Sedgwick's.

> they classify themselves, men tend to get aroused to men only, or women only, but not to both.[36] [2005:21]

Subsequent tests found that women showed behaviour closer to Kinsey's scale[37] in more of a continuum of sexuality as opposed to men's more categorical approach. Similar results were obtained by Hamer and his team in 1996[38]. So in essence you get bisexual women, but not bisexual men. It raises the question then, why would a man identify as "bi" if his physical arousal patterns would categorise him as something else (either straight or gay)? And while the answers may vary, from "bi" being more socially acceptable than "gay", to previous experience confusing[39] individuals into accepting that their actions must dictate where they identify, what is of significance is the degree of slippage between the naming of the categories and any 'essentialist' truth about them. Remember that the bisexual men in the study all identified *themselves* as bisexual, but according to the study, however, they aren't (despite the fact that they engage in sexual activity with both sexes.)

Study 2 : the gay brain

In 1991 Simon Le Vay produced a media fanfare by claiming that the hypothalamus was smaller in gay men than straight. This sexual brain theory has a number of hugely unscientific problems upon closer examination, as Marjorie Garber points out in *The Return to Biology*[40]. Of the 41 people Le Vay examined (all cadavers so no self-proclaimed sexual identity could be ascertained), he claimed 19 men were homosexuals who died of complications from AIDS and, as Garber quotes:

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[36] Wilson, G. and Rahman, Q. 21. Italics Wilson and Rahman's.
[37] Kinsey's scale was numbered from 0 to 6. 0 denotes exclusively heterosexual, while 6 is exclusively homosexual. The continuum implied that a 3 would denote a bisexual person. Further reading on Kinsey's scale can be found in his landmark book *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* [1948] 651.
[38] Hamer, D. et al quoted in Wilson and Rahman, 20.
[39] I use the word "confusing", but it is ironic, because the confusion arises out of whether it is the person's desires or actions that would dictate the identity category. The grey area here completely eradicates any clear cut definition and, therefore, the usefulness of the definitions themselves. Does a gay man (gay by virtue of his previous experience), who finds a woman attractive from traits that are considered masculine, therefore display bi-sexuality? Must he engage in sex in order to be considered bisexual, and what if he finds no pleasure in his sexual experiment, is that proof that he really is gay?
[40] Essay appears in Morland, I. and Willox, A. 54-70.

> Sixteen subjects were presumed heterosexual men; six of these subjects died of AIDS and ten of other causes. Six subjects were presumed heterosexual women. One of these died of AIDS and five of other causes.
>
> The word 'presumed' in the phrase 'presumed heterosexual men' is marked by a footnote. : "Two of these subjects (both AIDS patients) had denied homosexual activity. The records of the remaining 14 patients contained no information about their sexual orientation; they are assumed to have been mostly or all heterosexual on the basis of numerical preponderance of heterosexual men in the population [A.C Kinsey, W.B. Pomeroy, C.E. Martin, *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male* (Saunder, Philadelphia, 1948)] [2005:61]

Garber systematically destroys Le Vay's hypothesis and shows that his lack of inclusion of lesbians, his assumptions on the sexuality of the 14 "presumed" straight cadavers that have no basis in provable fact, the denial of homosexuality activity being taken at face value, and the reliance on Kinsey's 40-year-old report as a basis for statistically skewing the data make his findings completely unscientific. To give projections based on 41 subjects about whom he knew very little shows at best some creative extrapolation, and yet to this day it remains apocryphal in the gay canon that somewhere, somehow there exists a gay brain – or at the very least structural differences in the hypothalamus between gays and straights.

Study 3 : in the genes

Just two years after Le Vay's findings were published, the headlines lit up again. In 1993 Hamer and Associates went looking for the "gay gene" after studying the life histories of 114 self-identified homosexuals. It led to rather remarkable statements about the so-called "X28 marker". Interestingly enough, a Canadian team who repeated the attempt to detect a gay gene on the X chromosome did not report the same results[41]. Why? The difference cited by the Hamer team was that the teams had used different methodologies; the Hamer team asking participants to identify their sexuality as their core identity, while the Canadian team incorporated those whose behaviour might count them as homosexual. So why is science being so unreliable? The jury is still out on anything conclusive, but Joan Roughgarden's take on the discrepancy between the results is interesting, coming from a transsexual woman. She states in *Evolution's Rainbow*:

[41] Roughgarden, J. 253.

> I support the conventional wisdom, which is suspicious of any result highly dependent on how a question is posed. In my experience, a strong and robust result is not extremely sensitive to methodological details – different people, both friends and foes, get more or less the same answer, whether they like it or not, even with somewhat different approaches. I believe that if a gay gene were a major phenomenon, its detection wouldn't be so tricky. [2004:254]

I use these examples not to suggest that science has no place in researching our biology or genetic make-up, but to clearly instil the fact that the motivation underlying the search will affect both the findings and the manner in which the knowledge is used. Science implies the search for facts and truth, but we so often forget that all knowledge must be interpreted, applied and validated. Whether there is or isn't a gay gene is not of paramount importance, but only how we would use that information. Data becomes the ammunition by which opinions are made facts. While it is interesting that the scientists so often disagree in their findings, what is critical is to retain our scepticism about what we're looking to find in the first place. If science is searching to accurately pinpoint the markers for identity, surely the consistent ambiguity and variation in the results is pointing to a constellation of effects, to answers that lie in a shifting, nebulous cloud rather than any exact single location? If we track even further back to the mid-twentieth century and early sex research in animals, we gain an even clearer picture of how what we ask determines what we're going to find.

In the chapter "The Rodent's Tale" in Anne Fausto-Sterling's book *Sexing the Body*, she critically analyses how early experiments on animals were often inadvertently transposed onto human models.

> Consider, for example, the idea that a male rat that exhibits lordosis [passive behaviour associated with a female rat about to be mounted] when mounted by another animal performs a homosexual act, while at the same time, the mounting male behaves heterosexually. The analogy to humans would suggest that only one member of a male-male couple is homosexual, but usually we understand that when two men have sex, both are homosexual. [2000:225]

This extract is taken from one of a catalogue of research experiments that Fausto-Sterling uses to outline how our naming of an identity can frame our understanding of it. Clearly, the discrepancies outlined in the above quote would create ripples throughout the current paradigm of "gay". If, for example, we take the above example of rat behaviour as applicable to humans, are male 'bottoms' homosexual, while male 'tops' are hetero? If all men can still be acting heterosexually while engaged in sex with another man, then perhaps the religious right really does have something to fear. Granted, the modern conception of the word gay does not blur this distinction - you are gay no matter what role you might play in a same sex relationship - but it does raise questions about the term itself.

Study 4 : cellular memory, or do we see with gay eyes ?

Let us entertain for the moment where the question of cellular memory might leave us in queer theory. But first I will expand on what cellular memory is, and why it holds interesting ideas about where the essential "us" resides.

Paul Pearsall, in his book *The Heart's Code* and the publication *Organ Transplants and Cellular Memories,* is a leading proponent of the concept of a living systems theory. In short, our bodies are involved in totality in forming our 'selves'. Rather than the notion of a brain-centric idea of self operating the puppet of our bodies, our bodies are complex dynamic systems that work together to create us. One of the predictions of this view would be that people receiving organs from a donor (especially the lung and heart transplants which are performed together to help reduce the possibility of organ rejection) would also inherit memories, feelings, cravings – even personality changes such as temperament or sexual attraction.

What does entertaining this possibility imply for our current understanding of identity?

In her book, *A Change of Heart*, Claire Sylvia charts her interesting journey after receiving a heart and lung transplant. She claims to have inherited a host of traits, likes and dislikes from her donor – including a craving for Kentucky Fried Chicken. It is a

moving personal account, in the course of which she writes about the similar responses found in other patients after she started a support group for transplant survivors, and a concept that receives at best mild scepticism from the medical fraternity. For most scientists the heart is just a pump. But Pearsall has gone on to audio tape many transplant patients, recording (1) the recipients report; (2) the donor family's report; and (3) the recipient's family or friend's report. All of them are fascinating in terms of their implication for identity. Perhaps the most controversial account involves a young girl who received the heart of a murder victim, and who identified the killer through the "cellular memories" triggered after her transplant[42]. Of course, while being clinically interesting, we're focusing on the light that such a concept brings to identity. Below is one case that Pearsall recorded:

> Case 5
> The donor was a 19-year-old woman killed in an automobile accident. The recipient was a 29-year-old woman diagnosed with cardiomyopathy secondary to endocarditis.
>
> *The donor's mother reported:*
> "My Sara was the most loving girl. She owned and operated her own health food restaurant and scolded me constantly about not being a vegetarian. She was a great kid. Wild, but great. She was into the free-love thing and had a different man in her life every few months. She was man crazy when she was a little girl and it never stopped. She was able to write some notes to me when she was dying. She was so out of it, but she kept saying how she could feel the impact of the car hitting them. She said she could feel it going through her body."
>
> *The recipient reported*:
> "You can tell people about this if you want to, but it will make you sound crazy. When I got my new heart, two things happened to me. First, almost every night, and still sometimes now, I actually feel the accident my donor had. I can feel the impact in my chest. It slams into me, but my doctor said everything looks fine. Also, I hate meat now. I can't stand it. I was McDonald's biggest money-maker, and now meat makes me throw up. Actually, when I even smell it, my heart starts to race. But that's not the big deal. My doctor said that's just due to my medicines.
>
> "I couldn't tell him, but what really bothers me is that I'm engaged to be married now. He's a great guy and we love each other. The sex is terrific. The problem is, I'm gay. At least, I thought I was. After my transplant, I'm not...I don't think, anyway...I'm sort of semi- or confused gay. Women still seem attractive to me, but my boyfriend turns me on; women don't. I have absolutely no desire to be with a woman. I think I got a gender transplant."

[42] A full description of this can be found in Pearsall, P. 7-8.

The recipient's brother reported:
"Susie's straight now. I mean it seriously. She was gay and now her new heart made her straight. She threw out all her books and stuff about gay politics and never talks about it any more. She was really militant about it before. She holds hands and cuddles with Steven just like my girlfriend does with me. She talks girl-talk with my girlfriend, where before she would be lecturing about the evils of sexist men. And my sister, the queen of the Big Mac, hates meat. She won't even have it in the house." [43]

There is much anecdotal evidence that Pearsall uses to support his theory of cellular memory but all the claims are made by the recipients themselves, and as such are both incontestable as well as empirically unprovable. As a scientist, Pearsall is trying to explain some very unusual phenomena in terms of a palatable scientific theory. What is interesting for our purposes is to consider the identity embedded within the entire body, not just the brain-centric view of science.

Living systems theory proposes a highly interconnected model between the biological body and conceived self; its conception is that we are literally 'found' in all our cells. The theory also relies on a highly developed bio-feedback system if we are to grasp that inheriting another person's organs – literally their biology – can affect the elements that we think of as strictly mental, such as dreams, cravings, and even sexual identities. Living systems theory proposes not just that our biology can hold the elements of self in ways we have previously never considered, but that systems are sensitive, integrated and constantly in a state of feedback with each other. Our experience and choices create environments that can change our very biology, as much as our biology moves to create the environment it desires. We are complex creatures constituted of multiple glandular, hormonal, genetic and cellular structures that operate within, and in turn are affected by, complex cultural and social conditions. We are created by and in turn create the thing we call "identity". In this concept, our freedom comes from realising that this many-faceted formation process creates a many-faceted identity. There is no singular 'becoming', only identity clouds. To see identity in this light is a political view-point albeit set in a spiritual ethos. I believe it is a freedom towards which we should strive, dismantling rigid identities and leaving individuals.

[43] Internet site *Organ Transplants and Cellular* Memories, downloaded on 10/11/2005 from http://www.nexusmagazine.com/articles/CellularMemories.html

The rhetoric around identity categories is formulated around what the identity categories *mean*, but we must swop this for an ideology that simply looks at what the categories *do*. We can use queer to see the sexual playground in more than just black and white, we can add colour and perspective. To see queer in this 3-d space we must take a look at Judith Butler's composit of queer as she puts gender in the spotlight. Butler's stressing of the performativity of gender in *Gender Trouble* gives us the space to see that it is often the enacted role we play, rather than who we essentially are, that constructs the gender identity. This 'performativity' is because essentially 'being' one's race or sexuality is in itself flawed, especially when considering that we learn to 'do' gender, long before we learn our sex[44]. Performatives [45] are special kinds of speech acts that qualify as social acts, such as "I promise" being the act of promising, or "I now pronounce you man and wife" performed in a wedding ceremony being the act of getting married. Similarly, Butler sees gender as something one does, that in pulling on a dress, acting in a feminine way, one "does" woman; that the identity is no more constituted in reality than say being married. Wilchins eloquently situates the debate around performance in identity by examining gender's originality, in *Queer Theory, Gender Theory*:

> When we see a drag queen, we may know the performer is not a woman, but we can't help seeing one because s/he stylizes her body in very specific, learned ways we recognize. Yet the more we go looking for real gender, the more it recedes and in its place, we find only other women, who also stylize their bodies in very specific, learned ways we recognise. Woman is to drag – not as Real is to Copy – but as Copy is to Copy. Gender turns out to be a copy for which there is no original. *All* gender is drag. All gender is queer. [2004:134]

[44] What is interesting about Butler's performativity is to compare her theoretical work in *Gender Trouble* and *Undoing Gender*, with the work of psychologist Sandra Bem. Bem's study showed "3-, 4- and 5-year-olds photographs of either a naked boy or a naked girl and then some of the child dressed in either girls' or boys' clothing. Children younger than three had a hard time labelling the naked children as a boy or a girl, but successfully used social clues – clothes and hairstyles – to classify the dressed ones. About 40 percent of the 3-,4- and 5-year-old children accurately identified sex in all the photos once they had acquired knowledge of genitalia. The rest, however, had not yet acquired the notion of sex constancy – that is, they used gender signals such as hairstyle and clothing to decide who was a boy and who was a girl. This also meant that some of these children believed that they could become the opposite sex by dressing as one. Their own gender identity was not yet fixed." Quoted in Anne Fausto-Sterling's *Sexing the Body*, page 248.

[45] Detailed information on the word can be obtained from internet site *Performative*, downloaded on 28/05/2006 from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Performative.

It follows that if gender is constructed, then "Female need not become Woman. It could just as easily become Man, or something else entirely" [2004:135]. Queer is the freedom to choose and even become "something else entirely". It means no longer applying the value judgements of exclusion when the box ticked is neither male nor female, or the sexuality practised is not just only hetero or homo. It redraws the space that identity occupies, not as fixed points, but as *probability clouds* of identity.

Of course, the word "queer" itself (as the definition states: being "odd or strange")[46] is still seen as derogatory by many in the fold that it supposedly corrals, but perhaps that is still a measure of the power of the word itself to unsettle us, to destabilise. The postmodern ethic finds resistance in the marginal spaces that queer theory champions in its move away from specificity into a more amorphous site not necessarily occupied solely by the gay and lesbian narratives. In the essay *It's your Gender, Stupid*, Wilchins argues that it is the very notion of identity that must also be questioned, as paradoxical as it may sound, "there is room to question whether any identification, however stable and long-term, actually constitutes *having* an identity. Identification is always an act, a repetition, a name we give to a collection of discrete traits, behaviours, urges, and empathies." [2006:25]. Identity is, therefore, always an act of "becoming"; it is never something reached, a goal attained or position settled into.

