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Affected Potentials: The Dimensions of Incipient Homosexuality and Foundational Affect in Contemporary Gay Literature

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Abstract

An explosion of LGBTQ+ representation in contemporary literature has foregrounded the need to study the development of representation of these abjected identity categories. Part of this new trend in literary publication is the development of a more niche genre of literature, novels of incipiency that narrate the coming-into of identity and marginalised subjectivity of abjected individuals. The novels of incipiency often figure the complicated process of developing a sense of self in opposition to a dominant social order that deploys regulatory forces that corral and police the emergence of subjects. Incipient homosexuality and its foundational affects name a new methodological approach to the study of this abjection; while there is no specific theoretical genealogy of incipient homosexuality, it itself refers simply to the ways in which a subject develops into a homosexual and the various processes by which they adopt the textual significations of queerness. Where incipiency can be defined as being a type of beginning or, an early stage of existence, incipient homosexuality does not seek to label a definitive and rigorous stage in the lifecycle of homosexuality; rather, it is about exploring the various methods by which individuals resist dominant forms of heterosexist subjectivation and form homosexual subjectivities. The theory of foundational affect is used to account for the scrupulous and slippery theory of incipient homosexuality. Foundational affect can be defined as being one of the conditions by which queer subjects are constituted by the social order, where foundational affect is the result of the iterative effect of regulatory forces on the body. Though it specifically labels the specific ways in which the regulatory forces of the social order orient queer bodies by describing the ways in which meaning is constituted for the subject within a certain ideological frame and a subject's relation to that frame. This new methodology accounting for the emergence of homosexual subjects will be done through a close textual analysis of three contemporary novels: *At Swim, Two Boys* by Jamie O'Neill, *Loaded* by Christos Tsiolkas, and *Swimming in the Dark* by Tomasz Jederowski. This thesis concludes that the affects of loneliness, shame and anxiety have become central to representations of incipient homosexuality and the literary expression of queerness but that homosexual subjects have methods for desublimating the negative valences of these affects that facilitate their coming-to-terms with their abjection.

Contents

I romanticize even the worst of times,
When all it took to make me cry
Was being alive.
Look up and see a reflection of someone who never gave way to the pain,
What if I told 'em now that I'm older
There isn't a moment that I'd wanna change?

-Paramore, 2023

Hey, my lil' rager teenager
Tryna figure it out.
Living in a season of screaming
And turning it out.
Hey, my little rager teenager
I've missed you around, yeah
Missed you around.

-Troye Sivan, 2020

Moon, tell me if I could
Send up my heart to you?
So, when I die, which I must do
Could it shine down here with you?

Cause my love is mine, all mine,
I love, mine, mine, mine
Nothing in the world belongs to me
But my love, mine, all mine, all mine.

-Mitski, 2023

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And so it ends.

It is hard to fathom where the community that supports me ends; it seems to stretch the more I think about all of the people who have impacted me and shaped this work. Every conversation that I've had ratified my path and consolidated my belligerence, and in that way, there is no realistic end to the thanks that I owe. I guess the sensible thing is to start at the beginning.

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Introduction

The opening line of Christopher Isherwood's 1964 novel, *A Single Man*, serves as the inspiration for this thesis; Isherwood narrates the protagonist, George, coming-into himself in the morning. "Waking up begins with saying *am* and *now*," Isherwood writes, "That which has awoken then lies for a while staring up at the ceiling and down into itself until it has recognised *I*, and therefrom deduced *I am*, *I am now*" (2010, 1).[1] The slow stirring of a being into awareness highlights the distance between the self that is experienced as body and the self that is experienced as identity. This is not to purport tired tropes of a mind/body dualism, but rather an attempt to walk a finer line between a feeling-body that encounters the world without question or interpretation and an identity that must interpret the information and decipher its relationship to the things the body is feeling for it. In George, Isherwood has expressed succinctly the ways a socialised identity lags behind its own body, for a body will just 'wake up,' but the identity must infer the consequences of that waking. Incipient homosexuality and foundational affect come from this understanding of a body being steeped in a world of phenomena, and any sense of identity or subjectivity, is not given in this world of phenomena; rather, they are cultural productions of socialisation. As such, this thesis works to analyse the ways that the production of the abjected subjectivity of homosexual males is constructed through and represented in contemporary literature.

To achieve this, this thesis deploys analytical and theoretical terms and concepts in exacting ways, attempting to leverage rhetorical nuance and specificity so as to work deftly within both literary spaces and queer spaces. The ambition of this thesis means that a careful exclusion of qualifying literature was necessary. Specifically, this thesis studies *contemporary literature*, which broadly refers to any literary work published in the last thirty years. This might mean that the literature under consideration in this thesis fall under the theoretical aesthetic category of 'post postmodernism' (Grattan 2017); the reality is that these categories of literature, be it aesthetic, genre, or otherwise, had no bearing on the demarcation of this line. Rather, it seems that the excavation of a modern/contemporary divide exists as a way of demarcating gay literature not dedicated to the experience of homosexual liberation or

[1] As argued by Victor Marsh in *Mr. Isherwood Changes Trains* (2010), Isherwood was deep into a study of the Indian philosophy of Verdanta when he wrote *A Single Man*. Marsh defines Vedanta as being "the most highly developed presentation of the Indian scriptures, the 'Vedas', and subsequent commentaries including the 'Upanishads'." (2010, 13). Vedanta like other Easter philosophies explored non-dualistic senses of self, drawing on the basic Indian philosophical enquiry "Who am I?" This is extrapolated in the relationship between self and the world, subjectivity and identity.

the AIDs crisis. It might be theorised that gay literature produced from the mid-nineties was more able to shift its focus towards optimism and the representation of liveable lives, or even the exploration of what it means to be homosexual in an almost post-crisis world. The kinds of literary production this thesis is most interested in, however, is literature of becoming, being narratives about protagonists assuming identity or subjectivity in a hostile world.

In this thesis, the terms queer, homosexual, and gay are all used carefully and are not understood to be interchangeable. Given this, homosexual and homosexuality are deployed to refer specifically to same-sex sexual and romantic attraction and are used in this thesis to only refer to the sexual experience one man may have with another. The word 'gay' and all its forms move homosexuality further into culture, where gayness formalises "the notion that homosexuality is not just a sexual orientation but a cultural orientation, a dedicated commitment to certain social or aesthetic values, an *entire way of being*" (Halperin 2012, 12). In this way, to locate something or someone as being gay is an act of identifying the cultural orientation of the subject or object, for Halperin, "Gayness, then, is not a state or condition. It's a mode of perception, an attitude, an ethos: in short, it is a practice" (2012, 13). For something or someone to be gay, it must be *doing* things that are recognisably gay; Lee Edelman (1994) labels the act of codifying gayness or homosexuality as legible in culture as *homographesis*. The use of queer and queerness in this thesis names the force that works in opposition to homographesis. In this way, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's definition of queer remains the most functional and rigorous; Sedgwick defines queer as "the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically" (1994, 8). Homosexual, gay and queer, all work discreetly in this thesis to represent the nuances of abjected subjecthood and identity, working to express the many ways literature succeeds and fails in communicating the object of its study to an audience.

The major aim of this thesis is the introduction of incipient homosexuality and its foundational affects as new analytical categories in queer literary studies. As demonstrated, the categories of incipiency and foundational affect can read queer texts with patience and joy, understanding that the work of social order and its regulatory forces are often aggressive, regressive, and damaging to the psychic life of the subject. Instead of determining the rightness or wrongness of any given young adult subject's identity and relationality, incipiency and foundational affect work to recontextualise the textual subjects of contemporary literature in the mired context of a homophobic past. By framing literary

analysis through such a queer and reparative lens, these categories explore with tenderness the myriad ways that identities and subjectivities can express themselves in narrative.

The Closet and Incipiency

In an April 2020 essay written for *The New York Times*, Jake Nevins asks: "Gay literature is out of the closet. So why is deception a big theme?". Nevins' question bemoans a paradox wherein for gay literature to be categorised as gay it can have never been in the closet, punctuated by a full-stop which sutures this totalizing statement to the subsequent question in some Frankenstein's Monster-esque attempt at scandal. What this does is conflate the closet and deception, where deception prefigures an agential and wilful homosexual subject exacting harm on a heteronormative through betrayal or rejection. Such a conflation is not unique and is deeply tied to neoliberal notions of living authentic lives, and any attempt to insulate oneself from those demands is construed as lying, a phenomenon that Stephanie D. Clare has previously outlined[2]. The epistemological ramifications for this line of thinking do not end at its esoteric attempt at editorialising drama in the title. Nevins makes the claim that "For much of the 19th and 20th centuries, from Dorian Gray to Tom Ripley, the lie of the closet was the hinge upon which queer literature would pivot." This is a cruel diagnosis for the real condition of being-in-the-closet, a condition which is presupposed in the world of compulsory heterosexuality. To present closeted characters, or tacit characters, as being villainous and deceptive trades on the falsehood that not only has gay literature moved on, but that it now deals in openness and authenticity. Never mind that claiming "the closet was the hinge upon which queer literature would pivot" ignores that the closet as a universal condition of homosexuality is a contemporary conception, filtered through the privileges of whiteness and wealth (Chitty 2020), that in a more classical sense there was a possibility to live openly homosexual lives throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, that perhaps the reason for that is because homosexuality as identity category is a result of the sexual liberation movements of the mid-twentieth century. It does however, foreground that the issue of the closet as a circulated idea is completely inadequate and limited.

Here I claim that a more dedicated research space used to unpack the history and burden of the closet, attend to the importance of the closet and coming out to contemporary homosexual identities and narratives, is necessary. As Nevins continues, "the closet now is

[2] Clare, S. D. (2017). 'Finally She's Accepted Herself!: Coming Out in Neoliberal Times'. *Social Text*. 35 (2), pp. 17-38.

not the potentially terminal fate it once was, but rather a layover in the long journey to the self" (2020). The issue with this statement is that it misdirects the flow of injury suggesting that the closet[3], being in the closet, being unable to come out of the closet, was a 'terminal fate' and places the burden of coming-to-terms with difference on the individual.

Any discussion of the closet would be incomplete without acknowledging the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, who in *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), made a long point of introducing to queer theory a set of axioms for the performance of critique, the first of which is "people are different from each other" (22). This maxim simply asks the reader and theorist both to acknowledge the simple reality that difference "demarcate[s] at more than one site and on more than one scale" (26). In a later axiom Sedgwick also makes a remark about tacit fantasies, but is important here to draw down on that statement of observation to say that the belief that the closet as a function of lived queer experiences is representative of internalised homophobia and of fear, shame and a host of other negative affects, is a tacit fantasy that is underpinned by a contemporary mainstream LGBTQ obsession with phantasmagorical neoliberal ideologies of self-realisation, which I go on to discuss in chapter one as being mythologies of fabulous individualism. Sedgwick's axiom five, "the historical search for a Great Paradigm Shift may obscure the present conditions of sexual identity" (44), explains that because homosexuality is not hereditary or inherited, it is a problem when theorists and critics attempt to delineate a continuous gay identity. It becomes a twist, then, that all attempts to denaturalise the past, to read radically into the history of homosexuality, have resulted in a prescient need to denaturalise the present; the drive of such a denaturalisation might be to suggest that homosexuality is always new and uncanny, that the closet is always clumsily formed around the new subject of homosexuality never entirely sure if it is purpose-built.

It is the ahistorical and anachronistic reading of homosexuality that Nevins does here that requires undoing, not the often-necessary phenomenon of closeting (though a world in which one did not need to be closeted would be ideal). To create a genealogy of homosexuality, and in turn of the closet, is to turn to Foucault and *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1*, in which Foucault marks 1870 as the time when Carl Westphal first wrote on homosexuality, in an article about contrary sexual sensations. But as Jeffrey Escoffer has identified in *American Homo*, first published in 1998, the closet as a device was used to carve

[3] As well as drawing obvious comparisons to the relationship between gay men and AIDs.

out a space for discreet forms of homosexual sociality in public spaces (2018). Yet, as outlined in George Chauncey's *Gay New York*, "given the ubiquity of the term today and how central the metaphor of the closet is to the ways we think about gay history before the 1960s … Nowhere does it appear before the 1960s" (1994, 6), so while we may identify similarities between closeted forms of homosexuality now and in the past, the emergence of the closet is tied to movements for gay liberation. The two are now intertwined such that the push for liberation is the action that closeted homosexuals might take in response to the closet. This creates a dimension of outness that unintentionally determines any homosexual not 'out' as therefore being 'in.' Though as we can see in the example from Escoffer, understandings of the closet are useful in understanding the shapes of sociality used by gay men to navigate a hostile world, it is important to note that narratives of authenticity and liberation are critical aspects of contemporary homosexuality, and are critical only to those who would *identify* as being queer or homosexual; making a clear delineation between what is a cultural and social *homosexuality*, and what can be only be reasonably and accurately described as the sexual behaviours of *MSM*[4] (men who have sex with men). The tension between what the closet is/is not and when the closet first emerged or who the closet applies to is not a tension that has been or can be (?) resolved, yet it is a tension that is productive of the myriad of gay identities produced under neoliberalism. As Carlos Decena argues in *Tacit Subjects* (2011), some subjects, particularly those who are people of colour, negotiate outness and their sexuality at the same time they are negotiating their racial identity; this intersectional approach to the closet reveals that outness is a lived experience that becomes compartmentalised depending on racial and cultural values. The anachronous approach of reading 'onto' the past that has become popularised, as exemplified by Nevins, is asynchronous with any study of the lived experiences of homosexuality or queerness as it reads into the past contemporary white neoliberal values, eliding the complex vagaries of same-sex desires and the cultural formations that have developed with respect to these.

In the briefest discussion of Garth Greenwell's 2020 novel *Cleanness*, Nevins homes in on the chapter 'Gospodar,' believing that the representation of a debasing sexual encounter manifests as homographesis and that self-abasement as concealment, suggesting that physical pain and rough sex are just punishment for being deceptive. Nevins writes that, "intensely

[4] Jane Ward explores this idea in her book *Not Gay: Sex Between Straight White Men* (2015), in which heterosexuality's relationship with the homoerotic is under analysis. Yet the obvious difference is that a man capable of identifying as gay is one who is capable of accepting the social and discursive responsibilities and consequences of being thusly labelled. MSM struggle to make this identification because they privilege too much or enjoy the privileges of the heteronormative social order as a straight presenting man. Critically, to say that any MSM is a gay man would be incorrect, for a complex set of reasons that Ward explores thoroughly.

self-aware, sensitized to the redemptive properties of love and intimacy … is a cornerstone of queer narratives, which suggest that whatever comfort can be found in concealment is inextricable from self-knowledge" (2020). While the suggestion that concealment is inextricable from self-knowledge cuts close to the ontological purpose of the closet, the idea that such concealment is deceptive and that the cost of such a deception is self-abasement misconstrues the direction the harm of the closet travels[5]. This is because 'the closet,' even in its prescribed and judiciary function as a regulatory force of a heteronormative social order, excavates a place of safety for the nascent homosexual to negotiate identity and sexuality. Kyla Schuller outlines in *The Biopolitics of Feeling*, "emergent solidification of modern sexual discourse picked up speed in the 1890s, and sexuality came to be deemed an inherent aspect of interiority" (2018, 31), which is to say that at the *fin de siècle* medico-judicial discourses of sexuality were becoming more popular in usage as labels for aberrant and non-normative sexual behaviour within institutional spaces. However, organised categories and classifications of homosexual identities did not emerge at the same time as the emergence of these discourses. As Foucault, cited by Jonathan Ned Katz, urged, we should not "employ our terms *bisexuality, homosexuality,* and *heterosexuality,* in a way to suggest that these were the concepts past subjects used" (1995, 36). The communities and identities that have developed, particularly since the emergence of gay pride movements, and which see homosexual identity as central to personality and culture (one might now even argue for the new cleavages of queer identities and cultures) cannot be projected onto the past and read as real and legitimate. But there is something very real in the past that needs to be read, engaged with, and understood: an affective genealogy of gay and queer feelings that are inherited from culture and developed. If categories such as homosexuality were invented in clinical settings, then metaphysical conditions like 'the closet' are the products of working backward to fill gaps in knowledge with haphazard theoretical categories that do not properly explain the arrival of sexuality. As such, the result is that we end up trying to grasp the past by reading the present onto it, producing clumsy readings of historical sexuality.

Didier Eribon argues that historically "the closet was also a location of resistance against oppression, a way of living out one's homosexuality in times and places where openness was not possible" (Eribon 2004, 49). What is best demonstrated here is the practice of reading the closet in the past. By contrast to an anachronistic reading of identity in history,

[5] For clarity, the harm of the closet always flows toward, and is addressed to, the closeted subject. A closeted subject, who does not have full control over their identity or subjectivity, also has no control over how their closeted-ness is received. This does not mean that those subjects who become mired in the closet long into adulthood are not deserving of the experience of their sexuality.

this approach entails that a theorist skims the surface with a new lens for interpreting the past. Eribon does not attempt to subsume the past under his thought; he does not attempt to wrest the past from its historical contexts; rather, he seeks only to relate to the past with the contexts that give the present its meaning. The reason such distinctions need to be made is because they are not always self-evident. Eribon continues his argument in *Insult*, saying that the emergence of the closet as an intrinsic aspect of gay cultural identity and experience has resulted in a framing of closeting as a deliberate and secretive act, "one thing that characterizes a gay man is that he is a person who, one day or another, is confronted by a decision to tell or not to tell what he is" (2004, 52). What is not stressed here, but is one of the points of Eribon's thesis, is that there are situational experiences and contexts for being in or out of the closet, for choosing to be in or out, given that homosexuality is a precarious experience fraught with negative affect and the external pressures of regulatory forces. From its outset, an analysis of incipiency understands that sexuality and desire are complex cultural and social performances and that affects of pleasure are mediated by regulatory forces; that the arrival at the adorning of discursive identity categories like homosexual, gay, lesbian, etcetera, is a difficult journey that is at least partially dependent on the existence of relationally positive encounters with difference. The closet, then, is a personally and politically useful space for the delineation of identity and sexuality, even as it hampers and harms. The closet's complexity means that varying degrees of outness can be managed depending on the social contexts a given subject finds themselves performing within; this is why a new concept of incipiency helps to elucidate the nuances of homosexual becoming.

The conclusion of this dissection of a mainstream essay and its extended discussion of the closet is the communicating and debating of what Kadji Amin describes as being an attachment genealogy. As Amin defines it, "attachment genealogy traces backward to locate and fill out the specific geographic and historical context from which that field disposition emerged. The scholar is then freed to perform the final step of attachment genealogy, that of elaborating the alternative scholarly priorities and feeling states the object generates" (2017, 31-32). In following the work of Amin's *Disturbing Attachments* what we are given is an example of contemporary queer theory dealing with forms of deidealised and anti-ethical cultures we produce. As such there is no longer an ethically pure subject of queer theory (but there never really was), for Amin, "deidealization deexceptionalizes queerness in order to analyze queer possibility as inextricable from relations of power, queer deviance as intertwined with normativity, and queer alternatives as not necessarily just alternatives" (10). The point is to create a break - in culture, in theory - to take the time to reorient ourselves

around queerness and homosexuality, to re-imagine and conceive that the journey to sexuality as framed by the closet is limiting but the category of the closet is still a necessary rhetorical device in narrating the journey to homosexuality. At the end of it all that is simply what incipiency is: narration, an affective narration of the everyday experience of living with sexual difference. Such a break might also be called what Sedgwick has termed a nonce taxonomy, which is defined as "the making and unmaking and *re*making and redissolution of hundreds of old and new categorical imaginings concerning all the kinds it may take to make up a world" (1990, 23). Through acts like gossip, which provide the practical space and framework for imagining, "making, testing, and using unrationalized and provisional hypotheses about what *kinds of people* there are to be found in one's world" (1993, 23), but while a nonce taxonomy is the act of theorising, what identities and behaviours exist within the world, constitute the wider cultural world, it is not a massive leap in logic to assume that the act of theorising *how* these kinds of people came to be is itself performative of a nonce taxonomy. The importance of this argument only extends so far as it provides the distinctions that can be explored in relation to power and the dynamics of power. In this way, an attachment genealogy demands that we consider power by specifically analysing the ways in which queerness is ensconced in the formations of power. In this sense, we are asked to consider how queerness and the queer relates to destituent forms of power (being the power to resist and undo sovereign constituency)(Agamben & Wakefield, 2014). Whereas a nonce taxonomy is almost quite the opposite, it is performative of constituent power, interested in the legitimacy of the self-determination of *the people*, and what emerges is singular and not defined by the world that produced it, but rather defines the world it produces.

The potential of using affect and affect theories to study literary affect is to allow oneself to be moved by the text, to not reorient the text in the direction you believe it should be but rather to be reoriented by the text, allowing it to open up the horizons of potential for you to read reparatively. For Sedgwick, "the desire of the reparative impulse … is additive and accretive. Its fear, a realistic one, is that the culture surrounding it is inadequate or inimical to its nurture; it wants to assemble and confer plenitude on an object" (2002, 149). Sprouting from the same thought, the desire of this thesis is to read texts for the ways that they enrich an understanding of queer sexuality and sexual becoming, not wishing to strip that experience for parts, but to pursue the mechanistic function of coming-to-terms with difference and of the formative impact of regulatory forces. In the same vein is the idea of unpacking the attachment genealogy of the work, to question where these thoughts emerge

from and to engage with them in a way that is productive and not constrictive[6]. While there is a modicum of futility in running around in theoretical circles, dealing in branches on branches of critical theory as well as literary and cultural studies, is important to, at the outset, firmly position the thesis on its epistemological horizon before moving in any direction.[7]

Queerness, Incipiency and Literature

Literature and its contemporary productions become a critical site for the representation and exploration of bodily resistance. For Bataille, literature and literary expression "raises the problem of *communication*" (2012, 172), where communication is everything that exists in a network of humanity that pulls them from isolation and gives human life its meaning, and Bataille argues that communication is stronger in "the sense of profane language or, as Sartre says, of prose that makes us and the others appear penetrable, fails and becomes the equivalent of darkness" (2012, 170). Literature, in its representation of human experience, is fussy and geared towards resistance, and by bringing human experience into prose, it renders the impossibility of human sociality. This is why the literary space is so useful for analysis; it can represent so many situations, similarities and differences of queer experience. Literature can bring to queerness and homosexuality a rendering of their failure and elisions, of being penetrable and relatable, of bringing into common discourse the varied and varying lived experience of abject subjectivities. The problem of communication in literature, at least as Bataille portrays it, is that literature, in its existence, presupposes its own reception or its capacity to be received. Yet, in a contemporary world of market logic, an audience is never guaranteed, and a more complex relationship with the notion of queerness is required to understand the ways in which we might potentially receive queerness and homosexuality in their literary representations.

Orienting a relationship with the queer and what is meant when queer is deployed within theory is important. Where queer is labelling abject sexualities, it is also referencing

[6] It is important to disclaim here that it is impossible to ever genuinely avoid construction in one's own reading practices, this is because the self that reads the text is always implicated in the systems and knowledges that produced the text, and as such the self in the act of reading has already arrived at the text with prior knowledges and assumptions.

[7] For this reason as well, terms like 'becoming' or 'immanence' lack the theoretical specificity and agility of incipiency. As will be discussed later, incipiency limits itself to the period of coming-to-terms with sexuality, providing a more formal theoretical frame for unpacking the lived reality of closeted-ness. Whereas both becoming and immanence suggest an ongoing process that is never completed, and in many ways is impossible to achieve.

the definition of queer given at the beginning of this introduction, "the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically" (Sedgwick 1994, 8). Not all forms of homosexuality are necessarily queer anymore, as demonstrated in the concepts of homonormativity and homonationalism, where homonormativity is the depoliticised queer subject (Duggan, 2002) and homonationalism is the repoliticisation of the homonormative subject to uphold the values of the state (Puar, 2007). Queer then, as Petrus Liu outlines, is a way of marking through language the various exclusions that are made by the social order which then render, as sign, the difference of some social beings; in this way, we are not considering queer as those who act queerly, but rather, we are considering queer those whose bodies have been marked as different and nonnormative. Though it is those exclusions haunting through 'democratic exclusions' (Butler 2000), that relates interestingly back to the queer, where in such a case, one who has been queered will always be reminded of their queerness, it becomes a material haunting where the body of the queered will always remain awaiting the harm that has been done to them, a scar. To include theories of subjection from Butler, the possibility of a body being haunted by the exclusions that mark its subjection is a legitimate consideration for the queer. If, as Butler tells us in *Excitable Speech*, "Interpellations that 'hail' a subject into being, that is, social performatives that are ritualized and sedimented through time, are central to the very process of subject-formation" (2021, 154), then one must consider the ways that we, as subjects, are and are not hailed into existence. In *The Psychic Life of Power*, Butler argues that "subjection is neither simply the domination of a subject nor its production, but designates a certain kind of restriction *in* production, a restriction without which the production of a subject cannot take place" (1997, 84). The hailing of the subject determines the way in which the subject will come to be within the social order. At the same time, the subject is also disciplined into a specific mode of being when they are repudiated for undesirable behaviours or actions. This is where the exclusion that defines queerness emerges, as "In the reprimand the subject not only receives recognition but attains as well a certain order of social existence, in being transferred from an outer region of indifferent, questionable, or impossible being to the discursive or social domain of the subject" (Butler 1993, 82).

The mark of difference happens at such a formative stage of subjection, as the repudiation, the reprimand, always remains in the skin as a reminder, that the consequences of acting out haunt the subject. As such, this is the queerness that this thesis is most

concerned with, the queerness that is defined by harm and failure, a social category of non-normativity, instead of the political category of revolution and revolt. It is the instance of social trauma in the form of the reprimand that is compelling, as Butler, again, reminds us, "Social trauma takes the form, not of a structure that repeats mechanically, but rather of an ongoing subjugation, the restaging of injury through signs that both occlude and reenact the scene" (Butler 2021, 37). Where the haunting of the material of the body occurs because subjectivity exists iteratively, where subjects are always in negotiation with the terms of their subjection and as such the injury of queerness is restaged and the action and sign of queerness is always rejected.

It is impossible to come to a consensus about what queer is. Perhaps as a way out of the various traps of theorising queerness, we can argue that if queerness is anything, it's a plateau. By figuring queerness as a plateau, we are always-already poised for the ways theorists might attempt to orient it, whether as slippage, transgression, negativity, or identity, to move on a plateau means that all orientations exist simultaneously and within reach of each other. However, this thesis often relies on the conception of queerness as negativity, as being the structural opposite of heterosexuality, or the zero of the social order, the figure in which all slippages and excesses of meaning that disturb the dominant order are dumped, in which any signifier of queerness is dumped and made reducible to nothing. More specifically, queerness in this thesis is used to locate signifiers of social and sexual difference, as queerness itself does not specifically locate sexual identities even as marginal sexualities can be designated by queerness; for example, gayness does not equate to queerness because it refers to a cultural and sexual identity rather than to a resistant subjectivity, as the liveable aspects of gayness have been made permissible and are not structurally negative to the social order. Queerness is leveraged as such to refer to the infinite variability in the experience of sexual difference and incipient homosexuality, then stands as a way of attempting to frame those variabilities by zeroing in on the affective process of coming-to-terms with sexual difference as a method for the essentialising or universalising of LGBTIQA+[8] experiences.

In terms of literature, acclimating to a reading of incipient homosexuality and foundational affect within texts also becomes a way of deconstructing attempts to consolidate gay identity in literature. Sedgwick argues in *Epistemology of the Closet* (1991), that in the wake of Foucault's contribution to the history of sexuality that scholarship and popular thought tends toward "delineating a continuous *identity*" of homosexuality (1991, 157).

[8] LGBTQIA+ is the preferred acronym in this thesis to refer to the social, cultural, and political identities and lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, queer/questioning, intersex, and asexual people.

Which is to say, that in the way that literature is written and critiqued, there is a risk of attempting to read early twentieth homosexual identities as being the same as contemporary ones. This is the implicit danger of articulating an epistemology of the closet, as it becomes a dangerous emotional appeal to the reader that their personal experience is being totalised and actualised. The hazard of this relationship between readers and text is the risk that readers will become complicit in the construction of the political endeavour of the text, hazardous because it needs to be decided whether or not the realm of the closet constitutes an epistemological position or an ontological one. Specifically, because there is an idea laid out in *Epistemology of the Closet* that "the aspect of 'homosexuality' that now seems in many ways most immutably fix to it — its dependence on a defining sameness between partners — is of so recent crystallization" (Sedgwick 1991, 158). In other words, the attachment of same-sex desire and sexual inversion is not as natural or interchangeable as once thought in humanist and modernist scholarship. Following through on this logic, gayness as an identity can be critically viewed as being a gendered identity, given that not all same-sex desiring individuals will possess or form the same sexual identity. In that case, the pressure then to read literature as textually presenting a totalised construction of gayness needs to be resisted. The benefit of treating culturally and temporally diverse literatures as objects for analysis in this thesis is to already assume that to come-of-age on a plateau is to be opened toward the horizon of potentiality, that the assumption of a sexuality and the living of that sexuality happens within a milieu of choices that impact how individuals experience and understand affect.

Any application of desire to homosexuality opens up the contested spaces of what it is to be inside or outside, particularly given the stresses of living on the margins, but there is a tension between the desire to be included in the social order and the desire to be freely homosexual. This thesis' argument about desire is then extended to childhood, itself a disturbingly liminal space that exists only to be endured — endured in the sense that childhood is something that must be survived. This liminality posits the importance between desire and pleasure, where desire is socially constructed, and pleasure belongs to the body and is somewhat outside of the social. So, while Sedgwick is correct to criticise any drive to link homosexual identity across time as a theoretical agenda through the textual burden of identity, it is more conceivable that what homosexual subjects do inherit is feeling as part of a

rich and storied affect genealogy.[9] Such a genealogy emerges and reemerges in the figures of queer literature to describe not the experience of identity but the experience of bodily difference, which can then be salved by the assumption of a minority sexual identity. The experience of foundational affect marked by shame, anxiety and loneliness as part of a greater affect genealogy which defines the orientation of incipient homosexuals coming-to-terms with bodily difference then needs to be explored further.

The value of reconceiving the queer coming-of-age narrative as a foundling narrative is a reparative one. It places the queer narrative on a playing field that does not need to be compared or contrasted with heterosexual narratives, a necessary movement due to queer encounters with failure. Such a failure is the consequence of queer subjects being unable, or resistant, to participation in heterosexual lifeworlds and lifecycles. All coming-of-age narratives feature a defining moment of individuality, where the protagonist of the text encounters the self as other, an other which must either be recuperated into the self or rejected. The *bildungsroman*, then, can be said to be the narration of recuperation of the self, where a young protagonist encounters an image of their self within the social order and is forced to negotiate that schism and become a functioning part of that very same social order. Foundling narratives differ then, in the acclimation of abjected sexualities must reject the heteronormative ideal of self and pursue an unsanctioned social life. In the introduction of this thesis, it was argued that Christopher Nealon's conception of foundling narratives bridges the gap between the *bildungsroman* and queer coming-of-age narratives. For Nealon, the foundling narrative traces "an exile from sanctioned experience … [and] a reunion with some 'people' or solidarity who redeem this exile" (2001, 1), which emerges from a historical imperative that studied homosexuality and homosexuals as being ontologically Other. As such, we might consider the foundling narrative as relating the mutation of Child into Invert, the narrating of the failure of a given subject to effectively naturalise to the social order. Suppose the bildungsroman does indeed recount the recuperation of the young subject in becoming an adult. In that case, a foundling narrative is the necessary response giving space to relate the failure of the queer subject.

The gay coming-of-narrative is not a *bildungsroman*, as it does not narrate a coming-into of sanctioned social experience, nor does it strictly narrate a coming-of-age. Rather it narrates a coming-to-terms with an unsanctioned life, a coming-into of a precarious

[9] Affect genealogy comes from Christopher Nealon's way of critically theorising the various ways in which queer emotion is passed from subject to subject, particularly in the events of the Stonewall riots and the AIDS crisis. This theory will be discussed at length in chapter 1.

subjectivity that cannot be inhabited comfortably. Franco Moretti suggests that "the history of the *bildungsroman* itself bears witness to the sudden rise of the new social bond" (172), in effect arguing that *bildungsroman* is a novel of capitalism, of the subject's relation to capitalism and capitalism's dominance over the subject. For Moretti, the symbolic position that the *bildungsroman* occupies is of representing the life of a young person as the principal for the representation of the evolution of history (227). Usually, the notion of a future is denied to homosexuals, given that they cannot participate in the usual structures of family and reproduction. In a discussion of Nealon, Heather Love articulates that "foundling texts express a desire for an 'inaccessible future,' for forms of life and community that are impossible in their own historical moment. These texts inhabit a 'time of expectation,' as they wait for the friends who will know how to read them" (89). Here, Love is advocating that foundling texts and characters are writing for someone in the future who is not guaranteed to exist, who may themselves tap into the wealth of gay historical emotion and be connected to the lives and affect of those who came before them and those who may exist alongside them, creating a site of engagement for the coming-to-terms of sexuality.

Here, the adaption of the homosexual experience into foundling narrative revels in the ability to represent a queer subjectivity, one that has access to the affective-commons, to call into being the pain of queer history, but also the possibility of an eternally deferred queer utopia, providing queer subjects with their work and production in pursuit of creating a world of their own. The intersections of *jouissance* and utopia call the affective-commons into existence and thus create the possibility of a queer world, which is radically different from the world called forth but made unavailable to queer subjects by the *bildungsroman*. This also names the limit of foundling narratives and the arrival of incipiency as a category of analysis; for Nealon, the project of the foundling is a historical one, or at least 'seemed' to be, where "the story of discarded attempt — of unfulfilled desire and the incomplete historical project of connecting personhood and peoplehood it cathects" (2001, 19). Here, incipiency inserts itself as a method of accepting what is on the surface of these narratives without the need to dig deeper – accepting a more contemporary attitude towards reading that it is for one's self. Stories of incipiency attempt to bypass the risk that narratives of queerness become a *thanatology* wherein the queer subject writes their annihilation by writing themselves into "a fiction of meaning *for the other* that turns ab-sens into ab-sexe" (Edelman 2013, 16). Such writing enacts a more extreme version of Edelman's *homographesis*, making the gay self legible in a discourse that is not its own and would efface it given the opportunity. While incipiency as a category for study does not make a wholesale rejection of the impetus to

formalise a queer world through the narration of its own history, it encourages readers, instead of trying to entrench a formalised sense of gay or queer identities, to accept encounters with queerness in a narrative as it is presented.

The care required in narrating queer coming-into sexuality, the thing that incipiency is, is elucidated best by Heather Love, who argues that "gay pride is a reverse or mirror image of gay shame, produced precisely against the realities it means to remedy. In the darkroom of liberation, the 'negative' of the closet case or the isolated protogay child is developed into a photograph of an out, proud gay man. However, the trace of those forgotten is visible right on the surface of the image, a ghostly sign of the reversibility of reverse discourse" (2007, 20). The inherent hazard of representing queer youth in coming-of-age narratives is to present them as being proud and moving toward happiness, discovering how to function in the heteronormative social order, learning how to negotiate the possession of abject sexuality and remaining part of the family unit. Love argues that this representation of the pursuit of happiness creates a hierarchy of queerness between those who can accept themselves and be proud and those who cannot come-to-terms with themselves due to isolation or fear. This representation only serves to validate certain queer subjectivities over others when the conceit of queerness is that, in its abjection, it is all valid and acceptable. As Edelman argues in *Bad Education,* "the encounter with whatever counts as 'queer' effects an anacoluthon in the rhetoric of reality. Queerness, like anacoluthon (from the Greek *an*, 'not,' and *akolouthos*, 'following'), cuts or interrupts a sequence (grammatical, narrative, or genealogical) by confronting the logic of meaning with the ab-sens from which *nothing* follows" (2023, 26). To accept, then, narratives of queerness as being queer is to accept that they may present themselves illogically or might not follow the expectations of a formalised genre. Incipiency, as a category, is taken to this notion already, placing no demands on a text to follow a given narrative, accepting that to place an action like coming out at the climax of a coming-of-age narrative, elides over the difficulty of accepting homosexuality as a liveable life. This sublimated negotiation of coming out is a defining trait of incipient homosexuality and, in turn, of foundling narratives. Characters must come to negotiate the way in which and the degree to which they will present their homosexuality, which marks the importance of representing the role of the affective genealogy, which, as argued in this thesis, takes the form of shame, anxiety, and loneliness.

Methodology as Feeling

While we can read onto the past, and through narrative, we can relate to the past, the reading of the past onto present makes the incorrect and arrogantly neoliberal assumption that in time moving linearly, that constant progress for the liberation of homosexuals that has been made is globally and culturally ubiquitous. This thesis stands as an intervention to ahistorical representations of homosexual affect because temporary obsessions with queer modernisms risk reading the past onto the present in an ahistorical anti-genealogical conflation of the lived experiences of homosexuality and queerness. The question that grounds this work is: How is emergent homosexual bodily difference rendered in text? This question comes out of an engagement with Lee Edelman's work in *Homographesis*, where he argues that "'the homosexual' enters into view *as a homosexual* only through a rhetorical operation that essentializes as a metaphoric designation, a totalized identity" (1994, 197). The work of this rhetorical essentialisation is the crafting of homosexual difference as belonging to the realm of the semiotic. At the time of my proposal, I argued that this production of a visibly discernible homosexual difference, in turn, produces a social map through which all bodily difference is marked on a topology of potentialities, creating ways in which all bodies and identities can come to be discursively known, but that also creates ways in which those Othered bodies can be rendered precarious. The metaphor of the map, here, comes by way of Gabriel Giorgi, where any social map of precarity would be arrayed through powerlessness and that any attempt to read equality into "such a map may mitigate—even normalize—the dislocating impact of precarity upon existing identities" (Giorgi 2013, 73). The demand that is made of such an argument is simply that any Othered identity that can be understood as being precarious must hold that acknowledgement in mind before comparing that identity to others, as attempting to contrast or to read equality onto two or more precarious identities risks obfuscating the impact of precarity. The point to which I was delivered by this understanding was that any research conducted should be committed to examining the discursive methods by which emergent homosexual subjectivities are written and how that aids in an understanding of homosexuality as either having or producing an innate bodily difference.

According to this thesis, the best method for constructing an understanding of bodily differences and homosexuality in literature is through a study of literary affect. To do so is to take seriously that literary texts are elaborate ideological and discursive projects; as such "literature is a *thing* … the *thingness* of literature is tied up in its materiality and given

meaning only when activated by human[10] consciousness" (Vallelly 2019, 45), this statement has roots in the philosophy of Georges Bataille, specifically the work *Literature and Evil*, which figures literature as being an object and as such cannot be communicated with, rather our relationship with literature is dependent on this thingness, as we resonate with the work and bring our own affective experiences to it. The potential of literary affect is "a desire to cast things as *eventful* … to refuse to view things as static material objects that simply reflect culture, but instead give things material depth by keeping open their durational and immanent reality" (Vallelly 2019, 46), which we can take to mean (in the vein of Lauren Berlant's *event*), that literature attempts to figure through language the force of the everyday and that in studying literary affect, the critic keeps fresh that force by focussing on the effect of the intensities, instead of becoming mired in questions of the cultural relevancy of any given event. For Neil Vallelly in *Affect Theory and Literary Critical Practice*, the reparative impulse is powerful and advantageous for the critic as, "when I am beside a text, I cannot face it; I cannot assert my interpretative authority over it. As I move, the text moves, and vice versa. We look out on the same world, and move together through this world" (2019, 49). Through a study of literary affect the critic never presumes the meaning of the text, rather they allow themselves to be guided by the feelings produced by and through the text, allowing us to find meaning in the event of the text that always remains immanent and open toward a horizon of potentialities.

It is difficult to fully understand regulatory forces like racism, sexism, transphobia, and homophobia, as they traverse the human world and within each social context take on different forms, operating differently, but the effects they produce are often the same. It is impossible to categorise who is the ultimate beneficiary of these regulatory forces, in the same way that it is impossible to designate who is singularly the most victimised by them, such is the inevitable result of globalisation as it serves to give perspective to the ways in which every victim is indentured to the social order. As Heather Love says, "The saturation of experience with ideology is particularly important to queer critics because homophobia and heterosexism inflect everyday life in ways that can be difficult to name" (Love 2007, 12),

[10] In this instance it needs to be recognised that the prompt of *human* here errs toward the problematic. Insomuch as there is no acknowledgment of the slipperiness of the category of 'human,' what counts as being human, what is more than, or less than human. Additionally, the idea that meaning in material can only be activated by the human subject elides that consciousness need not be human, such as it is, anything may find meaning in a book if we extend a phenomenological analysis in the style of Sara Ahmed. For instance, a set of wooden shelves might only ever be a shelf, but with a book or two upon them they find new meaning as a bookshelf. While this is a human understanding of the object and the capacity of the object, of the thing, the flow of this train of thought leads us to the understanding that we cannot ever comprehend the ontology of the object and all of the ways that it might find or produce meaning.

the event in which homophobia occurs is often oblique, happening in a moment so small or insignificant one might convince themselves that they are being paranoid, but an eventual build-up of events will lead up to, as Berlant argues, a crisis, in which the effects of the world threaten to have a terminal effect on the subject. Even as books are written and produced in particular material circumstances, they are in turn often read in separate material circumstances. The ability to use literary affect and read beside a text is important as an attempt to neither overwhelm the text by reading the contemporary into it, nor ignore where we are by only considering the context in which it was produced. Through the analyses in this thesis, we approach the text as thing-in-itself and as such believe that the thing is a reflection of the real, the potential of which is brought forth, again, by Heather Love, who argued that "As resignifying or refunctioning stigma has become synonymous with the political in queer criticism, stigma itself has fallen to the wayside." (Love 2007, 21). The analysis presented within is concerned with stigma, the moment of stigma, and the effects and affects of being stigmatised, it does not make value judgements about texts if they contain homophobia. A study of literary affect is so important here as, "affects enable images, ideas, bodies, and objects to resist and transcend the singularity of the event" (2019, 53). As always, we return to the affective genealogy, for if queerness cannot be genetically reproduced how can we be sure that certain texts we encounter are sharing with us homosexuality and queerness worth knowing, except for the ways in which it makes us feel.

This thesis introduces the concept of incipient homosexuality as a category of sexual subjection that is more able to account for the varied potentialities of encountering homosexuality due to its flexibility. Incipient homosexuality is also then, the process through which a person develops a sense of their experience of same-gender desire, through encounters with abject sexuality and the assumption of sexual identity. The thesis examines novels that feature a protagonist who begins the narrative unaware of their sexual desires and, over the course of the narrative, 'comes into' their feelings of homosexuality. Eve Sedgwick, in *Tendencies* (1993), argued that queer theory could denaturalise heterosexuality and its taken-for-grantedness. In a Hegelian sense, this denaturalisation occurs as heterosexuality posits itself as being the Thing to the absolute negation of all Others; queerness and queer theory exist as a way of transgressing that negation through abjection. Queer theory interrogates normativity and provides this thesis with the tools to explore the social effects of the ways in which the embodied feeling of difference characterising incipient homosexuality is represented in literature. Sedgwick's approach of reparative reading is one such tool, which, according to Sedgwick, is "additive and accretive" (2003, 149) and, as such, provides

the reader with the ability to read for queerness without needing to position itself as being transgressive or abject, to read for how queerness in text in discursively constructed out of the same language that posits heterosexuality as the Thing.

Reparative reading is in opposition to what Sedgwick calls paranoid reading. Aparanoid reading entails uncovering secret meanings of a text, seeking to expose the negative agenda of the text, and claim the negative agenda is the 'true' meaning of the text. Jake Nevins' article, which levels the claim that deception has become a big theme in contemporary gay literature, is an example of a paranoid reading that claims to uncover hidden truths in text, truths that have the power of the reader and influence behaviour and as such, deserves to be revealed. Paranoid reading anticipates that it will find negative messages in a text, and Sedgewick describes it as a theory of negative affects because it uncovers feelings like shame, paranoia, anxiety, and self-loathing in representations of queer subjects in texts (2002, 130). Paranoid reading comes from a desire to critique normative, violent, or otherwise problematic representations. However, it is unable to navigate complexity in texts because it impatiently assumes that the sum social effect of a text with any problematic representation is harmful. It forecloses other possibilities for reading. By contrast, reparative reading is about reading with possibility: "on generating concepts that add to the complexity and inclusiveness of our representations, rather than trying to prescribe the right revolutionary path" (Gregg 2004). Heather Love says paranoid reading "misses the descriptive richness of weak theory [reparative reading]. Weak theory stays local, gives up on hypervigilance for attentiveness; instead of powerful reductions, it prefers the act of noticing, being affected, taking joy, and making whole" (Love 2010, 237-8). That is to say, where a paranoid reader might be ready to call out aspects of representations that imply phobic, unjust or violent views of queer subjects, a reparative reader would remain attentive to some of the resistances, acts of decentering of normative ways of knowing and moments of possibility offered for a queer reading of a text.

In her article 'Curriculum as Death for Black Female Subjects' (2016), Esther Oganda Ohito says that reparative reading is about "rebuilding connections to prospectively injurious objects of critique" (439). The reparative reader looks for ways to read texts that call into doubt, oppose, or interrupt the potentially negative or harmful social effects of textual representations, especially, in this thesis, harm to queer communities. It is not that reparative readings are not alert to the possibilities that aspects of texts might perpetuate harm, violence, and injustice in the way they represent aspects of the world, experiences, and identities. Still, they resist rejecting other possibilities in a text because of those aspects. Approaches to

analysis of subjects in Western thinking and academia have often emphasised the necessity of keeping a distance between the analyst and the object of analysis. Any analysis which did not maintain such a distance was framed as a bad practice that compromised the validity of any findings. Reparative reading might be accused of constituting a 'bad' reading of a text because it encourages the reader to identify with representations in the text and to feel emotion. So, it fails to remain critically distant. The concept that it is possible to be distant from an object of analysis is a product of Western scientific ways of knowing, which take their validity and authority for granted. Such a concept ignores the ways in which subjects are constituted in and through specific social and historical contexts which shape their thinking, including their thinking about what is and is not objective. Paranoid readings risk taking for granted that it is possible to read at a (presumably objective) distance from a text, and they also risk assuming the validity of their ethical position. They may also presuppose their authority to judge marginalised groups' representations. Reparative readings recognise the difficulty of remaining at a distance from the text. They allow the reader to have a range of critical and affective responses.

According to Neil Vallelly, reparative reading "enables us to use affect theory to unpack the diverse range of feelings and sensations within literary texts without downgrading these to merely ideological or cultural effects, particularly in eras when emotions were conceived through less of a psycho-logical or psychiatric lens" (2019, 49). By this, Vallelly positions us to consider how reparative reading allows a reader to approach and consider emotions without colonising them and taking out a political stake in their existence and their relationship to identities. Such readings facilitate self-reflection on the reader's ethical positions because they resist taking a single, definitive, or totalising approach to understand the social effect of a text. The idea that critical analysis of texts can function to reveal the ultimate meaning of a text is rejected. Vallelly argues that reparative reading "develops an open-ended hermeneutics that is more congruous with the multiplicity of literary experience" (2019, 49). Again, for Vallelly, reparative reading provides the tools for using a theory that matches the diversity of reading and 'literary experience'. Those potentialities for interpretation become more nebulous and flexible.

Literature of incipient homosexuality often offers ambivalent representations of homosexual desire and identity, which a reparative reading approach is best suited to unpack. In the novels examined in this thesis, the clumsy articulation of homosexual desire as an incipient feeling almost represents homosexuality as a failed version of heterosexuality. The characters in these novels do not take up identities as gay men early on in their narratives, in

public ways, or ways aligned with agitation for political change based on recognition of queer identities. Again, the differences between reparative and paranoid reading can be exampled through incipient homosexuality; a paranoid reading would dig in on the clumsiness of the homosexual desire and assert its badness. This is because, in a paranoid reading of queer literature, there is a drive to analyse how a text works to depoliticise queerness. The benefit of reparative reading is that it takes that paranoia into account while recognising that "even the most 'negative' or 'stereotypical' representation of sexuality might be someone's lifeline, or their sign that 'there are other people like me'" (Albury 2009, 648). To read reparatively is to arrive at a text prepared for all the ways a text might come to signify meaning, for all the ways it might potentially interpolate readers. To see in a text the potential for how a reader might attach to the representations and how

In many cases, they occupy a marginal subjectivity that does not threaten the dominant centre. A paranoid reading might conclude that these novels reinforce heteronormativity and actively cause social harm in marginalising the experiences of young gay men. A reparative reading would be attentive to the restrictive and punitive social contexts these characters live and must grapple with, so their marginal subjectivity cannot be regarded as simple acquiescence to normative social order. Reparative reading does not see such representations as somehow reflective of the 'real world' experience of some young gay men, but it does recognise that readers are positioned to identify with characters through a process of textual construction of reading position. Reparative reading, because it does not pretend to the critical distance between reader and text, explores how reader and text become enmeshed. Literature plays a role in the construction of reality and the construction of subjectivity through processes of interpellation and reader address. Most protagonists in this genre of coming-out/coming-to-terms homosexual fiction (a genre that dates back to Andre Gide and *The Immoralist* in 1902) articulate their bodies through feelings of desire, in effect, rationalising their homosexual desire as something which "can't be helped" and "can't be explained," it "just is." They do not see their embodied desires as being immediately indicative of specific politicised social identities. It is often not until later in the novel that they take a position of textually recognisable gayness. For Bradway, this cannot be characterised as a failure on the part of those characters or on the part of the text to represent homosexuality less ambiguously; he writes, "the languages of the body are not, then, a failed form of a social critique but an incipiently social mode of affective politics, a mode that works the aesthetic failure to create a queer becoming in the event of reading" (2017, 121). Bradway describes how reading is a means of queer subject construction that can take many

forms and have many meanings. Representations of incipiency offer forms of resistance to both ideals of gay identity and social order in ways that need not create a binary between overt rejection of that order and acquiescence to it.

Critical to this moment is the chasm between coming out and coming-to-terms. To know one's sexuality is not to accept one's sexuality, and there is also a significant *leitmotif* across the genre of gay young-adult literature of honesty, suggesting that queer children owe something to their friends and family, as if to provide their friends and family with an opportunity to reject them. However, as discussed in the introduction, to enter into the critical act of reading assuming a stable relationship between coming-to-terms and the speech act of coming out takes for granted that power is not stable, which problematises the ability for sexual politics around incipiency to develop (Frischherz, 2018). This relationship between discursive knowingness and a hampering of sexual politics might end up clarifying the importance of the natural world to queer fiction, where nature, being "humanity's metaphysical other … opposed to culture, technology and … art" (Remien & Slovic, 2022, 7), represents a place where a subject can more readily subvert the discursive construction and givenness of a space, to easily insert themselves within a space and a world where their oneness cannot be negated. Indeed, such a theoretical position would also elucidate the tension that exists between queerness as queer and a formalised discourse of queerness, where, for Edelman, "the unbearable Real of ontological negation, the ab-sens that undoes the oneness, the comprehensible *identity*, of the world, compels us to seek to preserve that world by affirming our oneness within it" (2023, 16-17). Any process of coming-to-terms with abject sexuality leaves a subject wrestling with expulsion from the social order, of wrestling between ab-sens and the inheritance of a comprehensible identity — the speech act of coming out then represents the 'affirming our oneness'. The importance of incipiency as a theoretical tool is to leave space to account for this tension properly.

Chapter Summaries

In chapter one, there is a discussion of neoliberal literary production. This includes a discussion on the rise and importance of neoliberalism to culture and cultural production, discussing the ways neoliberalism has both subsumed all forms of life under itself and rendered itself invisible. Central to this discussion as to how neoliberalism has become the primary organising logic of our time is how it has also gone on to structure our understandings of identity and identity politics as well as our relationship to sameness and

otherness. The chapter goes on to introduce the concept of the neoliberal novel, in particular arguing for two forms of gay male fiction in under this category, these being FagFic and novels of incipiency. The connection made here is that novels of incipiency are studies into the interior lives of nascent homosexual subjects, containing therein the narrative that delineates the road to the assumption of a gay male identity. This conceptual arrival at incipiency as a category that has the capacity to identify major slippages in identity and expresses patience with the subjects of its narrative is the jumping-off point for the central argument of this thesis. The work of this chapter is a stubborn excavation of the way literature arrives to a reader and how its arrival presupposes a number of social, cultural and political influences that need to be undone in order to also understand the way literary affect resonates with readers.

Chapter two expands on the concept of incipient homosexuality. As touched on previously, incipient homosexuality as a concept arrives at the point where both the closet and the queer child fail to capture the nuance of how a subject, in undergoing the processes of subjectivation, first encounters the affective experience of abject sexuality and the subsequent processes of coming-to-terms with that abjection. The first point of order is to unpick the differences between adulthood and childhood to attempt to delineate the instability of the two categories as well as to make an argument that homosexual coming-to-terms is tied to coming-of-age. The concept of incipiency, as it is used in this thesis, is rooted in a negotiation of Butlerian and Deleuzo-Guttrarian thought as an attempt at describing the contemporary rigours of identity and subject development as well as a turning out of the rigours towards the potentials of queerness. In previous research (Lawless, 2017), I argued for the existence of a tension in homosexual subject formation between drives of homonormativity and drives for queerness, a negotiation in both subjecthood and identity formation that all homosexual subjects must make an individual case for. Given these assertions of a sovereign individual with their own relationship to the social order, not just a relationship inherited from the cultural world that produced it, the results of that research impact this thesis in that it informs the position that the arrival of incipient homosexuality has already placed an emergent subject in an impossible position that creates a negotiation between harm to the self and harm to the other (a literal expression of the violence of the closet). It is why this thesis finds itself 'against purity,' in accordance with the work of Alexis Shotwell, where subjects are already polluted by discursive and ideological structures, and that queer subjects themselves upon arriving at incipiency have already been shaped by heteronormative socialisation (argued here as being regulatory forces of the social order) that

determine responsive affects at the encounter of the same-sex sexual object. The determining aspect of incipient homosexuality is a concern not with 'coming out' but rather with 'coming-to-terms,'[11] which labels the moment that a homosexual subject comes-to-terms, not only with the abjectness of their sexuality but the various ways their sexuality positions them within the social order.

In chapter three the determined affective responses are expounded more thoroughly as being foundational affect. A theory of foundational affect is deployed to make an account of the scrupulous and slippery theory of incipiency. Foundational affect is defined as being one of the conditions by which queer subjects are constituted by the social order, where it attempts to qualify the iterative effect of regulatory forces on the body. Though it specifically labels the ways in which the regulatory forces of the social order orient queer bodies by describing the ways in which meaning is constituted for the subject within a certain ideological frame and a subject's relation to that frame. The importance of reading foundational affect next to incipient homosexuality is to be able to read the orientation that a subject has to the flow of meaning which iteratively strives to constitute their being, as such also central to the theory is the idea of negative registers which provide strategies for subjects to read themselves into meaning where they do not previously exist. The chapter begins by situating itself with a coherent theory of affect, working from the canon of queer theory with Butler, Sedgwick, Berlant, and Ahmed, as well as the work of Massumi, the thesis situates itself as defining affect through individual relation to the world. This is done so that the work of defining foundational affect as being iteratively impacted by their exterior relations, sticky impressions which are difficult to shape as they become contingent to a subject's becoming. This thesis then identifies three specific affects as being foundational to male homosexuality: shame, anxiety, and loneliness, arguing that these affects are constitutive of the flow of meaning, orienting male homosexuals to a particular horizon of potentialities.