When we identify with a way of being, a group, a belief, we say *this is who we are*, which is an exclusionary process that by definition positions us as *who we are not.* If I am gay, I am therefore not straight, and the range of choices and behaviours for living a straight life contract to the boundaries outlined in the definition. However, if I am queer, I may sleep with men, find women attractive and call myself "trans", because this conception of identity is about scope; I am not limited in labelling according to only my behaviour, my desire, or even previous self-identification.

[46] Internet site *Ask* Oxford, downloaded on 15/11/2005 from http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/queer?view=uk.

In this way, I propose that spiritual models of belief can become political models in the manner that Ghandi's doctrine proposed that we "become the change we want to see"[47]; for what greater political action than to actively and openly deny the constraints by which traditional sexual identity formulations attempt to exercise their power. As the philosopher and spiritual teacher J. Krishnamurti, states in his *Commentaries on Living*,

> Identification is essentially a thought process by which the mind safeguards and expands itself; and in becoming something it must resist and defend, it must own and discard. In this process of becoming, the mind of the self grows tougher and more capable; but this is not love. Identification destroys freedom, and only in freedom can there be the highest form of sensitivity. [1956:12]

Queer doesn't need to become something, and therefore it need not follow the process of having to own certain traits and discard others. It comes as no surprise that these are the words of a spiritual teacher and not a scientist, but they strike a resonant chord in the politics of queer. Our identities allow us to be "tougher and more capable", which is understandable for fighting political battles, but what does this rob us of as human beings? The freedom of which Krishnamurti speaks is the fluidity that queer proposes. It is unpinnable in any real sense in that it has the ability to shift, and transgress. It retains even the right *not to* belong, without giving up the political *modus operandi* to still struggle for the rights of the margins.

If we turn to some of last century's most notable queers, and I use the term here to connote homosexuals who had trouble with a pre-"gay" identity[48], we can grasp the idea that no individuals will ever find themselves fully articulated in any group. Take the maverick William Burroughs, whose homosexuality is well documented, but who actively resisted the terminology, as Shaun de Waal saliently captures in his dissertation *A bit out of line, somehow : William Burroughs and the queer reading the queer*.

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[47] Quoted from internet site *Thinkexist*, downloaded on 10/04/2006 from http://en.thinkexist.com/quotation/we_must_become_the_change_we_want_to_see/11442.html

[48] Remember that the concept of a 'gay' identity, as a labelling mechanism for homosexuality only came into being at the turn of the previous century.

> For one thing, Burroughs was involved in a personal battle of self-definition long before "gay" became a tenable identity formation, and to identify himself he used the pre-gay word for homosexual, or at least one of the available terms, as well he might… While appropriating the insult "queer" he uses it not only to put himself apart from the heterosexual norm but to make himself distinct from other kinds of homosexuals, or, better put, to reject other labels, the connotations of which he dislikes. [2005:19]

Michel Foucault also expressed his concern with his own 'gay' identity. Why? I believe the fundamental issue is that we are composed of more than merely a sexual identity, and that our own shifting within that identity consistently cracks the rigidity of any identity we might profess to be. Identity does not stand up to any scrutiny or delving questions because of this rigidity, and that is the reason that even some of the most notable homo's in history search for terms with more inherent 'give' in their formation. Enter queer as a tenable solution.

Do I believe that "queer" will become the new "gay" or "lesbian" with the required colloquial street cred? Perhaps not yet, but it is suitably empowered to deal a heavy blow to current identity politics in both political and academic circles, and from there we can only track its degree of appropriation by popular culture. The key is not that we're just giving broader, fuzzier-edge labels, but that the labels themselves contain the political ethos of self-reflexivity, of holding up a mirror to identity itself.

Consider, for example, whether we can prioritise the multiple identity groups one straddles. Would a person be, say, white first, gay second, and third a father? Or does sexuality get a privileged position over race, class or the host of other 'identifiers' that could lay claim to us? The question seems ludicrous - how can one be more gay than white? - but it points directly to the means by which we value this currency called "identity". Queer has already deflated the value of these terms in the sexual arena by making apparent the illusion of identity, exposing its currency, and therefore automatically setting up our own re-evaluation. Yes, this evaluation will shift over time and in other contexts, but it is critical that we announce the process, we draw attention to construction of any identity as it occurs.

Of course "queer" is ultimately just another term, another label, however complex its operation. Is it the only one that functions in this self-reflexive manner? No, there are others that operate as successfully, and for similar reasons. I propose that recovery from addiction or alcoholism - that the label of "addict" or "alcoholic" - operates in a very similar way as "queer" does. And by comparing "queer" to "addict", we can reflect the powerful ethos that underlies queer's tactical operation in modern discourse, as well as emphasise the critical elements that compose queer's value as a site of contestation.

Addiction & queer, the strength of non-essentialist identities

By now we have a view of queer as a model working in three-dimensional space to hold numerous sexual identities, but also queer as an ethic that we can use to lance the illusion of identity. What has addiction[49] in common with queer? The point is that addicts subscribe to an identity that has virtually no fixed qualities; "addict" displays the same *probability cloud* formation as queer. "Addict" connotes a broad way of life, rather than a description of the manner, mode or means of substance abuse. Addiction is seen by each individual addict as an affliction that while shared, occurs uniquely in a recovering person. No addict is the same as any other, not their story, their drugs, or their path to recovery. The term "addict" has become the very centre of a non-essentialist identity that ties a dramatically diverse range of individuals together. The only common point is that there is a process of addiction, although its form is always unique. Narcotics Anonymous works because people create a fluid identity that is malleable enough to incorporate any individual, whatever their belief system, sexual proclivity or spiritual paradigm. Like the queer, the addict obeys the laws of Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle; there is no need to pin down what addict means, because it means something different to each individual addict.

I do not wish to regress the understanding of queer to a medical or psychological condition like addiction (although addiction is defined as an incurable disease by

[49] I will refer only to addicts and recovery from drug addiction from this point on, but the word "addict" stands also for alcoholics and alcoholism.

Alcoholics Anonymous[50] and NA alike, ironically similar to the pathologising of homosexuality at the turn of the previous century), but to examine the similar patterns of functioning for their inherent strengths or weaknesses. Why compare addicts with queers? The addict identity is governed by three principles which I think are key in the application – both politically and spiritually – of queer's most positive application in the same realm. The three principles are honesty, open-mindedness and willingness. While the objectives of queers and addicts are in fact diametrically opposed (one identity seeks to obviate itself; the other is engaged in celebrating itself), the point of departure is the same. They are devoted to a life-long, delving of self-knowledge, where they consistently re-constitute the self through proactive self-analysis and re-evaluation to best integrate and uplift both this constantly changing self and the community.

Of course, addicts are not politically motivated in the way that the sexual margins are. There are no constitutional courts awarding (or removing) the rights of the addict community. They are a group committed to upliftment within their greater community. It is a political agenda without a recognisable constituency.

Consider the statistics given by Ricky George in *Counselling the Chemically Dependent* that "roughly 34.5 out of every 36 people who are chemically dependent are going to die from it" [1990:5][51], and that "close to 60 percent of those who attend AA have been sober for more than a year" [1990:167]. It is statistically beyond question that those who have identified as recovering addicts/alcoholics in the likes of NA and AA have a far greater chance of success than those who have not. The process of why NA and AA work is too complex to engage here, but the critical point is of a non-essentialist identity formation. We need to belong, but we need to belong in a manner that can hold us as complete entities, with all our fractured and discordant elements. Addict, like queer, can do this.

[50] I will refer to Alcoholics Anonymous as AA, and Narcotics Anonymous as NA from hereon.
[51] Statistics are given for the USA only, quoted in George, Ricky L. (1990) *Counselling the chemically Dependent: Theory and Practice*. Prentice-Hall, Inc : New Jersey.

Of course the addict community[52] is closed in the sense that one must have been an addict to belong to a recovery community. There is even often palpable discomfort when addicts attend alcoholics meetings, and vice versa. So not everyone has access to the group, because the group requires the individual to self-identify as an addict. It's somewhat like the magicians vs. the muggles in the Harry Potter books, where a community shores up its banks to prevent breaching by non-members. The moment there is a price of entry, those who can't pay the tithe are not allowed access to the collective power of the group itself. It becomes an 'us' and 'them' situation that does its greatest disservice to the addicts themselves. Why? For there is not, I believe, a single human being who has not acted on, been influenced by, or in need of an understanding of compulsion or addiction. Furthermore, NA and, to a greater extent, AA are focused on a daily analysis of the self within society from the perspective of a very fluid, non-essentialist identity. To return to the point that Fausto-Sterling made about these debates catalysing the "possibility for change", I believe that the process of conscious living, of an awareness of our construction, is the most powerful political act that any of us can perform. It is the "change" that we must be, for it to be enacted. It is an act that is at once social, spiritual and political that requires nothing less than everything from us, because it is not static but a shifting horizon. And through the principles of honesty, open-mindedness and willingness, we are forced to consistently re-evaluate ourselves throughout our lives, and constantly shift our conception of ourselves. This constant re-evaluation requires rigorous discipline, but promises a degree of freedom from the constraints that identity attempts to impose upon us. It is not a goal that can be attained; it is a way of life that in itself will erode any idea of a homogenous mainstream because the vast plethora of likes, dislikes, positions and fantasies are limitless and in constant flux. In this way, we are *all* queer. We are all as Copy is to Copy, because the iconic ideal of any belief, mainstream or margin, simply does not exist.

But we aren't all queer, are we?

[52] But they remain a marginal group whose numbers stay statistically fairly constant and whose actions forged a community on June 10th, 1935 with the formation of Alcoholics Anonymous (but has since spread into numerous different Twelve Step groups, the second largest of which is Narcotics Anonymous).

Interestingly we must also look at Suzanna Walter's hypothesis of claiming 'queerness' if one is not gay, lesbian, bi or transgender. "If it is clearly co-optive and colonizing for the white person to claim blackness if he or she 'feels' black… then why is it so strangely legitimate for a heterosexual to claim queerness because she or he feels a disaffection from the traditional definitions of heterosexuality[53]" [2005:11]. Let's follow the argument though. If a straight man can never 'know' what it is to be persecuted for being gay, are we saying that another gay man can, merely because he is gay ? Do all GLBT people experience persecution (or pleasure) in the same way? Clearly not, which raises the question of how we differentiate between the experience of being Jewish, or Black, or of any other identity grouping? And if all experience is so specific that no-one can ever know another, then why not claim that a white person knows what it's like to be black, because, after all, experience is merely a tenuous approximation for what each individual might be feeling? Is all experience queer?

I understand Walters' hesitation to allow the groups walls to be breached by non-members, but if we see that inherently all identity politics is flawed in the same way, the argument becomes pointless. Identity itself is unable to cope with even the slightest variation from its heavily boundarised inclusiveness, and if we start to pull one thread the entire weave falls apart.

Conclusion

Like Heisenberg's discovery, we need to embrace the uncertainty that sometimes we can know, but not describe, while at other times we can describe and yet have no knowledge of what identity means.

This is my point. If we can not know each other, but only ourselves. If our experience is unshareable, then perhaps this is the nexus for our similarity more than our isolation from

[53] Quoted from her essay *From Here to Queer: Radical Feminism, Postmodernism, and the Lesbian Menace* from Morland, I. and Willox, A. 6-21

each other. "Queerness calls at once for a celebration of diversity of identities, but calls for a cultural diversity that surpasses the notion of identity" write Morland and Willox [2005:3].

Aidan Rankin wrote in an article in *The Spectator*, "it is a truism that the love that dare not speak its name refuses to shut up" [54]. Standing at a cinema in Johannesburg in January 2006, I had the choice of *Brokeback Mountain*, *Transamerica* and *V for Vendetta*. There were eight movie theatres, which meant that we minorities were getting 37.5% of the media space (assuming we can take the lesbian sub-plot in *V for Vendetta* as sufficiently significant). Not bad for categories that are supposed to form 10 % of the population[55]. Our times have changed and, with them, we in South Africa have too. We have been held up as the icon for positive political change, and the only country in the world that has protected the rights of sexuality in our constitution. So perhaps we will be able to fire the furnace and melt the sacred cow of identity. It's not religion that is the opiate of the masses; it is identity. We are addicted to the idea of who we are and trapped into the power mechanisms of playing out these roles.

To quote T.S. Eliot's *Little Gidding*,

> We shall not cease from exploration
> And the end of all our exploring
> Will be to arrive where we started
> And know the place for the first time.[56]

[54] Quoted from internet site *The Advantages of Being Gay*, downloaded on 10/10/2005 from http://www.media-diversity.org/articles_publications/The%20advantages%20of%20being%20gay.htm , from Rankin, A. *The Spectator* 25 May 2002.
[55] These statistics I use as the often incorrectly quoted '1 in 10' theory debunked by Wilson, G. and Rahman, Q. 13-27.
[56] Internet site *Little Gidding*, downloaded on 31/05/2006 from http://www.sover.net/~bland/littlegi.htm

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troll. a cellular memoir

creative essay: component two

1. now

I stand outside an electric blue door. My head is, for the most part, a blank, except for the details of this very blue door which is peeling on the bottom left corner where some small animal has scratched it, obviously to be let inside. I guess a cat. I look back down the well-kept, neatly trimmed flower beds at the day-glo green lawn and manicured path. A small ceramic gnome pokes his red Santa cap into a flowering hydrangea next to a very clean bird bath. The gnome alarms me, as does the terrifyingly neat flower beds, but I am trying to reserve judgement. I bet the neighbours have pushed back their curtains to watch through their windows, thinking now *there* is a Jehovah's Witness with real stamina. In truth I haven't even rung the bell. I mean, I have reached out to ring it, but my hand just points at the brass buzzer so I take it back. It isn't that this is illegal, it isn't (although the word anonymity has been used a lot by the nurses). But there's this weird, awkward feeling that keeps my finger from pressing down on the bell. Oh, and a batch of agreements that my parents signed, but hey, they signed, and that was three years ago. So there I stand because the answers I need are behind that blue door, and they have to be some outrageous answers to explain the bizarre circus of events my life has disintegrated into. So there just isn't the option of turning and walking back down past the ugly little gnome. And, while I am certainly not into any moonbeam mumbo jumbo, it is also a little strange that it's so close to the anniversary.

I reach into my pocket for the fourth time and take out the small piece of paper with their names and address. Beth and P- Landers, 79 Adamson Drive, Westdene. Beth and P-. Parents to Pierre Landers. I imagine Beth as this skinny, mousey type with a mousey personality to match, a bit like a Disney character (say, Mrs Frisby from the Rats of Nimh, although she still had chutzpah). Him, the P with no letters attached, I don't have a clear picture of, just a fuzzy feel that he's a greying, stiff-upper-lip-kind-of-John-Cleese type.

I can't be sure how much time has now passed, but it feels like days. I reach out and this time my finger connects. Inside there's a tinny melodic chime. Nothing happens. Then the door clicks open and there stands a squat black woman who smiles broadly.
Why hadn't I considered this? My mouth opens and freezes there, gaping at her. Why? Why hadn't I thought of this and, then again, what difference does it make?
The black lady starts to look a little scared, as if she might be dealing with something criminal.
'Hello', she says, expectantly raising her eyebrows.
'Beth'. It's all I manage to get out. I was hoping to sound friendly and make a good impression, but there's this edge of hysteria.
'Oh… iyeeeees', the woman smiles again and walks back inside.
'Madam! Madam!' I can hear her belting out for the lady of the house.
Just a domestic worker. I can't even decide what I am supposed to feel so I just continue standing there, an empty vessel without critical thought.

The sun edges out from behind a cloud and I am getting those armpit sweat rings. I take off my jersey, which is why I never see Beth arrive at the door.
'Can I help?'
She is nothing like I imagined, with long deep black hair, which is tied up in a braid. She looks Christian in her floral dress, which I would argue is a little too short for her age.
'I'm looking for Beth. Mrs Landers…'
'I'm Beth.'
'Hello Mrs Landers, I'm Karl.'
'Hello. How can I help you?' she is quite brusque, and looks at me expectantly.
In her hand is what looks like a duster, and I guess that I've interrupted her cleaning regimen, which, judging by the look of her is a daily routine. I rub the back of my neck because this feeling like pins and needles arches up into my head and my mouth dries instantly. It all comes down to this. It's so surreal that in my head it plays like a movie. Me, standing there blabbing on, and her listening. Then her hand flying up to her mouth and tears starting to come down her cheeks, and then she collapses into my arms. And

the movie holds on that wide. Me, Beth and a little gnome burning to white in the sun as a forgotten duster falls from her hand.

Inside it's quite different from what I imagined. I realise that I had expected something else, something less three brown ducks flying southish. Something less Morkels, and more House and Home. Beth grips my hand and leads me through to Pierre's room. At least I assume it's his room. There is a poster of Ricky Martin above a bed with faded blue night sky on the duvet-cover. It feels like a fifteen-year-old's space, no trace of an adult. Weirdly untouched, frozen in time, but with no real clues. Maybe the Ricky Martin poster? We sit down on his bed, and she chats about the anniversary. I look around but there's no recognition, no feeling of anything, which is also unexpected.

'Is there anything you want to know about him?'
And there it is, the opening I have dreamt about for the better part of the last three years. And I watch it sail right by. I have no fucking balls.
'Uh, what was he like?' I ask, thinking what a coward I am. But when I look at her she does make me feel horribly depressed, so I guess I shouldn't be trying to cheese-grate what's left of her tattered emotional state.
Beth smiles and shakes her head.
'Where do I start? He was just, such a wonderful boy. He was just the softest, sweetest thing,' she laughs at this, a small girlish giggle, 'and of course he was very popular at school, he always had hordes of his girlfriends over.'
I'm thinking, ja, right hordes of his "girlfriends". She must have suspected that they were *just* friends? Not that Beth was probably imagining her dearest son to be knobbing them in large groups, because this was a no-sex-before-marriage outfit that she was wearing. I nod as I think thoughts that would make this poor woman defibrillate and froth, and I compare her to my folks - Trish and Len. They're not this obtuse are they? But of course, the sad answer is if they do know (which I suspect they might now), they're also going to pretend that one day it all might just go away. To stop fidgeting I sit on my hands. Beth reaches out to one of the photos on the bedside table.

‘This is him in primary school.’ It’s of a little boy missing one of his front teeth. He looks very bookish, or nerdy actually, with slicked down black hair and big round eyes.
‘So, was he a… well, a sporty guy?’
She thinks about this.
‘I wouldn’t say sporty no, although he was very good at long distance running in primary school and then at high school…’, she trails off. ‘But you know how it is with teenagers.’
I nod but I’m not really sure what she’s getting at, and frankly all I want is some direct answers to the questions I’m too afraid to ask. Like, did he mainline heroin in the girl’s loo over lunch break? But Beth probably isn’t aware what mainlining is, and the timing would be a little insensitive.
‘How old was he, when…’
‘Nineteen. It was just before he turned twenty.’
‘And it was in an accident?’ Ok, here goes nothing.

Beth holds a finger under her nose, I think it’s to centre herself and stop what’s left of her imploding. Then she nods.
‘Yes. He was impaled.’
And that’s it. No fanfare. QED. Everything I suspected is true. Funny though, I feel absolutely no different. I just nod like that’s the way most nineteen-year-olds tend to leave the planet; skewered like a kebab.
Beth has gone very quiet.

‘Karl, are you sure that it’s… you know, our son, that…’ She doesn’t finish. And the room drops a degree or two.
‘He was thrown by a horse?’
Her eyes tear and she manages a small quick nod.
‘He’d just started, he was in the grade class with all the youngsters.’
I nod. I remember them well, those scowling six-year-old eyes that turned to shock. I’d seen them often enough.
Beth blinks back tears.

‘And you, tell me about you’, she asks, gripping my hand like a fish eagle with a wriggling trout.

‘Well, I work in advertising’

‘Oh! How exciting.’

‘Yes. Well, I am between jobs at the moment.’

Beth nods at this news. ‘Well, these are hard times, and you, you probably have had a lot to deal with, since…’, she nods at my chest and I feel a small twinge in my scar.

‘Yes, it’s taken quite a long time to get back on my feet.’

‘I’m sure.’

‘I live in Greenside.’

‘That’s a lovely area.’

I leave out any of the pathetic details of the commune-style drug halfway house. What would that help anyway? Something nags me to ask more questions. To get more of the nitty-gritty stuff.

‘And… well, there’s not much else to tell really.’

‘Nonsense, I can just see that you’re bursting with life, but I know what it’s like to have some old biddy prodding and poking for answers – I was young once too, you know!’

She boldly gathers energy to get through this statement, but all the while her face has the look of a deflated balloon.

‘I really should go,’ I say.

‘Oh, ok.’

We both sit there, and I look around the room, but I can’t force the feeling. I just don’t remember this.

‘Would you like to come for dinner?’ Beth asks.

‘That’d be nice.’

‘We’re having slap up tonight, but tomorrow or the next day I could make you a good old home-cooked meal.’

I can see that she’s registered my apprehension, but she’s forging ahead anyway – it’s a show of what tigresses mothers are when it comes to their children.

‘And maybe there’s something that you like I can make?’

‘Anything is fine with me.’

‘Isn’t there something special that you really like?’ She has this glint in her eyes. Well, why not go for some finer detail?
‘Chicken pasta would be good,’ I say, ‘with pesto, that’s my favourite.’
And with that she collapses into tears. Sobbing, she stands up. Gasps for air and then hurries out the room.

And now?
It’s true, that’s clear. Should I go? Is she coming back? I look around the room again, and I honestly remember nothing, not even sad, desperate Beth who I can hear running water and blowing her nose in a nearby bathroom. I figure that it’s time to go, so I stand up and head out. She comes out from the bathroom still dabbing her nose with a tissue and smiles weakly at me. She is a woman on the verge of a meltdown of Chernobyl proportions.
‘So let’s make it that you come back tomorrow night, say sevenish.’
‘Ok.’
‘Lovely.’
She takes my hand in that vice-like grip and leads me back to the front door. On the way we pass the maid, who looks at both of us with a pained expression. At the blue door Beth grips me again, and then gently pushes me down the stairs.
‘I look forward to our dinner, and you can meet Peter.’
I nod.
‘Goodbye, and thank you for coming,’ she waves and turns back and closes the door without looking me in the eye again.
So, his dad’s name is Peter.

I get back to the halfway house after four. Most of my housemates aren’t back yet, which is good because I don’t feel like facing anyone, especially Ralph who most probably has been smoking crack all day. Why the fuck his parents still bother with him (his thirteenth rehab according to him) I have no idea. Soon Yi is on the couch watching Oprah and eating cornflakes in what looks like chocolate milk.

‘Heeeiiy, wat you look so fuck up about?’ Korean, her English is remarkably good for someone who is self-taught in a matter of months.
‘Nothing.’
‘Fuck you.’
I sit down next to her.
‘Oprah, say you must be happy, she say drugs are bad.’
I digest this while she slurps through the brown, mushy cornflakes.
‘But, heey, Oprah fat black whore, so fuck her, hey?’
Soon Yi stops munching and stares at me.
‘Did you go see?’
I nod.
‘Ooh, my fuck.’
I nod.
‘Sorry Kal,’ she almost whispers, ‘so, what they say? You tell them all? You find out stuff?’
I go for one more nod while Oprah waddles her fat black arms at the audience.
‘I met his mom, Beth. She was ok. His dad was at work.’
‘Ooh, Kal, I am just fuck bitch, I so sorry that I forget. You want to make you some tea?’
‘Nah. I’m ok.’
‘I so sorry. But you brave and do it, and that mean you get better and not fuck up with the drugs, hey?’
‘I guess so.’
‘Yes. It true.’

Soon Yi, satisfied that the world is in better order goes back to Oprah and cornflakes. I contemplate suicide. I have been hamstering on the wheel of perpetual crap for too long. I decide to give Lane a ring. She’s shooting some series or sitcom or something, a very talented actress who has turned to belly dancing and clowning to find financial reward in a miserable industry. Not that I’m an expert but, according to Lane, belly dancing and magic tricks are a step up from being the lead in a South African feature film. Anyway, she’s also one of the few people who knew the before and the after. So I go to the lounge

where they have installed a proper pay phone. The last two landlines from Telkom were sold for buttons by a relapsing socio-path called Mandy.
The phone rings twice.

'Hi babe!' She knows the halfway house's number by now.
'Are you busy?'
'Not really, the crew are fucking about with lighting, which is a lark because the script is so crap they should rather shoot it in the dark.'
'So why are you doing it?'
'Cash. Either it's this or I have to eat the bunnies as I pull them out the hat. And just think how all those cancer kids would cope with that.'
Lane also does this volunteer clowning at the kid's oncology ward, which she says is uplifting despite the high turn over of audience members.
'Oh.'
'How're you today?'
'Ok.'
'Don't tell me… Oh my god, you went? You went!'
'Hmmmm…'
'Well, tell me, did you get, like, flashbacks? What were they like?'
'Beth, that's his mom.'
'Beth, god that's so Mormon sounding.'
'And she is quite.'
'Really?'
'Very happy-clappy.'
'Oh God, no wonder her son was a little off the wall… but what did she say about him? Was he…?'
'He was killed by a horse.'
'Oh my God…' Lane tapers into silence.
'Yep.'
'And what about…?'
'I didn't ask.'

‘Oh’

Silence. We both think about the horse and the dead boy.
‘If the horse thing is true, it kind of seems that the rest will follow?’ Lane is thinking out loud, I know she wants to see how I feel about it. I don’t know how I feel about anything.
‘Probably.’
‘Probably, yip,’ she agrees.
‘I’ll try to find out more.’
‘Are you seeing them again?’
‘Dinner.’
‘Oh my God.’
‘Yep.’
I can hear Lane suddenly shouting at someone on set.
‘I’m COMING! Cheese and Rice! What the… now you need me…”
I listen to her chewing the head off the first AD.
‘Bye Lane.’
‘Ja, by darling. I’ll come visit during visiting hours tomorrow.’
‘Ok, bye.’
‘Ich komme, ich komme…’
The phone cuts off.

I go to bed and stare at the ceiling. This isn’t new. The ceiling is a close friend of mine. I hear Ralph getting back because he makes so much fucking noise. I take out my hand from under my duvet and look at it. It doesn’t look different, but somehow it just isn’t mine anymore. I share it. And with all the group work, and getting-honest bullshit (excuse the pun) I just can’t fool myself into thinking that I am who I thought I was. I’ve changed, in big ways and small ways. My hands move differently, I mean, I never was a person who gestured a lot and now I could direct traffic. It’s like the joints are more oiled and flexible. It reminds me of Linda Blair from the exorcist (ok, granted I’m not vomiting on priests and sticking crucifixes where the sun don’t shine). Remember the

scene where the priest's mother's voice starts begging him to stop, well all I can think of is Beth, trapped inside me, baking and cooking and cleaning and being all Christian.

No wonder everyone has left.

Like Shelley.
Well, she left years back, but it still feels like yesterday. Her parents had been so fucking happy that she could now go and find a good Jewish boy and not some goy. Shelley had been my girlfriend for the better part of my adult life. Well, legal adult life anyway. I still feel like a school boy in a grown up body, and for the most part act accordingly. We met in school. She was the first girl I ever had sex with. It was on the back of a bakkie, under a tent made of blankets after smoking beedees – little banana leafed cigarettes that give you such a buzz. We'd been together for most of the time after that. There was a year long break when she found out I had slept with her best friend, but even that we managed to get through. Shelley always used to say that she was addicted to me, that she couldn't get enough of me. It was an ironic choice of words considering the situation. And cruel, considering how easily she kicked the habit. She blamed the accident. The surgery. But somehow the change in me was about something else. She had stood at the door, her bags packed, and there was this cursory goodbye. I sat in bed, naked. It wasn't the sex, she said, when of course it was the sex. For some reason I had gone beyond embarrassment after trying to fuck her for the nth time without having a hard-on. We'd both known it was very much over.

And now, two years on and here I lie, Drugville RSA. Alone, trying not to imagine that my body has become my enemy, and that some tainted part is leaking its thoughts and feelings into me. Turning and changing me. I roll over and close my eyes. If drugs can't hide it, well there's always sleep, and tomorrow I have to go looking for work. For a job. It's the last thing I think of before sleep covers me in black nothingness. Like everything else it fills me with dread. As I drift off I have these flashes of my breath being squeezed out of me. A man hammers on my chest and slaps me across the face.

2. then

By the time Karl finally OD'd his body had taken real punishment. He remembered the last thing was Alan fishing him out of the bath. He felt this heavy, hot breathlessness. Something inside had gone ping, like the timer on a microwave and he knew he had cooked his goose. There's a feeling when you have gobbled your food down and you're stuffed, but you know that the full payload hasn't even registered with your brain yet. That your overindulgence will be punished, but there is a slight delay when you get to consider the error of your ways. That was the feeling he had had. Way too much, and he was about to find out what that really meant. Then he remembered Alan picking him out of the bath.

The next thing was a man straddling his chest, pounding down on him with his fists. The most surprising thing was that this was happening in familiar surroundings. It was his room wasn't it? He lolled his head sideways, and saw two other people, a woman with a machine and another man. He didn't know either of them. And then he saw Alan leaning against the cupboard. It was Alan's face that scared him. Things were bad. Alan was pasty white, standing watching him with a combination of dread and fascination. Karl felt rising panic. What had happened? The man on him, he realised, was a paramedic.

'Are you ok?' the paramedic asked.
Karl nodded slowly and tried to answer but he found that he couldn't speak.
The paramedic turned to Alan.
'He looks ok, but we can take him in if you want?'
'That's ok', Karl managed, although he slurred the ok.
The paramedic looked at him. 'What did you take?'
Karl shook his head, 'just working too hard and haven't slept in ages…'
The paramedic didn't even bother to contradict him.

Eight weeks later Karl got the call in Rehab to say that Alan was dead. It had come from Alan's office because Karl had used him to do courier work. They phoned to say that he would be getting a new courier because unfortunately Alan had died. Alan's jacket and a pair of worn sneakers were still in Karl's cupboard at home.