Chapters four, five, and six are all analytical chapters, in which literary analysis is used to unpack the relationship between foundational affect and incipient homosexuality. The first of these is an analysis of Jamie O'Neill's 2001 novel, *At Swim, Two Boys*, which will engage in a reading for shame. In the novel, the titular boys struggle to come-to-terms with their sexuality in a deeply Catholic Ireland in the middle of a burgeoning revolution that culminates in the 1916 Easter Rising. This analysis is conducted by feeling for the ways in

[11] Here, coming-to-terms is representative of the incipiency of a abjected subject, who must, by way of their sociality, determine the relationship their abjection has with the pursuit of a liveable life. This might more simply be expressed as the accepting or rejecting of a relative degree of otherness or abjection in the articulation of an identity.

which shame is deployed to determine the flow of meaning and how that flow is disrupted so that the protagonists can come-to-terms with their sexuality, a moment that effectively ends incipiency. The second analysis is of Tomasz Jedrowski's *Swimming in the Dark* (2020) which is about the relationship between Ludwik and Janusz in Soviet Poland between the years of 1979 and 1980 and their negotiation of finding love and a liveable life in a deeply homophobic country. This analysis is reading for anxiety in the novel, which as a pre-emptive affect does not possess a particular object, rather it predicts the arrival of a more negative affect (like shame, anger, or melancholy), but itself is also a result of the constitutive effect of stigmatizing regulatory forces that rebuke queer life that behaves queerly. The third analysis is of Christos Tsiolkas' 1995 novel, *Loaded*, which follows a day in the life of Ari, as he blitzes around the city of Melbourne encountering people and taking various drugs to mediate those encounters, dealing with his attraction to his brother's roommate and negotiating the space of his closet with room for his friends and family. The analysis is concerned with how one deals with loneliness because unlike shame and anxiety which are social affects caused by being social and in turn are resolved by being social, there is no clear solution as to the desublimation of loneliness. The analysis wrestles with the possibility that any resolution to loneliness, in a possibly 'pure' utopian ideal, would be a simple inversion towards contentment, the movement from being dissatisfied with the structure and alienation of one's life to an acceptance of it, becoming satisfied with one's lot.

Any conclusion to this argument will need to extrapolate on the impact that iterative experiences of foundational affect have on the construction of homosexual identities, and while this thesis has focussed exclusively on gay male identities of white postcolonial bodies, it needs to be further emphasised here that this work is open toward the potentialities of all bodies and identities. At all turns the thesis will need to be concentrated on resisting the pull of mythologising the narratives it is analysing and of creating a monolithic structure of gay neoliberal literary genres; instead, the thesis should achieve its goal by attending to the myriad of ways that individual identity might be expressed through narrative and how their similarity and difference to other identities shape the evolution of literature as part of an affective genealogy. The effect of this reading is to make a theoretical account for the impossibly diverse ways in which queer people come-to-terms with themselves, to make note of the ways queer people manage the experience of their social and political precarity because every country in the world right now either has in place, or in front of their parliaments, pieces of anti-LGBTQIA+ legislation which could drastically impact the quality

of life of queer people, these range from back-tracking on medical and familial rights to outright bans on discussions of homosexuality in educational settings.

Forthrightly, the work of this thesis, and the introduction of incipient homosexuality and foundational affect to the canon of queer literary theory, works in strict opposition to the popular positions held by people like Nevins. This thesis is about working through and more thoroughly elucidating the complexity of queer and homosexual subjectivation to argue that the assumption of an abjected subjectivity and identity is not an easy journey. This is best reflected in the choice of literature for analysis in this thesis, as each represents a colonised form of Whiteness, be it Irish, Polish, or Greek-Australian, that exists in tension with the ways it would know itself to be and the ways of knowing that have been imperially imposed on it. They are literature that intuits the bodily pull of desire and resistance because epistemological forms of knowing the body have been tainted, and literature about bodies that seek in the world places where contrary and regulatory forces of socialisation cannot be imposed on them. Incipiency and foundational affect, then, name the ways that homosexual subjects come to know themselves as liberated in their abjection in spite of the duress that is placed on them.

Chapter One: Neoliberal Literary Production

The key concepts of this thesis, incipient homosexuality and foundational affect, are theoretical products of contemporary thinking on homosexual subjectivity and its development. The consequence of this line of inquiry has meant that theories of neoliberal capital and its effect on bodies have become central to framing these concepts, grounding them in the philosophical and theoretical present. This chapter, as such, is meant only as a summary of both neoliberalism's effect on the human body and how that effect has had repercussions on literary production and the form of the novel. Indeed, this chapter ascribes significance to the work of Franco Berardi and Byung-Chul Han in summating the experience of subjectivity under neoliberalism; the leaning toward both Marxist and psychoanalytic theories provides a sufficient platform for negotiating the enduring effects of late-stage capitalism, as well as offering a critique of the ways new technologies and digital culture have impacted critiques of human-ness. The chapter then takes a turn to discuss neoliberal literary production and the affective turn in literary theory, specifically leveraging the work of Rachel Greenwald-Smith, Tyler Bradway, Pieter Vermeulen, and Nancy Armstrong, before moving onto the way in which all these forces have culminated in new forms of gay literature that need to be fully laid out before proceeding to the critical aspects of theory in this thesis. The result is that two intersecting genres of literature reveal themselves, literatures of incipiency and *FagFic*[12]. The emergence of these new categories of gay literature stands as further evidence of the proliferating complexity of the literary space under neoliberalism. Even as literature becomes subsumed under and produced by capitalist logic, it still retains the power to destabilise neoliberal economic and political tendencies.

Neoliberalism has robbed the human body of its potency, which is to say, the body has been stripped of its energy. As one of the largest resources on the planet has been exhausted, made impotent by the demands of neoliberal capitalism. For Franco Berardi, potency is subjective energy that brings into actuality the immanence of possibilities[13], which structure human life (2017). Under neoliberalism, there has occurred a pillaging of the body's

[12] As a category, FagFic will be explored in greater detail later in the chapter. However, a brief definition is that FagFic is a portmanteau of 'faggot' and 'fiction' and articulates a category of literature that is written for, and marketed towards, a normative homosexual audience.

[13] This notion of the immanence of possibilities differs from the horizon of potentialities, as possibilities (while plural) are the not infinite ways to act in the world. In contrast, potentialities refer to the infinite ways of becoming in the world. Berardi also deploys immanence as a way of being inside a system, as being inherent to that system as part of the body that structures and animates it — as opposed to the plane of immanence, which refers to the plane of existence where all matter is equal to itself.

potency, its energy for change (of itself and the world it is in), and the body, having been stripped of its potency, the human body thus becomes impotent, instantiating the movement from human labour to human capital. This totalising view of neoliberalism may suggest a sort of liberal anarcho-socialist paranoia, but as Wendy Brown has argued, "Neoliberalism is a specific and normative mode of reason, of the production of the subject, 'conduct of conduct,' and scheme of valuation, yet in its differential instantiations and encounters with extant cultures and political traditions, it takes diverse shapes and spawns diverse content and normative details, even different idioms" (2015, 48). So often in this regard, the point is made that governments, having moved to biopolitical forms of power, only make possible lives that are financially beneficial to the State and its operation and only make investments in those bodies that will reward a high return. To be robbed of potency, or as Berardi poetically regards it, to be rendered *impotent*.

If, for Berardi, potency is "conceived of in terms of penetration and subjection … doomed to give way to a system of technical devices which are better endowed than man to accomplish the goal of penetrating and subjugating fortune and the magma of events" (2017, 74), then potency is the capacity, the energy required, to make the event and affect possible, of bringing reality into possibility. Impotency, then, is figured as the lack of energy, as lacking the ability to effect change, but critically, for Berardi, impotency is not powerlessness because powerless people still have the ability to come together to effect change. To be impotent in the age of impotence, what Berardi terms our current situation within neoliberalism, is to be denied access to immanence because we have surrendered immanence to machines and algorithms that define the most profitable shapes of human life and sociability. In the context of this argument, it becomes important to consider how, in surrendering the potency of human life, textual representation in literature becomes unreliable and 'flattened' out by the efficient and profit-seeking mechanics of neoliberalism. In this way, a study of affect and its resonances is required to hazard the relationality of text to the lived experiences and material conditions of life under capitalism.

At its worst, neoliberal policy and logic enact what Byung-Chul Han, in *The Expulsion of the Other*, terms *the terror of the same*, where "The negativity of the Other gives way to the positivity of the Same … The violence of the Same is invisible because of its positivity. The proliferation of the Same presents itself as growth. At a certain point, however, production is no longer productive but destructive" (2018, 1-2). By this, Han is making the argument that subjectivity is at risk of losing its meaning, of being constructed out of the Same no longer defined by the Other, that which it is not, the thing it will never be.

Han has a few arguments that support this thesis; the first relates to the proliferation in technology, making it easier for us, as consumers, to always access content that we like and for that content to always be like things we have seen before. The second is that broader trends in society mean that we have entered a palliative society, by which Han means a society scared of pain, the pain and anguish of encountering the other. Yet, in being rendered impotent, subjects are robbed of their access to immanence, which, as Berardi describes, has dire consequences for "becoming other which is already inscribed in the present" (2017, 13). The connection being made here between Berardi and Han is that in the rendering of the subject as impotent, what is also rendered is an inability for the subject to develop or change through immanence, becoming other. Excessive presence of the Same causes disgust, which, for Han, is because where disgust is normally triggered by the presence of an unassimilable Other, in the presence of Sameness, disgust is caused by the lack of the Other and negativity, which is equally unassimilable. But Mel Y. Chen argues that the neoliberal self is "an entity that is autonomous (hence, nondependent) as well as responsibly self-authored, and one that owes no sense of its own formation to past trace in time" (2012, 77), which if we take to be axiomatic of neoliberal subjecthood would mean that subjects being self-made are never really constituted through difference and are indeed defined by the sameness of the world in which they consider themselves to be agential subjects of. Incipient homosexuality is a mark of a messy and unsettled subject, unruly in its attachment to the social order, but the 'everydayness' of neoliberal literary representation, particularly in the spaces of young adult literature, threatens to open up a colonising space that will rob queerness of its potency and capacity for resistance.

One of the achievements of this literature is to open up a space for gay historical fiction where some of these novels delve into disturbing possibilities, like John Boyne's novel *The Absolutist* (2011), which explores the trenches of WW1 through the relationship of two lovers, who eventually come to conflict over their dedication to the nationalist cause. Or even Will Eaves' novel *Murmur* (2018) traces the unravelling body and fragmenting self of Alan Turing as he suffers the consequences of chemical castration. Yet, in other cases, gay historical fiction acts as a way of eliminating the queer affective commons by adhering to familiar and contemporary affect and experiences as occurring immediately within the past. It writes contemporary forms of homosexual affection onto the past, the effect of which is to take for granted the legitimate ongoing struggle for homosexual political recognition. It creates an ephemera of melodrama to be consumed rather than to be engaged with and critiqued. It also desires to position the queer experience as comparative to the heterosexual

experience by placing homosexuals within famous conflicts, conflating the conflict of homosexuality with the conflict of the nation. In some ways, this accomplishes a limited critique of the usual tactics of silencing and forgetting the presence and contributions of queer people to societies and nation-building. However, it also facilitates the construction of a homonationalist position. Instead of posing a threat to social order and the integrity of national borders and identities, queer people are enfolded back into narratives that once aimed to cast them out. This works to recuperate queer experiences back into a neoliberal agenda that, as an operation of the social order, seeks to stabilise itself.

As this thesis will come to explain in detail, strictly speaking, the genealogical burden of novels of incipiency, which stand here in direct contrast to FagFic, is to represent the inner life of the homosexual while avoiding the traditional discerning textual markers of homosexuality. The effect of prioritising this inner life and experiences with affect over the material appearance of male homosexuality works to emphasise the "dislocating impact of precarity" (Giorgi 2013, 73) as the incipient gay bodies of these texts traverse the world trying to nestle somewhere their identity is no longer at odds with their body. Indeed, the contemporary literatures under consideration in this thesis are all inheritors of a queer affect genealogy and, whether consciously or not, will leave an impression on (and, as such, change) that genealogy for those readers who inherit the affective world of the text. Doing so even as the existence of the homogenised and ahistorically delineated homosexual identities of FagFic become adhered to identity politics that demands that all identities account for their existence through a textual audit of bodily signifiers. Though, as Mathias Nilges argues, this only occurs "once the relation to capitalism becomes fully ontologized and contracted into the subject" where the subject is "transformed into a matter of identity, politics itself becomes a matter of identities" (2019, 164), so even as we might criticise the subsumption of literary production under neoliberalism, it still needs to be conceded that to deal with identities now is to deal with their politics and their position and status within political spheres.

Literatures of Incipiency

Neoliberalism is the primary organising logic of the twenty-first century, seeing the perfection of ideologies of rugged individualism and objectivism. It posits individual value associated with labour and production and loyalty to corporations. People become brands. As such, neoliberalism has no exact political agenda, only an economic agenda, which drives to burn through resources and transform them into capital. Even as populations remain

biopolitically regulated, mythologies of self-determination are rampant as the possibilities for that determination are themselves subjected to biopolitical regulation. What is becoming exceedingly common is that the State no longer possess the necessary power to determine what bodies will be given the right to exist as subjects. Rather, as Gabriel Giorgi has argued, "subjectivity now has to create, to invent, to design ways to affirm its own indeterminacy, which neoliberalism has turned into an explicitly, manifest condition" (2013, 69). Giorgi means by this that all bodies are granted life under the condition that it is precarious, and as such, only exceptional forms of life that can properly argue for their productive value will be made 'secure.' This, for Giorgi, represents the shift in which "subjectivity, therefore, cannot be understood as a defence or an immunization against precarity, but a 'work' through it, a relation with that which is left once the structures that provided social protection and symbolic recognition are dismantled" (2013, 70). Through this shift, the onus is placed on precarious subjects to read themselves into neoliberal discourse, where neoliberalism has established a clear and varied discursive field for subjects to do so. While this may account for changes to literary cultures under late capitalism, it might better explain and account for the rise of identity politics and demands for ever-proliferating identity groups and the subsequent rise of identity politics. Incipiency is, from this perspective, the unruly and uncolonised space of queer identity, a space different from formalised queer identities that have recently come to be subsumed under the category of the neoliberal self – even once 'indeterminate' categories have been interpolated into patterns of the autonomous consuming self.

Identity politics, in its own way, can be appropriated as a tool of neoliberalism because it functionally provides a "social map organized around the distribution of the powerless as opposed to the privileged." The inherent risk of mapping precarious identities is that it may provide the discursive framework that "may mitigate – even normalize – the dislocating impact of precarity upon existing identities … it tends to reinforce received topologies of inclusion and exclusion, and the identities and the grammars of violence projected by those distributions" (Giorgi 2013, 73). There are many cynical ways to read this neoliberal drive to privilege individuality and identity politics, none that are interesting to this argument, which seeks only to accept that it happens, and that the cacophonous proliferation of identities makes the work of theory difficult because it is always behind the times and always lacking in sympathy. In its own way, the failures of identity politics fall in line with the terror of the Same. For Jeffrey T. Nealon in *Alterity Politics* (1998), "…identity politics remains unable to deal with the other *as* other; it continues to thematize differences among

persons, groups, and discourses in terms of (the impossibility of their) sameness" (6-7), it is for this reason that Nealon suggests that "…identity politics as a project is doomed to fail because every specific identity likewise fails to be complete, falls short of some kind of plenitude" (3). Perhaps this is the argument for a study of neoliberal literatures, or in the event that such a proposal is scandalous, the study of literatures produced under neoliberalism, as all forms of representation become at risk of becoming vacuums of meaning as the Market demands that holes and gaps in representation be filled. Such is the position of minoritized bodies like Blackness and Queerness, that they are repositories of meaning, their own status as being Zero supplements and stabilises Whiteness and normativity, ensuring they do not collapse in on themselves and become meaningless[14].

The productive relationship between incipient identities and fictional spaces foregrounds the development of formalised genres of gay literature. Though a politics grounded and expressed at the level of identity is a newer phenomenon and has influenced the production of homosexual identities in literature. As introduced earlier in this chapter, two specific genres have emerged: literatures of incipiency and *FagFic* (which will be discussed later). These literatures of incipiency narrate the emergence of homosexual subjectivity over and through time, marking in language the experience of developing some form of homosexual identity. Critically, the semantic demand of these novels is that they do not narrate homosexuality onto the past (Stockton, 2009); rather, they express their narrative in the present or past tense, exploring the feelings as they arrive without imposing future knowledge and meaning to them. This thesis cannot also presume to say what the urtext of literature of incipiency is because this research has not attempted to compile a detailed survey of the literature, but a tradition of incipiency can be traced from Twentieth-century literature. Perhaps the earliest example that can be given, though it doesn't cleanly fall into the category, is Andre Gide's 1902 novel, *The Immoralist*, which more than anything, narrates the bodily compulsion of an unnamed homosexual desire (as the narrator is a pederast). The intensity of bodily affect that is explored in this text is interesting, as the narrator often positions himself as unable to stifle the feelings of desire he feels for young men, indeed, the protagonist and narrator, Michel, is a servant to these desires. Historically, this novel predates contemporary understandings of queerness and homosexuality as a cultural or sexual identity,

[14] Is it too much then, to hope that even as we might be careening towards the fall of neoliberalism, that we might too be witnessing the collapse of Whiteness, Heterosexuality and Cisgenderism as the stable categories of the One? Perhaps THIS is the subject of queer optimism, not to itself become a liveable and relatively stable category, but that the instability queer and Black subjects have come-to-terms with will become the dominant ontological experience.

crafting a character who doesn't have a language for his desires but follows the intensities of his desires anyway.

Literature of incipiency begins to take a more formal shape towards the middle of the Twentieth-century, the historical significance is that homosexuality as culture and identity is beginning to take shape, developing a cohesive sense of behaviour and politics (Halperin, 2011). Gore Vidal's novel *The City and the Pillar* arrives as the best earliest example of what a literature of incipiency looks like. Narrating the boyhood obsession Jim has for his childhood friend, as Jim chases the high of his first sexual encounter with Bob, yet it does not fully encapsulate what this genre has to offer as it bears the hallmarks of a *bildungsroman*, as Jim undertakes a semi-formal education learning how to be a homosexual man. The indeterminacy of the narrative's finale and the protagonist's identity does mean that this text can be considered an incipient text as his homosexual education is either incomplete or it fails. Literatures of incipiency became more recognisable with the publication of John Donovan's *I'll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip* in 1969. The intensity of friendship experienced between Davy and Altschuler and the ways in which they experiment in engagements of these intensities. It is, once again, a novel hallmarked by ambiguity that defines early representations of homosexuality (particularly in English-language literature), Pádraic Whyte and Keith O'Sullivan argue that the narrative "does not make visible specifically, and unequivocally positive, gay identity, at a time when such representations were absent from children's literature, the use of the word 'maybe' [in the final exchange] both releases the protagonists from a certain heterosexual future and suggests the possibility of a non-heterosexual future, positioning both futures on equal terms" (2014, 53). Uncertainty and unruliness are semantic features of incipient literature, as they make more casual engagements with abject sexuality more acceptable.

As the gay liberation movement begins to gain traction, the shape of incipient representations begins to change. A 1975 novel by Umberto Saba, *Ernesto*, narrates a tricker engagement with incipiency through the precocious Ernesto, who willingly engages in a sexual affair with an older man who is grateful for the attention, though the capricious attitude of the young Ernesto leaves the older man devastated. The novel ends with Ernesto finding someone his own age, Ilio, whom Ernesto is taken with; Saba writes, "With Ilio's answer—with everything about the day—Ernesto felt in seventh heaven. The boy's proximity seemed to be emanating a sweet warmth. He would never be without it again" (2017, 99). The narrative, again, leaves the reader with a sense of uncertainty as to the shape of the connection between the boys; even as the author brings them close, it is important never to

speak the name of their desire. A few years later in 1982, Edmund White would publish a more explicit text with *A Boy's Own Story*, a semi-autobiographical novel that explores the developing romantic sensibilities of a fourteen-year-old boy. The rhetoric of White's novel is far more direct in naming homosexuality for what it is, as well as for exploring that 'homosexual' as a category was a cultural one, not a sexual one. At one stage, the boy remarks to himself, "I see now that what I wanted was to be loved by men and to love them back but not to be homosexual" (2016, 182). Even as literature moves into more assured spaces of sexual representation, there is an eschewing of more formal categories of homosexuality[15]. It might be argued that this happened because there was not a diversity of formal homosexual identities that exists under neoliberal capital, but it must also stand to reason that a homosexual life was still considered to be unliveable.

More contemporary examples of this literature negotiate different uncertainties of homosexual life, becoming more concerned with the intersections of sexuality with class, gender, and race. One of the more poignant examples is Édouard Louis' 2014 debut novel, *The End of Eddy,* which considers the shame associated with abject sexuality in working-class France. Louis writes about the betrayal of a body, where one fights against the compulsion of abjection because it would be safer and easier to be heterosexual, and Eddy becomes frustrated with the refusal of his body to cooperate. This return to the idea of compulsion, as described by Gide, evidences that writers are still fighting against what is nature, what is the natural order, and what is social. Another critical example of contemporary incipiency is in Phillipe Besson's 2017 novel *Lie With Me*. A trend becomes obvious in this text about the genre of incipiency. The reader is given two characters; one is hopelessly homosexual, unable to resist the pull of bodily desire and the other, generally, the one more masculinely coded, flirts with abjection, but his incipiency ends with a turn back towards a normative heterosexual life. This masculine/feminine dichotomy in incipient literature is inevitably tied up in class and the expectations of local culture and work. To move away from French literature, Ocean Vuong provides an excellent representation of incipiency in *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* (2019). Vuong's narrator considers the world of a Vietnamese immigrant and his relationship to the social and cultural worlds he is embroiled in. Where French examples were tied up in class and shame, Vuong's novel focuses on how race and anxiety become related to sexuality. Vuong writes, "Because

[15] Given that the setting of *A Boy's Own Story* is the 1950s, this resistance of the category of homosexual is not done in response to the early stages of the AIDs crisis, and the declining public and political opinion of public homosexuality.

freedom, I am told, is nothing but the distance between the hunter and the prey" (4), betraying the socialisation of violence that some people will always be the target of harm, to be consumed by something stronger[16].

This sense of being pursued, of living on borrowed time, is a feature, as well, of incipient narratives written in Australia. Novels like the work of Jay Carmichael, *Ironbark* (2018) and *Marlo* (2022) explore the ways in which young Australian men who grow up in rural Victoria engage with their sexual abjection. Both narratives frame coming-to-terms with sexuality as a barrier to growing up, which is another common theme in incipient literature, but this idea was theoretically fleshed out by Halberstam in *The Queer Art of Failure*, yet incipiency as a theoretical cannot answer whether growing up is something that should be capitulated to or moved on from. The intersection of sexuality and race is also developed in Australian literature, most often by Middle-Eastern, Greek, and Macedonian writers, fleshing out the complexities of whiteness when the ideal form of whiteness is Anglo-Germanic. Michael Mohammed Ahmad unpacks these issues in his novel *The Lebs* (2018), and Peter Polities does it in *Down the Hume*. Both novels are similar to Christos Tsiolkas' *Loaded* (1998) in that the pressures of culture and masculinity weigh heavy on the development of a homosexual identity are the primary focus. Interestingly, this relationship between sexuality and gender works to develop an Australian sense of what it is to possess a 'down-low' or tacit homosexuality that is heavily racialised and gendered. Nigel Featherstone's *Bodies of Men* (2019) adds to this canon of literature as well, through an excavation of sexuality, masculinity and the Australian ANZAC mythology (of Australian and New Zealander soldiers). Seemingly, Australian incipient literature comes to be more focused on the relationship between sexuality and gender, something that becomes a more prescient issue as the category of homosexuality proliferates and becomes productive and consumable.

Consumable Gayness

Foundational to homonormative politics is a desire for a future that is expressed by participation in the heterosexual regulatory regimes of marriage and parenthood, itself manifested by queer optimism. This attachment may seem counter-intuitive for queer people as if it were an erosion of the benefits of queerness, but it needs to be stressed that there is no

[16] Other examples of literature of incipiency includes: John Boyne's *The Absolutist* (2011), Yukio Mishima's *Confession of a Mask* (1949), Denis Theriault's *The Boy Who Belonged to the Sea* (2015), Madeline Miller's *The Song of Achilles* (2011), Peter Cameron's *Someday This Pain Will Be Useful to You* (2007), Tom Lennon's *When Love Comes to Town* (1993).

shame in desiring to reduce harm, insecurity, and injuriousness. However, homonormative politics sits at a precipice wherein what was once a deliberate movement to ensure safety is now poised to become the default logic of homosexuality. Futurity, as Jose Esteban Munoz argues, is both a risk and a threat; "heterosexual culture depends on a notion of the future … but that is not the case for different cultures of sexual dissidence" (2009, 49). For Munoz, the value of queerness is that it can be lived and enjoyed in the present without needing to guarantee itself a tomorrow, as opposed to heterosexuality, which must constantly defer the future through reproduction. At this point in the twenty-first century, homosexuality has no determining logic, which demands it must either defer the future through reproduction or resist the social order by enjoying the liveness provided by its sexual dissidence. The reproduction of this choice for every queer subject provides the illusion of the performance of the agency; here, an illusion is stressed, as homonormativity (acting as an agent of neoliberalism) persists in its attempt to undermine queerness and subsume all homosexual identities under it. Therefore, the most indicative of twenty-first century homonormativity is the emergence of queer complacency, which suggests that homonormativity should be the assumed subjectivity for all queer-identifying people. Productions of sexuality in more popular literature fall under this description of queer complacency, articulating the neoliberal need for surety in markets. This literature might be described as *FagFic*.

In a discussion of heteroflexibility, Jane Ward argues that "among the many privileges of whiteness, the power to both normalize and exceptionalize one's behaviour, including one's 'discordant' sex practices, is central" (2015, 21). The result is that homonormativity drives to pull gayness out of desire and to reproduce it within a floating signifier of homosexuality, producing an ephemeral gay culture that can be produced, engaged with, and consumed: a simulacrum of sexuality. While the previous statement might be considered an almost damning reprimand of contemporary homosexual culture, it, in many ways, represents a necessary shift that occurred to protect the identity of the homosexual, to protect its endangered status as different. What is created then is a 'way of being' homosexual, which extends beyond the engagement of desire; it creates a 'scene' on which homosexuality can be performed where heterosexuality can be excluded. Though the exclusion of heterosexual counterparts must be stressed as being the privilege of white homosexuals who can drift in and out of the realm of dominant social exclusion themselves, though it has been a popular discourse to diagnose homosexuality as a racialized minority (Mumford 2011), what that discourse fails to consider is the different ways in which oppression is exerted on the bodies of the oppressed. White gays are always-already

presumed to be heterosexual, and it is their sexual difference that becomes the site of difference. This switch point is exerted on the grounds of abject cultural behaviour, acting outside the realms of acceptable sexual behaviour. Gays of colour cannot, in some ways, be homonormative because their bodies are always-already stigmatized, in that they are always-already presumed to be a colour and therefore considered to be essentially less than the white majority. This is problematised further by the complicated relationship racialized minorities have to masculinity, whereas white homosexuals are granted the privilege of normativity as their bodies only come to be stigmatized through their sexuality and status as 'out,' a notion which is itself reproduced through popular culture.

The importance of popular culture to the perpetuation of contemporary gay culture cannot be understated, as it is through narratives perpetuated by popular culture that young homosexuals learn the ways in which they need to reorient themselves to become gay. Given that homosexuality is not predictably reproduced like in religion or ethnicity, it must find other ways to bestow emerging subjects with a sense of culture (Halperin, 2011). Richard Dyer elucidates the ways in which textual constructions of homosexuality have created rifts in queer subjectivities, "work that sought to establish the continuity of lesbian/gay identity across time and culture seemed to be imposing the way lesbian/gay sexuality is for 'us' now upon the diversity and radical differences of both the past and 'other' (non-white, Third World) cultures and often eliding the differences between lesbians and gay men" (1991, 186). The elision of differences is something that Heather Love has attached to the politics of gay liberation and homonormativity as an agenda of reading for positive representation in the past at the cost of queer negative affect. Dyer is attempting to excavate around the politics of representation by calling into question the role of authorship in the production of textual homosexuality; Dyer advocates that "what is significant is the authors' material, social position in relation to discourse, the access to discourses they have on account of who they are" (1991, 188). In effect, what Dyer is arguing for is a calling into question *who* is producing and what is the discursive and ideological position of those producers, which becomes a significant question as homosexual representation becomes more visible in popular culture.

Visible sexualities are how the question of consumable sexualities emerges as "sexual statuses, populations, behaviours, and so on, all get processed through popular culture. Some become visible in it, others are rendered invisible; some are celebrated or treated as legitimate, others are denigrated or delegitimated" (Gamson 2011, 27). Of note is that this is an entirely occidental phenomenon attributed to capitalist cultures. Michele Aina Barale has

argued that, "homosexuality—lesbianism—is 'good' just so long as it is useful in maintaining heterosexuality. Lesbian sexuality is permissible only when it is available for heterosexuality's consumption" (1991, 236). For Barale, homosexuality is reproduced under the dominant as 'Similar' by refiguring their bodies as bodies of desire through the reinforcement of traditional gender roles. Lee Edelman's notion of *homographesis* anticipates the trouble of representing abjection. Edelman defines the act of writing homosexuality into the tradition of Western metaphysics wherein the body of the homosexual becomes determined; in a sense, it is a *being*, not a *becoming* (1994). The specific concern of *homographesis* is that it "would name a double operation: one serving the ideological purposes of a conservative social order intent on codifying identities in its labour of disciplinary inscription, and the other resistant to that categorization, intent on *de*-scribing that the order has so oppressively *in*scribed." (Edelman 1994, 10). Homosexuals create a set of corporeal signifiers of difference (ephemera) in an attempt to constitute their sex and desire as 'Similar,' by defining their difference as being entirely physical. The result of this is a burdening sex with significance and signification, imbued and legitimated by 'love,' delegitimated by profligacy. Yet, it may also be because, as Edelman articulates, "the homosexual, in such a social context, is made to bear the stigma of writing or textuality *as his identity*, as the very expression of his anatomy, by a masculinist culture eager to preserve the authority of its own self-identity through the institution of a homographesis whose logic of legibility, of graphic difference, would deny the common 'masculinity,' the common signifying relation to maleness, of gay men and straight men alike" (1994, 12)[17]. Such is the significance of Barale's definition of the 'Similar,' as it posits that, for homosexuals, the opposite of the Other is not the Same. Homosexuality, in its desire to reduce harm through acceptability, has discovered that by positing itself as similar to heterosexuality but by critically denouncing itself by assuming the burden of stigma as their identity, can become suitably legible to a heteronormative and masculinist social order.

While *homographesis* may account for the ways in which homosexuality bears the responsibility of its textual representations, the idea of performativity is needed in order to extend it out towards the performance of bodies within space, where the assuming of gay ephemera to wear on the body, functions as a way of presenting legible homosexuality to the public, presenting and performing something which can be consumed as gay. Consumption is

[17] For an example of the ways in which compulsory heterosexuality can negotiate complex relationships with same-sex desire through the disavowal of homosexuality as Other read Jane Ward's 2015 book *Not Gay*, which serves as a comprehensive account of same-sex desire and relations between straight identifying (White) men.

not by the individual who wears it but by the individual outside who views it, the individual who demands that all bodies should be 'knowable.' In a discussion of the theory of José Esteban Muñoz, Judith Butler argues that Muñoz rewrote queer theory by stating, "the performative will be neither a single act nor a series but something that happens, and not just for one person but for many, taking place through a stage, a staging in time, a staging that may or may not involve a proscenium" (2018, 2). Homosexuality used to be something that occurred through a sexual act in bathhouses, public parks, public toilets, and other subaltern spaces shown in darkness and anonymity, but in the twenty-first century homosexuality is something that can be expressed through culture, like music, film, and television, as well as sartorial choices and bodily performance. This draws a distinct line between what is a performance of acceptable homosexuality versus what is a performance of unacceptable homosexuality, where to perform unacceptable homosexuality is perceived by the social order as an act of violence that can be responded to with discipline, further illustrating the precarious nature of homosexual performance and textuality and the desire to move into a state of exception.

The dual wielding of the 'Similar' and homographesis illustrates how the genre of *FagFic* emerges under neoliberalism. *FagFic,* a portmanteau of faggot and fiction, works to formalise consumable homosexuality by stripping it of its complicated, diseased, and promiscuous past. In neoliberal literature, the homogenisation of identity, what can be attributed to the similar (or equally to Byung-Chul Han's 'the same'), seeks to erode difference as a way of introducing surety to markets. Predictable identities are easier to sell to, to profit from, yet because difference cannot be entirely eradicated, Neferti X. M. Tadiar terms "acceptable equilibrium" which defines the borders between "subjects and nonsubjects of a neoliberal regime of governmentality and political rationality" (2013, 22). *FagFic*, through homographesis, provides an acceptable plane of identification for homosexuals in popular literature that does not alienate more dominant market categories. The effect this has on incipiency is that *FagFic* begins to delineate a new pattern for gay coming-to-terms and coming-of-age, which becomes the model across the social order for dictating the emergence of new homosexual identities.

Queer Complacency

The emergence of consumable homosexual identities poses a problem, not necessarily because homosexual identities should or should not be consumable, but rather because it

posits the expectation that all homosexual identities should be consumable, in turn suggesting that any unconsumable identity is somehow improper. The surrender to heterosexuality by homosexuality represents the desire for security exemplified by the movement into the state of exception, but is a movement into the state of exception possible for homosexuals? Arguably, no. The insult and harm incurred by bodies within the state of siege, that place of the Other, is relentless and impossible to shoulder so desiring a place within the state of exception is not an unreasonable desire, but that is not what is granted. What is instead possible is a move into the state of inquiry, characterised by the emergence of queer complacency.

A developing sense of homosexual visibility that emerged throughout the sixties and seventies can be tied to what Jasbir Puar identifies as homosexuals being branded with an 'outlaw' status (2007). This proprietary recognition of the homosexual's right to gather as a People developed out of the capitalist view that homosexuals were an untapped monetary resource, given that they didn't have families and their perceivably large disposable incomes could be used on the high street rather than the back alley (Duggan, 2002). While this perspective is still debatable, given that the gay community was still nascent and unorganised, homosexuality itself was not considered cohesive enough to form the basis of an identity category, and homosexuality was still largely defined by and attached through negativity through the forces of shame and insult. The emergence of the outlaw status signifies the movement of the homosexual into the state of inquiry (though Puar argues that it is a movement into the state of exception), as what follows is that the homosexual subject is still prevented full legal recognition, nor are they made culturally permissible, what does emerge is the right to work and the right to consume, which are not necessarily civil rights so much as they are capital rights, the right to make money and the right to spend money. This is a critical development given that the goal of capitalist societies is to eliminate the precarious subject, either by integrating into the social order the Other who can be neutralised or the expulsion of the Other who cannot.

The Other who has been successfully neutralised and depoliticised in effect can live in the heteronormative social order with few problems and little contention as their participation in that social order is dependent on their ability to render their bodies invisible. Consequently, the ability to render a body invisible results in the production of other bodies as visible, where to be invisible is to benefit from being considered a generic person, but in turn, produces the need to define that generic personhood against that which should be considered Other. It is at this point that the distinctions of homonormativity and

homonationalism emerge. Homonormativity, through its attachments to upward mobility, seems to desire the expression of superior acceptable homosexuality demonstrable through its pursuit of marriage, adoption and working rights, positioning itself as more desirable and superior to forms of homosexuality that do not pursue those same rights. Homonationalism differentiates itself by being concerned more with racial and ethnic superiority, not through violent forms of racism, but rather through support of national agendas of oppressing ethnic and racial Others. However, both of these terms exist to describe radical extremes of homosexual subjectivity but do not accurately qualify the general lived experience of homosexuals who are neutralised and depoliticised, though it does illuminate the existence of a duality in homosexual subjectivity, "this duality creates an abiding conflict between those who demand the freedom to be otherly and those who pursue the right to be normal" (Goldstein 11). The demands that are placed on a subject who desires the 'right to be normal' are extreme and require that they abide by the social order and the hegemonic demands that result from it.

Queer complacency is symptomatic of the Other who can be neutralised, the Other who desires the 'right to be normal,' since homosexuality is not an acceptable 'agential' subjectivity, it must perform normativity by participating in the heterosexual life cycles of work, family, and inheritance. What is represented in queer complacency is the taken-for-granted status of being 'out,' as for the homonormative subject, being out represents no immediate threat to their personal physical or emotional safety. Emergent within these issues is the competing space for representation between those who are negative and those who are complacent, given as such because the political motivations between the two posit politics of outness differently. In the twenty-first century, then, it is possible to see how outness becomes consubstantiated with recognition, not only in the literal sense where to be 'out' is to signal how a body is to be framed and recognised, but in the legal and constitutional sense, where one must be 'out' in order to receive the little rights afforded to homosexuals. A closeted person cannot be 'gay married,' nor can a closeted person pursue legal action against discrimination as any legal act would demand that their body be recognised as homosexual. Though as such, it becomes critical to realise what it means to ask questions on behalf of the unrecognised subject; Butler proposed this issue in *Frames of War*, 'Indeed, the "we" who asks such questions for the most part assumes that the problem is a normative one, namely, how best to arrange a political life so that recognition and representation can take place' (2015, 138). Butler's concern is that any attempt to bring forth issues of representation or recognition runs the risk of being complacent, given that any form of representation is

brought forth in order to be consumed by an audience. These forms of representation become susceptible, reduced, not to discursive logic, but to feeling, 'with the possibility of being excited by imagining the other's excitation, with the temporary suspension of the distinction between one's own desire and the desire imagined' (Butler 2018, 3). What occurs from this contact of representation poses a risk still, as the performance of representation can still be consumed.

In a way, the consumption of identities becomes the critical feature of queer complacency. A fracturing of queerness by bringing forth discursively representable identities, an act of homographesis, the writing of queerness onto the body. Complacency acts to regulate the legitimation of desire, wherein homonormative formations of sexuality pursue the consumption of happiness, love, hope, and other forms of *better-ness*, desiring only to give representation to acceptable subjects whose own optimism makes real the optimism the homonormative subject experiences. Queer complacency can be further defined as the rejection of difficult and unruly forms of queerness that obstruct normative and consumable queer subjects from attempting to move into the state of exception. The complacent pursuit of *better-ness* acts as a method of securing the precarious subject; Butler terms this experience as being a form of *vicarious* life, 'susceptible to another, registering each other at a level that is less concerned with establishing truth than with sensing what might be felt over there … speaking of that desire to yet another person gives it the status of a shared reality' (2018, 3). Vicariousness and the pursuit of *better-ness* are poised simply as a way to reduce harm by acclimating to the forms of political recognition already afforded; this comes with the danger of resisting representation to still subjugated subjectivities which are more violently harmed; it is possible then to conflate the notion of queer complacency with queer optimism, a diminished border between hope and ignorance that reduces harm to some subjects and increases violence to others.

Fabulous Individualism and Queer Neoliberal Literatures

To be a neoliberal subject is to adhere to certain social expectations and to enact cultural mythologies; one of the most important of these is the idea of rugged individualism, which is to be strong and self-sufficient. Rugged individualism under neoliberalism is related closely to virtue and responsibility as the proper way to be an individual (Esposito & Finley 2014); the argument is continued by defining this style of individualism as being virtuous, for Esposito and Finley, "a virtuous citizen is one that is self-reliant, assumes personal

responsibility for his/her own problems [only insofar as wealth and success are concerned], and demands or expects as little as possible from others, especially from government. This ideal version of a neoliberal subject is consistent with the notion of 'rugged individualism'—i.e., the type of individual who embodies the American pioneer ethic, steps up to any challenge, and lifts him/herself 'up by his/her boot straps'" (86). In the case of the neoliberal homosexual, homonormative subjects who acclimate to these demands, their bodies embody a fabulous individualism. In this fabulous individualism, a homonormative subject models themselves off of new mythologies of exceptional gayness, whether this be figures like Madonna, Kylie Minogue, Neil Patrick Harris, Ellen Degeneres, Whitney Houston, Christopher Isherwood, Rock Hudson, Gore Vidal, and so on and so forth. These models create representations of gayness that help to stabilise queer signification, but it also ties into Jasbir Puar's notion of homonationalism, creating a brand of homosexuality that "operates as a regulatory script not only of normative gayness, queerness, or homosexuality but also of racial and national norms that reinforce these sexual subjects" (Puar 2007, 2). It is this slow unpicking of homosexuality from queerness that finds Pride parades being distanced from protest to this violent history of the AIDS crisis being forgotten, where a subject picks themselves up by their jockstrap.

To give narratives of this fabulous individualism a name is an attempt at reorienting discussions of this literature, to attempt to delineate between literatures that pander to normative representations and those that engage in the challenging task of representing queerness. But despite this lofty goal, some jest needs to be indulged in here by way of theorising the possibility that contemporary gay literature has taken on features that need to be cynically labelled as being *faggot fiction* (FagFic, for brevity). In turn, contemporary obsessions with homonormativity and the exceptional homosexual subject of equal rights for marriage and parenting have produced accompanying narratives of utopian gay subjects who are at liberty to live their lives the way that their parents did. Such an obsession is always guilty of producing, as an effect, phobic stereotypes of gayness that can be deployed to craft these narratives of exceptional subjects. FagFic, then, is a neoliberal literary genre that seeks to construct a life outside politics, activism and the damage of the AIDS crisis as a way of producing 'clean' and naïve homosexual subjects who are interested in reproducing the heterosexual life cycle and cultures.

Arguably, the genre of FagFic is most prevalent in young adult literatures, where the central concern of the narrative is the coming-to-terms of bodily and sexual difference, and the representation of developing bodies that are contextualised as outside of official histories

and are negotiating for their compromised position within the social order. The effect of a genre of FagFic on these narratives is that contemporary characters have a preoccupation with reducing the harm addressed to them by the social order, as well as the experience of hurtful and damaging affects and feeling, to approximate nil. The representation of such a preoccupation is then always the inhabiting of a queer subjectivity that is exceptional (and therefore, palatable) to heterosexist hegemonies. Characters then turn to ideating the ways in which they figure their queerness as palatable to their parents and peers, but also, while maintaining the secrecy of the closet, determine the most acceptable attachments for their affections. Perhaps this is most apparent in a novel like Becky Albertalli's 2015 novel *Simon Vs. The Homo Sapiens Agenda*, where the gay protagonist, Simon, views himself as being 'just like you[18],' his attempt here is to articulate that every aspect of his identity is normative and that he is only held back by his sexual and romantic desires. The consequence of such a narrative structure is that sexuality and sexual difference, although the narrative wants nothing more than to normalise it, becomes the site of conflict not just for Simon, but his friends and family as well, as Simon's attempts to come out are continually compromised by a neoliberalism that disavows his attempts to inhabit a homosexuality that has not properly reckoned with its position within the social order.

Yet without becoming embedded in cynical logics, arguably what is actually happening in these forms of FagFic is that "either subjects are physically prevented from making any significant choices by the dearth of meaningful options, or their subjectivity has already been delimited by the ideological schemas in which they find themselves" (Elliot 2013, 85). Which is to say that contemporary literary subjects, so determined by the dominating logics of neoliberalism, become narratively tied up in an abundance of choice, or of having no choice whatsoever. It is the latter point that is most common in contemporary gay literature, though, as characters are often beleaguered by the inability to live a life that does not cause them harm; in the case of Simon, he is so consumed by the pressure to live an acceptably 'out' life that is not construed as queer, that he almost obsessively internalises shame, but it is not a shame of *being* gay, instead it is a shame of being perceived as feminine. It is this construction of gayness, one that turns away from its own history, forgetting the hyper-masculine body-builders and leather daddies (figures that are now deeply tied to the AIDS crisis), that attempts to communicate itself as being as fabulous individual

[18] Such a direct address like this, is part of a conversational style of narrative that directly implicates the reader in the narrative, forcing them to construct a readerly identity in which a character that may or may not be different actively attempts to destabilise the difference already contained in the reader/text subject/object boundary.

(the type often seen on *Will & Grace*), that attempts to convince the world that it is clean, innocent, and above all, naïve of what it is to have a queer sexuality. Incidentally, it is these new ideologies of gayness that are critiqued and unpacked by Garth Greenwell in his novel *Cleanness* (2021). Without being too detracting, it is possible that through neoliberalism, that FagFic attempts to erase the queer affective commons, something Heather Love warns us of in her essay on compulsory happiness.

It is here that tenderness towards the object of study must be deployed, this is because neoliberalism is a mellifluous force, having come in on the back of capitalism, its ability to subsume the logic of everyday under market logic has been seamless. To take it to an extreme degree "we might say that neoliberalism both does and does not exist. It exists as a normative force that motivates and defines the contemporary production of meaning and value, but it doesn't exist if we can fully appreciate its post-normativity" (Huehls, 7). This normalising force goes so far as to, as Rachel Greenwald Smith posits, create a contractual logic between texts and the readers, seemingly following through on the promise of the death of the author[19], readers whose time is largely accounted for between work and upkeeping their body so that they may continue working, only read to fulfil a contract – to learn something about the world, or to learn something about themselves (Greenwald Smith 2015). This argument is furthered by stating that novels and texts cannot help but fulfil this agreement so long as they are enjoyed. For Greenwald Smith,

> Novels that follow through on their emotional promises, then, reinforce neoliberalism in two ways: they concede that literary dynamics can and should mirror market dynamics by allowing the contractual logic to proceed without question; and in obeying that contract, they often strengthen emotional beliefs that underpin neoliberal subjectivity. (48)

This kind of theorising is not an accident, it builds on what is now over two decades of work on neoliberalism, conceptualising that the role of texts changes in a world where everything is subsumed under the logic of an exchange, but also the vast resources of the Internet become increasingly available. The great power of neoliberal texts is their ability to provide a surface for emotional identification, being an obvious extension of identity politics, which encourages a culture of reading that "allows readers to feel more fully emotionally affirmed –

[19] This is, indeed, a bold claim, and to investigate would be to discover that this is not the case at all. The opposite can be argued, in that authors are more alive than ever in their works – through the use of social medias, something encouraged by publishing houses, authors can create direct connections with their audience, answer questions, revise information, and world-build outside of the text. Yet, they also deploy their bodies as palimpsests, rendering their position as author as textual.

while the feeling of connection with the man and the boy that is cultivated by the novel allows readers a sense of greater connection with others whose feelings resemble their own" (2015, 55). These textual entanglements with emotional identification, which are always problematised by queerness, provide access to sublimated structures of feeling and the social order finds itself with the tools to determine, and potentially globalise, emotional responses. This has resulted in fascinating relationships with emotion and affect. For instance, it has become popular that individuals called out for racist behaviour can leverage their feeling ashamed as the person calling them out as having deliberately shaming them.

In speaking of the structures of affect and feeling we often forget that affects are themselves, structured. We cannot control how the intensities of affects arrive — affects are sticky and unpredictable, but when they do arrive the ways that affect, feeling, and emotion move through us are structured, sublimated responses that are much more predictable. Take for instance the moment of same-sex eroticism, the intensity of that instance causes pleasure, maybe happiness, but the sublimated response to that pleasure is to feel shame — a punishment for taboo desires. Such as it is, all of the affects under discussion in this thesis begin with a touch. It is the instantiation of the touch that triggers incipiency, and it is the touch that returns that manifests the bodily responses that are described later as being foundational affect. Literature has the power to do this, it has always had the power to do this as a form of communication – and communication is sovereign where "a sovereign author addresses sovereign humanity beyond the servitude of the isolated reader" (Bataille 2012, 161), but where in the past the author would deny themselves, deny their "own peculiarities in favour of the work, at the same time that he denies the peculiarity of the reader in favour of reading" (Bataille 2012, 161). There has been a change under neoliberalism where writing is no longer an idealised version of 'the work,' it is driven by the need for money so that one may survive and contribute to neoliberal capitalism, and reading is no longer reading, it is an emotional contract of pleasure so that a reader can recuperate and continue to contribute to neoliberal capitalism.

Yet, this has never stopped literary texts from being complex formal and ideological entities, but more so, these ideological texts are objects that are filled with feeling and emotion that need to be studied for the ways they attempt to implicate the reader. As Peter Vermeulen argues, "*as linguistic constructs*, literary works cannot dwell in uncodified affect … Literary works are defined by restless interplay between emotional codifications and affects that inevitably escape them" (2015, 9). This leaking of literary feeling and affect from the text is a product of the same reason that affect is present in the text: that affects are sticky.

While the novel, and indeed all creative pursuits, have always had this ability to affect the reader, the contemporary novel does so through neoliberalism, and as Rachel Greenwald Smith has stated, now forming a contract with the reader to deliver on an emotional experience. Yet, as Vermeulen continues, "the friction between emotional codification and affective solicitation marks all literary works" (2015, 10); while this understanding bases itself around affect being 'raw' and emotion being 'filtered,' it is not a valid position to uphold. To permit a deviation, a text can indicate to us that a literary scene is romantic or 'sexy,' or any other manner of the basic emotional unit, but the reader cannot help themselves when reading it if they feel different if, for instance, they were to read a scene of sickly and indulgent romance, the reader could be forgiven for experiencing embarrassment better described, as is becoming the theoretical trend, cringe. Perhaps this is the intention behind Vermeulen's argument, that the tension between 'emotional codification' and 'affective solicitation' occurs because the text cannot determine how the scene will be received by the reader, even as the text attempts to tell them. For Vermeulen, and Greenwald Smith, narrative genres seem to function by soliciting a reader's emotive expectations, but queer readings have always failed to meet these expectations, and queer readers often find themselves implicated in the text differently. This is also what can be meant by affective solicitation, as the queer reader's own experiences and affective life cause them to relate to a given text differently.

Texts are indeed objects of feeling; they contain within their pages a vast archive of affective knowing that readers all arrive at differently. All the novels under consideration in this thesis involve an instance of a body responding both physically and culturally to their environment, changing so that they might move through the world while reducing the harm addressed to them, these texts will come to be known as novels of incipiency, narrating and representing the coming-to-terms of bodily difference of coming-of-age queer subjects. This is a leap forward from FagFic, as a genre of queer fiction that desires to return to gay affective genealogy by positioning, through realist form, historical events and times, and the past as a point of departure into queer experience. As such, this form of contemporary literature treats the novel as the quiet space of representation which creates moments of narrative opening that tell alternative stories of identity. The characters of these novels are struggling with their improperness and, in their struggle, manage to create an affective vocabulary of queerness. This moment of incipiency makes for a compelling study as it distinguishes between what is an epistemology of the closet and the ontology of queer subjectivation. Jack Halberstam was undeniably correct when he said that "childhood, as

many queers in particular recall, is a lesson in humility" (2011, 27). To be a child is to be putting feet wrong and having them corrected constantly – it is the experience of this correcting that is 'particularly' humiliating for queers and marks for itself the borders of the affective field queer people stumble into, fumble through, and when reading texts, get sideswiped by. Given this knowledge and understanding, a study into the affective world of queer children through incipiency becomes important.

The contemporary gay novel, under neoliberalism, comes to be about the limits of homonormativity and homonationalism to recuperate the precariousness of social exclusion and a friable social contract. About queer subjects feeling for the limits of acceptability. Yet where "the precarity novel constitutes crisis at the ongoing an ordinary condition of narrative itself" (Connell 2021, 36), gay novels aren't ever hinged on crisis. Rather, they frame failure as the ongoing and ordinary condition of the narrative itself, framing the exceptional, or what, despite its best efforts at resistance, is always rendered as exceptional. This is largely due to, as discussed above, the relationship contemporary gay literature has to the AIDS crisis as all contemporary gay novels are written in the wake of that crisis – whether they manage to discuss it or elide it, the spectre of AIDS is a contingent condition of all gay literature. But literature is important to queerness; as Tyler Bradway argues, "queerness is shaped by passionate attachments to certain forms, and certain forms make queer orientations available for readers" (2021, 712), and the role of the writer hasn't completely changed and it can still be, as Bataille described, about 'the work.' As Bradway continues "…contemporary writers turn to narrative to explore the relational forms that queerness takes in a historical moment when it is less clear what counts as queer" (2021, 713), which in the context of this chapter, we can take to mean that queer writing, torn between normative representations like FagFic and other more complex engagements with the inner life of queerness as in novels of incipiency, help contemporary audiences, through emotional investments and appeals, to discern their relationship with queerness.

Chapter Two – Towards a Theory of Incipient Homosexuality

In reading for incipiency and its affects in texts, what is being analysed is the representations of precarious bodies and how those impacted bodies can be read through reparative textual engagements. The use of queer theory to read for this form of queerness is important, not only for the givenness of the subject of analysis but because it lays the groundwork for analysing the relationship between sexual subjectivity and power. In discussing how developing subjects are subject to the effects of heteronormative colonisation of their body, this colonisation perceives the queer child as having the power to expose the meaninglessness of social identities used in the comprehension of bodies. This thesis has crafted a new language for expressing the processes by which queer children negotiate subjectivity and identity in a hostile social world bent toward biopolitical manipulation and subsequent eradication of their desires. As Lee Edelman elucidates, the knowledge that "queerness, wherever it shows itself (in the form of catachresis), effects a counterpedagogy, refuting, but its mere appearance, the reality that offers it no place" (2017, 125), the queer child, or the incipient subject more broadly, can be held up as proof of the contingent nature of difference to humanity, one that owes its existence to a sensorial world where every intensity and sense can be experienced in an infinite myriad of potentialities that come to settle on the feeling body and define a bodies place within the world. Yet, as Edelman also argues, queerness is also a bad education, "the education that teaches us nothing but the nothing of the *thing which is not*" (2017, 125), where queerness inhabits the position of being the zero of the social order — as being nothing, as being a vacuum of meaning — the *thing which is not,* then the lessons of incipiency are not about giving subjects space to discover the relation of their desires to the world, but also that identity categories like 'gay,' 'lesbian,' 'trans*,' and 'bisexual' are ways of assuming abject sexuality without being rejected from the social order.

In the grand scheme of a heteronormative world, to affix one's queerness to identity is an attempt to affix oneself to the social order. Edelman warns us, though, that "homosexuality, in certain Western democracies, may be shedding (in part) its connection to queerness, continuing the process of normalization by which it mirrors and so reinforces dominant ideologies of social relation" (2017, …). This thesis traces the tension homosexuality experiences with queerness and normalisation and the pull between resistance or capitulation; as such, the depoliticisation of queer life is a prescient topic and concern

within queer communities, particularly as the backsliding of human rights achievements like gay marriage become immediate – yet it has been critical to look at the assumption of identities with generous eyes. To come-to-terms with abject sexuality can be difficult as it is the end of innocence; it also marks the end of childhood and the aggressive deployment of regulatory forces, like insult and education — even as those forces are already at work, the end of innocence makes a subject aware of their working — making the assumption of abject identities more difficult. This opened incipient subjects to the potential of negative registers, being the strategies employed by queer people that give them the power to rupture sociability and disturb the social order, providing queer subjects with the ability to assume these more normative identities and figure themselves as part of the social world. In reality, negative registers, labelled in this thesis as desublimation, disidentification, and *jouissance,* are socially meaningless actions exposing the social's constructedness and fragility.

Monsters and The(ir) Closet

The dominating theory of 'the closet' puts us at risk, as Kathryn Bond Stockton argues, of "the implied child in ellipsis (whatever child predates '… and that I became gay') is increasingly closer to (or one could say in danger of) community or clinical labels such as 'gay' or 'homosexual.'" (2009, 19). As Stockton goes on to argue, the child in ellipsis was more likely to be labelled as 'strange,' 'odd,' or 'weird,' the issue then with presenting sexual labels for children is that it operates as a method of colonising their unruly bodies and affixing them to a discursive mooring where their bodies can be appropriately framed. The act of labelling is also performative of pathologizing abject bodies and of recognising the presence of deviancy so as to enact strategies that may curtail such behaviour. A perfectly cynical position may take up the position that there is a neoliberal demand on young people to identify their sexualities so that we may begin to position their identities in market structures, to orient them toward LGBT-specific media, as a way of colonising them as homonormative subjects. But any theoretically paranoid position that takes as a given that the sexual identities of children *will* and *must* be colonised ignores the radical, subversive power of the unruliness of children, and it also takes for granted that that exists as a sexual desire instead of analysing the ways in which sexual desire may emerge as a result of the experience of bodily difference.

What do we put in the closet? Clothing, clutter, books, records, files … in essence, the closet is a space for useful items; we do not want to ruin the appearance of a room because it,

in some way, spoils the effect we are producing. All gay people, after they have come-to-terms with their sexuality, are placed within the closet by virtue of being required to disclose that sexuality to the public. This is a kind of 'ghettoing' of homosexuality that forces gay people to manage their sexuality and identity in relation to a more powerful and forceful heteronormative social order. Gay people are useful and productive to the Western social order; within the neoliberal system, they are perfect consumers, but their queerness is messy. Figuring them within the closet functions is a way of managing their usefulness and their messiness. But we cannot escape the reality that a closet is a hiding place; it is a place we go when we play games, it is a place we go when we are scared or angry, and it is a place of emotional excesses. The closet is also the place where monsters lurk. Children are told that the monster in the closet will not hurt them. They are told that the monster will not leave and that it will not emerge in the middle of the night and steal them away. Rather, the monster remains in the closet, as if it were trapped within its confines and only there by its own shame and emotional excesses. Is it possible, then, that the monster in the closet comes into existence as some *Gespenst*, a spectre or revenant which haunts the child, teaching them to fear all that the monster does and feels, to position it as ontologically and epistemologically distant and Other. Homosexuals might not be literal monsters in the closet, but for certain, they are put in the closet where they are freely allowed to be conflated with a monster, a pedagogical movement the value of which is substantiated by the heteronormative social order.

The closet also bears the dubious distinction of being furniture, of being an object we cannot communicate with, its shaping of us does not happen through text or speech. Like a table, our proximity to a closet offers us no particular feeling unless we are using it; if we are 'in the closet,' we aren't struck by any particularly strong feelings of metaphor; we don't feel as if it is a place for monsters, homosexuals don't see it as the place from which they emerged. What happens when an object is placed in the closet? Its value is frozen, hung up and denied the usefulness of being 'on hand.' A similar thing happens to homosexuals in the closet; they are tidied away, denied their agency, and effectively told that they are not as useful as they are. To say that they are 'denied agency' is not to suggest that they are made to be enslaved. What is meant by that is that a closeted homosexual does not bear the ability to make 'queer decisions'; they are denied the ability to inhabit a queer ontology or to be, even basically, oriented toward queerness. The positionality I am attempting to articulate here is that the homosexual does not 'closet' themselves. It is never a genuinely agential choice to be closeted; to be closeted is always a movement of power caused by the social order. Is being

in the closet a form of abjection of the self? Julia Kristeva describes the closet as abjection in so much as "all abjection is, in fact, recognition of the *want* on which any being, meaning, language, or desire is founded" (1982, 5); it is possible that it is. Yet, it is not completely true, as to be in the closet is to be *contra naturam*; it is to resist the experience of bodily desire, so in a personal sense, to be in the closet is abjection of the self only insomuch as an individual has abjected the experience of their desires. But to be in the closet also represents a resistance to becoming abject in the eyes of the social order. To obscure abject sexuality and perform heterosexuality acts as an almost double-bind of abjection between nature and society. This is because to remain closeted is to act contrary to the demands of the heteronormative social order and its expectations of what gayness will look like; to remain closeted is to exert some agency over the regulation of your sex. Anyway, the closet is one of the most effective regulatory tools of identity in culture and needs to be given more attention.

If it can be accepted that to be 'in the closet' represents a sort of disorientation, where a subject attempts to internally abject their sexuality so that they cannot themselves be abjected for that sexuality, then it becomes easy to see that: "disorientation involves contact with things, but a contact in which 'things' slip as a proximity that does not hold things in place, thereby creating a feeling of distance" (Ahmed 2006, 166). The closet[20] is in its own way, a form of exile which every homosexual is *forced* to endure, it is an subjective distance between the closeted homosexual and heterosexuals (even out homosexuals), and framing it as such gives more sense to the implicit physical movement of 'coming out.' But when is the closet instantiated? Is a homosexual always-already in the closet, or is the closet created only by the recognition of abject sexuality and its subsequent suppression? These are questions that eat away at the theorist of the closet who must attempt to understand that the closet is a lot of things at once; it is a place of safety, but it is also dangerous; it allows a subject to move through the world with ease, but it stunts their growth and prevents them from having a liveable life. The closet is a troubling and enigmatic space and the suggestion that a homosexual is always-already in the closet is to gesture toward the role of accusation and insult in informing discursive and textual representations of homosexuality and queerness,

[20] 'The Closet' is, in a way, a colonial narrative. To place racial and ethnic minorities in the closet is to place a condition on their sexuality that may not exist for them, and often stigmatises them in a way that alienates them from queer communities. The metaphysical articulation of the closet is a taken-for-granted structure. So while it may be useful to relate to certain bodies as being in-the-closet it should never be assumed that the closet is a lived experience for every homosexual subject. To read further on the subject, read Hammoud-Beckett, S. (2007). Azima ila Hayati – An invitation to my life: narrative conversations about sexual identity. *International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work*, *2007*(1), 29-39.

particularly as regulatory actions which damn effeminacy and aid in the production heteronormative masculinities.

Any act of coming out presupposes the existence of the closet. The act of coming out is itself a variable locution which aims at conveying a particular individuals orientation to their own sexuality as well as to social order. The locution of outness can then be anything from a word whispered in the dark with a confidant, to an announcement on the internet to an intended but unactualized audience. So regardless of a homosexual's subjects' position on their orientation, and comfort with their sexuality, the closet is framed as always-already present, as any declaration of sexuality is an act of coming out. The closet is then a metaphysical construction used to obfuscate an abject sexuality from the social order and used in order to force a homosexual subject into recognising their position of being abject and Other. But where does this construction end? The impact of contemporary social politics has meant that the social stigma surrounding homosexuality has diminished, a result of this is that children are now able to come-to-terms with their sexuality and are coming out at younger ages. Traditionally, the closet has been used to describe adults who deliberately obfuscate their sexuality for protection from shame and insult, but is this diagnosis suitable for a nine-year-old? A development of power through late capitalism has resulted in a complete reframing of what it means to be in the closet. Simply, the closet is no longer positioned as being a place for protection (though this is its fundamental action), the closet is a place of shame — the place where you go when you are ashamed of yourself, not afraid of what others will do to you. In effect, power in late capitalism has effectively shifted the responsibility of the closet from the social order to the abjected individual.

Seemingly, the construction of the closet is posited as oppression in the twenty-first century rather than the place of safety that it previously was. Yet, any narrative which cares for its protagonist must represent the perception of danger attached to being out, given that the forces of shame and insult are still significant in the formation of homosexual subjectivities, as opposed to demanding that being out is the only correct way to be a homosexual. Yet, if any act of coming out presupposes the closet, what is the suggestion made about the position of homosexuality that coming out is still necessary to form an acceptable homosexual identity, but to remain in the closet, resisting the pull of the social order, makes a homosexual unacceptable and presumed to be ashamed? As Stephanie D. Clare argues, "in the context of neoliberalism, one comes out not simply to be a normal lesbian or gay person but also, more generally, to be seen as a normal person" (2017, 19), the effect of which, "frames coming out as compulsory for acceptance" (2017, 20). The demand

that a homosexual recognises and owns an identity in order to be accepted into the social order is an important cultural shift, as it moves homosexuality out of the domain of desire and into culture, wherein an identity and markers of identity must be constructed around it in order to make it a stable category. In this scenario the only unacceptable homosexual identity is a non-identity which is assumed as a contrarian politics of social and sexual refusal, the choosing of which is made to be impossible given its unproductive nature. What the shift in the narration of homosexuality does reveal is that coming out has become laden with the enabling myths of neoliberalism, serving to reassert mythologies of the individual and upward mobility; in turn this demands that subjects will assume an identity which will make them productive bodies.

A by-product of this neoliberal interference is that, closetedness, becomes a sort of debility, which prevents subjects from engaging in society and culture fully. The reasserted emphasis on the importance of coming out also, as Clare argues, valorises heterosexuality as *the* norm and coming out is framed as a coming-to-terms with being outside of the norm, as self-acceptance. "In addition, in this framework, to not come out is to have a problem with one's self—not to have a social, cultural, or political problem. And finally, coming out is framed as belated, always already too late" (2017, 22). Such debilitation is used to make homosexuals feel as if they are falling behind, to rush them out of the closet and make them participate in economic processes[21]; the framing of closetedness as such does represent a significant failure in understanding what to be in the closet is. Eve Sedgwick has argued that "'closetedness' itself is a performance initiated as such by the speech act of silence — not a particular silence, but a silence that accrues particularly by fits and starts, in relation to the discourse that surrounds and constitutes it" (1990, 3). If the closet is actually instantiated by the awareness of an abject sexuality, then closetedness is created by, and perpetuated by, the silence which dealing with abject sexuality requires, as well as the coming-to-terms with that very abjectness.

Indeed, the work that is done by conceiving of the closet in this way, by taking it at its face, is to reposition the relationship we might have with the closet. Instead of figuring it as an absolute and constitutive aspect of homosexuality and homosexual becoming, this thesis wants to consider how the closet might not be part of that becoming at all. Realistically, what has been argued here is that 'the closet' as a metaphysical condition, is a very necessary tool

[21] The increasing commodification of queer processes like Pride as well as the co-option of queer icons and iconography are examples of the various ways in which capital is 'investing' in queer communities. For specific recent examples see Taylor Swift's music video for 'You Need to Calm Down,' or Calvin Klein's range of pride jockstraps and mesh tank-tops.

in the protection of developing homosexual subjects – and as argued by Carlos Ulises Decena in *Tacit Subjects* (2011) – the closet provides useful affordances for managing 'outness' for gay subjects. Yet, the theoretical work that is being achieved here is to place 'the closet' in an attachment genealogy, to trace the uses of 'the closet' and to define its limits, where:

> Attachment genealogy traces backward to locate and fill out the specific geographic and historical context from which that field disposition emerged. The scholar is then freed to perform the final step of attachment genealogy, that of elaborating the alternative scholarly priorities and feeling states the object generates. (Lim 2013, 31-32)

In the context of this thesis, the 'alternative scholarly priorities' are clear: 'the closet' is no longer an effective category for defining, or elaborating, the processes by which young homosexual subjects come-to-terms with their sexual subjectivity. What is required now is a new framework which can adequately account for the many variables in the emergence of subjectivity and the rendering of bodily difference.

Incipient Homosexuality and Subjectivity

The possession of a body is burden as all bodies must be determined and framed by the social order, a process which in turn occasions subjectivity. The problem with subjectivity is that it requires the presence of a hegemonic force, in the form of the social order, in order to bring that subjectivity into being. To be an 'I,' which is to exist as a subject, presupposes the event of having been subjected which is the logical formula of becoming that Judith Butler defines as being subjectivation. Subjectivation occurs where the subject is under the rule of a social order, Butler imagines this figuration as that of a master and a slave wherein the master "at first appears to be 'external' to the slave reemerges as the slave's own conscience" (1997, 3). For Butler, the subject and their very subjectivity are the effect of power in recoil as, phenomenologically speaking, in the same moment that we touch we are touched by something in return; it is that which acts upon us that informs and forms our subjectivity and intelligibility, effectively framing the body of the subject. The something in the case of subject formation is Power which creates and defines the limits of bodies by instructing how subjects give and receive the information which is bestowed by touch, effectively defining the limits of a subject's agency or capacity for agency[22]. To feel is to feel the Other, to feel all

[22] While there are some theorists like Butler who believe that the framing of a body by power defines our agency, some believe that it doesn't end there and that the feeling bestowed by touch defines our capacity for

that we are not. The Other is a sign that represents the impression of being, the critical function of which, the feeling of being, is not 'a mere given,' it is bestowed upon subjects through subjectivation and it is given because "if I feel, then I have been touched" (Butler 2015, 47), where touch is the integral component to subjectivity and its formation: "if I cannot be touched, then there is no object, no elsewhere, no outside, and I have become unutterable with the absence of touch" (2015, 46). To touch and to be touched constitutively mean that a subject is part of the world of the social order, yet just as we can touch, we can also be out-of-touch, risking that the subject may fall outside the social order.

In its own way, incipient homosexuality locates the young homosexual at risk of falling out-of-touch with the social order. The incipient homosexual, who in cultivating ipseity[23], encounters through 'incorrect' sexual attachments the self as Other and exceeds the teleology of normative growth. This conception is made possible given the body of any 'child' as colonised by heteronormative narratives of innocence. Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley have argued that, "the child is the product of physical reproduction, but functions just as surely as a figure of cultural reproduction. Thus, both the utopianism and the nostalgia invoked by the figure of the child are, in turn, the preferred form of the future" (2004, xiii). Suggested here is that the figure of the child, structurally, bears the weight of the future. The social order places upon them the expectation of reproduction. The effects of a homosexual incipiency do not take place during 'childhood,' itself a slippery and difficult category to define (since it varies widely with culture, ethnicity, education, social status), but this due to the experience of childhood being a queer experience, the queerness of which is absorbed under the discursive and ideological umbrella of *innocence*.

Kevin Ohi makes the radical suggestion that *innocence* is a way of accounting for the unruly and unsocialised bodies of children. Ohi argues that,

> To say that children aren't queer is a way of asserting that we know what children are and we therefore know what adults are. To argue that all children are queer, then, is not to argue that all children feel same-sex desire (which, for all I know, they do). Rather, it is to suggest that childhood marks a similar locus of impossibility, of murderous disidentification; the disidentification with childhood queerness presumes, in other words, to recognize it, and to recognize it by emptying it of reference to

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agency but not the limits of that agency. In this instance, to agree with Butler is to accept a both/and situation which ethically accounts for the presence of the non-human and the Other.

[23] Ipseity is a way of describing individual identity and selfhood which is separate to subjectivity and is separate to any process of subjectivation.

> anything but an incipient normativity. *Innocence* is the term through which this disidentification is achieved, the term that is deployed to contain the queerness of the child. (2004, 82)

Ohi's argument is a powerful one, the suggestion that in the eyes of adults (and, in turn, the social order), children are believed to have no agency, and the figure of the child is a careful discursive and ideological construction. The role of disidentification, in this instance, is a way of arguing for the ways in which the social order can potentially undermine the agency of children. As Javier Esteban Muñoz argues in *Disidentifications* (1999) "to disidentify is to read oneself and one's own life narrative in a moment, object, or subject that is not culturally coded to 'connect' with the disidentifying subject" (12). To the adult subject, a child is an object that cannot necessarily be communicated with until they have properly been subjected. Adults are not children; the bodies of adults have been thoroughly entrenched in processes of subjectivation. As such, they are only ever able to read themselves into the space of children, and they are unable to literally identify with children. For Muñoz, "disidentification is the third mode of dealing with dominant ideology, one that neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it; rather, disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology" (11). Ohi's argument becomes more interesting given the definition provided by Muñoz, as disidentification is a strategy employed by marginalised subjectivities to carve space for identification within the social order, yet Ohi argues that disidentification may be employed by the dominant as a strategy for recuperating the transgression of queerness.

Children, in the sense of the preceding argument, are placed in a nexus of being always-already incipient, as a set of constantly operating to colonise their unruly bodies. It is not wrong to speak of children as being unlimited sites of potential, but it is important to view that potential as being only ever insidious, a potential to be colonised, not to proceed with its own agency. Kathryn Bond Stockton has argued that "the gay child is not itself a singular notion. It is not an island of ferment, or torment, as a conception to itself or others" (2009, 8). Seemingly, Stockton is arguing that, in terms of incipiency, the gay child isn't produced in isolation; they do not become straight and then become gay through a separate process of indignant incipiency; incipient homosexuality is not a re-education process. It is tangential to incipient heterosexuality, as well as other forms of incipiency which form other minoritized subjectivities. The strident point that is being made here is that children, in their innocence and their queerness, are sites of unlimited potential for ideological colonization and processes of incipiency, a colonization that is vastly different from subjectivation, which

produces touching/feeling subjects, which substantiates and activates the 'I,' but the colonization of incipiency determines the discursive frame and affective orientation of any given subject.

All subjects endure some sort of incipiency as part of their subjectivation. Such various forms of socialization can be considered as processes of belonging, processes tightly woven into the world of affect, which substantiates the various ways in which they can act and be acted upon. Incipiency, then, takes on various shapes through temporal and geographical spaces, where some subjects may undergo significant economic incipiency, racial incipiency, sexual incipiency, or gendered incipiency. This is not to say that undergoing one type of incipiency excludes a subject from experiencing the others — this is, after all, the argument Kimberlé Crenshaw makes with intersectionality. The importance of arguing with incipiency is to open up the horizon of meaning, which defines affective relations to the world, where intersectionality defines social and political potentialities. When one considers incipiency, one is also calling into question the stratification of belonging and the ways in which affective relations are organised by the subject. In terms of intersectionality, such stratifications would work as a way of determining the biopolitical priorities of precarious populations. The relationship between incipiency and the stratifications of belonging is one of organising the planes of affect which define any given body's position in the world.

Strictly speaking, incipient homosexuality is nothing. Although it marks a definitive moment in the life cycle of the homosexual, there isn't any evidence to suggest that every queer-identifying person passes through it, though this is due to it being a process of queer *assujettissement*. What incipient homosexuality does term is the process by which a child moves from being a proto-gay child to becoming a homosexual. Stockton, in *The Queer Child*, defines 'the pattern' of incipiency as being a process that 'delineates for going-to-be-gay boys goes like this: not fitting in, same-sex attractions, "the deniable" becomes "undeniable," and "adoption" of a "sexual identity or label" — in other words, "…and then I became gay"' (2009, p. 19) It is through the 'child-in-ellipsis' that incipiency is best articulated. However, incipiency doesn't fit cleanly into the category of the queer child as it desires to describe the affective relations by which homosexual subjects come-into-being and come-to-terms with their sexuality. As such, incipiency is more interested in the experience of the closet as well as the affective forces of shame and insult, as opposed to Stockton's notion of the queer child, which categorises the process by which queer children come-into-being. Incipient homosexuality itself is an elusive term that has been taken for granted in the

work of queer theorists, most notably in Judith Butler's book *Undoing Gender* (2004). Butler argues that the inclusion of Gender Identity Disorder in *DSM IV* acts as the discursive and ideological way of scrutinizing incipient homosexuality, specifically for Butler, 'this diagnosis that has, for the most part, taken over the role of monitoring signs of incipient homosexuality in children assumes that 'gender dysphoria' is a psychological disorder simply because someone of a given gender manifests attributes of another gender or a desire to live as another gender' (p. 4-5).[24] Curiously, what is being argued for here is that incipient homosexuality, which can be seen as a process of coming-to-terms with difference, is not simply a time wherein the homosexual becomes comfortable with their sexuality, but it is also a time where the homosexual needs to discover the ways in which they will adapt their gender performance in order to feel most comfortable with their bodies and sexuality, this performance is, of course, influenced by the overarching effect of neoliberal ideology and discourse, which is deterministic in its production of bodies.

In the figure of the incipient homosexual, the closet is the silent and invisible space where queer children isolate themselves to come-to-terms with their sexuality. From the position of the closet, they can peer out and determine the right time to announce themselves to the world. The exit from the closet signals the adornment of not only a public sexual subjectivity but of an identity, which must be constantly reproduced in order for the sexual subject to remain intelligible within the neoliberal social order. This identification is a perforce of the regulatory regimes of neoliberalism, which demand that all bodies be rendered intelligible, yet, as Judith Butler warns, "identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes, whether as normalizing categories of oppressive structures or as the rallying points for a liberatory contestation of that very oppression" (1991, p. 3-4). This emphasises the importance of the closet in an age of neoliberalism as a space of relative security from oppressive structures of identity formation, in that it expresses the power in delaying coming-out in favour of coming-to-terms, desiring to make permissible the occupation of the closet as a place of security and not one of shame. Eve Sedgwick has expressed most effectively the relevance of shame to the development of homosexuals, as for Sedgwick, "shame is the affect that mantles the threshold between introversion and

[24] While it is important to not conflate sexual orientation with gender, it cannot be helped that part of studying incipiency is studying the gendering of sexual orientation, whether as an act of resistance or as an act of depoliticization. In *Outside Belongings* (1996), Elspeth Probyn discusses how 'desire' operates as a powerful method to "create and disrupt belonging" (42), on the basis that it is given that "desire as lack is the oblique term that nonetheless sustains such structures and works to produce a conception of the social[24] …" (43). Here, the use of desire as social is extraordinarily useful as it tells us that 'what we want' is subjectivated, it is determined by the social order in the limited and limiting space of how a subject can act and be acted upon.

extroversion, between absorption and theatricality, between performativity and — performativity" (2003, p. 38). Here, shame begins to mark the body for debility or capacity as the presence of negative affect reveals bodily potential; Sedgwick seems to almost argue for outness as possessing the ability to allow a body to be extroverted, making permissible the performance of homosexuality as opposed to those affected by shame who must remain, in a sense, introverted, allowed only to perform compulsory heterosexuality.

Novels of incipiency follow on from this, narrating a coming-into of sexuality. In this sense, all incipiencies are a coming-into of any sexuality. This is because incipiency is about mapping the relationship between subjectivation and a social subject who has a relationship with abject sexuality. The tension that exists between these two things needs to have a more formalised way of recognising the impacts sociality has on the representation of adult sexuality. Indeed, once mapped and reoriented towards the horizon of potentiality, a reader becomes attuned to the nuances of identity and its development and should come to recognise that there is no singular form of gayness, queerness, or of any other sexuality. This is largely to do with the impact of regulation on the body and what acceptability is interepreted by the subject as being.

Incipiency and Regulatory Forces

What has been described so far gestures at a different model for analysing homosexuality, positioning incipiency as a new mode for accounting for the various ways in which the burden of textual queerness is placed on coming-of-age subjects. This is not the case. Incipiency is not meant to replace any theorised or imagined state of queerness, and the only goal is to name the process by which queer subjects are manoeuvred into the closet and to describe the persistent experience of affect which is shaped during incipiency and continues to determine the actions of queer subjects through their lives. The coming-to-terms with a bodily and sexual difference is a cognisant and deliberate process for any queer subject, and incipiency doesn't work to simply and strictly resolve the negative affects of emerging queer subjectivity; it also needs to create various schemas for dealing with rhetorical, ideological and discursive frames produced alongside negative affect. Didier Eribon, in *Insult* (2004), argues for the critical role of insult of the development of subjectivity and the subsequent cultivation of ipseity:

> Insult and its effects are not limited to defining an exterior horizon. Insult creates an interior space of contradiction in which are found all the difficulties a gay person will

> meet before being able to assume his or her identity, before being able to accept being identified with or identifying with other gay people. It is with this identification which is first rejected; but then it must, as a place from which to start, be constructed or at least accepted —even if later its importance or signification may lessen. (69)

While Eribon never uses the language of incipiency, he offers that there is a process for gay people by which, in coming-to-terms with their difference, they must extricate themselves from dominant discourse as "we are as much spoken by language as we are speakers of it" (67). Insult and incipiency then find themselves in a complicated relationship, wherein the role of incipiency as a process is to (in the pursuit of a resolution to bodily difference). More keenly, Eribon offers that insult is effective in stigmatizing abject identities as "a given individual does not actually need to be 'discredited' if he is already 'discreditable' (66). Such is the power of the social order and processes of subjectivation that insult, acting as a regulatory force of that order, does not even need to be addressed if a subject, being conscious of their difference, fears that they are addressable and, therefore, discreditable.

Incipiency, in so far as it has been described, ends when a gay person has come-to-terms with their bodily and sexual difference, but this shouldn't be conflated with outness, as this coming-to-terms is a purely individual cognitive experience, wherein a gay person becomes comfortable in themselves with identifying with and being identified as other visible structures of gayness and queerness. In a discussion of the often homophobic pretence of Sartre's philosophy in positing a dialectic of authentic/inauthentic lives, which often frames homosexuals as living inauthentic lives given the secretive nature of the closet and the abjectness of their sexuality, Eribon pushes this dialectic to a contemporary and anti-homophobic place. Eribon manages to reconceive authenticity as acclimating to the pressure of being 'what one is,' "to be gay not simply as it were *en soi* (which is to say according to the gaze of others, of society), but rather *pour soi* (that is, having assumed the identity for oneself as a project of freedom)" (2004, 111). While it would be difficult to construct a vaguer argument for the construction of identities, especially given the sticky and contested nature of concepts like 'freedom,' there is a dignified recuperation of what it is to be 'gay,' which compliments the idea of coming-to-terms. Ed Cohen argued in *Inside/Out* (1991) that,

> "if human beings are imagined as existing in an essentially proprietary relation to themselves, they are constituted simultaneously as possessors and possessions of themselves, thereby reproducing the isomorphic dissection of mind/body which the concept of 'identity' seeks to reconcile" (78).

This lends itself to the idea that a subject, although subjected to the social order, still intrinsically 'lives for themselves.' Through this, it becomes obvious that, in order to live authentically (which we might imagine as to live governed by positive affect), a subject must be *pour soi*. However, the issue of freely and positively homosexual desire has not been properly addressed, which is a problem as homosexual desire is still fiercely regulated and policed by the heteronormative social order. This problematic is an example of the dialectic tension between homonormativity and queerness, between remaining under the regulation of the social order or attempting to break free from it. Positioning moving desire into queerness as an 'attempt' is critical as, under queerness, desire becomes liberated but is still expressed and resisted through homophobic discourse; this is because queerness and queer desire have not been constituted outside of the frame of heterosexuality but rather structurally designated as its Other.

The representation of incipiency presents itself as a significant issue, as any site of representation and a discussion of such would mark an attempt at creating a pedagogy of queerness. Any attempt at such a hazardous motion would represent an endeavour at subsuming queerness under a constituent power, "violence which makes the law" (Agamben 2014, 70), making clear that incipiency as pedagogy does nothing but work to define the limits of homosexuality and performs the function of a homographesis. It might be the insidious aim of neoliberalism to achieve a constitutive power over queerness, as it has recently managed to colonise some forms of homosexuality. Lee Edelman warns against this constitutive power:

> the marketable value of a domesticated and domesticating good, of a faith in the power of literature to make us better, more fully human. Could any pedagogy renounce the sublimation inherent in acts of reading, taking seriously the status of teaching as an impossible profession and seeing ourselves in relation to our students as agents of radical queerness whose assault on meaning, understanding, and value would take more from them than it would ever give? (2011, 169)

Edelman's discussion of sublimation is critical to understanding the various ways that the power of the social order organises subjects as textual by way of rendering sites of oppression as physical (exampled in the powerful stigmatizing effects of insult). Edelman positions reading as a radical act that, in the hands of the child, bears the power of desublimation and can potentially untangle the various ways power constitutes subjects through texts. Yet, by teaching children how to read critically, resistance becomes organised under a pedagogy, a resistance that never truly overthrows the structures it resisted and eventually reproduces that

same power. Such is the precarious position of arguing for the value of reading incipient homosexuality, as it desires to read into queer narratives the terms by which gay subjects come-to-terms with their sexuality, should it become organised into a pedagogy incipiency, in a word, becomes *en soi*, able to be (textually, physically) read by others as the ideological and discursive terms of queer subjectivation become a matter of fact. The inevitable destination of this train of thought is: how can we make reading incipiency a reading of resistance? Potentially, the only way to maintain resistance in queer reading is to focus on the forms of reading which are most sticky and undisciplined; the proposition, then, is to focus on the affective capacity of reading, particularly in relation to the power of queer negative registers.

In a discussion of Ayn Rand and cultures of greed, Lisa Duggan articulates why a study of incipiency is necessary. By elucidating the complex nexus of Ayn Rand's political views around the time of the Bolshevik revolution, Duggan comes to the point that:

> Jews are a widely diverse and divergent group, scattered across nearly every ideological spectrum. But not in a purely random way. As with other excluded or oppressed groups, the experience of marginalization does not determine political views, but it does shape the forms they take and leaves traces in the affective tenor of political commitments … The experience of anti-Semitism shaped how Jews participated in politics across the whole political spectrum, from communism to capitalism. (2019, 16)

Duggan has incidentally and effectively outlined a method of the way in which incipiency unfolds. The pattern of incipiency is determined by what Duggan has termed (in passing) as an affective tenor. The potential for the employment of tenor in this context is exceedingly interesting, as Duggan likely used it to describe the 'meaning or content' of affects created in the wake of stigmatization of minority groups. The employment of 'tenor' could also gesture toward a more literal range of production, in which affective tenor lends itself to be seen as a range of affective production, in which processes of subjectivation and incipiency have defined the limits of any given subject's ability to produce affect and be affected. Or, affective tenor could be making a reference to resonances and vibration, to how our experience of affect arrives to us and leaves us. Yet, this is an oversimplification of what a range of affective production could be, as it ignores the potential power of orientation and the various ways in which subjects are oriented by power. It makes sense, then, that homosexuals undergoing incipiency do not all emerge as carbon copies of each other, following predictable behavioural schemas, but rather inhabit every position on every ideological

spectrum — this is the effect of the variable ways in which affect impacts bodies. The important takeaway of which is that there is no reliable way to determine the ways in which a queer subject will emerge from their subjectivation, but there does need to be rigorous ways of accounting for the myriad of potentialities involved with the production of homosexual subjects.

The incipient homosexual is always-already oriented toward difference and resistance. The possible ways in which that difference will express itself textually through signification and identification, while never fixed or totalised, is determined by that orientation. Signalling the importance of affect to incipiency, as it accounts for the various ways in which the regulatory forces of the social order exert themselves upon the incipient homosexual and appear as an affective continuum like a tensile rubber band that threatens to snap by repudiating homosexual subjects who fail to walk the line, a keen a description as any of the impact territorialisation has on the body. The constitutive effect of these forces compounding on the body is the emergence of *foundational affect*, which defines the body's orientation toward the horizon of potentialities. Experiences of foundational affect, like shame and anxiety, exist to regulate the performance of homosexual subjects within the social order and queer theory helps to define strategies that queer people have developed to subvert foundational affect, acts of subversion that Lee Edelman defines as being 'bad education.'

Incipiency is then framed as moments of dialogic becoming, placing the nascent homosexual inside a matrix of potentialities. Here, analysis of foundational affect attends to the decoding of the myriad of ways a body can be oriented within that matrix. The aim of doing this is to try and extricate bodies and their materialities from significations, representations, and identifications (Ruffolo 2009). While the thought of any such achievement is utopian, the desire is to move from thinking of bodies as *being* to bodies as *becoming* to, in effect, crack open the concepts of subjectivity and identity and to conceive of bodies that can be produced outside of the social order. For theorist David Ruffolo, by pushing forward with the political philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari, we arrive at the notion of bodies as *desiring-machines* that are defined by flows of meaning, which then connect with other desiring-machines through a system of interruptions to those flows of meaning. Ruffolo argues that "what differentiates a system of interruption (becoming) from a system of meaning (subjectivity) is that interruptions do not destruct flows but constitute them" (2009, 44). Here, constructing a relationship between the body and the forces that constitute it suggests that subjectivity is inadequate as a form of critique as the flows that

define the body emerge from stagnated meaning, whereas becoming as a mode of critique is more agile as it poses bodies as defined through interruptions to those stagnant meanings. To place incipient homosexuality as complementary to this critique of bodies as becoming is to emphasise bodies as emerging through difference and as occurring within ambiguities and failures.

Critical then is the notion of explicating bodies from signification, where becoming is not structured by language, and more importantly, within the model of becoming, difference is not iterative. Rather, difference is always a new production because it is an interruption and, as such, constitutes a new flow; difference never relies on the iteration of language or performance to constitute it. The issue here, with difference not being iterative, is that it cannot possibly consider a body that is constituted within the social order; rather, a new production produced by interruption marks a new pattern of iterative performance and affect that will itself be reconstituted by a new interruption. Bodies as dialogical-becoming are defined by their myriad of potentialities, which do not need to be referred back to coherent wholes that go on to constitute them iteratively. The view from this position is that it opens a plateau of analysis where the various strands of queer theory open up as if they were themselves assemblages, appreciating that while queer theory developed as a mode of critique of heteronormativity, current antinormative strands as well as critiques of that antinormativity, provide a plane of critique for ontological immanence by exploring possibilities of, and ethics of, opting out of the social order. Ultimately, as Deleuze and Guattari argue, these bodies of dialogical-becoming, these bodies-without-organs, are deterritorialised, and they precede the emergence of the subject. This is altered slightly as we come to argue for "bodies that matter"[6] (bodies that have the capacity to be recognised and attended to by the social order), it is possible to remain deterritorialised. The possibility of such a deterritorialised ontology requires that a subject becomes oriented toward a plane of potential wherein deterritorialization is figured, and the becoming body must constantly (and iteratively) destruct itself, refusing to become identifiable in any discursive or textual way, as such, any deterritorialised body is invisible and impossible to conceive of, though this is not a way of denying their existence.

The potential of incipiency is that attempts to conceive of a form of homosexuality that precedes the formation of the subject and, as such, leaves theoretical room to explore forms of homosexuality before territorialisation by language through the queer-heteronormative dyad. The result is an effective way of discursively opening up the concept of 'innocence' and analysing children's bodies as existing on a plane of potentialities, as

opposed to denying that children are subjugated by the social order. The effect of this acknowledgment of subjugation is the production between how adults figure children within the social order and the ways they figure themselves. Incipiency, then, construes a framework for considering children as unruly objects that we seek to colonise through education. It is possible that incipiency as a theory is extending the work of Foucault, who argued that "the problem is not to discover in oneself the truth of one's sex, but, rather, to use one's sexuality henceforth to arrive at a multiplicity of relationships. And, no doubt, homosexuality is not a form of desire but something desirable. Therefore, we have to work at becoming homosexuals" (1994, 135-136). Sexuality, for Foucault, exists as a way of reorienting oneself toward a new horizon and provides adequate scaffolding for homosexual subjects to call into question the terms of their subjectivation. In turn, incipiency focuses on the production of frames that seek to colonise and orient bodies, governing the ways in which they act and are acted upon. The most fundamental aspect of this resistance is the possession of a feeling body, which is the originary site of oppression and resistance for human subjects.

In full, incipient homosexuality is what occurs before the assumption of full and recognisable textual gayness. The arrival at incipiency from 'the closet' gives us the capacity to identify major slippages in identity as well as to express patience with the subjects of analysis by making no demands of their behaviour. The temporality of incipiency is always in the present, it is never narrated in the past, nor can incipiency ever exist in the future. This is because incipiency and what categorises it as being so is always contemporary – informed by where we are and where we've been, with only the slightest sense of where we might go next. Yet, what becomes apparent by thinking this way is that the notion of incipiency is always guided by culture and the social – that the 'coming-into of,' 'assumption of,' and 'coming-to-terms' of queerness, homosexuality, and abject sexual subjectivity needs to be considered with flexibility because cultural attitudes around these categories are themselves fluid. In a broader sense, incipient homosexuality can be defined as the impression of culture on the queer subject. As incipiency occurs before the assumption of any textually recognisable gayness, the process of incipiency is like a palimpsest – the writing over of queerness and cultural attitudes around queerness onto a developing subject.

Reading for Incipiency

Recent theoretical encounters with new materialism have emerged to "challenge longstanding assumptions about humans and the non- or other-than-human material world" (Gamble,

Hanan, & Nail 2019, 111); the possibility of such challenges might be said to have been platformed thanks to engagements in poststructuralist theory and the affective turn, by expanding the possibilities of the world and how bodies engage with material realities. Importantly, reframing the material world as *plastic* and of having *plasticity*, provides theorists with rhetorical tools for considering the affective potential of all engagements with human and non-human objects, as well as to diminish the rigidity of the border between those two categories. But, as Kyla Schuller and Jules Gill-Peterson discuss in the introduction of their special edition of *Social Text* (2020), the use of new materialism and plasticity provides a theoretical pathway between affect theories and theories of biopolitics since "plasticity refers to the capacity of a given body or system to generate new form, whether internally or through external intervention" (1). The interlaying of bodily feeling, material realities, and biopolitical governance instantiates new materialist rhetoric that foregrounds how it might be possible to read for incipiency in texts. This is given that in reading *for* incipiency, what we are reading for is the existence and reality of precarious bodies and subjectivities and the ways those impacted bodies are made legible in textual engagements.[25]

Theories of new materialism help to develop incipient homosexuality as a concept, helping to elucidate it being an active phase in the homosexual lifecycle. For instance, in the article 'What is New Materialism' by Christopher N. Gamble, Joshua S. Hanan and Thomas Nail articulate a school of new materialist thought that they define as being 'performative materialism,' that is characterised by its distinct treatment of ontology and epistemology as being "inherently co-implicated and mutually constituting" (2019, 122), the potential that they identify from this distinction is that it opens up theories to that which is Other than human. The value of this constitution of matter as being mutually contingent is that it provides a way of considering the matter as being indeterminate, which, as the authors describe, means "…a (relatively) determinate entity, does not entirely precede — and is not fully separate from — the physical, material apparatus used to observe it" (2019, 122). While the authors are here discussing the material property of light, this definition can be extended to all matter, suggesting that the object that appears can only be conceived of in the instance that it is apprehended, and while it has its own separate life, what matters to performative materialism is that the life of the object does not fully come before, nor can its context be fully extracted from the one who apprehends it. The authors also pick out Karen Barad as

[25] By introducing new materialism there is no deliberate attempt being made to adhere theories of new materialism to those of queer or affect theory. Nor is it an attempt at an intervention or enjambment of queer theories. Rather, within philosophies of new materialism, there are encounters with concepts that make the rendering of structural readings of difference easier.

being a prime example of performative materialist theories, identifying that Barad's theories expound the notion that "no property of any discernible thing, that is – whether its physical features, agency, or even its speech or thought – entirely precedes or remains unchanged by its actions or encounters with other things" (123). Here it becomes apparent that it is not necessary to attempt to adhere new materialism to queer theory as it already cuts close to what contemporary queer theorists are moving towards themselves, the very Deleuzo-Guattarian conception of what matter is and what matter can do, as being situated on a plateau and oriented toward a horizon of potentialities, as being affected by the intensities of other matter and itself being rhizomatic, always moving, changing and developing.

For Gamble, Hanan and Nail, the future of new materialism lies in three theses of performative materialism: "the activity of matter itself must be *pedetic*, or characterized by *indeterminancy*"; "matter must be an *ongoing iterative process*"; and "matter must be fully *relational* and immanently self-caused" (125). These theses, or rather claims, resonate with both queer and affect theories, particularly as these theories have been relayed in David Ruffolo's *Post-Queer Politics*, in attending "to the *becomings* of life that do not reiterate the past but move forward as continuous productions" (2009, 7). Ruffolo, referencing Bakhtin, conceives queer as being a movement (or force) that can either be centripetal or centrifugal in that it can move towards unifying or differentiating, respectively. But as Ashon Crawley stipulates about the power of Blackqueerness in his article 'Susceptibility' (2021), the movement of the (black)queer body is centrifugitive, in so much as it is constituted by both centripetal and centrifugal force, even as the centripetal force moves on the outside to unify queerness as identity, centrifugal forces move from within to destabilize and differentiate that unification, as such these queer identities are always formed on the edge, never completely filled with meaning. If we might dare to imagine identity as occurring around a black hole, where queerness would be formed and sustained at the event horizon, it exists theoretically in that the boundary that it marks cannot be known but also marks the point at which matter, light and radiation can no longer escape the gravity of a black hole. If the black hole is then what we consider to be the zero of the social order, and space is the one outside of it, then queerness as the event horizon is acted upon by both the gravity of space and the gravity of the black hole.

One of the central concerns of new materialism is the belief that matter can be plastic.[26] In the introduction to a special issue of *Social Text* on 'Race, the State, and the Malleable Body,' Kyla Schuller and Jules Gill-Peterson make the claim that "*Plasticity* refers to the capacity of a given body or system to generate new form, whether internally or through external intervention" (2020, 1). Specifically, Schuller and Gill-Peterson argue that "feminist and queer theories of plasticity are offered to support nondeterminist accounts of matter and categories such as gender" (1); in this, we are given to read that plasticity is the philosophic account of how matter might be understood through an onto-epistemological lens, as containing the infinite capacity, not only for change but reorientation. In the most abstract of senses, matter is in this regard treated as infinitely given to change, as it may take any form that it cares to, expressing itself in the impossible configuration of variegation, whether it be that matter wills itself so or is compelled to. What we arrive at then, in theorising matter as plastic, is that matter must be *malleable*, as in malleability, we are required to conceive that matter might only change as the result of force and energy being applied either from within or without. From there, Schuller and Gill-Peterson conclude that "If the malleability of plastic bodies appears to antagonize state power from the subindividual scale … but that malleability is already an enlisted feature of state power through the biopolitics of plasticity" (2). It is here that the connection to be made between new materialism and queer theory is rendered evident in that the queer body, in being a figure of abjection, is always already plastic, dynamic and changing, placed on the outside of the social order, but becomes critical in maintaining the border of what is/is not inside of that order but virtue of the inside as being defined without. A consideration, then, of how matter is managed within biopolitics is critical to the advancement of a reading of incipient homosexuality as it makes clear the ways in which homosexual and queer subjectivities are crafted by the social order through the use of force.

By naming biopolitics as being central to a consideration of the processes, regulatory controls, and interventions enacted through the power to manage populations and their right to life. Again, Schuller and Gill-Peterson articulate that "plasticity is the organic vector through which the biopolitical practice of managing and optimizing the population transpires at the level of the individual body" (2). What is being worked towards here is the idea that all bodies, even as only incipient homosexual bodies are under consideration here, are subject to

[26] In this instance, the use of 'can' instead of a more definitive article like 'is,' is deployed to err on the side of caution, The work of Kyla Schuller, Jules Gill-Peterson, Kadji Amin, and other contemporary scholars of new materialism all hazard that the plasticity of matter is a distinctly raced and gendered concept, as they argue, strains of Lamarckian race science believe that only civilised bodies are capable of adapting and changing, that savage bodies lack the capacity.

regulatory forces that determine the shape and form that matter may take and express itself through, being the deterministic force of how a body might move, might dress, what feelings are acceptable, what language is appropriate and so on and so forth. Even as plasticity names "the capacity of bodily tissue to develop, regenerate, and otherwise transform themselves is dynamic relation to matter, technology, and the environment" (Amin, 2020, 49), all bodies are limited by what is discursively and ideologically possible, so trapped as they are by the need for recognition and legibility in order to move within the social order. For this reason, Schuller and Gill-Peterson situate that "within biopolitics, whiteness is valorized as plasticity of the individual body, which connotes potential, resilience, and dynamic transformation" (3), and that in order to move forward with plasticity as a rigorous and useful concept in queer theory, there needs to be work done to extricate what is the most expedient aspects from those that bog it down in historically problematic discourses.

At this, the point of extrication is where theorisations by Kadji Amin become most prudent, as he affixes trans* to plasticity. For Amin, "Trans* exemplified in the plastic and generative capacities of matter, is at once that quasi-mystical force that generates being and that unpredictable movement that destabilizes taxonomy, selfhood, and ontology" (2020, 50). Here, what is pulled at is the potential of trans* to label, as Jack Halberstam intends, "unfolding categories of being organized around but not confined to forms of gender variance" (2018, 4), forcing readers to reckon with gender and sexuality as domains of not only historical categories but all the ways that gender and sexuality might be expressed in the future. As such, Amin describes that "*Trans* plasticity* describes the capacity of organic matter to transform itself in ways that transgress ontological divides between sex, race, and species" (51). It might be utopian, then, to labour under the assumption that one can automatically be open to trans* plasticity and all the possibilities that are opened forthwith, but it would require significant thought even to begin to consider what that horizon of potentialities might contain. A critical reason for this is because, as hazarded by Schuller and Gill-Peterson, "plasticity does not confound biopolitical logics but, rather, comprises their very substance" (4). Even as the attempt is made to think past what plasticity is and what trans* plasticity could entail, we are hamstrung by being constituted and contingent on the very plasticity we are attempting to subsume under queerness. Thus, what is required is a connection between how queerness and plastic matter are already relational so that the discussion of what life and matter might or might not be possible can happen.

Real-world examples of plasticity, like gene therapy and xenotransplantation, generate instead of disturbing ontobiological categories and concepts such as race, sex, and

species (Amin 2020). However, the theoretical issue that is opened here could be answered by a consideration of ontological negation, through which the *ab-sens* of the social order (the zero) remains zero, instead of being turned into the one "through repetitive tropological substitutions … by making the ontological exclusions articulated as queerness or blackness" Edelman 2017, 133). The radical and infinite capacity of matter as plastic to reconfigure the borders of the body is, as Amin argues, castrated by this plasticity becoming generative of the borders it has the power to disrupt — the logical structure of such means that plasticity has become a signifier of those 'tropological substitutions' that work to ontologically exclude disruptively plastic bodies (like those of queer, trans*, and black). Yet these exclusions also affect the instance of identity, or what can be described as "the social imperative … toward a unified system, a comprehension, that strives to efface its internal rupture or structural impossibility" (Edelman 2017, 133). It might be reasonable, then, to assume that the generation of borders that discipline plastic matter works with the knowledge that determines futurity, in that "the Thing's sublimation as the creation of something out of nothing, as the dialectical negation of negativity that generates presence through reference to futurity" (Edelman, 129). This is to say that just because the body's matter can be manipulated through gene therapies, hormone therapies, xenotransplantation, and the potentials of glandular research, it does not automatically follow that it will "result in an opening of possibilities for new ethics or forms of life beyond the categories of sexually dimorphic Euro-humanism" (Amin, 54). This is because these categories of the 'sexually dimorphic' human are already structured into what can be envisioned as the future and, as such, cannot be easily discarded for new considerations for what is and is not human, what can and cannot be life.

To figure out the relationship between this theoretical configuration of plasticity and incipient homosexuality, we need to start at the instance of ontological negation, the moment at which the subject is first threatened with becoming excluded from the social order. What emerges then is an almost critical need to observe the plasticity of queerness as the possibility of its change stands as the biopolitical imperative to determine certain lives as unliveable and unrecognisable, which, as Edelman argues:

> Queerness, by contrast, though always fleshed out in catachrestic figures, refers to what never accedes to representation in itself. Instead, it denotes what eludes the stabilization of the 'in itself,' referring to what is not itself and so to what is not, *tout court*, in a given regime of meaning. Like the zero, it enacts the negation of what is – opening onto the spaces of the imageless, the impossible, the unthinkable – while

> occasioning phobic embodiments in particular types of beings (those a given culture queers) made to stand in for the death drive in its stubborn ineducability. (2017, 157)

While it might be tempting to label what is happening as an instance of *negated plasticity*, insomuch as it might be conceived that different bodies are constitutive of different types of plasticity and not all forms are equal. This cannot ever be quite true because, as it stands, plasticity merely refers to *every* body's capacity to change and be made to adapt to the desirable forms as dictated by the social. The trouble that queerness encounters, then, is that what is thought possible as *queer* (and indeed black, feminine, or indigenous) can only be conceived through 'phobic embodiments' of the queer. What Edelman inevitably argues, and this follows his work from *Homogrpahesis* through *No Future* and into his project on *Bad Education*, is that the catachrestic figure that stands in for the *ab-sens* is always one that has been made permissible, a reasonable amount of queerness, so that even as a subject attempts to opt out of the one and moves to inhabit the zero, what occurs is that their body finds itself trapped in circles of representative queerness that have already been folded into the negation of what is. This is to say it is impossible to know what direction the plasticity of a body must be stretched in order to *actually* queer it because those bodies that have achieved it have acceded to something akin to death in itself as it moves toward something that is entirely unknowable. Yet, the features of plasticity can be studied as regulatory forces, those aspects being impressibility and mutability, features of plasticity that assist in creating limitations on the ways plastic bodies move.

Impressibility and mutability are contingent dialectic features of plasticity, pushing and pulling on the plastic material, determining its suitability to remain within the realm of the social. In this sense, both impressibility and mutability are epigenetic, a configuration of external environmental factors that might be seen as impacting the genetics of a body, or in the sense of queer and cultural studies, of being determinate of how a body engages the terms of its subjectivation to negotiate how it can act and be acted upon. Schuller and Gill-Peterson define that "*Impressibility* marks a body's relative responsiveness to and absorptiveness of its stimulations and thus is its capacity to move forward through time" (6), which locates that an important factor in considering the plasticity of bodies is how those bodies respond to the material conditions of the world that they're in. For Schuller and Gill-Peterson impressibility is the "fleshy substance of race and sex difference" because impressibility defines the surface that responds to the world and to the stimulations of the social order. The idea of impressibility has an interesting history rooted in Lamarckian evolutionary theory and

eugenics, and to acknowledge it as being so, aids in conceiving the effects impressibility has on queer bodies, especially through violent regulation like conversion therapies. Additionally, for Schuller, "impressions of objects leave indentations, impressions on the impressible are absorbed deep within the body, where they stimulate a provoking response" (2018, 82), while I will go on to describe this 'provoking response' as being foundational affect, it is important to take the time to describe that the reason that impressibility goes deeper than a mere impression on an object, has to do with the adherence of time. Time in impressibility leaves deep marks, eroding away bodily resistance,[27] but also, as Kyla Schuller outlines, defines the body as being a product of time and an accumulation of "an innate but not immutable biological substance" (2018, 10) – in a way, to regulate a body through impressibility is to return a body to an innate biological beginning.

If impressibility is the pushing of a body, the deliberate moulding of the body through stimulations of regulatory force, then mutability is the pulling of a body. Yet, to describe mutability as a 'pull' ascribes a flow of power that is once again outside the body when the opposite is true. Mutability in this sense, is the power of the self, of the body, to change. For Schuller and Gill-Peterson, mutability "enables matter to respond to pressures placed on it from the milieu while still maintaining coherence as an individuated entity" (2018, 10). In a spectacular and unfulfilling thought experiment of 'the chicken or the egg,' it is hard to say whether impressibility or mutability came first in the order of eugenic regulation – it may be that the belief that humans have the infinite capacity to change and adapt, but also that humans *never* change, demonstrates that these ideas go too far back to figure out. But to discuss it here, mutability defines the body that self-changes to its environment, those changes might be queer, might manifest to antagonise State power, but overall, it is more likely that the potential of the body to self-change is only ever done on the grounds to meet outside demands and stimulation. To be controversial, it appears like the choice presented by a vaccine mandate, wherein one can 'choose' to get vaccinated at the behest of the State and continue living their lives unopposed, or one can 'choose' to remain unvaccinated and in turn expose themselves to State powers and regulation that may force them to be vaccinated in the end anyway. Such as it is to say, the decision to not change, to not be mutable, might force

[27] This is where the difference between Blackness and white Queerness emerges, Blackness (as described by Ashon Crawley and mentioned above) operates at the limit of impressibility because even as there is a desire to colonise and regulate the black body there is never an acceptable placed carved out for it within the social order. White Queerness differs here, because once queerness can be managed, regulated, through impressibility the body that remains is always a White one.

the hand of impressibility. Not that this cuts to the core of what it means to have a plastic body and to be queer.

While the connections made here appear to be abstruse, the relationship between incipiency and contingent features of plasticity, but the obviousness of the connection will be made apparent by a discussion of another theory of plasticity, that of pliability. Kyla Schuller makes quick mention of it in *The Biopolitics of Feeling* (2018) by saying, "pliability, rather than rigidity, has recently come to characterize the materiality of the body as it was understood in the nineteenth century" (11). As mentioned with impressibility, there is a belief that there are immutable aspects of biology; these beliefs developed throughout the Enlightenment and came to extreme prominence with evolutionary theories of the nineteenth century. As Schuller notes, the idea of "the body's biological material [as] a discrete, immutable, and dissimilar substance, meted out by capricious nature in wildly unequal fashion, that locks the individual into a predetermined set of aptitudes and behaviours" (2018, 1), such an idea would present the body as being rigid, marblesque in its fashioning. Pliability then reframes the body as plastic, as both impressible and malleable; it is through understanding the body as a pliable object that can be changed that we can understand the role of new materialism here. In incipiency, the role of regulatory forces is paramount to understanding how developing subjectivities are fashioned. In the case of the pliable incipient homosexual, the effects of forces that impress on the body and the choices that also render the malleability of that same body create a tension between a forced heterosexuality, a tolerable homonormative subject, and an impossible queer one. The rendering of incipiency as being entwined with plasticity provides a legible framework for observing the linguistic and discursive representations of a homosexual coming-of-age.

While the limit of incipiency is its potential conflation with the closet, a confusion which can be explained by the purely theoretical difference between *being* and *becoming*, being *framed* or *unframed*, where incipiency is again limited by being the relatively utopian idea of *becoming*. This limit of incipiency is typified by its resistance to any textual markers of queerness, given that any such marker conflates the experience of homosexuality with the social construction of queerness. Though it is not a complete failure that incipiency is felt, as like any body making its way in the dark, it is sensitive to changes in the environment, to the bumps in the road and to fluctuations in the air of temperature and wind. Such a body can deliver itself to safety by moving away from resistance, or in the event of extreme resistance, it can lay down and weather the turbulence. It could be said then that the sensing body that

bunkers down in the face of adversity is the body in the closet, one that obscures itself for safety. To read for and narrate incipiency, then, is to not only be reading for precarity, but for the conditions that make precarity ontologically possible. This experience of precarity is ontologically different from experiences of precarity as prescribed by neoliberal subjectivities, and it is marked by a body that is attempting to conceive the difference between liveable and unliveable lives. However, as has been argued throughout this chapter, the benefit of studying incipient homosexuality is that it is positioned as being a site of constant resistance to the territorialising effects of the social order. To take the definition of precarity is "a condition of dependency" (Berlant 2011, 192), where the precarious subject is dependent on others for the recognition of their bodies and their lives as being liveable.

As Judith Butler argues in *Frames of War*, "to be a body is to be exposed to social crafting and form, and that is what makes the ontology of a body a social ontology" (2016, 3); this makes the point that there is no bodily ontology that is innately biological, that in some way, to be touched by a mother is to be touched by the social. This point also marks the difference between homosexuality and gendered, disabled, and racialized bodies, in that homosexuality arrives to precarity later, and the exposure to social crafting is slower. What is more important here, however, is that a queer subject must apprehend themselves as queer; this initial apprehension is both the marker for the beginning of incipient homosexuality and the initial encounter with the epistemological problem of the closet. This apprehension of oneself as being queer begins the process of reckoning with processes of sublimation that distanced the subject from an ability to recognise themselves as possessing a liveable life. This apprehension opens the nascent queer subject to structures of feeling and affect, a world of gay life as defined by their relationship to foundational affect.