3. now

The couch I'm sitting on is a grey taupe. It's all very new millennium minimal chic with touches of retro in the massive entrance. The money spent keeping up-to-date with fashion is mind boggling. The secretary smiles.
'He'll be down in just a mo.'
She speaks like the queen, which is strange in a large black woman who looks like she could comfortably handle shebeen violence.

I stroke the taupe faux suede, and watch the giant plasmas play all the award-winning work over and over again. It's a shrine to the self-obsessed world of advertising. Hogans is a massive agency, and I've come to see Jonathon. A Lebanese guy I met at a party. Tall with jet black hair, and strange shapes cut into his beard – all very advertising. We'd chatted, and it turned out that I had actually done some work for Hogans before, and Jonathon was a little drunk and had made lots of noises about seeing me again and "working together". So I called his bluff.

He comes round the corner looking like he's stepped out of a Vanity Fair catalogue shoot, all ex-foliated and fresh in an electric blue shirt and linen pants.
'Hey there, Karl.' He smiles at me in such a warm, friendly way.
'Hi there, Jonathon. How are you?' Must I sound so fucking formal.
'Good. Sorry to keep you waiting. Things are just hectic.'
'No problem'. I reek of desperation, and it's a sickly, rotting kind of smell.
Since cleaning up, and that's hardly a record-breaking three months yet, I've been amazed at how I can't keep up with the hectic pace of Joburg. I feel caught in slow motion. Trapped in treacle while the herd thunders past. And Jonathon, perfectly turned out, manicured, pedicured and gymned is an example of all the things I just don't know how to be.
I follow him through the office and my rising panic has me resuming an old habit of costing random electronic equipment. Coffeemaker, Breville, about two thousand six hundred. Oil heater, six-fin, four fifty. Plasma screen, LG, at least twenty thousand, and

with speakers twenty two. I'm on the sixth plasma screen and third coffeemaker (although the last is a cheapie from Boardmans) by the time we reach Jonathon's office.

Jonathon sits down and smiles.
'Cappuccino ?'
'Sure.'
Jon hits a button that calls a lackey to order them two skinny caps. That's what he calls them – "skinny caps".
'So,' said Jonathon, and smiles at me.
'So.'
'You're looking for some work with us.'
'Yip. I've done quite a bit of stuff for you guys before. I dunno if you saw the Nappy stuff?' I catch myself mid-gesture and sit on my hands. My face flushes.
'Did you see that? It was for Proctor and Gamble.'
'I did'
'I did that.'
'Ok. With Christa?'
'That's right, her name was Christa.' I nod some more.
'She left.'
'Did she?'
'Yep. Bit of a scandal.'
'Oh.'
'Ja,' Jonathon nods and shrugs his shoulders. I have no idea what it means, so I just pull a face that could be "ouch" or maybe "should-have-seen-that-one-coming". Jonathon smiles as if I should continue, so in I dive.

'Oh. Well, there was also that launch for Microsoft that I did for you guys.'
'Ok!'
'So, I was keen to, you know, see if we could do some more work. Together.'
'Ok.' Jonathon nods. And then smiles.
There is a moment of just sitting there, where Jonathon smiles again.

‘You’ve got my reel.’ I add. Filling in air-time.
‘Yeah. But nobody actually watches reels these days.’
‘Oh. Well there it is, in case someone does, you know. Want to. Watch it.’
‘Kewl. Ok.’
‘Thanks though for seeing me though.’
‘You know there’s nothing at the moment, and I’m really hectic with so much other stuff, but I will keep you in mind for the next job that, you know…’
‘Sure thing, man. It’s great to see you again.’
I listen to myself finishing off his sentence. I have no fucking balls.
‘Ok then.’ I say, filling more silence with sound.
And then Jonathon looks at me in this buddy-buddy way, and says, ‘Do you want to grab some coffee or a bite to eat later?’

I can’t be sure but in my version of this movie there would have been a strange sound on the soundtrack at that very moment. Somehow, it doesn’t seem as though he is asking about coffee.
“Sure thing, man. That’d be great.”
It’s like the words are coming out of my mouth, but I have no idea where they come from. Do I want to have coffee? No, I want to get some work so that I can pay for the halfway house. Oh fuck, I haven’t mentioned the drug thing. Shit, shit, shit.
I smile, should I try and add it in?
‘Ja, it’s good to see you Jon. Coffee would be great, maybe just catch up. You know.’
Jon smiles a big Cheshire-smile. That would be better. Tell him in a non-work environment. I stand up, and Jon puts his hand on my shoulder.

‘Thanks for coming in to see me. I really am thrilled to see you back on your feet.’
My smile goes polar. Oh Jesus, he knows. He knows, and now he thinks I’m hiding it from him.
Jon is standing very close to me, and I’m suddenly aware of just how close. I turn and start towards the door.
‘Cool, lekker, well, I’ll give you call.’

I just keep focused on the door and move. I only turn when I'm outside the office and then I smile and wave in Jon's direction and he makes some comment about coffee and I nod and smile like a retard because I have stopped listening.

Is there some kind of pheromone that I'm giving off? I mean, can they smell it? In fact, I hadn't even realised that Jon is, well, batting for the other team. Or is he? Or am I just imagining the whole fucking thing?
What the fuck is going on with me?
Am I that desperate to take any lead?
Yes. That's the short answer, but more than that, hey, why not play this game? I mean, why not fix the problem?

I catch a glimpse of myself as I am walking out the building. How can it have taken me over like this? Its three years since I parted ways with my motorbike in mid-air. I can still hear the high pitched whine of the tyres trying to grip air.

4. then

The first thing after the accident that he noticed was that he couldn't remember exactly what had happened. Or, more specifically, it was that he could remember two different things happening. Two very different events.

Waking up in the hospital, he surfaced into a world of sweat and metallic tastes. Afterwards they told him it was the morphine and the cyclosporine that he had to take. He kept drifting in and out of different dreams. The first one was of a bike, which kind of made sense because he could remember buying a bike with Shelley for their Christmas holiday, a bike tour down the Garden Route, which had never happened. The dream was always the same. He tried to reach the bike as it flew away from him and then he watched the ground get closer and the sound of the bike whined before it went to black.

The second dream was less clear.

He was sitting on a horse and there were two little girls on horses next to him. He felt this terrible dread and a very stern looking woman shouted "go". He tried to make the fucking horse go, but it just wouldn't. He leaned forward and to whisper encouragement and hoped they couldn't see how hard his heels were digging into that chocolate brown horsy-hide. He remembered wishing it dead and carted off to a glue factory.
Little girls in their bright tracksuits and riding crops looked at him pityingly. So he kicked hard, and prayed to break at least a rib. And it launched off. There was screaming and shouting, and he could hear himself panting as he tried to stay on. Suddenly a large jump approached at high speed and he tried to turn the horse away, but it had long stopped paying attention to what he was doing. It veered right, then left, and then almost as suddenly came to a complete stop. He sailed over its head.

The next thing Karl saw was his left foot just hanging. It had on a green sock, which he realised was kind of odd because he didn't like the colour green and in fact didn't own any green socks. It occurred to him that he was missing a shoe. He looked around and

the world seemed strangely upended, because his head was pointing towards the ground, and his legs were sticking up and there was a dull throbbing in his chest. The light also had a strangely fake quality about it, like the air was filled with miggies. The smell of dirt and sawdust was really strong. He reached into his top pocket to get his cell phone to call to his mother. In the dream Karl had this odd feeling because his mother was the last person he would call if he was in a hit and run with a horse. The phone dropped down to the ground. It was a Nokia, with one of those slide faces. He stretched his fingers to reach it, and then gave up and hung there feeling the blood fill his brain and the pressure and heat in his head getting really uncomfortable. And then the sound of screaming was all around him. Someone was asking him to stick his tongue out, which seemed fucking stupid and after about the fifth time he just couldn't be bothered. There was the noise of roaring wind and he closed his eyes to the dust.

And then nothing.

The dreams came and went throughout his stay in ICU, which in real time, he was later told, was three days. On the fourth day they moved him into high care. His mother, Trish, who had kept a vigil by his bedside finally took a day off to sleep at home. Shelley, his girlfriend, came in and out, looking pale and drawn. Karl remembered people touching his hand a lot and speaking in soft voices, and Lane coming and going with her belly-dancing outfit which softly jingled down the hospital corridors. And, in between, dreams of horses and bikes.

When Karl finally woke up all he craved was chicken and pesto. The noise of the hospital, with the heavyset nurses talking loudly at the station and the regular blips and pings of machines went on around him, but he was filled with thoughts of chicken and pesto. It was an odd combination considering he hadn't eaten any solid food for four days. Of course, the first few days he had missed out completely. His parents, Trish and Len, sobbing in the ICU corner and Shelley praying her desperate prayers to a Jewish god that she didn't actually believe in. After he came round he was amazed at how quickly people had adapted. Everyone used to visit on their way to work or back home, and

people he hadn't seen in ages came in to say stuff in quiet voices about how he would be fine, and what a lucky person he was.

One week later, at lunchtime, his mother and Shelley came to visit together.
'I can't believe how lucky you are', said Shelley.
'No, it's just a miracle', said Trish. 'Yes, a miracle.'
Most conversations began with these two sentences, and Karl had heard the two women in his life saying the same mantra endlessly for the last seven days. He was bored and unconvinced of his luck.
Shelley then leaned in close and her eyes flashed to Karl, giving a conspiratorial look as if someone might overhear, 'I heard the nurses talking…'
Trish leaned in.
'They were talking about the donor', she broke there, and then added, 'well, I think it was the donor.'
'Oh my god', said Trish.

Both Trish and Karl were staring at her, and Shelley was clearly unsure about having said anything at all. Trish was like a great white and there was blood in the water.
Shelley bit into her lip. 'They said they harvested this young guy.'
'Harvested?' Trish gulped back a horrid look.
'That's' the word they used. Harvested.' Shelley confirmed with a series of small nods.
'That's horrible.'
'He was just twenty', Shelley said and leaned back.
Karl sat upright in the hospital bed.
'Are you sure they said a guy?' he asked.
Shelley pulled her confused face, 'What do you mean?'
'I mean, it could have been a girl.'
'Don't be stupid, how could it have been a girl, they can't use a girl's… you know.. stuff…', as she said this Shelley realised the implications. 'Can they? No. I mean, yes. They definitely said him.'
She nodded, remembering.

Karl played with the powder-blue sheets.
'He was in an equestrian accident', she then said.
Trish's hand went to her mouth and she shook her head.
'What?' said Karl.
'That's what they said, an accident with an equestrian. Maybe they meant pedestrian?' Shelley offered.
'It means horses.' Karl looked at the two women and realised that things were getting very weird. Shelley was nodding her head though as if she somehow understood what was going on.
'My god, he must have been trampled underfoot by horses or something.' This was her assessment of an equestrian incident.
'No, that's not what happened.'

It was the authority with which he said this that made both women turn. His mother took his hand, 'My boy, whatever it was that happened, it wasn't your fault and we owe a great thank you to Jesus'. Karl hated his mother's occasional bouts of crisis-induced religious fervour.
'He wasn't trampled by horses mom, he was thrown by a horse in some kind of competition.'
Shelley looked surprised and a little hurt.
'Karl, they are not supposed to be discussing this with you. It's private and confidential, and could actually harm your recovery.'
'But your eavesdropping is ok?'
'I overheard them talking as I walked past, I couldn't help it. They were practically shouting it. Anyway, I'm sorry I brought it up.'
'Oh no dear, don't be silly. Karl's just feeling the effects of all the drugs they're pumping into him', Trish declared while patting Shelley's hand. Shelley looked a little less put out. They all sat there, mulling over the dead person and the horse.
'His name was Pierre.' Shelley said, and then nodded as if this was the last word on the subject.
'A French name,' Trish squeaked, 'that's so tragic.'

Karl pulled a face. Trish looked at him with Bambi eyes and said, 'Just think of the parents.'

Karl couldn't think of the parents, because all he could think about was this guy Pierre's liver pumping French thoughts into his bloodstream. He wondered if because a person has a name all the parts that make them up also have the same name; was his new liver also called "Pierre", or was it a "Steve" or "Joan"? And was it actually a French Pierre or just some Afrikaans guy like Pierre De Villiers or something. He reached down and traced the scars across his stomach and chest.

After Trish and Shelley left, he lay and stared at the soccer on the t.v. He imagined he can hear this voice.

'Don't you want to change the channel?'

Karl looked around. The voice was in his head, and he was probably just imagining it, but it was also quite possible that he was losing his mind. He lay there waiting for it to speak again, but nothing happened. Pieces of the dream came back to him. The green socks, the Nokia phone and the strange sense of being there and yet knowing that he couldn't have been. Pierre. It didn't spark off any recognition. He had never met or known a Pierre before.

Karl rolled back to stare up at the ceiling.

'Sorry mate.' He said the words aloud. Maybe wherever Pierre was, if you believed in a wherever, he would be ok with the fact that he had died so that Karl could still be on the planet. It was terribly nerve-wracking when the world worked in his favour, because it drew Karl's attention to the fact that at some point it wouldn't. Just like it hadn't for poor Pierre and his killer horse.

And then it occurred to Karl. He should find Pierre's killer. He was going to have to instigate another equestrian accident, one in which the horse got a sticky end.

Karl nodded to himself in the dark. That was only right and fair. He would avenge Pierre's death. It wasn't grand. It was probably going to be messy and horrible, but what else was there that he could do for this boy called Pierre whom he would never meet?

Karl rolled over and went to sleep, dreaming dreams of decapitated horses.

5. now

The rule in the halfway house is that you have to be out of the house by nine in the morning and can't come back till after three. The idea being that the really slothful sinners can get their fat asses out of bed, and get work or do something constructive other than miss their drug of choice. I have no work. I quit my job five months back, before rehab, before they fired me for being an addict. I had always thought of myself as a very productive addict because I made so much cash while snorting loads of meth up my nose, and then, because there was no sleep or rest of any kind, I just worked all the time. Granted, I was doing a good living-dead impression, with drawn pale yellow skin and a six-pack from not having eaten in weeks, but I was a productive zombie nonetheless. So it's a surprise to me to be lying in bed with the clock pulsing its red LCD with the numbers 8:55.

Soon Yi pokes her head in the door.

'Get up! You going to be in tellibil sheit if you stay in bed.'

I throw back the covers.

It's cold in my room because it's south facing and always in shadow. I can hear shouting. It must be the house warden, Nicola, who comes through at nine to lock the house up so that there are no stowaways. I could try and hide, but I know that Soon Yi or Ralph will rat me out so it's pointless trying to squeeze into the narrow drugs cabinet. How ironic.

Nicola walks into my room without knocking.

'Karl, I'm locking up', she sees I'm not dressed. I stand there feeling six years old.

'You know I have to keep strict time, Karl. Now get dressed.'

'I need a shower.'

'Well you can't have a shower because you are late and now you have to get your clothes on or leave and spend the day in your jamies.'

I walk over to the cupboard and drop my pants and take my shirt off, hoping I might embarrass her.

Nicola shakes her head, 'You've got three minutes,' and walks out again.