Chapter Three – Theories of Affect/Foundational Affect

Theories of Affect

Since incipient homosexuality is a process that occurs before the assumption of textual queerness or homosexuality, a problem arises in the form of a question: how can we recognise incipiency in texts? Seeing as how the world of incipiency is defined by impressions, it makes sense that the obvious way to approach this question is through the realm of affect. Where incipiency looks to extrapolate a body's relationality with the social world to study the ways regulatory forces impact and shape subjective becoming, affect can be used to detail the intensity of those forces on incipient bodies. At a basic level, reading for affect in a text can orient the reader toward incipient potentiality because to read for affect is to read for intensities that exist without signification. In a more nuanced sense, as Chris Ingraham argues in *Gestures of Concern* (2020), "Affect accordingly operates as a kind of shared reservoir wherein the potential for incipient meaning pools up, until, overflowing, it becomes personal in the form of feelings, social in the form of feelings" (40). As such, to make the obvious connection, incipient homosexuality finds itself sharing a realm with incipient meaning, and as Ingraham argues, it is not only possible but inevitable that the accrual of intensities eventually becomes so large that it finds itself spilling out and, in the spilling out, it takes on the form of signification. So, even as Ingraham describes affect and its incipient meanings as being "pre-personal, not-yet-conscious, asignifying, and non-representational" (2020, 40), eventually, such intensities incubate for so long that they manage to enter the world of the personal, conscious, signifying, and representational. This chapter pushes this argument forward by taking up a notion of foundational affect, where foundational affect is a product of reading queer theory alongside affect theories and arriving at a conclusion that certain affects encounter the subject as a deliberate means of surveillance and control of all subjects and their subjectivation.

The importance of a turn towards affect in this thesis is to achieve, as Patricia T. Clough argues, substantive reasoning for the 'subject's discontinuity with itself,' which is instantiated not only by the subject's proximity with the horizon of potentiality that defines the irreducible specificity of life but the various ways in which the non-intentionality of emotion and affect are involved in that very horizon (Clough 2010). Clough elucidates the point that this very turn "points to a dynamism immanent to bodily matter and matter

generally — matter's capacity for self-organization in being informational" (2010, 207). Here, emphasis is placed on the ability of bodily matter to organise itself, and Clough argues that it is an immanent capacity of matter to do so; in such a way, it is being argued that bodily matter is deterritorialised and its capacity to self-organise is discontinuous with a subject's consciousness. In its own way, then, the turn toward affect emerges as a way of attending to bodies by opening them up to the radical potential of the immanence of affect. It is then important to any study of the subject to view the various ways in which it is constructed, particularly in this instance of the ways in which subjects are formed through affect and its encounters with the world of encounters.

Subjectivity, in many ways, ends at the skin, at our capacity to touch and be touched. Judith Butler writes, "If I feel, then I have been touched, and I have been touched by something outside myself" (2015, 47); the thing that touches me is not me, and at the moment that it touches me, I am also touching in return, which is to say that in the moment of the touch, there is no passivity. Feeling, or rather, affect, defines the capacity of the subject to operate in the world by elucidating the epistemological and ontological frame that animates the 'I,' as Butler goes on to argue, "something is already underway by the time we act, and we cannot act without, in some sense, being acted upon" (2015, 61). This is the limit of the subject that its construction requires an encounter with the Other and that Other recoiling, creating a boundary that exists with touch and ends the subject at the skin. It can then be inferred because possession of subjectivity requires the existence of a skin barrier that affect marks an individual's belonging to the world, where affect defines the 'in-between-ness,' those forces that occur in the spaces between atoms that go on to influence the limits of an individual through the ways in which they act and are acted upon.

As Seigworth and Gregg argue in the introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader*, "affect marks a body's *belonging* to a world of encounters" (2009, 2), signalling that a body's relation to the world is constituted by its capacity to feel affect. In a reading of the work of Marin Heidegger, Sara Ahmed attends to the object because while humans might be subjects of the social order, we are also objects of the world of encounters; as such, as Ahmed considers,

> … the arrival of an object does not just happen in a moment; it is not that the object "makes an appearance," even though we can be thrown by an object's appearance. An arrival takes time, and the time that it takes shapes "what" it is that arrives. The object

> could even be described as the transformation of time into form[28], which itself could be redefined as the "direction" of matter. What arrives depends not only depends on time, but is shaped by the condition of its arrival, by how it came to get here. Think of a sticky object; what it picks up on its surface "shows" where it has travelled and what it has come into contact with. You bring your past encounters with you when you arrive. In this sense an arrival has simply not happened; an arrival points toward a future that might or "perhaps" will happen, given that we don't always know in advance what we will come into contact with when we follow this or that line. (2006, 40)

Considering that our bodies our construed out of our capacity to feel, a feeling which is defined as occurring at the skin barrier, then the arrival of a feeling subject (who is an object to the world of encounters) is shaped by the impression of everything it has felt on its skin where time exists to measure the depth of any given impression, where what sticks to the skin, what is revealed on the surface of the body, is what that body has become. Ahmed, in this passage, is trying to remind us of something we all already know: time is fluid, and the experience of time is not fixed. Time, then, is itself without an object and is an encounter that we cannot feel but that we use to explain the impression of any given feeling on our body.[29] When Ahmed describes the object as time transformed into form, the suggestion is that bodies are energy in perpetual motion, constantly moving and coming into contact, being shaped and shaping everything it comes into contact with, where time is a frame that allows us to perceive the impact of the world of encounters on the body. Central to any theory of affect is the idea of movement and motion, of having the energy and capacity to transform and exist within the world of encounters as both a subject and object. It is also critical to begin framing the importance these ideas have to narrative and the pools of intensity and affect contained therein.

Following Brian Massumi, affect needs to be viewed as an intensity because, as Massumi argues, "intensity is immanent to matter and to events, to mind and to body and to every level of bifurcation composing them and which they compose" (2002, 33). Here, central to any notion of matter, bodies and minds is that they all contain within them the ability to touch and be touched — to affect and be affected. Specifically, Massumi deploys

[28] This idea of time into form leaves a huge amount of space for re-reading the impact of queer time on the development of queer subjectivities.

[29] Perhaps, in a radical sense, time belongs only to the epistemological and there is no necessarily ontological experience of it. Thomas Nail in *Being and Motion* (Oxford University Press, 2018) suggests that what is ontological is the experience of motion, of moving through time.

affect "as a way of talking about the margin of manoeuvrability, the 'where we might be able to of and what we might be able to do' in every present situation" (2015, 3). While in traditional Western epistemology this innate capacity has been used to define the limits of the body and the mind by constructing a mind contained in a body and a body which ends at the skin, there are actually no specific limits. For Massumi, the instance of intensity (as experienced by the body) is the same instance wherein the materiality of the body is transformed into an event; a moment where the mind is interpreting bodily information into something which can be communicated; this instance of conversion into intensity is a preconscious act which relays between the bodies corporeal and incorporeal dimensions. Massumi then goes onto argue that the moment of intensity as preconscious happens to a body that is "not yet a subject" (2002, 14), but that the moment of intensity itself contains the conditions for subjectivity, so it may be considered as a form of "incipient subjectivity."

In its preconscious state, then, Massumi identifies affect as occurring in the confluence of a unit of quasi corporeality with a unit of passion (2002),[30] which manifests as "an ability to affect and a susceptibility to be affected," and emotions and feelings are simply affects that exist within the language of the social order. Highlighted in Massumi's definition is the centrality of *inbetween-ness* to the occurrence of affect; the intensities that happen in-between matter, that space which is not quite *us* but defines the limits of what can be accounted for as being part of the body and bodily experience. The tenor of affect is unpredictable and there is no certain way to ascertain the pattern of affect as it unfolds through time and space, given that the reception of any affect is defined by the reception of every affect which has preceded it and the profundity of the impact those affects made on the body. As Deleuze and Guattari argued, "affects are no longer feelings or affections; they go beyond the strength of those who undergo them" (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 164). Deleuze and Guattari are here emphasizing the critical point of affect, is that they are, like bodies, territorialised; discursively trapped in order to define the limited experience of the human body, used in order to render into social law that which is right and wrong, to leverage punitive measures against those who experience positive affect in abject experiences, but more so to qualify the human against the non-human.

[30] "The quasi corporeal can be thought of as the superposition of the sum total of the relative perspectives in which the body has been implicated, as object or subject, plus the passages between them: in other words, as an interlocking of overlaid perspectives that nevertheless remain distinct" (Massumi 2002, 57-58). The quasi corporeal is a way of conceiving objects without image and in this sense operates as a map of potential and potency, identifying the various ways in which intensities impact and transform bodies.

The contrived attempt to discursively subsume the affective experiences of the human and non-human is riddled with a certain irony as, under affect, there is no particular distinction between subject and object, and more particularly, there is no subject of affect, which is why affect is a force which is always problematising our subjectivities. As human subjects, we are always set on course for collision with objects which threaten to undo our relation to the social order which has construed us as subjects. We can consider then that "affect can be understood then as a gradient of bodily capacity—a supple incrementalism of ever-modulating force-relations … Hence, affect's always immanent capacity … both into and out of the interstices of the inorganic and non-living, the intra-cellular divulgences of sinew, tissue, and gut economies" (Seigworth & Gregg 2009, 2). While Deleuze and Guattari had already argued that affects go far beyond the materialities of the body and that affects do not happen *to* bodies, but rather that affects belong to a world of encounters which bodies are a part of, enmeshed within an already existing plateau of connections and encounters. While, in the sense of immanence, there is no subject of affect, we cannot deny that as subjects, we experience affect, that we feel and are felt, that we touch and are touched; the capacity of this is due to not only affects lacking a proper subject but also lacking a proper object – lacking a methodological way of coming into discourse.

In *Touching Feeling* (2003), Eve Sedgwick brings forth the idea that affects lack a proper object, in that there is no proper way for an affect to emerge. For Sedgwick, "affects can be, and are, attached to things, people, ideas, sensations, relations, activities, ambitions, institutions, and any number of other things, including other affects" (19); in this way, there is no correct way to account for the emergence or pattern of affect as they unfold in a million unpredictable ways. Tying in then, with Deleuze and Guattari's argument that affects exist themselves on a plateau which is only ever partially available to the experience of human bodies, more than emotion and feeling, affects possess the ability to connect individuals and communities over time and space, becoming a central process to the emergence of particular identities. Though it not only accounts for their emergence but also for their orientation, of the various ways in which affect positions subjects in relation to the social order, pointing them toward certain objects and away from others. As Sara Ahmed considers in *Queer Phenomenology*, "the 'here' of bodily dwelling is thus what takes the body outside of itself, as it is affected and shaped by its surroundings" (2006, 8-9). The various ways in which we can affect and be affected grant our bodies access to the world of affect that is outside of ourselves, introducing subjects to the world that extends beyond the skin. Impacting the very shape that identity takes by effecting a mould of potential experience, which is then oriented

within the world, affect has a defining impression on how and what identities are formed under subjective experience.

To return to Massumi, who in *Politics of Affect* (2015), said, "affect is simply a body movement looked at from the point of view of its potential — its capacity to come to be, or better, come to do" (7), a return to this point reasserts that to consider affect is to consider bodies as occurring on a horizon of potentialities and that there is no sure way to determine how a body will move along that horizon, nor can it be guaranteed that specific affect will determine specific emotions. Seemingly, in the world of subjectivation, the power of the social order emerges as a way to govern the ways in which one ought to think; it totalises the epistemological experience of subjects and orders it accordingly, creating on its way systems that will ensure the production of predictable subjects that will act to the logic and will of that very same social order. Under this system, while subjects cannot necessarily act outside of governing logics, they can certainly *feel* outside of them, which is the tempting force of *jouissance* that Lacan articulates: the acclimation to the death drive which results not in the death of the subject, but the death of the social order. The attachment of *jouissance* to immanence then poses a uniquely queer threat as it posits affect and desire, which is immoral and unproductive as sites of resistance that define a tension within bodies between the pursuit of pleasure and the pursuit of success.

A Theory of Foundational Affect

While affect marks belonging to the world, frames constructed from the iterative impression of norms impose limits on that belonging, specifically by orientating subjects away from certain affects and the production of regulatory forces that constrict the experience of affects which may be deemed unproductive or taboo. However, the power that maintains the frame can only do so if it itself resits, becoming a totalising framework; as such, "the frame never quite determined precisely what it is we see, think, recognize, and apprehend" (Butler 2014, 9). This is the effect of a power that enacts itself through discourse, as it must constantly move with discourse and transgression in order to locate and suppress new sites of resistance. The frame determines how we are perceived; for example, the man who is framed as a faggot will be perceived as such and treated accordingly. To be a subject of the social order is to be framed; it is to be known under discourse, to be accused, though in terms of it construction, it is as all things are in the work of Butler: iterative. Where something is iterative, it becomes the burden of the subject to continually assert their position within the social order. In this

postulation, the role of the frame is to, in terms of affect, govern how a subject can be oriented within the social order as well as to define the limits of how they act and are acted upon. For example, a gay man who is perceived as being a faggot.[31] Given that they are acted upon as if they were a faggot, in effect accused by the social order as being deviant in their expression of masculinity by presenting themselves (not as androgynous) as being obviously (even violently) feminine, the subject is then oriented to act as a faggot given that is how their bodies have come to be legible under the social order. Yet, not only is the performance of gender and sexuality iterative to the subject and their constitution but so too does the experience of affect become iterative for subjects, rigidly coming to define how they can feel their body and experience liveable lives under the social order.

If we take as a given, that affect marks an individual's belonging to the world, defined as the 'in-between-ness' which influences the ways in which an individual acts and is acted upon, then foundational affects are produced by the impression of norms on an individual during the process of subjectivation (also emerging at this point is the notion of 'the frame'). As argued in the previous section, a body is at once both a subject as well as an object in the world of encounters, and the impression of affects results in the production of a feeling subject who then must determine what those impressions mean to them. In a sense, this is where feelings and emotions emerge as discursive markers that trap affects in a representational system that demands they be sublimated by the social order. Language then acts as a way of subsuming experience by becoming the universal mode of communication; language is then not only what universalises experience but that which organises subjects. Judith Butler in *Senses of Subject* (2015) reminds us that the motion of acting and being acted upon is a coextensive movement, one that is not opposite or contradictory nor are they the same. What Butler is gesturing towards in that argument is that we were always already feeling bodies and that our ability to feel precedes our ability to understand what we are feeling, but to be inaugurated as a subject, a body must be activated by the touch of power, which for Butler, "it is on the basis of this irreducible and nonconceptualizable figure, we

[31] In this instance, deployment of faggot exists along the complicated discursive and rhetorical structure of insult and recuperation of the insult; where in the twenty-first century the use of 'faggot' as insult has rendered it as rather innocuous but the textual markers that it calls forth remain in place. As such, the usage between gay men, of the word is used to textually locate on the body, those who are effeminate and camp and (usually) bottoms (though the contemporary rise of the 'fem-top' opens up new discursive possibilities), and it powerfully aids in drawing attention to the various ways in which gay men allow their sexuality to be gendered, where there are men who avoid being interpellated into the textual system which defines 'faggots.' It would be difficult to accredit any institution for allowing such a rise in varied gender expression among gay men, but I would hazard that increasing media representation of beauty culture and drag culture has offered 'safe spaces' for the fluid experimentation of gender.

might say, that we apprehend the world" (2015, 56). The effect of language under power is to confer intelligibility onto the subject by constructing a discursive and ideological frame through which a subject can perceive and be perceived by the world.

The production of the frame orients the body; it works over the top of affect as a mode for governing the ways in which the body acts and is acted upon by limiting exposure to affective potentials (creating and enforcing taboo) and by constricting discursive and ideological expression of feeling and emotion. Frames, in this instance, are heavily gendered and racialized as they pursue the agenda of acknowledging the constitution of the rights-bearing individual. Incandescent markers like straight, white, and male are actually norms that effectively "organise visual experience" and delineate what bodies are rendered as apprehensible; the reiteration of these norms (and, in turn, their performativity) produces a frame as a "historically contingent ontology" which renders bodies as being either recognisable or unrecognisable. For Butler, frames do not render some bodies as wholly invisible, as if there may be some body out in the world that is physically incapable of being perceived, rather it determines, to move with Lee Edelman, the graphetical value of a given body, that is the ways in which we identify a body through discourse. Yet, frames are not a totalizing force of subjective ontology; they are iterative and subject themselves to development. As Butler elucidates, "a life has to be intelligible *as a life*, has to conform to certain conceptions of what life is, in order to become recognizable. So just as norms of recognizability prepare the way for recognition, so schemas of intelligibility condition and produce norms of recognizability" (2014, 7). In an insultingly basic way, we may easily identify a human form, but we may refuse to recognise that form as having the privileges of humanity. While Butler's argument construes a convincing account for the horrific treatment of refugees, asylum seekers, and racial and ethnic Others, as well as those who are gender non-conforming, it does not quite articulate the ways in which homosexual subjects precariously fall in and out of recognition.

Foundational affect defines a subjects exterior relation to the world; a perfect subject is an interior without an exterior (Merleau-Ponty, 56), it is a soul without matter, the way its body articulates itself within the world is invisible and it meets no resistance. Foundational affect then, describes souls with matter that are articulated visibly in the world, whether by skin colour, disability, gender, or sexual orientation (in the form of visible queerness). These affects are, as Sara Ahmed explains, 'sticky,' as such the impression of norms during processes of subjectivation and the subsequent production of frames means that foundational

affects attach themselves to objects of subjectivity that are used in the production of identities and themselves become iterative of that identity. The impact of regulatory forces on the body is violent, the most formative of which is insult. Didier Eribon says of words like faggot and dyke, "these are not merely words shouted in passing. They are verbal aggressions that stay in the mind.[32] They are traumatic events experienced more or less violently at the moment they happen, but that stay in memory and in the body" (2004, 15). Insult becomes a structuring logic to the ways in which homosexual subjects articulate and orient themselves in the world. Irish drag queen Panti Bliss posed this question in 2014 when she asked:

> "Have any of you ever been standing at a pedestrian crossing when a car goes by, and in it are a bunch of lads, and they lean out the window as they go by and they shout, "Fag!", and throw a milk carton at you? Now it doesn't really hurt. It's just a wet carton and anyway, they're right: I am a fag. So, it doesn't hurt, but, it feels oppressive. And when it really does hurt, is afterwards, because its afterwards that I wonder and worry and obsess over what was it about me? What was it they saw in me? What was it that gave me away?"

This feeling of oppression, which Panti feels, is a cleverly desublimated version of shame that anyone younger and less confident would feel, but I will go on to explain that in more detail later. The point is that bodies that are subject to regulatory forces then become complicit in the maintenance of the processes of subjectivation. Foundational affect then works by attaching itself to improper objects of identity, such as clothing, hair, skin, voice, and gait. Critically, what occurs when Panti 'worries' and 'obsesses' is that their body is given matter, it is given the burden of textuality, and they must decide whether or not they will acclimate to the demands of the social order and adjust their gender performance, or carry on.

Queer literary affect, though, is always historicised; a subject may feel the immediate effect of regulation, but there is a temporality to understanding the relationship between regulation and foundational affects. In this way, homosexuality, like gender, is a historically contingent category being performative of the cultural citations that it is constitutive of (Butler, 2007). Queer literature operates as a textual negotiation of the constant, rich and varied evocations of embodied responses and actions within specific frames, accepting the historical limits of a frame in relation to the queer subject being produced in text. Any

[32] An important clarification at this point would be to point out that while insult is definitely a regulatory force, other forces may be more obfuscated. We may take, for instance, 'wellness' to be regulatory as it defines the very limits with which we can experience a healthy life.

encounter with bodily difference is a historically, culturally and socially negotiated moment, wherein the subject of the encounter must hazard for themselves the relative risk of that difference; such a risk varies over and through time from the deeply hetero-paranoid milieus of the American Stonewall era New York, the AIDs epidemic, Thatcher's Britain and Section 28, the anxious movement between the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich, to more moderate experiences under Western neoliberal Capitalism. In *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* (2019), Ocean Vuong draws a connection between parental discipline and insult, framing both as regulatory forces; Ocean reflects on the monstrosity of his mother, concluding that "To be a monster is to be a hybrid signal, a lighthouse: both shelter and warning at once" (13). He follows on from this with, "I read that parents suffering from PTSD are more likely to hit their children. Perhaps there is a monstrous origin to it, after all. Perhaps to lay hands on your child is to prepare them for war" (13). For the queer child, to learn from one's parents the limits of acceptability is to be heteronormatively socialised, it is to enter the world already with shame and anxiety, but as Ocean suggests, perhaps this discipline, the imparting of foundational affect, makes survival possible. Through a historicising of discipline, of insult, of education, it becomes possible to make legible the effect regulatory forces have on the construction of incipiency and homosexual identities.

We may specifically examine the ways in which these regulatory forces elicit specific affects and attach them to specific objects. Taking, for instance, the pejorative force of insult, which is deployed in order to maintain the limits of masculinity, defining some things to be 'gay' or 'faggy,' the result is eliciting of shame in the individual who, in turn, as a mode of discipline, will attach shame to the object which caused the insult to be delivered. In future, an individual will either engage with the shame object, or the engagement with that object will result in an anticipatory affect (anxiety) as they expect to be shamed again. The by-product of anticipatory affects is also interesting because they don't only recognise a bodies imbuing of particular objects with affect, but are also contingent on the body recognising what is framed and the limitations of that frame. As such, the production of anticipatory affects also signifies a subject's recognition of their subjugation. The effect of this acknowledgement of subjugation is the production of tension, particularly between the affects of pride and shame, but also between the drive between producing queerness or homonormativity.[33] Notably, anticipatory affects can also be foundational, and we may argue

[33] Discursively speaking, homonormativity is the acclimation to the discursive constitution of homosexuality by the social order; queerness, as resistance, is the desire to constitute a discourse of homosexuality outside of the social order.

that during the process of incipiency, that a homosexual will develop shame alongside anxiety as a foundational affect.

Foundational affects are positive affects (in the sense that anger and laughter are negative in their capacity to interrupt the flow of meaning); foundational affects constitute meaning, given a certain ideological frame and a subject's relation to that frame (be it secure or precarious). Situations are arrayed around affects which define the limits of any given situations discursive and ideological intelligibility. Giving structure to the flow of meaning that passes between subjects. In the example of queer subjects, the foundational affects of anxiety, shame and longing all provide a way of framing a queer subjects flow of meaning as it orients them towards certain horizons of possibilities. In this sense, experience of shame and anxiety, as well as other affects which become foundational (longing comes to mind), become central to the flow of meaning to a subject, it is through their experience of foundational affects that they manage to come-to-terms with their sexuality. It is important to consider that negative affects in this sense are not foundational, there is a complex interplay of affect at work in this instance, given that same-sex sexual desire is a negative affect, but all subjects of the social order are made to attach disgust to same-sex desire. Negative affects are structurally powerful as they allow subjects to pass affect from one body to another, in that we are capable of sharing anger and laughter, but we cannot necessarily give other people our disgust or shame. Disgust, like shame, anxiety and longing, act on the body defining the flow of meaning, constituting that same-sex desire is disgusting and shameful, in turn causing anxiety (at being disciplined by regulatory forces), the effect of which is to create longing for something which cannot be had. This is an entirely dystopian figuration, however, as we well and truly know that not all homosexual people are relegated to the closet so confined by shame, disgust, anxiety and longing that they cannot come-out, and that it is possible for homosexual[34] people to break the flow of meaning that colonises their bodies and identities.

Given that foundational affects are positive and serve to reinforce a subject's position within the social order, a considerable part of a working theory of foundational affect is an account of the ways in which homosexual subjects are able to resist their *assuijettisement,* in this case, I am choosing to articulate those methods as being *negative registers*. Negative registers give foundational affect its queer orientation, particularly given that queer subjects are governed mostly by negative affects (shame; longing; anxiety). Queer experiences of the

[34] I would like to stress here that while homosexuals, and specifically gay males, are the object of study here, this is a theoretical figuration that has the potential to work with other sexual minorities. However, at this stage, I do not have the space to flesh this out, and as such, I am working to avoid any account of sex, gender and sexuality that may be mythologising and totalising.

process of *assujettissement* preceding the emergence of foundational affect. Therefore, foundational affect is necessary and contingent to the existence of queer subjectivities; although these affects do develop over time, given post-queer potentials for subjectivity (becoming rhizomatic), foundational affects are potentially sublimated and mutated, but a foundational affect is always already present as a contingent aspect of subjectivity. Compounded negative experiences may see anxiety develop into hysteria, shame may develop into disgust, and longing may develop into moroseness. In any case of negative compounding, what is at risk is that the individual subject turns against itself rather than the terms of its subjectivation. In a way, José Esteban Muñoz has already argued for this in *Disdentifications* (1999), where Muñoz argues that "these identifications with others are often mediated by a complicated network of incomplete, mediated, or crossed identifications. They are also forged by the pressures of everyday life, forces that shape a subject and call for different tactical responses" (38). While it is not my aim to confuse identifications with orientations, the two concepts share a similar valence at this juncture — to the point where it is possible to replace identifications with orientations. An individual subject's orientations are conciliated by an emphatic network of iterative encounters with the Other. Foundational affect then performs the role of informing the subject of its need for tactical responses, reacting in a miserly capacity of shortcuts themselves informed by the iterative effect of everyday forces. Yet, this is the structure of an uninterrupted flow of foundational affect, one where queerness is completely subsumed under a heteronormative social order; unaccounted for in this structure is the potential of the negative registers of queer subjectivities which are created by its structural position as Other and offer a way of interrupting the flow of foundational affect and open up post-queer possibilities.

The Negative Registers of Foundational Affect

The emergence of pride as an affect within an individual does not overwrite foundational affects like shame and anxiety. Rather, pride is the result of negative registers which help in the reorienting of queer subjects. Though this is the limit of negative registers, reorienting, as it is impossible to figure oneself outside the social order, let alone to discursively constitute a subjectivity there; even contemporary racist discourses can only ever figure minority subjects at the limit of recognition and cannot deny their existence fully. In a sense, a body that has matter will always figure into the social order to a certain extent as that is the bare material that constitutes human-ness. To this point, there are three identifiable negative registers:

desublimation, jouissance and disidentification. These registers work as a way of suturing the subject by way of interrupting the flow of meaning between the way it feels itself to be and the ways in which it is felt. Lee Edelman has argued that the "structural inability of the subject to merge with the self for which it sees itself a signifier in the eyes of the Other necessitates various strategies designed to suture the subject in the space of meaning where Symbolic and Imaginary overlap" (2003, 8). This is an interesting formulation as it posits the individual as responsible for being the agent of change, as containing within it the power to subvert the hegemony the social order exerts over it. In terms of the theory that is being moved with here, it is not necessarily possible for the subject to become an agent of change, yet they do contain the ability to be subverted themselves. It is more likely that negative registers reorient subjects and allow them to move in new ways.

For Lee Edelman, one of the greatest troubles of homosexuality and living queerly is the untangling of knowledge that must occur in order to come to terms with the life a subject wants to live. Everything a subject is taught, as Edelman argues, is sublimated knowledge. All education has been colonised and rendered to be common sense, presenting to the child a schema of how things *should* be, "the one sublimates or positivizes—in the form of 'presence' or 'being'—the negativity of primal division, which in consequence becomes unthinkable" (2017, 148). The queer subject who then desires to live queerly then must enact processes that make possible the untangling of this sublimated knowledge, which constitutes itself as 'being,' a rendering of heteronormative life as being ontologically pre-determined life. A possible method of this is *desublimation*; in its most theoretical formulation, desublimation exists as a form of Lacanian negativity which works to deconstruct the *innocence* of the child, revealing the child's position as a creature of desire and pleasure and undermining heteronormative theories of innocence where the child is a figure of futurity; in effect, desublimation works as an exposing of the child and its "implication in the pulsion of the drive" (Edelman, 128). The power desublimation possesses to call into question the work of the social order's colonisation of bodies is nearly unfettered as it works to reveal to us the socially constructed-ness of the grounding logics of identity, as Edelman expresses, "less the encounter with an entity unaltered by the gloss of idealization than the *undoing* of the entity as already idealized, already sublimated, in its framing *as* an entity" (160). Once again, as if to continue beating the proverbial dead horse, desublimation is not in itself a totalizing force or unique and complete process; rather, it is a continuous and iterative process that must constantly work to unpick at the sublimated world of education. It also poses the struggle of

resistance, as it is entirely impossible to preclude oneself from the social order; one may only ever figure oneself as already on the margins,

> Desublimation, like jouissance, thus functions in a purely negative register (as its prefix already indicates), performing an act of givenness of what it is. In doing so it opposes itself to the work of education, which reinforces the 'one' of the entity in the form of knowledge, meaning, and legibility. (Edelman 2017, 160)

It also figures the work of critique as a recuperative mode that seeks to render as legible the work of resistance and works to elucidate the division that exists between the Imaginary and the Symbolic, between that which is legible within the social order and that which exists on the plane of immanence.

Another Lacanian figuration, jouissance, inhabits a curious position here, where desublimation is a purely negative process that works to undermine the Symbolic and the social order. Jouissance is figured more as a drive of the Imaginary, as Edelman defines it: jouissance is "a violently disruptive enjoyment that threatens the integrity of the object insofar as the object is nothing but a catachrestic positing intended to foreclose the primal negativity of *ab-sens* as the subtraction from being and meaning without which neither can arise" (2017, 125). Yet as Mari Ruti figures it in *The Singularity of Being* (2011), jouissance is something which must be structured as desire so that we may operate as legible subjects, as Ruti argues, "without this organizational consistency of desire, we would be compelled to ride the wave of bodily jouissance in ways that would keep us forever caught at the junction of excessive pleasure and excessive pain" (2011, 16). As such, any resistance to the movement of jouissance can be seen as a capitulation to the colonisation of the body. The potential, then, that jouissance has as a negative register of foundational affect is that it contains the power to crack open the body and to open it to a horizon of bodily affect that cannot ever be fully conceived of. Mari Ruti extends her argument by asserting that "this unattainability of unadulterated jouissance is what makes social life possible" (19). Ruti's argument here does, indeed, fail to consider the various ways in which jouissance offers radical potential for reorganising queer life and sociability. In terms of foundational affect, jouissance remains unbearable, a void of self-shattering desire that connects the body to the world of affective encounters that we cannot access. As Edelman concedes, "the persistence of the zero we never can know as such, the ubiquitous access to jouissance we never can endure as such" (2017, 142). Yet, the experience of jouissance, no matter how temporary, has the ability to irrevocably change a subject by reorienting the subject to experiences of desire and affect. We may consider this in terms of 'breaking the seal' of anal pleasure, where a

subject discovers that what was considered as grotesque and taboo is, in fact, deeply pleasurable to them, which can be considered as being a substantiation of *nothing*, which in turn, reorients the subject to the pursuit of anal pleasure. Such a revelatory turn in the subject uncovers a world where such pleasure is acceptable and opens up the possibility of rendering as acceptable other things deemed as grotesque by the social order. Jouissance, therefore, is a necessary experience for homosexual subjects as they discover that the things that they previously experienced as gross and taboo become entirely enjoyable and fulfilling.

The third negative register offers more by way of a strategy for reorienting the way in which a subject engages textually with representation. Queer performance scholar, José Esteban Muñoz, theorised in his first book the power of disidentification. Muñoz theorised a way of working within utopianism to uncover perfect and beautiful ways for a minority subject to create, within themselves, a fantasy where representations that were previously shut off to them are open to being identified with. There are at least two ways in which to deploy; one is from a position of privilege wherein disidentifying gives the opportunity to empathise with the minority subject. Muñoz argued this as being a "hermeneutical performance of decoding mass, high, or any other cultural field from the perspective of the minority subject who is disempowered in such representational hierarchy" (1999, 25). Yet, the ability to empathise with disempowered subjects does not quite capture the radical dexterity of Muñoz's work, where "disidentification is, at its core, an ambivalent modality that cannot be conceptualised as a restrictive or 'masterfully' fixed mode of identification … a survival strategy that is employed by a minority spectator … to resist and confound socially prescriptive patterns of identification." (1999, 28). In a way, disidentification argues that subjects who are susceptible to regulatory forces can opt to work within the structures that oppress them in order to alleviate the stress inflicted on their bodies by normativity. It would be slightly off-pitch to label disidentification as a transgression when it is more "about recycling and rethinking encoded meaning. The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstrues the encoded message's universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recruits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications" (Muñoz 31). Disidentification, then, as a negative register of foundational affect, wretches open the horizon of potentialities and allows minority subjects to figure themselves upon a plateau of representation and to imagine for themselves a liveable life. The keen edge of Muñoz's thought here is that disidentification is a highly politicized term that allows a subject to move ably among discourse and ideology, which are themselves highly variable

ends, and disidentification provides the subject with a swift mode of resistance that allows it to avoid becoming territorialised.

Structurally, queer negative registers are an iterative process of social transgression and its work is never complete as regulatory forces are deployed to recuperate the transgressing subject. Such as it is, social transgression is not a futile exercise as transgression aids in the queer subjects ability to re-orient themselves and their position within the social order. Returning to the figure of 'the faggot,' that figure of insipid and effeminate homosexuality, whose sexuality has become an identity. The potential of negative registers means that it is possible that through the figure of the faggot queerness' relationship to masculinity has been desublimated, challenging the notion of how a man should look and how he should perform, as well as challenging the very role of 'he,' and "opposes itself to the work of education … knowledge, meaning, and legibility" (Edelman 2017, 160). Also, at work in this example is disidentification, as the faggot begins to renegotiate their relationship to the regulatory forces of the social order and begin to construct new narratives for themselves which aid in disidentifying. An immediate example is of how Edmund White manages reappropriate the shame of homosexual sex done under toilet stalls or in bushes under the cover of dark and makes it become a site of desire, as particularly written in *A Boys Own Story* (1982) and *The Beautiful Room is Empty* (1988). Sexual activity in these narratives is filled with thrill and lust as the narrator creeps around hives of sexual activity seeking to satisfy his sexual compulsions, with disidentification occurring, not in the eradication of shame, but rather the interpellation of shame into discourses of desire. Jonathan Alexander argues for White's subversion of shame as, "other forms of sexual experience, ultimately remembered fondly … 'love' is therefore both obsessional and transformative; in delighting in his obsessions and compulsions, they turn from shameful self-degradation into aestheticized remembrances" (2014, 50). Calling attention to White's writing is important given that homonormativity has been revealed to be the sublimated version of gay sexuality in capitalism by a heterosexual social order, and as such depoliticised and desexualised representations of queerness flood the media, what White achieves in transforming shame into something desirable is effectively a desublimation of gay sexuality. As well as this, the reliance on affect to describe a body that precedes the emergence of the subject seems to depend on the incorrect assumption that the feeling body is pre-cultural, but it is possible to conceive that the same body is unruly and resistant, that it is exploring its own ability to exist within the same social order which is attempting to constitute it.

Foundational Affect: Shame

There is likely nothing no new information to share about the experience of shame as an affect and what it is like to be shamed. Yet, both the demand of (critical) queer theory and any contemporary project that desires to be antiracist is that in spite of having nothing revelatory to share, the project must be strict in defining its relation to the theory it deploys. In a discussion of shame in *Statistical Panic* (2009), Kathleen Woodward espouses that "shame is not so much identifiable as a particular emotion as it is virtually inherent in the way one responds to the social world of everyday life as well as to dramatic events. It is an effect of one's subordination in society, a way of perceiving and being in the world that is reinforced at every turn" (95). Having traced a couture genealogy of shame out of Sartre, Virginia Woolf and Eve Sedgwick, Woodward portrays shame as being foundational, that it bears such a weight and significance in the body that it orients us to the world through what is shameful. Elspeth Probyn identified that,

> Shame, for example, works over the body in certain ways. It does this experientially—the body feels very different in shame than in enjoyment—but it also reworks how we understand the body and its relation to other bodies or, for want of a better word, to the social. (2010, 74)

In this example, shame illuminates to the individual how their body is different to the social, how that body acts out in ways that are shameful. In this way, shame is produced through the body as "both idea and affect" (2010, 79) and not only are we made to feel in profoundly negative ways what it is to be different, but we are also given to understand the reasons for those feelings. Shame, here, operates differently from anxiety and loneliness because it is cultural, and its regulatory power is "produced out of the clashing of mind and body" (2010, 81), where the mind is given to understand the reasons for shame being the result of a failure of the body.

When dealing with shame in this context, it is important to deal with shame *as* shame instead of utilizing the more popular gay shame, which has become embroiled in complicated racial politics, where gay shame is predicated on what has been identified as gay cosmopolitanism that itself can only be materialised through whiteness. As first exalted by David Halperin and Valerie Traub, gay shame is meant to give critical attention to aspects of gay life that have been perceived to be forgotten in the wake of gay pride (Alexander 2015). A cultural movement of gay pride has been judged as having discarded ugly feelings that

contravene the "narratives of pride, self-acceptance, or assimilation to larger cultural norms of social and sexual acceptability" (Alexander 2015, 39). Though what is apparently ignored is that a movement of gay pride has its origin in queer ethnicity, emerging out of and contingent on shameful feelings and shameful history. This gay shame/pride being constructed is dependent on the idea of a genealogy of inherited feelings in modernity, passed down from the Greeks through to the cosmopolitan queers of the nineteenth and early twentieth century (Nealon 2001), structuring a literary genre of mutual obligation, paying off the debt of another's shame to live comfortably with pride.

Gay pride is part of a movement, not necessarily political or cultural, but a social movement, wherein gay men attempt through assimilationist acts to shed the fatal fear of AIDs stigma and is itself formed on the ground of 'being shamed' of being made to feel ashamed of "the sexual acts associated with male homosexuality" (McCann & Monaghan 2020, 94). The problem, then, is that gay shame (and pride, in turn) are concentrated on shame as a site of ethnic similarity on which gay identity should be formed, taking as its assumption that all gay-identifying people have felt ashamed for *being* gay and totally ignores the regulatory structures that exist to prevent subjects from making such an identification. This is also the point that gay shame becomes materialised through Whiteness, as it assumes that there is both the ability to identify as gay (in the cosmopolitan and modern sense) and having made that identification a subject can freely find in their negative feelings a source of cultural, social and political liberation — forgetting all that some subjects may need to leave behind in order to do so.[35] Gay shame needs to be ignored in this discussion because it precludes the action of the regulatory force in favour of studying the identitarian effects. Shame for gayness is not the proper object of those who are queer-identified because the shame of gayness (and of queerness more broadly) may be leveraged against any subject who acts queerly, which is why there is a conscious decision here to examine shame *as* shame.

To leave behind the notion of gay shame, even though it was taken up by distinguished theorists, is an acknowledgement of the failure of queer theory to properly account for the body of the ethnic and racial Other. To acknowledge, instead, shame *as* shame is not an automatic redux, that we may, in the pursuit of antiracism, throw off burdensome and racist theories does not mean that we default upon antiracism, taking shame

[35] Popular representation of gay shame includes men in the closet or on 'the down-low' like in Barry Jenkins' *Moonlight* (2018) and queer men married to women as explored in the HBO series *House of the Dragon* (2022-).

as shame is part of an antiracist movement that requires that we constantly feed it energy so that it may continue to be antiracist. Much like the promise queer theory was organised around, antiracism must be a constant destabilising movement, content to move over territory it has already covered to undo any damage even it itself has caused. In turn, in considering the impact of shame on foundational affect and incipiency is also itself an acknowledgement the work is itself only rigorous and honest in considering the potential impact of affect on all marginalised bodies and to admit that more specific work will need to be done in considering the intersectional impacts of the theory. Much like how in literary theory there exists both the ideal reader and the actual reader, in queer theory it can be posited that there exists both an ideal subject and an actual subject. In the instance of shame, "the affective subject is a collection of trajectories and circuits" (Stewart 2007, 59), and all those trajectories and circuits become turned toward shame, in the ideal subject of queer theory it would be presumed that the ashamed body is white, or that white theory is sufficient in understanding how that body has come to feel ashamed. Theories of an ethnicized gay shame are totalizing in their use of an ideal subject that is white and cosmopolitan[36], making a concurrent presumption that racially and socially marginal subjects will find ways to disidentify with the presented theories.

Shame arrives with the sublimated understanding of homosexuality and queerness as perverse and is internalised as the homosexual body as being inherently perverse. A part of Eve Sedgwick's legacy seems to be an obligation of all queer theory to recognise the centrality of shame to queer subjectivities, while acknowledging that the emotional sequencing of shame differs within that category – the shape and form of gay shame has different effects and impacts than that of trans shame, or even of lesbian shame, and it might be that the critical reason for this is the way that gender and gendered obligations interplay with affect. Though, Kathleen Woodward (2009) argues that shame as a transformational affect bears a resemblance to Alison Jagger's *outlaw emotions*, as it becomes foundation that queer subcultures form themselves around. For Sedgwick, in this context, the most critical emotional sequencing is shame-pride, where desublimated residues of shame become a point of identification, and its association by the value of its desublimation to pride becomes radical. As Woodward argues, there is a model of shame where "there is a subject who judges and there is an object who is judged" (2009, 105); the radical aspect is introduced by the

[36] Hiram Pérez makes specific references to eurocentrism in his monograph 'A Taste for Brown Bodies' (2015), however I do not think it is as productive a category of critique as it used to be — instead there needs to be a category that is able to steadfastly hold to account eurocentrist beliefs alongside American imperialism in the alienation of black and brown bodies from being privileged.

shamed object making a reclamation of their personhood, recognising for *themselves* that they possess a liveable and grieveable life, pride as the affective corollary exists to rebuff the person who "embodies the values of dominant culture" (2009, 105) preventing them from utilising locutionary acts that are shaming to the queer subject.

The position of shame as a foundational affect does not require too much arguing. Indeed, the work of most queer theory scholars would gesture to shame's position as being axiomatic, but it is not just for the work of smarter people does its place get solidified. As Eve Sedgwick argued in 1993, that shame is an immediate affect, "shame floods into being as a moment, a disruptive moment, in a circuit of identity-constituting identificatory communication … like a stigma, shame is itself a form of communication" (5). By this, Sedgwick suggests that not only do we learn and make something of ourselves in the instance of being shamed, but by feeling ashamed, we have communicated to those around us something about our identities, which then becomes constitutive of that identity. But Hiram Pérez, in *A Taste for Brown Bodies*, seeks to disrupt the timeline of shame because while it might be an immediate affect, achieving all the things Sedgwick suggests in the instance of shaming, "the relationship of shame to identity formation is not theorised as an ongoing dynamic process. In fact, much queer theorising of shame is oddly nostalgic without consideration of the dynamic, affective quality of that nostalgia" (2015, 102). This quote affirms two things; the first is the point of this entire project, which is to study how identity formation is a dynamic process, and how foundational affects like shame are constantly at work on the body, determining the material conditions of its existence. The second point that is affirmed is that a tradition of gay shame in queer theory works as evidence of a queer ethnicity, something that, to be theorised, must be rendered as a stable category.

However, it is the guiding principle of queer theory to be constantly fluid to act as a destabilizing force that works to undermine to totalizing effects of the heteronormative social order; through the notion of a queer ethnicity, this destabilization becomes impossible as ethnicity is only possible through, what Lee Edelman has termed homographesis, the stabilizing of queer identities through rigid discursive formations. Any *body* may be shamed for acting queerly, and every *body* internalises the experience of that shame, whether from having regulatory forces leveraged against them, from witnessing it, or from being the one who does the leveraging — this is simply the result of living in a heteronormative culture. As such, to explore gay shame is redundant, because not only does it foreclose on the dynamic nature of shame, but it also internalises homophobic shame as the proper object of the queer identifying when this is not the case, it is the object of all subjects. None of this however,

means that shame can be discarded as a foundational category of gay identities, even as of writing this thesis, human rights afforded to homosexual subjects is not so absolute that queer identities are being formed outside of shame.

Foundational Affect: Anxiety

To examine the concept of 'queer anxiety' is to study the outward force of queerness on the heteronormative social order, to examine the effect queerness has on the heteronormative and the anxiety that effect causes. Where the relevance of shame to queer and gay literatures is more studied, anxiety requires more fleshing out. Such a fleshing out explores some of the more contingent ways in which literatures of incipiency represent the embodied experience of queerness. This sustained perspective in queer theory panders to the ability queerness must, firstly be deliberately inhabited, and secondly to transgress and make abject the world of the heterosexuality. This accordance of subaltern power to that which is queer seemingly grants the queer the ability to exist in the present as a propulsive force that can at any time effect its difference onto the world. In this conception queer would foment on a logical fallacy where that which is negative is not devoid of matter, but we know that queerness is the *zero* of the social order, it is the negative and as such it has no matter, and it has no force. In theory, to queer something is to fail or to observe a failure, to witness the threat of falling out of meaning. Even in the most ambitious of theory queerness should only ever be posited as a becoming, a perpetual movement toward an unachievable goal. It is important to clarify this position before engaging in a discussion of anxiety because to write about the conditions of anxiety is to write about the place where nothing becomes debilitating, enduring and complicit in asserting the authority of heteronormativity.

Traditional philosophical thought argues that anxiety is the proper object of *angst*, being a moment of great distress that is triggered by a traumatic event. By this logic anxiety is perceived as a sickness and an effect of being-in-the-world, as Heidegger and Kierkegaard both advocate, when to be anxious is to be confronted with nothingness becoming an embodied experience of existential dread, then what is ignored is the ways that anxiety subsumes the body when there is an object of anxiety. Placing stress on anxiety here, being a necessary *effect* of being-in-the-world ignores how anxiety acts as a regulatory force pursuant to correct and normal behaviour within the social order. Framed as sickness, being anxious is made to be understood as an abnormal condition of being, that the experience of distress and unease is a problem with a subject's individual functioning. However, traditional philosophy

posits that anxiety has an inside-out formulation in that anxiety comes from within the subject and attaches to objects outside of itself. It is because of this inside-out structure that "anxiety is conceived as a pivot around which the whole of human existence, both actual and possible, revolves" (Tsakiri, 2006, 20), its presence becoming the necessary condition of change, particularly for Kierkegaard, anxiety is a dizziness that threatens to overwhelm an individual, a dizziness which requires faith and courage to overcome.

The hazard here is that the definition of anxiety becomes tied up in petty semantics, yet "Kierkegaard makes a powerful phenomenological distinction between fear and anxiety; one fears this or that, but one is anxious of 'no-thing'" (Bradley 2015, 181). This train of thought is expanded more clearly in the example, "one cannot be anxious of a crime, for a crime is a definite thing, and one can only be anxious of no-thing. In the care of a crime one can only be anxious about the possibilities that arise from that wrong action" (Bradley, 182). In this example, anxiety is construed as being productive of a moral life, and it guides our actions through experiences of sinfulness that may prevent us from doing wrong. Anxiety becomes, then, adhered to freedom and possibility as the necessary feeling that informs the right way to make choices. Daniel Bradley articulates that due to this adherence to freedom, "anxiety … points us in two directions: forward toward an authentic grasp of one's freedom in responsibility but also backward toward a world that individuals find to be always already disordered by their own choices" (190). To be precise, to have anxiety is to have concern over the future, concern over making choices and the consequences of those choices and in the classical sense, anxiety can only ever be related to the future and to future choices of human potential to make wrong choices and be punished for them (Beabout, 1996). Anxiety here also pre-empts trauma, predicting that a traumatic event may be the consequence of a future choice.

The effect of this argument is to serve as a reminder that anxiety, more than being a condition of human experience, is a signal. To take this up as a position, though, is to take up Lacan's arguments around anxiety, specifically that "Anxiety is a signal in relation to what occurs in connection with the subject's elation to the object *a*[37] in all its generality" (Lacan, 86). Where the object *a* stands for the object of desire, the occurrence of anxiety serves as a signal to make the subject aware of their proximity to such an object. Anxiety, then, does have an object, but as Lacan argues, the subject in their experience of the intensities of

[37] For Lacan, object *a* or, *objet petit a*, is meant to stand for the unattainable object of desire. The presence of an object *a* not only designates that a subject has the capacity for desire but that the subject is finite – limited by the thing that is not, the thing it desires, object *a*.

anxiety, is not necessarily aware of that themselves: the object of their anxiety or what direction it is being applied from. Lacan argued that, for Freud, anxiety is a 'rim phenomenon,' a signal produced at the ego's limit when the ego is threatened by an outside force. Yet, in queer subjectivity, anxiety is not a signal produced by the ego because something threatens it, rather anxiety is a conditioned response to regulatory forces – in sum, the object *a* that threatens the queer ego does not arrive from the outside, rather it comes from the inside, and anxiety as a signalled response is meant to bar the queer ego from encountering object *a*.

It is possible then, that for Lacan, anxiety is caused by lack – a haunting of lack through the persistence of the signifier that cannot be abolished. It is here that a connection to incipiency, anxiety, and *jouissance* can be made – for the incipient homosexual, anxiety is the anticipatory affect of their existence, subjectivity, and status as incipient becomes contingent on the presence of anxiety which instructs them as to their relationship to the social order and its regulatory forces. If the experience and haunting of lack are caused by the distance between a subject and object *a*, then the more a homosexual subject comes to terms with their sexuality the closer they encroach on taboo desire the greater a reduction in the experience of anxiety. Inasmuch that anxiety signals danger in the world, which for Lacan might also be a signal for the irreducibility of experience, the question that needs to be asked is: why do some subjects experience less anxiety than others? The incipient homosexual and their experience of anxiety is one of prohibition, anxiety as a signal, signals when their desire might be in breach of the social order, any encounter with that desire and *jouissance*, resolves the tension in the subject. For Lacan, this resolution in tension is the given resolution to desire as law, as "unbounded satisfaction is actually a defence and an implementation of a law inasmuch as it curbs, suspends, and halts the subject on the path to jouissance" (Lacan 2016, 150), the suggestion here is that the assumption of a homosexual identity, as a resolution of incipiency, might be the sensible limit of a subject who was at risk of experiencing *jouissance* and coming into contact with object *a*. As an answer to the question, this explanation tells us that a reduction in the experience of anxiety moves, or rather shifts, the ontology of anxiety — where the incipient subject experiences anxiety as the signal that alerts the subject to the presence of something inside themselves, the homosexual, having fully come into their identity, experiences anxiety as a threat to that subjectivity.

The Contingency of Anxiety

These traditional views of anxiety fail to articulate how anxiety becomes central to twenty-first-century subjectivities fully, this is not, however, to argue that this change has not been theorised. In *The Phenomenology of Perception*, while making no extended analysis into it, Merleau-Ponty argues that "the anxiety of neurotics at night comes from the fact that the night makes us sense our contingency" (2012, 336), by which he is arguing that there is a philosophical quality to the night that is conducive to self-reflection. It is in these moments of self-reflection that subjects are made to feel the contact they have with the world, to sense how they are attached and connected to the world around them and the intensity and proximity of those connections[38]. The anxiety experienced by the recognition of one's contingency is suggestive of the precariousness of the connections that form us and Merleau-Ponty reminds us that when a subject feels truly alone is when the feeling of the conditions of their life will be made real to them. While the point that Merleau-Ponty makes is not the same as the one that I will make, is marks a movement toward thinking of anxiety as something other than a necessary existential condition for human progress. The conditions of anxiety need to instead be figured as occurring as a condition of the social order, a regulatory force which acts on subjects causing discomfort and as such any discussion of anxiety should be a critique of the material conditions that instantiate it.

Marginal communities possess the power to determine the material conditions that will signify their community, what they do not possess however, is the ability to determine how that resignification will be interpreted by the social order at large. Interestingly, the effect this has on the experience of anxiety is to compound what Freud identified as being the three types of anxiety: objective, neurotic and moral (Hall 1995). Where objective anxiety is described as "a painful emotional experience resulting from a perception of danger in the external world" (Hall 1955, 44), this is the more contemporary view of anxiety although in Freud's view anxiety is still a paranoid position as the feeling occurs within the individual. Neurotic anxiety is "aroused by a perception of danger from the instincts" that can be organised into three further denominations "free-floating type of apprehensiveness which readily attaches itself to any more or less suitable environmental circumstance" (45); the next is a phobia, which defined as anxiety or fear out of proportion to the danger a given object may actually pose is not applicable to the experience of queer anxieties about the harm the social order may address to them; the third denomination of neurotic anxiety is panic

[38] Taking a cue from Sara Ahmed, contingency differs from attachment because its focus is on what connections ground a subject in the world and relates to how a subject comes into being, whereas attachment critiques the feelings we have towards the connections that we form as subjects.

reactions, these are the result of acting out in bizarre and extreme ways "of discharge behaviour which aims to rid the person of excessively painful neurotic anxiety" (46), this may be seen in acts of internalised homophobia where closeted homosexual subjects may act out using homophobia in order to defer any feelings of anxiety concerning being outed. As stated, the experience of precariousness and vulnerability compounds the experience of anxiety and emerges as a social condition of marginality and changes the structure of anxiety as an affect.

Suffice it to say that what has been ignored in the philosophical study of anxiety are the ways it is experienced as an affect by marginalised subjectivities. Contemporaneously, to speak of anxiety as being about nothing (even if that nothing is the nothingness of *nothing*) is to diminish its importance as an affect. To argue that anxiety is central to human experience is to argue that it is productive, that it builds toward something, and that feelings of anxiety are not as inhibiting or debilitating as we experience them to be. A sharp and workable distinction is needed to discern anxiety from fear. At a basic level we can argue that to be anxious is to be concerned about what *may* happen, while fear is the concern of what *will* happen. This fulfils the basic philosophic mandate that anxiety has no specific object attached to it, to be anxious is to fret over something-maybe, again fear in this sense distinguishes itself by having a specific object, a something-definitely. It can be speculated that because anxiety has no object that it also lacks a subject; as an affect that does not attach to particular affective objects, but it may in turn lack a subject, which is to be about nothing or caused by nothing, suggesting that anxiety may be caused by anything.[39] The instance of anxiety may be instantiated by any experience: of trauma, the uncanny, stress, bodily and emotional difference, or even nothing much at all. This shift in thinking is necessary in thinking about anxiety as a debilitating affect and not a philosophical object, "anxiety is not an existential condition but a churning of the stomach, a throbbing of the arteries, a tension distending the skull, a series of stresses and shocks running the entire length of the body." (Shaviro 1993, 129). At its worst, anxiety curves through a body, weighing it down in a single moment, thickening blood and numbing fingers, calling into question every fibre of a being, and distorting a body's relation to the world.

Implicit in this argument is that anxiety has a relationship to discomfort, that by placing oneself on the margins, a subject is placed in a position of discomfort. So, although

[39] The form of power in Western neoliberal cultures is always invisible and acts on the body in invisible ways, such is the power of Law that "can make one dead in life, and even determine when and if one is to be resurrected" (Joan Dayan 2002, 61).

there is no specific subject or object of anxiety, the suggestion that is made then is that anxiety adheres to discomfort, that 'I feel anxious because I'm uncomfortable,' that we can only know of our anxiety if we also feel discomfort. In terms of moving on from these feelings of desublimating this sexual education, Berlant argues that "the only requirement is that sexual subjects be able to manage any anxiety emerging from their failure – always possible – to be the *something* that they need or want to be" (Berlant 2011, 147). This is important as it stresses implicitly that an individual must come-to-terms with their sexual and bodily difference to desublimate negative affects effectively. It also defines that incipiency, as a period of sexual and educational development, is an impasse where,

> An impasse is a holding station that doesn't hold securely but opens out into anxiety, that dogpaddling around a space whose contours remain obscure. An impasse is decompositional – in the unbound temporality of the stretch of time, it marks a delay that demands activity. The activity can produce impacts and events, but one does not know where they are leading. That delay enables us to develop gestures of composure, of mannerly transaction, of being-with in the world as well as of rejection, refusal, detachment, psychosis, and all kinds of radical negation. (Berlant 2011, 199)

Berlant here calls attention to how a delay caused by an impasse creates anxiety because of the threat of failure, but she also clarifies that these delays mean that marginalised subjects learn new ways of being in the world that teach them how to form communities out of their failure. Brought forth through Berlant's thesis is that incipient homosexuality as coming-to-terms with difference causes a delay that becomes intrinsic to queer subject formation as it can lead to a break in the flow of the social order and allow the subject to create queer attachments. Queer and other marginal subjects will always be made to feel uncomfortable and anxious in a white and Western heteronormative social order, and to relieve that anxiety, a subject must come-to-terms with their difference.

Foundational Affect: Loneliness

As this chapter has been structured around the qualities that foundational affects possess, where anxiety is an anticipatory affect that determines a queer subject's relationship with their queerness in the future tense, and shame is an immediate affect that is always the result of being shamed for the instance of queerness, so loneliness emerges as the enduring affect, as the consequence of behaving queerly. In *Feeling Backward*, Heather Love (2007) suggests

that “contemporary queer subjects are also isolated, lonely subjects looking for other lonely people” (36); while the sentiment is poetic, the implication is that loneliness and isolation are contingent and essential aspects of queer subjectivity – that queerness can only come to itself through loneliness and isolation. There is a myriad of reasons why loneliness is important to a queer subject that has fully come into their queerness, given its position as an enduring affect, but for now, what is more important is to examine why loneliness is a foundational and critical aspect of incipiency. In concluding her argument, Love goes on to say that the problem with feelings like loneliness is that “they are not good for action—they would seem to disqualify the person who feels them from agency or activity” (161) from a perspective of foundational affect and incipiency it becomes obvious that this is, indeed, the point of subjects being made to feel these feelings, of being affected in this way, it also highlights the complexity of incipiency of creating workarounds for these issues.

Loneliness is the affect of marginality. It renders the lived experience of a body as ambiguous and disposable, invisible and vulnerable. To experience loneliness is to test the capacity of a body and, in turn, discover the limits of a body. This test is conducted on the grounds of an absence of feeling; unlike anxiety and shame, there is little physical feeling to the experience of loneliness. It is marked not by a rush of heat to the face or by a twisting of the gut; it is millions of nerves yearning to feel the earnest and genuine touch of another. The lonely body desires for little else than to be attended to by another. Whether it is the modest grazing of knees or the exhilaration of seeing another smile upon your arrival, the abatement of loneliness arrives in the smallest of instances of bodies impacting each other. For Sara Ahmed, in her seminal text, *Queer Phenomenology*,

> “loneliness allows the body to extend differently into the world, a body that is alone in this cramped space of the family, which puts some objects and not others in reach, is also a body that reaches out towards others that can be glimpsed as just about on the horizon.” (2006, 104)

Ahmed adeptly argues, in the space of a sentence, that the ‘that is alone’ is such only within the space and domain of the family and that this body that is alone reaches out in unknowable ways to a community it does not know exists but that has it eyes out for vulnerable and marginal subjects, such as itself. It is loneliness that makes it possible for homosexual subjects to exist on the horizon of potentiality, stretched across it and open to the impact of the flow of meaning.

As Fay Bound Alberti discusses in *A Biography of Loneliness*, “loneliness forged in childhood and adolescence seems to set a pattern for loneliness in later life” (2019, 10),

which positions the foundationality of loneliness to subjection creation, centralising the experience of abjection and alienation in the realm of the social to human development. Alberti's use of 'forged' is an interesting suggestion as it theoretically makes loneliness contingent on queer subjectivity as well. The embodiment of loneliness brings the subject to the limit of feeling or non-feeling; loneliness pulls the subject to the limits of grief for the loss of acceptance into the social order and for it to be forged. It is this loss of acceptance or anticipation of the loss that makes loneliness so potent for homosexual subjects who often estrange themselves from normative sociality so as to prevent an outright rejection. Loneliness, in this way, is the feeling without a name. As Alberti explains, "it is impossible to perceive or experience the self without a body that thinks, feels, and believes" (2019, 193) and to give a name to loneliness would be to identify the conditions under which the incipient homosexual has been alienated. Indeed, the social order only functions in keeping silent over the harm that it causes in pursuit of its own survival. It could be that it also needs to exist for the incipient homosexual as a nameless feeling because loneliness does not exist as an emotional dyad, where we have standard dyads of shame/pride, anxiety/optimism, anger/joy, loneliness has no direct or clear dyad.

This lack of an opposite for loneliness has to do with the often-complex way that loneliness may arrive for the subject. As Alberti argues, "loneliness has many forms, then—social and individual as well as creative and destructive" (222); it arrives as a consequence of a cluster of emotions. This cluster might be effective social or individual loneliness where the subject alienates themselves from either groups or themselves, and it might be that the loneliness is creative or destructive, that it might be used positively in the generation of art, or it might be destructive of the individual subject. In its role of enduring affect, in the anticipatory/immediate/enduring affective flow, the homosexual loneliness of incipiency emerges as a destructive form of loneliness due to anxiety and shame; the lonely homosexual aims to prevent negative feelings. Though therein lies the rub, the determined reduction in harm by deliberate alienation is itself destructive; if anxiety has adhered to failure, then loneliness has adhered to longing, the alienation from the social develops a longing for connection through the pattern of incipiency, it is always unclear whether that connection will be queer or normative.

Homosexual loneliness can, obviously, be theorised in many ways, though as with shame and anxiety, the source of loneliness always arrives from outside the body, which means what is left to be explained are the forms that loneliness can take. In one instance, loneliness may take the form of hermitage, as the condition of a hermit, one who wilfully

casts themselves to the edge of sociability. Where the hermit deliberately removes themselves from the realm of the social out of a dislike of the social world, a homosexual may remove themselves from the world of the social for two reasons, the first being deliberate action to reduce the actual or potential violence of regulatory forces, the second being that the desire of a heteronormative social order is the disappearance of the sexual Other. As such, in this example, homosexual loneliness differs from hermitage because it does not have any connotations with opposition to sociability. Indeed, homosexual world-making is itself structured on the need for connection, developing the concept of 'found family' to describe the relationship queerness has with the social. Where the life of a hermit takes on a philosophical value, a return to nature and isolation that is intended to stir within the individual a movement toward enlightenment that would be otherwise disrupted or corrupted by social, metropolitan life. The lonely homosexual, on the other hand, is lonely because the conditions of their relationality and materiality have been determined by the social order to be Other and, as such, have been pushed to exclusion.

In keeping with the feeling of a body that is alone, an effect of loneliness is the embodied experience of being pushed to the margins. Under these terms, it would be wrong to conflate isolation as loneliness, even as physical isolation may also be an effect. In this case, the experience of bodily affect and material is more important to an understanding of loneliness. To experience belonging is to feel comfort even on the margins. This makes the issue of homosexual loneliness an epistemological one. Kathleen Woodward discusses the power of outlaw emotions to minoritised or oppressed subjects (2009). As theorised by Alison Jaggar, outlaw emotions describe how marginal subjects have access to emotion that centre subjects cannot access. Woodward stresses that shame, while having an outlaw status, is not an outlaw emotion because it cannot be liberated of its negative valences. Can the same be said of anxiety and loneliness? – giving reason to the powerlessness of the incipient homosexual. If emotions are socially constructed, then it is important that the construction is queered. Laura Silva argues that "outlaw emotions are exactly emotions that go against the agent's web of internalized oppressive beliefs about the world" (2021, 678); they are improper to the social order since they are essential bodily reactions to the experience of precarity. The epistemic value of these emotions is that they create the conditions "that motivate the agent to *question* her oppressive beliefs" (2021, 668); indeed, these are the very conditions that are outlined by incipient homosexuality and foundational affect, the establishment of oppressive affects that force the subject to confront their position within the social order.

The question remains, however, about whether loneliness might be labelled an outlaw emotion. Certainly, for queer subjects, it has the potential to be loneliness (and anxiety, too) that informs the queer subject of their marginal status; the uncomfortable feeling of being on the edge causes the subject to question that position. While the effect of that questioning and its results are complicated, being bound up with gender, socioeconomic, race and other intersectional aspects of marginality, it is impossible to know whether an incipient homosexual will remain closeted, become radically queer or desperately homonormative, and so on. Yet, a passage from Heather Love calls into question whether or not loneliness has the capacity to be an outlaw emotion,

> self-pity despair, depression, loneliness, remorse—are in fact bound up with pleasure, with precisely the sort of pleasure that gets regularly excoriated as sentimental, maudlin, nostalgic, self-indulgent, and useless … associated with pleasures—even ecstasies—so internal that they distract attention from the external world. (2007, 161)

There is potential, then, from Love's perspective, that subjects are at risk of indulging in these emotions and that incipient subjects might come to loneliness as a way to distract themselves from (instead of questioning) their marginal status. Mind, as Justin Remhof argues, "loneliness is nearly always painful" (2018, 196). Remhof stipulates that this is the case under Nietzsche's philosophy of loneliness; he further argues that "some might enjoy moments of loneliness, for instance, and thus the aversive effect of loneliness might be minimal." The suggestion here is quite clear that even though one might indulge in their loneliness, such an indulgence might only mitigate some of the pain of being alone. Nietzsche goes much further than this, however, outlining an argument for the existence of our *loneliest* loneliness, an epistemological experience of aloneness that brings about an encounter with the eternal recurrence — the notion of being forced to live one's life over and over, where every aspect is repeated, all the best and the worst of that life.

In *Queer Phenomenology*, Sara Ahmed makes the point that "unhappiness of the deviant performs its own claim for justice … not only does it expose injustice, but it can also allow those who deviate to find each other" (2006, 105), it is unhappiness as a result of loneliness that is important, the experience of injustice and precarity forces an encounter with eternal recurrence, delivering the queer subject to loneliest loneliness. To Nietzsche, the loneliest loneliness is figured as a moment that triggers radical self-transformation, wherein an individual arrives fleetingly at their most painful isolation and is stirred to change (Remhof 2018). For homosexual subjects, an experience of the loneliest loneliness cannot bring forth a will to change as a gay subject must first desublimate their shame and anxiety;

such a desublimation must unpack the relationship the gay subject has with their deviant status. The unhappiness caused by loneliest loneliness and its injustice also unfurls on the subject the experience of ethical loneliness, what Jill Stauffer defines as "when a human being, because of abuse or neglect, has been refused the human relation necessary for self-formation and thus is unable to take on the present moment freely" (2018, 26). If the attachment style of the incipient homosexual's loneliness can be described, it would give privilege to ethical loneliness, which comes first, as this style of loneliness "is the trauma of loss of safety. In particular, it is the loss of the sense the lucky among us have that other human beings will treat us as human beings rather than as objects" (Stauffer 2018, 27). By feeling aloneness in this way, gay subjects open themselves to the potential of the radical change of loneliest loneliness; critical to this change is the coming-to-terms with bodily difference and understanding of precarity in order to feel safe peeling themselves off of the margin they need first to feel comfortable with their sexual and bodily difference. In this way, loneliness is the dominant affect structuring incipient homosexuality, the desublimation of ethical loneliness, having experienced the loneliest loneliness and encountering the eternal recurrence, marks the assumption of a queer community through the coming-to-terms of bodily difference and, as such, a definitive end to incipiency.

In terms of making the body of the incipient homosexual legible, loneliness is the most productive affect. Not only does the experience of loneliness bring the homosexual to their lowest low that triggers radical change, but loneliness as well "can therefore provide significant insight into the values that we might want to embrace in order to become who we most desire to be" (Remhof, 199), in this context we can take this to mean that loneliness can be read for how incipiency will be delineated. The usefulness of loneliness is brought forth by the acceptance of loss, which as José Esteban Muñoz argues, "to accept loss is to accept queerness—or more accurately, to accept the loss of heteronormativity, authoritization, and entitlement … to veer away from heterosexuality's path" (2009, 73), this acceptance and opting out does not eliminate or desublimate loneliness, rather the queer subject now aware of their minority status can understand the ephemera of loneliness and how it positions them. One of these effects of loneliness is the apprehension of exposure. Given its position as a foundational affect, loneliness needs to be read as being productive and conducive to the psychic and physical protection of a subject; loneliness shields the incipient subject from the harm that is addressed to them by the social order by offering recourse for their fear of exposure. Yet, as an enduring affect in incipiency, loneliness also offers protection from the failure of queerness by already alienating the incipient homosexual from the social order,

akin to an abdication of social responsibility. It is the homosexual's relationship to these protections which will help to predict how incipiency will delineate; subjects who find themselves comfortable with the conditions of their minoritization will exit their incipiency in homonormative or heteronormative ways, interested in upholding the values of the social order.

So much emphasis has been placed on the power of desublimation and the ability to recode affective relations in the service of queer identity formation, but it must be noted that desublimation is neither total nor absolute. The coming-to-terms of difference and acceptance of loss is a radical opening of difference which "cannot be said to be violent or nonviolent" (Mercier 2020, 5), the effective desublimation of regulatory forces acting on the queer body effects itself a sort of cleavage in which the body is hewed, permanently altered by the acceptance of such difference, and desublimation lacks the power to suture the damage of that radical opening. This need not be considered negative or, as mentioned, violent, yet as Heather Love states, "erasing all traces of grief" (2007b, 54) is needed to be properly accepted as being 'happy.' The erasure of negative affect, instead of their desublimation, is a forfeiting of injury required for the pursuit of normative homosexual domesticity. This erasure is another form of regulatory force that asks that queer subjects ignore the injury and violence that has been addressed to them in favour of dealing with that violence and the subsequent feelings it caused, but as mentioned, if full desublimation is impossible, then a complete erasure of affect is also impossible. Happiness is not impossible for the queer subject; however, simply to meet it in the terms laid out by the heteronormative social order would, in effect, 'seal off' the trauma of incipiency, and queer happiness is a difficult area to theorise. Rather, the argument here is that loneliness would not desublimate into happiness, as the reworking of loneliness would not default into happiness because loneliness has no opposite; instead, loneliness desublimates into optimism. Where loneliness is the absence of hope, where a subject is rendered at their most isolated, than the overcoming of such loneliness gives way to the potential for the reformation of community and connection. While not perfect, this desublimation can be best argued as being the return of optimism to the queer subject.

Perhaps optimism is still not quite right, as Lauren Berlant tells it, "the *affective structure* of an optimistic attachment involves a sustaining inclination to return to the scene of fantasy … will help you or a world to become different in just the right way" (2011, 2), but as argued here, optimism has a definite attachment and the subject "leans toward promises within the present moment" (2011, 24). The confusion here is that queer optimism would

always be attached to a utopian future that is never guaranteed, a utopian future or utopian potentials that are not definite. Yet, there is no way around what happens to loneliness when its desublimated; optimism is the only reasonable option, the ability for queer subjects not to see the future but rather attach to the possibility of a future. As Michael Snediker argues in his monograph on the subject, queer optimism is immanently oriented – that it is for the *self* as the *self*, for Snediker "queer optimism doesn't aspire towards happiness, but instead finds happiness *interesting* … it wants to *think* about feeling good, to make disparate acts of feeling good thinkable" (2009, 3). It is in this way why optimism as desublimated loneliness in incipient subjects is critical, as the emergence of a queer optimism being immanent to the subject platforms a way for the queer subject to figure out a liveable life.

Is this liveable life, delivered to the queer subject by the successful desublimation of their negative affects, anti-relational even, as demonstrated, they are theoretical connections to queer negativity. But there is not anything anti-relational about queer negativity, which asks us to figure a life and a future that is not structured by the heteronormative figure of the child. Rather, it could be that anti-relationality structures its future out of a politics of harm, a form of necessary survival. This notion of necessary survival and a politics of harm drags queer utopia, relationality, and negativity into the present; optimism, too, occurs in the present. Necessary harm demands that the subject be impure, maybe even immanently so, and this liveable life figures itself as part of queer utopia, but necessary harm is conducive to utopianism, as any queer survival and persistence is a radical notion of aliveness that redresses the terms through which queer subjects imagine their lives. To be born impure is to be born. From birth, every individual is given no choice but to survive. The terms of this survival are highly regulated – falling into the realm of biopolitics – and sometimes, the system will discard individuals. However, until such a time as one dies, there is no choice for anything other than survival. Except for suicide, which is always framed as violent and taboo and never as a choice. Negative affects (shame, anxiety, loneliness) are seen as dirty, contaminating the purity of the subject. This is critical from an anti-relational perspective as the notion of a contaminated body provides the material grounds for resisting the social order. Framed dialectically as normative/queerness, pure/dirty frames a pursuit of becoming that should not be viewed as being right/wrong. We are born into impurity, into already impure systems that are sexist, racist, homophobic and transphobic. We are, therefore, born implicated in those systems, and such implication also provides the immanent grounds for resisting those systems.

This is the logic that structures ethical relationality, at least as Alexis Shotwell (2016) argues, which is why, when coupled with foundational affect it becomes imperative to resist condemning individuals for how their incipiency delineates. This train of thought does not follow through to a conclusion of forgiving people for the harm they do, instead, it works to construct a politics of harm. Perhaps it is still callous and cruel, but a politics of harm would only state that an individual is not responsible for any incidental harm done to others from any action in pursuit of basic and necessary survival. This should not be confused as a call to harm but should instead be understood as a call for leniency for anyone pursuing the terms of necessary survival. This politics of harm needs to be framed as only making sense, given that all humans are ethically compromised from birth, and there is no way to live a pure life. Importantly, this politics of harm is adhered to non-violence; this is critical because non-violence asks us to consider how our lives are built from the relations we have "to account for this way that selves are implicated in each other's lives, bound by a set of relations that can be as destructive as they can be sustaining" (Butler 2020, 9). Queer subjects cannot fully opt out of the social order, nor from the marking of their bodily difference can they feign to be pure or innocent, yet they can form from their queerness their own ethical relationality founded on their own experiences with desublimation of regulatory forces, which would force them to consider how their affective life is implicated in the world around them, the genealogy of their feelings, which might be as Butler suggests, destructive or sustaining.

Culturally correct emotional responses are foundational to subjectivity, given that they are how we first become activated as an 'I.' Queer emotional responses will never be naturalised and will always require subversion. But this has already been argued through the discussion of outlaw emotions and of desublimation. Its position here, however, has to do with a structure of feeling. Following Mel Y. Chen that affect is something 'not necessarily corporeal' and having the capacity to engage many bodies simultaneously, anxiety, loneliness and shame are affects in that they don't only impact an individualised body. Our anxiety, loneliness and shame do not only affect us, but they also affect those around us. When we feel anxious, we make those around us feel that anxiety, inviting them to share the knowledge of our vulnerability. When we feel ashamed, we let those around us know that they have shamed us and that there is something present to be ashamed of. This is not intended to be revelatory or inspirational; rather, it is meant to indicate how affect is manipulated by regulatory forces. The power of these feelings and their 'stickiness' is that they create a queer structure of feeling, a language that becomes recognisable as queer that can be decoded by

other queer subjects, like Kadji Amin argues in *Disturbing Attachments*, "structures of feelings are indicative of a minoritarian or emergent social experience that is not officially recognized" (2017, 201). This is, after all, the sum of foundational affect, a structure of feeling that has become central to the experience of queer subjectivity where the resolution of sexual bodily difference delineates the shape of that structure of feeling, predicting in its way where an incipient homosexual will take up their affect genealogy.

Foundational affect is critical to a study of incipient homosexuality in literature. A reading of literary affect brings to the surface of the text an understanding of the embodied-ness of characters in a narrative. To read anxiety, shame, and loneliness is to understand the structures of feelings that construct contemporary literary representations of homosexuality — in many ways, it is the ability to read for the failure of subjects to perform in expected ways. As has been theorised by Jack Halberstam, failure is an object of queerness because not only is failure contingent in a logic of capitalism adhered dialectically to success, but as Halberstam argues, "we can also recognise failure as a way of refusing to acquiesce to dominant logics of power and discipline and as a form of critique" (2011, 88). It is unfair to make this argument under the assumption that just because failure is queer — also a kind of framing of queer as better — that the experience of failing and the act of failing, to fail out of the social order by deliberately or accidentally resisting hegemonic power, is not easy. "The intensity of the need to *feel* normal is created by economic conditions of nonreciprocity that are mimetically reproduced in households that try to maintain the affective forms of the middle-class exchange while having an entirely different context of anxiety and economy to manage" (Berlant 2011, 180). It needs to be stressed that the drive for normality Berlant describes is a material reality for many subjects, but the objective they strive to achieve is fictitious and impossible to reach. Incipiency and its foundational affects define the subject striving for impossible normality in literature that often strives to represent that failure of normality as their central conflict.

Chapter 4: Reading *At Swim, Two Boys* for Shame

Published in 2001, Jamie O'Neill's novel *At Swim, Two Boys*, chronicling the coming-of-age of Jim Mack and Doyler Doyle, creates a dialectic between the coming-to-terms of abject sexuality and emerging nationalist sentiment in early twentieth-century Ireland. It would not be correct to read this attachment of homosexuality to an aggressive and militant campaign for independence as an example of what Jasbir Puar labels homonationalism, in which homosexual subjects of a nation-state perpetuate nationalistic ideology and discourse in order to secure lives within the nation, particularly for Puar, exceptionalism is "a process whereby a national population comes to believe in its own superiority and its own singularity" (2007, 5). Puar's argument rests on the assertion that "queerness as transgression … relies on a normative notion of deviance always defined in relation to normativity" (2007, 23); in making the argument for homonationalism, Puar goes to great lengths to articulate that the need for a homonationalism, that is a need to be acceptable - and accepted by - the state, emerges because queerness always adheres to deviance. *At Swim, Two Boys* does not graft its characters to conservative national politics; instead, it imbricates them with a nascent nationalist sentiment that was post-colonial and revolutionary. Instead, *At Swim, Two Boys* represents a utopian project that takes the figure of an uncertain future nation, which the protagonists project acceptance onto. Sean Austin Grattan, in his monograph *Hope Isn't Stupid,* makes the case for the importance of figuring utopia in literature. Contemporary literature, he argues, "is not based on the construction of a perfect society; instead, the contemporary utopia is marked by ambivalence and incompleteness" (2017, 5); Grattan's point is that utopian fiction is meant to fail in presenting an argument for a perfect world, instead, these forms of fiction are meant to incite inside the reader a feeling of something better.

The reading of negative affects that are key to homosexual feelings and the ways they are reprogrammed in the production is a form of reparative reading, reparative in the sense that texts are not necessarily an *object* to study. Rather, they are a textual terrain on which discourse, ideology, and affect are transmitted between subject and text; Grattan makes the claim that text has an innate ability to 'catalyse' real-world consequences (2017). This view is important to the reading of texts as utopian as it forces the reader to consider that the world that is imagined on the page isn't impossible or entirely fictional. Queer relationships and the possibility of queer relationships in fiction are founded on and rely on feelings of hope; hope

that they will survive, hope they will be happy. As such it is reasonable to assume that any text that fashions queer romance as happy and secure is itself working from a utopian imagination. Sean Grattan makes the point that,

> Remaining attuned to structures of feeling of the present, and the ways literature attempts to map — without codifying — these structures articulate nascent and emergent social forms that hint at practices of coping, resisting, embracing, or, in short, living in the present. (2017, 16)

Engaging with literature as a method of adjoining the past to the present, structuring feelings of hope as delineating through time and unfolding toward a horizon that is itself saturated with hope. The adhering of hope to the past engages with an affect genealogy which connects queer readers with a present that can be changed and a future that can be lived; unlike the locution 'it gets better' which is fundamentally exclusionary in its ethics and possibilities, the reparative work of queer historical fiction opens queer subjects up to the possibility of enduring and being connected through time. In a way, queer historical fiction is an act of being beside you in time.

At Swim, Two Boys constructs a utopia out of social exclusion as its way of connecting its readers through time. For Jim and Doyler, the prospect of a Republic of Ireland is construed as being a utopian possibility; the narrative places the characters at the edge of social exclusion, young enough to recognise their sexual difference but not old enough to be ejected from the social order for it, the result is that Jim and Doyler are able to pin all their hopes for a happy future on the potential republic which they can shape to include their happiness. The novel traces the relationship both Jim and Doyler have to the world around them closely. The beginning of the text establishes the significant differences in education and class between the two boys, Jim being a scholarship student at an affluent high school and son of a middle-class shopkeeper; Doyler, already having matriculated out of school early at fifteen, is one of the Dungman's boys, going around the town collecting people's faecal waste. In the first half of the novel, both of the boys begin to undergo a process of incipient homosexual socialisation; Jim is targeted, groomed and molested at his school by Brother Polycarp, who attempts to lure him toward a monastic life, suggesting that Jim would be able to pursue homosexual desire under an ecclesiastical hierarchy quietly. Doyler is prostituted by a Wildean Aristocrat, Anthony MacMurrough, who has just returned to Ireland after being imprisoned in England for gross indecency. These two relationships become central to the incipient development of Jim and Doyler, as Brother Polycarp offers a form of homosexuality founded on unremembering, of not attaching feeling across time and identity,

and Anthony MacMurrough offers the opposite, a homosexual identity that genealogically connects homosexual subjects across history through feeling and memory.

The second half of the novel dispatches the unremembering of Brother Polycarp and places the focus on the relationship between the two boys and their queer education at the hands of MacMurrough. Jim is being taught to swim by MacMurrough and steals time at the end of their lessons to learn more about homosexual relationships in history, about the Spartans and the Sacred Band of Thebes. Jim's lessons are all building to the promise that he made to Doyler that on Easter Sunday of 1916, they would swim together to the Muglins (a crop of rock islands off the coast of Dalkey) and claim it for Ireland. O'Neill is then adhering to the coming-to-terms of Doyler and Jim's relationship to the revolution, which, in turn, adheres homosexuality to death. Through the figure of MacMurrough, Jim and Doyler learn that homosexual subjectivity is always haunted by a past that tries to kill it, yet because homosexuality exists, it must persist and carry itself into a future it cannot guarantee for itself. MacMurrough teaches them that gayness cannot be eradicated through abjection, though the social order may have hoped that the epistemological emergence of 'the closet' would have smothered it. In spite of this historical oppression of gayness, both horrifically violent and horrifically traumatic, homosexual men and women have continued to emerge throughout history, likely due to gayness' unpredictability; unlike race or religion, gayness does not reproduce itself in any cognisant way, so, in order to control gay subjectivation, the social order concentrates on managing the assimilation, disempowerment and depoliticization of homosexuals.

Catholicism, Magisterium and Homosexuality

The Catholic Church's position on contemporary homosexuality is at once clear and complicated, the side-effects of an ancient organisation walking the line between faith, doctrine, and public consciousness. As it stands, Pope Francis has maintained a focus on human dignity and compassion; the Pope has gone on the record as saying, "If someone searches for the Lord and has good will, who am I to judge?" (BBC, 2013). Such a claim, as theologian Steven P. Millies (2023) argues, is in line with Catholic teachings on sexuality – this is to distinguish between what is considered a crime and what is considered a sin, where any sexual act that occurs outside of marriage is considered a sin, but a sin can always be forgiven by God (the catch here, obviously, is that in the Catholic Church, two men can never marry each other). Yet, this upholding of doctrine does an easy job of eliding over the history

and development of sin in the Catholic Church, that it is easy to locate the historical moment and context in which homosexuality moved into the domain of sin. It also ignores the many historical instances of the Catholic Church acting as judicial arbiters that moved this sin into the category of crime.

As of the completion of this thesis, the Church's stance on all forms of human sexuality is based on the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, issued by Pope Paul VI in July of 1968. This document is particularly interesting in its restatement of the Catholic Church and its magisterium's absolute right to uphold and interpret "natural moral law" (The Holy See, n.d). This states that all sex and sexual acts should at least be generative of procreation, meaning that the only sex permitted in doctrine by the Catholic church is that between a man and a woman that bears the potential of creating life. Yet, the specific prohibition of homosexuality is covered in section 8 of the *Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith Persona Humana* (1975), otherwise known as The Seper Declaration. Section 8 states explicitly that "homosexual behaviour is wrong, immoral and intrinsically disordered." The declaration elaborates on this point further by arguing that "in Sacred Scripture, they are condemned as a serious depravity and even presented as the sad consequence of rejecting god. This judgement of Scripture does not, of course, permit us to conclude that all those who suffer from this anomaly are personally responsible for it, but it does attest to the fact that homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered and can in no case be approved of." This deliberate mixing of Church and State in the form of a medico-legal discourse of 'disordered' is an attempt to ground a critique of homosexuality in something other than doctrine, describing it as being more than a sin against god but also a perversion of human biology.

Mark D. Jordan identifies that the history of same-sex desire in Catholicism and Catholic doctrine is a mess of contradicting accounts and colonised and suppressed histories. In *The Invention of Sodomy* (1997), Jordan argues that "the tellings of and retellings of the passion of Pelagius, his invocation and representation, are a kind of emblem of medieval theological relations to same-sex desire" (27); for Jordan, homosexual desire in Catholicism's history "has to be evoked and then contained, made possible but implausible" (27) so that the site of the moral transgression can be identified as being Other and from outside. The invention of sodomy itself can be attributed to Peter Damian, an eleventh-century theologian (Jordan, 1997). It was coined as an analogy for blasphemy, the "most explicit sin of denying God" (29); as such, it is at its most essential a theological category for invoking mortal sin, guilt, and divine retribution. Traced further back, sodomy is connected to a set of sins that had been labelled as *luxuria*, a diverse set of acts that could be broadly attributed to the

genitals, this is until Gregory the Great began to read *luxuria* as being part of a sinful trio (with malice and pride), and it became fleshy, "symbolized by the ass, the pig, and the worm … described as staining, polluting, stinking" (Jordan, 39). There is a noticeable tying of sodomy to embodiment here, which, in theological terms, might just be an attempt to articulate sodomy as being not *of* god, but is a useful coincidence in this thesis as it also helps return homosexuality to the body.

Judith C. Brown, in *Immodest Acts* (1986), which reconstructs the life of historical lesbian Benedetta Carlini, identifies that Western attitudes around homosexuality turned around the thirteenth century. Brown articulates that Albertus Magnus "linked both male and female homosexuality to new and emerging notions about nature" (1986, 16); this framing of sexuality as being against nature and god has the effect of producing fear and shame around bodily materiality and desire. A strict regulation through law (Roman, canon, and local) of sexuality functions as a biopolitical governmentality, clearly delineating the limits of sexual behaviour. Brown goes on to identify specific instances in law and theology of Kings and thinkers doing further work through the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries of carving out major and minor instances of sodomy. The historical effects of these thinkers are brought to the fore in *At Swim, Two Boys,* where young Jim Mack is made to wrestle with arriving at sexuality before the Church can effectively sublimate him. One such example is after Jim has sex with a soldier, he attends a lecture from a priest the following day, proselytising about the sins of the flesh. Jim thinks to himself, "That the church should see so far ahead, so deeply inside the soul, that no contingency was overlooked but she planned for all the twistings and quibblings of conscience" (O'Neill, 2017, 406). The power, control and foresight of the magisterium of the Catholic Church overwhelm Jim, making him feel as if there is no mistake he could make that god and his church could not bear witness to.

Ireland, Colonialism, and the Catholic Church

To effectively unpack O'Neill's novel, it is important to first unpack the ways that the scene of the narrative intersects with history, a culmination of aggressive colonial oppression that fostered the religious and political conditions of revolution. The Irish are considered a Mesolithic people (Ranelagh, 2012), though little evidence of their habitation exists. Yet, this point is important as it highlights the deep roots of Celticism and the mythological tradition that existed on the island. While no exact date can be given to the arrival of Christianity to the island of Ireland, it is known that Pope Celestine determined that there was a sufficient

population of converts on the island to send a representative of the church, Palladius, to guide them in 431 (Ranelagh, 2012). It can be understood, then, that even as the Irish have inhabited the island for approximately 7,000 years, the Catholic church being present for over 1,500 years is not an insignificant number, and as such, there is a deep connection between Catholicism and Irishness. This is a critical relationship because it was the Papacy, under Pope Adrian IV (the first and only English pope), under an understanding that the Church had sovereign control of all lands that Christianity influenced (Ranelagh). So, in 1152, by decree of a papal bull entitled *Laudabiliter*, Pope Adrian IV assigned lordship of the island of Ireland to King Henry II (Ranelagh, 2012).

English occupation on the island of Ireland sparked a complex chain of events that would shape the Irish nation and its relationship to gender and sexuality. The selling out of the Island of Ireland to the English had many effects on the Irish culture and society, yet this thesis only needs to jump forward to the Irish famine and the development of a so-called 'devotional revolution,' which started in the mid-nineteenth century that marked a national and cultural turn towards Catholicism (Larkin, 2013). Indeed, despite a centuries-long relationship between the Catholic church and Ireland, it was the famine "that would transform the Irish Catholic people *as a people* in a generation" (Larkin, 2013, 92). The increased wealth of the Catholic church over the period of 1850-1890 led to reform that "focused predominantly on a massive rebuilding project, with thousands of buildings, including convents, schools, and cathedrals" (Delay, 2020, 108). The befalling catastrophe led to a renewed reliance on the Catholic church by the Irish laity, which gave the Church unprecedented control over the shape of Irish culture and society (which, due to English colonialism, was already under siege).

One of the more interesting ways in which Catholicism shaped Irish culture is at the level of bodies, more specifically of gender. As Cara Delay argues, the impact of English colonialism was the eradication of historical senses of Irish Celtic masculinity, and the result is that the Irish had to negotiate new sites of masculinity that were opposed to Englishness (2020). For Delay, there are two sites of Irish masculinity at this time: sports and the clergy; in the instance of *At Swim, Two Boys,* we are trading in the priestly notion of manliness. "Notions of priestly masculinity were complex: in order to model Irish manhood, priests had to demonstrate strength but not physical brutishness, embody middle-class manners without alienating rural parishioners, and exhibit verbal prowess while not appearing to be too emotional" (2020, 106). Joseph Valente explores this further in *The Myth of Manliness in Irish National Culture,* arguing that the English had created a double bind for Irish

masculinity, "It [the double bind of Irish manliness] materialized and was implemented on either side by the feminizing discourse of Celticism and the bestializing discourse of simianization, which cooperated in representing the mere' Irish as racially deficient in manhood and so unready for emancipation" (Valente, 2011, 11). For Valente, because the Irish were presented as being both simianised and feminised, there was no reasonable way to resist English oppression without *becoming* English. The boom in educational infrastructure due to the devotional revolution is what provided this new form of priestly masculinity to emerge, wherein "a growing number of Irish Catholic boys, often from nationalist families, attended native academies modelled, in their fetishism of the manly, upon their British counterparts" (2011, 19). *At Swim, Two Boys* resists notions of imported British manliness through its representation of homosexuality, implicitly forwarding the argument, that any revolt against colonial oppressors must include all ideological imports. The school the boys attend is one such academy that provided a training ground for a new class of Irish men to be formed, one who could not have his emancipation so easily denied to him.

"…baked for shame": Sublimating a Scholarship Boy

It is not just because children are physically vulnerable that *innocence* is spoken into the world, but that childhood is vulnerable to queerness. "Children are queer," argues Ellis Hanson, "Their sexual behaviour and their sexual knowledge are subjected to an unusually intense normalizing surveillance, discipline, and repression" (2004, 110); the scrutiny placed on children which monitors for queerness is not simply a punitive regime it is a normative and normalising action. The body of the Child is a spurious territory for adults that requires colonisation facilitated by education. Such thought gestures at a radical conception of the Child as being ontologically different to the Adult, the dialectic that is then created between Adult and Child comes to express the "persistence of the zero we never can know as such, the ubiquitous access to jouissance we never can endure as such, and the ceaseless pulse of the death drive we can never master as such" (Edelman 2017, 142). The Child and childhood queerness stand in for the fallacy of totality in adults, revealing to us the mundane and inane state of the Social, which can never truly come to signify anything; for Edelman, the Child represents the signifier as *ab-sens*. The sublimation of the Child then comes to enact an ontological negation; a sublimation of the Child as a signifier of queerness works to negate the "opening onto the space of the imageless, the impossible, the unthinkable—while occasioning phobic embodiments in particular types of beings (those a given culture queers)

made to stand in for the death drive in its stubborn ineducability" (Edelman, 158). It is possible to read this occurring in *At Swim, Two Boys* through the character of Jim, as he becomes sublimated as the social entity of good school-boy and then begins to figure, through the negative registers of queerness, the ways to decolonise his body and resist the ways his identity has been constructed for him, which is to say: Jim's coming-to-terms with his sexual subjectivity performs a disruption to sublimating of his body as innocent.

When Jim is first introduced in the text it is through the subjection of his appearance to the gaze of outsiders to the narrative — a group of girls outside a sweet-shop who know him and who never appear again — they pass comment on Jim's appearance in his college uniform, the girls describe Jim as looking "grand swell" (which is to say really nice) in his "dinky cap and lovely shiny boots," with his "kickers up to his knees and proper black stockings … Wouldn't you love to take him home with you and stick him on a cake?" Doting further on the particulars of his appearance the girls further remark, "Big boy he's getting, and handsome with it" which invites the counter, "though without the anatomicals yet" (O'Neill, 32). The text in this instance is working hard to establish the boyishness of Jim's appearance, rhetorically textualizing his body as *un*sexual and connoting the innocence that he bears with him at the beginning of the narrative. After this instance Jim is taken aside by his brother's girlfriend, Nancy, who is the point-of-view for Jim's introduction, Nancy tells Jim that she has received a letter from Gordie (who is fighting for England in the First World War), she permits Jim to read the letter up until she sees his ears begin to redden, she takes it away from him declaring that the rest of the contents are "mashy something desperate" (34). Knowing that Jim's mother has died at that his father is a desperate socialite, Nancy goes out of her way to mind Jim; it is this caring for Jim that the text intends to tell the reader something of his manner, in the narration Nancy remarks that,

> At last she had made him smile. His cheeks rose, the dimples came, the lonesome look departed.
>
> 'You see?' she said. 'That's found the sunshine in you.' (35)

Nancy's presence in the narrative performs an interesting function for Jim. Nancy is keenly aware that Jim's innocence masks something which is thinly veiled, recognising the differences between Jim and his brother in their manners, and instead of using education in order to sublimate that difference, Nancy slowly and gently bestows Jim with forms of sexual knowledge which give him the tools to later come-to-terms with his own difference. For Nancy doesn't want to Jim to be "baked for shame" (32), rather she desires to make him feel good about himself.

Standing counter to the character of Nancy is the paranoia of Brother Polycarp,[40] leader of the flute band and Jim's Latin teacher. Polycarp takes a particular interest in Jim, believing him to be vulnerable to the corrupting influence of Doyler's "vilipendence," as such, with innocence on the line — innocence which obscures the *ab-sens* — Jim is made a target of Brother Polycarp's education because he recognises in him an incipient queerness. This recognition of a queerness which threatens to destabilise the image of the innocent Child — which stands at the core of heteronormative hegemony — must be recuperated by the men who deem operate as the gatekeepers of Irish education. It is through them that Jim learns to be anxious, ashamed and lonely. Jim's innocence and naiveté are imperative to this operation of sublimating negative affect into his subjectivity as education "instills and enacts the imperative to sublimate" (Edelman 2017, 128). As Edelman goes onto argue, "good education thus always intends and assures the *social* good by negating whatever refuses that good and so endangers the Child, even if that danger inheres in the very nature *of* the Child" (2017, 129). The recognition of a queer proclivity in Jim spurs Polycarp into action, as he sees it as part of his vocation — in ensuring the social good — to sublimate in the child negative affects which will inhibit the display and enactment of homosexual behaviour. In effect, Polycarp, acting as the clergy, takes it on as his responsibility to destroy either Jim's sense of innocence, as innocence as a Child acts as a discursive umbrella to obscure acts of queerness, or to destroy Jim's relationship with his childhood queerness and thus reinstating his innocence. Early in the narrative, Jim is invited by Brother Polycarp to do a thirty days devotion to Mary, this devotion is done to see if one is a good fit for a monastic life. Jim's participation in the devotion means that he needs to spend more time with Polycarp as he is shown the way to his vocation.

On a day of no note, Jim is standing in Brother Polycarp's office after Flute practice and is made subject to the first of Polycarp's sexual advances. The critical moment here is the confusion created between paedophilia and pederasty, not that the aim is to dwell on the ethical distinctions between the two, however, the use of education is employed differently — where pederasty is often expounded by people like Andre Gide (a pederast) for its ability to create a mentor/mentee relationship where sex becomes a part of the educational exchange for an adult and an older child, paedophilia differs as it teaches nothing about sex or sexuality, instead it reinforces a negative relationship to sex and sexual affect designed to

[40] Named for Saint Polycarp a 2C Christian martyr, considered to be an Apostolic Father, Polycarp's significance in Christian theology is that he was believed to have had contact with some of Twelve Apostles, lending weight to the authority of his writing.

keep the Child in a position of being a sexual resource to be exploited.[41] In one moment Brother Polycarp, overcome with devotion to the Lord brings himself in closer to Jim,

> The brother shifted from his chair, heaving himself up and round, and Jim closed his eyes as resiny black linen enfolded his neck. The brother's arm wrapped around him, bringing him down, on to his knees, the brother kneeling beside.
>
> 'Don't worry you feel confused. It is only natural you feel confused with your mother taken from you.'
>
> A finger rubbed on his cheek, down to his chin-bone, to the collar of his shirt. Far out to sea, Jim registered the touch. (O'Neill, 64)

The paedophilic sublimation of sexual education is present in this encounter as Polycarp makes no attempt to stop Jim from feeling ashamed or uncomfortable. Polycarp needs Jim to be ashamed, anxious and isolated because he has nothing else to offer him, so ashamed he is of his own sexual desires that he never attempts to reciprocate, he becomes obsessed with implicating Jim into a regime of sexual experience that only teaches him the wrongness of homosexual desires. Further, Polycarp drills into Jim that his feelings of wrongness cannot be helped, that he feels complicated desires because his mother died when he was young. That Polycarp says this is intended to cultivate Jim with feelings of shame for the unnaturalness of his affections — Polycarp wants to sublimate in Jim that he is helpless, that he should be ashamed, that he should worry and that he should isolate himself, a sublimation which will push Jim toward a monastic life and unilaterally expose Jim to Polycarp's advances.

Due to the effects of Polycarp's sexual sublimation of him, Jim realises that his feelings for Doyler are not innocent, that they carry with them shameful and sinful affections. In this way, Jim has learned to feel guilty for his feelings, which as Judith Butler argues, "guilt is a way of managing destructiveness in order to survive" (2019, 66), and Jim's guilty feelings prevent him from acting on his desires. Yet, the possibility of a future and of hope emerges here with a disidentification,[42] with negative affects being carried forward into the narrative, Jim and Doyler are performing in the flute-band for the Irish Volunteer Army and they hear a speech about a famous Irish nationalist, Wolfe Tone, and his love of Irish country. Upon hearing the speech, Jim remarks to himself:

[41] The novel attempts to resolve this distinction with the introduction of MacMurrough, however, it cannot overcome that contemporary understandings of sex, sexuality and children condemn any attempt to foster a sexual relationship between adults and children — even if the relationship purports to be healthy and beneficial.
[42] "To disidentify is to read oneself and one's own life narrative in a moment, object, or subject that is not culturally coded to 'connect' with the disidentifying subject." (Muñoz 1999, 12)

> Jim knew this man's heart was deep and true, for he made Jim wish for an equal love and an equal truth in his heart. He was swept by a great desire to take hold of Doyler's hand and tell him in his ear, That's how I think of you, that's exactly how I think of you. (228)

The disidentification is Jim reading into the soldier's speech something which is not a call to arms, instead he identifies a hope for the future, one in which physical and emotional intimacy between men won't be something shameful. Jim is yearning in this moment to have the courage to follow through on his desires, the yearning for an equal love and equal truth makes Jim strategically disidentify the possibility of homosexual love inside the hope for revolution and a new political future. While narratively this moment is of little significance and Jim has not really begun his journey of coming-to-terms with his sexuality, nor does it represent Jim fully disidentifying with his education, rather it is notable because, as Sean Grattan argues, "feeling is a social act, even if feelings seem alienating, ostracising, or depressing" (2017, 21). The moment that this is sees Jim, while disidentifying with a given statement, at his most sublimated, he strains against this education of shame and anxiety but he cannot quite yet, instead he leaves himself to be alienated from his desires, but this is still a social act, still a homosexual act. Just because Jim cannot manage to overcome the terms of his subjection does not mean he inhabits an ethically dubious position given that as an incipient homosexual his focus is on the reduction of harm and the pursuit of a liveable life; the resistance to the power of regulatory forces, like education and insult, is an unfathomable ability to Jim at this point as he is yet to learn for himself that it is possible to live under the stress of being determined abject.

Doyler remarks to Jim that "nothing is named but for an occupying power" (236). While Doyler's socialist education gives him perspective and a discourse for describing the ways in which his body and his country are subjugated. It is also possible that he means to reference his sexual and romantic desires for Jim, longing to liberate his body from subjugation. Both Doyler and Jim have no name for their feelings for each other, except for the language of sin and shame that is given to them by England and the Catholic Church. Jim is unable to disentangle himself from his education, he stares at Doyler as they are sitting together discussing the future,

> He was lying on his front with a meadow grass sticking out from his mouth. How did Doyler do this? He could make Jim so angry with himself, so ashamed. The next minute, he was all alive, like a spark was inside, like the full of him was electric. How did Doyler do this to him? He really didn't know. (315-316)

Even having at this point disidentified and managed to reason to himself that he has complex feelings for Doyler, Jim is still tortured by the way his education pulls at him, attempting to pull him into line, knowing that he has no words for what is happening to him, the anger and the shame are given to him from the Church. Also, given the Catholics Church's position on pre-marital sex and masturbation, at this time Jim has no grasp for understanding the possibility that he is feeling for Doyler what he might feel for a female. For Jim, his biggest obstacle for coming-to-terms is that every time he comes close to recognising the excitement he feels for Doyler he is reminded that it is wrong, because through his molestation by Brother Polycarp and other members of the clergy he believes that any excitement, any implication, would render him an impure sinner.

Jim's ability to desublimate his education begins to present itself only when he pushes Doyler away and he begins to unpack the guilt he feels, declaring to himself, "And God help me, he never asked anything of me, never a thing, save a kiss, and even that I refused him" (361). Seemingly in this moment, Jim is internally reckoning with all three foundational affects: shame for failing his friend and love, anxiety that they'll never be together again, and loneliness caused by his shame ostracising him from Doyler. This passage represents a culmination of Jim's education from Brother Polycarp, he has pushed Doyler away because Doyler makes Jim feel foolish and powerless but also because he has, as Jim frets, 'greasy buttons.'[43] Polycarp had set Jim on a course, not toward queerness nor to homonormativity, but to tacit homosexuality. While tacit sexualities are culturally and racially complex, often serving to ease tensions in households where love of family and family honour are placed in high regard and subjects wish to avoid the damage an out subjectivity will wrought, the tacitness of a Brother or Priest who uses their position of power to satisfy their sexual urges while not acclimating to the demands of homosexuality circulates only sexual violence and negative affect — effectively enacting a shameful denial of sexual identity which precludes them from the structures of being, feeling and affect which define homosexuality.

"And he's my country": Desublimated Queer Radical

In reading for the effect of the negative registers of queerness on foundational affect in narrative, it becomes important to start trying to identify the moments when a character's

[43] The concern over greasy buttons emerged from a story that Mr. Mack told Jim in which after he was promoted as an officer in the British army, he had given a formal warning to Doyler's father for not having clean buttons on his jacket. Jim carries this anxiety through as a form of class anxiety, that he is alienating his friend over petty snobbery.

expected affect becomes something else. Such a moment might appear rhetorically like the pushing out of expectations in an act of resistance instead of the acclimation of being pushed down by a regulatory force. These acts of resistance can appear in the subtlest of ways, as Grattan argues, "If the present world is not enough, and it fundamentally is not, then the mapping of its horizons has to be a part of any resistant acts of world-making" (2017, 21). Beginning around page five hundred, the narrative shows the effect of Jim and Doyler starting to subvert their foundational affect. Jim having pulled away from the Church and Doyler having joined the Citizen's Army result in the boys becoming more aware of the legitimacy of their desires as they come-to-terms with their sexual difference by challenging their educations. Their small acts of resistance, even so small as coming-to-terms, are radical acts of queer world-making which adhere the boys to hope and open their world up to a new horizon of potentiality. For Jim, his acts of resistance are centred a tenet of his personal ideology, the one piece of knowledge that he took from his Father and education for his own, one little nugget of un-sublimated knowledge,

> You don't choose a friend. A friend would come to you. And you don't turn him out, no matter what others would say. You're only too thankful if you found him. (135)

This point is made after Mr. Mack attempts to create some distance between Jim and Doyler, suggesting that some friends are more valuable than others, yet, Jim holds close to him the notion the friends that come to you are the ones worth keeping. It is this idea that becomes the keystone for Jim's coming-to-terms as it gives him a foundation for considering his attachment to Doyler as proper. That Jim provides himself with the rhetoric for justifying choosing Doyler at every opportunity means that he can construct a rubric for compartmentalising his behaviours and managing expectations. The shape of Jim's incipiency is beginning to show itself here in that he is learning to be a tacit subject, which as Carlos Decena outlines is "an analytic framework that draws attention to the range, interaction, and intersection of the meanings and contexts that structure their social relation" (2008, 340), where the tacit subject maintains a social status of being 'in' and 'out' of the closet, meaning that they begin to code their bodies in a way that they can silently be understood as being queer without courting the consequences of a verbal declaration.

No matter how neatly an analysis might attempt to delineate the plot of a novel, it needs to be stressed that the tension between queerness and normativity moves unpredictably. As much as disciplined queer theory attempts to normalise the existence and performance of queer subjectivity it remains a difficult and impossible decision to make, such is the point of explaining incipient homosexuality with foundational affect, as it works to elucidate that the

affects which shape normative subjects do not disappear with an acclimation to queerness. Never in the novel is this as well explored than after Jim first has sex. Doyler has left and Jim has been forced out of his home while his brother's girlfriend gives birth to an illegitimate child, placed on the fringe of knowledge and innocence, old enough to be involved in the discussions surrounding Nancy's participation in his family but not old enough to be taught the trials of childbirth, Jim wanders the piers at Dún Laoghaire.[44] In this instance Jim is described as feeling lonely and isolated, remarking on the passing train as "lives flickering by in single snaps of light" (O'Neill, 395), and the voices of soldiers in the distance, accents he recognises as being from all over Ireland. As the train passes Jim presses himself against a wall and the vibrations give him a "stiff and unmitigated" erection, "what sustained it he could not think, for nothing of the sort was on his mind" (396), it might be hazarded that what sustains the erection is the need for closeness. Jim then runs his tongue across his upper lip, attempting to imagine what a shaved moustache would feel like against it; expelled from the family home while the child of the eldest son is born, Jim becomes overwhelmed by the desire of his sexual difference, "he had a wish to do something, to shape by deed the confusion he felt inside. But no deed he could think of seemed remotely expedient" (396). Standing at the edge of the sea, the wild waves bashing against the sea wall and the wind 'boastful' in his ears, Jim is made to be his most isolated because incipiency is an isolated thing, because it is an internal thing.

The consummation of his sexual difference does not culminate in the end of Jim's incipiency, rather it serves only to complicate it as he enters into an entirely more complex liminal area between incipiency and the closet. This liminal area is one that exists between the encounter of sexual difference and a coming-to-terms of that sexual difference. Jim is lonely and longs to acquire a certainty, to effectively come-of-age and understand his place in society, yet this development is hindered as he has not properly desublimated his education, nor has he disidentified with the culture that encodes his body, meaning that Jim lacks a sufficient understanding of his differences even though he has been fully sublimated with complex feelings about it.

> …He felt a bursting to be known, to be born, that would no longer de delayed, but whose labour had come. He thought of that other birth at home and the child he soon would hold in his arms. Through his fingers he felt the wall behind and he was struck

[44] The novel refers to Dún Laoghaire by the name it was known at the time, Kingstown. My choice to refer to it by its Irish name is for more accurate representation of place, space and ownership.

by the strangeness of concrete things: the ledge, the columns, the floor to his feet: things that did not move, while the sea never ceased.

He had not long to wait. A soldier had followed him. A match struck, a cigarette was lit. The red glow was offered in Jim's direction. (398)

This moment is the most pivotal moment in Jim's sexual development. Through this he learns that his desires are not singular to Doyler, that though he may love Doyler his sexual difference is an experience unique to itself. Jim acknowledges the experience of his difference as being akin to the ocean, powerful and beating against unchanging structures. These structures are concrete, they give shape to the world around him, give him paths to walk along as well as edges to fall off of. These structures are made strange to him because of the ocean, because of the thing which beats against them, how is it that these man-made constructions don't bend or change or move with nature. Jim quite literally wants to be birthed into the world, to be legitimated and officiated, to be delivered into a world where he will be known and loved for who he is — this consummation fails for Jim simply because he lacks the knowledge of his sexual difference, he lacks a connection to a genealogy of those he views as being his kin.

Lacking any sort of queer education, Jim does not possess the faculties for understanding the consequences of his queer desires and so all he has to process his action is his sublimated education. The result of his consummation is that Jim becomes consumed with shame and anxiety, unable to extricate acting on his desires with the moral guilt, sin and dirtiness that he thinks has now marked his body. Yet O'Neill does not grant the reader access into Jim's mind at this time, opting instead to demonstrate to the reader the outside effect of his shame on his body and demeanour to those closest to him. While it is not obvious to them, Jim is doing penance for his action — repenting in order to assuage his guilt — one night, Jim brings one of his blankets down for the baby, who is already smothered in them, he gives it to Nancy instead, Nancy remarks of him, "Poor old Jim. There was a cloud hanging over him, she didn't know what it was, only she hoped he wasn't jealous of all the attention. Night the babba was born, he comes home, but he's only hanging about the door" (401). Nancy who is new to motherhood and new to the family is notices Jim's estrangement if only out of concern that she has caused it, she further notes that, "whatever it was, there was no touching him these days and he was for ever at the wash-bowl. He washed his face so hard, he rubbed the smiles away" (402). The foundational nature of shame to Jim's incipiency manifests in his inability to cope with the consequences of his actions and he cannot properly understand the politics of sex. The narration then offers up a moment from

Jim's past when he was on a religious retreat with some Dominican Brothers where Jim is mediating on why he feels ashamed for his actions and he recalls a confessional he had with one of the brothers on the last day,

> Jim didn't know what he told the other boys, for no boy ever spoke of that confession – he told Jim of the sins of the flesh, the horror of impure thoughts, the terrible consequences of the solitary vice. No sins destroy the soul so utterly as this shameful sin, he said. It steals the sinner from the hands of God and leads him like a crawling thing into the mire, he cannot get out. The more he struggles, the deeper he must sink: for he has lost the rock of faith. (405)

Jim fears that his consummation of impure thoughts means that God has abandoned him, before his night on the pier Jim was at his most isolated, with Doyler gone, his father out drinking and his Aunt Sawney and Nancy busy with Nancy's labour, however this moment describes Jim at his loneliest as he reaches back through his own history and recalls a time when he felt ashamed, anxious and alone.