Fifteen minutes later I am walking up the road towards Rosebank. Normally I get a lift with Ralph whose parents gave him a car (how enabling is that), or call Lane before she gets to set, but as I've missed those options I have to walk. Dressed in a blue parka, I realise I'm going to get hot and sweaty soon. I should have gone to the gym, but it's too far to walk so I figure that the mall, which is all Johannesburg really has on offer anyway, must have something that can occupy me.

Lots of busy mommy-types are fetching and carrying stuff at the entrance and a couple of youngsters pose with smokes, all gangsterish, and I guess they're bunking school. I carry my jacket and pull-over and I'm still sweating. I know I am luckier than a lot of addicts in that I have some cash left that I didn't spend on drugs so I can at least afford a cup of coffee. I head for the Seattle which has the best brownies in the world, crunchy on the outside and moist and soft inside. I order a Sugar Daddy, which is a latte with caramel and hazelnut. It's bound to make me edgy and as sugared up as an hysterical nursery school terrorist, but I get off on the buzz and as a junkie I can't really pass up the opportunity to get even the smallest high.

There's no-one else at any of the little black, marble tables so I just sit and watch people go past. It's nice because I have no desire to look busy. I don't even have to pretend to be waiting for someone. I just stare and sip my coffee.

Across from the Seattle shop is a very loud adventure bowling arcade (apparently the adventure part is bowling in day-glo neon light). I'm reminded of Sun City's chamber of horrors with all the slot machines screaming and jangling. The noise and lights only has me as an audience which seems strange. Next door is a small internet café.

I can't see anyone inside. When I look at the café I get this strange feeling. It was on the net that I managed to track down Pierre's parents. Well, not directly. The first thing I had to work out was who died the same time that I had my accident. Nothing had appeared in any of the newspapers online, although there were lots of obituaries to research. I suppose there always are. I was looking for something quite specific though, because I

had to find someone who had died after being thrown from a horse. I mean, that's what I would have to find for the memory that suddenly appeared in my brain to be his, and that's what Shelley had overheard the nurses talking about. Of course I had to be a bit of an Inspector Clueso about it, putting two and two together to get twenty-two. I had found lots of dead people in that week. They can only keep the organs 'fresh' for a couple of hours once the person is brown bread, unless they're harvesting from a vegetable; all this according to the articles under 'organ transplant' I found through Google. Only a few, however, could have been my donor. There were a load of people who had ended up in small pieces. Like Jaques Marais who had literally disintegrated on the N1 when he had careened into the back of a stationary taxi at 250km per hour on his Yamaha, and one can assume didn't have a liver worth looking for on the asphalt. I had found three people's names who could have been my donor. All I had to do was track down which one had been in an episode of "when-good-horses-go-bad", or, find out that I was just an overly imaginative gay junkie who had decided to come out despite twenty-six years of being, well… something else.

Three names: a young woman called Petunia Maleleko, age twenty-nine. A young guy called Pierre Landers, age nineteen; and someone called Ricardo Punsari. Petunia, Pierre or Ricardo. These three names had been revealed to me in an internet café just like the one I was facing. It had been a very da Vinci Code moment.

6. then

His surgeon had a cleft palate that looked like it had been fixed with a number nine knitting needle. He was deformed, and it occurred to Karl that in his business he surely should have it fixed. His name was Dr Rabin, and he sounded irritated when he spoke to Karl.

'So what's happening? Your mom said you've been acting kind of strange?'

Karl felt such terrible animosity towards this man, it was incomprehensible that this was the person who had supposedly given him a second chance at life, because what boiled up was unadulterated hatred.

'It's this liver. I think', said Karl, but then didn't explain. He was hoping that the doctor with the fucked face would jump in and finish off the statement with an 'oh yeah, it's taking over your body and making you into something *else'*.

'What about it?'

What was he going to say? The truth?

'I've been reading. And a lot of books have stories that say that people who have had transplants get stuff left over from the person they got the transplant from.'

'What do you mean?' he said. He looked interested.

Karl's lip curled, and in his head he ranted, 'I mean, you fucking stupid cunt that you've put something inside of me that is making me into something fucking horrible. Didn't you check the fucking doorknob you pulled this wretched liver out of?'

Of course, all he managed was: 'I crave chicken, and I used to hate chicken.'

Karl sat there, again unable to say the stuff that was starting make him mad.

'Nah. That's not possible.'

That was his professional advice?

'I think that's what's happening to me.' Said Karl.

'So why do you think the craving is not from you? Maybe you just want chicken?'

'Well you see, that's just it. I don't know. I just have this terrible – well, it's almost like a thirst but…'

Rabin got this quizzical expression of a medical mind being forced to deal with a loon.

‘I don’t think you realise the trauma you’ve been through.’

Karl’s face turned to stone as he watched the smarmy fuck lean forward on his desk.

‘People who experience the trauma that you do will have some fall-out. After effects that seem strange and disorientating. You’re ok, man, you’re a survivor – anyone else would have been brown bread. Not you. You’re amazing; don’t forget that.’

It was tempting for Karl to believe that, based solely on the catastrophe of the man’s face.

‘So can’t tell you me who this liver is from?’

‘No, that’s strictly confidential.’

Karl’s face was already flushed and he realised that because he’d already lost, that it didn’t really matter what he said.

‘Ok, can you tell me something about him?’

‘I can’t give you any details. It might not even have been a him.’

‘Ok, well I need to know something about this *person*.’

‘As I’ve said, I can’t give any details.’

‘Were they gay?’

‘Sorry?’

‘Was the person whose liver you chopped up and planted inside me a gay?’

It was easy to watch the mechanics of Rubin’s brain slowly click over. He realised what Karl was saying, and then where the conversation was going. Rabin was truly taken aback. He stared at his desk with a blank look, then back up at Karl.

‘I don’t know, but… can I give you the number of a psychologist. That’s what I think you need. See someone to deal with the trauma you’ve been through.’

Karl stood up.

There was a relieved pride because he had gone past the place of caring.

‘Don’t bother. It isn’t going to help.’

‘Karl, I strongly recommend….’

There was certain satisfaction in closing the door on someone who was still speaking to him, especially Dr Mengeler.

As Karl drove out under the hospital boom he looked at his hands and flexed his toes. It was undoubtedly his body. But it had also changed. He had changed. There was no getting past it. And it was only parts of him, but they were important parts, and he missed them. Because what he had become was not part of any plan that he had had. The bag on the seat next to him had an address in it. He had found the details on the internet. He didn't think it was the right person, but he had to start eliminating the possibilities as he went along, and her name had been the easiest to find so far. Petunia Maleleko. She had been in a coma from unknown causes and had died the same day he had been admitted to the Milpark for the operation. She had been easy to track down because her family were minor celebrities, her dad being some big-knob in a mining deal that had made him hundreds of millions ZAR. Granted the deal had the reek of Kebbling, the new term for theft on such a grand scale that it made even the most common thief appear legit, but it had bought them a grand palace in the heart of Sandhurst. There were so many articles about little Petunia's death and the terrible grief of her family, but what was of interest to Karl was a little line at the bottom of one of the articles. Petunia's organs had been donated to help save other lives.

Now Karl didn't remember being black in the dream about the horse, but then he didn't really remember what he looked like, so anything was possible. Also, if it was Petunia's liver quietly Kreepy Krawly-ing his blood then maybe the memory was just a dream after all. Or, maybe getting a girl's body parts was making him a little girlish. This could at least account for his sudden penchant for penis. Karl turned onto the Rivonia offramp and headed towards Sandhurst.

The house was a collision of Tuscan villa and Greek palace. The cost must have been tens of millions, but the effect couldn't hide the monumental lack of taste that the Maleleko family had created. There were two armed guards at the gate when he pulled up who asked him to open the boot and get out of the car. They went through the vehicle, and asked him whether he had an appointment.
'No, I don't'

‘Then you must go, you cannot come to this house without permission from Dr Maleleko.’

Dr? He didn’t realise her dad was a doctor, he thought he was just a miner.

‘I need to see Mr.. Dr, or Mrs Maleleko about their daughter.’

This stopped the two Nigerian looking guards dead in their tracks.

‘What about?’

‘Well.’ Karl realised that it was unlikely he was ever going to get past the main gate, but that a bare faced lie would probably be the only possible way forward. Karl had already guessed that this kind of money meant Petunia must have had pretty much the best of everything.

‘Petunia Maleleko and I were at school together and I have…’ Karl reached into his car and looked around. Nothing. He opened his bag and there was Deepak Choprah’s *Quantum Healing*.

‘I have this book of hers that I wanted to return to her parents.’

The one guard moved back into the guardhouse. There was a brief wait and the gates swung open. Karl got back in the car and drove up the most expensive driveway on African soil, at least that he had ever seen.

A woman waited at the colossal front doors. Karl took the book, which he had bought last week in an attempt to get more spiritual, and walked up to her. He was trying to work out whether it was one of the army of hired help, but there was something about the way this woman stood that told him he was looking at Petunia’s mother. She wore an ochre dress, had skin of softest cappuccino-brown, short cropped hair, and huge almond eyes. She looked Moroccan.

‘Hello.’ She reached out her hand and Karl shook it. ‘I am Angiwe, please, come inside.’

‘Hi, Karl.’

He followed her into the enormous reception area which had twin staircases that peeled off to the vast reaches of the second story. She continued through to a large sitting room.

‘Have a seat. Would you like something to drink?’

‘I’m fine thanks.’

She sat down and smiled, but it was a wary smile.

‘You have something of Petunia’s?’

Karl stood up and brought her the book.

‘Yes, Petunia lent this book to me. And I wanted to return it.’

Angiwe took the book and turned it over. She read for a moment.

‘It is strange, for she was not a great reader and this looks like some kind of… spiritual book.’

Karl realised he had to tread carefully here.

‘Yes. She said to me that she was really keen on learning about Deepak because some of our mutual friends had attended a workshop he gave when he was out in South Africa.’

‘How interesting. Did you know my daughter well?’

‘Uh, not really. I mean, we weren’t very close, it’s just that she... Well, I found her very nice and she made a big impression on me.’

Angiwe eyed him out like a cat watches a goldfish.

‘I’m afraid she didn’t mention you… Karl?’

‘Karl, yes. Well, we weren’t close.’

‘Where did you meet?’

Karl had this tingling feeling that this could really go south and, the way this woman was watching him, she suspected something was up.

’Church.’

‘Oh.’

This immediately seemed to settle Angiwe. She looked at the book again.

‘Thank you for offering to return this, but you may keep it. I can see that in some way you were close to my daughter, and I suppose I cannot be so naïve as to think she didn’t have a life outside of the one we tried to make for her.’

Karl gave a small nod. Angiwe watched him.

‘My daughter was a wilful woman, and in some ways that makes me proud, even now.’

‘Mrs Maleleko, I never found out, but how did she… how did it happen.’

Angiwe stood up and walked over to me, handing me the book.

‘She was hijacked and shot.’

‘I’m sorry.’

‘Yes, we all are.’

Karl stood and then walked back to the exit. At the door, she shook his hand.

‘Goodbye Karl.’

‘Goodbye, Mrs Malaleko.’

She turned and walked away and Karl returned to his car. So Petunia Maleleko was not the previous owner of his liver. She was just some pretty rich dead princess from the right side of the tracks who had probably been on the wrong side of town. It was a strange closeness he felt to her though, even though he hadn’t ever met her. Mentally he crossed her off the list. It left Pierre and Ricardo.

7. now

Beth opens the door and immediately starts to cry. I smile because, well, what the fuck else am I supposed to do? I wasn't sure about accepting the invite but the decision was made by default because Soon Yi and Ralph decided to have a party at the halfway house. I had to get out and why not here?

'I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I just can't help it.' Beth takes quick gulps of air and smiles, all the time dabbing her eyes with a tissue that she has obviously snuck away in the sleeve of her floral blouse. Her hair is up, and she has gone to some bother with make-up and a long skirt. She looks matronly. I think she was aiming for something more glamorous, but age and dowdy taste conspired against her.

'Hi Beth. It's nice to see you again,' I say.

'Oh and it's lovely to see you too.' She stands a moment, and then it bursts out of her, 'Can I give you a hug!' She almost yells it, and before I can answer she squeezes me. I stare out over her shoulder and think that this must be the most desperately sad moment in a three-year-long litany of sad moments, and yet there isn't any matching feeling for the thought.

After a minute she lets go, leaving a dampness on my shoulder. She adjusts herself, takes my hand and leads me through to the kitchen. It's all warm food smells and boiling pots and bubbling pans.

'Now you just sit yourself down and let me get you something to drink.' She stops.

I am starting to get very nervous because I can never tell which way her mind is heading, and she keeps giving this meaningful looks, trying to connect with *him*, the tenant, without letting the landlord know.

'Would you like a rock shandy?' Just the way she says it, I can tell that it must have been Pierre's favourite.

'That'd be nice.'

She looks at me in that way, waiting for the flash, the spark of recognition that will tell her *he* is still inside there somewhere. Then she licks her lips and moves to the fridge.

We don't say anything while Beth tries to instil making the rock shandy with such attention that the silence doesn't feel so present.

The questions I have left to ask I just can't. At least not directly and there is always the distinct possibility that Beth doesn't actually know the answers. And what would she say if she did? Yes, we knew for sure when I caught Pierre wanking to the protein shake man advert on the telly that he was, you know, a 'gay'. Of course, she might say, he only ever had sex with the motor mechanic down the block, but still, it never would have worked because *he* was married.

'Beth, uh, do you mind talking about Pierre?'

'No, as long as you don't mind me bursting into tears when we do.'

'That's ok.' I smile. Well, that's a little more relaxed.

'Where did the accident happen?'

'It was at a riding school he had joined, it was called…' The chopping stops as she thinks. 'Something with 'sun'… oh, yes, Sunlands. Sunlands.' She repeats it to herself and nods.

'And what did they do with the horse?'

Beth turns at me with surprise.

'I don't know, I mean, it wasn't really the horse's fault, was it? It was the riding instructor who put him on the beast. And, well, he had signed one of those indemnity forms so we had no case against her. What a horrible woman though. Absolutely awful. She screamed at us, our child is killed by her rampaging horse, and she screams at us. It was all just too horrible.'

The door opens behind me, and Pierre's dad Peter walks in.

Peter explains a lot about Beth. He is not talkative. When he walks in he is uncomfortable and I don't know if I should try and hug him, but he just puts out his hand. He is formal, offering me another drink in a slightly Afrikaans accent, even though my rock shandy is still practically full. There is an air of discipline about Peter, which smacks of German precision and military school compassion. Beth, if anything, just becomes a little more highly strung with her husband around.

'I will set the table,' says Peter and disappears from the kitchen, leaving her and me alone again. Beth takes the boiling pot off the stove.

‘Won’t you help me here dear?’
I hold the colander as she pours in the steaming pasta, and follows it with a dollop of butter and some salt and pepper.
‘Pierre loved this.’
I don’t say anything.
Beth stops, and puts the wooden spoon down.
‘I’m sorry Karl, it is really quite silly of me. I’m treating you as if… well, as if Pierre is still with us.’
Peter stands in the door.
I register this. Beth looks to Peter who gives her a small smile. He looks over to me.
‘We are both very glad that you found us. But we also understand why they try to not let us meet,’ says Peter.
I start to feel heat rising under my collar.
Beth chimes in, ‘Now don’t you take this in the wrong way my dear, I can’t tell you how pleased we are that you did actually find us; this is like putting to rest a final chapter in a very sad story for both of us. What Peter is saying is that, well, you got our Pierre’s liver, but there’s someone out there with his heart and lungs, and someone else with his kidneys and I think that someone might even have been given his eyes. And it is what our boy would have wanted,’ she starts to cry now, ‘but it is very hard.’