Jim, without the presence of Doyler, and preceding the involvement of MacMurrough in Jim's life. It is at this moment, at his loneliest that Jim is unable to see the wood for the trees, having been aggressively sublimated by Catholic doctrine. Jim muses that, "his hand moved in actual sin, but his mind dwelt far away, far away from the efficacious sins of desire, perhaps on the sea" (407), that Jim once again returns to the sea here could mean that he once again is being torn between what he experiences as his nature and what he feels is the concrete that gives shape to his world. Yet, even in his shame and guilt Jim begins to come-to-terms with the pleasure of the act and more so begins to submit to the future pleasure that his desires could bring to him. While in bed one night he returns to the thought as he masturbates,

> Even then he was not sufficiently steeped in the mire, but his hand must go below to the throb that was there, and moment by moment, touch by touch, he relieved the scene, delighting in every strangeness, and the queer freedom he had felt in his submission, the relishing of his exposure, his bending to the seat and willing, and hearing still the grunts of pleasure and his own compliant moans. (408)

At this time Jim in not desublimating or disidentifying, he is erring toward *jouissance*, he is beginning to discover the potential of self-shattering pleasure, the potential that pleasure has to completely disrupt the flow of information and creates a new flow for the queer subject, orienting them toward a new horizon of potentialities.

However, Jim only brushes against *jouissance* since he is still sublimated and he becomes obsessed with the purity of his soul, he begins to starve himself drinking only water so that he can repent. It gets to such a point that during a game of rugby Jim has an epiphany about the church's treatment of him,

> In a moment of brilliant lucidity he knew why he never had trusted Brother Polycarp. When other brothers had put their hands between his legs he had never really minded. Only Brother Polycarp had put his hand round his neck. The ambiguity of that gesture had involved him in it, where the groping had left him untouched. (417)

Following his brush with *jouissance*, Jim is then set on the path of properly being able to come-to-terms with his sexuality, he begins to understand the difference between the experience of same sex desire which is pleasurable and those that are harmful. Jim acknowledges that he coped with being molested as he does not feel complicit in the act but considers that Brother Polycarp's action implicated Jim because of the intimacy inferred by the action. Jim is then given a chance to fully come-to-terms with himself, as during the rugby match, Jim passes out with a serious flu, a fever keeps him unconscious for a couple of days and as if granting his wish, Jim is born into a new life. When he wakes up, having been attended to by a doctor provided to him by MacMurrough, Jim embarks on an apprenticeship with the older gentleman who will coach him in swimming and provide him with lessons that will help him properly desublimate his education.

MacMurrough provides Jim with memory, their ability to remember a queer past maims them. Their inheritance of memory makes them undesirable subjects as memory creates friction between queerness and the damage of lived hegemony. As J. Halberstam argues in *The Queer Art of Failure*, "for women and for queer people, forgetfulness can be a useful tool for jamming the smooth operations of the normal and the ordinary. These operations, generally speaking, take an air of inevitability and naturalness simply by virtue of being passed from one generation to another" (2011, 70). It is MacMurrough's education which works on the boys to desublimate them, to queer them. Forgetfulness, memory and remembering all work together to disturb the individual queer subject, to render their bodies as unruly. In a moment preceding the climax of the narrative, MacMurrough lectures Doyler on the value of the queer education and the impact that it had on Jim.

> Yes, and Jim had grasped instinctively that significance: that more than stories they were patterns of the possible. And I think, how happier my boyhood should have been, had somebody — Listen, boy, listen to my tale — thought to tell me the truth. Listen while I tell you, boy, these men loved and yet were noble. You too shall love,

> body and soul, as they; and there shall be a place for you, boy, noble and magnificent as any. (O'Neill, 607-608)

MacMurrough's queer inheritance for Jim was in giving him hope, by connecting him to a genealogy of men who came before him, to a history of feeling that Jim can use to legitimate his desires, to reconcile his place in society. This act of feeling backwards is a performance in the narrative but is also a performance that the novel itself performs, MacMurrough's beseeching to Doyler is also a hailing to the incipient homosexual who may be reading. Central to this quote is that MacMurrough does not clarify what the place shall be, and when the time shall be — in an almost 'Somewhere' moment — the failure to elucidate signals that the place might be incredibly small and incredibly intimate, that it may not made laid bare to be celebrated by the public, that it may not even happen while they are living, but it is still the provision of hope that intends to desublimate the shame that Doyler and Jim feel.

The moment when Jim actually manages to comet-to-terms with himself is once his swim to the Muglins with Doyler has been completed. The night before Jim and Doyler have sex for the first time, however their swim needs to be viewed as a consummation of their affections for each other. It is a culmination of their training and a follow through on every promise they made to each other. Through the swim they are able to make an acceptable public declaration of their dedication, notably this declaration is not a coming-of-age for them, they have already done that, this moment is them fully coming-to-terms, it is them acknowledging that they do not need to ashamed or alone anymore. The shaking of these affects is most apparent when after the swim Jim is feeling what it feels like to be with Doyler in a way he never conceived was possible,

> For a moment of two, he was aware of the hardness of the stone beneath him. He heard them come back again, the seaside sound of the waves and birds. Behind his eyelids the sun had its red glare. There was a sweat on his back which the air traced. He felt it far away, the intimate search of foreign fingers. Then Doyler pushed against him. His eyes squeezed and all sensation shook. (533)

Surrounded by nature, both environmental and human, Jim thinks about the way his body is interacting with the space around him, the way the sun burns his eyes, the sweat on his back which is cooled by a light wind which he feels as it moves across his back. When Doyler pushes against the thought of nature, of feeling his body in nature, disappears because all that matters to him now is that his world is now framed by how Doyler makes him feel, a new frame which constantly works to disrupt how he knows to feel the world. This is Jim's full experience with *jouissance* as he no longer understands his body in the world, everything has

become distorted, including time. It is in this moment after the swim Doyler passes two comments to Jim: "there's nothing to be afraid of now" and "we have all the time in the world," as if Doyler is saying that now they have come-to-terms they no longer need to worry about time skipping from them, and that they can enjoy having each other into an indeterminate future, that in coming together they need to reconceive how they experience whatever time they have left with each other.

Jim successfully manages to desublimate his anxiety in the wake of Doyler's death. He moves from worrying he is doing wrong to feeling he has been wronged. Where Jim's shame and loneliness have become an unquenchable rage, his anxiety becomes hope. In feeling that wrong has been done to him Jim opens up the opportunity to right those wrongs, though this hope that his world can be righted is interfered with by his rage.

> 'They will too be shot,' said Jim. 'But I'm worried they won't shoot me. They'll say I'm too young or something and I'll be left out.'
>
> 'You're being silly, Jim. We're prisoners of war. There's nothing like shooting going to happen.'
>
> 'You don't understand.'
>
> 'Well, what is it so?'
>
> 'I know what I'll become if they let me go. And I don't know can I bear to be that … You know, don't you, MacEmm, what I'll be. I'll be ruthless with them. I'll shoot them easy as stones. I won't never give up. I'll be a stone myself. Tell me you know that.' (636)

Jim's rage distracts him from the future, he fears he will become unfeeling and immovable from his position, consumed by the need for an aimless revenge. In this way, is Jim's rage evidence that the utopian project of the novel has failed given that he goes on to become a soldier in the Irish civil war? In an interview with Masha Gessen, Judith Butler argues for the force of non-violence by saying, "People in the world have every reason to be in a state of total rage. Rage can be crafted—its sort of an artform of politics. The significance of non-violence is not to be found in our most pacific moments but precisely when revenge makes perfect sense" (Gessen 2020). The form of Butler's non-violence is a radical refiguration of equality that requires subjects redress the violence done to them, not through revenge, but rather through non-violent forms of retribution. Non-violence in this figuration is a utopian project, given that it asks that people put their hurt aside in order to address grievance in non-violent ways. The utopian project of the novel does not fail with Jim's rage however, nor does it fail when Jim becomes violent — really, it never fails because Jim does not seek a

revenge to satisfy a personal vendetta, instead his rage makes him a revolutionary fighter who goes to war, in continuing the fight for a Republic of Ireland Jim is continuing the fight for his and Doyler's utopian vision.

It is critical that the utopian project of the novel does not end when Jim's rage reveals his debilitated subjectivity, how unsuited he is for living in society. A novel that worked to enforce hegemonic ideology might have ended the narrative with Jim's grief, suggesting that his life would endure only to mourn for the loss of Doyler, constructing a bad subject out of the queer romantic storyline it had just ended. Instead, the novel ends in Jim's fevered rage, enforcing a utopian project spurred on by remembering and through that remembering opening up an invitation for change. To return to Grattan, "In no way is utopianism or feeling utopian at all related to happiness as read by contemporary normative subject positions, as any discussion of the contemporary world will describe a world of horror, illness, and trauma (19). With Jim becoming fully a disidentifying subject, the utopian project of the novel succeeds through to the end, as Jim and his successfully desublimated foundational affects are now able to fully engage with, on his own terms, the social order that attempted to subdue his queerness and work for the possibility of a better future for people like him, a future that he can see on the horizon of possibility. This is why Jim's education with MacMurrough is important, it informs him of the legitimacy of his desires, exposing him as well to the damage addressed to him by the social order, and also providing him with the tools to work with and against that same order.

At the narratives close even though Jim is revealed to have a debilitated subjectivity, "the subject of redress and grievance thus functions as a recapacitation of the debilitated body" (Puar 2017, 11), so while through his rage Jim becomes marked for death, that same rage acts as a recapacitation of his body that he must act on, it is the driving force of Jim's new desire for change. The narrative makes it unbearably clear that Jim dies because he must, because he is without Doyler and without Doyler, Jim has no hope for a liveable future for himself, it complicates the experiences of Jim's affect because he is not necessarily anxious for death, nor lonely without Doyler, nor does his grief and rage make him melancholic for death, rather Jim has a sort of perturbed hope.

> After a time he learnt to harbour the share of his heart was left him, and he did not look for Doyler, not in crowds nor the tops of trams, nor in the sudden faces of lads he trained and led to fight. Even in his dreams he did not look for him, but stared at the sea while behind him he knew Doyler so dreadfully walked away; and after he woke he stayed where he lay, fingering the revolver he kept by his side. (O'Neill, 643)

Following his coming-to-terms with sexuality, Jim must undergo a coming to terms with grief, something which he achieves through time by finding space for himself in the world. The perturbed hope which he develops has to do with his relinquishing of hope that he will see Doyler in crowds, trams, or the faces of his recruits, nor does he hope that he will see Doyler in his dreams, rather he becomes certain of their being reunited and the terms of that reunion and as such Jim hopes to die. It is a strange hope that forecloses the possibility of one's own future yet to still work toward a singular possibility which exists upon the horizon of potentiality, and while it is impossible to conceive of Jim's motives as to hazard would be to read into the text information that is not offered on the surface, it is possible that the reason Jim keeps a revolver next to him is the same reason that he never turns it on himself, to keep it is to keep hope close to him, it is to keep close the hope that he will see Doyler again.

Chapter Five: Loneliness in Christos Tsiolkas' *Loaded*

Perhaps there is nothing more harmful to the incipient homosexual taking refuge in the closet than to be discursively summoned, to have insecure and frightening bodily truths dragged out into the world to be determined by people before one has dealt with them themselves. Yet, this is the peril explored by Christos Tsiolkas in his 1995 novel *Loaded*, where incipient and closeted homosexual, Ari, traverses his gendered and ethnic identity in Australia. To set the scene, in the middle of their night out, Johnny, the drag queen known as Toula and the protagonist, Ari's, friend, describes Ari in terms of drag by declaring to a small group of strangers,

> Maybe you'd prefer Ari's stage name … We call him Persephone. You know the story don't you, she spends half her time in hell, the other half in the real world. Johnny glares at me. Tonight our sweet little Persephone is slumming it in hell … The trouble is our little Persephone is beginning to enjoy her time in hell. Aren't you sugar? You don't know what's real anymore, do you? (Tsiolkas 1997, 96-97)

In Greek mythology, which is important because Ari, his family, and all of his friends are Greek or members of Greek diaspora, Persephone was a child of Zeus and Demeter and was considered to be so beautiful and pure that she was known as *Kore* (the Maiden). Many of the gods were deeply in love with her, particularly the ones who weren't already married like Apollo and Hermes, but Demeter kept her away from them in order to maintain Persephone's purity. This all changed when one day, while communing with nature a chasm appeared in the earth and from it Hades emerged in his chariot and stole Persephone from Demeter and brought her to the Underworld. Before Persephone could be returned to her mother, Hades shared with her six pomegranate seeds and, Persephone, having now eaten food from the underworld was cursed to return to the Underworld for six months of every year. Over time Persephone came to revel in the arrangement, for six months of the year she was Kore, a maiden of the earth who communed with nature, and for the other six months she was the Queen of the Underworld where her principle role was to escort the souls of heroes through Hades into the fields of Asphodel. When Johnny disparages Ari by calling him Persephone, he is casting aspersions on to Ari's desires, calling in to question Ari's sexuality and masculinity by suggesting that by having tasted the seed of the underworld that Ari has corrupted his own innocence and where he was once stuck in hell, he has grown to enjoy his

time in the underworld. Ari hates that Johnny speaks to him this way, that a man who would dress as a woman would call his working-class Australian masculinity into question, but Ari does not challenge him, instead he acknowledges, "Johnny knew, he smelt the come on me, smelt where my desires were taking me" (98). It is this tension between the overworld and the underworld, the world of Ari's desire and the world of his family, that defines the rigidity of Ari's incipiency, the shape of his affect, and the central conflict of the novel.

While verbal declarations are only one form of locution, and in turn, are only one form of signification, being signified as gay is codified with loaded meanings, saturated with centuries of understanding of maleness, sexuality, and the role of sex in the world. The creation of a cognitive dissonance between identity and sexual behaviour aids in a codification of a "heteromasculine culture of abjection and aggression" that embeds a relation to sexuality, specifically faggot sexualities, to homophobia and misogyny (Ward 2015, 3).

This reification of the relationship between sexual behaviour and gender as being constitutive is a troublesome idea, yet as Jane Ward surmises "straightness and queerness are differentiated not by early tendencies toward same- or opposite-sex desire, but by the way these tendencies are 'gathered into specific social and sexual forms'" (2015, 33). It is the helplessness that is faced by queer subjects in the face of sexual tendency being 'gathered' into sociality, resulting in the exposure to regulatory forces that seek to correct abject tendencies, that cause feelings of anxiety. This is where we find Ari at the outset of *Loaded*, investing in the ambiguous nature of homosociality to provide himself an alibi for his tendencies, yet this investment in masculinity and homosociality troubles Ari and unfortunately alienates him from himself. This fear of loneliness, of being ejected from the family unit and made to be isolated from his valued ethnic identity, itself causes Ari to feel lonely. This chapter looks to unpack the sublimation of loneliness as being an engendered experience of masculinity, caused by the fear of alienation from a reified and mythological version of manhood.

What becomes apparent is that Ari is constructing himself a tacit sexuality, slowly learning how he can code his body as being queer without making a verbal declaration which would irrevocably assert his queerness, but still would result in him being able to traverse effectively heteronormative and queer socialities. As Carlos Decena argues, tacit subjects "understand that their own bodies traverse the social world and signify in ways that exceed (and often betray) the intention of those who inhabit them" (2008, 340). There is a way that gay subjects from immigrant families discover how to control the flow of textual information and become managers in how their bodies produce meaning. This increased attention paid to

the way the body signifies is a consequence of the realisation that the ability to move out of the closet is framed as being a privileged form of gay self-realization that provides access to 'chosen family' and "collective social change" (Decena 2008, 339), and critiques of coming-out help to illuminate "the persistence of this way of thinking about gay subject formation and the racial and class biases obscured by this dominant model" (339). For the tacit subject, the ability to self-manage the textuality of their body and sexuality means they can effectively maintain the social connections that are meaningful to them, it is "the management and circulation of information that, if expressed explicitly in the wrong context, could hurt a person's real (or perceived) possibilities of legitimacy and social mobility" (353). It is this that motivates the desire to study incipient homosexuality, as a mode of analysis which considers with more tenderness the horizon of potentiality and determination that figures each individuals queerness, how they arrive at it, how they accept it, and how they move with it and beyond it.

In a contemporary neoliberal Western discourse "that exalts the atomized and unmoored individual and in LGBTQ communities that celebrate self-making by clinging to the promise of coming out as the romance of individual liberation" (Decena 2008, 355), there is a cultural demand that all subjects delineate themselves along lines of homogenous becoming in the hope that this will produce predictable and biopolitically manageable forms of homosexual identity. As Stephanie D. Clare argues,

> Over and again, the 'problem' with gay and lesbian identities is figured not as one's queerness but, rather, one's (potential) lack of self-acceptance. In fact, this 'lack' might be understood as a new form of queerness, one that is tied not necessarily to the breaching of gender and sexual norms but to the breaching of a new set of norms concerning self-assertion and transparency, norms whose performance is especially values in neoliberal culture. (2017, 17)

The problematic nature of asserting self-acceptance as the key signifier attached to coming out is adeptly outlined by Clare, shaping a narrative of coming-out as a homosexual subject who has found complete mastery over their sexual identity asserts an unnatural pressure on gay men to pursue those forms of sexual identity that closely identify with that narrative. As Decena reminds us, "tacit subjects may make us more aware that coming out is always partial, that the closet is a collaborative social formation, and that people negotiate it according to their specific social circumstances" (2008, 355). This is representative of the importance of studying a novel like *Loaded*, as it provides the opportunity to frame the issues of developing homosexual identities and subjectivities in, at least in this instance, ethnically

diverse cultures. The narrative poises Ari in an ongoing personal crisis of identity formation, wherein Ari is learning to navigate the experience of sexual pleasure and the maintenance of his family's traditional values. The narrative wishes to explore the struggle Ari has with dominant forms of coming out, given that it is often conflated with self-determination and agency, "by adhering to neoliberal normalcy, this coming out narrative has the danger of treating the effects of structural inequality as the personal failure of those who suffer from it" (Clare, 19). What remains important in the discussion of *Loaded*, is to remember that Ari's foundational affects (shame, anxiety and loneliness) are all shaped by his cultural, ethnic, and religious experiences, representing his feelings of belonging more to a Greek family than to the culturally dominant White Protestant Anglo-Saxon Australian families, where he was born, a connection that complicates his ability to fully inhabit a public persona of homosexuality.

A passage of text that begins to engage properly with how Ari has a complicated affective engagement with his identity and family is when Ari is getting his coffee cup read by his Aunt. Sitting in her kitchen while his sister is also having a reading, Ari is at relative ease, even in spite of the "mixture of dope and caffeine" (16) that's effecting him, also acknowledging that a lot of coffee cup readers are 'bullshitters,' but that if you look past the wedding rings and jobs, his aunt is the real thing.

> There is someone who is wanting to look after you, Ari, someone who cares for you, but you are not facing them. You are ignoring them. She points to a few blobs of dried coffee. I can make out the figures in the blobs. A line does divide the figures. Their name begins with a *gamma*. I know immediately that it is George. I can even smell a faint trace of his sweat in the room. I say nothing. I feel foolish about the thought. (17)

At the mention of George, Ari is flushed with shame, he can see for himself in the coffee what is aunt sees, he intuits what that could mean for him, what it would be to think someone thought of him affectionately. Ari is ashamed to imagine the romantic possibilities of opening up and orienting himself toward George, the reason why is explored later in the novel and is mostly concerned with Ari's obsession with being in actuality and being perceived as masculine. But this affective experience of shame creates for Ari a negative experience with those around him, as he begins to perceive them as the origin of the feeling.

> The perpendicular lines of the *gamma* are clear in the middle of the black muck. I tell you, Ari, she says, a girl whose name begins with a *gamma* is going to steal your heart. I avoid her eyes. I can taste George's sweat. (17)

Having encountered the feeling of shame, Ari directs his disgust at the object which has instantiated his shame: what was before 'blobs of dried coffee,' has now become 'black muck,' what was just a trace of George's sweat is now a taste in his mouth. It is as if, in feeling shame and its subsequent turn to disgust at the shaming object, the feeling is quickly followed by loneliness, of Ari revealing in his disgust the physical and emotional isolation that he maintains from others as a way of self-managing his textual sexuality, being how his body is read as a text through his body, speech, and behaviours.

The Shape of Incipiency

Christos Tsiolkas wastes no time in *Loaded* in introducing us to the complicated and resistant sexuality of protagonist, Ari. Waking up as the morning is ending, he masturbates and then moves through his dirty surroundings, "past cobwebs, stains on the carpet, a biro on one step, a cigarette but on another" (1997, 2), and into the kitchen on his brother's house-share. In the kitchen Ari sees George and the conceit of the novel is immediately established, "He smiles up at me and I return him a cool smile, nothing too eager. He's in pyjama bottoms and through the slit I catch a glimpse of pubic hair. All I want to do is touch him but I look away" (2). On its surface this quote establishes most of the conflict that comes to define the novel, Ari's coyness with his sexuality, his veneer of masculinity, and the disgust that orients his incipiency and his experience of foundational affect. It is Ari's attraction to George that gives this away since George comes to be associated with freedom and a degree of whiteness for Ari, but he is also relaxed, casual and masculine, all traits that Ari valorises most in the men he desires. From the onset of the narration Ari's sexuality is incipient, it is all desire and drive with little cultural or social nuance, he is pulled toward things he finds pleasurable and repelled by those things which cause him disgust — he has not yet learned how to negotiate the social impact of sexuality, even as he clumsily navigates his way around masculinity, ethnicity and family.

Before he eats breakfast Ari is bored, a dissatisfaction that will continue throughout the narrative, "Have you got any gear left?" (3) he asks his brother, looking for marijuana in order to abate the symptoms of his boredom, his brother replies, "Breakfast and coffee first. Then you have to ring Mum and then you can roll your own joint" (3). The familial hierarchy is established and Ari's brother, Peter, is asserting a schedule on Ari, ensuring that he in some way, shape or form is caring for his needs first. There is a tempting psychoanalytic reading here that would suggest that Ari likes to be dominated by masculine figures who want to take

care of him, such a reading would be lacking in any genuine engagement of the text however as it would fall into the trap of representing heteronormative ideologies of 'top' and 'bottom' sexualities, the 'natural' and 'essential' presence of a masculine and a feminine energy in a sexual relationship. Instead that moment is followed by a charged moment with the genuine object of Ari's desire: "George is laughing at me … I try to say something to him but my mouth is too full of egg. He leans over and wipes some food from my bottom lip. He smells of fresh sweat, dry come and tobacco. My cock goes hard and I don't try to speak" (3). The complex nexus of affective relations that form sexual attraction cannot be ignored and in this instance the unrelenting desire Ari feels for George is, firstly, a desublimated version of embarrassment, where Ari interprets the embarrassing signifiers (the wiping of the food, the smell of come, the infantilisation) as highly erotic, instead of allowing himself to be shamed by the motion he takes the gesture to be a sensual and exciting one. Secondly, the desire is a disidentification, while Ari sees in George a sort of masculine ideal to which he is complicatedly related to, the disidentification occurs in Ari's refusal to be shamed by a patriarchal gesture as he understands himself to be a *Man* and a man wouldn't be made ashamed of a homosocial[45] gesture such as George's. Certainly that seems like a clumsy description of a passing motion, however, as the novel proceeds the shape of Ari's incipiency and its precarious relationship to masculinity become clearer.

It is Ari's confident participation in homosocial action that places him precariously on the edge of the social order, so complicit he is in reinforcing heterosexual ideals that he makes himself exceedingly vulnerable to feelings of loneliness and anxiety, so desperate to not be ashamed that he is open to other forms of violence, such as a lack of belonging and social identification. When Ari smokes a joint with George he is once again placed in an intimate proximity, "I look at him. He hasn't shaved or washed and a coat of thin hair is growing on his chest. He lights the joint and blows the first wave of smoke into my face. I breathe it in and grin at him … I look down into my coffee. Anything not to look at George" (5).

The focus of the analysis here settles on the shape of Ari's incipiency, having outlined the various forces which pull at the tethers of Ari's burgeoning identity and establishing the affects that are at force in shaping how Ari acts and is acted upon. As Ed Cohen argues that all subjects exist in relation to themselves "as possessors and possessions of themselves,

[45] At its most basic, homosociality describes the social relations between people of the same sex … Jane Ward in *Not Gay*, argued that homosociality was a patriarchal tool that was used to reinforce heterosexual masculine ideals through inoculation to homosexuality and perversion.

thereby reproducing the isomorphic dissection of mind/body which the concept of 'identity' seeks to reconcile"[46] (1991, 78), and that while identity and subjectivity are always already becoming and remain as becoming, incipiency is a starkly immanent moment in which the subject has a coming-to-terms with the experience of their body and its relationality. So, while we possess and are possessed by our own bodies, incipient homosexuality takes as its conclusive and decisive moment a reconciliation of bodily affect and an inhabitable (liveable) identity. A brief return to Butler can affirm how the repetition of gender and sexual signification "produces as its *effect* the illusion of a prior and volitional subject" (1991, 24), and the production of such a subject risks the delineation of ephemera of a pre-existing subject of gender and sexuality. This represents the trap of 'coming out,' as it frames not only an emergence into sexual legitimacy, but through a speech act creates a cognitive distance between the subject who existed before and after the locution.

This is the central issue posed by the narrative of *Loaded*, the struggle that Ari deals in with is having to consider whether or not the assumption of a homosexual identity through the locutionary act of coming out would override the construction of the coherent and masculine identity that he has assembled. While on the tram on his way to a party, sitting with his sister, he spies a pair of women who are eyeing him nervously,

> I glance at the women who were at the tram stop and they are obviously avoiding me and Alex. A wave of anger hits me. It's not like I've done anything wrong. Maybe they think my voice is too loud. I don't know what it is but they are filling me with a load of spite tonight and I'm tempted to do something stupid like harass them, wolf whistle them when they get off at their stop, do something to confirm all their worst impressions about me. (35)

What the narrative gives away at this point is Ari's obsession with controlling the flow of information, with being the master of his own body and needing to have complete determination over how his body is textually understood. The problem here is that it is overly successful, Ari's masculine presentation is understood by the two women on the tram as being threatening and dangerous, as being violent and aggressive — all traits associated with masculinity. The other side of this sword is that these women are interpreting this violence through a racist lens, viewing Ari's ethnic difference as the dominant aspect of his masculine

[46] It is important to note here that I do not believe that Ed Cohen buys into the notion of Cartesian dualism, rather I believe that he accepts such theories of the Enlightenment as being central to how heteronormative ideologies are produced. Therefore, in doing queer theory (though the publication of this book chapter predates the formalisation of this school of thought), Cohen seems to be admitting that while such dualism is bogus, queer theory cannot progress unless it forms an uneasy relationship with how queerness itself gets produced in dominant ideology and discourse.

danger. Ari does understand this though, his throw away about his voice being too loud is itself a racially coded message for wog (Tsolidis & Pollard 2009). The spite that he feels toward them needs to be read as a frustration at the failure of the tacitness of his sexuality, that these women cannot see him and identify that he is not a sexual threat to them angers him and makes him want to pose that danger through a violent act. It is this problem of the 'prior and volitional subject,' the effect of a masculine produces the sign of a masculine and sexually aggressive man, something that Ari is at odds with, given his own fear of tenderness and of affectionate relationships with other men.

The result, that really defines the shape of Ari's incipiency and his foundational affects, is that the tensions formed in Ari's identity and subjective experience form a dialectic between masculinity and faggot*nes*^{9}.[47] The force of this dialectic is that of a regulatory force, deployed by the social order in order to best configure normative identities for subjects, it is an attempt at sublimation that writes over the queerness of the zero (the *ab-sens*), and to construct it into the one of the social order. Lee Edelman articulates that this effort "toward a unified system" effaces the negativity of the zero "through repetitive tropological substitutions that continuously turn the zero into the one by making ontological exclusions articulated as queerness or blackness, for example, assume the substantial status of the 'queer' or the 'black' as identity" (2017, 133). While no substantial argument can be made for a 'faggot' identity being the zero of the social order, what can be considered is that, as Edelman argues, the various ontological exclusions that determine the emergence of the dialectic between the masculine and the fag result from the same rejection of negativity and difference that instantiates queerness and blackness. However, in the case of Ari, where masculinity and heteronormativity are representative of the one, the zero which is ontologically excluded through continuous tropological substitutions is a faggot identity. In a scene where Ari is with his friend Betty, Betty makes a serious proclamation

> She takes a drag from the cigarette, stops laughing at me, then looks serious. I'm glad you don't act like a faggot, Ari. The words ring in my ears. I flex my muscles. I'm a man, I say, in a deep drawl. And I take it up the arse. Of course you do, she answers, you're Greek. We all take it up the arse. (46)

Where the serious tone Betty strikes is an act of sublimation for Ari's masculine behaviour, the ringing in his ears is substantive evidence of anxiety, that Ari is taken by the words and hyper fixates on them, resulting in an physical affective response where he attempts to diffuse

[47] I deliberately avoid employing effeminacy in this instance because 'fag' and 'faggot,' even '*pousti*,' are all more accurate signifiers of a textuality and set of behaviours that disgusts Ari.

the conversation with humour, a deflection from the serious implications that such a locution might have on his own development. It is the operation of an ontological exclusion that attempts to create a gendered difference between the act of anal sex and the conflation with a homosexual gendered identity. In a way, this falling for of heteronormative discourses of the relationship between sexual behaviour and gender represents an example of failed desublimation on the part of Ari.

The formative tension which surrounds this issue is why the framing homosexual narratives through the notional account of incipiency and foundational affect is useful as they provide the staging for considering how these tensions act as sublimation of regulatory forces on all bodies, but which are felt exclusively by bodies of difference. The employment of negative registers by marginalised subjects, as explored in earlier chapters, becomes central to the way they learn to endure in a hostile world. In *Loaded* an example of this is how Ari uses music to disidentify with the world around him, to in effect, plaster over the world he despises and engage in it in a new and personally meaningful way. For Joseph Cummins, "Ari's interaction with popular music provides a level of stability that his identity does not" (2015, 2) and position which is furthered when Cummins considers that, "through the Walkman, the radio, or the sound system, music becomes a means of rejecting mainstream society." This argument suggests that the ability to control the experience of the external world through the manipulation of soundscapes gives the subject the power to reject the way the external world implicates them. However, Cummins' argument sees music as the articulation of a broader soundscape that Ari is listening to, making the implication that to inhabit a different soundscape is to remove oneself from the external world they move in, yet even in his 'rejection,' of mainstream society, Ari never exiles himself from it physically. Rather, the soundscape that Ari creates, whether through the Walkman, sound system, radio, or requests to bands and DJs, operates as a new plane of identification where Ari can posit himself with less exterior friction, learning to move easily in the world around him. As Nicola Dibben argues, music like film invites the listener to take up a subject position in relation to it (2006). For Dibben, the evidence that this occurs is "that our sense of self develops within cultural narratives that are already extant … our sense of self is formed by the cultural narratives that are already present" (2006, 174). For Ari, what is at work is that he has to both find music that is composite of his subjectivity, music that he can identify himself within, but also, in protecting the status of his sexuality he must find ways of identifying himself within music that would not compromise his tacitness. Hence, he must disidentify with both music and the world in which that music is played.

As a narrative device, music is used to bridge scenes in the novel, predominantly in the form of Ari using his Walkman, but also in him dancing (which becomes more significant toward the end of the narrative). The disidentification that occurs is one in which Ari can inhabit a social world that he doesn't believe he belongs in and to carve out a small and liveable space for himself, music creates a new plane for articulating meaning and Ari is allowed to freely identify on that plane. "The Walkman is my favourite toy. It creates a soundtrack for me and lets me slip into walking through a movie. The tape I've got on at the moment I put together week at my cousin's house" (Tsiolkas, 18-19). By listening to music, Ari provides himself a moment to control what he feels, as if providing a non-diegetic frame through which to identify upon. Sonic disengagement with the world needs to be viewed as an affective response with affective dimensions, as the exhaustive experience of negative affect needs to diffused in some manner and so listening to music, blasted through a Walkman or otherwise, is a forceful attempt at the subject recentering itself, bringing itself back to a neutral point. This recentering is made possible through an affective dissonance that is created through the space which is being inhabited and the sounds which are being heard. For example, while dancing on the floor of the Greek club, which is the most masculine space that Ari inhabits in the novel, Ari has requested a song ('Your Two Hands', by Markos Vamvakaris) and is dancing with his brothers friend, Ariadne but she disappears to him in the midst of the music, "As the words pierce my skull, I see the unshaven face of George appear behind my closed eyelids, morning sun across his face, and I open my eyes" (72-73). In this instance, Ari has taken a place which he could never as a homosexual or with a male partner and he figures through the music a space where he could, maximising the affective quality of the space through a disidentification.

Disidentification is a very forceful and violent act that marginal subjects leverage against themselves to form a frame for themselves within a hostile social order. As Muñoz argues in *Disidentifications* (1999), "disidentification is a step further than cracking open the code of the majority; it proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture" (31). Important then in *Loaded*, is that the music Ari listens to is very popular, being a very literal example of how raw cultural material is used to represent disempowered subjects. One example is that Ari listens to 'I want you back' by The Jackson 5,

> On one of my tapes I have one side of the cassette playing only that song. When things aren't going so well I play that cassette over and over and just walk around the city or walk around Richmond. I sit on a rock by the river throwing bread to the

> ducks, letting a young Michael Jackson cheer me up. In the three minutes it takes the song to play I'm caught in a magic world of harmony and joy, a truly ecstatic joy, where the aching longing to be somewhere else, out of this city, out of this country, out of this body and out of this life, is kept at bay. I relive those three minutes again and again till I'm calm enough to walk back into life again. (19)

Something noteworthy is that, generally speaking, 'I want you back,' The Jackson 5, and even Michael Jackson are not considered canonically as being central to queer or gay cultures; a musical canon which centralises the figure of the *diva* and so places greater emphasis is given to artists like: Donna Summer, Diana Ross, Martha Wash and Whitney Houston. But 'I want you back' does open itself to readings of loneliness, of a rejected singer yearning for a lost lover, it also informs us that while the novel takes place in the 90's, Ari doesn't seem to listen to, or identify with, mainstream music of his time signifies his isolation, of being unable to carve space for himself in mainstream culture. That Ari has such a strong affective relationship with the song speaks more to the slippery cultural entanglements of musical taste, but his dogged persistence in listening to a specific song in order to force fresh affective engagements is important. All of his rage, shame, anxiety and loneliness, are pushed aside through popular music so that he can persist within the social order. In particular, given reference to his 'aching longing,' the song is used to help him push aside the loneliness he feels due to a lack of community and belonging.

This thematic reliance on music as a site of disidentification continues when Ari is at his drug dealer's, Phil, house. Immediately on walking in Ari makes note of the smell of "the incense, the nicotine, the dope" (20), and two people slumped on the floor; Ari is uncomfortable and he pays attention to the "slow reggae song" and the walls, "covered in prints from Asia and from the Pacific. Maori prints. Indian prints. Koorie[48] prints" (20). While Phil is organising the deal Ari "look[s] through the records and the CDs. Mostly reggae, a little bit of Cat Stevens and Led Zeppelin, a couple of twelve-inches, but I can't find anything I like. I settle for the soundtrack from *Altered States* and turn the volume up. Good music for the smackheads on the couch" (20). Anxious and uncomfortable, clearly aware that he does not belong socially to a drug sub-culture, Ari chooses to play music to put the others at ease, attempting to mitigate the possible consequences of others discovering his bodily difference. His need to disidentify through music disappears however after he takes a

[48] Koorie (or Koori) is the name given to broadly identify Australian Aboriginal people from Victoria and parts of New South Wales. Tsiolkas doesn't make any reference to any specific Aboriginal language groups or nations, but usage of the term is not considered disparaging or offensive.

hit of speed his anxiety is desublimated, the adrenaline and rush of the drugs give him a new focus, he stops being bored and he is reengaged in the world. But it is this disidentification through music that makes Ari's life in the suburbs possible and tolerable.

On the Suburbs

The novel is structured around the suburbs of Melbourne, where Melbourne itself sits in the centre and the suburbs sprawl out around it, where the further out towards the edge you go the more ethnic the spaces become (Tsolidis & Pollard, 2009). These are the suburban spaces that Ari inhabits, the most marginal and liminal, those places that literally create a border around a white centre, giving definition and significance to the whiteness that structures Australian life. The suburbs represent a "good life quite detached from disturbing histories of displacement and dispossession is shown for what it is: an utterly self-centred materialism" (Dines 2012, 962), a good life which is predicated on the expulsion of precarious populations whose existence threaten the coherence of a suburban identity. However, to take for granted that suburbs represent an obsession with 'self-centred materialism' is a wholly cynical position to take, one which privileges a White experience of suburbia. It is not as cynical to acknowledge the ways that suburbs are historically deployed in a biopolitical way to enact harm on vulnerable populations (Wilson 2015). Ari recognises this, "It is the North where I search for the body, the smile, the skin that will ease the strain on my groin, that will take away the burning compulsion and terror of my desire. In the North I find myself, find shadows that recall my shadow" (83). Ari's sense of place is such that he understands the value of being down-low. While Ari has no specific shame in homosexual sex, he still needs to keep the secret, the structure of North Melbourne is such that he will be able to have that sex while colluding with other ethnically similar men who understand the value of secrecy. The anonymous circles of the Northern cruising areas are a way to ease the strain of desire without the threat of being outed.

In performing transgression within the space of the suburbs, Ari makes a deliberate choice about how he wants to relate to his exterior world. Didier Eribon argued that "insult defines the horizon of one's relation to the world, it produces the fateful feeling in a child or adolescent who feels himself or herself to be contravening the world's order … to choose to be what you are can attenuate or annul the weight of 'deviance' that is lived as personal drama" (2004, 65). While Eribon is referencing specifically the choice to live in or out of the closet, it seems equally apt to appropriate his argument to encompass the degree to which a

person may be in the closet, particularly as the closet is figuration that is predicated on the assumption of Whiteness. Suburbia is structured out of iterative performances of belonging and conformity, where the "need to belong fuels conformity, for individuality threatens suburban equilibrium" (Madden 2017, 9). Moreover, is the uncanny ability of suburbia in feeling for bodily difference, a feeling of regulatory forces which act because "inappropriate elements, such as individuals who refuse to conform, must be forcibly extracted in order to maintain cleanliness and sanctity within the community" (Madden 2017, 10). In *Loaded*, Ari is often described as being unclean, as covered is sweat, spit and come, he manifests himself as the polluted body as a transgression against the volatile suburbs he hates. Yet, as I go on to discuss later in the chapter, the transgression is always recuperated, particularly through the act of showering, of cleaning himself and wiping the evidence and the smell of another man away, because the transgression is always only for Ari's own satisfaction fuelling his own claim to an outsider status and to alleviate the stress of the experience of loneliness.

In terms of analysis for *Loaded*, the function of insult as regulatory force operates solely in the realm of the suburb; in *Loaded* the suburb is king. As Ari moves around the suburbs he is exploring how "suburbia is used as a metonym for living death. Its geographical and metaphysical connotation is that of a middle-class limbo located somewhere between the blessed bush and the fascinatingly infernal inner city" (Gerster 1990, 565). For Ari, "sanity is a chemical reaction" (Tsiolkas, 70), and a life in the suburbs is lacking in virility, to succumb to the structure of a normal suburban life is to become "fat and inert" (86). In their lack of dynamism and virility, the suburbs are concomitant with a white-washed temporality in which the nuclear family unit inhabits a home through to death and idealise nothing disturbing that. In this way, the ideology of the suburbs is a mastery of both time and event, determining that the ideal life will mean that no event will disturb the passage of time. The text constructs suburbia and domesticity as obscuring trauma and violence, a physical attempt at plastering over the various harms that have been addressed to the subject through the iterative action of normative domestic life. Ari is resistant to this structure as he articulates himself,

> Families can detonate. Some families are torn apart forever by one small act, one solitary mistake. Marital indiscretion, someone doing drugs, a father fucking a kid up the arse in the bathroom. Living in my family it was a series of small explosions; consistent, passionate, pathetic. Cruel words, cruel threats. (75)

Loneliness and marginality become ways of resisting this, to be placed on the fringe and to experience precarity is to remember violence and the effect that it has. Loneliness is an

experience, then, of the *unheimlich*, and as such Ari's is a haunted adolescence, repressing and configuring childhood violence and trauma into an adulthood he is not ready for constantly re-emphasising his "embodiment of an uncanny figure caught betwixt several different dichotomies" (Madden, 16). Ultimately, this means that Ari's incipiency, as all incipiencies are, in a liminal space of becoming, haunted by both the past and the future, unable to engage with the present.

Ari's first narrative interaction with his father gestures toward the negative affective relations that Ari maintains with everyone around him.

> I go up to him and gently touch his shoulder. He pulls away. Go see your mother, he says, she's upset. He yanks the Walkman out of my hand. Where have you been you animal?
>
> -With Panayioti. He walks away and fiddles with some flowers. I hear him muttering about me, about my brother, about my sister. I expected his anger, I'm used to it, but at the same time the whole of my emotions, all the shit fluttering around my head, feels like it's going to erupt out of me and all over him. My body is immediately tense, waiting for the fight. I yell arsehole at him. He hears and shakes his head. (11-12)

In the moment that Ari's father attempts to shame him, accusing him of upsetting his mother and calling him an animal, Ari responds with aggression, because he is unable to properly process that shame and allow it to become something else. His father's speech act of insulting Ari, acts on him in the way that it should by making Ari feel anger and shame for having in some way failed the family. In this scene, Ari is firstly oriented negatively toward his father, but then his father's negativity stirs anger in Ari, but there is some subtext occurring within the text here. Ari's parents do not know or suspect that he is gay and as such do not think to leverage homosexual shame against him, Ari has made himself safe from that form of violence, but in turn has left himself vulnerable. The vulnerability that he feels in this moment is that he knows that an investment in a disembodied subjectivity is to place oneself at risk of a violent expulsion from the social order. It's 'all the shit fluttering' in Ari's head that betrays his vulnerability, the assumption that his fathers muttering constitutes an attack that requires defending, since the experience of precarious subjects is that their lives are always-already at risk and need to be protected.

The Gothicism of the suburbs in *Loaded* is both prevalent and prescient where both the suburbs and Ari are used to critique the modern body of neoliberal capital. In this narrative critique "the modern body … is racked with anxieties around hygiene, body

boundaries, 'fluids that flow in and out of the body, the ways in which others touch one's body'" (Wise, 928); Ari's disgust in normativity manifests in a revulsion in the ways normative bodies impact his own, rejecting and turning away from the ways those bodies try to make him feel. Shame for being unemployed and being single, anxiety about not wanting to study and not being prepared for an inevitable 'future,' but more importantly, lonely for not being like them. Normative bodies wish to constantly press on Ari and remind them that they are unalike to him, that he is different, and manifest that difference as a physical distance. The novel seeks to undermine the boundaries of the body, to point out that in suburban life there are things that pass into the body, that, as Ari would say, make it inert. While at the Greek club, Ari gets into a fight with his friend Joe as Joe wants for Ari to get a job, for Joe, Ari is the thing which causes him anxiety, the body of failure and poverty and drug use that he resists against. But when Ari is staring at Joe while being yelled at he sees something different, "I study his face. Notice the light layer of fat forming under his chin, the small strands of wrinkles around the eyes" (66), Ari then watches Joe leave the pub, "Dina holding onto his hand: watching an ordinary man walk out with an ordinary woman into an ordinary life" (67).

In the bodies of Joe and Dina walking out of the pub hand in hand, Ari sees the life that is determined for him by his parents, the one in which he must passively resist while not compromising his tacit sexuality. In their bodies he sees the shape his life should of taken, which the resistance of such seems impossible because, "It is precisely because of their embodied nature that habitus and hexis[49] have the capacity to induce in us affective responses to inter-subjective encounters with those around us and to interactions with our environment" (Wise 2010, 922). As much as Ari is repulsed by a normative life he is equally contingent on its persistence, his very bodily materialism is dependent on how he exists within the suburbs, how he moves around them, he is framed by them — which is to say, that the limits that define how Ari acts and is acted upon is defined by the very place that he rejects. It is these limits which define the central struggle of the text, as well as the struggle Ari has with negotiating his foundational affects. Where Ari's strong identification with lowly places is concerned it is largely to do with "The boundaries of the modern body extend to the modern urban forms where distinctions between purity and defilement are encoded into the built environment" (Wise, 928), in the sense that Ari's body is often contaminated, acting as a

[49] Habitus and hexis are deployed here in the context of the theory of Bourdieu where habitus is the social location as manifested by the embodiment of history, place and culture, and hexis is the embodiment of the habitus in an individuals posture, manners and way of speaking etc.

symbol of his transgression, where he brings such dirty objects as semen and sweat into the places they don't belong. This belligerent hostility directed at the social order can be read as being, "The bodily, muscular, visceral quality of place relations … that are all the more emotionally intense, filled with bodily revulsion and neurotic bitterness" (Wise, 932), Ari derives a pleasure and power from knowingly disturbing the purity of heterosexual spaces, the precarious way in which he inhabits these spaces determines his need to undermine them because they produce in him strong feelings of disgust, a result of the loneliness he experiences, the harm of which he attempts to mitigate.

On Disgust

The powerful feeling of Ari's disgust results with a disidentification with working-class Austalian masculinity and masculine desires. He identifies within masculinity a social power and mobility that he fears will be stripped from him if his sexuality is disclosed, masculinity becomes in this way the object of Ari's anxiety, it is also the reason why Ari uses speed. For Ari, "speed is exhilaration. On speed I feel macho but not aggressive. I'm friendly to everyone. Speed evaporates fear. On speed I dance with my body and my soul" (23). The suggestion that is being made is that through the consumption of speed, Ari is able to desublimate his foundational affects, particularly his anxiety, that the temporary dissipation of these affects allows him to engage in the world in the very masculine way that he idolises. After a conversation with his Mother, Ari thinks to himself that, "I don't want a life like she has. And I don't want the life she wants for me" (27). Aside from speed, Ari also desublimates his anxiety with nihilism, a romanticised disidentification with self-destruction that has him convinced that heterosexual life is banal and not worth living, that if he lived a heterosexual life he would cease to matter — believing this even as he maintains all of his connections to that social order. When the feeling of the drugs begins to abate Ari becomes indignant, a reaction to harm that has been wrongfully imposed. Effective of his presumed moral superiority, a position that Ari has assumed because he believes he sees through the world, of the decomposing bodies of those that live in the suburbs for a dream that will never come true; it is in the moments when the blur of the drugs fades that Ari's loneliness and its twinned feeling of disgust flare up, an experience that is indicative of Ari's feelings of bodily difference.

Ari never turns his disgust into a speech act, likely because it is understood that what repulses him, what he turns away from, is not *disgusting*, that to speak to heteronormativity

as disgusting will not make the label stick to it. As Sara Ahmed argues, "To name something as disgusting is to transfer the stickiness of the word 'disgust' to an object, which henceforth becomes generated as the very thing that is spoken" (2006, 94). Ari lacks, in this sense, the necessary power to engender those things that repulse him with 'disgust,' because "disgust works to align the individual with the collective at the very moment both are generated" (95), Ari cannot speak disgust into the world because he cannot align with a collective which would mean that his disgust signals the presence of something else. Sianne Ngai stresses that "disgust find its object intolerable and demands its exclusion" and because of that "disgust is urgent and specific" (2005, 337), the teleology of disgust is, then, to inspire a spatial and temporal movement — the individual who feels disgust is compelled to move away from the thing that is disgusting and in turning away, place that feeling in the past. Without a collective to speak and legitimise his disgust, the meaning of disgust has changed for Ari, because he lacks a power to make his disgust stick, what occurs is that disgust becomes contingent[50] to Ari's subjectivity and his incipiency. The discussion of disgust in chapter two, argued that disgust works on the body by defining and structuring the flow of meaning, that disgust begets shame which begets anxiety which begets loneliness, and that this flow of meaning operates as a colonisation of the queer body by a social order that functions to suppress it. Disgust is not foundational to Ari because disgust is not attached to his body, he is not disgusted by his appearance or his sexuality, his repulsion points away from his body, defining an exclusion zone of identity of things he does not want to be.

In considering narrative disgust, it is important to stress that the reason why Ari's disgust concerns an exclusion zone is because disgust is one of the ways that subjects manage the limits of their bodies. Disgust marks the arrival of a refusal, a rejection of an object and a defiance of an incorporation of that object into one's body, in *Loaded* this border is rigidly policed by Ari, never letting his vulnerability slip, never admitting to the force of the things he finds disgusting. For Martha Nussbaum,

> Disgust concerns the borders of the body: it focuses on the prospect that a problematic substance may be incorporated into the self. For many items and many people, the mouth is an especially charged border. The disgusting has to be seen as alien: one's

[50] In this instance disgust does not provide the necessary basis for being a foundational affect is that disgust does not occur at the base of Ari's homosexual incipiency, not in the ways that shame, anxiety and loneliness are. Instead, disgust is contingent with Ari's subjectivity, that is to say, his body has emerged and been framed through the world by disgust and the experience of disgust is not dependent on Ari's sexuality or sexual identity. As I go on to explain though, disgust becomes adhered to loneliness in structuring Ari's incipient subjectivity and defining the ways in which he acts and is acted upon.

> own bodily products are not viewed as disgusting so long as they are inside one's own body, although they become disgusting after they leave it. (2004, 88)

Interesting here is the notion that the production of disgusting things is safe as long as it stays inside one's own body. While this is an obvious summation of disgust that extends back through Julie Kristeva and Georges Bataille's own formulations of abjection and the abject, in this instance of *Loaded*, what Ari internalises and refuses to let leave his body are moments of softness and tenderness, this is because Ari believes that his only value, socially, sexually, is in his ability to be masculine. As when he has sex with George, Ari thinks to himself, "I see sparks, a tiny shower of electricity rains down on the bed from the point where our hands touched. He sees nothing" (Tsiolkas, 125), and then a moment later Ari confirms his relationship to disgust, "in my head, running around and around is the thought that I must appear strong for him to want me" (125). Disgust for Ari is a negative affect, it disrupts the flow of meaning that is colonising his body, disgust reorients Ari away from objects his views as being capitulation to a suburban heteronormativity.

As suggested in chapter two, the negative compounding experience of a positive affect may result in the sublimation of a negative one. In this instance, the compounded experience of loneliness, the inability to live a public and normative homosexual relationship, has resulted in the sublimation of disgust as a newly emerging foundational affect, signalling that Ari as a character has had his queerness fully subsumed under the social order. The risk that opens up here, is that while Ari's disgust is directed at objects outside of his body his destructive behaviour suggests he is frustrated with his body's inability to feel normal, he indulges himself in drugs, alcohol, semen and sweat as ways of further sublimating his position as a despicable subject of queerness. At the end of the novel Ari is lying on his bed and is considering the harm the subjects himself to and he thinks of his friend Johnny, who is able to live out to his father and go out in public as a drag queen, Ari thinks, "he tells me that I'm a faggot and that I'm a faggot for life. Johnny warns me not to go overboard on the chemicals. Watch them kid, he says, they'll dull the brain and they'll dull the soul," but Ari counters this claim, "drugs keep me quiet. And relatively content" (Tsiolkas, 146). Functionally, disgust and drug use are performing the same role in Ari's life, that of a failed disidentification. Where a working disidentification would provide a horizon for a subject to adeptly move over discourse and ideology without becoming territorialised and providing the means of figuring a liveable life, Ari's failed disidentification manages to only to affirm his position as an outsider who cannot ably be represented within the social order, he manages

only to remain silent and content, an object that things happen to instead of an active subject.

An example of how Ari's disidentifications fail him is presented in an interaction with one of his high-school friends, Joe, Ari remarks on the ways Joe is starting to become settled. Ari believes that "there are two things in this world guaranteed to make you old and flabby. Work and marriage. It is inevitable" (10), what is striking about this belief is that it is laced with both disgust and defensiveness. On the one hand, Ari's nihilism makes him disgusted by the thought of marriage, of work, of settling down, losing the hardness and virility of his youth and making way for softness in contributing toward a meaningless life. On the other hand, it can be read that this position is intrinsically defensive, believing that he will not ever be able to have access to these forms of normativity and domestic life, Ari instead chooses to have a virulently negative opinion on that life — instead of being rejected by the social order, Ari has pre-emptively opted out. Ari believes that Joe is acquiescing to futurity, that he has caved to the demands of the world around him,

> Parents, friend, bosses, girlfriends, girlfriend's parents, cousins, aunts, uncles, even the fucking neighbours. They all want to sell, buy, invest in the future. And now he is just waiting for the right bid, and I know what it is. Once his parents and her parents offer a house, or at least a hefty deposit, the deal will be clinched. The marriage will be arranged. Joe will have joined the other side, just another respectable wog on a mortgage … Coward, I whisper. But he doesn't hear me. (11)

Implicit in this quote is Ari's confession that he understands his incipiency. He understands that he is not yet an adult, and that in order to become one there is a list of things he must check off and once that is completed, he will have sold himself out to the future and to the social order. He will be trapped in the reproduction of the very order that gave him a life to live. Ari is then most characterised by his resistance and antagonism, oriented towards transgression and his inability to relate himself to the future or to any other form of queer futurity has resulted in the failure of his disidentifications, his loneliness compounded into disgust at the forms of sociability he feels rejected from prevents him from being to identify anywhere in that same symbolic order.

As a foundational affect, loneliness extends out from the body, it is made legible by the emotional and mental toll of the experience of outsidedness, this is an effect of loneliness' own apprehension of exposure. A loneliness that's own anxiety at being known brings to the surface of a body the evidence of its own contamination and the emergence of disgust twinned with loneliness is a result of this reaction as an effective disidentification with one's

own emotions as a violent retaliation against the vulnerability and exposure of precarity brought on by loneliness, as Georges Bataille has argued, "the nauseating forms of dejection provoke a feeling of disgust so unbearable that it is improper to express or even make allusion to it" (1997, 129). The drive in *Loaded* for self-destruction should not be confused with a drive for annihilation or suicide, Ari is not courting an actual physical death, merely a social one, the reason for such is the adherence of disgust to his loneliness, where Martha Nussbaum clarifies that, "Disgust, for each, is not itself a harm to be regulated: it is, rather, a criterion we use to identify the bad, indeed the very bad, and hence the regulable." (2004, 85-86). Ari is not harmed by his disgust, as violent as it seems, it is a negative register that attempts a disidentification of the world around him, that he can never complete due to his tacit sexuality. As Ari argues for himself, "The constraints placed on me by my family can only be destroyed by a debasement that allows me to run along dark paths and silent alleyways forbidden to most of my clan and my peers" (132), Ari takes pleasure in being debased, relishes in the secret knowledge that he contaminates his body, it provides him with the energy he needs to remain in the social world of his family and friends. His ability to act against the social order through a transgression makes Ari feel powerful and gives him the powerful feeling that he is acting with free-will.