The three of us stay put. I look at a spot on the floor, and Beth and Peter look at each other.
‘I’m sorry,’ I say.
They both nod.
‘I wanted to meet you because.’ I could feel all the stuff well up inside me. ‘The thing is you see, I think that I have some… memories, which might be your son’s.’
Beth raises her one eyebrow ever so slightly.
‘I know how crazy this sounds, but I remember the accident with the horse. And other things, strange things that have all happened to me since the accident, well, since I got your son’s liver.’
Pierre’s parents stay focused on him.

‘And I needed to ask you some questions because my life has fallen apart and I am not blaming anybody, but I need to know.’ I take a gulp of the rock shandy.

It’s now or never.

‘I want to know if your son… if he was gay?’

Nobody moves, and the water boils on the stove.

‘And also if he… if he took a lot of drugs?’

Beth’s oven glove falls to the floor.

‘I beg your pardon?’ she stares at me.

‘I need to know.’

Peter walks over to the counter and picks up a bunch of keys.

‘You should leave now, please, just leave. We can’t go through this.’

I am desperate now.

‘I’m really sorry he’s dead, but you can’t imagine what the last few years have been like. I’ve been going mad. I mean really mad, with the drugs and men, and god knows what else. And it was never like this before.’

I can hear the shrill rise in my voice as Peter takes my arm and leads me out the kitchen. Beth has not moved from her spot next to the stove. So I turn to Peter and beg, ‘Please, please just tell me if he was, I need to know.’

‘Stop it!’

The steel in Peter’s voice silences me instantly. His hand has cut off circulation in my arm. He yanks me close so the next words are just whispers.

‘Don’t ever come back. Ever.’

This is not how I had foreseen the evening of chicken pasta and reminiscing playing out, but I nod my head. Peter leads me to the door, which he opens and then keeps walking me down the garden path. At the bottom he lets me go. I rub my arm, and turn to Peter, ‘He was gay, wasn’t he? I mean why else react like this, hey?’

‘Never come back here.’ And with that Peter turns and walks away.

I stand in the cold and then walk back down the street. It’s a long walk to get back to the halfway house.

8. then

Of course by the time he involved Lane in the chaos of his mind, it was way too late. Her solution, however, was simple. So there he sat, on a hot Christmas day in small black golf, kicking up dust on a road fit for pigs and goats.
It was miles out that they had to drive. Lane was chatty about all kinds of stuff that was very ignorable. They drove past the muck-infested swamp of Hartebeespoort Dam. God only knew what real estate agents had to tell their prospective clients about that smell. Houses there cost millions and people flocked for their weekends and holidays, sunning themselves in this god-awful sewer stench that hung over the valley like the black death. Then they went past Brits. The road turned to gravel, and Lane continued to prattle on about inane stuff. Karl stared out of the window. Black women shaded by umbrellas wandered down the roads. People didn't seem very stressed out here, and Karl couldn't stop imagining what they were headed towards. He had this light, sick feeling which was both really nice and really off-putting.

'It's really great that you are doing this, Karl. It's important, you know,' said Lane.
He didn't answer. What could he say ? Yes, let's go to the place where all the others go. Let's see what was to become of me.
The car wasn't built for the dirt roads and the temperature inside was rising rapidly as they drove through the semi-desert scrub. Everything was dirty, even the sheep were matted brown from the dust. They came to a farm gate, and Lane jumped out to open it. Still nothing to give away what they were driving towards. On the website it had said "family environment". It also said "men only", but Lane insisted that dykes must be allowed, and she could pull that role off. She didn't look typically lesbian, but then neither of them knew any lesbians to compare with.
A carport appeared. There was also some green grass, so obviously they at least had water there. There was a pool and men were lying next to it. Lane was staring.
'That's strange,' she says.
'What?'
'It's strange that they're not wearing any clothes.'

Karl looked again. She was right. They were all naked. A man got up and walked to the pool, and both of them were transfixed by his really large member that flopped along with him.

'Shew,' said Lane. 'I hope he's got sun block on.'

Karl's heart was pounding. Lane started to get out the car and he just sat there.

'What the fuck. Am I supposed to drop my rods here?' he asked to no-one in particular. He looked at Lane, 'We're so leaving!'

Lane stopped, 'What? Get out the car Karl,' she ordered him.

'We've come for a day in the sun, and that's what we're going to have.' She started packing out the picnic basket, and got towels from the boot. He just sat in the passenger seat. Then he saw a really fat, annoyed man marching towards them. The man was saying he was sorry, but he was wearing his angry eyes and mouth. Lane was pretending she hadn't seen him bearing down on them.

'Sorry meisie, you can't come in here. There are no girls allowed on the property. This is a men's only resort,' said the man.

Lane turned to him and smiled, and then made Helen Keller noises and signed at him. This was her routine, when in doubt she played a deaf person who couldn't understand anything. It worked for her. She made garbled whining noises that could be mutilated words, and waved her hands in strange ways. Once she did this to someone and they turned out to be a real deaf person. When this guy gave her an annoyed, confused kind of look, she just got really angry and started crying and shrieking.

The really fat man had stopped and was just staring at her with an awful look on his face. He turned to Karl and spoke very loudly,

'Mister, your friend can't come here – it's a man's only place.'

From the alarmed look on the fatty's face, he obviously thought that Karl was also some deaf mute, because he spoke louder and slower and looked at him in desperation. It was hard not to notice that he had a really small penis for such a big man; it was a shrivelled little walnut and dark. Karl peered at it, feeling kind of dizzy. Lane was still packing, now pretending that the failed conversation between her and fat-man-little-penis had been

resolved. Fat man turned back to the other men at the pool and yelled, 'They're deaf, Koos, and there's a girl!'
'She's a lesbian,' said Karl. Fat man turned to him.
'You're not deaf?'
'No.'
'She can't come in. Sorry.' Although he didn't look sorry when he said this.
'But,' Karl pleaded, 'we just drove all the way from Joburg and she's a lesbian.'
'How horrible,' fat man said, looking at Lane. 'A deaf lesbian. Fuck me, that's awful. But if she was blind I'd say she can come in. But deaf, no man.'
And then, out of nowhere, Karl started to cry. And not a put-on cry. But really sob.

'Jesus,' says fat man.
Karl cried, and Lane continued on as if this was just another day for her. She sing-songed some gobbledegook at her bawling friend, and then marched off to the pool. Some thin man shrieked when he saw her and ran off into the bushes, but she just kept walking. Fat man was stunned. He then burst into a wobbly run. 'Come back here, come back!'

Karl got out the car, still crying, and followed them. Fat man was standing over Lane, he seemed afraid to actually touch her. He was making shooing signs as if she was a pigeon on some ledge that would frighten and fly off. Lane took out a Woolworths' salad and then looked at fatty as if he had just appeared again. She stood up and loudly made these nasal shrieks back at him that were quite threatening. He backed off, so she sat down, and he just stood there. He looked for support, and then walked back towards Karl. His face was flushed and he was obviously highly peeved. Someone shouted at him, 'Ag, Francine, just leave it'. Francine looked back at a middle-aged man standing at a braai. 'Leave it, Franci, it's fucking Christmas and if she's happy then there's nothing to worry about.'
Francine, the fat-man-little-penis-with-a-girl's-name, gave up and waddled off to the bar area, a kind of Skukuza by the sea. Lane had stripped to a pink bikini, keeping in with the theme of homosexual-pride Karl supposed. He walked over to her little picnic spot

and sat down. She smiled, and searched in her bag, bringing out some sun block that she started generously lathering all over herself. She then handed him a tissue, because he was snivelling, and made crying noises and pulled faces for effect. The men across the way were staring and she waved, over-friendly till the end. They waved back, but not with quite the same commitment.

Karl lay down and watched through half-closed eyes as lots of naked men wandered to and fro from the pool and bar area. After awhile he could stop looking at all the penises, because they just became background to the vastly weird characters themselves. The fantasy of cover-model heaven was clearly a vast exaggeration on the quality of gay man attending the Christmas lunch. But there were two guys he spotted. One youngster, must have been twenty something, and one moustached guy with a beer boep. Not classic beauties.

They sat there for about an hour. Lane tried a number of times to get him to take his shirt off, but she also knew how sensitive he was about the scars, so she gave up. Karl sat in the sun, sweating in a costume and t-shirt. When Francine came back wearing a Father Christmas hat and said lunch was served, he ignored both of them. Lane waved at him just to annoy, then turned to Karl and said, 'Come on, lets go get lunch.'
'But we've got food.'
She just smiled and pointed at all the queens shuffling past a buffet under a huge green tent. She wasn't about to miss a gathering, a potential audience.
He could see that she was tired of the whole deaf act, but as an actress she was now 'in the role' and would play it till the bitter end. They walked under the huge green tarpaulin. Inside there were benches and trestle tables and naked men sat about with paper party hats. They were the only ones with clothes on. Francine was playing Santa and doling out potato salad. Lane looked like she was in heaven, and squawked some unintelligible things at people. Boney M was playing "Little Drummer Boy" over the speakers and she then picked up the tune, warbling along like a retard. She also put on that spastic grin that retards have, and Karl thought she might be overplaying it, but naked bodies parted like she was Moses.

They didn't hate me, she would say later, they hated my character. Well, the thin man who ran away earlier certainly looked like he hated her, and Francine hated both of them. The lunch was action packed. Whatever myth left to Karl about gay men being paragons of style, grooming, and good looks was reduced to singing peroxided nancy-girls drunkenly yodelling and pulling each other's paper hats off, culminating in one very tall man vomiting as he pulled a Christmas cracker. Where were the lonely men from Brokeback Mountain with stomachs of steel and eyes to drown in? Karl picked slowly at the braaied lamb and potato salad, but even that was disappointing. Weren't gays supposed to produce culinary miracles? This was like a boarding school lunch. The vegetables cooked past taste, and the meat with a rubbery spring-back action that just kept you chewing. As the party got louder, Karl focused his attention on eating so as not to stare at the naked, screaming men with their floppy cocks.

Lane, meanwhile, had adapted to the festivities and managed to make friends with some young boy who was clearly not included in his much older lover's conversation. They communicated by pulling faces at one another, and occasionally threw food. The older lover eventually lost his patience and slapped the young boy across the back of his head. 'Vok Fanie, moet jy soos 'n vokken drie jaar oue meisie rond vok?'

Lane was startled and the boy flushed and sat still. Karl pushed his food away, and walked outside. He ambled over to the picnic blanket and lay face down, his body nestling into the warm heat of the blanket. Sitting up, he took his shirt off. The scars ran down and across his stomach, a bit like a thin white cross, and he lay back on the blanket, the warmth and his full tummy making him drift off.

Someone sat down next to him, and he opened his eyes. The first thing he saw was a very large penis. Even here in Penisville, this was a citizen you wouldn't miss. It was attached to a very well built man who was lathering up in sun tan lotion. The man smiled at Karl, and then lathered up his member, which got a little larger from all the attention. It was hard not to stare.

The man spoke.

‘Hi, I’m Willem.’

‘Hello, Karl’

Willem leaned over and they shook hands, with Karl trying to look everywhere but at Mr floppy.

‘Nice day for some sun, hey.’

Willem had a very strong Afrikaans accent, which Karl thought made him sound a bit stupid, but he was trying to reserve judgement. Trying not to think, cock, cock, cock – which was impossible, because the penis seemed to have elbowed out all other thoughts, and he struggled to form words for a response.

‘Uhhh, ja’

‘Why don’t you take your clothes off?’

Karl gave a weak smile, ‘Because I like a tan line.’

‘Oh’, says Willem. ‘Ok.’

Cock, cock, cock, Johnson, penis, willy, cock, cock, cock. Karl closed his eyes, but the image remained. Mr Floppy. Karl opened his eyes to find Willem looking at him. Meaningfully. There was that unspoken, yes, I know what you’re thinking. Karl closed his eyes again, taking a halting breath. This is what ostriches felt like. Heads stuck in the sand, they hope the world will be different when they look up again. Karl opened his eyes, and yes, Willem was still looking and this time he smiled. The pressure in Karl’s chest was monumental. There was a pounding in his head, and he really wanted to adjust his hard-on. He struggled to think of something to say to… What was his name?

‘So Willem…’

Willem smiled, ‘Yes ?’

‘Do you come here a lot?’ Mary mother of god, was that the extent of his thought process? Cock, cock, cock, willy, willy, willy.

‘Ja, I do.’

‘Oh.’

Cock, cock, cock, cock.

‘Well, you must spend a lot on sun tan lotion.’

Willem just smiled, and Karl realised that when he spoke he sounded mental.
'Do you want to go somewhere,' said Willem.
Karl looked up from the penis and, oh yes, there was a man attached.
'Uh, ok.'
'Follow me just now, I don't want my lover to see,' and Willem motioned to a man on a lilo in the pool who was looking directly at them.
Jesus Fucking Christ thought Karl, how can he not see that you've been practically having a wank on the pool lawn? The pounding intensified and Karl lay back and tried to pretend to be elsewhere. He heard Willem stand up and walk off, and slitted his eyes to watch him go behind a zozo hut further off in the bushes. What's a good waiting time? Should he give it one minute or ten? Was there etiquette for cuckolding in a public place on Christmas? Jesus, what if he tried to… stick it up him. Lord have mercy, maybe he was a sicko with a penchant for shtoeping younger guys with that monster of his. It was difficult for Karl to work out if he was more turned on or just fucking scared shitless. How long had it been, he wondered? Fuck, maybe the guy was getting pissed off because he was taking too long. And where was Lane ? He looked around and immediately caught sight of the hideous crypt-keeper lover on the lilo staring directly at him, with a stare that said I-know-exactly-what-the-fuck-you-are-doing.

Karl stood up and moved off towards the hut. He could feel the eyes of the old wrinkly lover burn into him. He rounded the hut and found another small building which looked like a toilet. He went inside.
'Willem?'
A door opened to one of the cubicles and Willem is there, cock in hand.
'Come in.'
The toilet had that old wee smell which was gross, but other than that it was not too tacky. Just dirty white tiles, with the odd large crusty insect in the corner. Willem closed the door behind him and continued to rub his dick.
'You nervous?'

Willem had obviously noted that Karl didn't have a hard-on anymore, and that he was licking very dry lips and trying to look comfortable in a bush toilet. Karl just nodded rapidly and grimaced.

'You want a line?'

'A what?'

'A line?'

'It'll make you relax.'

The idea of drugs only filtered to Karl kind of slowly, but it seemed to make sense. Yes, of course, it made sense that in this place of debauchery there would be drugs. It was not that Karl hadn't registered that his parents enormous investment in his education and upbringing had still only managed to bring him to the point of trying to get it off with a well-endowed man in a toilet somewhere in the African bush while his lover was probably stalking them. Standing in a Speedo on the dirty white tiles with the sound of cicadas deafening him, he couldn't recall how the fall had begun. Unthinkingly, he traced the scars across his stomach and chest. He had a girlfriend two years ago. Now he was doing drugs. Now he wanted men.