Ari boasts that "In latrines and underneath piers I have enjoyed pleasures that are made sweeter by the contempt I know they bestow on me in the eyes of the respectable world I abhor" (132). Ari believes that his closeted transgressions make him contemptable "in the eyes of the respectable world," yet, the respectable world knows nothing of his transgressions because he conducts them in latrines, underneath piers, in alleyways and strangers bedrooms, he is not contemptable because nobody has witnessed these acts. That is, the power afforded to a subject through feelings of disgust and the experience of abhorrence makes one feel as if they are autonomous, that they have come to that repulsion of their own accord. However, this is a form of self-deception, as disgust and abhorrence are sublimated reactions, they are not natural or individual, they are negotiated and cultural. Ari is boastful and arrogant about his transgressions, he believes that he does it in the name of "protecting myself" (141), but he is acting entirely within the interest of the world he abhors by obscuring his sexual acts. The powerful feeling of Ari's disgust results with a disidentification with masculinity and masculine desires and the problematic effect of this particular disidentification is that, "in disgust, contingency is itself intensified … As one object is substituted for another … a border is temporarily affected, despite the fact that neither object is inherently disgusting" (Ahmed 2014, 89). Effectively, in his disgust of normativity and his embrace of the queer

subaltern, Ari predicates his identity (but not the terms of his subjectivity) on a personally destructive relationship to masculinity and masculine ideals.

The best way to explain the relationship of masculinity to the protagonist is: belligerent. Ari's arrival at disgust toward what he pejoratively identifies as being an "ordinary life," criticising the fatness and inertness of such a life, as well as his harsh position against gay identifying men who he objectifies as being faggots, is done in such a way as to position Ari as repelled by ordinary life but still on the side of masculinity in being repelled by homosexual identity and sex. The danger in the structure of his masculine relationship is that it constructs a disidentification without an adjacent desublimation of the shame and anxiety around being a faggot. Within the text there are a few moments where Ari responds with vitriol to the gay men around him, in one instance "A hand brushes across my crotch and I glare at the man who touches me. He offers a short, insipid laugh. I want to smash his face in" (Tsiolkas, 89). In this quote, a man who Ari identifies as being a faggot, makes an advance on him in an act which compromises the strength of Ari's identification with masculinity. On the previous page it was articulated that Ari wants people to look at him, to know that they find him attractive, "so attractive that he will risk my dismissal of him, that he is prepared for my turning away from him" (88). For one to look at him does not place Ari at risk as they are at a distance and Ari can turn away, however the act of touching him disturbs the border and the veneer of masculinity. As Ahmed argues,

> the proximity of the 'disgusting object' may feel like an offence to bodily space, as if the object's invasion of that space was a necessary consequence of what seems disgusting about the object itself. Pulling back, bodies that are disgusted are also bodies that feel a certain rage, a rage that the object has gotten close enough to sicken, and to be taken over or taken in. To be disgusted is after all *to be affected by what one has rejected*. (Ahmed 2006, 86)

Ari's compulsion, but not action, to punch the stranger in the stomach serves as a reminder that he lacks the necessary knowledge to desublimate his encounter with a 'disgusting' object, that the touching of his crotch elicits rage as a response is due to Ari's belief that because the man who touched believed Ari was touchable that Ari must understood as being open to the touch, therefore understanding his body as being that of a faggot, Ari feels rage than because the touch undermines the integrity of his masculine presentation, unable to process that his body is already contaminated.

Ari's contempt and antagonism for those around are centred on the notion insult, of being insulted, and the reduction of harm that may be addressed to his subject. This is often

why in social situations he reduces himself to the spectre of a sexual object, so that he may safely inhabit a space without being textually reduced to a gay object. For all the complicated experiences of bodily difference and affect that a homosexual subject may undergo, for all the physical and sexual violence, insult remains one of the most prescient concerns.

> Insult creates an interior space of contradiction in which are found all the difficulties a gay person will meet before being able to assume his or her identity, before being able to accept being identified with or indentifying with other gay people. It is this identification which is first rejected; but then it must, as a place to start, be constructed or at least accepted—even If later its importance or its signification may lessen. (Eribon 2004, 69)

Central to the development of a theory of incipiency is the argument that while a subject may experience homosexual desire they may not identify as being homosexual. This is a significant issue within queer theory, the conflation of sexuality, gender and identity, which is presented as a form of identitarian politics that must be affixed to a subject to determine their legitimacy. In *Loaded*, Ari's disgust is presented as a desublimation of this pull to be affixed, a refusal of being made inferior because "the inferiorized individual is thus refused the status of an autonomous person, for the dominant representation of the individual is always as an example of a particular species" (Eribon 2004, 71). The way that Ari's disgust in oriented is interesting, he seems to be disgusted most at people who settled for little lives in the suburbs, people who he says live without guts, yet those people without guts have power over Ari — the have the capacity to strip him of his autonomy. This is another significance of his conversation with Trin because the reader is given an opportunity to see Ari engage with someone who has been stripped of their social autonomy, reinforcing Ari's drive to remain in the closet.

The culmination of the experience of disgust in the novel is Ari's sexual encounter with George, in this confrontation Ari's loneliness and twinned disgust and contingency to masculinity come to bear on him. Despite his obsession with George, until the moment they are in a bedroom together, Ari does not conceive that George might be gay and Ari's commitment to the masculine ideal means that he did not think to perform for George, this refusal of earlier vulnerability only further pushes Ari to the margin, only makes him lonelier

> my face, a light touch caressing me. Have you done it with a guy before, Ari? Then he laughs. A sarcastic laugh. He takes his hand away. I guess you have, he says.
> His words are knives. Carving me up. I fix my eyes on the screen. In his eyes I am

> something else, I am someone else. I'm a wog boy, a straight boy. He is blind to my desire for him. (126)

It is as if, because Ari has only ever had sex with either other wog men in secret or with men he deems to be faggots, he has never had an encounter with someone like George, a Skip, a white Australian man, one who has cultural and social power that Ari cannot have access to. That George's words are knives, that he believes George only figures Ari as a sexual and ethnic Other makes Ari feel as if he does not belong, that Ari has now encountered a problem with being figured as an object is that the sexual encounter will not be as meaningful as he would like. A belief that does extend into the sex, which is short-lived and aggressive, it lacks the tenderness that Ari is both disgusted by and yearns for,

> He pushes into my mouth and I choke as his cock is forced down my throat. I raise myself onto the bed and lick his cock and massage his balls. He groans and strokes my hair and I take his cock further and further into my mouth, saliva dribbles down my cheeks, I still feel as if I'm choking yet it is impossible for me to release him. (126-127)

Having earlier in the novel declared that "no one fucks me" (103), Ari is now as close to *jouissance*, absolute and self-shattering pleasure, as he has been. He takes everything George gives him, allows George to stroke his hair, and then after George comes Ari swallows "all of the shit he flushes down my throat, lick his cock, his balls, his groin, swallow his sweat and his semen and his flesh" (127). With clenched fists Ari has acquiesced to the sex and allowed a Skip man to be on top of him.

It is this sexual encounter which most defines Ari's experience of incipiency, the encounter threatens to undo him through the power of *jouissance* by threatening to irrevocably change him, demonstrating the pursuit of a form of queer sociality that he once thought was disgusting might be pleasurable for him, however, Ari's inability to desublimate his emotions results in the failure of the transformative potential of this moment. George confronts Ari about the status of his tacit sexuality after decreeing that all Greeks are liars, Ari defends himself,

> You have to lie, I tell George. Bullshit. He says it hard, spittle flies toward me. All it takes is guts, confront your parents. It is your life after all. I listen to his words. I've heard them before; I've played them in my own head, played them over and over. You have to lie, I repeat. (128)

Ari is now coming up against mythologies of neoliberalism and upward mobility being characterised by a man he desires, the words tell him that his life is his own and that he can

seize it, that he should come out of closet regardless of the consequences, but Ari in experiencing loneliness understands just how vulnerable he will be without his family. To return to the character of Trin, it has been demonstrated in the narrative the great empathy that Ari has for those who are excluded from even those forms of sociality that Ari still adheres to. This is foremost because, as argued in chapter two, loneliness effective as a foundational affect because it insulates the incipient homosexual from the failure of their queerness by creating a symbolic distance between them and the social order.

The rugged individualism of George's whiteness continues to alienate Ari when he says to Ari, "the truth is yours, it doesn't belong to anyone else" (129), the words themselves action a linguistic distancing; George proposes to Ari that to be properly homosexual he needs to come out to his parents, to effectively take ownership of his 'truth.' Ari's response is to crack George, to break the veneer and to in some way prove that he is not better than him. "I curl my right hand into a fist and slam it hard into his stomach. Hard, so hard that he stops breathing for a moment, then squeals and falls on me" (129), in punching him, Ari is both taking out his anger on him and inadvertently testing his masculinity, he wants George to be a hard man. Ari's response to George's ethnic alienating of him is a violent one, as George's response is wild, "he hits at me, no punches, a slap on the side of the head. He kicks his knee into me thigh. He's thrashing around like a little child, the tears still falling from his eyes. I can't feel the pain" (130). Not feeling pain in this moment is a two-fold effect of Ari being loaded with drugs and alcohol and his own feelings of loneliness in the moment mean that the only way he felt he could engage George was through physical violence, a result of shame surrounding his intelligence and class anxieties. When George is leaving, he is compelled to insult Ari, "Find yourself a good Greek girl, Ari, that's what you really want, eh? Stop messing around with us poofters. Go home to Mummy and Daddy, go where you fucking belong" (130). In the event of being insulted here, Ari cannot protect himself, he cannot reduce the harm, as such this needs to be viewed as the inciting incident which will shape Ari's incipiency. George has issued a challenge to Ari, to either accept his homosexuality, or to go home and accept the 'fat and inert' life his Greek family has determined for him. It is from this point that Ari must reflect on what his sexuality means to him and what the shape of it will be going forward.

Conscious of the trap of coming out, and sceptical of the promise of sexual legitimacy and social freedom the close of the narrative demonstrates that Ari, while not having intrinsically changed, has arrived at a point of clarity. In a conversation with one of the girls he was out with the night before, Serena, Ari challenges her that he keeps his sexuality quiet

to protect his parents, “I’m protecting myself. Mum and Dad are adults. They can protect themselves” (141). The clarity that Ari is experiencing is that he understands now that as much as he’d like to not give a fuck about what anyone thinks of him, he does rely on his family and the forms of sociability it provides, and that the protection that he needs is to ensure that he is not excluded from that sociality. Ari also condemns ideas of Western neoliberal truth making, possessing a knowingness that life does not have an intrinsic and essential value, “A child isn’t purpose, a child isn’t meaning. A child is what happens when a piece of sperm bumps into an egg” (149). Ari is torn between the life he could lead and the life he has, the novel concludes with an embrace of his tacit sexuality, a gesture that he will carry on as before, that in spite of his affection for George it is more important that he maintains his familial ties.

> I want to go to Alex and tell her that I may be in love. That I think I’m going to be a faggot for the rest of my life … I look at the walls and the ceiling. My hands are playing with my balls. I’m not even thinking about sex, not thinking about anyone or anything. I’m just looking at the ceiling. (151)

It is here looking at the ceiling, playing with himself in his own bed in the family home that Ari experiences a proper desublimation of his loneliness, he comes to terms with his difference, making an acknowledgement of his own negotiation of social determination understanding that his experience of loneliness is necessary insofar as it is preventative of an even worse and more harmful form of social exclusion. This exclusion would be an expulsion from acceptable Greek social circles that he enjoys, having admitted to enjoying being Greek over being Australian.

Chapter Six: Incipiency and Anxiety in *Swimming in the Dark*

At the time of writing this approximately one-third of Poland's townships and electorates have declared themselves to be 'LGBT-free' zone, that is to say, they have apparently publicly liberated themselves from the influence of LGBT ideology (Ash, 2020). These LGBT-free zones happen quite literally in the realm of space, banished proprietarily from the physical instance of a certain place, a sort of Nuclear exclusion zone where so-called 'LGBT ideology' is literally cast out to the margins. The operation of this spatial operation as an infringement of human dignity (though a matter of rights is surely par for the course) needs to be understood as a biopolitical function of the State. Wherein spaces that are "understood to provide economic and social opportunities" (Clunan & Harold 2010, 38) are weaponised so as to deny visibly queer citizens the ability to articulate themselves in public discourse. In this instance, the case for Nuclear exclusion is two-fold. Firstly the exclusion of LGBT ideology is like exclusion zones around Nuclear disaster sites such as Chernobyl, where governments determine what is an appropriate amount of exposure and control population access to toxic areas for fear of radiation poisoning. Secondly, it is an exclusion from Nuclear formations of family and society, a literal barring of entry to the home by the State. There is also a striking concern here to be discussed about the legitimacy of LGBT bodies and a conflation with Western visibility politics, here Poland is operating within a liminal space where it is an EU member and thus incorporated into a dominantly Western nation group, but it is itself hardly Western; this is a complex issue where Poland's national identity needs to be negotiated around a history of colonialism as well as its connection as being the Eastern bloc, as always being not quite European. The juxtaposition is then constructed "between zones of opportunity and zones of exclusion" (Clunan & Harold 2010, 39), and inclusion to a zone of opportunity is predicated on movement into the state to exception.

Though Poland is an interesting case in that homosexuality was never expressly made illegal in sovereign law, but anti-sodomy laws were introduced in the eighteenth century by the occupying forces of Prussia, Russia and Austria, these were abandoned when Poland gained independence again in 1918. In 1932, a deliberate legal provision for homosexual relationships was made when the age of consent was set to 15, equal to that of heterosexual partners, for homosexuals. Anti-sodomy laws were put in place again during the Nazi occupation of Poland (1939-1945), the Nazi's of course had adhered anti-sodomy to

nationalism and the protection of cultural and social values. There is scarce information on the state of homosexual rights under Polish People's Republic, the lived experience of homosexuals was vastly different, but homosexual prostitution was legalised in 1969, which is evidence that the social and judicial opinion of homosexuality was widely differing. This tension between official and unofficial approaches to governing homosexuality resulted in the production of an anxious population. Subjects seeking political legitimation are anxious due to inhabiting the state of insecurity. Such a state of insecurity exists concomitant with both the state of exception and the state of siege, where the state of exception defines those subjects whose lives are ensured by the state, and the state of siege delimits those bodies that may be killed by the state. Insecure bodies in this way are those that cannot necessarily be killed because they are necessary to the function of the state, but these insecure bodies may be unilaterally exploited. Defined by processes of precarization, which "means living with the unforeseeable, with contingency" (Lorey 2015, 17), the state of insecurity is the lived experience of the precariat, those subjects who always live under conditions that they will never meet. Homosexuality and its queer valences fall under the state of insecurity given their ability to be secreted, unlike blackness which is always worn on the skin to be seen (though the harm that secreting queerness does to a subject is not being contested).

Swimming in the Dark is a 2020 novel written by Tomasz Jederowski, it is the recounting of Ludwik Glowacki's youth in Communist occupied Poland. In it, Ludwik narrates the story of his incipiency, from his early encounter with his Jewish neighbour Beniek, to his graduate trip to a beetroot farm for the harvest where he meets Janusz. As the title suggests, this chapter frames *Swimming in the Dark* as a novel about anxiety, as such the frame which will articulate this argument is one that considers political legitimacy. The protagonist of this novel is primarily concerned with having his bodily difference and sexual desire acknowledged and affirmed by the man he loves, at the same time he lives in a political environment that openly condemns such affection, where the protagonist is anxious to be loved and also anxious for the consequences of that love. One of the few identifiable historical incidences gestured toward in the novel is that of *Operation Hyacinth*, a concerted effort by the Polish secret police to trace the network of homosexuals in Poland, though it only officially started in 1985, so the novel which is set in 1980 only ever anticipates its arrival. Similarly, Ludwik's arrival in New York in the early eighties also anticipates the arrival of the AIDs crisis, a subtle connection to suggest that Ludwik will suffer at the hands of a cruel and negligent government twice.

Since this is a narrative that is dominated by anxiety, both personal and political, it is necessary to define the limits of how anxiety will be presented and analysed through the text. One of the preceding conditions of anxiety as foundational affect is contingency on others where we become both exposed to others and dependent on them for protection and recognition. For Isabell Lorey, anxiety is subjugating, it holds an individual in place and in order out of fear of what may happen to them if they fall out. Framing anxiety in such ay reveals it the experience of anxiety is intentionally isolating; one must be afraid to reach out to another body for fear their hand will be cut off. But as Lorey argues, this isolation breeds its own form of resistance, new ways of bodily resistance are constituted on the grounds of precarious subjectivities, "In a destituting, fearsome mode of constituting, a capacity of the threatened and threatening precarious emerges to invent new forms of protection that do not consist in the immunizing warding off and negating of vulnerability and contingency" (2015, 110). Where the queer[51] can be positioned as the tool that can exploit dominant narratives and accept that being sick, poor, vulnerable or contingent are not debilitating categories of subjection and can actually be the ground on which non-violent forms of cultural revolution are built upon. Anxiety is also predicated on formlessness, not an existential formlessness, rather a political formlessness based on a lack of recognition. "the anxiety of formlessness—whose potentiality follows us everywhere—makes us awfully teachable, for a minute. To the degree that the conventional forms of the social direct us to recognize only some of our attachments as the core of who we are and what we belong to" (Berlant 2011, 125). The resolution of this anxiety is the attachment of the future to an optimistic object, the pursuit not of happiness, but of remedy, though this comes from *Cruel Optimism*, Berlant labels this abatement of anxiety through an appeal to the social by adjusting behaviours *stupid optimism*. For Berlant, this stupid optimism, "is the most disappointing thing of all … the faith that adjustment to certain forms or practices of living and thinking – for example, the prospect of class mobility, the romantic narrative, normalcy, nationality, or a better sexual identity – will secure one's happiness" (2011, 126). It then becomes necessary, in identifying a relationship between optimism and anxiety, to provide the means for analysing that relationship.

So far in this thesis each textual analysis has been conducted with a varying range of theory being deployed. The aim of such an action is not to confound readers, nor is it meant as an act of egregious ego, instead, the doing of queer theory needs to be confronted with the

[51] While queer is specifically referenced here due to the subject matter of the thesis, it needs to be iterated that the queer does not exist in a vacuum of resistance and that 'black,' 'latinx,' crip, trans* and other categories of marginality all exist here in a sort of precipitous confluence that designates the potential and possibility of change.

terms of its own emergence: difference. In regarding each text with varying theory, this thesis engages them on the terms of their own difference, respecting that a single analytical framework might be totalizing (and certainly hegemonic). As Jeffery T. Nealon points out in *Alterity Politics* (1998), while we may identify the concept of difference as occurring through lack, this does not mean that they produce nothing, as the experience of this lack is productive of certain effects, one of them being foundational affect. Terms like plasticity, mutability, and impressibility all work toward considering the ways in which subjects manage the experience of expropriation, that is the experience of meaning constituted through identity being recuperated by the social wherein the minoritized subject is left with only their own lack. Nealon negotiates in the claim that bodies can be expropriated that subjects are then property of the eminent domain,

> the primary relation—to oneself and to the other—remains an imaginary relation of expropriation: revelation comes from incompleteness, lack, slippage. But to term this noncenter of the social or the subject a 'failure' presupposes the normativity of some state that is somehow not constituted by these interpellative social conditions, a state where the nation or the subject would or could be undivided. (1998, 11)

While, for certain, the centre of the social is determined by a condition of acquiescence to the demands of power, to come-to-terms with the ways that power deems to determine the material conditions of subjectivity — which in any case would be the geopolitically relevant figure of absolute privilege. As such, the framing of bodies as only occurring through power supports that claim that they are figured within an eminent domain freely accessible to the source of power to exploit as it sees fit.

In the instance of *Swimming in the Dark* and exploring that relationship between the foundational affect of anxiety and the affect of optimism. Looking toward theories of new materialism to expound on the experience pressures exerted by the regulatory forces of the social order. The first marker that new materialism provides us is that of impressibility, "*Impressibility* marks a body's relative responsiveness to and absorptiveness of its stimulations and thus is its capacity to move forward through time; it thereby became the fleshy substance of race and sex difference" (Schuller & Gill-Peterson 2020, 6). The ways in which fleshy substances like race and sex are felt through the skin, the ways we feel the impact of insults are how the experience of impressibility manifest itself. In terms of the narrative Ludwik's body is highly impressible given the speed with which he responds to negative stimulus in culture. The next marker is mutability, which as in astrology, refers to a person who is adaptable and flexible, "Mutability, in the midst of internal cohesion, enables

matter to respond to pressures placed on it from the milieu while still maintaining coherence as an individual entity. Plasticity thus comprises the tension between resilience and transformation" (Schuller & Gill-Peterson 2020, 10). The character of Janusz can be said to be more mutable, he responds to the pressure to conform with a greater ease and a certain eagerness, but he does not necessarily react quickly to negative forces, like a frog in a pot, he waits for it to be unbearable before responding. The final marker is plasticity, which is a little harder to define, as plasticity is how the impressible and the mutable are governed. "Plasticity, in other words, does not offer an escape from technologies of control but, rather, provides its very substance" (2020, 10), as such subjects who are plastic, or have plasticity, are the ideal subjects of the social order, totally able to be manipulated and able to be moulded into a desirable shape.

Sublimation**:** "Those Jews don't live here anymore. Understood?"[52]

The ways *Swimming in the Dark* preludes its narrative about political legitimation is recounted in how Ludwik regards his youthful relationship with his neighbour Beniek. The importance of this relationship is to define the Ludwik's homosexuality and his sublimation, in that it is important to understand where Ludwik's capacity to resist and his acceptance of his sexuality emerged from. Beniek and his family are Jewish, in post-WW2 Europe, particularly in the Soviet nations, Jews were treated with severe speculation and hostility and several times there were mass exodus's and expulsions of Jewish people from the Eastern Bloc. Ludwik gets wise to the subtle ways in which Beniek is made different to him,

> We only went to his place once. The staircase of the building was the same as ours, damp and dark. But somehow it seemed colder and dirtier. Inside, the flat was different – there were more books, and no crosses anywhere. We sat in Beniek's room, the same size as mine, and listened to records that he'd been sent by relatives abroad. (Jedrowski 2020, 6)

Despite living in the same group of apartment blocks which were designed to be identical Ludwik realises that even though things that are built equally, it does not mean that they are treated as such. He notices that the building is damper and darker, that Beniek's family flat lacked any Christian symbolism, more educated and more connected to the Western world. Ludwik is discouraged from building a relationship with Beniek by his Grandmother, and it

[52] Jedrowski, 14

cements his education that some people are treated differently for no rational or perceivable reason, "'You know, Beniek is different from us,' she said with a sneer. 'He couldn't really be part of the family'" (2020, 7). The difference that he learns here, is that it is insurmountable and that it is abnormal and completely alien.

The work of regulatory forces is to teach subjects consequences without imparting secreted knowledge. "Mother would have worried: about the red-faced veterans who sold trinkets in the market square with their cut-off limbs exposed, about 'perverts' – the word falling from her lips like a two-limbed snake, dangerous and exciting" (2020, 5), this education is a very literal one in learning what 'perversion' is, in that what is delineated is people who pervert the course of regular sociality. But it is important because Ludwik learns from his mother that there is something to be scared of, something to be avoided about these people she labels as being 'perverts.' In this instance the regulatory force is not education, but it is insult. Ludwik is being taught a label and the social consequences attached to that label, to instil in him that he should avoid such lecherous behaviour – but he is not old enough to be given the specific knowledge of what constitutes perverted behaviour. Yet, Ludwik still identifies in the speaking of the insult the mysteriousness and the lure of the abject, and it is likely because having run off on adventures with Beniek, Ludwik does not perceive these people in the market square as being a threat to him — instead Ludwik is now in possession of knowledge that he has learned for himself and has empathy for these people at the bottom, those people who are constituted a threat to the State. The lure of difference and perversion excites Ludwik, however,

> I was aware of wanting to see Beniek naked, surprised by the swiftness of this wish, and my heart leapt when he undressed. His body was solid and full of mysteries, white and flat and strong, like a man's (or so I thought). His nipples were larger and darker than mine; his penis was bigger, longer. But most confusingly, it was naked at the tip, like the acorns we played with in autumn … Either way, this difference excited me. (8)

The boyish curiosity that Ludwik approaches this interaction is telling, he doesn't turn away out of embarrassment or shame, he engages in this voyeurism with desire, to understand why Beniek and his difference, as well as his forbidden-ness, is important. His heart racing as he looks over Beniek, what is also given away in this interaction is that Beniek does not repudiate Ludwik for his gazing.

The gazing and its desire are confronting for Ludwik and he does experience shame after the boys at a pre-celebration for their sacrament of the eucharist. It is a dance and during

it the boys dance together and under the cover of darkness they kiss, “We pulled apart. And though we continued to dance, I no longer heard the music. I was transported into a vision of my life that made me so dizzy my head began to spin. Shame, heavy and alive, had materialised, built from buried fears and desires” (10). Ludwik goes on to avoid Beniek until their first Eucharist, significant because under Catholicism, when a child accepts their first Communion it is the first time they accept the holy trinity into their bodies, bringing them closer to god. At the end of the ceremony, after having accept the eucharist Ludwik is not swept away in the celebrations, he is alienated from them. “And despite the sweeping wave of communal cheer, I couldn’t join in. It was as if there were a wall separating me from the other boys, one I hadn’t seen before but which was now clear and irreversible. Beniek tried to catch my eye and I turned away in shame” (11). It is in Ludwik’s first experience of the vulnerability of social transgression, the being at risk of violence and oppression, the tacit understanding that he is possibly at risk of death. There is no indication that the other boys understand what has happened, nor have the other boys vilified Ludwik or Beniek, yet in the innocent act of being pulled towards someone of the same sex, Ludwik understands that he has become implicated in something negative. The wall that emerges between him and the other boys is significant, it is one he constructs for himself because he implicitly understands that he cannot get close to them for risk of that closeness making him vulnerable. The communion is the last time Ludwik sees Beniek as Beniek and his family leave Poland for Israel after this.

In recounting his relationship with Beniek, Ludwik has the realisation that “not everyone suffers I the same way; not everyone, in fact, suffers. Not from the same things, at any rate. And in a way this is what made us possible, you and me” (15), and such the knowledge that two people can come together and that it is always made on the plane of difference, two different life experiences can come together only through a negotiation. Yet, the work of Ludwik’s anxiety also opens the second movement of the narrative, that he feels “an alienation from my twenty-two-year-old body” (17), unsure of his body and what it can give him. This alienation from his body results in an anxiety and he is left unsure of what attention his body is worthy of, it makes him unsure of the coded world of homosexual interactions, anxiety leading him to misinterpret signals that are sent to him. “Pieces of that night — the boys and the men who wanted them, the flirtation, the codes of seduction I could only guess at — returned to me with even greater intensity that I had lived them” (22), the way that an older Ludwik understands that the codes and flirtations of that night as actually happening, signals that in the present since he has desublimated his foundational affects, that

he knows the opportunities he missed. There is one significant moment where Ludwik struggling with his sexuality and he goes to the park where the inverts are known to gather, or rather, cruise. While mutually masturbating each other Ludwik takes in the affects of the engagement, "as we rode like this, him panting and me gasping, the urgency and abjection rose within me like heat, like an irrepressible scream, mounting pushing, taking over" (31-32), the need for desire coalesces with the knowing strangeness of the action and Ludwik tries to pull against the desire even as he submits to it, creating further anxiety in him, fraying him at the edges. After the men finish, Ludwik and the man speak and Ludwik wants to inquire about the possibility of finding love, but the man interjects,

> He huffed, and smiled for the first time, revealing a set of grey teeth. 'As a *ciota*, a fag,' he finally said, 'you will always be lonely. And you will learn to bear it. Some have a wife and children' – he nodded his head – 'like that one you saw walking past earlier, but they are the worst. They can stand themselves even less. At least I'm free.' He looked across the dark park, lit a cigarette and exhaled the smoke into the night. 'We give and take love for one night, maybe a couple of weeks. But not longer than that. There is too much resentment. Too much hatred. You live for pleasure if you're like this, and hope the police won't stop you." (33)

This is the most important lesson that Ludwik learns as it is the first piece of knowledge that he has learned from another homosexual, in terms of an affective genealogy this is what he inherits, the shape of a sexuality that he is gifted with. The idea that one can only be free is they are single, the notion that homosexual relationships are filled with resentment because they cannot be free together, to love each other as they might like to. Homosexuals in Soviet Poland are only allowed to experience temporary pleasure, anything else would be a transgression because homosexuals are meant to struggle, they are not meant to resist.

Pastoralism "…towards each other by instinct…"

Resistance to oppressive regimes of sublimation does not emerge of its own accord, it is structured through brief moments and opportunities wherein one is free to move about as they please without the fear of violent rebuke. These moments may occur through time, but more often than not they happen in space, arrived at in a foreign destination where the rules of one's life seem to be suspended, so in discussing political belonging of homosexual subjects spatial belonging is also important, as it is critical to locate the sites of queer liberation. Considerations for social structures and the ways in which homosexual subjects make

liveable lives within them becomes critical. In terms of *Swimming in the Dark*, there is a lot of resistance around where characters are comfortable and what places elicit a sense of belonging. The first encounter between Ludwik and Janusz marks the beginning of the second movement of the narrative which cements within the protagonists the possibility of a liveable homosexual life. After finishing university, Ludwik is given the opportunity to spend the summer working on a farm for the harvest, on arriving to the farm Ludwik remarks that, "It made me think of Aunt Marysia's garden outside Wrocław, with its berry bushes and fruit trees and places where one could hide, and beyond its fence nothing but fields. I hadn't thought of that in ages" (37). Ludwik's arrival at the possibility of being hidden, and of uninterrupted fields marks the opening toward the thematic possibilities of the pastoral. This passage of pastoralism seems to ask what happens when the concrete structures that imperil us are stripped away and replaced by natural constructs that may be moved upon any which way?

If we take that the pastoral novel emerged as a genre as a rebellion against the industrial revolution, that sought to return literature to bucolic roots, meditating on simple pleasures and plights. Terry Gifford stresses that "retreat and return is the essential pastoral momentum" (2014, 2), being the retreat from urbanity and the return to the country. Then what we arrive at is an often quaint and twee genre of literature that is a composite of representations of the country and of nature construed by urbanites that acts as the constructed boundary between city/country binary, as Sarah Wagner-McCoy argues, "the pastoral mode originates not from a single source but from a stock of images contained in canonical texts and contemporary instantiations …. the overlap of ideal and real settings … exemplifies the complex intersection of Arcadias, Edens, urban idylls, country houses, and natural landscapes" (2011, 17). The pastoral is then always anthropocentric, always emphasising the ways nature has been subsumed in order to create the ideal bucolic life outside of the city. These subtle narratives about the how humans exist over nature, from fantastic representations as in J.R.R Tolkien's invention of The Shire for *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*; to depictions of the English middle-class as in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* or *Jacob's Room*; to the early novels of Christopher Isherwood and even E.M Forster's invention of the Greenwood for *Maurice*; extending through to America with Annie Proulx's *Brokeback Mountain*, and Edmund White's *A Boy's Own Story*, all become construed with national imaginaries of how to behave with nature. Yet as suggested by the preceding list, a novel's status as being a queer narrative does not provide the necessary

ground to resist the pull of an anthropocentric relationship to nature, and instead a more deliberate counter narrative is required in order to construct a more ecocentric text.

Movement towards the pastoral risks questionable engagements with N/nature and concepts enclosed therein. Critiques that have been levelled at the pastoral target its amorphous structure, hazarding that because it dances between being labelled as a poetic, politic, or aesthetic, that it works more broadly as the literary form that is "used to prevent the questioning of power structures that underpinned land ownership and, indeed, the complete fabric of society" (Gifford 1999, 8). A tension emerges between the city and the country, between humanity and nature within the pastoral wherein the animating fantasies of metropolitan cultures become contingent on their inescapability, emerging as a panoptic power that culminates in the obliteration of the pastoral as a place that exists separate to the social, "when retreat is an end in itself, pastoral is merely escapist" (Gifford 1999, 47). Here, the tension then where the discourses of the city and the social are hegemonic and pastoral discourses run the risk of being termed uncivilised and falling out of touch with the social, in turn exposing it to violence. This opens a few theoretical possibilities for the queer to exploit with the pastoral, in that it may explore a basic 'queer pastoral' formation or it can move more radically toward a 'queer anti-pastoral.'

If the pastoral novel is derived to reinforce the connection of land and nationalism, a queer pastoral novel must necessarily disturb that connection. "As against a nationalist structure for representations of homosexual desire" (Christie 2001, 824). While the extreme end of that argument is the queer anti-pastoral as outlined by Cameron Clark which "present more nonegalitarian, inhospitable, and discomforting representations of queerness within the natural world that often struggle to achieve interpersonal or ecological connections" (2019, 212). Yet there is no clear outline for what a queer pastoral narrative would look like and it cannot be assumed that the answer can be divined from the median point of the pastoral and the queer anti-pastoral. Clark submits that the queer anti-pastoral "bring[s] into the frame not only the violence deployed against queers within nature, but also the queers that instigate violence therein. Such representations straddle the line between homophobic figurations of antisocial criminals … and prickly representations of queer negativity" (2019, 214). Coming at this from a relative disadvantage of having not theorised around the potentialities of the incipient homosexual, it is no surprise that Clark imagines that the queer must be 'anti' pastoral, instead of conducive to representations of the natural world, for who else would cast themselves into the country, into obscurity and isolation, but a homosexual man tired of being at odds with the world. Clark unearths the theoretical category of the homoerotic

pastoral which, "may depict some instances of animal husbandry or land-based labour, but its primary aim is to create positive affective spaces of reprieve, pleasure, and romance … this pastoral naturalizes and valorizes same-sex desire, while at the same time, it follows traditional forebearers in imagining restorative practices for humans within a landscape" (2019, 216).[53] The queer anti-pastoral resists the pull of reifying homosexuality as a natural category, if only on the basis that homosexuality as a discursive category has no derivatives within nature and is an artificial social construction – a human condition.

My conception of a queer pastoral novel differs in its own considerations of the role of nationalism in these land-based imaginings and romanticisms. Such is the importance of utilising it in the instance of *Swimming in the Dark,* given the relationship communism and socialism have to the honest labour of the land, as opposed to other frivolous or fey pursuits.[54] We might imagine that where the queer anti-pastoral desires to position the queer subject as being strange in nature (or even as being haphazardly cast over nature), centred around feelings of grief and failure that pursues the impossibility of an ethically pure queerness or *jouissance*. In his discussion of the queer anti-pastoral, Cameron Clark submits that "grief opens up a new ethics of relationality and environmental politics that are *not* entirely founded on empathy or care, but on what is brought forth when interdependency is a ruse or failure" (2019, 212) advancing the critique that a subject who might disappear into nature does so when the terms of their contingency within the social order have failed. Instead of grief, the affective plane of queer pastoralism may be anxiety, producing not those subjects who find themselves at one with nature, working symbiotically with the earth producing what they need and giving themselves in return, but rather a queer pastoral subject treads over the earth with uncertainty, waiting for the moment that they might be rejected. If we attach anxiety to queer pastoralism, what emerges is a relationality between the queer and the ecological wherein the queer attempts to mitigate feelings of displacement through the escape to nature and a possible renunciation of citizenship but a certain renunciation of belonging (or rather, the terms of belonging). Jack Halberstam in *Wild Things* (2020) reconsiders the relationship between wildness and homosexuality by articulating the natural

[53] Perhaps the forms of pastoralism that Cameron Clark most resists are those that we might label as being 'twee,' in so much as their representations of land are excessively quaint to the degree in which the romanticism of land-based labour becomes classist and, dare it be said, racist.

[54] Fey in this instance leverages codified homophobic connotations of 'fairy,' while tying it into other definitions of the word which mean unworldly, supernatural and, from the Old English, being fated to die. As such, at the same time that fey is an insult, it may also identify the ways in which the insulted category comes to be biopolitically managed.

order of homosexuality. Halberstam begins to articulate that while "earlier sexual dissidents had feared to find themselves on the wrong side of nature, now they situated themselves against it" (17), urging the argument that Wildean characters of the *fin de siècle* went from being anxious of nature to being vehemently opposed to it, in a move that might be seen as crucial to contemporary poststructuralist thought as it placed homosexuality discursively on the border between the natural and built environments. The effect of such a move assures us that "Homosexuality indeed depends on, requires, and bolsters this split between the natural and the aesthetic, the normal and the aberrant, the domestic and the wild" (17).

While this might seem like a near damning indictment of the useful of a queer pastoral genre, where homosexuality only operates across the boundary of normal and aberrant, as the zero of the social order, the primary argument still centres around the dimensions of incipient homosexuality – making considerations for the ways subjects come into homosexuality. The value therein is that the incipient subject is a liminal being "situated on the endlessly shifting border between nature and culture, they are extra-social, pre- and posthuman, and they represent a kind of otherness to the adult human subjectivities against which they are always deemed lacking" (Halberstam, 56). By ways of their liminality and relation to a horizon of potentiality, incipient homosexual subjects are the ideal subject of the queer pastoral novel as they become unruly subjects within an unruly environment, instead of trying to master the world around them, they relish in the freedoms afforded to them, theoretically to such a degree that they might begin to disrupt subject-object binaries. None of this is to say that a queer-pastoral would bear witness to the complete disintegration of the subject-object binary, or a breaking through and opening up new ontological categories of species and desire. Rather it may be best to describe the queer pastoral as providing the grounds for a transgression and a catalysing moment of *jouissance,* in which the subject is not undone but reoriented toward new potentialities for living. In any such instance, the narrative moment in which a character returns to the city and to the familiar restraints of the social, the pastorals ability then to open subjects up to new potentialities renders it an affective utopian concept, which bluntly said, is a utopia structured out of possible feeling. As discussed in chapter one, Sean Grattan argues that utopias are operational critical methodologies that permit readers to revel in what is missing in the world, "and although any utopia delimits itself from the community it exists in resistance to … this resistance [is] explicit and immanent at the foundational moment of the utopia" (Grattan 2017, 44). It is because utopias have a "radically contingent nature" (45) that the feelings of boundless optimism that they create are contained within the temporality of the utopia, which is always

a temporary one. Ludwik and Janusz discover for themselves a spatial utopia, an uninhabited forest clearing in which they are free to explore themselves without limits, the utopia that they create for themselves inevitably fails because they refuse to speak it into the world out of fear of what carving their feelings into discourse would do to them.

In what can be clumsily referred to as the *pastoral coda*, where the sublimation of the protagonists begins to be disrupted through an encounter with the Wild but one that also signals the end of pastoralism in the narrative, nature provides cover for covert affections in Jedrowski's novel. Shrouded by the phenomena of the world the characters feel free to explore their connection, the push and pull of their attraction and the limits of their feelings. Arriving at a farm at the end of his degree, to participate in the beetroot harvest (significant given beetroot was a staple food for Poland at the time), Ludwik remarks of the land, "It made me think of Aunt Marysia's garden outside Wrocław, with its berry bushes and fruit trees and places where one could hide, and beyond its fence nothing but fields. I hadn't thought of that in ages" (37). These first glimpses out towards nature bring forth recollections of days before obsequity, where the utopian impulse that nature gave a path forward without the stresses of needing to perform the ordinances of the social order. Indeed, it lays out a structure for how the novel will progress, in the berry bushes and fruit trees Ludwik will hide himself and his desires, avoiding reaching out and touching those around him, not just maintaining a closetedness but also an aloofness towards the other students on the farm; at the end of the harvest Ludwik and Janusz will move beyond the fence, where they will arrive at their *locus amoenus*, their pleasant place, their temporary utopia.

Having arrived at the harvest anxious and disarticulated, having only just experienced the cold rebuke of homosexual life and sex, Ludwik is eager to stop feeling the materiality of his queerness and to engage in behaviours that might render him invisible. In this sense, the novel engages in that most quintessential pastoral trope of the retreat. Initially there is a resistance to the land, Ludwik is not strong enough to cope working outside struggling to be without shelter, "I pushed on, feeling the pain in my body, but beyond that, sensing that it had started to give way. I was surprised by the energy that lay beyond the discomfort. The rhythm made me move on, the touch of the earth and the feel of the plants becoming hypnotic" (37). Ludwik is in his own way relearning the world, what it is to be in the world and to interact with it, learning alternative forms of bodily materiality and affect — moving beyond the discomfort and discovering of what his body is capable of doing and feeling if he manages to effectively push the boundaries. Such is the purpose of the retreat in pastoral literatures, it is

always meant to be a moment of reconfiguration, a renegotiation of subjectivity away from the stresses of metropolitan sociality. Narratively in terms of incipient homosexuality, a pastoral moment functions as a suspension of belief, of belief in the social, it creates a physical break in cognition and provides marginalised characters with a moment where they get to act out. For Ludwik the more time he spends within the bucolic the more he reckons with a new materiality, becoming more rhizomatic as he reaches out towards the earth and finds himself taken in.

> Slowly, slowly, I found a rhythm. I stopped fighting. One day, as I worked away like this, sweat began to release itself. I allowed the union between the earth and my body, I let go, and for the first time in my life I appreciated everything for what it was, observed the miracle of it. The earth for being the earth, my hands for being my hands, the plants for growing out of seeds, and the others around me, everyone, with their own rights and dreams and interior worlds … It was as if the sweat had washed away the past and all the thoughts and fears of the future and all that remained was now, clean and light and ever-dancing. (42)

In terms of impressibility, Ludwik demonstrates the ease with which he responds to his environments, as he creates a union between the earth and his body, even as he is able to clearly delineate between where his body ends and the earth begins. Where Ludwik's interactions with the land in this capacity mark a fresh moment of impressibility where he achieves a sort of radical empathy in which he can appreciate everything for what it is as it comes to him, which itself marks Ludwik's movement towards the *locus amoenus* and is a utopian impulse; as such this radical empathy will be stripped from him as he moves away from his pleasant place, making such empathy Orphic — being the mutable characteristic that is compromised by technologies of power.

Towards the end of the harvest, after having done his best to avoid Janusz, Ludwik surrenders his copy of Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* to Janusz. This is the return of his anxiety, a return of the pressures and conceits of social life, and in a way, a failure of the retreat to the pastoral. The reader is given a sense a further retreat is needed to escape the influence of the social fully, as is observed by the narrative: "By then the uniform had adapted to my body, yielded to its shape, and my body had adapted to the land" (54). The harvest had begun as seeming like a significant intervention has been revealed to have plasticity, in that the characters have not actually been able to escape from technologies of control even as they have been given more space for transgression against that control, the harvest in such a sense is constitutive of the social order, as where before Ludwik had felt

freedom in engaging with the earth, of the miracle of plants growing from seeds, and from considering the interior lives of those around him, marvelling quietly at the spectacle that is the hyperobject of life on Earth, Ludwik now feels like the uniform which once didn't fit him has now softened to him, there is no longer any resistance with the fabric. His body, which had once been out of place on the land, distinguishable from the earth he dug his hands into, had now adapted to it, becoming nothing more than another technology that kept the communist machine running. The chance to retreat further is provided by Janusz, when he asks if Ludwik will accompany him on his hike through the countryside. And so, as all of their classmates depart on a bus back to the city, Ludwik and Janusz take off by themselves further from it than when they started.

While on their *camino*,[55] Ludwik and Janusz come into conflict over living in Poland under the Party and Janusz accuses Ludwik of being a dreamer, of naively believing that the West might be any better than what they have.

> '*Freedom?*' you huffed, and smiled, as if you'd had the same conversation many times before. 'Having oranges and bananas every month of the year – is that freedom to you?' Your smile was gone.
>
> 'There is freedom is having what you want,' I said carefully, 'in choosing for yourself.'
>
> Your eyes narrowed. 'And do you think that doesn't come with a price? You think those people in the West don't spend their lives working like machines, earning just so they can spend?'
>
> 'I don't mind hard work. As long as you get something for it.'
>
> 'It always seems better somewhere else,' you said, ignoring my comment. (61)

This passage might best be explained by stating that it represents a tension between homonormativities. Both characters are moving hesitantly toward each other, approaching from different perspectives of their own sexuality; for Ludwik, he wants a life where he can choose for himself the shape that his life takes, self-determination being Ludwik's definition of freedom; whereas Janusz seems more content with living a life that has been determined for him, to find his own sexual liberation within the various margins and failures of that determination. After this slight conflict over ideology and belonging the boys seem to make a tacit agreement to not challenge each other on such topics again knowing that it would

[55] Camino is being utilised here to identify both the literal walking that the characters are doing and that it is similar to, but not quite, a pilgrimage or sabbatical, in so much as there is no specific destination but they will arrive somewhere.

become a source of anxiety, compromising the acceptance and belonging that they might feel with each other. Then that night as they are sleeping in a barn,

> And slowly, drop by drop, the rain started up again. It pattered on the roof like fingertips practising piano chords. We lay on our backs and listened, not saying a word. I sensed you near me, your body somehow animated despite its stillness … you shifted towards me and placed your head on my shoulder. My heart stopped. I didn't dare breathe. Your head was heavy, like warm marble, and your hair brushed my cheek. I was paralysed by possibility, caught between vertigo of fulfilment and the abyss of uncertainty. (63-64)

While the entanglement does not go any further, it is the first example of natural elements, specifically water, being used as cover for the boys to express their affections, the rain in this case will stop anyone from hearing them and would likely deter anyone from prying, though the boys themselves do not say a word to each other, like how so much of Janusz and Ludwik's relationship occurs in silence, as if they are afraid to speak their love into the world. It is itself one of the more direct references to a feeling of anxiety in the text, Ludwik being 'paralysed by possibility', experiencing being torn between 'vertigo of fulfilment and the abyss of uncertainty,' afraid to move or to make a move because he is unsure what the consequences of his action might be, he is certain of one thing: if he does nothing, nothing will happen.

The further they unwittingly move toward the *locus amoenus* the more the narrative seems to become a euphemism for the loss of virginity, the characters hesitation at moving forward and the checking in with each other, ensuring that they are both comfortable with what happens next, might seem melodramatic but it has metaphoric value because the characters are about to cross the border. As they stand at the edge of a forest that hides a hidden field that they had been encouraged to visit by a woman the boys quickly confer with each other,

> 'Are we sure about this?' I said, suddenly aware that it was just you and me again, nervous like on the first day I'd met you.
>
> 'What else can we do?' you said calmly, smiling. 'Let's go.' You put your hand on my lower back and pushed me with you into the forest, sending a shock of warmth through my body. (69)

Here, the boys stand at the edge of the wild, now complicit in the knowledge of what going forth into it means, for the first time since they met, they will be truly alone at risk of no one finding them. The moment of the utopian wilderness that emerges is a breach in orthodox

Christian and heterosexist ideology, it is an uncolonised space that should not exist precisely because it offers protection for transgression and taboo. The break instantiates the gap between a subject and the terms of their subjection and allows resistance to occur. Such a break is what is understood by Ludwik when he initially enters the *locus amoenus*, "We walked to the edge and let our bags drop to the ground, looking across the lake, gleaming like a mirror hit by midday sun. The forest was all around us, and we were in its centre, protected and soothed by its glittering eye" (70). Having arrived at the end of the *camino*, the boys find themselves nestled in the heart of the wild and within the wild they may now have desires without explanations, as Jack Halberstam urges about wildness, "it offers a rubric for passions, affects, movements, and ways of thinking that exceed conventional oppositions … lays waste to oppositions that structure modern life" (2020, 31). In their newly discovered Eden, Ludwik and Janusz are provided the opportunity to explore their bodies and their affects, discovering new ways in which they may move over each other or with each other because they have arrived at a place without structure and if they choose they might exist within it without the necessary constraints of modern life. The potential of such a moment is such as Halberstam fired across the bow, "queerness without wildness is just white homosexual desire out of the closet and in sync with a new normal" (2020, 39).

It is the forest clearing that strikes at the heart of the novel, when the wild world gives way to a veritable and undisturbed utopia, like E.M Forster's greenwood from *Maurice*, yet the function of forest and the lake are offered to the reader as critiques of the conflation of land and nation. There is no resistance to Ludwik and Janusz at the lake, the world does not punish them being there, exactly the opposite occurs, it welcomes them, the water is perfect, the grass is perfect, the weather is perfect. Perfect in the sense that it affirms their right to be there as they choose to be. It is the juxtaposition between the world that they may determine for themselves and the world that has been determined for them, and the potential for discerning a liveable life. In the wilderness a subject may disappear, but in the city they are always-already known; because in genuine forms of the wild subjects become obfuscates by nature, they begin to blur with it and become indistinguishable from it, whereas in a city where power takes on its panoptic form, subjects always stick out against the crowds and concrete, they can always be picked out for acting outside the boundaries of the normal. Again, water emerges as a significant catalyst for homosexuality, because even in the clearest water things are still distorted bodies and their fluids ripple out and mix with the body of water that they are treading, for Ludwik and Janusz they immediately arrive at the edge of the water,

> You had turned away, swum a little way off. I stood there feeling the wind graze my chest, tickle me between my legs. I looked at the water. I couldn't see through its body, couldn't assess its contents. But I stepped in … Under the surface of the water something warm rattled in my belly. I approached, until I could see the drops of water on your forehead and on the tip of your nose and in the corners of your mouth. We didn't say a thing. We looked at each other, already beyond words. You were there and I was there, close, breathing. And I moved into your circle. All the way to your waiting body and your calm, open face and the drops on your lips. Your arms closed around me. Hard. And then we were on single body floating in the lake, weightless, never touching the ground. (71-72)

The coming together in a body of water, becoming a single body that is weightless, has a feeling of being elsewhere and extant, the motion passes without word or comment and as Ludwik moves further into the water and toward Janusz the water is murky as if because they cannot see where exactly their bodies are, they have become less complicit in their coming together. The moment is then described as being 'already beyond words,' which obviously gestures that the characters are being driven by affect and desire, their bodies being compelled toward each other, though more significant is that the moment is one of a practical *jouissance*, in so much as the characters may not have experienced a complete undoing of themselves or their subjectivities, but they have experienced something that has changed them — although such a change has not been operant of desublimation where the characters might have unlearned something. The boys have begun to unspool around each other, the result is that they will become contingent on each other for social and political recognition.

The developing contingency and affection for Ludwik and Janusz builds out from their moment of weightlessness to a very rhizomatic engagement with materiality. Of course, making two characters entirely dependent on each other to feel legitimated is only a narrative device to make the reader devastated when eventually they are wrenched apart. It also works within the confines of the queer pastoral that the bodies of the characters become stripped of any artificial signification, instead the value of bodies becomes its ability to commune with another, "There was so much I could not get enough of, so much I would never be able to grasp or possess, no matter how much I tried. And I tried, we tried. Covering ourselves with each other, merging into one, pulling, following the pull letting its current take over" (73). Like in the Catholic Eucharist, Ludwik and Janusz are transubstantiating, changing from two bodies into one desiring-machine, that reaches outside of itself and follows the flow of desire, incorporating objects outside of this body as part of their desire and desire-production; it not

just that they are having homo-sex and the sense of transgression that provides, it is where they are having their sex and experiencing their desire — that they can reach out around themselves and not be met with violence or resistance, the earth around them gives into their desire. As is expounded in the text, "We'd wake in hazy happiness with the sun still above us, and when we'd walk back to the tent the only thing we'd leave was the shape of our body in the flattened grass" (74). Of specific note in this passage is 'the shape of our body,' as if with nothing impeding them the protagonist now considers their body to have achieved a unity. There is a sense of peace to this notion, as to feel as if nothing is wedged between them is to be without anxiety, it is to feel as if the world unfolds around you and that you may stretch out towards it without fear of punishment. There is also the engagement with the natural in this instance where the characters and their unified body leaves nothing behind except the shape of their body in the grass, which is to say they leave no evidence behind of what they are doing except that they were there and together, imprinted upon a nature that did not attempt to reject them. The text from this point is struggling with the concept of the naturalness of homosexuality, it becomes stuck over the engagement as being pure desire versus being homosexual — the issue that it has is that in the instance of sex between the characters, their union is not one of body parts, of a penis and an anus, it is rather the entanglement of skin and bodily materiality.

Such is the nature of utopias and their radical contingency that feelings of boundlessness eventually reach and end, either physical or temporal, and such is the position that Ludwik and Janusz are found to be in. Ludwik acknowledges of their discovered utopia, their *locus amoenus* that, "In a way these felt like the first days of my life, as if I'd been born by that lake and its water and you. As if I'd shed a skin and left my previous life behind" (74). The energy provided by *jouissance* and an entire reorientation of the self toward a new horizon of possibility provide the grounds for feeling reinvigorated by the world, suggesting even that the water has been operant of some sort of baptism, the significance of which is given more clarity when Ludwik elaborates of the feelings the utopia provides him, "… devoid of struggle, a feeling of weightlessness I hadn't thought I could feel. During these days the shame inside me melted like mint on my tongue, hardness releasing sweetness" (75). In terms of incipiency, Ludwik in being able to experience desire without shame, to love without struggle, to feel as if he is not burdened is a strong signification that he is working through his incipiency and beginning to come to terms with his sexuality and what it means to him, though caught in his utopia he has not come to terms with the possibility of a homosexual life. Still in the *locus amoenus* of the lake, shielded from a world that addresses

them violence, Ludwik and Janusz are living an impossible life because it is a transgression against the social order that they live in, and like all transgressions they will eventually be recuperated. Even as they put their return to the city from their minds and attempt to bask in their temporary freedom, "We swam, fearless and free and invisible in the brilliant dark" (76). What is their brilliant dark? If darkness can be revered for what may be hidden in it then a brilliant one may be celebrated for the obscurity and anonymity it provides. Much like the wild the characters find themselves hidden within as well, such a brilliant dark would provide the possibility of living a life of no resistance and one without anxiety, until such a time as the outside impedes on their obfuscated interior.

Anxiety and Resistance**:** "…however brutal or dystopian a thing…"

Returned then, to their regular world, the characters become immediately isolated given that they must return to the life that they had before they met, not the one they wish they could have that reflects the level of intimacy and passion they have experienced from each other. After a wave of disappearances from opposition leaders that Ludwik learns about on the pirate radio station, he considers that his isolation is not simply the result of his queerness, but that even in his queerness, he and Janusz do not share the same opinion of The Party, "Maybe the worst thing is that I have no one to speak to, no one who could open the window on this stake air of speculation. I know that, I will need to find somebody to trust" (78). It is in returning to the city, having left the utopian world behind, that Ludwik must begin to negotiate for himself a *locus gratus*, which is to say: if the forest clearing is the *locus amoenus* the pleasant place of their dreams and desires, then a *locus gratus* would be an agreeable place, a good enough place, a liveable place. In knowing the need for trust, but not reaching out for Janusz, Ludwik understands that the agreeableness of a life in Poland would centre around bringing people in on his secret – yet his anxiety surrounding the potential consequences renders him unable to make that leap. Additionally, the various methods through which Ludwik and Janusz begin to buy themselves security make Ludwik uncomfortable, in reducing his anxiety he debilitates his capacity to resist the social order that is subjecting him.