'Are you ok?'

Karl looked at Willem with a faraway look.

'A line would be nice,' said Karl.

Willem produced a small bag of powder, a bit like a magician's dove, except there were no sleeves to hide it. Whatever, thought Karl; just go with the flow. Willem went over to the toilet and straddled it so that he faced the cistern and tapped out a pile of powder on top of it. There was a lot of concentration in his work. He put a note over it and ground down the powder with a credit card. There was a noise outside and Karl's heart tried to exit through his throat. He breathed through clenched teeth as someone, or a few people… yes, the sounds of a more than one person entered into a cubicle a few doors down from them. Willem continued to gently crush the drugs and Karl was tempted to scream, 'HURRY THE FUCK UP!' But instead he just breathed, and listened for any sound. What if it was the lover? The angry, ugly lover?

'There you go', said Willem.

Willem had drawn too long thick white lines across the top of the cistern, and handed a rolled note to Karl, who whispered back, 'You go first.'
Willem stuck the note up his nose and snorted a line in one quick movement, hoovering all the powder up. He handed the note to Karl.
Karl took the note, and felt it start to unravel as he stuck it up his nose. He could feel he was squinting as he bent down to try and keep his eye on the white line. He snorted, but nothing went in.
'Hold your other nostril closed', said Willem.
He held the other nostril. It felt like he was engaged in a very complex action involving much too much co-ordination for his current state. He snorted again, and a burning chemical smell tore through the back of his head. Jeeeeeeeeesus. His face scrunched up as the burn got worse and he snorted and gagged.
Willem laughed, 'Relax, it burns a bit, that's all.'

Karl leaned against the faded white of the wall. This was it. This was the collapse. The world felt lopsided. Willem was standing again and rubbing his dick, but Karl couldn't assimilate all the different sensations currently and just watched him. Willem started feeling him and kissing his body. He didn't react. And then, something happened.
It was gentle at first, just a shift away from strange to something good. He felt like peace flowed through him. Things were just so ok, and everything was going to be all right. The drug was so… so good. Karl smiled and kissed back. And so what if the lover came in, he was just having some fun. Karl started to smile and realised he couldn't stop. Fuck, it felt fantastic. This pure energy that swept all anxiety, fear and worry away, and left him in an embrace with a man he thought was fucking hot. The sex was like a porn movie; he found himself watching what he was doing as if he was the director, thinking, fuck yes, this was sexy. Willem was sucking him off, and didn't stop when he came. He was squirting inside a man's mouth. Groans that he realised were his, and could probably be heard back at the pool, echoed through the toilet.
Karl started to laugh. A great, easy laugh that just burbled up from inside him.
'What's so funny?', said Willem.

Karl just shrugged his shoulders and laughed, and it felt fantastic. It felt better than anything he'd ever done. He just laughed and laughed. He helped Willem jerk off, and they stood there sweating and breathing hard.

'Want a last line?'

'Yes, siree', said Karl.

Willem cut another one, and this time Karl snorted like a pro – not leaving a grain of white behind. The burn made him twist his face in a grimace, but this time he knew that it was a small price for what was coming. Big globs of burny snot slid down the back of his throat. And he waited for the lightness in his stomach. His vision felt slightly whited out, as if the light was just a bit too bright, and sound also seemed a little loud, but he smiled. There was no sad, there was no tension. Just happy. Blissing out.

9. now

I sit in the car outside Sunlands riding school. It's a dump set in the heart of the mink and manure belt. All around are palazzos with horses and manicured lawns, but this place is run down. It's all broken wire fencing and collapsing wooden logs. There are three horses in one area, and all of them look worn and underfed. I ring the intercom. A tinny annoyed voice comes through.

'Yes?'

'Hi, I'm here… for, to learn… to learn to ride.'

'Push the gate, it doesn't work, and make sure you close it!'

I get out of the car and push open the gate, drive the car through and close it again. What an unfriendly fucking place. The driveway is just an eroded path that leads to the ramshackle main house. As I park a woman comes out. She looks like an Australian lesbian who has been left in the outback after a nuclear war, hardcore with a hat. She strides towards the car, and I get out.

'Claudia.' She announces.

'Hi, Karl.'

She shakes my hand with a mighty grip and calloused fingers.

'So you want riding lessons?'

'Yes, I was looking at riding again.'

'Can you?'

'Can I?'

'Ride. Can you ride ?'

'Uh. Not really.'

'Well then we need to start at the beginning, when do you want to have a lesson?'

'Well, should I make an appointment?'

'Yes.'

'Oh, ok. Well when can I make an appointment?'

'Mornings are good, can you do weekdays?'

'I can actually.'

'Allright, it's one hundred per lesson, and you need to put down a deposit of four fifty.'

‘Oh. Ok.’

She looks at me with disdain.

‘If you want you can have your first lesson now and sort out the payment later.’

‘Oh, ok, yes. Can I have a very calm horse?’

She looks at me, ‘All our horses are well trained. It’s not the horses that make mistakes it’s the riders.’

‘I’m sure, but I might make a lot of mistakes, and I’d rather make them on an old, slow, nearly dead horse than something too frisky.’

She walks off. I follow.

She dresses me in the tackle room and then makes me carry a saddle which I can barely walk with. She picks out a brown horse called Scamp that seems pretty laid back. I have ridden before, but horses tended to make me nervous. Of course my real intention is to discover the name of Pierre’s killer. While she’s putting all the gear on Scamp I look at all the different horses in the stables. Nothing clicks from my dream, and no horse stands out. I look again at Scamp. Maybe it was him?

‘So does Scamp ever get… carried away?’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Oh, well, does he ever get upset and just gallop off?’ I laugh at the end of this, but it sounds forced.

‘No.’

I mount Scamp and he just stands there and starts to eat grass. This isn’t the deadly beast that Pierre had been riding.

Down in the paddock Claudia makes us walk round and round with me standing and putting my arms out like a plane. It’s an exercise to improve my balance and I realise that I am not going to be walking tomorrow. I also realise that my plan has been rather poorly conceived. I mean, what would I do if it was Scamp that caused young Pierre to get speared three years back? It was just some stupid mangy animal that had stopped and ended up killing the rider. An accident. What can one do? As I go round and round the circle another realisation hits me. If anyone needs to get punished its Claudia. What a

fucking bitch. We finish up and walk back to the stables. Claudia makes me take the saddle off myself, which takes me ten minutes of unstrapping and loosening. While I'm doing this a man walks up behind me. I see his shadow first.

'Do you need some help with that?'
I turn and look at the face of god. Well, at least the face of rough and tumble lumberjack of about six foot five. Now, three years ago this would have been my competition, right now he's looking like good husband material.
'Thanks.'
Like a pro he has the saddle off and sitting on the wooden gate in a few seconds flat. I introduce myself.
'Karl.'
'Derrick.'
'Are you coming for a riding lesson?'
Derrick laughs.
'No. No, I'm married to Claudia.'
There are a few things that happen when he says this. Firstly, I ask why? What would a man like this get out of some bull-dyke horsey trollop with the attitude of angry rhino and the skin to match? Then I think, most people would have said 'I'm Claudia's husband', not 'I'm married to Claudia'. Interesting. And the third, and final thought, is the clear and present means to make that awful cow pay for killing young Pierre. It all fits so neatly together. I watch this huge man and realise that this is one of those moments you have to just dive in. So help me god, I am going to have this man in a way both biblical and epic. And when I look into those blue eyes, at that easy smile, something tells me it isn't even going to be that hard a sell.

10. then

Karl found himself on the street and couldn't work out how the hell he had got there. He was in his pyjamas (camo stretch pants and t-shirt), and sandals, which was not much protection in the autumn Johannesburg morning. At least it could be morning or late night. Whatever it was, it was fucking dark with no-one else around. His panic level rose as he realised that he didn't have any memory of getting to this place.

A black prostitute angled up the street toward him. She clearly thought he wasn't worth the time from his dress sense, but she was a professional.

'Hey sweetie, where do you leave your shoes? You wanna warm your toetsies on my cookie?'

'Fuck off'

'Right, that's a nice way to talk to a woman. Go fuck yourself.'

She pushed past him, and he caught the whiff of something. No, *the thing*.

'Wait!'

She turned to him, and smiled.

'Hey boy ? You want some of this? But I want to see the cash.' She was all business now.

'What are you wearing?'

'What am I wearing? Well you can see what I'm wearing, but I got some sexy underwear. But its three fifty bucks hey.'

'No. I mean what's that smell, what perfume… Or what is that smell?'

She looked confused, and smelt herself.

'Dunno. It's something my boyfriend bought me. You like it?' She sniffed herself again.

'Yes. I like it.'

This was the *thing*. He knew it like he knew his heart was beating; it didn't require checking, and it would let you know if it stopped working. There on the street, wet and cold with crap stuck to his sandals was this little piece of Nirvana. And he didn't know why. A feeling that said that beyond a shadow of a doubt that the smell of an eighteen-year-old going-on-forty whore, was the *thing*. Karl got hard just from sheer proximity.

Her name was Penny. She was a hooker, obviously, but also a dancer (obviously). Penny had blonde hair (not her own) and skin like a balloon, shiny and plastic, like she had a great pressure underneath it that was pushing the zits and sweat onto her outermost layer. Karl and Penny stood in the street talking shit. Every now and again Karl would lean in and get a whiff of her.

'Hey if you want to then we can use my regular,' she said.

Karl found himself following her, walking down the street and crossing over past the Frango's chicken place. There was the occasional car and a hobo who might or might not have been alive. She was talking, but he had switched off. He breathed in clouds of icy vapour and smiled, even the freezing ache from the cold could not take away the feeling of impending *something.*

They got to the Sands Hotel, a dump with a sign, and went in.

"Room 506" it said on the door.

It was small, with a single bed and linen that was one hundred percent rayon. Thinning and worn through from heavy wear. The pillows were brown and thin. She moved around the bed and sat. Karl realised that he was probably going to have to have sex with her. He didn't want to, but he was also not sure why he was there so there didn't seem to be any other options. She took her top off and revealed small tits in a black bra. Karl moved over to her and clumsily cupped them like he was getting a fresh litre from a mule. At that close proximity the smell suddenly became much more powerful and her breasts felt sensual, soft, like the skin was worth touching, sexy. He couldn't step out of the embrace, and thankfully didn't want to, because from more than two feet away she was repulsive to him. But like this she was fucking magic. He was semi-hard, and even if he couldn't get it up, he didn't feel all that concerned. He slid his top off and the rest was like rote. They fucked, unprotected, cos when he tried to stick it in her with a rubber he just lost it – and both she and Karl got so annoyed that he just took it off and sank inside her. Up close like that it was like being in a porn movie. So fucking exciting. He

kept smelling her breath and sucking it out of her. He came quickly, but somehow the excitement was still there.
He lay back on the bed.

She got up to go to the bathroom and the feeling of revulsion suddenly sank in. The stink of the place was overpowering. The door clicked shut and she locked him out. Christ, thought Karl, she can fuck me but not take a piss without locking the door. He lay there and things fell apart. Without her near, there was no clarity about why and where and the weirdness of what he was doing was coming in quickly.

His breath came in short and fast, panic was rising and… then he heard this noise, like glass clinking. His heart was racing. The *thing* was here. He stopped breathing so he could concentrate on every sound. There was a light *Shhhh* noise, so barely there that he could hardly hear it, but which got him hard again. He walked to the door of the bathroom. He could hear her inside making small movements. She was not on the loo.
He pushed the door and the lock gave easily.
'For fuck's sake man, close the fucking door.' She was sitting on the edge of the bath and the room stank of *it.*
'What are you doing?'
'Having a hit, what does it look like?'
'Can I have?'
'Sure, but it's extra.'
She handed him a glass pipe, a lighter and then fished around in her bag. He swivelled the pipe up close. Deeper parts of his brain were reacting. This was life. He was holding life in his hands. She found a rock, a little one, that she squeezed into the end of the pipe and lit for him and he inhaled and the rushing filled him with a life so exact and perfect and right, and things could be everyway he wanted them to be and were.
And he was sitting and holding himself and he looked up from the floor and saw this beautiful creature, that fuck yes, she was troubled and dying, but still somehow perfect and right. And he had to close his eyes.

The feeling died when he started to notice how fucking cold his toes were on the floor. And then he coughed. Memories that weren't his flooded in. Nothing in this world had prepared him for the thing that he had just let inside, and he knew, without doubt, that his life had just ended.

bridge over troubled water

essay on the relationship between the academic and creative components

Introduction

This essay forms the third and final part of the dissertation and comprises a self-reflexive analysis of the relationship between the dissertation's academic and creative components. I have chosen to write this as a third component as both the academic and the creative elements, while intimately linked with each other, have retained very separate dynamics that would be best served if they retained their individuality. This essay ties the creative impetus to the academic exploration with the aim of examining both their common ground, as well as their differences.

As the academic and creative were formed in cyclical co-operation, I will follow the trajectory by which they influenced and informed one another to create a further dialogue on identity based on the dynamic between 'theory' and 'practice'.

What if?

The project began with a central concept, a 'what if?' statement. I had years earlier become interested in reports where transplant patients had described 'inheriting' thoughts, dreams, feelings, cravings and even character traits from their donors. Being a gay man and a recovering drug addict, it was a short step to hypothesising a story where an 'ordinary Joe' (my lead character Karl), becomes a gay drug addict after receiving an organ transplant. I wanted to explore the means by which we come to grips with our own identity, and the concept allowed a creative mechanism for spotlighting identity by giving it a physical form - that of the donated liver. The liver automatically set up an *other*, and allowed Karl's internal world to become polarised between two different identities clamouring for different needs and wants: that of the liver, representing homosexuality and addiction; and Karl's previous identity as a straight non-addict. The liver worked to embody the nebulous concept of identity into a visceral, tangible and biological pound of flesh, rooting the etheric properties of identity into the physical - 'queering' the body in the process. This set up a number of basic issues in the fictional narrative, immediately raising the question of *where* our identities our housed, and giving the biological imperative prime position in the formation of identity.

The dynamic of the liver/identity transplant formed the spine of the narrative tension, and created the situations by which Karl had to re-negotiate his life. The intent was to lead him on a journey of self-actualisation, focusing on how the tumultuous flux of Karl's inner life becomes exposed to the outer world, and how he in turn reflected these events.

It is important to highlight my own belief system that informed this creative interpretation. While my own identity as a gay man and recovering addict might place me in the social margins, my belief is that every individual experiences to some degree or other a constant movement of 'identity' as desires, experience and action change and inform another. The three-dimensional space that I propose in my interpretation of queer theory is because I do not feel any rigid identity formation can ever hold the fractured multiplicity out of which we are composed. I want to posit that we are more than just the sum of our biography. Ultimately 'troll' is a spiritual journey, a creative means to undermine the concept of identity itself, and what draws our identification with Karl is the manner in which he manages the collision between 'who am I' and his social context.