At the beginning of the narrative Ludwik has an optimistic attachment to the idea of leaving Poland for the West, invested in the potential of political freedom, but Janusz holds him back. Though the promise of a good life elsewhere makes a bad life temporarily liveable, and because of this Janusz becomes the repository for Ludwik's optimism, into him is poured

all of the hope for a liveable future adhered to relationship which makes a life Poland possible. Janusz understands this and vows to do what he can to make that life possible, however the narrative meets its complication when Ludwik learns the cost of that possibility,

> …my eyes wandered the crowd until they landed on you. It was as if someone had turned off the music, like an electric shock in my mind. You and your perfectly shaven face, turned towards her, her earlobe between your fingers … This is an image I cannot forget: your hands around her waist, your fingers sinking into the fabric of her skirt … I tried to tell myself that it didn't mean anything, that it wasn't real. And yet I could no longer look at you without feeling absolutely drained of my power. (122)

It is Ludwik feeling as if Janusz is turning his back on him that Ludwik feels the possibility of that future being foreclosed upon. Drained of his power, he must figure out a way to reinvest the energy to imagine a new future, but he finds himself lacking the energy to do so. Even as Ludwik is waiting to here about the future of his PhD, of having that something all to himself, the problem of his contingency on Janusz comes to a head in this passage, as he learns about what he has to give up in order to love a man like Janusz. The force of this shock on him, makes Ludwik act out in another way, as is the expectation for someone as impressible as he is, he must react quickly to the negative stimulus in an attempt to reduce the feelings of anxiety that is has caused him. That anxiety being the electric shock to his brain, that has opened up a host of potentialities that Ludwik cannot possibly prepare to deal with. The arrival of these potentialities and a heightening sense of anxiety delivers him to a definitive revelation, "No matter what happens in the world, however brutal or dystopian a thing, not all is lost if there are people out there risking themselves to document it. Little sparks cause fires too" (125). Ludwik begins to understand that his anxiety and capacity to resist are connected and that no matter what happens to him he cannot be completely obliterated, even as he might be disappeared.

It is this moment, combined with the illness of the old woman whom Ludwik rents a room from, *Pani* Kolecka, the stresses the limits of Ludwik's impressibility. The objects that he has imbued with optimism are placed at risk of failure, the livability of his future is in danger because of those same risks. As Lauren Berlant argues, "In cruel optimism the subject or community turns its treasured attachments into safety-deposit objects that make it possible to bear sovereignty through its distribution, the energy of feeling relational, general, reciprocal, and accumulative" (2011, 43). Ludwik is made to be in a crisis of precarity that drives him

toward the end of the narrative in which he makes an exodus from Poland,[56] the optimistic-objects which are supposed to aid subjects in the experience of sovereignty by including them in relational feelings are drained of their power. The crisis of precarity is then a situation, which as Berlant describes, "A situation is a state of things in which *something* that will matter is perhaps unfolding amid the usual activity of life. It is a state of animated and animating suspension that forces itself on consciousness, that produces a sense of the emergence of something in the present that may become an event" (2011, 5). As a narrative device, the recounting of a situation, itself imbedded within crisis, is useful for articulating the enduring nature of anxiety as an affect and the ways in which it frames and orients subjects. For "crisis is not exceptional to history or consciousness but a process embedded in the ordinary that unfolds in stories about navigating what's overwhelming" (Berlant 2011, 10), it is in the everyday ways that subjects are exposed to anxiety and the harm that it does to them, as situations compound they create a political life that becomes unliveable for the protagonist, as the fact of unliveability increases Ludwik is delivered to two options, to leave or to die.

After Janusz sweeps in with an appointment for a private doctor and Pani Kolecka is given the medical treatment she is in desperate need of, Ludwik is unbalanced by his feelings of powerlessness, anxiousness is exacerbated by Ludwik's guilt over his failure to help and a panic over what Janusz had to do in order to secure a private doctor. He calls his own grandmother, a trope is normally used to recentre the character, except in this instance he detects a sounds of exhaustion and loneliness, further stressing Ludwik to feel guilty. Yet, the confluence of these negative affects with being powerless to enact change delivers Ludwik to his first moment of genuine desublimation, the first instance in which he affords himself the privilege of feeling differently and acting out. In failing to adapt to the social and political systems around him, Ludwik is beginning to feel the pain of falling out of touch, his capacity to live that life is diminishing and all that will be left is his ability to resist. "I walked with rage in my body, the old shame stirring, reawakening in the depths of my stomach, heavy and hard and sharp" (131), these feelings take him to a protest that is happening, where he finds a bag of printed propaganda. Taking the propaganda to a nearby rooftop he empties it out into the crowd below causing havoc, "I saw the faces in the street looking up, men and women and children, the police as well, confusion and amazement drawn on them as the paper rained

[56] Like other narratives that tell stories of an exodus from the Eastern Bloc, say *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, subjects are framed as abandoning their homes in return for a selfish life of capitalism. Not only then are these movements made to be selfish, but characters are also made to regret this decision.

down like giant confetti" (138). Afterward, Ludwik sleeps feeling "unmoored, a ship that had finally left its harbour, only to be pushed by the wind without any control of its own" (145), not so much a moment of *jouissance* or desublimation — the incident at the protest and his subsequent feelings suggests a failed disidentification with Polish nationalist resistance. The effect of this failed disidentification is that Ludwik attempted to find space for himself within the resistance, but he understands implicitly that what they are fighting for is not what he needs, which is sexual liberation — this is then coupled with a feeling that there is no impact to resisting, Ludwik's anxiety becomes concentric of feelings of futility.

If liberation is the object of Ludwik's cruel optimism than the cruelty that is delivered to him is failure. In being confronted with futility, Ludwik has arrived at the moment where he is the most abjected from his future as he could possibly be, arrived at his most sublimated. For Lauren Berlant, "Cruelty is the 'hard' in a hard loss. It is apprehensible as an affective event in the form of a beat or a shift in the air that transmits the complexity and threat of relinquishing ties to what's difficult about the world" (51). Before this moment, Ludwik would regularly tune into a pirate radio station that provided alternative news, of the fights and struggles of the Polish people against the Soviet Union, and it is this behaviour that makes apprehensible the affective event of failure. "I sat by the window and watched. I couldn't bring myself to listen to the secret frequency again. A great weariness overcame me every time I thought of it, and of that night, and of the abyss of fear that has opened up as I'd stood in that closet. Something inside me had shut down" (149). It is the loss of possibility that Ludwik feels foreclosing on his future, his 'great weariness' is indicative of the intensity of his anxiety — he cannot bear to listen to the station which would provide evidence of his actions, of his failure to confront the law that would suppress him. Hiding in a strangers closet a victim of their mercy after committing an act of resistance, Ludwik comes to the realisation that he cannot survive in Poland, that the threat of State violence is too great a shadow to live under, in effect, this is the limit of Ludwik's impressibility, he can no longer bend, no longer change.

The primary conflict of the narrative is the tension between Ludwik's impressibility and Janusz's plasticity, Ludwik's inability to adapt to the environment and Janusz's capacity to capitulate to the social order. When Ludwik attempts confronting Janusz over how he managed to get Pani Kolecka an appointment with a private doctor, he finds that he cannot.

> I was too happy to see you, too relieved. Too weary to struggle. I let myself fall on the bed. The cold air gave us goosebumps as we undressed. We found warmth beneath

> your covers. We tested our strengths, wrestled with the urgency of desire, conjured up heat. Our bodies like firestones. You had me and I had you. But it didn't feel like the other times, the first times. It felt like we were settling a score, evening something out. Like we needed this, this language, this code, to know where we were, and who. And that we were both still holding on. (152)

Suffering from his great weariness, feeling anxious, debilitated and alone, the pull toward Janusz is strong. His vulnerability returns him to cover, before this his cover was the dark of the forest tucked away in nature. In this instance he finds solace in the sheets, obscured and covered from the world again, except when they were in their *locus amoenus* their bodies came together in union, melting together and in this communion they come up against each other, fighting one another, holding onto each other. Like two atoms that are having heat applied to them, the boys are becoming increasingly restless and feverish. The result of this scene is that Ludwik becomes even more contingent Janusz, as he pours even more of his optimism for his future into Janusz, he becomes Ludwik's only anchor in the world, the only thing that gives Ludwik clarity. Because the narrative prevents access Janusz's perspective the reader is given to one side, by only seeing Ludwik's perspective the reader wants to believe that the relationship is equal, that both boys want each other and a future together equally. The tension and primary conflict of the narrative is that this is untrue, Janusz is a character who grew up on a farm in a rural area, the first in his family to go to University, to become a Party member and work for the government, Janusz is then a character of upward mobility and exceptionalism, he may be anxious, but his anxiety is always geared toward losing the comfort and privilege that he has accumulated; Janusz more than Ludwik understands that they will always need to be secret, the possibility of their relationship being realised in the future is impossible, he understands that that future will always be deferred.

Ludwik comes up against the impossibility of his fantasy while at a party that Janusz invites him too, this in turn exacerbates the experience of his anxiety, as an anticipatory affect the experience of a more discrete and intense anxiety signals a subject who is becoming more vulnerable and isolated, a further disconnection from the life they believe they are alienated from. At the party, being hosted by the girl, Hania, that Ludwik suspects Janusz is having an affair with to further himself socially, and he begins to notice how estranged he has become of his surroundings. "I sat on the couch next to a kissing couple, watched the people on the dance floor, and fell deeper and deeper into a sense of alienation … You were smiling at me, but I couldn't bring myself to smile back … It disgusted me, and I realised that your power over me went so unthinkingly far beyond the physical" (163-165). The emergence of disgust,

present here for the first time in the narrative, marks a moment of significant disassociation of Ludwik's desire, but if disgust "strengthens and polices" the boundaries between the subject and object (Ngai, 335), then the boundary that is being reinforced is Ludwik and his own sense of alienation from the social order. Particularly, Ludwik is disgusted at the way in which he has allowed himself to become implicated in Janusz and his actions, the notion of being homosexual and sexually involved with another man under a Soviet government required a huge amount of blind trust, and Ludwik becomes disgusted with himself and the relationship because he realises the amount of risk he placed himself at by trusting someone so wholly. At the end of the party Janusz appeals to Ludwik, "I tried to assemble my thoughts, to resist. But nothing came. 'You're the one who didn't see a future in our country,' you said, your voice soothing. '*Here* it is'" (167-168). Janusz has work, and friends, a partner and a lover, he has figured himself within the world in a way that is comfortable to him; in terms of mutability he has moulded himself neatly within the social order, becoming more fixed and less plastic, finding a way to resolve the tension in his subjectivity.

Ludwik then has his PhD application rejected because he is not a member of, nor is he connected to, the Party and in order to continue his studies, Ludwik will have to call in a favour. Though he understands that he only has one trade to make, he must, in effect, give Janusz up to Hania. Through being rejected Ludwik comes to feel 'powerless' and 'desperate,' he is also taken off guard "I was unprepared. I had neither scarf nor gloves nor hat. I had underestimated the weather" (171), furthering the idea that he is estranged from his environment his anxiety is beginning to peak as he loses things to work for and things to resist. Ludwik begins to notice the change to himself and to the world around him, when he goes on a trip with Janusz, Hania and her brother Maksio, and he realises "There was a strange air between us, as if we'd become accomplices in a game" (180). This game disgusts him as well, as he feels a wave of nausea, becoming disgusted by the way he has become implicated in a life that Janusz is forcing to live, to live for the future that Janusz wants. If things had been easy and natural in their *locus amoenus*, then Ludwik is learning that his *locus gratus*, his agreeable place, the space that he can negotiate for himself where he can accept a livable life. The opportunity that Janusz has provided Ludwik in having access to power and influence creates a rift in their relationship, as Ludwik has theoretically completed his incipiency, he understands who he is and who he wants to be, he also appreciates that the covert life that he will lead is not what he wants. Hania confronts Ludwik about Janusz's behaviour, Hania is worried that Janusz is seeing another woman and that's the reason he acts so cold and detached, "A part of me wanted to laugh out loud, hysterically, until my throat,

vocal cords and stomach muscles hurt. The other part didn't, was just plain exhausted. I kept my face neutral, shook my head truthfully" (186). Though there has been no narrative significance given to a moment of desublimation of shame, Ludwik has none, further his exhaustion gestures that Janusz constantly attempting to push him into the closet and obscuring his identity. The two parts of him, the one who laughs and the one who is neutral, are constitutive of the tension in his identity, the laugh is who he actually wants to be, loud and boisterous to openly, he is the little spark that can cause a fire. Instead, his reaction to Hania, in being subdued is the person that Janusz wants him to be, the one who keeps secrets and keeps his identity secreted away.

Since the primary conflict of the novel is the tension over social and political visibility, then the climax of the narrative would centre around a decision over whether or not to assume that visibility. One night while in the country, under the influence of hallucinogenics, Ludwik, Janusz, Hania and Maksio, all play naked hide and seek in the woods. At one point, Ludwik and Janusz find themselves alone,

> Our bodies formed one, protecting each other from the cold, perfect in the night. We kissed. You were mine. I realised then that this was the only thing that counted. Nothing else had ever existed. Just our lips and hips and sighs … the cracking of twigs behind us and there was Maksio, standing naked a couple of metres away. (193)

Pressed against a tree and under the cover of darkness, Ludwik and Janusz share in their recondite desires, as in the natural utopia, their bodies coalesce and form a singularity escaped from the structures of the social that oppressed them. With no artificial constructs impeding their relationships, the boys feel themselves coming together, with the feeling that nothing else but them had ever existed, no clothes, no status are coming between their union. The 'cracking of twigs,' is signifier of their world shattering, it is the sign that their secret can no longer be kept, it is the moment that someone has entered their utopia, this intrusion on their *locus amoenus* makes their desire for each other impossible for they have nowhere to turn. Maksio catches them in the act, he is a naked man who does not articulate himself with the same desires that they do, he stands there as a testament to their wrongness. The intrusion is a deracination, and it forces the boys to make their decisions, Janusz overcome with shame and anxiety turns to Hania, and Ludwik later catches them having sex on the floor of woods, desecrating their space. Ludwik reaches, in this climax, the critical mass of his anxiety, which is to say that any further outside stimulus which might affect him would result in some sort of

explosion. But a critical mass of any affect, let alone a positive[57] one, and Ludwik "vomited during the night, convulsively. It felt like I was setting something free, ridding myself of a monster" (196), a moment we might theorise as being one of *negative jouissance*, an experience of extreme displeasure that it constitutes the individual, assigning them to a singular defining experience that they can never back away from. Debilitatingly anxious, having fully devoted himself to a man he realised he couldn't fully trust, Ludwik finds himself naked, alone and betrayed, at his lowest point, the experiences of bad feelings have compounded and will now consolidate him into a relatively different person going forward; one capable of making impossible decisions for his own safety.

Conclusion**:** "…a vast cavernous emptiness …"

Ludwik makes the decision to leave Poland, as queues become longer and food becomes sparser, Ludwik is confronted with the impossibility of his future, "I wanted to cease existing. I wanted to un-be. I sat in the hallway and tried not to think of you and me … I tried not to think of all the things I had imagined we'd do together" (200). This is the sticky part of his desublimation, as he begins to untangle years of affective knots which give structure to his subjectivity, that he allowed himself to become so contingent on Janusz means that he cannot figure who he is without him, cannot figure his future. The desire to cease existing or un-be, matches with the severe experience of a negative jouissance, such a moment wherein he feels his sense of self has been shattered but instead of unspooling is some posthuman sense, rather he collects inward, his individuality becoming ratified, his need to operate on his own determined. In this instance, for Ludwik "the fear, the terror of my life alone, was always there, like a clasping, growing abyss, waiting to devour me. I can still feel the tremors of that fear today" (201), what is interesting is Ludwik's fear is of being alone, not of being punished or attacked for his sexuality, he fears not sharing his desires with someone. Realistically this puts him in opposition to Janusz, as one wants to live freely and openly shared with another and the other just wants to be secret and safe.

The journey to get a passport proves to be treacherous, narratively as the denouement there needs to be a resolution to the conflicts in the novel, the arrival of this revolution when Ludwik is told that he cannot be given a passport because he is on a list of known

[57] To return to the theory, positive here is not in reference to a good or happy affect, rather one which constitutes the flow of meaning and defines a subjects exterior relation to the world.

homosexuals, his name was given up by the man that he had sex with at the beginning of the novel. Ludwik is resigned to this revelation, "The man who'd told me his life story, the man whose mouth had relieved my anxiety for one night – and whom I had told my name. Instead of anger, strange sort of tenderness invaded me" (204). The lack of anger is likely due to him anticipating this would be the position he'd end up in, him feeling tenderness for Marian Zalewski is because he empathises with the position that Marian was put in, but he knows how to direct his anger toward the political structures that created the impossibility for being homosexual. In order to get his passport, Ludwik is given the same opportunity, to write a list of his sexual encounters,

> At first, there was emptiness. Thoughts flew through space, trying to ignite. A sky readied for fireworks, a stage cleared for decisions. But where do decisions come from? … I felt the pause of time. A moment pulled into its smallest parts, spread so thin it threatened to break. When I imagined taking that piece of paper reaching for the pen, pictured the possibility of it, of writing your name, my arm refused to move. I couldn't feel it. I couldn't feel the fire in my gut, I couldn't feel any pain. I'd gone numb. (205-206)

The complete lack of affect that he is experiencing in this moment is indicative of him struggling with his desublimation, while he is not feeling anxiety or shame in this moment, because he isn't feeling anything gestures that he hasn't figured out how to direct those bad affects into good ones. As such, the shape of Ludwik's incipiency is still to be determined. He experiences a moment as if it stretches out into forever, stretched so thin that it could break, but it won't, such is his experience of negative jouissance that he knows exactly what he is capable of doing, even as he is unsure how he feels about it.

In saying goodbye to Janusz, Ludwik arrives at his lowest point, even as the primary conflict of the novel has been resolved, he is still left with the problem of resolving his personal conflicts. Having cut loose the one connection he could previously guarantee, "I was terrified, saw no way out. But I suppose that right then, in the midst of despair, I felt the stirring of instinct again, the murmur of that voice … I knew that something would occur to me, a pact I could try to live with" (214). If previous moments in the narrative gestured at the choice that needed to be made, the moment has arrived in which the choice needs to be made. The suggestion that's being made here is that at a suicidal edge, proffering that if he cannot live with the decision that he makes that he might as well throw himself over a bridge, but more importantly as the forecloses around him he becomes increasingly anxious over the possibility of whether or not something good will ever happen, whether he can ever be happy

with the life that he has. As Steven Shaviro has suggested, Ludwik as a subject at this point is completely dispossessed of himself, impossibly implicated in a system which refuses to surrender him, contaminated by that same system to feel diseased and lost. This is one of the fates of the state of insecurity, subjects who cannot accommodate the demands of the social order will inevitably fall out of touch with it – though it can be difficult to figure how that falling out will be depicted, suicide is an obvious representation though a disappearance or an exodus would also perform the same work.

Ludwik trades in Janusz for a passport, though he does not provide his name to the police,[58] rather he cashes in the favour that he has with Hania, Ludwik effectively gives Janusz to Hania by promising that he will leave and never compete with her for Janusz's affection. When he makes it to New York, that historical haven for immigrants escaping desperate lives, he receives the news that Janusz and Hania got married and that Hania was visibly pregnant at the ceremony — Ludwik makes the connection that the evening when Janusz had sex with Hania in the woods was the night she became pregnant. He knows that he has to confront the dispossession that he experiences, learn how to reorient and recentre himself.

> And I cried, despite myself. All this time I'd meant to ask you whether you loved her It was the one thing that I regretted not asking. I realise now that it never mattered. Because you were right when you said people can't always give us what we want from them; that you can't ask them to love you the way you want. No one can be blamed for that. (227)

Critically, this is not an example of Ludwik forgiving Janusz, rather he is forgiving himself for leaving. He has learned the limits of feeling guilty for necessary harm, of feeling anxious for the consequences of doing what he needed to do to survive. This is Ludwik as he's desublimated his anxiety, learning what he is and is not to blame for, no longer afraid of what a consequences a destitutive power might inflict on him because he is no longer threatened by it. In falling out of touch with the social order of Soviet Poland he has been alienated from the effects of its subjectivation, all that is left are the scars. "I am hungry, suddenly, as if I haven't eaten in weeks. I want borscht and *pierogi* and warm poppy-seed cake, and I feel this as a vast cavernous emptiness inside me, a yearning for warmth. But it isn't painful at all. It feels like a promise" (228-229). This is the closing line of the novel and it closes the narrative

[58] Though the novel predates it, the Polish government in the mid to late eighties did pull in known homosexuals to surrender the names of people they had slept with under the guise of 'Project Hyacinth.' Named for the male lover of the Greek god Apollo, who was killed by a discus Apollo threw that was blown astray by a jealous wind spirit.

out with a tone of ambiguous optimism. Given that we might theorise optimism as the desublimated affect of anxiety, Ludwik's ability to look toward a future while living in the United States is structured on a loss of fear over punishment, given he has already lost the life he had wanted.

Optimism, unlike foundational affects, does not contaminate the body, rather it is inverse, the body that feels optimism has its own way of contaminating the affect. As Michael D. Snediker outlines in *Queer Optimism* (2009), in the way that optimism is deployed by theorists like Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, it is often preceded by an epithet that places conditions on the limit of optimism, "optimism often is imagines epithetically as 'premature': as though if the optimist at hand knew all that she might eventually know, she might retract her optimism altogether. Prematurity qualifies optimism as a temporary state of insufficient information" (2009, 1). Instead of premature, it is more likely that Berlant and Warner intend for epithets of optimist to gesture towards it being a conditional attachment, something that may come to structure the life of a subject but only if certain terms are met. Indeed, "Any object of optimism promises to guarantee the endurance of something, the flourishing of something, and above all the protection of the desire that made this object or scene powerful enough to have magnetized an attachment to it" (Berlant 2011, 48). Throughout the course of the novel, Ludwik is given an attachment to leaving Poland, leaving the scene of his destitution, the promise of leaving is that of a good life worth living. Having then left Poland for the United States, Ludwik is placed in the position of being given a close proximity to the object of his optimism, and he is optimistic, but its ambiguous nature is due to him coming-to-terms with the consequences of his turning-away from Poland, the abandonment of his Grandmother and his forfeiting of Janusz which act as an admittance of his failure of normativity. It becomes more obvious that in doing necessary harm to ensure his own future, Ludwik now experiences the punishment of security, or in a convoluted sense: the insecurity of security. And yet, the most crucial aspect of this turning-away from Poland and gaining of political security is that the narrative is structured so that the narrator, Ludwik, does so as he recounts his life and perspective on his relationship to Janusz in a letter to Janusz, as such the movement to the United States has given Ludwik a political legitimacy and a platform on which to articulate his resistance, in effect, his voice is only given the power of articulation and addressability when he enters a State that recognises his difference. Ludwik may worry about what is happening to those he left behind, but he is not anxious, instead his worry is adhered to guilt because whatever might happen to them will always be his responsibility. The ambiguous optimism that is experienced by Ludwik is

because if anything good happens to him, if there is any form of positive pay-off to his optimism it would trigger Ludwik's guilt over leaving everyone behind. His optimism is ambiguous because it is conditional on a perfect set of circumstances, in which he is not anymore happy or comfortable than the those he has perceived himself to have abandoned.

The form the narrative takes is that of a single epistle written from Ludwik to Janusz, recounting his decision to leave and the life that he has in America. It is possible that if the narrative were to be set entirely in Poland, that Ludwik never left, that the structure would drastically shift to something like a 'secret diary' much like the 'Valerie's Letter' device in *V for Vendetta*. It speaks to the danger Ludwik was in before he went to Hania for his passport, that he knew he would either end up dead or in a prison, there was only two possibilities while he was at his lowest, it also draws a parallel between the two texts, that of confession. The cause for the writing of the letter is given as the announcement of martial law in the Soviet Republic of Poland is made, and Ludwik realises that he is left in the dark about what is happening, that in being silent in America he has made himself vulnerable to not knowing the fate of those he loves in Poland. While he knows that the letter may never reach Janusz, he still makes his confession in an attempt at hope, to resolve the ambiguity in his optimism, to be assured of his decision. Speaking of which, there is a line in Valerie's letter that speaks strongly to the position of Ludwik, "But it was my integrity that was important. Is that so selfish? It sells for so little, but it's all we have left in this place. It is the very last inch of us, but within that inch we are free" (Book 2, Chapter 11). For Ludwik, in the act of confession he is preserving his integrity, but he is also making a capitulation to the social order (in his case, now an American one); this is also true of Valerie, in making her confession she is capitulating to the social order, finally coming-to-terms with her death. As Foucault argues, "Confession frees, but power reduces one to silence; truth does not belong to the order of power, but shares an original affinity with freedom" (1998, 60), if the novel has largely been about anxiety and resistance, the narrative being framed as a letter of confession admits one major thing, that ultimately by being in America, Ludwik submits to the American order and finally feels free, he no longer has to be anxious and he no longer has to resist.

Conclusion

Behind the central claims of this thesis is a call for patience on behalf of the reader. To approach the incipient subject with tenderness and forbearance in order to slowly unpack the relational field of the affective valences that the incipient subject, or any subject, is constituted by. This discussion of the incipient subject has been staged through a foregrounding the evolution of literatures of incipiency in the context of recent literary production. Within this mainstream, neoliberal context, gay literature[59], at times, attempts to shake its diseased and tabooed past by moving toward a future of normative equality[60]. Consideration of these capitulatory actions reveals the ways that late capitalism seeks to separate gayness and queerness from gender and sexual orientations and to reduce them to simplified social and cultural signifiers, an inevitable result of a neoliberal flattening of culture (Gershon, 2011). This flattening has the effect of producing cultural hegemonic equivalences in texts that see all identities and experiences as interchangeable and is aimed at eradicating any recognisable sense of difference (Han, 2018). The sanitising of representation does the work of this alienation. Though, as argued in chapter one, if gay literature were to somehow 'move past' its diseased and taboo past fully, such a movement would require shaking off the impure history of queerness through a wilful erasing of queer experience and history. The impossibility of this movement has been demonstrated throughout this thesis as encounters with shame, loneliness, and anxiety that demonstrate how queerness and the assumption of queer identities is a tricky business, itself fraught with managing and mishandling of complicated emotions instilled in queer subjects throughout their lives in the form of a lived reality. The flattening and sanitising of queer representation problematically alienates subjects pursuing the conditions of their survival from their own lived experience. This alienation works to frame necessary actions of surviving the social order, like being in the closet or masking, as being not only inauthentic but harmful to queer and normative others. The patience that is called for, then, asks for readers to see beyond the flattening of culture and eradication of difference in order to recontextualise queer subjects in their own history and culture.

[59] In the context of this thesis, gay literature, has been defined as a prose narrative that features at least one protagonist who identifies as a man, who experiences romantic and sexual feelings for other men.
[60] The action of this sanitising is described by Christopher Castigilia and Christopher Reed, in their monograph *If Memory Serves: Gay Men, AIDS, and the Promise of a Queer Past* (2012), as being a form of 'unremembering' facilitated by assimilationist policies and homonormative politics.

As in the discussion in chapter one, most contemporary queer scholarship, which focuses on the figure of the child, tends to analyse exclusively how normative constructions of children can be queered and be made subversive. This analysis focuses on young adults who 'act out' through any exhibition of recognisably queer behaviours or performances, behaving strangely and inexplicably and moving in such a way that they subvert innocence with knowledge of the adult world, from which they are often protected. The significance then of this project's attention to incipient homosexuality is not the focus on children who 'act out,' but rather on the queer subjects coming-to-terms with their sexuality who must negotiate feelings of difference, those who do not know how to act 'in' or 'out,' because they are so bound up in their feelings of abjection. Reading incipiency, therefore, comes to be about reading a character's capacity to affect and be affected by the world around them and the ways in which that constructs their homosexuality.

As argued in chapter three, foundational affect provides a theoretical grounding and cohesion for incipiency; by describing the iterative effects of regulatory forces and the experience of negative affect. This thesis argued that the affects of shame, anxiety, and loneliness are central to the experience and constitution of any homosexual subjectivity – even as one may take precedence over the others, and even as the experience of other affects, like disgust and lust, also have influence. The existence of foundational affects is best illustrated through the deployment of negative registers; desublimation, disidentification, and *jouissance*. Queer subjects liberate themselves from negative affect and its valences, coming-to-terms with their sexualities and bodily difference by learning to code those affects differently, structuring identities and liveable lives out of the hangovers of disciplinary society that failed to pull them to heel. Where incipient homosexuality locates the young homosexual at risk of falling out of touch with the social order, foundational affect gives a language for describing how the incipient subject comes to be dispossessed of themselves and how they recover from that alienation of the self. The transformative potential of this reorientation of queer subjectivity asserts the radical potentiality of gay subjectivities, forwarding, again, the idea that these subjectivities can be, and already are, anything but that sexuality cannot be distilled and effectively rendered as textual markers without causing harm.

Through the arguments made in chapter two and three it has been made clear that this study into incipiency relies on considering literature as *bodies of affect* and how foundational affect, then, as a critical tool, provides the grounding to consider how the bodies of affect constitutive of text also provide ways of reading developing gay sensibilities. The study of

incipiency, after being adhered to affective genealogies wherein the emotional and affective experience is culturally historicised[61], relies on the various forms of "badness," resulting in alienation and abjection, that have been developed in (and through) queer theory, Tyler Bradway's bad reading (2017), Lee Edelman's bad education (2017; 2022), Jack Halberstam's wilderness and art of failure (2020; 2011). The way these theories elucidate queerness and its relationship to wrongness or badness has helped to construe a more generous and rigorous conception of incipient homosexuality that accounted for a more varied subjective becoming. This more relational and reparative approach to textual construction also allows for more nuanced representations to emerge, wherein we can take Berlant at their word when they suggest that objects hold up a lifeworld that may sustain capitalist subjectivities (2022), in the sense of performativity, where to continually produce identities within such a formalised form like literature, enacts and normalising of those identities that becomes complicit in capitalist (re)production. The rendering of incipiency and its foundational affects can be viewed as being a form of resistance in the face of a new form of literature dictated by an optimistic queer subject who carves out community and economy by regulating who is and is not allowed to identify within queer identificatory spaces (making queerness a colonial force[62]).

In reading for incipiency and its affects in texts, we have been reading for representations of precarious bodies (Butler, 2014) and how those impacted bodies can be read through reparative textual engagements. The use of queer theory in reading for this form of queerness is important, not only for the givenness of the subject of analysis but because it lays the groundwork for analysing the relationship between sexual subjectivity and power. In discussing how developing subjects are subject to the effects of heteronormative colonisation of their body, that works to produce a coherent, regulated, and normalised sense of gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality and so on. This colonisation perceives the queer child as having the power to expose the meaninglessness of social identities used in the comprehension of bodies, and this thesis has crafted a new language for expressing the processes by which queer children negotiate subjectivity and identity in a hostile social world bent toward biopolitical manipulation and subsequent eradication of their desires. As Lee Edelman

[61] This thesis has resisted historicising social and cultural signifiers of queerness and homosexuality. Arguing that relatively new categories of homosexuality cannot ethically frame the past without eliding the lived and material reality of historical queerness. It is still possible to historicise the affective experience of queerness, as it connects, through time, the phenomenological experience of queerness.

[62] Queerness as colonial force traverses a tricky discursive and ideological field, but while we understand resistance to be inherent to queerness, the production of neoliberal subjects has revealed that this resistance is not always given or obvious.

elucidates, the knowledge that "queerness, wherever it shows itself (in the form of catachresis), effects a counterpedagogy, refuting, by its mere appearance, the reality that offers it no place" (2017, 125), the queer child, or the incipient subject more broadly, can be held up as proof of the contingent nature of difference to humanity, one that owes its existence to a sensorial world where every intensity and sense can be experienced in an infinite myriad of potentialities that come to settle on the feeling body and define a body's place within the world. Nevertheless, as Edelman also argues, queerness is also a bad education, "the education that teaches us nothing but the nothing of the *thing which is not*" (2017, 125), where queerness inhabits the position of being the zero of the social order — as being nothing, as being a vacuum of meaning — the *thing which is not*, then the lessons of incipiency are not about giving subjects space to discover the relation of their desires to the world, but also that identity categories like 'gay,' 'lesbian,' 'trans*,' and 'bisexual' are ways of assuming abject sexuality without being rejected from the social order.

In the grand scheme of a heteronormative world, to affix one's queerness to identity is an attempt to affix oneself to the social order. Edelman warns us, though, that "homosexuality, in certain Western democracies, may be shedding (in part) its connection to queerness, continuing the process of normalization by which it mirrors and so reinforces dominant ideologies of social relation" (2017, 125). This thesis traces the tension homosexuality experiences with queerness and normalisation and the pull between resistance or capitulation; as such, the depoliticisation of queer life is a prescient topic and concern within queer communities, particularly as the backsliding of human rights achievements like gay marriage become immediate – yet it has been critical to look at the assumption of identities with generous eyes. To come-to-terms with abject sexuality can be difficult as it is the end of innocence; it also marks the end of childhood and the aggressive deployment of regulatory forces, like insult and education — even as those forces are already at work, the end of innocence makes a subject aware of their working — making the assumption of abject identities more difficult. This articulates the need for negative registers for incipient subjects, being the strategies employed by queer people that give them the power to rupture sociability and disturb the social order, providing queer subjects with the ability to assume these more normative identities and figure themselves as part of the social world. In reality, negative registers, labelled in this thesis as desublimation, disidentification, and *jouissance*, are socially meaningless actions exposing the social's constructedness and fragility. The encounters with these negative registers and any subsequent undoing of affective sublimation

that aids us in identifying incipient subjects, yet such a category for the uses of literary analysis is at risk of redundancy from queer complacency.

As highlighted in chapter one, twenty-first-century young adult gay literature produced under contemporary dominant discourses of homonormativity and neoliberalism place identity and the act of coming out in a dialectic tension of oppression and liberation. This is to say that there are now, in literature, grounds to argue that being 'in the closet' represents being oppressed and to 'be out' represents being liberated. This cultural transformation does not necessarily represent a positive shift; instead, it can be seen as representing an increase in neoliberal demands on homosexual subjectivation; Eve Sedgwick perhaps identified the results of this shift in her essay *How to Bring Your Kids Up Gay* (1994),

> The renaturalization of and enforcement of gender assignment is not the worst news about the new psychiatry of gay acceptance, however. The worst is that it not only fails to offer, but seems conceptually incapable of offering, even the slightest resistance to the wish endemic in the culture surrounding and supporting it: the wish that gay people *not exist*. (161)

Sedgwick is possibly predicting what would become neoliberal demands of upward mobility, heightened demands on bodily capacity, and a depoliticisation of selfhood for an identity that can be sold and sold to. This is important as it foregrounds the emergence of homosexuality or queerness as a gendered category, delimiting its own potential for resistance by becoming a colonising force. Homosexuality has always had a complex relationship with gender identity, in so much as any participation in homosexual cultures has made the erosion of gender norms and performance acceptable and permissible within its own socially abject groups. Despite these neoliberal identifications, homosexuality continues to be affiliative, connected through space and time by an affective gay commons. Though the primary site of change is the demand placed on homosexuality to acclimate to the social order, the trade-off is that homosexuality is no longer completely abjected — so long as it plays the part of an acceptable neoliberal subject. While it is important not to conflate sexual orientation and gender, given that there is no predictable correlation between sexual identity and gender

identity, it cannot be helped that part of incipiency is the gendering of sexual orientation[63], whether as an act of resistance or depoliticisation[64].

While the Closet is often the confluence between incipiency and subjectivation, where homosexuality is negotiated at the level of the individual and personal, it is not a determining factor in the coming-of-age of homosexuality. This is because homosexuality falls outside the realm of the normative passage and expectations of time, as the argument is made by Jack Halberstam in *A Queer Time and Place* (2005), in that the possession of abject sexuality disbars a subject from participation in heteronormative sociocultural developmental milestones. However, some factors are fundamental to the emergence of the Closet, which can be extrapolated to establish a methodology for reading homosexual identity in its myriad potentialities. According to Eve Sedgwick, "the aspect of 'homosexuality' that now seems in many ways most immutably fixed to it — its dependence on a defining *sameness* between partners" (1990, 158), seemingly postulating that homosexual identity is not constitutive of the sexual act and that, traditionally speaking, the attachment of same-sex desire and a sexual inversion was not as natural and interchangeable as once thought. As such, gayness as an identity can be critically viewed as a gendered identity, given that all same-sex desiring individuals will possess or form the same sexual identity. In terms of incipient homosexuality, this was explored in the argument that incipiency, as a category, cannot predict future identity, which is, in part, due to a lack of homosexual sociocultural developmental milestones. Sedgwick is correct to criticise any such drive to link homosexuality across time through the textual burden of identity, for this reason; it is more conceivable that what homosexual subjects do inherit is feeling as part of a rich and storied affect genealogy, but that genealogy cannot anticipate the material expression of homosexuality.

The theory presented in this thesis has worked to negotiate a turbulent real-world moment in which subject development remains as complex as ever, and desire remains as policed as ever, even as culture and experience are being flattened. In *Outside Belongings* (1996), Elspeth Probyn discusses how 'desire' operates as a powerful method to "create and disrupt belonging" (42) on the basis that it is given that "desire as lack is the oblique term

[63] To organise and argue for the connection of affective resonances and material reality for homosexual subjects is to, even accidentally, argue that the category of homosexual *can* and *is* gendered.
[64] However, this conflation of gender and sexuality can increasingly be seen in the rising Trans* culture wars, where conservative ideologues lack (though any such lack exists because of a refusal to learn) the requisite language of gender and sexuality to express their beliefs logically.

that nonetheless sustains such structures and works to produce a conception of the social[65] …" (43). Here, the use of desire as social is extraordinarily useful as it tells us that 'what we want' is subjectivated; it is determined by the social order in the limited and limiting space of how a subject can act and be acted upon. Any application of desire to homosexuality opens the contested spaces of what it is to be inside or outside, particularly given the stresses of living on the margins. However, there is a tension between the desire to be included in the social order and the desire to be freely homosexual. The argument about desire is extended to childhood, itself a disturbingly liminal space that exists only to be endured — endured in the sense that childhood is something that must be survived. What is being posited here is the importance between desire and pleasure, where desire is socially constructed, and pleasure belongs to the body and is somewhat outside of the social. The arrival, then, of the depoliticisation of gay identities works at this schism, developing the distance between the two concepts and, in effect, establishing a new understanding of desire as safe and consumable and pleasure as being worthy of censorship – effectually drawing a line between thoughts and actions.

The central concern of gay coming-of-age narratives is the coming-to-terms of the experience of bodily difference; as such, they are always already representing the development of bodies that are outside of official history, bodies, which, in their possession of queerness will come to inhabit a different structural position in the social order, that of the empty set, of zero, of nothingness. The theoretical chapters of this thesis have foregrounded ways of working through and creating a coherent account of homosexual becoming, taking seriously the potential literature has for representing the onto-epistemological category of coming-to-terms as being a unique stage of the queer life cycle. While a massive undertaking, this project has managed to articulate the importance of understanding why both incipient homosexuality and foundational affect need to be regarded as a consequential addition to queer literary theory. Critically, with the emergence of a neo-conservative backlash to late-modern culture that has coincidentally arrived during a time of depoliticisation of homosexual identity, the categories of incipient homosexuality and foundational affect may still prove prescient, given their ability to patiently unpack the relationship between queer identity and the disciplinary societies that attempt to regulate it.

[65] Positing desire as social, given that, as Foucault argues, desire is impossibly implicated with lack, seemingly positions the social as bonded together through lack. Though this can be given as correct as what function do social groups serve if not to provide each other with what they desire by helping to fulfil needs and wants.

This depoliticisation of homosexuality gives rise to that which is beyond incipiency, what can be labelled as *literature of self-regulation* (or determination), an attempted project of queer sovereignty. Sovereignty in this sense comes from Lauren Berlant and their monograph *On the Inconvenience of Other People*, where Berlant states, "Sovereignty is thus a fantasy of jurisdiction. It is a defence of entitlement, reference, and agency" (2022, 3). In this formulation, queer subjects move against what they call 'queer-baiting' to affirm the borders of their own cultures and identities because they see themselves as entitled to agency and oneness. This literature of self-regulation would be constituted by a body of narratives where characters undergo a meta-process of becoming homosexual (or Trans*, non-binary, asexual, bisexual, and so on) in which they would be challenged to position themselves in relation to queerness fixedly as another character (who would never be the antagonist) challenge the authenticity and purity of the protagonists claim — effecting a call-to-arms to protect the identificatory space of queerness. The bifurcated process is critical to these narratives is important because those who would adorn the ephemera of queerness without possessing an openly queer identity are framed as being an inconvenience to the authenticity of queer life, and those who would engage in queer acts without coming out and assuming an openly queer-identity are framed as being antagonistic to the authenticity of queer life. A theory of incipient homosexuality legitimises this experience of abjection, arguing that those who might disavow queer desires are not antagonistic to queer life; rather, their decision to pursue heteronormativity should be framed for what it is, an act of survival. While the sexual politics of these narratives is dubious, there is a very real risk of these fantasies animating actual life. Concerning narratives of incipiency, this literature of self-regulation no longer needs negative registers to describe how sexuality is come-to-terms with, because these new narratives represent the successful subsumption of queer ontologies under neoliberal capitalist discourses and ideologies. But incipiency as a category is not useless in the face of this challenge.

Incipiency's Ambivalence and the Future of Queer Complacency

As a category for potential study, incipiency is at risk of irrelevance due to literatures of self-regulation. However, adhering incipiency to Berlant's notion of inconvenience and Halberstam's notion of wildness gives us a way to get around this emergent problem. To be an incipient homosexual is to admit oneself to a plane of precarity wherein one begins to articulate oneself at risk of becoming unacceptable. Incipient homosexuality itself only

represents subjects at risk of falling out of circles of acceptable social life; ahead of them is a world they may never have access to, and behind them is the figure of the Child who threatens to efface them as subjects of innocence and hope. A theoretical hazard of viewing incipiency as a part of development is a risk of 'freezing' subjects in a discursive and rhetorical moment, burdening those subjects with a complex array of affects they cannot be made responsible for. Incipiency is, therefore, about ambivalent relationality. Incipient homosexuality is a relational category, defining the proximity of a subject to abject sexuality and gender.

Literature of incipiency teaches queer subjects to desublimate even as it works at sublimating its own relations. The proximal relationship established here teases the formative dialectic relationship between the ab-sens and the sens-absexe[66], the push and pull between oneness and queerness. It can then be argued that incipiency is about ambivalent relationality, where the induction of "elbow room, breathing space and patience with the contradictory demands we make of our objects" (Berlant 2022, 28). Contemporary readers are demanding that their texts be pure but also that they represent them – the trick there is that nothing pure can possibly represent us. To attempt so would be like trying to make distilled water chemically react with something, an impossibility since there is nothing for a reactive agent to engage with in such water. But the created representation exists in the name of a bad education that makes no demands on how material forces shape subjects. By way of appropriating Berlant, since incipiency cannot be consented to, when it is assented to by the subject, they are accepting it under terms that it *will happen* and, as such, incipiency is "not a thing whose narrative, affective, or sensual shape one holds with assurance" (Berlant 2022, 19). Incipiency can then be considered an ambivalent becoming as the subject pushes and pulls at bodily meaning.

What ambivalence can mean to incipiency is interesting in and of itself. Jacob Breslow deploys Freud's definition of ambivalence in his monograph *Ambivalent Childhoods* (2021), arguing that ambivalence is structured by the coexistence of love and hate towards a single object, which Breslow states "structures people's various attachments to the contemporary contours of identity" (2021, 187). Understanding incipiency as ambivalent is easy, given Breslow's argument, as it can be assumed that an incipient subject, in not being

[66] In this formulation, sens-absexe is the exclusion of sex that specifically to sex *as* the difference that governs the Symbolic. Edelman (2023), argues that this is how Lacan terms the way sexual difference is fundamental to meaning.

given a choice to undergo incipiency[67], enters instead into a love/hate engagement following an encounter with ipseity. Following on with Berlant, when one begins their incipiency, they have not consented to the inauguration of such a process; they can only assent to it after it has begun (2022). In effect, though, what one is assenting to is to acquiesce to the influence of regulatory touch, "one is assenting to be overwhelmed or disorganised or aroused from touch that happens in the right way, whatever one means by that, and often what one means by that specifically in positive terms is variable, elastic, and imprecisely defined" (2022, 39). Regulatory and punitive touch still hold extraordinary power over incipient subjects, which is why *jouissance* is such a contingent aspect of incipiency – the undoing extends beyond any feeling of being overwhelmed. Indeed, one cannot be overwhelmed if they are obliterated or immediately and wholly transported from one ontoepistemology and into another.

Even as an emergent body of literature centred around self-regulation works to establish the absolute right of the individual over the community, a consequence of that movement has led to greater visibility of all forms of queerness within a culture. The result is that even as self-regulation works to formalise the textual representation of homosexual identities. There has become even more space for more effectively incipient representations to emerge and what becomes obvious is that every narrative about an encounter has the same goal: they are all centred around a feeling of hope, the hope that queerness and the feelings of bodily difference it elicits can be resolved. The difference between these narratives is the relationship they have with ab-sens and sens-absexe. Consider again, the question posed by Jake Nevins and his assumption of the deceit of the closet. To take on the paranoia of this deception is to erode a sense of hope from the experience of the closet, to foreclose on the joy of outness at the right time, to participate in sexuality when one wields the safety and confidence of the rightness of their desires. One of the most interesting and sustained narratives in popular culture is being told through the character of Will Byers in the Netflix series *Stranger Things* (2016-present). Beginning when Will is twelve, the narrative follows Will as he deals with emergent feelings of bodily difference and being queered by the trauma of being brought into an alternate dimension and tortured by a monster. This culminates in the fourth season when Will expresses to his best friend (and potential love interest) Mike why he is important to the series protagonist El,

[67] Positing desire as social, given that, as Foucault argues, desire is impossibly implicated with lack, seemingly positions the social as bonded together through lack. Though this can be given as correct as what function do social groups serve if not to provide each other with what they desire by helping to fulfil needs and wants.

> It's just she's so different from other people, and when you're different, sometimes … you feel like a mistake. But you make her feel like she's not a mistake at all like she's better for being different, and that gives her the courage to fight on. (Duffer & Duffer, 2022)

At this moment, Will is projecting his feelings onto El to give Mike the impetus to continue fighting for her. Will speaks to his own alienation and affirms his relationship to the queerness that threatens to undo him, recognising that the existence of a romantic or loving connection gave him the ability to desublimate his negative feelings around his difference. Yet the overarching narrative of incipiency for Will has justified the importance of incipiency's ambivalence as we watch Will move in relation to his closet, never fully out, but moving towards a more tacit subjectivity, a movement that always mirrors his closeness to Mike.

Incipient subjects are not helpless or hapless in that what happens to them is out of their control, that their acute experience of Otherness makes them insipid subjects; rather, they are distinctly without agency. Lauren Berlant, in *The Queen of America Goes to Washington* (1997), argues for the figure of the female immigrant as one who cannot speak on or for the citizenship they are made to represent. For Berlant, "with no capacity for agency, her value is also in her irrelevance to the concerns about achievement, intelligence, subjectivity, desire, demand, and courage that have recently sullied the image of the enfranchised American woman" (177). This description is not singular to the immigrant woman in America, and it is also a succinct description of the experience of incipient homosexuality. Reduced to the closet, the incipient homosexual has a reduced capacity for agency given that they cannot act or be acted upon in the interest of their sexual Otherness; they also move into the competitive league of 'passing,' of performing heterosexual normativity, now tacitly competing against other incipient homosexuals each attempting to valorise heterosexuality more than the other. Therefore, the incipient homosexuals exist in and with ambivalence because stripped of agency, incipient subjects are torn between what they can do to get that agency back and the danger and fear associated with coming-to-terms with sexuality cannot be parsed over here because "a whole world can wobble when that openness ignites insecurity about how to live otherwise" (Berlant 2022, 76). The threat of harm delivered by the regulatory forces of the heterosexual social order cannot be taken lightly, as the actual harm that they do cause can be deadly.

The analysis chapters of this thesis have traversed a myriad of theoretical domains while framing texts through incipiency. Each novel under study in this thesis, *At Swim, Two*

Boys, *Loaded*, and *Swimming in the Dark*, has been produced under varying cultural, temporal, and economic conditions while attempting to narrate the historical conditions of homosexual subjectivation. In chapter four, the analysis of *At Swim, Two Boys* relied on contextualising the narrative with the specific historical conditions of life in a pre-independent Irish State. Understanding the importance of the Catholic church to that State to the development of masculine identities was crucial to the impact of shame on the character of Jim Mack. For *Loaded*, in chapter five, an analysis of Australian suburban spaces and the geography of immigrant families worked on elucidating how Ari's identity was produced and why he may have resisted completely shedding his cultural heritage to assume a culturally acceptable gay identity. In chapter six, the most recent novel in the cohort, *Swimming in the Dark*, needed the deployment of ideas around nature, specifically the *locus amoenus* and its contextual place within literary theory, to help demonstrate why there was such a radical divergence in the coming-to-terms and identity formation of Ludwik and Janusz. In each of these analyses, the dominant frame of incipiency and foundational affect worked more effectively, being synthesised with specific theories that aimed at developing more sophisticated understandings of the narrative contexts of the novels.

Incipient Homosexuality and Foundational Affect in Popular Media

This thesis has been completed at an interesting time, one that is witnessing the demise of optimism and the subsumption of social consciousness under paranoia and cynicism. Despite the achievements made in human rights spaces for the global LGBTQIA+ community since the beginning of the millennium, the backslides and regressions in rights advancement are frightening. While the loss of rights and protections seemingly prove the immediacy of studies into queerness, particularly studies like this one that investigate how incipient queer subjects receive the flows of this information, the usefulness of these studies is brought into question by a university sector hellbent on undermining its own value. However, it is important to understand intimately the risks of experiencing bodily or sexual difference. Incipiency and foundational affects are, after all, forms of sensation, and as Stephanie D. Clare states, "sensation indexes that I have access to 'public' space, that there exists a public infrastructure that is accessible to me, that I have leisure time to make use of this infrastructure, and that I have been taught ways of moving my body that feel good" (2019, 43). As this thesis assumes, having a body is to exist in the world – something that has always been beyond our choice. To have subjectivity and identity is to be given the tools for

moving around in that world, but as incipiency teaches us, how we move and how we feel about moving is up to us.

There are several examples of incipiency in popular literature and media at the moment. Where many gay texts work to frame 'the closet' as an oppressive space that is a regulatory function of a heteronormative social order, literatures of incipiency oppose this, understanding that the existence of the closet is guaranteed within the abjection of queerness. To be radically queer, to inhabit the joy of resistance, and to work as an agent of opposition, is to inherently reproduce the epistemological necessity of the closet in Western neoliberal cultures. This idea is explored in Casey McQuiston's 2019 novel *Red, White and Royal Blue*, a popular romance novel about the relationship between the fictional First Son of the United States, Alex Claremont-Diaz, and a fictional Prince of England, Henry. The climax of the narrative focuses on the outing of the couple and the consequences of their affair; the novel turns on a speech made by Alex to salvage his mother's re-election campaign. The novel takes a turn for the nationalist here, articulating the relationship between the normative subject of queer desire and the sociocultural context in which they were raised. Yet, it also eschews the projection of shame on managing a secret homosexual affair; Alex says in his speech,

> The truth is, Henry and I have been together since the beginning of this year. The truth is, as many of you have read, we have both struggled every day with what this means for our families, our countries, and our futures. The truth is, we have both had to make compromises that cost us sleep at night in order to afford us enough time to share our relationship with the world on our own terms. We were not afforded that liberty. (373)

While the 2023 film adaptation emphasises the relationship with the closet, shame, and the power people wield over those in the closet, the novel effectively represents a turn towards the negotiation of incipiency, foundational affect, and the homonationalist subject. Alex frames himself as placing his happiness second and reprimands those who outed him for not affording him the time and the space to come-to-terms with his life and his desires in his own way — a pushing back on the imposition of normative time on the development of queer identities and sexualities.

Similar resistance is explored in Alice Oseman's *Heartstopper* (2019-). This webcomic has now begun to be published as a series of graphic novels, as well as having been adapted into a Netflix Original series. *Heartstopper* recounts the relationship of Charlie Sprigg and Nick Nelson, an emergent bisexual sports star in crisis. A feature of literatures of

incipiency that has been underdeveloped in this thesis but worthy of further study is an innate magnetism experienced between two characters that go on to have a romantic and sexual relationship. This magnetism is characterised as an unconscious pulling towards each other that generally happens before the initial encounter with sexual difference. Initial encounters with sexual difference are always complicated because it is the first time a character comes up against their sublimation; it is the first time a character begins to understand that the world they learned about might not be the one that exists. Nick begins to come against this education in the changeroom as he catches Charlie taking his shirt off; given the closeness and intimacy of the friendship they are developing, Nick is taken to see Charlie differently, and after seeing how the character of Ben assaults Charlie, Nick begins to question what his feelings for Charlie are.

This brings us to what might be the most recognisable scene in Heartstopper. At this point, physical encounters with Charlie bring Nick to an encounter of bodily difference. An awakening of the self to feelings and desires that he had never felt before. Nick arrives on Charlie's doorstep the morning after the party, soaking wet from walking to Charlie's. After listening to a rambling apology from Charlie, Nick takes him into his arms and kisses him again. The frames are surrounded by little flowers, a motif Oseman uses to signify overwhelming positive feelings like happiness or fantasy. This is Nick's moment of jouissance because this is the encounter; stripped away of social pressures like friends and unafraid that he will be caught, Nick allows himself to experience the depth of pleasure and excitement that this kiss brings him. It is jouissance because after this moment, while he is unsure of his identity, he is not confused about his feelings. As he acknowledges he is in the middle of a "full-on gay crisis," Nick understands that while he is experiencing same-sex desire, the category of gay is not varied enough to account for his feelings. Volume 2 of *Heartstopper* is dedicated to exploring Nick's sexual identity. This is interesting because, through his relationship with Charlie, Nick can come-to-terms with his abject sexual and romantic feelings before he possesses a textually recognisable identity. Throughout the rest of the narrative, the author, Oseman, carefully takes the time to let characters explore the highs and lows of developing sexuality, of the joys of sexual experience and acceptance, as well as the lows of rejection, the characters of Nick and Charlie also map out a relationship with foundational affect, consolidating their experiences through anxiety and loneliness.

The introduction of incipient homosexuality and foundational affect as new analytical categories in queer theory aids in the continuing work of projects of failure and to further elucidates the ways that queer life is lived in the gaps, elisions, dissonances, and resonances.

As demonstrated, these categories progress the analysis of queer texts with a reparative sensibility that understands that the work of social order and its regulatory forces are often aggressive, regressive, and damaging, made to mould subjects of a social order sens-absexe. Instead of trying to determine the rightness or wrongness of any given subject's identity or to cast ethical or moral judgement on the ways incipient subjects approach their sense of queerness, incipiency, and foundational affect, take the subject as they are, exploring with tenderness the myriad ways that identities and subjectivities can express themselves in the narrative. To work with the novels chosen for study, *At Swim, Two Boys*, *Loaded* and *Swimming in the Dark* have helped to prove that incipiency is a necessary category of analysis that is useful in accounting for both the harm an individual experiences through the social order and the effects that harm has on identity formation. In particular, *At Swim, Two Boys* can be considered the novel of incipiency *par excellence*, where its expression of childhood trauma, education, and social experiences all come together neatly in the often-tormented affective life of the protagonist, Jim. To come-to-terms with bodily differences and to rise as a full subject of the social order without diminishing the experience and feelings of queerness, one has demonstrated the difficulty it takes to form from incipiency any kind of respectable and liveable homosexual life. The critical theme across these texts is that homosexuality and a liveable homosexual life are discovered throughout the narrative, and critical to this project is how the reader feels and understands this journey as the narrative contributes to their homosexual culture and subjectivity. Queer subjects are always negotiating the terms of their own survival, authenticity and transformation, and incipienct homosexuality and foundational affect provide a valuable, robust and incisive language for understanding how that happens and why the knowledge of other liveable lives is such a difficult certainty to comprehend.

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