The academic component I began after reaching a midway point in the creative. I knew that the heart of the work was an interrogation of identity, but because the story had many close autobiographical ties it had been very hard to sift between my own embedded ideological views and the fictional path the lead character of Karl was going to take. This process became much easier once the character had started to develop a voice that could be effectively distanced from myself. The academic essay aimed to outline the revision of the rigid concept of identity into a more amorphous *identity cloud*, using queer theory as the building block. I made the decision to use queer theory as the theoretical basis for exploring identity; firstly, because it made sense that the narrative was a voice from the sexual margins and, subsequently, it became useful for the non-essentialist properties that extend queer beyond the bounds of the sexual.

Step 1

In the creative component I took the concept of identity to an extreme, whereby the lead protagonist inherits the identity of a gay drug addict. The point was to interrogate the

conflict regarding how the protagonist defines *who* he is based on his history, actions or feelings. It is important to stress that each of these – experience, desire and action - in turn formulate their own identity, with Karl's past being straight and straight-laced, his present being gay and drug fuelled, and his experience showing the conflict between these inner and outer realities.

The basic narrative through-line consists of a young man, who, after receiving a liver transplant at twenty-six, finds himself attracted to men and craving drugs. The story starts with his tracking down the parents of Pierre Landers (his donor) in order to prove that it is Pierre's identity that he has inadvertently inherited. Karl's perception is that the changes he undergoes represent something repulsive and repugnant, and that the change is inevitable. The story arc is his coming to a different understanding of his identity.
I called the creative component "troll" to draw an obvious comparison between a physical monster and the perception of what or who Karl is. The title's by-line, a "cellular memoir" is a playful allusion to the fact that many autobiographies are appearing[57] that have used the 'memoir' label to flag their manipulation of events for the sake of dramatic narrative. It also is a play on the words "cellular memory", the key scientific concept in Dr Pearsall's proposal of a cellular memory, which elaborates a concept where our 'selves' are recorded in the cellular material throughout our bodies.

The fundamental issue raised by "troll" is the question of whether identity is a pre-determined, biological *fait accompli*. Karl's journey never allows him the space *not to be* a gay drug addict. He acts upon his impulses, he has sex with men, and he takes drugs. There was no point at which I wanted to give him the space to change his interior desires; rather, by exploration of his new identity, Karl becomes less constrained by its implications. In this way it is a 'coming out' story, in that it details Karl's self-discovery, and his battle with stereotyping himself is the real journey, rather than any means of claiming a different identity.

[57] I reference in particular *Running With Scissors* by Augusten Burroughs and *A Million Little Pieces* by James Frey which have both received huge publicity for having a dubious relationship with the truth. Both are entitled "memoirs"

The most fundamental divergence between the academic aim and the creative exploration is the degree of practical change and effect Karl has on his own identity. In the academic component I argue strongly for re-conceptualising identity itself into something looser and less rigid, the 3-d model. In the creative, however, the opportunity for this place to reflexively look back at identity doesn't exist for Karl. He never gets to see his identity as the 'illusion' of which Blackmore writes. In this way he will never escape to the kind of consciousness that I quote from Krishnamurti. In essence I do not see 'queer' becoming an ethic that Karl will ever come across in his context. While academia can theorise towards an idyllic towards which we strive, I do not see it occurring in a way that effects major change in Karl's experience of his identity.

The point of departure for the academic essay was to move from the rigidity of specific labels to the more blurred *identity clouds* that queer embodies. However this idea of a non-essentialist identity, while looser, is still an identity and is therefore constrained, even if less so, by the combination of experience, desire, and action. The academic argument is based on re-conceptualising identity but not abandoning its constructs. In a sense I still experience a far greater 'positivism' in the academic work because it is a space that allows me to explore idealism. Tonally, it contrasts quite significantly with the creative work, because I don't believe that one can move the theoretical into the practical with ease.

The core issue of identity in this concept flagged the following key points :

- Where is identity situated?
- How is an identity created?
- Out of what elements are our identities composed, and is there a hierarchy of importance?
- Can our identity change and, if so, what catalyses that change?
- And finally, and necessarily last, what therefore *is* identity?

Creatively I needed answers to these questions, and the answers I found are set out in the paragraphs below.

Cellular memory, systems theory and identity, queering the body

Karl's 'previous' identity was alluded to mostly through his relationship with his ex-girlfriend Shelley. He referenced his bike riding (which is the reason he needs to get the liver transplant), and in the back-story I created for him he was very much the all-South African boy-next-door. The liver transplant's effect raised the question of where his identity is situated, and to what degree it is 'housed' in his body. Before I had researched any academic material on the subject I was very interested in the strangeness of what systems theory proposed. My personal view is that most people think of identity as something like a soul, a very etheric, essential 'thing' that cannot really be described in detail because it has no detail. This very blurry conception is founded in the fact that we are seldom placed in the position of asking 'who we are' in terms of integration with what we do, desire or think (and these are three very different elements in and of themselves). When first confronted with this narrative line, most people will see the liver as carrying some piece of Pierre's identity, a part of the person and their personality, which is in many ways a kind of possession by another. What I enjoy about this idea of possession is that it immediately stages the internal conflict between the Karl before and the Karl after the transplant, as well as the conflict each identity has in negotiating the outside world. It's an ideal narrative line to explore the 'coming out' process as it dramatises a traumatic time where the inner world has to be integrated twice, first internally, and then externally. I would argue that most marginalised sexualities experience something close to what Karl must navigate, a journey in a vessel most of us would not have chosen.

How then does this debate relate to where our identity is situated?

Academically, I approached the question with the end point of postulating that, in fact, identity is ultimately something we do, not something we are, and so both 'nowhere' or 'everywhere' are equally true possible answers for *where* it is situated. I set out to

outline that the constellation of effects that create our identity are from multiple sources, hormonal, genetic, nurture and nature, etc. One and all are involved in identity formation and, while in different contexts we might privilege one over another, each is subjective and subject to change. The returning to scientific studies such as Fausto-Sterling's examples of research on rats and Le Vay's hypothesising on the 'gay brain' was to show the clear doubt that we must retain in any examination of identity.

I want the reader not to endow the concept of identity with the degree of power mainstream culture attributes to it, *no matter* where it may or may not be found. The argument begins with the quote from *A Way out of Illusion*, as Blackmore states, "An illusion is not something that does not exist, but something that is not what it seems"[58]. None of us can escape the illusion to the point that identity ceases to exist, but all of us can be given the tools to see the machinations of identity in operation and, therefore, become conscious of the filters with which we view the world.

The academic process I embarked upon to occupy this position was to examine the concept of identity, and then to look at the means by which we understand the terms and 'science' surrounding it. Queer theory is working on the cutting edge of re-formulating how we view sexual identities per se and the academic, therefore, takes a brief trip in understanding my conception of 'queer' in order to finally postulate the 3-d space of an identity cloud.

The first ten chapters placed Karl in contexts that are a function of what he wants or desires, and by implication has no control over. The unwritten final chapters in the novella will create the sense that Karl is not particularly interested in what the definitions actually mean. As his identity becomes less clear cut, so I want his control over his context to become stronger. Ideologically, I wish to set up the position that Karl attains greater freedom as he grows in self-acceptance by *not categorising* himself.

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[58] Dr Susan Blackmore, presenting her paper *A Way out Of Illusion* at Enactive Consciousness, Seventh Annual Conference of the Consciousness and Experiential Psychology section of the British Psychological Society, Oxford June 28-9 2003, Quoted in http://www.susanblackmore.co.uk/Conferences/Oxford03.htm downloaded on 28/03/2005

My personal journey has informed this, as I wish to compare (and this is what I attempt by quoting Marx's "opiate of the masses") identity to religion. Categorising and organising into understandable boxes is the limiting violence that we impose on ourselves and others. We must re-conceptualise identity as something with far greater fluidity and 'give' in order to keep our own open-mindedness. Queer theory, as I define it in the academic component, achieves this on so many levels, but its real political clout can only be felt by the individual. There does seem to be a longing for a political movement to mobilise the concept of queer into an action plan for asserting individual rights. However, real political change happens when an ideology of responsibility, honesty and self-acceptance takes root. In some ways queer is like Dadaism, it doesn't really facilitate the mobilised masses into a cohesive political grouping because it is individual and anarchic.

The manner in which I divided the novella, with the 'now' in the first person present-tense and the 'then' in the third person attached past-tense, was to further split the personalities of Karl. What is interesting for me is creating a single individual that we relate to differently because of his context – but in fact is still the same person. It also was an effective means for me to set-up Karl's change over time. Hopefully its not just a before and after snap shot, but also a means to show the more subtle shifts that occur at different stages of his assimilation. While a heightened reality, I still wanted the reader to experience that Karl is constantly changing, and will continue to change. The implication is that all identities shift over time.

In writing the back-story to the narrative, I made the donor a gay drug addict, admittedly, but I wanted to retain an element of doubt both in the reader' minds and Karl's mind whether the operation was in fact merely the catalyst to his own self-realisation, or whether he had absorbed another identity. Firstly, I retain my own scepticism about Dr Pearsall's work, despite its cogent documentation. Secondly, I maintain my position that even if systems theory becomes a common scientific fact, I do not wish to privilege *where* our identities lie as I maintain that it is not the important factor. The focus on 'where' is merely the invisible power play of identity itself obfuscating its own means

and methods of production and operation. The 'where' simply isn't valuable. Identity is so pervasive, powerful and often invisible in everyday life, that it is for the most part taken for granted. It is critical to constantly focus on the functioning of identity and not on its meaning.

Science and mainstream culture

This brings me to the second issue raised: How is our identity created?

The academic component focused on a number of scientific concepts and research pieces to further de-construct our understanding of identity. My starting point was to look at the world of quantum mechanics and mathematics because their basic conceptualising of the 'facts' of our existence have become outlandish and bizarre. Modern scientific research has turned traditional ideas of reality on their head, but mainstream culture has yet to adopt the findings into our daily way of life. This is the point from which I argue that identity clouds should be a goal towards which we strive. Practically, I have not even reached that point in the creative because it requires such a fundamental shift in the way we see ourselves that I believe it is a long way off. At best, even if Karl were content in his own self-actualisation, he is in a world that does not share his lack of concern for what identity means. Karl's search for the possible donor, and meeting with Angiwe, is representative of this. In many ways what Angiwe does not say about her daughter tells us all we need to know. She is rigid in her outlook and I try to give a sense that it is this rigidity that in fact powers the secret lives that many identities are forced to live. Angiwe represents wealth and success in a capitalist system, but also she represents a new identity (a new black elite) simply 'doing the right thing' in order to 'pass' (and I use the term in the trans sense) in the upper echelons of corporate capitalism. In a way the scene is one in which nothing really happens. For me, the point is that we most often choose to be only marginally aware of the hidden worlds that operate below the surface.

I used the 'epistemological anarchist' Paul Feyeraband's work, because I ascribe to the ethos that we must be on our guard when relying on science to give some fictional 'detached' and omniscient viewpoint to our way of life. The inclusion of the studies (the

four studies, from Le Vay to Pearsall) is to show the vast lack of agreement, many empirical flaws, and often downright false evidence that has managed to become embedded into mainstream culture because of the ease in which 'science' is associated with terms like 'truth' and 'fact'. I enjoyed the fact that the four studies do not find agreement or coherence with one another, but rather their lack of synergy makes a compelling argument for analysing the context in which we view scientific facts. In this manner I am proposing, as Feyerabend states, to seek out answers beyond science, while also trying to compose a model that does not inherently collapse when *no answer* is apparent or even on the horizon. Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem[59] should be just as possible in modern humanities – that no system is either complete or totally coherent. The scientific study outlining the lack of ever finding a bisexual man I included for a number of reasons. Firstly, I find it fascinating that self-identified men are considered to by lying about their own sexuality, despite their behaviour. This epitomises the problem of who gets to decide how the person is identified. It also is interesting that science *does not* support the concept of a continuum of sexuality in men.

When Karl sleeps with the female hooker, I want the reader to be placed in the position of considering whether sex with her requires Karl's identity to be defined by his actions or his desire. In the academic component I refer to the confusion experienced when homosexuals find the opposite sex attractive for traits that are considered to 'belong' to their own sex. The implication is that what we are attracted to is far more than another's gender. We are attracted to elements that often operate almost invisibly but that have nothing to do with the sex of the players themselves.

The other studies were included because they show the *lack* of science in many experiments considered scientific. They also demonstrate the exact problem that Karl finds in searching for answers to his question of identity. We find what we look for, and

[59] "The theorem states that within any formal system of axioms, such as present-day mathematics, questions will always persist that can neither be proved nor disproved on the basis of the axioms that define the system… Gödel's theorem set fundamental limits on mathematics. It came as a great shock to the scientific community, since it overthrew the widespread belief that mathematics was a coherent and complete system based on a single logical foundation", states Stephen Hawking in *The Universe in a Nutshell* [2001:39].

that is blinkered heavily by our perception of our own ideological filters. While it is most likely that Pierre is the donor, it is not an outright fact, and I like the small level of doubt that this lack of clarity seeds in the story.

Addiction and gay

The next issues raised were about the elements our identities are composed of and whether our identities can change? The answer to these questions I bundle together because they inform one another in terms of the creative and academic processes.

Perhaps the most exciting element in analysing queer theory is the freedom a non-essentialist conception of 'queer' allows from traditional notions of identity. The only weakness in the formulation is that it refers really only to sexuality, sex and gender identities, which amount to only a facet of the 'facts' of who we are. I incorporated the addiction element firstly because I have first-hand knowledge of its operation but, most importantly, because it operates in a similar manner to the one queer operates in. The comparison allows for a fresh conception because they come from such vastly different arenas.

The two issues collide in Karl, and this collision immediately allows for a comparison. What is it to be gay? What is it to be an addict? Their very lack of anything in common points to the multi-faceted dimensions that make up this thing called "identity". They have such completely divergent contexts, outcomes and triggers. This multiplicity sets up a cascading, constellation of effects that make up the *who* of Karl.

The academic essay outlines the identity of "addict as functioning in the same manner as the non-essentialist 'queer'. The success of this is that being gay and being an addict have nothing whatsoever to do with one another - one is a sexuality and the other is seen as a disease by NA or AA.

I think that readers can often associate with the concept of a craving or desire, and while the concept of same-sex partnerships might not be easily related to, the notion of wanting something obsessively is a common human trait. Karl's craving for cock or for crack is

merely his following of the interior life of his desires and finding himself in odd situations.

I love the creative potential these odd situations allowed the story, for our lives are constructed from decisions made based on both desire and need, which often place us in the strangest of positions. Breaking this 'automatic' behaviour is the ideological principle that I draw through both the creative and the academic components. I wish to pierce the 'illusion' that I quote in the beginning of the academic work, to see what *is*.

Conclusion

So, finally, we return to the beginning and ask: What is identity? In many ways it is this very cyclical nature of analysis and understanding that I feel is the critical element that needs to be raised. I quote the TS Eliot poem for this very reason. Identity is an illusion, created by a variety of effects and sources in constant motion that can only be understood in a specific context. My conception of *identity clouds* is an attempt to inform a visual representation that consistently draws attention to the process by which it is formed and informed. In this way, we become less bound by the categories that it supposedly delineates, because the categories become more blurred. In essence, the more we see the vast differences in each and every one of us, the clearer it becomes that it is the minutiae of all our differences that gives us common ground. Our uniqueness is the point at which we are all the same. And what a better world we would build if this could be instilled in each of us.